



NEW WARS FROM A CLASSICAL PERSPECTIVE

Continuity and change in post- modern armed conflicts

International community faces old and new challenges and traditional armed conflicts are, even today, a threat. Armed conflicts have not led to a safer world but, on the contrary, they have increased the complexity of managing conflicts causing “new wars”.

KEY WORDS: COLD WAR / NEW WARS / ASYMMETRICAL CONFLICTS / CLASSICAL THINKING

By **Ricardo Nibeyro**

INTRODUCTION

The end of Cold War with the fall of the Soviet Socialist Republic (URSS) led to a series of ethnic conflicts, such as in the case of former Yugoslavia, Somalia or Rwanda, in which analysts started to discuss a change of paradigm in war which they called “new wars”¹.

Among the most important authors who hold this theory, we can mention Van Creveld, Kaldor, Munkler or Lind, who state

that armed conflicts were caused by the end of the concept of state- nation. In particular, this would mainly take place due to the continuous erosion in the monopoly of the use of force, asymmetrical military means, the growing privatization of actors, the increase in the use of violence against civil population and the greater periods of time military operations take.

Another approach to armed conflicts is presented by the classical thinking, the logic of which is based on



human nature with a historical- analytical perspective. These authors have gone beyond their times, have contributed to understanding and conduction of wars during centuries.

This article aims at giving examples from history and the recent past, the comparison of different approaches, highlighting strengths and weaknesses as regards one of the topics of interest for international relations in their perspective of armed conflicts.

THEORY OF NEW WARS

New concepts for old problems

There are some analysts that have tried to develop different approaches and theories to understand the phenomenon of post- modern wars²; there is not a unique definition of the

concept of “new wars”, but a series of characteristics that make them different from “old wars”.

The renowned writer and historian Martin Van Creveld has been one of the first who favored this theory in his book “The Transformation of War”³, in which Low Intensity Conflicts⁴ (LIC) have relevance and are featured by the loss of the monopoly of force by the state, the little respect for international laws and the unclear limit among combatants and non- combatants or soldiers and civilians. The loss of the political target would be replaced by a mix of religious, cultural, ethnic and technological fanatics⁵.

In this line of thought, Mary Kaldor published her book “Old and New Wars”⁶ based upon the experience in Bosnia and African countries, establishing a relation between ethnic

1. There is not a formal line of thought about “New Wars”, but this shows the thoughts of several authors. Among them, we can find Mary Kaldor, who in her book “New and Old Wars” (1999) finds in globalization a series of indicators that make her think about a new way of understanding war which is different from Clausewitz’s thought.

2. Post- modern wars are understood as the period which starts with the fall of the Berlin Wall or the fall of the former URSS.

3. Van Creveld, Martin, *The Transformation of War*, Ed Free Press, New York and Macmillan, Ontario, 1991. There is a version in Spanish translated by Pissolito, Carlos, Buenos Aires, 2007.

4. Van Creveld, Martin, p. 51.

5. Van Creveld, Martin, p. 69.

6. Kaldor, Mary, *New and old wars organized violence in a global era*, Stanford University Press, 1998.

7. Kaldor, Mary, “A Cosmopolitan Response to New Wars”, *Peace Review*, 8 (December 1996), 505- 14.

8. Kaldor, Mary, *op. cit.*

9. Münkler, Herfried. *The new wars*, Oxford, Polity, 2005

10. Münkler, Herfried, What is really new in new war, quoted by Olsen, John, “On New Wars”, Oslo, IFS, 2007.

This argument is based on the idea of Clausewitz as to the nature of war, in which each war is unique and varies with the political nature of its reasons... therefore; the first act of a statesperson and commandant is to assess the type of war in which they will get involved and remembers that war is more than a chameleon that rapidly adapts to characteristics of each case.

problems, the growing globalization process and the fall of State- Nation⁷.

According to her, the main characteristics of this conflict are the loss of the monopoly of force by the state, little or none respect for international laws, increase of violence against civilians, unclear distinction between crime and war as well as the decline of fight between states to begin civil fights⁸.

Going deeper into the concepts analyzed before, Munkler published his book *The New Wars*⁹ in which the new is present in a combination of characteristics, such as the privatization of war in a colorful combination of combatants¹⁰.

These three authors¹¹, among others, have stated that globalization in its political and economic sense have led to changes in the international system that make Clausewitz's thoughts obsolete with respect to state- nation overshadowing the concept that war is the continuation of politics and, therefore, the Trinity of Clausewitz is not relevant for its interpretation even in Low Intensity Conflicts.

In sum, these authors identify a change in the nature of war which operates through the privatization of actors and the loss of the political target by another one of ethnic or religious status, asymmetry of actors and means, demilitarization of war with a growing number of civil victims and financing of war through other means.

From an evolving perspective, William Lind¹² and Thomas Hammes¹³ introduce a new category of "new wars" from a historical or generation perspective and state that there are fourth generation wars nowadays (4G).

Both specialists claim that great powers develop latest technology weapons systems, but they use operational doctrine and principles of maneuver war (3G) which had their origin in the German *blitzkrieg*.

Also, they consider that the beginning of fourth generation wars (4G) is the theory of the "people war" that Mao Tse Tung¹⁴ immortalized in his book *Guerilla Warfare*. With relation to this approach, we can state that war evolves and will surely continue evolving, but changes observed as regards "targets", "opponents or groups" and "weapons or technology applied to weapons" which seem to be based on context rather than basic.

Last, there is a radial type of the prior approach called "hybrid wars" that is used to describe current conflicts as "multimodal" in which simultaneity of levels (strategic, operational and tactical) and the convergence of modes (conventional, uprising and terrorist) with different levels of intensity (deadliness) and tempo (frequency) aim at physical affectation (destruction of personnel and material) as well as psychological affectation of the opponent. In this type of conflicts, different modes and levels become more confusing¹⁵.

Therefore, what is new and different is the hybrid mode¹⁶, a combination of deadliness of a state armed force together with fanaticism and will of fight of an irregular force¹⁷ and, as an example, we can mention the defense of Grozny by the Chechen and Hezbollah during the attack of IDF in 2006.

CLASSICAL THOUGHTS

Continuation during change

When we analyze the thoughts of classical thinkers, such as Thucydides, Sun Tzu, or Mao Tse Tung, it is possible to ask: are their ideas valid in light of this change of paradigm of "new wars"?

For the purposes of this work, we will analyze classical thoughts¹⁸ based on the following concepts that this thought state:

11. There are other authors, such as Robert Kaplan or Hans Ezensberger who also talk about the beginning of a type of wars that are appearing.
12. Lind, William S. Keith Nightengale, John F. Schmitt, Joseph W. Sutton and Gary I. Wilson, *The Changing Face of War* y William S. Lind, "The Changing Face of War Into the Fourth Generation, *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 1989.
13. Hammes, Thomas, *The Sling and the Stone on War in the 21 Century*, Zenith Press MBI Publishing Co, USA 2004 and Thomas Hammes, "The Evolution of War: The Fourth Generation" *Marine Corps Gazette*, September 1994.
14. Hammes, Thomas, op. cit., p. 44 (Mao and the Birth of 4 Generation Warfare).

15. Gray, Colin S. *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 2006 y John Arquilla, "The End of War As We Knew It", *Third World Quarterly* 28, N° 2, March 2007 369.
16. Hoffman, Frank G, Ltcol (Ret.), "The Hybrids War and Challenges", *JFO/issue* 52, 2009. Compound multimodal war takes place when irregular means are used in different areas or theaters and they are essentially different organizations. An example of this is TE Lawrence or the Spanish against Napoleon.
17. Hoffman, Frank G, Ltcol (Ret.), p. 37.
18. Handel, Michael, *Masters of Wars: Classical Strategic Thought*, Routledge, 3er Ed, 2001, p. XVIII.

Throughout history, guerrillas, insurgent people and other actors have always tried to affect the will of fight of the opponent before their means (physical and human), the difference is that today they have greater access.

- › War contributes to the political interest of the state (group, tribe or violent non state actor)
- › In spite of its rationale, there are restricting factors, such as friction, opportunity and uncertainty, passion, incompetence and irrational behavior
- › War cannot be the first resource and it is not always the last one
- › Military victory in itself is not sufficient and must be complemented with other acceptable diplomatic and political measures for long lasting peace
- › Its rational aspect includes establishing clear objectives, analysis of cost/benefit and rapid development of its ideal model
- › A classical paradigm is based on observation of human nature and historical evidence although it is pessimistic given that war is part of human relations
- › There is a trinity concept of analysis

What we can state is that the different representations of modern wars do not necessarily make a “new war” or “war generation” in the historical occurrence of armed conflicts. What they do reflect are context and specific aspects of target, band and weapons that underlie together with unchanging elements.

This argument is based on the idea of Clausewitz as to the nature of war, in which each war is unique and varies with the political nature of its reasons... therefore; the first act of a statesperson and commandant is to assess the type of war in which they will get involved¹⁹ and remembers that war is more than a chameleon that rapidly adapts to characteristics of each case²⁰.

Therefore, war is the manner to get the political purpose that can never be considered isolated from its purpose.

In a similar manner, Mao talks about the political nature of war and reminds that, unless current circumstances of war, its nature and relation with other things are understood, you will not know the laws of war and will not be able to get victory.

Given the complexity to understand the nature of the conflict, Clausewitz introduces the concept of analysis of the “trinity paradox”²¹ reducing the endless multiplicity in three dominant basic trends of a triangle, the edges of which are passion and violence, opportunity and probability and political reason and calculation, joining this with a second triangle, people, the commandant with the army and the Government, in which each one plays an important role in the definition of the type of war to be faced. As an example, during the Vietnam War, Northern Vietnam moved the people (passion, violence and motivation) surpassing Southern Vietnam that resorted to military power (opportunity and probability) with the help of the United States using traditional war with emphasis in the power of fire but without adapting to particular circumstances of the conflict –its nature- and, as it happened with the French, failed.

Two millennia before and on the other side of the world, Sun Tzu used a similar metaphor to compare malleability of water with individuality of each conflict: as water flows according to the surface on its way, a successful army adapts to the situation of the enemy and, as water does not have any shape in particular, there are no constant conditions at war²².

Military thoughts of Mao were inspired in “The Art of War” and their own observation of revolutionary war in China and liberation war against Japan (1937- 1945), which made him state that revolutionary war is the war of multitudes... the army and people are the foundation for victory... under absolute leadership of the party²³. Here, the trinity concept of Clausewitz can be applied to “the war of people” introduced by Mao, in which the party is the government.

This Maoist strategy²⁴ was inspired in “The Art of War” of prolonged has been adopted and adapted to different latitudes of the planet with particular success following an evolutionary pattern. Vietnamese case, the Sandinista refinement in Nicaragua, the Cypriot guerrilla (EOKA)²⁵ against Great Britain, liberation wars in Africa, Palestine

19. Carr, Caleb, *The Book of War*, Sun Tzu & Karl Von Clausewitz, Modern Library Paperback, Ed. 2000, Book 1, 27.

20. Carr, Caleb, *op. cit.*, Book 1, 28.

21. Carr, Caleb, *op. cit.*, Book 1, 28.

22. Sun Tzu and Sun Bin, *The Art of War*, Foreign Language Press, Beijing, China, 2007. Sun Tzu can also write like Sunzi

23. Army Command and College of CPLA Handbook, *Mao Tse Tung Military Thinking*, Chinese People Liberation Army (CPLA), Ed. 2006, p. 7

24. The three phases of the Maoist strategy are: 1) propaganda with little military action; 2)

Get strong and consolidate a basis area with balance of regular and irregular forces and 3) Transition to regular forces in the final attack. Army Command and College of CPLA Handbook, p. 52. This is also known for the Strategy without Time.

25. Grivas, Giorgio, *War of Guerrillas, lessons of fight for the freedom of Cyprus*, Ed. Rioplatense Bs As, 1969. EOKA means Ethniki Organosis Kipriahou Agonos.

26. Intifada means, in Arab, uprising.

27. Arreguin, Ivan, “How weak win wars, *International Security*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 93-128

28. Thucydides, “The Landmark of Thucydides: the Peloponnesian War”, Google eBook, edited by Robert Strassler, 1998.



intifadas²⁶ and in the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan may be examples. This type of strategies is known as the thesis of “how weak win wars”²⁷.

May the trinity analysis be applied to chaos or stasis²⁸ situations like the ones mentioned in the previous paragraph?

The answer is yes, because even when they start as a spontaneous representation of intifadas, ethnic or religious fights end of creating an independent with Government, People and Armed Forces as it happens with the Palestine example.

What is important and cannot be changed from the classical is because of the validity of concepts and usefulness of works even in post- modern times to describe the nature of the conflict.

WHEN PAST MEETS PRESENT

Methods, cause and civilians

When the past meets the present, it is necessary to ask whether the new theoretical developments are a representation of a change in the nature of war, or what has changed in war that makes it new and different with respect to classical ideas. And should something have changed, what is the use of the expression “new wars”? For this, methods, asymmetry and human impact will be analyzed.

As regards the changing nature of methods and modes of

war, the growing privatization of actors (among which there are insurgence, guerrilla, terrorists and armed groups) is not new as they have been present in many conflicts, especially if we relate this with civil wars, such as the American civil war (1861- 1865), the Russian civil war (1917- 1923) and the Spanish civil war (1936- 1939).

In terms of guerrilla or insurgence, we can find the peninsular war in Spain (1807- 1814), the Philippines against the Japanese or German occupation during World War II in France, Yugoslavia, China or even anti colonialist wars for the independence of Algeria (1954-1962), Rhodesia (1966-1979), Angola (1961-1975) and Mozambique (1962-1975), just to mention some examples.

Hezbollah, which faced the Israeli in Lebanon (2006) and which some authors called “hybrid war”²⁹ only shows that the type of war³⁰ has been wrongly selected in its nature with a wrong training of the Israeli Defense Forces, the focus of which was of a Low Intensity Conflict.

On the other hand, the increase in the training of

29. Hoffman, Frank G, Ltcol (Ret.), op. Cit.

30. Biddle, Stephen and Friedman, Jeffrey, “The 2006 Lebanon Campaign And The Future Of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy”. Available at <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil/>. This article has a critical analysis of the conflict.

Hezbollah which focused on the weaknesses of the Israeli Defense Forces is similar to Stage 2 of the war of guerrillas of Mao and, in this sense, there is nothing new³¹ as to the nature of the conflict.

With respect to asymmetrical war as a feature of the nature of war, the expression is trendy nowadays and discourse will be temporary³². It is not necessary to exaggerate a concept that is not new because war and combat have always been asymmetrical³³ and it is totally rational that one of the groups tries to search for a comparative advantage. Moreover, if someone is in inferior conditions, they know they will lose the combat against armed forces that are better trained and equipped and, therefore, avoid frontal combat or will try to find a more favorable advantage of non-conventional type.

As in the case of the war of Algeria or Vietnam, the lack of modern equipment led these people to adopt an asymmetrical strategy in means and methods that were successful.

Throughout history, guerrillas, insurgent people and other actors have always tried to affect the will of fight of the opponent before their means (physical and human), the difference is that today they have greater access³⁴. When

Van Creveld, Kaldor, Munkler or Lind state that armed conflicts were caused by the end of the concept of state-nation.

terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda³⁵ use human bombs promoted by religion, they only want to take Western influence away from Muslim world but, in the end, the purpose is political.

Contention strategy of the United States against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics is another example of the use of the comparative advantage and the asymmetrical response not to directly but through means with which one becomes stronger, such as economy or technology.

However, we can find the origins of asymmetrical war in Clausewitz about the war of people³⁶, in which they describe the basis for them to be effective and, in their classes about “small wars”³⁷ in the Academy of War in Berlin.

Another author that dealt with this topic was Jomini³⁸.

As regards human impact with relation to the increase in the number of civil victims and extreme savagery, “new Wars” understand that force is addressed against civil population, such as the systematic killing to control an area, ethnic cleaning or simply displacing population.

The example used by Kaldor is Bosnia (1992/1995) in which the ratio between civilians and military men is 8:1³⁹, being World War I its counterface (1:8).

However, the Documentation Center from Sarajevo⁴⁰ (CDS) published a document with the total number of victims (almost 100,000) with a ratio of 40% civilians, which is very different from the 8:1 stated by this author.

Even more, the lack of historical accuracy did not consider the brutality of World War II in the Eastern side



From left to right: Martin Van Creveld, Mary Kaldor and Herfried Munkler.

From an evolving perspective, William Lind and Thomas Hammes introduce a new category of “new wars” from a historical or generation perspective and state that there are fourth generation wars nowadays (4G).

or in Germany⁴¹ (8,5 million of displaced people) during the Russian advance or the Pacific Theatre.

Going back in history, we can see the savagery model adopted by European powers between 1830 and 1914, during the colonial wars in Africa in which brutality was part of peace campaigns by the Armee de Afrique and the British or Portuguese troops in those latitudes. The United States have made their part in Philippines (1898- 1902), where there has been a ratio of 200,000 civilians dead against 20,000⁴² military men. As Hugo Slim states: unfortunately the death of civilians has always been present at war⁴³.

Therefore, victimization and savagery are not particular from these “new Wars”, as massive migration flows, which is more visible for public opinion and will, therefore, be present in collective conscious.

Last, when we try to analyze the reasons for which people fight or go to war in terms of causes, Thucydides answered this question more than 2500 years ago: men go to war for honor, fear or interest⁴⁴. This is as relevant today as in the Peloponnesian War (431- 404 BC). When comparing this sentence with human conflicts, it will be difficult for someone to escape from these concepts.

CONCLUSIONS

The end of the Cold War has not significantly changed the dominant features of the last 50 years. New forms are not

as new as it has been explained but they have received more attention and became visible.

The theory of “new wars” caught the attention of certain representations of nature of post- modern wars, but getting confused with their context and empirical approach, in particular, with intra- state conflicts. This shows a great weakness to capture elements for continuity and change in the nature of war.

Changes presented in terms of causes, objectives, methods and victims are more apparent than real, they explain isolated cases rather than linear or significant historical changes.

What we can recognize as a contribution of this approach is the adaptation characteristic of internal conflicts of rebellion and insurgence to get support through transnational organized crime when there is no protection of super powers (United States- URSS) as it happened in Colombia, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Some authors have even observed a correlation between human aid (UN or NGO) and diaspora in the extension of the conflict as it is a financing source for combatants⁴⁵ and, therefore, part of the political equation.

Today, more than ever, classical theory of war reminds us of the complexity and reciprocity of the nature of war in its moral and irrational dimension, in friction, uncertainty, probability and opportunity within political context which, as permanent elements, cannot disappear.

For this reason, decisions of actions must adapt in darkness or in cases of shadow⁴⁶. Maybe some shadow may be lightened with advanced technological means and it may be possible to operate better with light than in shadow but as soon as this happens with a group, the other one will increase counter measures increasing the secret and, therefore, shadow. As a result, darkness and shadow with some rays of light will be constant in the context of war and it will be difficult to escape from this maxim.

Present requires to carry out a critical analysis of classical thoughts with universal feature and their relation with post- modern wars to find continuity and change in their fair context.

31. Peters Ralph, "Lesson from Lebanon- New model terrorist army", Recuperado de <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/lessons-from-lebanon/>

32. Gray, Colin S.

33. Storr, Jim, *The human Face of War*, Continuum UK, London, Ed 2009, p. 104

34. Echevarria, Antulio J., *Deconstructing the Theory of Fourth-Generation Warfare*, in Terriff, Karp, and Karp, 59.

35. This Muslim group will be referred to as "AIQ" hereinbelow.

36. Sun Tzu and Sun Bin, *Book 6, Chap 28 The Peoples in Arms*, pag 777. See also Jomini

37. Daaze, Christopher, *Clausewitz and Small Wars*, in Strachan and Herberg-Rothe, "Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century", p. 183. Para mayor información sobre la concepción de Clausewitz y las guerra de guerrilla se puede ver en Handel, Michael, *Clausewitz and Modern Strategy*, Frank Cass, London, 1986, 127-33.

38. Jomini, Antoine, "The Art of War", p. 25, quoted by Handel, Michael, *Master of Wars*, p. 120.

39. Kaldor, Mary, op. cit., p. 105. He mentions the example of Bosnia and Abkhazia

40. See Documentation Center from Bosnia. Available at <http://www.cja.org/article.php?id=247>

41. Beevor, Antony, *The Second War World*, Back Bay Books; edition 2002, pp. 28-32, 326, 410. During February and April, 1945, 8.500.000 German left their houses because of Russian fear.

42. Boot Max. *The Savage War of Peace -small war and the rise of American power*, Basic Books; edition 2003, Pag115.

43. Slim Hugo. *Killing civilians: Method, Madness and Morality in War*, London Hurst, 2008, Pag 3, citado por Adam Roberts, "The Civilians in Modern War" en Hew Strachan & Sybille Scheipers (comp) en "The Changing Character of War", Oxford Press 2013. Page 358.

44. Thucydides. *The Landmark of Thucydides: the Peloponnesian War* (Google eBook), edited by Robert Strassler, 1998.

45. Munkler, Herfried, *The new War*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005, p. 87

46. Carr, Caleb (Ed), *The Book of War*, Sun Tzu & Karl Von Clausewitz, Modern Library Paperback, Ed 2000, Book 2, 24