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## The Conception of the “New Wars”: a Question of Validity

This article analyses the concept of the “new wars”, especially the claim of its authors that conventional interstate war is no longer viable, as the nature of organized violence has changed completely. The article questions the validity of such a statement by showing that the “new wars” idea lacks historical precision and is based on a misperception of the theoretical model developed by Carl von Clausewitz; moreover, the conception includes unclarified theoretical assumptions. The article examines the most popular and influential “new wars” theorists: Herfried Munkler, Mary Kaldor, Martin Van Creveld, as well as scholars whose ideas are tightly related with the “new wars” discourse - Amalendu Misra, Rupert Smith, Thomas X. Hammes. It also refers to the recent Clausewitzian studies (Hew Strachan, Antulio J. Echevarria, Christopher Bassford) and to a very original concept of the Western dis-enchantment of war, coined by Christopher Coker. The article ends up with the suggestion to evaluate the “new wars” discourse as a reflection of changing Western attitudes towards war.

### Introduction

As far back as 1991 the famous military historian Martin Van Creveld stated that large-scale, conventional war was no longer viable. This idea reflected the words of John Mueller that major war in Western world might be rendered obsolete – like slavery or duelling. At that time, the post-Cold War confusion in international affairs, Yugoslav Wars, problems of humanitarian interventions and other factors highly stimulated the need to re-approach a mainstream discourse on violence and war. However, it took a while for the idea that major war is outmoded to make a solid stand – with a conception of the “new wars”.

Definition of the “new wars” was coined by Mary Kaldor. Highlighting underestimated tendencies<sup>1</sup> of contemporary organized violence, she took an ambitious position arguing that the prevailing perception of war is no longer adequate because a new type of organized violence has developed. The new

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of such tendencies: a growing importance of non-state actors, media and globalized economy, the deliberate targeting of civilian population, the questionable position of children and women, etc.

Kaldor, M., *New and old wars*. Cambridge: Polity, 2006.

concept, featuring a revision of the popular ideas of Carl von Clausewitz, quickly ignited a very productive academic debate<sup>2</sup>.

The challenging criticism of conventional warfare and efforts to grasp specific aspects of today's organized violence contributed a lot to the relevance of the "new wars" conception. But even more interesting are its links with broader changes in the Western attitudes towards war. For example, in the recent U.S. Field Manual of Stability Operations, fragile states, unable to meet the basic needs of their people, are seen as the greatest threat to the national security of the U.S. What is more, the main focus in the document is on the provision of a safe and secure environment, post-conflict reconstruction, law-enforcement and broader interagency efforts to provide a base for civil-military integration. One can see here obvious similarities to the main ideas of Kaldor. Of additional interest is that this document is meant to represent a milestone of U.S. Army's doctrine.<sup>3</sup>

The problem is that the concept of the "new wars" still fails to address many aspects pointed out by its opponents, thus undermining its validity. New wars analysis lacks coherence as well as a broader reference to military history. Therefore, the premise that war has gone through transformation is standing on very shaky ground indeed—as well as the practical political solutions suggested on its basis. This article aims to show that theorists of the "new wars" ground their arguments on vague generalizations and loose assumptions and, more importantly, do not distinguish between the nature and the character of war, confusing the levels of analysis. The article ends up with a suggestion to evaluate the "new wars" discourse as a part of Western disenchantment of war.

## 1. Clausewitzian Universe

Throughout history there have been many attempts to define the concept of war. Nevertheless, not many of them have had a long-standing success—apart from Clausewitz's "On War", Sun Tzu's ideas and probably some principles of Antoine H. Jomini. In Western strategic thought, Clausewitz's work deserves attention for its attempt to raise itself above the circumstances of a particular time period—to grasp the very essence of war's nature. The Prussian general sought to build a coherent, more universal theory—a kind of "idealtypus" of war.

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<sup>2</sup> On the one side of the debate are the „new wars“ theorists and scholars, who do not use the term „new war“, but still assert similar ideas (Rupert Smith, Kalevi J. Holsti, John Keegan, authors of the „Fourth generation warfare, etc.). On the other side, there are critics of the „new wars“ (such as Mats Berdal and Stathis Kalyvas) and renewed Clausewitzian studies (Christopher Bassford, Antulio J. Echevarria, Hew Strachan, Colin M. Fleming, Andreas H. Rothe).

<sup>3</sup> Headquarters Department of the Army, *Stability operations: field manual*. Washington: October 2008.

“War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will<sup>4</sup>” – it is one of the basic statements of “On War”. Force, or violence, embodied not only in combat, but in a mere possibility of it as well, is inherent in any war. The fact that this violence is a collective act—and so is social by its nature—distinguishes it from the realm of simple criminal activities. Clausewitz insisted that there are no logical limits to the application of this force and that the impulse to destroy one’s enemy lies in the heart of war<sup>5</sup>. However, these are only theoretical assumptions. Analyzing “On War”, it is very important to distinguish between the abstract framework – the “absolute war” – and practical particularities. Absolute form points to the natural tendencies of war: it is a strictly logical premise, a base for any coherent theory.

In real life, friction moderates war’s natural tendency to drive opponents to extremes. By friction Clausewitz refers to countless minor incidents, distinguishing war on paper from real war: it might be instincts, morale, environmental conditions, cognitive limits, imperfect information, or even political circumstances. Therefore, Clausewitz admits that wars can have all degrees of importance and intensity and only a small part of time in war is occupied by action, the rest being spent in inactivity<sup>6</sup>.

Of all the aspects moderating war, policy is certainly the most controversial one. According to Clausewitz, war is a political instrument and a continuation of political intercourse, by other means. Hence, in reality war is not an unrestricted expression of force – policy creates war and, more importantly, it gives an overall object for it, or else the escalation of violence would see no limits. But even today it is not clear what Clausewitz meant by *politik*. The definition of policy (or politics) is actually more debated than the very question of whether war is truly an instrument of policy. Clausewitz perceived war as a part of man’s social existence, and saw politics as a major expression of the interests of a particular community. Consequently, it is quite clear that *politik* is not just public policy or rational actions of public authorities. As Bassford has stated it, *politik* is more about the process of power distribution in a society of individuals, involving both rational and non-rational factors<sup>7</sup>.

Clausewitz stated clearly that imagining war between civilized people merely as a result of rational decisions made by their governments is a mistake; policy must adapt itself to its own instrument, and this process can radically change it<sup>8</sup>. Most likely, he sought to show that the character of war results from prevailing political circumstances: war is like a chameleon, slightly adapting itself to change of environment<sup>9</sup>. And yet the nature of war, its true essence, remains the same.

<sup>4</sup> Clausewitz, C. von, *On War*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989, p. 75.

<sup>5</sup> Clausewitz (note 4), p. 76.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 81-83.

<sup>7</sup> Bassford, C., *Clausewitz and his works*, <http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/Bassford/Cworks/Works.htm>, 2010 08 22.

<sup>8</sup> Clausewitz, p. 76.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 89.

The concepts of the nature and character of war have caused a lot of confusion. The character of war can be described as a way of applying force, or as a “theory of a conduct of war”, or simply as warfare. The character of war is always modified and is never absolute. The nature of war, on the contrary, points to the essential tendencies of war, to its innate logic, which does not lend itself to moderating principles of everyday reality. It certainly finds its most elaborate expression in Clausewitz’s idea that war is a paradoxical trinity composed of primordial violence and enmity (blind natural force), the play of chance and probability (the realm of creative spirit) and the element of subordination to reason alone (the principle of policy)<sup>10</sup>. The first aspect mainly concerns the people. The second addresses the commander and his army, and the third element is usually the realm of governments alone. It is of utmost importance that Clausewitz was reluctant to fix any arbitrary lines between those elements, as that would have destroyed the whole idea of war as an organic interplay. Nonetheless, many academics have attributed the main importance to the principle of war’s subordination to policy, overestimating the role of government/territorial state and political rationality in war. This kind of fallacy has also become a foundation for the “new wars” discourse.

One might call into question the need for such a complicated theoretical divide between the nature and the character of war. Concerning Clausewitz himself, he needed it to keep his theory coherent and to highlight the primary elements of any type of war. There again, Antulio J. Echevarria notes that our understanding of war’s nature also influences our approach to the conduct of war – the way we develop military strategies, doctrines or even the way we train combat forces. There is a big difference between a man who perceives war as violence with a tendency to get out of control and a man who thinks that war is merely an obedient instrument of policy<sup>11</sup>.

## 2. The Concept of the “New Wars”

### 2.1 Martin Van Creveld, “The Transformation of War”: the Beginning of the New Wars Discourse

Hew Strachan once said that in order to identify whether war is changing and how that change affects international relations, we need to know what war is. However, what we mean by war is usually determined by an individual experience or a living memory of recent historical events<sup>12</sup>. The

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 89.

<sup>11</sup> Echevarria, A. J., *Clausewitz and contemporary war*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 2, 58.

<sup>12</sup> Strachan, H., *The changing character of war*. Oxford: Europaeum, 2007, p. 2.

sources of traditional warfare have been traced back to the first “true” battle at Kadesh, 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Nevertheless, it is the established convention of war, affirmed over the last three centuries, that we call “classical martial law”. Within this framework, war is defined as “throughout history a normal way of conducting disputes between political groups<sup>13</sup>”, waged between regular armies of states. It means between standard (and equal) bearers of a *jus belli*, respecting their enemies at war<sup>14</sup>. According to Carl Schmitt, this kind of contained continental land warfare was still present in World War I.

Historian Martin Van Creveld was one of the first to claim that war had suffered a fundamental transformation and had entered a new era, in which conventional principles of war were no longer relevant for extending political interests. It should be specified that Creveld actually had in mind a large-scale, organized industrial war. He pointed out two main factors that were destroying the viability of major war: the political impact of nuclear weapons and the spread of low-intensity conflicts (LICs).

Creveld described LICs as bloody conflicts, usually unfolding in developing countries, technologically primitive and involving paramilitary units (which become intermingled with each other and with the civilian population in general). According to Creveld, since World War II LICs have shown some clear advantages over conventional wars: they were “dirt cheap” and they were the most popular way to change the political *status quo*. Nonetheless, attention given to this type of warfare was far from serious - the tendency to think about war in traditional terms and to base military programs on conventional wisdom prevailed. Creveld observes that it had lots to do with sheer inertia, on the one hand. On the other hand, it was a way to buy some time in case a real conventional crisis did arise: that is, to restrain further escalation (which could lead to nuclear war).<sup>15</sup>

It is important that Creveld perceived the spread of LICs as a negation of Clausewitz’s Trinitarian war, because LICs are conflicts without clear boundaries between the people, the government, state units, paramilitaries and international actors. Furthermore, the driving force behind these wars is not essentially “political” (it can be religion, culture or even existence). And since the idea that war is a continuation of politics was understood by Creveld in a forthright manner, he automatically made the conclusion that the Clausewitzian universe is not suitable to explaining the LICs<sup>16</sup>. In his subsequent books, Creveld revised his ideas about war’s nature, admitting that “at bottom, war

<sup>13</sup> Strachan (note 12), p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> The principle of equality granted warring armies with rights, that were not available for irregular fighters (for example, the status of the partisan was ambiguous until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> cen. Schmitt, C., *The theory of the partisan*. Michigan State University Press, 2004, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Creveld, M., *The transformation of war*. New York: The Free Press, 1991, p. 17-22.

<sup>16</sup> According to Creveld, the ideas of Clausewitz cannot explain the total wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> cen. and are not adequate for the bigger part of military history. He sorted out three historical alternatives to the Clausewitz’s “political war”: wars for religion, justice and existence. Creveld (note 12), p. 42, 124-149.

is simply an organized fight waged for political ends"<sup>17</sup>. Yet, he still insists that modern armed forces, as well as conventional forms of warfare need a profound conceptual change. Otherwise, counterinsurgency (a predominant type of conflict for the nearest future) will go on as a record of failure.

## 2.2. Mary Kaldor and Herfried Munkler: a New Type of Organized Violence

Low intensity conflicts (LICs) are not so different from the phenomenon which ten years later Mary Kaldor called the "new wars". A bit later the term "new war" was borrowed by Herfried Munkler, who made it popular in Germany, and Amalendu Misra, who started to talk about the "new civil wars". Similar, and at times even identical ideas can be found in the famous analysis of the "third kind of wars" by Kalevi J. Holsti and in the books of military historian John Keegan<sup>18</sup>.

The concept of the "new wars" came out when Mary Kaldor realized there were obvious similarities between the wars in former Yugoslavia (which she had been intensively analyzing for years) and armed conflicts in other developing countries. She asserts that these wars do reflect a new reality, in which traditional distinctions between war, organized crime and large-scale violations of human rights are blurring while political interests and financial motives become hardly separable<sup>19</sup>.

Globalization is an important factor in the context of new wars. Firstly, it facilitates the development of a globalized war economy: transnational economic networks are the main supporters of new wars. We can also observe the increased presence of media in the conflict zones and the emergence of diverse international agents: NGO's, private security contractors, reporters, volunteers, foreign advisers, etc. The context of globalization is hardly separable from the disintegration of a territorial state. Kaldor makes this clear, saying that "the main implication of globalization is that territorial sovereignty is no longer viable." (Misra also tries to look at the shrinking importance of territorial state from the perspective of globalization.)<sup>20</sup>

Apart from the globalized economy of war, there are another two factors making new wars exceptional: identity politics and the changed mode of warfare. The term "identity politics" describes a process of political mobilization and power politics, implemented by using certain labels, for

<sup>17</sup> Creveld, M., *The changing face of war: combat from the Marne to Iraq*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2007, p. 226.

<sup>18</sup> Holsti, K. J., *The state, war, and the state of war*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Keegan, J., *A history of warfare*. New York: Vintage Books, 1994.

<sup>19</sup> Kaldor (note 1), p. 2-3. Misra, A., *Politics of civil wars: conflict, intervention and resolution*. London: Routledge, 2008, p. 3-4. Examples of such conflicts: wars in Bosnia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, DR Congo, Sudan, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Rwanda, etc.

<sup>20</sup> Kaldor, p. 91. Misra (note 19), p. 35-37.

example, ethnic, religious, tribal or other divisions<sup>21</sup>. Open and cosmopolitan civil society, multiculturalism and moderate citizens appear to be the main target in new wars.

The changed mode of warfare can be shortly characterized as a brutal mix of guerrilla war and counterinsurgency: destabilization of society, spread of fear and hatred, destruction of cultural heritage and violence against civilians are the ways by which force is applied in new wars<sup>22</sup>. Traditional military hierarchy is destroyed and regular state units are replaced by paramilitaries, which operate in a strange atmosphere of both confrontation and cooperation.

Non-state or sub-state paramilitary groups do not comply with the conventional rules of warfare. Moreover, they usually fight for narrow financial (or commercial) agendas. According to Munkler, these groups can sustain themselves through plunder and diverse sources of external support: black markets, the Diasporas, individual remittances, assistance from foreign authorities, global media or even humanitarian aid<sup>23</sup>. According to Kaldor, the transition from centralized and closed economies of industrial wars to the globalized economies of current conflicts represents a major turning point in the changing character of war.

In the “new wars” discourse such a symbiosis between transnational financial capital and war is treated as a powerful source of individual gain and this comes as the main grounds for criminalizing new wars. Kaldor and Munkler both argue that the traditional notion of war automatically becomes irrelevant for the analysis of contemporary organized violence, as it cannot cover a range of interconnected interests and economic networks.

It is important that Creveld, Kaldor and Munkler all associate this traditional notion of war with Clausewitz’s ideas, which are seen as continuous with the modern interstate wars. They all appeal to the same idea of “statization” of war, deriving it from Westphalian times. The “statization” of war (or subordination of war to the territorial state) refers to well-known historical processes: the creation of an effective bureaucratic machine, the development of standing armies and the institution of soldiering, and codifying the norms of war. The state has taken over the prerogative to name its enemies, has made a clear distinction between violence and commercial activity as well as between criminal violence and lawful killing in war<sup>24</sup>.

New wars, differently from what they call the “Clausewitzian ones”,

<sup>21</sup> Kaldor, p. 7. Misra, p. 12. Kaldor suggests to evaluate the war in Iraq (2003) from the perspective of identity politics as well: as an attempt to develop a specific Western identity.

<sup>22</sup> Kaldor, p. 8-9. Misra, p. 45-46.

<sup>23</sup> Munkler, H., *The new wars*. Cambridge, Polity, 2005, p. 1, 14. Kaldor, p. 10. Another important characteristic of new wars is the sexualization of violence, when the violence against women is used in a strategic (systematic and calculated) way.

<sup>24</sup> Munkler (note 23), p. 38 – 41.



are spreading in the context of declining state's monopoly of mass violence. The military force is being privatized, the front lines and decisive battles are no more obvious and the distinction between civilians and combatants is blurring rapidly. Conflicts acquire a protracted character and weak states cannot contain the war, which proceeds according to its own logic. All in all, peace conditions in new wars are replaced by the state of war, in which new social ties and livelihood strategies are created. Thus, the prior imperative that the highest justification for war is peace, in new wars is utterly destroyed.

It is important that new wars are relatively cheap, because they normally do not rely on high technologies. This kind of primitiveness brings all the favourable conditions for militarists of the developing world: they can easily mobilize their fighters, getting a chance to protract the wars for years, or even for decades. The fact that war becomes a cheap business is one of the reasons why states are forced to compete with private subjects, losing their long-protected monopoly of organized violence.

In summary, by linking the phenomenon of major war to the Clausewitzian universe, Kaldor and Munkler are making the same mistakes as Creveld. They all give little serious consideration to the differences between war and warfare, between the nature and the character of war, between Clausewitz's concept of strategy and his concept of war. On the other hand, they clearly overstate the role that political rationality plays in the Clausewitzian concept of war and miss a deeper meaning of the term *politik*. It is not surprising that this reliance on a reductionist understanding of the Clausewitzian universe as merely a realm of contained interstate wars encouraged them to assert that war has undergone a major transformation. Let's turn now to a more comprehensive analysis of the shortcomings in the new wars discourse.

### 3. Key conceptual shortcomings in the "new wars" argumentation

#### **3.1. Questionable Generalizations: Globalization, Territorial Sovereignty and the Asymmetric Threats**

It was mentioned that recent U.S. Field Manual of Stability operations shares common attitudes with the "new wars" theorists. It is stated in the manual that stability operations are no longer secondary to the defense and offense. What is more, they are given a priority over combat operations. Essential stability tasks, named in the document, range from humanitarian relief (even



vaccinations) and restoring public services to the disarmament of combatants, securing borders and clearing explosive hazards<sup>25</sup>. All in all, the projected military mission is very similar to Kaldor's idea of the "cosmopolitan approach": rebuilding a legitimacy of public authorities through the reestablishment of a rule of law (a kind of "cosmopolitan law-enforcement" with help from both military and police)<sup>26</sup>.

However, this similarity does not necessarily show that Americans develop their military doctrines regarding the arguments of social scientists. It is rather a reflection of deeper changes in the Western attitudes towards the military. I will return to this in the last section. As for now, there are several important shortcomings in the "new wars" conception that need attention.

Firstly, the very term "new" war and the assumption that war has undergone a transformation is doubtful indeed. For Kaldor, new wars are a kind of antithesis to the old, Clausewitzian ones. However, the Clausewitzian era is not that easy to define – Clausewitz himself admitted that contained interstate war is only a temporary phenomenon. Furthermore, he welcomed the French Revolution inspired tendencies to return the people to the business of war. In his book, Clausewitz gave considerable attention to what can be called the "irrational" factors in war: emotions, passion, national spirit, imagination, chances and opportunities. Since the "new wars" theorists have overlooked the difference between the nature and the character of war, they came to identify Clausewitz's theory merely with modern interstate wars ("old" wars), bounded by a principle of political rationality.

It was mentioned that we can describe the character of war as warfare, the art of war or just the conduct of war: it is a product of a particular time period and specific political circumstances. The same can be said about Clausewitz's concept of strategy – first and foremost, it is a reflection of Napoleon's strategy. Differently, the nature of war points to the very essence of war, to its innate logic: it is an extreme representation of the phenomenon, a pure type. A majority of the characteristics attributed to the "new" types of organized violence – such as privatization of force, ethnic cleansing and brutality, pragmatic financial motives, etc. – indicate the changing character of war at best. However, the very essence of war—or war as an ontological phenomenon—is not necessarily changing in turn.

The "new wars" discourse has other empirical and theoretic shortcomings as well. At least three vague generalizations are quite distinct: "globalization", the asymmetric character of current wars and the atrophy of the state's autonomy. The concept of globalization is not properly defined. Firstly, causal connections implicated by it are hard to test empirically and hot academic

<sup>25</sup> The versatility of military missions, proposed in the Field manual of Stability operations reminds a few years old discussion about expanding the scope of military activities: U.S. Marines have offered an idea of a three-block war, which states that troops might be forced to engage in humanitarian relief, peace operations and conventional war simultaneously in a small area.

<sup>26</sup> Kaldor, p. 11-12.

debates about the interpretation of data are still going on. Secondly, the term is haunted by political biases<sup>27</sup>. Transnational cultural, economic and social networks, emphasized by Kaldor, create an image of a global village. However, the idea of such an integrated hyper-space lacks both empirical and theoretical validity. It might be useful to reflect on the role of local tendencies in the new wars. Stathis Kalyvas argues that scholars, who are leaving out of consideration historically settled local factors, such as religious, tribal, cultural characteristics, tend to romanticize old civil wars and to criminalize the new ones.<sup>28</sup> Wars in Africa or Southeast Asia do not have to comply with Western conventional rules of modern wars.

The “asymmetric” character of the new wars is a vague description as well. Strachan argues that much of this popular debate is historically naïve, as asymmetry is inherent in strategy: the weaker side will always try to gain advantage by using unpredictable responses<sup>29</sup>. For ages, guerrilla wars were troubling the strongest military forces of the time: it is enough to think about the Spanish uprising in the XIX c. It is important that Munkler relates the principle of asymmetry to a growing role of global media. Although there is a glimpse of truth in the assertion that media can well restrain strategic choices of counterinsurgencies, it is still not an instrument of the weaker side alone: the media is used to criminalize irregular opponents (fighters) as well.

There is no need to question Munkler’s idea that the absolute military predominance of the U.S. is leaving less and less space for waging regular conventional wars – as Michael Evans stated it, postmodern “high-tech” conflict has created its own antithesis<sup>30</sup>. Nevertheless, the need to adapt one’s own political approach by recognizing the importance and complexity of contemporary irregular wars does not necessarily signify a transformation of war – and such phenomena of “asymmetric” warfare as terrorism or humanitarian intervention do not do this either. The relation between war and terrorism or war and humanitarian interventions is not that obvious; it just makes the meaning of war even more fluid.

The assumption that territorial sovereignty and the autonomy of state are no longer viable is probably the weakest part in the “new wars” discourse. The fact that growing global networks are undermining the isolationism of states does not show that territorial sovereignty is no longer relevant. The problem is that new wars break out mostly in the developing world. It means we have to deal with states that have hardly ever seen a proper scale of a state’s integrity. In the better part of the developing states, statehood covers centuries-old tribal structures, where distinct tribes developed their identities only by constantly warring with similar tribes. According to Mats Berdal, different

<sup>27</sup> Berdal, M., „How „new“ are „new wars“? Global economic change and the study of civil war“. *Global Governance*, No. 9, Oct-Dec 2003, p. 480.

<sup>28</sup> Kalyvas, S. N., “New” and “old” civil wars: a valid distinction?“ *World Politics*, Vol. 54, No. 1, 2001.

<sup>29</sup> Strachan, 18. Smith, R., *The utility of force*. New York: Vintage Books, p. 6, 377.

<sup>30</sup> Evans, M., „From Kadesh to Kandahar: military theory and the future of war“. *Naval War College Review*, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0J1W/is\\_3\\_56/ai\\_105210224/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0J1W/is_3_56/ai_105210224/), 2009 05 22, p. 3.

ideas of statehood, historically constituted patterns of exploitation and socio-economic, geographical, ethnic or religious sources of intensity are moulding a different idea of war<sup>31</sup>.

Of course, theorists of the “new wars” can still argue that modern wars, unlike the new ones, were actually “making states” (as Charles Tilly stated it), not destroying them. However, such creation was far from innocent: Tilly forcefully argued that war making and state making were the largest examples of organized crime<sup>32</sup>. Before asserting that new wars do not foster state-making, but erode states instead, one should take into account the fact that these wars tend to break out in states that already live in the context of an internationally guaranteed sovereignty; i.e., in the absence of manifest external threats and constant need to guarantee survival of the state. No wonder that leaders of such states are more inclined to strengthen their personal power instead of the power of the state.

### 3.2. Historical Precedents of the New Wars

Theorists of the new wars could have escaped many questionable assumptions if they paid more attention to historical studies. Edward Newman is right that problems with the new wars discourse lie not in the analysis of today’s organized violence, but in its assertion of a general change from the past<sup>33</sup>. Most of the new wars’ characteristics are well known to military historians. Since the times of Thucydides civil wars have been especially brutal in regard to civilians, whereas classical interstate wars have also had an element of greed: Creveld states that Napoleon’s army turned feeding “war by war” into a fine art<sup>34</sup>. Privatization of violence has many historical precedents as well. City states, condotierri, religious associations and commercial organizations (such as British East India Company) - all these non-state subjects did engage in organized, large-scale wars<sup>35</sup>.

Historical guerrilla wars, even atrocious peasant uprisings had characteristics of violence similar to the new wars. Just consider the Thirty Years war (1618-1648), which was dominated by the strategy of economic attrition, indiscriminating killing of unarmed civilians, moral degradation of military forces and privatization of violence. One could even find here a model of open war economy – after all, a considerable part of the resources had flowed into

<sup>31</sup> Berdal (note 27), p. 491-493.

<sup>32</sup> Sorensen, G., *War and state making – why doesn't it work in the third world?* Aarhus: Aarhus University Department of Political science, 2001, p. 3. On the other hand, some kind of sub-state structures are often created by the warlords, who are settled in a particular area. Moreover, the warring/revolutionary party serves quite successfully instead of a totalizing and indoctrinating logic of the state (Schmitt has applied this principle to the logic of revolutionary guerrilla parties).

<sup>33</sup> Newman, E., „The “New wars” debate: a historical perspective is needed“. *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 35, No. 2, June 2004, p. 180.

<sup>34</sup> Creveld, 1991, p. 77.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 197.

Germany from other European states or even from the “New World”.

However, historical guerrilla wars, revolutions, insurgencies and other “small” wars often were not granted the name of war because of their irregular character. Devaluation of these conflicts in the course of military history (together with a lack of trusted facts) is probably the reason why nowadays they might appear so new. It is also important to bear in mind that throughout the centuries the harsh realities of war were not so escalated in public space as now. And much from them has been forgotten. Of course, it would be a mistake to argue that conflicts, analyzed in the “new wars” discourse, have nothing new: globalization and its implicated social inequalities, the trade of small arms and light weapons provide rebels and militarists with possibilities that they have never had before. Nevertheless, it is too early to assert a major change from the past and a major transformation of war.

Despite the weaknesses, the “new wars” conception has its obvious strengths, too. Michael Brzoska argues that the aim of its authors was not to prove something scientifically, but to understand<sup>36</sup>. Incidents that in modern conventional wars were only by-products of war are now becoming dangerous tendencies in new wars. Finally, even if tendencies in new wars recall historical realities in many ways, it still does not eliminate the desire and the responsibility to understand the particularities of our own times. What was understandable in the seventeenth century does not necessarily have to be justified in the twenty-first.

Munkler argues that he has chosen a badly defined conception of the “new wars” because it is difficult to frame contemporary conflicts into a coherent theory. But maybe there is no need for this? It is quite obvious that wars in Liberia or Sierra Leone were mainly driven by financial motives, but the character of the conflicts in India, Sri Lanka, Chechnya or Nepal was different. The role of identity politics is probably essential when analyzing wars in Bosnia, Sudan or Rwanda, but it has little to say about the cases of Angola or DR Congo. Understanding that these conflicts are not identical and thus require a set of theories has more potentiality. The main thing is that the primary elements of war, analyzed by Clausewitz, are endemic to all these conflicts. Furthermore, they all have a political character in the sense that they are expressions of interests of a particular community or group which seeks to consolidate its power by monopolizing force.

#### 4. Alternative Points of View: the New Paradigm of War or “War amongst the People”

Apart from the “new wars”, there are other famous attempts that ques-

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<sup>36</sup> Brzoska, M., „New wars“ discourse in Germany“. *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 2004, p. 108.

tion the viability of conventional warfare and assume that war has undergone a transformation – let's start with the idea of "fourth generation warfare" (4GW). The essence of the fourth generation war is the employment of all available networks – social, economic, political, even nets of infrastructure and information. According to Thomas X. Hammes, this type of conflict is over seventy years old and it evolved from mere insurgencies<sup>37</sup>. The society and battles over public mind are the decisive factors in the 4GW. Hammes is doubtful about the ability of modern conventional forces to counter evolving irregular warfare. In fact, he even proposes to see the future military threat of China from the perspective of 4GW as well<sup>38</sup>.

Another attempt was made by General Rupert Smith. Smith insists that industrial war no longer exists. What has had emerged in its place is a new paradigm of war: "war amongst the people"<sup>39</sup>. Smith argues that these wars are a complex combination of political and military circumstances, in which the people are the battlefield, as they become the target, the main objective of war and even the opposing force. It is particularly important, according to the General, that wars amongst the people are mainly tactical events, with just occasional forays into the operational level; hence decisive strategic victories are no more possible in them. However, the organization and training of modern military forces are just not suitable for the reality of wars among the people. Armed forces are not properly prepared for humanitarian or policing functions that become more and more important. Therefore, Smith concludes that conventional forces need changes in all the levels, starting from the conceptual one.<sup>40</sup>

It is easy to notice that given alternative viewpoints and the "new wars" conception together make a cohesive theoretical debate: actually, Kaldor and Creveld both criticized the idea of the Revolution in Military Affairs as based on inherited institutional patterns and confusing terminology. The aim of all these authors is to show that the most expensive modern technologies and inherited strategic imperatives are not effective in the amorphous realm of new wars. On the other hand, technology is a reflection of well-established military structures; therefore, a badly needed change must start from reassessing the very concept of conventional war.

Creveld is probably right that in the context of today's irregular warfare, relying on conventional attitude becomes a problem at more than only operational and tactical levels: the changed mode of warfare generates situations in which even the most disciplined troops find themselves constantly violating conventional rules<sup>41</sup>. Therefore, embarrassing moral dilemmas emerge next to the military ones (and such moral dilemmas do not constrain irregular

<sup>37</sup> Hammes, T. X., *The sling and the stone: on war in the 21st century*. St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2006, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Hammes (note 37), p. 254.

<sup>39</sup> Smith (note 29), p. 4-5.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5-7, 18, 28, 375, 411.

<sup>41</sup> Creveld, 1991, p. 92.

fighters).

Historically, conventions of war were changing time and again. It might be that today we witness a similar process and authors of the “new wars” are at least partly right. However, the new wars discourse can be assessed from an absolutely different angle – as a reflection of changing western attitudes towards war and war’s social function.

## 5. The “New Wars” Discourse - an Outcome of a Western Disenchantment of War?

Brzoska notes that in Germany the growing popularity of the “new wars” discourse coincided with changing public perceptions towards globalization and military interventions<sup>42</sup>. As a matter of fact, Clausewitz also wrote that war in all its forms is a reflection of ideas, emotions and conditions, prevailing at the time. One could wonder, what kind of emotions and social circumstances lies behind the current transformation in the attitudes towards war? According to Christopher Coker, it is the disenchantment of war.

The disenchantment of war started somewhere in the era of industrialization, when relentless technological progress devalued war both in the eyes of the society and the soldiers themselves<sup>43</sup>. Defining itself in terms of technological progress, Western civilization was persistently blurring out the line between man and nature at first, and between man and machine later on. The technological dictate had resulted in a creation of a post-human society, which was defining war in terms of speed, utility, precision and effectiveness. These changes directly affected the existential dimension of war, because the imperative of speed and precision had taken over the traditional values of a soldier – courage, self-sacrifice, and pursuit of glory and renown. As the space for individual initiative and creativity in war shrunk, the experience of a soldier appeared to be essentially dehumanizing (as World War II has shown). The extent of violence was too overwhelming to see it as still having a meaning. Finally, the understanding by society that war requires sacrifice - not so much for the state, but for the moral and ethical idea, embodied in the state – was undermined. This undermined understanding – Coker’s “metaphysical” dimension – was separating war from other forms of violence.<sup>44</sup>

However, the same technological progress enabled the idea of a “clean”

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<sup>42</sup> Brzoska (note 36), p. 114.

<sup>43</sup> Through the lenses of technology Coker seeks to demonstrate the changes, which are affecting the existential and metaphysical dimensions of war (he proposes an idea of three interrelated dimensions of war). The first dimension – instrumental conception – reflects the ways of implementing violence. The second one (existential) is dealing with the dilemmas of soldiers and the third dimension – metaphysical conception – is about ritualizing death and sacrifice in war, giving a higher meaning for it. Coker, C., *The future of war: the re-enchantment of war in the XXI century*. Malden: Blackwell, 2004.

<sup>44</sup> Coker (note 43), p. 6, 12-14, 22, 24-27

war—a particular Western way of humanizing war again. Modern technologies can minimize the risk for soldiers, allowing them to pass beyond the “death barrier”<sup>45</sup>. Coker argues that this process might “disenchant” war even more, as it omits the metaphysical idea of war, which is essential in transforming war’s nature. It is forgotten in the West that war is a bilateral act of violence, where both sides have to bear their part of sacrifice. Paradoxically, the attempt to humanize war has probably led to an even bigger crisis in the Western way of war. Of course, there are more factors contributing to this, like the need to respect human rights discourse or the imperative to wage war only for defence.

According to Martin Shaw, the crisis of the western way of war becomes a fundamental threat to the very legitimacy of war: traditionally, war was excluded from norms and criteria which were applied in other social fields<sup>46</sup>. Therefore, its conduct had immunity from many ethical and moral dogmas. Because of the imperative of a “clean” war, related to the human rights discourse, war has lost its long-time immunity. This process is reflected by the “new wars” discourse too, which basically demonstrates how the “discrowned” war is moved into a field of open moral criticism. Ungovernable, sexualized and devoid of deeper meaning, new wars are absolutely de-legitimized in the presence of Western moral structures. However, a romanticized image of patriotic, gentlemanly, impersonal and contained old wars is saved as well.

Generally, the “new wars” discourse reflects a broader Western trend: recent attempts to create a war with “human face”. However, the question as to whether humanizing war is leading to war’s own negation is getting more and more important. According to some scholars, the Western militaries are degenerating: the scope of their activities is widening notably, military and policing functions are becoming intertwined and the line between defense and security is blurring<sup>47</sup>. Throughout the twentieth century, war was defined by an unprecedented technological change. Regardless of what will mould the face of war in the twenty-first century, Western societies will first have to define their own relation to war and agree about the definition of war itself. The fact that nowadays it is so difficult to find an adequate approach to the changing character of war and to the causes of contemporary conflicts (the “new wars”) just shows that in the West we are not sure anymore what we should and what we should not grant the name of “war”.

## Concluding Remarks

In summary, the main shortcomings of the “new wars” idea are two: the assertion of a general departure from the historic past and the assumption that the nature of organized violence has suffered a fundamental transformation.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 126 - 129, 141.

<sup>46</sup> Shaw, M, *The new western way of war*. Cambridge: Polity, 2005, p. 195-197.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, p. 11. Creveld (note 15), p. 255-256, 274-276.



Many particularities displayed by this new type of war – such as privatization of violence, atrocities against civilians, narrow financial or commercial agendas, importance of collective memory and historically constituted patterns of hatred – indicate the changing character of war at best. However, the very nature of war—war as an ontological phenomenon—is not necessarily changing in turn. The “new wars” theorists’ intention to amplify the importance of low-intensity conflicts and civil wars, with tendencies and motives that were not given enough attention in the theory of war, is very welcomed. However, while criticizing one deterministic viewpoint, they offer another one. The previous trend to analyze wars exclusively in terms of geopolitics, power interests or political rationality in the “new wars” discourse is transformed into an attempt to criminalize contemporary wars, overstating their apolitical character and narrow opportunism.

The problem is that the authors of the “new wars” base their ideas on an inaccurate interpretation of Clausewitz’s theory (especially in the case of war’s trinity) and do not distinguish between the character and the nature of war. Moreover, they do not pay much attention to military history; new wars clearly have historical precedents: old civil wars, medieval peasant uprisings, guerrilla wars (such as Spanish resistance to Napoleon), and, finally, the Thirty Years war, were all marked by similar strategies of violence. Of course, nowadays these characteristics assume some distinct nuances. But it is essential to notice that previously many irregular wars and conflicts were not even granted the name of war. Probably this is why they seem so “new” today, especially when observing them on television, which is increasingly penetrating into the war zones.

On the other hand, the “new wars” discourse can be seen as a reflection of profound changes in Western societies: after the dehumanizing experiences of World War II, attempts to contain war once again had emerged. They represented a striving to make the war humane, which today can be easily observed in the idea of waging a ‘clean’ war. An expanding human rights discourse and the imperative to wage war only for defense have limited the opportunities for waging war, as well as for declaring it. Additionally, sophisticated technological developments enabled a belief that it is possible to have a war “with human face” – to overcome the death barrier by minimizing risks to soldiers and civilians alike. However, Coker claims that the Western attempt to re-enchant the war paradoxically devalues it even more, as the war’s nature is being changed instrumentally, without taking into account the metaphysical conception<sup>48</sup>.

According to Shaw, the wars in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) have really showed that the new Western way of war does not fit the criteria created by the West itself. Actually, it has signified a crisis in the attitudes towards war. This crisis is becoming a threat to the very institution of war, which is losing its historical immunity. The “new wars” discourse is a perfect example of the recent trend to criminalize war, by placing it into a field of open moral criticism.

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<sup>48</sup>Coker, p. 141.

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On the other hand, the dispute over new wars has shown that it is not easy to decide about the very definition of war. It might be that the character of war, as well as its convention, is really changing. It might be that such a change requires not only a new attitude towards war, but a “new pacifism” as well – based on proactive and responsible efforts of peace-enforcement. However, a starting point should be the same – if we are to find a relevant approach to the character and causes of today’s wars, we must first agree on what we should or should not call ‘war’.

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