Warfare in the 21st Century Postmodern World: Causes and Consequences for States' Survival

Agostinho Cunha
Retired army colonel holding a Ph.D. in political science at La Sapienza University in Rome. Currently, he is the Secretary-General at EuroDefense-Portugal.

Abstract

Complexity in international relations has been growing with the increase in the number of states present since the UN's inception, each having different views and interests, which sometimes led to conflictual interactions and growing tensions in their international relations. Recently, the involvement of new international actors other than nation-states that emerged with relevant roles in the international arena introduced additional uncertainty and brought even more complexity to the international system. The involvement of an array of new non-state actors in conflict, the empowerment of individuals, and the diffusion of power among states and from states to informal networks have already had a tectonic global impact on the international security system that forced a debate about the new character of conflict and war.

At the same time, new technological developments and the exploitation of new domains, such as space and cyberspace, along with a broader dispersion of power and knowledge that flows from the new information systems' era and the eroding legitimacy of the armed forces, all contributed to a multidimensional trend towards privatization within armed conflict, which some consider to be a game changer in the realms of security and defense.
Exploring causes and deducing consequences for nation-states' survival in such a complex and conflictual new security environment deserves a proper analysis that is proposed through an inductive approach based on a combination of experience and primary sources by the author.

Keywords: Security; International Affairs; International Environment; Cyberspace; Space; Complex; Hybrid; Conflict; Warfare; War; Insurgency; Terrorism.

Resumo

A Guerra no Mundo Pós-Moderno do Século XXI: Causas e Consequências para a Sobrevivência dos Estados

A complexidade nas relações internacionais tem crescido com o aumento do número de Estados desde a criação da ONU, cada um com pontos de vista e interesses diferentes, o que por vezes levou a interações conflituosas e a tensões crescentes nas relações internacionais. Recentemente, o envolvimento de novos atores internacionais, para além dos Estados-nação, que surgiram com papéis relevantes na arena internacional, introduziu incerteza adicional e trouxe ainda mais complexidade ao sistema internacional. O envolvimento de uma série de novos intervenientes não estatais em conflitos, o empoderamento dos indivíduos e a difusão do poder entre Estados e dos Estados para redes informais já teve um impacto global tectónico no sistema de segurança internacional que forçou um debate sobre o novo carácter do conflito e da guerra.

Ao mesmo tempo, os novos desenvolvimentos tecnológicos e a exploração de novos domínios, como o espaço e o ciberespaço, juntamente com uma dispersão mais ampla de poder e conhecimento que flui da era dos novos sistemas de informação e da erosão da legitimidade das forças armadas, contribuíram para a uma tendência multidimensional para a privatização no âmbito dos conflitos armados, que alguns consideram ser uma mudança de jogo nos domínios da segurança e da defesa.

Explorar as causas e deduzir as consequências para a sobrevivência dos Estados-nação num novo ambiente de segurança tão complexo e conflituoso merece uma análise adequada que é proposta através de uma abordagem indutiva baseada numa combinação de experiência e fontes primárias usadas pelo autor.

Palavras-chave: *Assuntos Internacionais; Ambiente internacional; Ciberespaço; Espaço; Complexo; Híbrido; Conflito; Guerra; Insurgência; Terrorismo.*

Artigo recebido: 10.03.2024
Aprovado: 24.04.2024
https://doi.org/10.47906/ND2024.167.03

> "Let us learn our lessons. Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy, or that anyone who embarks on that strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter. The Statesman who yields to war fever must realize that once the signal is given, he is no longer the master of policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events".
>
> Winston Churchill, *My Early Life* (1930).

1. The International Humanitarian Law Framework

One-sided Violence Against Civilians

The American military doctrine expressed at the beginning of this century stated: "The nature of warfare in the 21st century remains as it has been since ancient times – a violent clash of interests between or among organized groups characterized by the use of military force."[1] And this might well be still valid, considering the example of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In this definition, the focus is still on armed conflict and military force according to its traditional definition, which is armed violence between military forces of parties contesting an incompatibility between nation-states. However, since the end of the Cold War, much of the armed violence does not fit anymore into this category. There have been other forms of violence, such as massacres, arbitrary killings, and the wide spread of terrorist attacks, just to name a few, that were inflicted directly and intentionally on civilians. Although these forms of violence are unlawful, they often still take place in the context of an armed conflict, in which this particular type of "one-sided" violence[2] against civilians has been largely perpetrated.[3]

One-sided violence is not an armed conflict as such, as it directly and intentionally targets civilians who cannot defend themselves with arms. It is also distinct from battle-related violence that incidentally injures or kills civilians, for instance, when civilians are caught in crossfire between combatants, which is commonly described as "collateral damage". Yet, the distinction is not always easy to make. In contrast to indiscriminate violence, one-sided violence is a matter of conscious political and strategic choice and not a technological factor, which is an inseparable part of

1 United States Marine Corps, "Warfighting". MCDP 1, Washington DC, June 1997, p. 3.

2 The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) defines one-sided violence as the intentional use of armed force against civilians by a government or formally organized group that results in at least 25 deaths in a calendar year. Purely criminal violence is not included here, although the two can be difficult to distinguish.

3 Ekaterina Stepanova, "Trends in armed conflicts: one-sided violence against civilians" (Chap. 2). *SIPRI Yearbook: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security.* Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 2008, p. 43.

modern warfare. The practical utility of trying to distinguish between one-sided and indiscriminate violent attacks on civilians is, however, limited, especially in cases of widespread and large-scale campaigns of violence, as both are considered grave breaches of international humanitarian law. Indiscriminate attacks, including attacks on military targets that can be expected to cause excessive loss of civilian lives or too much damage to civilian infrastructure, which violate the principle of proportionality, are prohibited.

Although one-sided violence can take place during peacetime, almost all fatalities from one-sided violence occur in countries affected by armed conflict, where combatants perpetrate much of this one-sided violence.[4] Despite being unlawful, terrorism overwhelmingly uses one-sided violence against civilians and other non-combatants[5] in the context of armed conflicts, aiming at destabilization and public intimidation. This serves as a cost-effective force multiplier in the asymmetrical confrontation between a non-state actor and a much stronger state actor.[6]

Main International Humanitarian Law's Rules in Non-international Armed Conflicts

To limit the methods and means of warfare and to protect people who are not taking part in the hostilities, International Humanitarian Law (IHL) applies. For that purpose, the IHL defines and regulates only two categories of armed conflict: international and non-international armed conflicts, where in the latter are the localized wars that include very diverse situations, both in terms of the form and the objective of the internal armed confrontations. This term is usually used as opposed to the category of international armed conflict, thus replacing and including the notions of internal armed conflict, civil war, rebellion, insurrection, and others, which are not specific independent categories defined and recognized by the Humanitarian Law. Anyway, not every situation of armed violence within a state reaches the threshold of a non--international armed conflict. When violence is merely a situation of criminality, internal strife, or civil disturbance, IHL does not apply, and instead, nation-states apply their own internal criminal law.

Civilians are indeed to be protected in areas of armed conflict and occupied territories by the 159 articles of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which include

4 Kristine Eck and Lisa Hultman, "One-sided violence against civilians in war: insights from new fatality data". *Journal of Peace Research*, 44(2), Mar. 2007, p. 237.

5 A non-combatant is any person not taking part in hostilities, including civilians, military doctors, sick, wounded or captured soldiers, and former combatants.

6 Ekaterina Stepanova, "Trends in armed conflicts: one-sided violence against civilians" (Chap. 2). *SIPRI Yearbook: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security.* Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 2008, pp. 13-20.

protection from murder, torture, or brutality and from discrimination on the basis of race, nationality, religion, or political opinion. If enemy fighters are captured in a non-international armed conflict, they are not considered prisoners of war (POW), which term refers specifically to a special status afforded by the Third Geneva Convention to captured enemy soldiers (combatants) in international armed conflicts. Prisoners of war cannot thus be prosecuted for acts that are lawful under the IHL, such as using force or fighting with firearms. In contrast, in a non-international armed conflict, IHL does not prevent the prosecution of captured rebel fighters for the mere fact of having taken up arms, although it encourages governments to grant the broadest possible amnesties at the end of an armed conflict, except for persons suspected, accused, or sentenced for war crimes.

This means that most unprivileged combatants who do not qualify for protection under the Third Geneva Convention, which sets out specific rules for the treatment of prisoners of war (POWs), do so under the Fourth Geneva Convention, which concerns civilians, until they have a fair and regular trial. When captured, if there is any doubt whether those persons benefit from combatant status, they must be held as prisoners of war until they face a "competent tribunal" to decide the issue. If found guilty at a regular trial, they can then be punished under the civilian laws of the detaining power. These are the main sets of international rules regarding the methods and means of warfare in non-international armed conflicts.

Terrorism, a Special Case

Terrorism, however, disregards these constraints and has been a scourge that has increased across the globe, especially with the use of terror to further political causes that has accelerated in recent years. Terrorism is a particular form of non-legitimate and unlawful use of force whose complexity, fighting mode, organization, and countermeasures deserve a more profound and independent analysis. It can be expressed in many types and forms, and no single theory can cover them all. Terrorism, despite being widely recognized as a non-legitimate and unlawful use of force, has been practiced by political organizations with both rightist and leftist objectives, by nationalistic and religious groups, by revolutionaries, and even by states and state institutions such as armies, intelligence services, and police.

Politically motivated terrorism, which is the use of violence against non-combatants for the purpose of demoralization and intimidation to inspire fear and advance a political cause, is an old phenomenon. In spite of its recurrence, there is still no universally agreed-upon definition of terrorism, making it a difficult object to quantify. Due to these difficulties, terrorism is not legally defined in all jurisdictions, but the statutes that do exist generally share some common elements: terrorism involves the

calculated use of violence, or threat of the use of violence, and seeks to create fear, not just among the direct victims involved but also among a wider audience, as A. Schmid[7] mainly contends in his comprehensive analysis of conceptualizing terrorism and its nuances related to its concept, object, term, and definition. Despite these difficulties, terrorism is very real and intended to coerce or intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are typically political, religious, or ideological. Terrorism may thus be seen as the systematic and calculated use, or threat of the use, of violence to create a general climate of fear in a population and thereby bring about a particular political, religious, or ideological objective. While the existing United Nations' twelve anti-terrorist conventions and protocols are useful and necessary legal instruments regarding this controversial issue, there is still a need for a UN and a worldwide consensus definition.

In spite of what some might think, insurgencies and revolutionary or partisan warfare are not really forms of terrorism, although they often use terrorist tactics for their purposes. Terrorism has, in fact, its own logic, quite different from that of national or political groups seeking to control a state. Partisan warfare, just like terrorism, has also regularly been present throughout history and was used by guerrillas to achieve their political goals. However, terrorism and partisan warfare are very different concepts, and their differences should always be kept in mind. Like partisan warfare, terrorism is a political concept, but contrary to partisan war, terrorism is a planned, calculated, and systematic act. While the partisan has a real enemy whom he fights in an irregular war, which some claim to be humane and legitimate, the terrorist has an absolute enemy who must be annihilated. As Carl Schmitt contested,[8] terrorists are outside international law in general and outside the laws of war in particular, which is not the case of partisan warfare or other types of irregular or unconventional warfare.

In the modern context, asymmetric warfare is increasingly considered a component of a type of warfare that some call Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW).[9] But when it is practiced outside the international laws of war, it is often defined as terrorism, although it is rarely recognized as such by its practitioners or their supporters. For instance, terrorists typically use unlawful tactics, such as using women and children as human shields, a practice that is not considered either moral or part of traditional warfare and is forbidden by international law.[10] These practices cannot thus be used in partisan or in any other asymmetric type of warfare.

7 Alex Schmid, "Terrorism – The Definitional Problem". *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, 36(2), 2004.

8 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition*, 2007, p. xvii.

9 See Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and The Stone: On War in the 21st Century*. St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2004.

10 William C. Banks, ed., *New Battlefields, Old Laws: Critical Debates on Asymmetric Warfare*. Columbia University Press, 2011.

Another element to be taken into consideration is the definition and the existing criteria for qualification of the types of warfare. These cannot be used or interpreted as creating new categories of conflict that are not covered by international humanitarian law, as some states, for instance, the US and Israel, have tried to do in the past. The work of description and typology of the current forms of armed conflict is nonetheless useful to understand the particular forms of confrontation unique to each context. However, it should not lead to the creation of new legal categories that would fall outside the scope of humanitarian law and will probably open a Pandora's box in this respect. The recent US "Global War on Terrorism" (GWOT), therefore, is not considered a third category of armed conflict, and the guarantees of Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions[11] will apply in such conditions. Some states and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) believe, however, that counterterrorism does not even fall in the armed conflict category and is just a matter of criminal and human rights law rather than the law of war. This dissonance can have strong effects in warfare, especially when the military is involved in coalition operations, and military leaders in their day-to-day must maneuver carefully through the challenges posed by those present differences.

2. International Political and Security Tectonic Shifts of the 21st Century

Complexity in international relations and in armed conflicts has been growing with the number of new states existing today, with the UN alone growing from 51 member states in 1945 to the present 193,[12] which has brought in a wide range of new voices, perspectives, interests, experiences, and aspirations. Nearly as significant has also been the emergence of many relevant non-state actors in international affairs, including numerous NGOs dealing with global matters and a growing number of media and academic institutions with worldwide reach. In addition, an increasingly diverse array of armed non-state actors, ranging from traditional rebel movements to national and international terrorist organizations and various organized criminal groups, added an even higher level of complexity to the current international environment.[13]

11 Médecins Sans Frontières, "Non-international Armed Conflict (NIAC)", in *The Practical Guide to Humanitarian Law*. Article 3 offers an international minimum protection to persons taking no active part in hostilities, including members of armed forces in certain situations. Humane and non-discriminatory treatment are two of the protections offered.

12 There are 193 countries, if we consider the countries part of the UN. Others consider 195, adding in Palestine and the Vatican City.

13 International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), *The Responsibility To Protect*. Report of the ICISS, December 2001, p. 4. International Development Research Centre.

New Non-State Actors and the International Trends in Conflicts

Non-state actors began to be effectively relevant to international security in the form of insurgencies. Competition between human networks has been growing, in particular in the post-Cold War era, driven by different narratives and gathered around "coalitions of angry" or around opportunists based in societies in conflict. Insurgencies have thus emerged as transnational and self-supporting movements in many transborder conflicts, in weak and failing or failed states, as was the case in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine, but also in many other cases in Africa and elsewhere. Today, the involvement of many of these international actors other than nation-states that emerged with relevant roles in the international system has also introduced a new paradigm in warfare. They may not have a central vision or a clear end state, often fight with each other, and are unable to rule in coalition, but their role has been increasingly growing in international affairs, as it happened in several Arab Spring movements and more recently also in the Sahel conflicts. These new non-state actors, friendly or adversary, have forced the debate about the new character of war and of international interventions, which have sometimes been conducted online and live in front of a broader public.

Another sad trend in contemporary conflicts has been the increasing vulnerability of civilians, including their often deliberate targeting. Efforts to suppress armed and sometimes also unarmed dissent have in many cases led to excessive and disproportionate actions by states' governments, producing excessive and unnecessary suffering on the part of civilian populations. In some cases, regimes have launched campaigns of terror on their own populations in the name of an ideology, stimulated sometimes by racial, religious, or ethnic hatred and other times purely for personal gain or a need for power. In other cases, they have supported or encouraged terror campaigns aimed at other countries that have resulted in major destruction and unacceptable loss of life.[14]

Despite terrorism being widely recognized as an immoral and unlawful form of armed violence, we can expect asymmetric actions to be often accompanied by terrorist attacks and that terrorism will cyclically come and go, with atrocity levels also probably rising. Indeed, politically motivated terrorism has emerged as the most probable and sometimes the only possible weapon for those desperate, poor and weak needing to fight to advance their aspirations against overwhelmingly strong nation-state adversaries. The success or failure of their asymmetric actions will depend on a number of factors, but determinants of the future of insurgents and terrorists will predominantly be the availability of funds, suitable command and control systems, and the commercial availability of high-capability information

14 International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), *The Responsibility To Protect*. Report of the ICISS, December 2001. International Development Research Centre.

technology (IT) systems that, when used imaginatively and unconstrained by national and international laws, morality, and electoral accountability, can contribute to disrupting societies, especially if they are merged with the use of other powerful weapons of mass destruction.

Religious extremism, namely by Islamist movements, is another trend that may also peak in the next few years and then fade if all parties progressively accept negotiations. No matter what the root causes of extremism are, the main aspect affecting the future of insurgents and terrorists will always be the availability of finance.[15] Although this is a critical factor, the amount of money required for their actions does not have to be massive, which makes this type of conduct so attractive to them. Still, a huge amount of funding may be needed if terrorists or insurgents decide, and are able, to use chemical, biological, or nuclear agents. Whatever the methods used, asymmetric opponents, whether insurgents or terrorists, will nevertheless proliferate, and under loose franchises, they can even be able to cooperate for decades to come. To counter these threats, the use of military capability may not be proportional to the enemy they fought against in cases of asymmetrical conflicts.[16] In today's world, one of the main focuses of the military will continue to be unconventional warfare, and insurgency and terrorism will be a large and growing element of the security challenges the world will have to face in the 21st century.

In these contexts, powerful states have been intervening internationally to maintain global security around the world. Yet, they should not count on being liked or admired for their actions when the people of the countries where they intervene live in unbalanced and iniquitous economic and social conditions. In fact, they are more likely to be opposed and fought asymmetrically by them, as happened in Afghanistan or the Sahel.

The development of insurgencies in the new age of communications and mass media has also had a profound impact on the ways in which insurgencies operate. Like in many other conflict environments, narratives will be central. Media, in its modern form, allows for an insurgent to spread its narrative and to change the center of gravity of a conflict to a distant population, enabling the inclusion of disparate third parties, nevertheless how distant or detached they are, and allowing also for a direct line of communication between the insurgent and the part of the population still under government control. The introduction of this new non-corporeal "battle space"[17] will thus increase the area vulnerable to insurgent pressure. Overall, the

15 Robert A. Pape, "Empire Falls". *The National Interest*, 99, January/February 2009, pp. 21-34.

16 Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, "Handling and Manhandling Civilians in Civil War: Determinants of the Strategies of Warring Factions". *American Political Science Review*, 100(3), August 2006, p. 429.

17 Thomas Rid and Thomas Keaney, eds. *Understanding Counterinsurgency: Doctrine, Operations and Challenges*. Routledge, 2010, pp. 224-227.

advent of this new media space[18] and growing efforts in its use and exploitation have become a major and determinate factor in the success or failure of insurgency in the post-modern age. Even during wars of national survival, conflict will remain focused on influencing people. The battle of narratives will therefore be key, and maintaining public support will be essential for success in operations as well. Critical to this effort will be the perception of the legitimacy of the use of force, but also of the form of intervention and conduct in warfare.

Super-Empowered Individuals

Analysts and experts pointed out that modern information technology and media have also contributed to allowing elements beyond the military's direct control, the so-called "super-empowered individuals" – people who use the tools of technology and networks in order to have an outsized impact on the world – to have gained greater influence and opportunities to alter state policy through disruptive actions.[19] More and more, we have seen the emergence of these super-empowered individuals, or related concepts, in debates over globalization, politics, media, and war. The basic idea is that, today, an individual has much more power to create a difference, be it good or bad, than he or she did in the past. Thomas Friedman,[20] who coined the term "super-empowered individual", argued that globalization has radically "flattened" the globe, enabling individuals to decisively influence global systems in another tectonic shift.[21] Super-empowered small groups, perhaps even individuals, may constitute a serious threat as they already have greater access to lethal and disruptive technologies, particularly precision-strike capabilities, cyber instruments, and bio-terror weaponry. This enables them to perpetrate large-scale violence, a capability that formerly was the monopoly just of states. These groups or individuals will increasingly use the power of knowledge and new "off-the-shelf" technology, and while they may be loyal to a cause, they will hardly be it to a single nation. Biological advances, such as synthetic biology, nanotechnologies, or explosives, along with their decreasing cost and increasing availability, will contribute to the success of potential attacks. Examples of such attacks include

18 Thomas Rid, *War and Media Operations: The US Military and the Press from Vietnam to Iraq*. Routledge, 2007, p. 146.

19 Adam Elkus and Crispin Burke, "WikiLeaks, Media, and Policy: A Question of Super-Empowerment". *Small Wars Journal*, 2010, p. 1.

20 Thomas L. Friedman. *Longitudes and Attitudes: Exploring the World After September 11*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002.

21 *Tectonic shifts* are critical changes to key features of our global environment that will affect how the world "works".

the US Capitol Hill anthrax attack in 2001, or the 2004 Madrid and 2005 London bombings.

Other times, super-empowered individuals will instead use the power of just their money and influence, as was the case with the growing number of oligarchs in Russia and Ukraine. In reality, oligarchy is a form of power structure in which power rests effectively with a few people that could be distinguished by their royalty, wealth, family ties, education, and corporate or military control. The privatization of many state-owned assets that followed Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union gave birth to a powerful class of politically connected individuals. They accumulated tremendous wealth while acquiring and monopolizing assets spanning the country's metals, chemicals, and energy distribution industries and, since then, have played a crucial role in their internal political systems.

There are evident close ties between oligarchs and the evolution of Ukraine's political crisis. This was well illustrated, for instance, in Donetsk in 2014, when the Ukrainian candidate for president, Vitaliy Klitschko, met with Rinat Akhmetov, the country's richest man, to discuss the ongoing and future situation in the country. Russia, on the other hand, had a long tradition of centralized power, and while the Kremlin regained its power, Moscow subsumed or eliminated the superior influence of most of these wealthy individuals. Kyiv, instead, wielded no such political might, and Ukraine's oligarchs were never fully subordinated by the government, so their power could grow. There are yet some other examples of oligarchs that have a relevant influence in politics, government, economics, finance, industry, space, communications, and other crucial state areas. Their influence in international affairs can sometimes be great, as some think, for instance, in the case of Elon Musk. Musk co-founded and currently leads several strategic enterprises and businesses, such as Tesla, SpaceX, Neuralink, The Boring Company, X (the former Tweeter), and more. The rise of these super-empowered individuals and other non-state actors became possible due to the growing fade of influence of the nation-state, which they also contributed indeed to eroding.

The Disappearance of a Common Enemy and the Democracies' Decay

The disappearance of an international major enemy threat that came with Fukuyama's "end of history" that followed the Cold War, and the beginning of a new desired world peace was perhaps the main shift that had a profound impact on the international security environment. In an era when threats were swiftly transformed into challenges and enemies into adversaries, it enabled many of the world's tectonic changes and the beginning of the decay of security and defense policies, but also of democracies. The international political environment where liberal democratic nation-states of the Western world lived followed a similar trending path of slowly falling apart. Liberal

democracy's emphasis on the separation of powers, an independent judiciary, and a system of checks and balances between branches of government has also begun to fade away. While Western democracies were lacking the will to strive, populism and corruption grew, at the same time as personal agendas and private interests overlapped with the higher interests of nation-states. After decades of globalization, the Western democratic political system seems to have become obsolete, and spasms of resurgent nationalism are a sign of its irreversible decline. As Zanny Beddoes, editor of *The Economist*, stated on August 29, 2019, "Democracies are generally thought to die at the barrel of a gun, in coups and revolutions. These days, however, they are more likely to be strangled slowly in the name of the people. Old-established polities, such as Britain and America, are not about to become one-party states, but their democracy is already showing signs of decay. Once the rot sets in, it is formidably hard to stop." Values and democratic principles have indeed been disappearing or being substituted by populism, by the search for influence and power, and an excessive focus on economic growth and wealth. Lying became almost an art and a new normal in politics, even if the lie was many times bluntly different from reality. While liberal democracies were growing ill, their basic freedom principle of "government of the people, by the people, for the people," expressed in the Gettysburg Address of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln (November 19, 1863), seems to have also been forgotten in many cases. And these are not the only illnesses that show democracies have been stretched to their limits.

Political ideology also lost most of its strength and meaning. Communism, which had nearly disappeared as a relevant ideology after the Soviet Union's collapse, was rapidly followed by China's surprising economic system transformation. Afterward, Russia would become almost an ally in NATO, and China would have an almost traditional capitalist economy. These events resulted in closer international cooperation, economic growth, and dependence, with Western countries transferring their industries mainly to China and thus also their superior knowledge, condemning their future survival in the name of rapid profit. Countries that did not adapt stayed predominantly poor and internationally outcast, which might have been the case in North Korea and Cuba.

Meanwhile, in many European countries, socialism moved on to be converted into social democracy movements, as expressed in their socialist parties' political manifests, although they retained the fists on their red flags and symbols. Furthermore, in some cases, when losing democratic elections, they promoted unnatural alliances with both leftist and extreme left parties in order to be able to rule; regardless, they all followed afterward more or less liberal or conservative policies, despite continuing to call themselves socialist and leftist parties. Voters felt they had been deceived (but not only by them), and abstention rose significantly in many countries' elections, where discussions in campaigns often got apart from

the main problems societies were needing to be solved, as it seems was, for instance, the case in the UK Brexit.

At the same time, important international organizations have also been losing their influence in the international system, such as the OSCE or, more importantly, the United Nations (UN). The UN, which was settled after World War II and was then thought to be the world's bastion of peace and international law, setting the international relations' rules of conduct between states, solving their disputes, and settling quarrels, seems today to be no more effective in achieving it. While the UN became incapable of functioning at a variety of levels, and not only at its Security Council level, it has dragged down multilateralism with it on this disaggregation path. Multilateralism has indeed slowly been losing importance and is being substituted by the rise of a multipolar power world, where rather prevails the force of the stronger over the weak.

The apparent decline of Western democracies became even more evident with the rise of diverse, relevant non-state actors. These actors flourished due to the growing loss of relevance of the nation-state as the recognized legal actor with the monopoly of the use of force through its armed forces and committed to the rules of international humanitarian law. The armed forces of Western nation-states sadly followed a similar path, not being fit, lacking capabilities, suitable budgets, manpower, logistics, equipment, ammunition, and training. Another worrying insidious trend is the continuously growing political interference in Western armed forces leaderships, structures, and sometimes also in their operations. Military structures and leaders fully rely now on political nominations and organization, which sometimes extend to some rather low levels of the hierarchy, disregarding many of their best-suited and most merited military expertise.

War will expose these weaknesses, as we could have already seen glimpses in the high-ranking Russian military's conduct of war during Ukraine's invasion operations.

Contractors and the New "Civilization" of the Armed Forces

The empowerment of individuals and the diffusion of power among states and from states to informal networks will have a dramatic global impact in the years to come. Interconnectedness, the dispersion of power and knowledge, and the eroding legitimacy of the armed force are leading to a multidimensional trend towards privatization within the realms of both security and armed conflict.[22] The maintenance

22 Steven Metz, "Armed Conflict In The 21st Century: The Information Revolution And Post-Modern Warfare". U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College Press, 2000, p. ix.

of a high-tech military force is in fact very costly today, and this may explain why the US military began to search for ways to increase its strategic, operational, and tactical flexibility once the Cold War ended. The disappearance of the threat of a declared common enemy allowed the US military to begin relying on alternative markets' solutions and increasingly outsourcing some support functions to private contractors, a development that was later mirrored by many armed forces of other countries, which sometimes have taken even further outsourcing, extending it also to critical capabilities.

Indeed, many of the nation-states' intrinsic defense and security capabilities need to be fulfilled now by contractors and other civilians, while the Western armed forces have been declining in number, budgets, materials, weaponry, and ammunition, which is to say, they have lost fundamental capabilities and also their goal. As a result, most Western armed forces are no longer able to conduct independent high-intensity operations by themselves and thus need to be integrated and act in coalitions of the willing, within alliances, and in other geometries of forces for operations to overcome their weakness.

Nonetheless, up to now, this has only occurred within the realm of low-intensity conflicts and not really in conventional warfare, understood as one of the forms of high-intensity international armed conflict. For those more demanding high-intensity operations, Western democracies have been mainly relying on American support, which in the future might well never come, especially if Donald Trump becomes President of the US again. Without American support, European armed forces will probably not last long in combat in a high-intensity conventional war, as they have too many critical weaknesses, especially regarding command and control capabilities and almost any remaining meaningful mobilization capability due to the end of conscription. In addition, they do not have enough stock of ammunition and other logistic supplies due to the exigency of defense budgets, the decline of their defense industries, or the relocation of national technological industries to the Far East countries, some of which might well be adversaries in the future. These anti-natural strategic national decisions taken over the years fully compromised the abilities of the European armed forces, like the previous sole dependence on Russia's oil and gas, which fully compromised many European states' energy security in central Europe.

As nations seek ways to attain a surge capacity without the expense of sustaining a large peacetime military, and as they also face important economic constraints and difficulties in recruiting from their own populations, "contracting" was the most attractive option for filling the gaps. The privatization of war and conflict privileged therefore the use of mercenaries and of private military and security companies (PMSC), sometimes simply called 'contractors'. These are a specific type of non-state actors that have been having a "tectonic" influence on the changing character of

conflict and warfare. Corporate armies, navies, air forces, and intelligence services may thus be major actors in future 21st-century armed conflicts, which will open new realms for strategy and policy.

Contractors have already proliferated in all major conflicts as a means states use to augment their forces. They may have provided conventional capabilities, like in Afghanistan, or niche capabilities, like in Georgia, but they can also be used to replace state forces themselves, like in Iraq, Somalia, and Ukraine, or to avoid national and international restrictions, like those offered by private military companies in Nicaragua. Besides this widespread use of contractors mainly by state actors, they may also have a non-state use in niche capabilities, as they are commonly used to provide support in cyber, communications, anti-access, logistics services, training, weapons, and, why not also, by providing entire forces.

Recent military actions in Ukraine, after the unlawful invasion by Russia in 2022, clearly demonstrate that. Yevgeny Prigozhin, a Russian oligarch, led the attack and conquest of Bakhmut by the Russian state mercenaries of Wagner Group, which is no doubt a good example of the growing importance of contractors in warfare. Prigozhin conducted the brutal fight in Bakhmut through the winter and spring of 2023, relying on unorthodox recruitment of combatants in Russian prisons to quickly bolster Russia's badly depleted frontline regular forces. The battle for Bakhmut, one of the bloodiest of the Ukrainian war so far, sapped Kyiv of trained soldiers ahead of its counteroffensive, while Russia lost personnel that Moscow saw as largely expendable. Prigozhin was seen as a national hero in Russia, but soon was disposed of and killed during a private flight over Russia, together with other Wagner's Group leaders.

In many cases, PMSCs are indeed the modern reincarnation of an old lineage of private providers of physical force, such as corsairs, privateers, and mercenaries, which had practically disappeared but reappeared in the 1960s, during the decolonization period, operating mainly in Africa and Asia. Due to their widespread use by that time, the UN adopted a convention that outlawed and criminalized their activities. Additional Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions (Article 47) also contains a definition of mercenary, basically stating that they are recruited to fight in an armed conflict, and take part in hostilities, but are neither a national party to the conflict nor a member of the armed forces, being motivated by private gain.

The new contractors and other non-state actors of the 21st century operate, however, in extremely blurred situations where these frontiers are difficult to separate. The new security industry of private companies moves large quantities of weapons and military equipment, providing services for military operations and recruiting former militaries as civilians to carry out passive or defensive security. However, these individuals cannot be considered civilians because they often carry and use weapons, interrogate prisoners, drive military trucks, and fulfill other essential military

functions.[23] Being armed, they can easily switch from a passive or defensive posture to an active or offensive role; they may commit human rights violations and even destabilize governments; accountability will also be hard to guarantee as they cannot be considered soldiers or supporting militias under international humanitarian law since they are not part of the army nor in the chain of command and often belong to numerous nationalities. Finally, PMSC personnel cannot usually be considered to be mercenaries because the definition in the international conventions does not generally apply to the personnel of PMSCs that are legally operating in foreign countries under contracts with legally registered companies.[24]

Great efforts have been made to formalize the rules governing warfare through international law and conventions, trying to transcend cultural differences by applying a single set of rules into international law derived from Western tradition. However, the proliferation of non-state antagonists and the involvement of other civilians little bounded by these laws and conventions, became a global challenge to the domination of Western norms and rules, and appear to have also made ineffective the current legal and treaty regime. As impressive as may be the best legal system created, it matters little if it is consistently ignored. Moreover, new non-state actors, such as PMSCs, new disruptive technologies, like drones, robotics, or non-lethal weapons, and also new modes of warfare, such as the use of quantic computation, artificial intelligence (IA) and cyber warfare with its revolutionary new digital tools such as supply chains and blockchains, became all together a test to the traditional Western legal and treaty structure, focused primarily on traditional warfare between nation--states.[25] This new technological and digital evolution, brought in an exponential advance not only to weaponry systems but also into computer operative systems, and to command, control and communications systems, challenging the traditional concept of sovereignty in the digital realm, namely regarding the concept of new physical frontiers of action, as well as to the new domains of action, which means now also in space and cyberspace.

The consequent development of high-tech military forces has already had major repercussions on the relationship between the military and civilian spheres. As the technical complexity of modern weapons systems grew, civilian employees became progressively more important for maintaining and operating high-tech systems.

23 Jose L. Gomez del Prado, "The Privatization of War: Mercenaries, Private Military and Security Companies (PMSC)". Edited version of the presentation given in Geneva, on 3 November 2010, at a parallel meeting at the UN Palais des Nations, on the United Nations Human Rights Council, under the Universal Periodic Review, UN Working Group on Mercenaries and Global Research, on 7 November 2010 and published by Global Research, 27 January 2014.

24 Jose L. Gomez del Prado, *Idem*.

25 Steven Metz and Philipe Cuccia, *Defining War for the 21st Century*. 2010 SSI Annual Strategy Conference Report, February 2011, Strategic Studies Institute (SSI), Carlisle, Pennsylvania, U.S. Army War College, 2011.

Under the paradigm of network-centric warfare, individual sensors, weapons platforms, and control systems engaged in operations could be geographically far apart and spread across continents.[26] Consequently, civilian employees far from the actual battle space also began to perform an increasingly direct mission-critical support function in many of those high-tech military engagements. Civilian personnel who administer army battle command, control, and communications systems, cyber, or high-tech weaponry became already a highly specialized modern armed forces' component that supplements military capabilities in areas of operations, becoming meanwhile also an indispensable part of modern warfare.[27] These highly technical civilian personnel, together with other non-state actors directly involved in armed forces structures may constitute another tectonic shift, contributing to a new "civilization" of the armed forces, thought to be a change in the traditional culture, lifestyle, values, and customs inherent to traditional military forces, whose consequences are also yet to be conveniently experienced and evaluated.

3. Hybrid Warfare as a Consequence

In the 21st-century security environment, the challenges the international community has been continuously and increasingly facing are a blend of regular and irregular warfare, civil war, insurgency, and terrorism. This has led states and international organizations to adopt the new concept of "hybrid warfare". The US Marine Corps Strategic Vision Group that first introduced the concept of hybrid warfare defined it as a method to "combine a range of different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts, including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder".[28] The US National Maritime Strategy further described this new trend as "conflicts (that) are increasingly characterized by a hybrid blend of traditional and irregular tactics, decentralized planning and execution, and non-state actors, using both simple and sophisticated technologies in innovative ways."[29] Therefore, both states and a variety of non-state actors can be involved in the conduct of a hybrid type of warfare with multi-modal activities whose effects can be felt at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war.

26 Arthur K. Cebrowski and John H. Garstka, "Network-centric warfare: its origin and future". *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, 124(1), 1998.

27 Geoffrey S. Corn, "Unarmed but how dangerous? Civilian Augmentees, the Law of Armed Conflict, and the Search for a More Effective Test for Permissible Civilian Battlefield Functions". *Journal of National Security Law & Policy*, 2(2), 2008, p. 275.

28 Frank G. Hoffman, "Hybrid Warfare and Challenges". *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 52, 1st Quarter 2009, p. 36.

29 U.S. Army Combined Armed Center, "Hybrid Warfare". Center for Army Lessons Learned.

Hybrid warfare is a military strategy that combines all forms of warfare, such as conventional warfare, irregular warfare, information warfare, and cyber warfare, with potential attacks that could include anything from terrorist acts that involve indiscriminate violence and coercion and criminal disorder to nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons (NBC). Hybrid warfare addresses the use of a wide range of tools by current and future adversaries based on their capability and capacities against the adversary. This method of handling disputes is a powerful twist on traditional warfare that may be explained by the dynamic and flexible nature of the new "battle space," which is no longer limited to "battlefields," and which calls for a highly adaptable and resilient response.[30] As a result, more technological advancements for military application in tactics will likely be needed in future hybrid wars to be used in conjunction with conventional, unconventional, and irregular warfare strategies across the entire spectrum of conflicts, as well as information, cyber, and space operations.

Urban Combat and Warfare

In hybrid environments, urban warfare is expected to play a major role, as was the case in Syria, Ukraine, and Palestine. Urban combat can take many forms, from guerrilla attacks to militia patrols and gang violence, but fighting in cities and other urban areas, where civilians are at risk and combatants can hide more easily, is very different from combat in a more open or defined theater of operations, at both the operational and tactical levels. The main complicating factors in urban warfare include precisely the complexity of urban terrain and the presence of civilians. In spite of well-known IHL responsibilities requiring protection for civilians, in urban areas, civilians are always severely stressed by a lack of distinction in targeting and in their protection. In Eastern Ghouta, in Syria, for instance, the rebel-held enclave with high-density populated towns and suburbs of Damascus was subject to intense shelling and airstrikes for weeks, which rendered many semi-destroyed towns there. By 2016, the suburban enclave was effectively besieged by governmental forces, and around 400,000 people were trapped in an area just over 100 km^2 in size, with a population density of around 4,000 inhabitants per km^2.[31] Syrian forces continued their bombings while accusing Al-Nusra rebels of using civilians as human shields, a charge that they obviously denied. The humanitarian challenges in Ghouta and elsewhere in Syria included not only siege but also aerial and artillery bombard-

30 Jim Kouri, "War on Terrorism: Defining 'hybrid warfare'". Canada Free Press, September 16, 2010.

31 Tom Rollins, "The unravelling of Syria's Eastern Ghouta". *Al Jazeera*, 18 December 2016. Retrieved 22 February 2018.

ment and the alleged use of prohibited chemical weapons, which are forbidden by international law. This seems to be basically the case also in Gaza and in Russia's invasion war in Ukraine.

As contended by John Sullivan (Stratfor, 2018), sieges against cities are not fully prohibited under IHL, but their use is severely limited in order to protect civilians. Sieges must serve a military objective, which must be proportionate and cannot lead to the starvation of the civilian population under customary IHL (Rule 53). Examples such as the nearly 900-day Siege of Leningrad and its toll of mass civilian starvation had already well highlighted the horrors of sieges in warfare.

Aerial bombardment of cities is another legacy of human suffering, also highlighted by the Nazi and Fascist bombing of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War, the carpet bombings of Allies in Dresden and Tokyo, and the more recent bombing of Aleppo and other subsequent bombings in Syria. All aerial bombardments in urban areas have been recognized as having potentially catastrophic consequences for civilians, as have also artillery barrages that are recognized as having potentially indiscriminate effects. Indeed, the combined effect of aerial bombardment, artillery shelling, urban street fighting, and the siege of cities, as it happened in Ukraine or more recently in Gaza, arguably changed our appreciation of modern war.

In Syria, there have also been allegations that humanitarian aid has been blocked or denied in violation of customary IHL (Rule 55) and other war crimes, including the use of chemical weapons to make areas uninhabitable. Effective ethnic cleansing is also suspected to have been perpetrated. Protecting civilians by balancing military necessity and humanitarian considerations, including respecting IHL dispositions, is therefore needed for both state and non-state forces involved in urban operations and combat. Military commanders must be reminded of their responsibility to reduce civilian harm in operations, which will require additional training, intense intelligence preparation, and consideration of using alternative targeting methods, techniques, and procedures, such as precision striking, targeting, and direct fire, as opposed to aerial bombardment and shelling, which can better prevent indiscriminate civilian casualties but may not match political and military warfare objectives.

Notwithstanding all the difficulties, hybrid wars seem winnable, but winning will be invariably manpower-intensive, costly and will take a long time. The key problem in conflicts is, however, always political, and the remaining question is whether Western forces will ever get the resources, especially the time and political will, required to achieve success. In hybrid conflicts, as in many other types of armed conflicts, the use alone of military pressure cannot solve antagonisms that are fundamentally political problems. Thus, the need for using military force against insurgents and other non-state actors in hybrid warfare might make the military no longer the only answer to solving modern complex hybrid crises.

Multidimensional Threats and New and Disruptive Technologies

New threats in modern hybrid warfare are already very real and will impact the character of conflict, like the use of space, cyberspace, computer network operations, directed energy weapons (DEW), chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) defense, non-lethal weapons, and possibly other novel weapons,[32] such as the extraordinary Chinese announcement of their 'Force Gun', a new kind of magnetized coaxial gun that can generate plasma rings to move objects at a distance without physical contact in space that once operational definitely will impact future space operations. Space is indeed a critical enabler in modern society, in which domain technology is rapidly proliferating, and the environment is becoming contested. Here, like in computer network operations, Western forces are already very dependent on civilian information structures. This, along with their reliance on commercial logistic infrastructure, may provide opportunities for less technically advanced adversaries, but already cyber knowledgeable, to attack us at relatively little cost.[33] Disruptive capabilities and technological developments in areas such as drones, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, and biological computation are among the most important developing technologies that are bound to change the face of future armed conflicts. Unmanned systems' success in hybrid and in many other operations makes them already an invaluable asset. Aside from being a crucial part of military operations, drones are also quite popular in the public and private sectors because of their utility and growing affordability. Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are a popular type of remotely controlled device systems used in military warfare that have already proven their effectiveness. The military can deploy different types of drones for specific missions, and despite their becoming increasingly capable and autonomous, in most cases they will not be able to replace the human factor in warfare.

Cyber warfare is another technological advance at the core of governments and intelligence agencies' concerns, which are worried that digital attacks against critical infrastructures, like banking systems, power grids, or command and control systems, will give attackers a way of bypassing states' traditional defenses with the aim of creating significant damage, death, or destruction. Cyber warfare, despite being an emerging concept, is considered a significant component of future conflict and has already been embedded in military doctrine and structures.

Hybrid conflicts might also demand an expected increase in the use of non-lethal weapons, particularly in situations that may preclude other forms of force and will require improved law enforcement measures and coordination.

32 U.K. Ministry of Defence, *The Future Character of Conflict.* Corporate Report, Strategic Trends Programme. 3 February 2010, p. 15.

33 Colin S. Gray, "Understanding Air Power". *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Winter 2008, p. 25.

The exponential increase in new and disruptive technologies of the 21st century's conflicts has led to a continuous pursuit of control that has to expand to all operational environments: land (surface and underground); sea (surface and underwater); air (low and stratospheric); space (low orbit and outer space); cyberspace (internet-plus and artificial intelligence); but probably also to the biosphere (inside and outside the human body). Each of these environments will be affected differently, and will be interlinked and porous, with activities in one having effects on others.[34]

High-tech forces will therefore consist of many complex elements, including manned and unmanned, controlled by man, or man-in-the-loop and autonomous, in net-enabled operations, both centralized and decentralized, concealed and open or intermingled, increasingly using cyber, virtual and real, with lethal and non-lethal weapons, explosives and directed energy weapons, by stand-off and close combats in Joint Military Operations, with the involvement of civilians and other non-state actors, friendly, and adversary. In one word: complex. If our political class will acknowledge these new challenges anytime soon, affirm their political will and allow the resources to build a military prepared to cooperate with them still needs to be seen.

Global risks such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), long--range and hypersonic weapons systems, along with organized crime and terrorism, all play a multifaceted and interactive part in the dynamics of armed conflicts in destabilized regions. As insurgencies and civil wars overflow state borders, their indirect non-military international consequences will put further pressure on the homeland security instruments in faraway parts of the world. In many countries, furthermore, active migration and integration policies are also gaining strategic significance in homeland security, while the inflow of qualified individuals and unrestricted mobility across borders remain a key demand for the globalized economy and business.

Extreme complexity in conflicts will furthermore hamper the capacity to precisely predict the future and, at best, probable trends will be expected from analysis of such environments. To achieve success, it is needed a broader understanding of the overall security environment and the awareness that probably it will be subject to continuing shifts. Environmental sensing may be in fact the most important tool in trying to track changes, where the stress must be put on varying levels of potential instability and in the multiple groups involved, with their multiple motivations that may impact the security environment. A successful strategy will thus rely on incorporating analysis both on interactions among a broader range of actors and their changes over time.[35]

34 U.K. Ministry of Defence, *The Future Character of Conflict*. Corporate Report, 2010, pp. 20-21.

35 Lawrence Cline, "Complexity Theory and Counterinsurgency Strategy". *Small Wars Journal*, Mar 18, 2012.

4. Final Thoughts

Like Donald Rumsfeld once argued, "as we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don't know we don't know", which might continue to be a good description of the dangerous uncertainty and complexity of the current political and security international environment and, therefore, also of conflict and war.

After the Cold War's end, the disappearance of a major international enemy threat and the growing loss of relevance for the nation-state and main international organizations allowed the emergence of new trends in the international system that have already had a tectonic impact on the realms of security and defense. The new non-state actors' role in the international system, the empowerment of individuals, and the diffusion of power among states and from states to informal networks, all brought in new multidimensional threats and new domains of action, such as in space and cyberspace, in which conflict may be also conducted. In addition, the dispersion of power and knowledge associated with an increased interconnectedness and the availability of new disruptive high-tech weapons, in conjunction with the loss of capabilities in many military armed forces, led to another multidimensional trend towards privatization and civilianization in the nation-state armed forces. These might have constituted a new tectonic shift and are considered a game changer for security and defense areas.

While the military gap between the US capability for high-tech warfare and that of all other national militaries widened considerably, it contributed to a widespread feeling of humiliation in many world areas, especially in many Arab countries and in Africa, which rapidly learned the US could only be outmaneuvered by asymmetric warfare. Asymmetric opponents, whether insurgents or terrorists, have therefore proliferated, and in this context, terrorism as a military tactic, although unlawful, has been legitimized as a weapon of the weak in their struggle against the overly strong.[36] Future violent political conflict will thus likely be characterized by some sort of asymmetric approach and terrorism and will be marked by a growing involvement of civilians and non-state actors in warfare. The involvement of these non-state actors, the dangerous privatization of war and conflict, and the "civilianization" of armed confrontation resulting from the vicious interaction between all trends that evolved since the Cold War's end contributed to the change of character in conflict, and introduced a new paradigm to warfare.

36 Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War: The Most Radical Reinterpretation of Armed Conflict Since Clausewitz*. New York: The Free Press, 1991.

This is the background against which informal warfare flourished, which means armed conflict where at least one of the antagonists is a non-state actor, such as an insurgent army or ethnic militia. The 21st-century informal war will thus be based on some combination of ethnicity, race, regionalism, economics, personality, and ideology, and these types of informal war will be both more common and more strategically significant. Extremist non-state actors will range from state proxies to single-interest groups, transnational criminal gangs, and even individuals, in an explosive cocktail of interests that, along with the effects of globalization and more porous borders, will make some of these non-state actors much harder to counteract. Using asymmetric warfare methods, they can employ a wide spectrum of military capabilities, even if some only on a limited scale, but they will nevertheless be capable of using innovative tactics and techniques that will effectively exploit Western countries' vulnerabilities.[37]

While some informal warfare types will be somehow simple to solve, counterinsurgency, which uses military forces to attain not only the short-term restoration of order but also the ultimate resolution of the conflict, will take a long time and will be a different and more difficult problem to find a solution for. On the other hand, there is not yet an effective doctrine or strategy for quickly dealing with networked opponents, be they existing criminal cartels, terrorists, or future insurgents. Finally, finding and characterizing the adversary will also be more difficult to achieve, as warriors will be interspersed among non-combatants, using them as cover and as shields. Unlike formal high-tech wars, informal wars will thus remain dirty and bloody.[38]

Warfare will be increasingly conducted with and against non-state actors and among the civilian population. Military commanders must always have these new conditions in mind, remembering their responsibility to reduce civilian harm in operations. This requires training, intense intelligence preparation, and consideration of using alternative targeting methods and procedures as opposed to the traditional shelling techniques, such as mass artillery preparations and aerial bombardments, that can better prevent indiscriminate civilian casualties or excessive property destruction. Yet, these constraints might not fit into political or military operational needs.

Hybrid conflicts will be the most probable in the future, implying the simultaneous application of all modes of warfare by state and non-state actors, with a mixed use of advanced conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and disruptive criminality, taking different picks of violence to destabilize the existing order. Even if conflicts will be increasingly hybrid in their character, this does not specifically mean insurgency or terrorism, as it is more about a change in the mindset of the

37 U.K. Ministry of Defence, *The Future Character of Conflict*. Corporate Report, 2010, p. 18.

38 Steven Metz, "Armed Conflict In The 21st Century: The Information Revolution And Post-Modern Warfare". Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2000.

adversaries who are aiming to exploit all our weaknesses, using a wide variety of both high-end and low-end asymmetric techniques at the same time.
Last, but definitely not least, there may also be unforeseeable emerging threats related to the diverse strong military powers that are growing around the world other than the US. This means that the former assessment emphasizing the most probable scenarios of unconventional warfare and terrorism does not preclude the occurrence of a conventional, high-intensity international war or even a nuclear war involving nation-states. Nowadays, these threats might already be a possible scenario in eventual future confrontations with China, North Korea, Iran, or Russia. These confrontations will require specific high-tech heavy military equipment and training and will result in an unimaginable toll of destruction and death. If confrontation occurs, conventional or nuclear types of warfare might become a reality, along with other hybrid approaches. States and their armed forces need to be prepared for this new paradigm of warfare.
Ukraine's invasion by Russia was the last wake-up call for Europe regarding many of the aforementioned security problems: it introduced conventional warfare again; institutionalized hybrid warfare; highlighted the importance of international non--state actors' actions and their roles in warfare, and the need to safeguard civilian lives; relaunched the importance of transatlantic cooperation; underlined the need for a comprehensive approach in conflict; and highlighted the crucial need for an effective collective defense system.
What it did not achieve yet was the institutionalization of a political truth comprehension and concern about the new security threats we will probably need to face in the future, which is quite evident, for instance, in many European countries still missing at least the 2% of the GDP target for defense expenditure asked by allies in NATO; but also the need to build effective operational national armed forces; the importance of a European strategic autonomy able to face future international security challenges in cooperation and coordination with NATO; and the guarantee of a proactive combined European action in chosen conflict situations.

To Conclude

The emergence of new threats, new international non-state actors, new disruptive weapons, and new domains of action in warfare took the 21st-century postmodern world to the dawn of a new era. The diffusion of power among a growing number of relevant power states, from states to informal networks and to an array of non-state actors, will allow new risks to emerge from unforeseeable situations that might not be possible to counteract in advance. The uncertainty stemming from this new dangerousness, complexity, and fluidity of the international security environment

will have an important impact on conflict and warfare, allowing confrontation and conflict to grow.

To be able to survive in the 21st-century post-modern world, containing the spread of violence and conflict will be paramount for nation-states. To achieve it, they need to be willing to accept differences as the base for keeping independence and maintaining democracies meaningful. As usual, once armed violence is unleashed, nation-states will have to rely on their armed forces, naturally if they will have also some meaningful ones at that time.

With dangerousness and complexity growing in the international system, resilience needs to become a state of mind and a permanent integrated behavior culture in Western countries to ensure their survival. And, lastly, despite all UN flaws and constrictions, it will continue to be the only global multinational political organization that is still worth saving.

Despite all these well-intended wishful thoughts, we must be aware that, and may already say, the world seems to be again a powder keg, just like Edward House, US President Wilson's trusted adviser to Europe wrote in a report before the outbreak of World War I: "The whole of Europe (and now also of the rest of the world) is charged with electricity. Everyone's nerves are tense. It needs only a spark to set the whole thing off." And we would better be prepared for that if we want to survive.

Bibliography

Banks, William C., ed. *New Battlefields, Old Laws: Critical Debates on Asymmetric Warfare*. Columbia University Press, 2011.

Cebrowski, Arthur and John Garstka. "Network-centric warfare: its origin and future". *U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings*, 124(1), 1998.

Corn, Geoffrey S. "Unarmed but how dangerous? Civilian Augmentees, the Law of Armed Conflict, and the Search for a More Effective Test for Permissible Civilian Battlefield Functions". *Journal of National Security Law & Policy*, 2(2), 2008.

Creveld, Martin van. *The Transformation of War: The Most Radical Reinterpretation of Armed Conflict Since Clausewitz*. New York: The Free Press, 1991.

Eck, Kristine and Lisa Hultman. "One-sided violence against civilians in war: insights from new fatality data". *Journal of Peace Research*, 44(2), Mar. 2007.

Elkus, Adam and Crispin Burke. "WikiLeaks, Media, and Policy: A Question of Super-Empowerment". *Small Wars Journal*, 2010.

Friedman, Thomas L. *Longitudes and Attitudes: Exploring the World After September 11*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002.

Gray, Colin S. "Understanding Air Power". *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Winter 2008.

Hammes, Thomas X. *The Sling and The Stone: On War in the 21st Century*. St. Paul: Zenith Press, 2004.

Hoffman, Frank G. "Hybrid Warfare and Challenges". *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 52, 1st Quarter, 2009.

Humphreys, Macartan and Jeremy M. Weinstein. "Handling and Manhandling Civilians in Civil War: Determinants of the Strategies of Warring Factions". *American Political Science Review*, 100(3), August 2006.

International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS). *The Responsibility To Protect*. Report of the ICISS. International Development Research Centre, December 2001.

Kouri, Jim. "War on Terrorism: Defining 'hybrid warfare'". Canada Free Press, September 16, 2010.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). Non-international Armed Conflict (NIAC). MSF *Practical Guide to Humanitarian Law*, 2016. Available at: https://guide-humanitarian-law.org/content/index/

Metz, Steven and Philipe Cuccia. *Defining War for the 21st Century*. 2010 SSI Annual Strategy Conference Report, February 2011, Strategic Studies Institute (SSI), Carlisle, Pennsylvania, U.S. Army War College, 2011.

Metz, Steven. "Armed Conflict In The 21st Century: The Information Revolution And Post-Modern Warfare". Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2000.

Odysseos, Louiza and Fabio Petito. *The International Political Thought of Carl Schmitt: A New Global Nomos?* New York: Routledge, 2007.

Pape, Robert A. "Empire Falls". *The National Interest*, 99, January/February, 2009.

Prado, Jose L. Gomez del. "The Privatization of War: Mercenaries, Private Military and Security Companies (PMSC)", 2010.

Rid, Thomas and Thomas Keaney, eds. *Understanding Counterinsurgency: Doctrine, Operations and Challenges*. Routledge, 2010.

Rid, Thomas. *War and Media Operations: The US Military and the Press from Vietnam to Iraq*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Rollins, Tom. "The unravelling of Syria's Eastern Ghouta". *Al Jazeera*, 18 December 2016. Retrieved 22 February 2018.

Schmid, Alex. "Terrorism – The Definitional Problem". *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, 36(2), 2004.

Schmitt, Carl. *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition*, 2007.

Stepanova, Ekaterina. "Trends in armed conflicts: one-sided violence against civilians" (Chap. 2). *SIPRI Yearbook: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), 2008.

Sullivan, John P. "Urban War fighting and Classic Siege", STRATFOR, 20 Mar, 2018.

U.S. Army Combined Armed Center. "Hybrid Warfare". Center for Army Lessons Learned.

U.S. Government. "Hybrid Warfare". GAO-10-1036R, September 2010.