

FROM KADESH TO KANDAHAR

Military Theory and the Future of War

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Only the dead have seen the end of war.

PLATO

As the world enters the twenty-first century, it appears to be in the midst of revolutionary shifts in the character of international security, with the forces of information technology and globalization seemingly transforming the theory and practice of war. In retrospect, it is now possible to see the decade between the collapse of Soviet communism in August 1991 and the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center in September 2001 as an era of the unexpected. No one in the West expected, still less predicted, the fall of the Soviet Union; the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War; the Asian financial crisis; the Indian and Pakistani nuclear detonations; or, of course, the events of 11 September.

Over the past decade, armed conflict has not remained within the traditional parameters of conventional warfare between rival states. From Somalia through Bosnia to Kosovo, East Timor, and Afghanistan, the face of war has assumed bewildering expressions. Under new global security conditions, the postmodern has collided with the premodern, the cosmopolitan has confronted the parochial, while the Westphalian state system has been challenged by new substate and transstate forces. Conventional high-tech Western armed forces have had to come to terms with a world of failed states populated by ethnic paramilitaries; of rogue regimes equipped with ballistic missiles and poison gas; and of radical ex-

tremists embracing a philosophy of mass-casualty terrorism.

For Western policy makers and military professionals these are deeply perplexing times; war seems more dynamic and chameleon-like than ever before. There are pressing questions: What is the future of war

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in conditions of great flux? Can traditional ideas of military power continue to dominate in an age of both globalization and fragmentation? What is the meaning of Western military supremacy in an era when democratic civilization—as demonstrated by the events of 11 September—is highly vulnerable to unexpected and unorthodox threats?

This article seeks to provide some answers to these questions. It adopts an approach reflecting a conviction that while events are always impossible to predict, it is possible to undertake intelligent analysis of trends in order to make some interim judgments about the kind of military conditions that might emerge in the near future. The article explores four areas. First, the fragmentation of the international system in the 1990s is analyzed in an attempt to demonstrate how new political conditions caused a diffusion of conflict modes that in turn have brought great uncertainty to the world of military analysts. Second, the main theories of war that emerged in the 1990s and the complexity these brought to traditional military thinking are examined. Third, a snapshot is provided of some of the most important challenges facing the West in terms of the theory and practice of the military art over the next decade and a half. Finally, some of the likely characteristics of warfare over the next decade are identified and subjected to tentative analysis.

WAR IN THE 1990S: THE DIFFUSION OF CONFLICT

In the 1990s there appears to have been a major transition in international relations away from a mainly state-centered system toward one marked by greater interdependence and interconnectedness. This trend toward interconnectedness was propelled by the dual impact of globalization and its handmaiden, the information revolution. Together, these two forces appeared to have altered the context within which modern states operate, bringing about an apparent redistribution of power among states, markets, and civil society.¹

From a military perspective, the globalization of the last decade is perhaps best described as a process in which space and time have been so compressed by technology as to permit distant actions to have local effects, and vice versa. The international system that emerged by the beginning of the twenty-first century was an interconnected world order in which regional and local military developments could be of global significance.

Defense analysts quickly discovered that conflict and disorder anywhere in the world could be quickly transmitted everywhere—and invested with crisis—by a pervasive global communications media, epitomized by the Cable News Network. It was also discovered that globalization is not a homogenous process but contains a striking paradox in that it brings about both convergence and divergence. The notion of interconnectedness and a heightened sense of global

consciousness are paralleled by polarization and particularism. As President William Clinton put it in April 1999, the West finds itself engaged in “a great battle between the forces of integration and the forces of disintegration; [between] the forces of globalism and the forces of tribalism; [of the forces] of oppression against [those of] empowerment.”²

In effect, by 2001 the contemporary international security system had bifurcated—that is, it had split between a traditional twentieth-century, state-centered paradigm and new twenty-first-century substate and transstate strata. The great change in the early twenty-first-century international system from that of the last quarter of the twentieth century is the transition away from a dominant state-centric structure toward one marked by a greater number of substate and transstate actors. With bifurcation came a reduction in the relative significance of strategic geography, simply because the globalization of the information era appeared no longer to allow any state or society to retreat behind physical or moral borders.³

It is very important to understand clearly what is meant by the “relative decline” of strategic geography. In no sense does such a phrase imply “the end of geography” in the same sense that Francis Fukuyama famously spoke of “the end of history.”⁴ In terms of logistics, campaign planning, and topographical analysis, geography remains fundamental to the art of war, while geopolitics remains

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an important component of statecraft.⁵ Nonetheless, a shift away from territoriality toward connectedness has diminished the effect of strategic geography as a

primary rationale for defining a nation’s defense and national security postures. The process of this transformation—in which older forms of linear conflict have been supplemented by new forms of nonlinear conflict—has been recognized by both Western and non-Western strategists. For example, the leading American strategic analyst Phillip Bobbitt has observed, “National security will cease to be defined in terms of borders alone because both the links among societies as well as the attacks on them exist in psychological and infrastructural dimensions, not on an invaded plain marked by the seizure and holding of territory.”⁶ Similarly, two Chinese strategists have argued that we are entering an age of unrestricted warfare in which “there is no territory that cannot be surpassed; there is no means which cannot be used in . . . war; and there is no territory or method which cannot be used in combination.”⁷

The result of globalization over the past ten years has been the development of an unpredictable and complex pattern of armed conflict. Under conditions of global strategic bifurcation the old distinctions—between civil and

international conflict, between internal and external security, and between national and societal security—began to erode. It has become clear that in an era in which various transnational and substate forces were greatly empowered by technology, such issues as civil conflict, terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction could no longer be easily quarantined within states or regions. From the early 1990s onward, these phenomena emerged as global strategic threats precisely because they acted to blur the distinction between internal and external crises. Under new conditions, transnational and substate forces threaten not just states but entire societies and thus the fabric of international stability itself. Consequently, traditional ideas about warfare have come under challenge as the political, economic, and military dimensions of security have more closely merged and state-on-state war seems to have been supplemented by new forms of substate and transstate conflict.⁸

The changing character of conflict and war mirrored the bifurcation of the international security system in the 1990s. The various views expressed about the future of military conflict reflected the post–Cold War fragmentation of international security and the diffusion of contemporary war into a variety of different modes. War became at once modern (reflecting conventional warfare between states), postmodern (reflecting the West’s cosmopolitan political values of limited war, peace enforcement, and humanitarian military intervention), and premodern (reflecting a mix of substate and transstate warfare based on the age-old politics of identity, extremism, and particularism).⁹ It is important to note that none of these categories represents neatly divided compartments of activity; they overlap and interact with each other. The U.S. Marine Corps’s recent doctrine of the “three-block war”—in which troops may be engaged in a conventional firefight, peace operations, and humanitarian relief simultaneously in a single small area—captures the essence of this complex interaction.¹⁰

However, if modern, postmodern, and premodern forms of war overlap with each other, each mode has distinctive features. Modern war remains symbolized by a classical doctrine of “encounter battles,” collisions of rival states’ armed forces moving on land, in air, and at sea. This is a mode of classical warfare that can be traced back to the first properly recorded battle in history, in which the Egyptians defeated the Hittites in a chariot and infantry battle at Kadesh in 1285 B.C. The most recent model (at this writing) of armed conflict by encounter battle is the 1991 Gulf War, when Western and Iraqi forces employing missiles, tanks, and mechanized infantry clashed in the deserts of Kuwait.

In the West’s public consciousness, modern war is based on high technology and the conventional force-on-force warfare of the kind associated with the two world wars, Korea, and the Gulf. In contrast, postmodern war is mainly characterized by the extremes of Western risk aversion, since for the Western powers

the stakes seldom involve issues of vital security or national survival. Postmodern war is based on high-tech aerospace power, casualty limitation, and cautious exit strategies, such as we saw during the Kosovo conflict of 1999. In many key respects, the war over Kosovo was the model of a postmodern conflict. It was, to borrow David Halberstam's ironic phrase, "war in a time of peace"—a conflict carefully calibrated, enabled by high-tech weaponry, with its course determined by Western opinion polls.¹¹ However, postmodern conflict based around high-technology aerospace power has created its own antithesis—asymmetric warfare, including the threat of weapons of mass destruction, waged against Western society.¹²

For its part, premodern war is symbolized by the images of "blood and iron" the West now allegedly abhors. Premodern war is essentially social rather than technological in character; it is an expression of the existential rather than the instrumental aspect of warfare.¹³ Those who wage such struggles may choose to sport middle-class suits and exploit the spread of advanced technology, but their mind-sets are mixtures of the antimodern, the millenarian, and the tribal. Such radicals embody what Pierre Hassner has called "the dialectic of the bourgeois and the barbarian."¹⁴ Premodern conflict merges unconventional—to use the term *du jour*, asymmetric—warfare methods with the conventional or semiconventional military activities of failed states. The premodern model of conflict also tends to exploit the rise of nonstate actors, cultural identity politics, and ethnopolitical conflict. In many respects, premodern war represents a cultural revolt against the philosophy of Western liberal globalism; it is a conscious rejection of the universal values based on cosmopolitan democracy that followed Western victory in the Cold War. For many premodern radicals, the social order offered by globalization is anathema; it appears to them a facsimile of the secular, materialistic, and trivial world inhabited by Homer Simpson. For millenarian radicals of political Islam like Osama Bin Laden, the West's alleged cults of hedonistic individuality and intellectual relativism threaten societies that seek to define themselves by collective spirituality and timeless cultural traditions.¹⁵

Premodern struggles embrace aspects of substate or intrastate civil conflict and ethnic cleansing ranging from Bosnia through Somalia to East Timor. Unlike the old national-liberation insurgents of the Cold War era, premodern radicals are more concerned with age-old cultural identity than the universal class ideology of Marxism; with a strategy of population displacement rather than winning popular support; and with sectarianism and secession rather than building inclusive model societies. One of the biggest changes in contemporary military affairs, then, has been the obsolescence of the Cold War political model of unconventional warfare and, as a result, of much of the West's counterinsurgency theory.¹⁶

When distilled to basics, these three overlapping models of modern, postmodern, and premodern war provide us with two vividly contrasting images of future conflict—one that is mainly symmetric and one largely asymmetric. On one hand, we have the blend of modern and postmodern war seen in the 1991 Gulf War and waged in the air over Kosovo in 1999 to serve as a grim metaphor of Western supremacy in any conventional conflict. However, on another level, we are confronted with a strange mixture of premodern and postmodern conflict—a world of asymmetric and ethnopolitical warfare—in which machetes and Microsoft merge, and apocalyptic millenarians wearing Reeboks and Raybans dream of acquiring weapons of mass destruction. To use a Hollywood analogy, it is as if the West's Buck Rogers were now lined up against assorted road warriors from the devastated society portrayed in the "Mad Max" films.

MILITARY THEORY IN THE 1990S

The fragmentation of war has been mirrored in the world of strategic analysis. In the 1990s, military theory reflected the rapid diffusion of conflict following the end of the bipolar Cold War world. Multiple new theories of armed conflict appeared in the first half of the 1990s. At the beginning of the decade, the American analyst John Mueller gave us the "obsolescence of major war" theory, which argued that war in the advanced West was as outmoded as slavery and dueling.¹⁷ The Israeli scholar Martin van Creveld followed Mueller by declaring that the Gulf War was a historical freak, a throwback to World War II rather than a vision of twenty-first-century war. Van Creveld argued that the long era of interstate war first codified by the Prussian philosopher Carl von Clausewitz in the early nineteenth century had ended. What he described as Clausewitzian "trinitarian war"—based on the nexus between people, government, and armed forces—was dead, and Western military theory derived from classical warfare had become obsolescent.¹⁸

The American futurists Alvin and Heidi Toffler then gave us the theory of "third wave" high-technology information warfare that helped initiate the "revolution in military affairs" debate.¹⁹ According to the Tofflers and the information-age warfare theorists who followed them, the Gulf War provided a glimpse of postmodern war as the realm of high technology. Precision strike, "dominant battlespace knowledge," and stealth platforms would shape future conflict. In the 1990s RMA-style ideas dominated American force planning for a future based on fighting two major theater wars, as enshrined in the Pentagon's blueprint *Joint Vision 2010*.

In contrast, military writers like Robert Kaplan, Philip Cerny, and Ralph Peters proceeded to give us a vision of future war in which the form of social organization involved was far more important than the level of technology

employed.²⁰ For Kaplan, the war of the future was the “coming anarchy” of a Hobbesian world of failed states; for Cerny it was the “neomedievalism” of warlordism and violent disintegration; and for Peters it was a struggle by Western forces waged against a world of warrior cultures and paramilitaries from Mogadishu to Grozny. In 1996 Samuel P. Huntington published his seminal study of a coming “clash of civilizations” in which conflict between world cultures and “fault-line wars” would dominate the geopolitical future.²¹ Finally, in 1999, the British analyst Mary Kaldor put forward a theory of “new wars” in which identity politics and the privatization of violence would challenge the new global order.²²

By the turn of the century, the West was awash in a world of competing ideas about the future of armed conflict. War and conflict had, in effect, split like an unraveling rope’s end into a multiplicity of strands. War could be whatever one sought in the cookbook of theory: it could be desert combat in the Gulf, street fighting in Grozny, or something between the two. Armed conflict could be asymmetric or low-intensity style “fourth generation” conflict waged by guerrillas and terrorists against the West’s conventional military supremacy. In addition, the ominous New Terrorism of nuclear, chemical, and biological warfare conducted by rogue nations and nonstate entities was also viewed by some analysts as representing a form of “nontraditional warfare.”²³

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: THE CHALLENGE OF FUTURE WAR

Given the proliferation of military theory and uncertain political conditions, what are the possible contours of future warfare over the next decade? What cautious speculations can we make about emerging trends? In September 1999, the bipartisan U.S. (Hart-Rudman) Commission on National Security/21st Century stated:

The future strategic environment will . . . be one of considerable turbulence. . . . The international system will be so fluid and complex that to think intelligently about military issues will mean taking an integrated view of political, social, technological, and economic developments. Only a broad definition of national security is appropriate to such a circumstance. In short we have entered an age in which many of the fundamental assumptions that steered us through the chilly waters of the Cold War require rethinking. . . . The very facts of military reality are changing, and that bears serious and concentrated reflection.²⁴

If the Hart-Rudman Commission’s judgment about the facts of military reality changing is correct—and many, including the present author, believe it is—those concerned with preparing for armed conflict in the early twenty-first century must expect to confront a range of old, new, and hybrid forms of armed conflict. During the Cold War, the West confronted a unidimensional threat from

the Marxist-Leninist Soviet Union—an adversary whose motives were certain and whose moves were predictable. In the new century, such conditions no longer apply. In the words of the present U.S. secretary of defense, Donald H. Rumsfeld, new military thinking is now required to arm Western societies “against the unknown, the uncertain, the unseen, and the unexpected.”²⁵

It has become imperative that all concerned with security issues pay greater attention to the merging of previously discrete forms of war. The conceptual basis for the study of warfare in the West must now be broadened to include a rigorous study of the interaction between interstate, substate, and transstate

conflict and of the diffusion of contemporary military capabilities. We have to recognize that in an interconnected age, linkage and interdependence seem to pervade all aspects of armed conflict.

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Military analysts and force-structure specialists need to concentrate on the multifunctional use of force in highly complex operations. In addition, military professionals must learn to embrace the challenges of proportion, coercion, and dissuasion as well as the older tradition of battlefield destruction. In particular, what the U.S. Hart-Rudman Commission has described as “the spectrum of symmetrical and asymmetrical threats we anticipate over the next quarter century” must receive increased attention from both military theorists and policy makers.²⁶ In short, the challenge is to prepare for full-spectrum conflict.

The task will be much harder than many defense analysts realize. The notion of a spectrum of conflict is not a new idea, but for most of the Cold War the Western understanding of war was based on generic intellectual categories of “conventional” (high-intensity) and “unconventional” (low-intensity) conflict. Most in the field of strategic studies thought in terms of separate worlds of conventional interstate (or high-intensity) and unconventional intrastate (or low-intensity) military activity. Unfortunately, the spectrum of conflict that is emerging in the early twenty-first century is distinguished by merged categories, multidimensionality, and unprecedented interaction.²⁷

In an era when all security issues are interconnected and when the national security of Western states has become critically dependent on international security, single-scenario strategies and rigid military force structures have become anachronistic. Traditional concepts of deterrence and defense need to be supplemented by new doctrines of security preemption, security prevention, and expeditionary warfare. Moreover, the clear separation of peace and war must be supplemented by an acknowledgment that modes of war have merged. In a new age marked by networks and instant communications, the need is for advanced

military forces with skills useful across a range of tasks that may involve preventive deployment, preemptive strike, war fighting, peace enforcement, traditional peacekeeping and peace building, and counterterrorism.²⁸

However, the intellectual challenge facing military professionals is not, as Martin van Creveld would have us believe, to consign Carl von Clausewitz and two thousand years of Western military knowledge to the dustbin of history. Rather, the task is to learn how to fight efficiently across the spectrum of conflict. No responsible Western military theorist can accept at face value the thesis of the “obsolescence of conventional war” or the paradigm of asymmetric warfare as primary force planning or doctrinal determinants. In a dangerous and unpredictable world, military professionals and their political masters must prepare to fight in conditions of a “high-low mix”—to be ready to tame the big wildcats and not simply the vicious rodents, to be able to fight troops like Iraq’s former Republican Guard as well as Taliban, al-Qa’ida militia, and terrorists. As every good operational commander knows, in the military art one can “trade down,” but one can never “trade up.” Moreover, all the evidence indicates that success in peace-support operations requires the kinds of conventional firepower, mobility, and force protection available only to military establishments that are optimized for conventional warfighting.²⁹

Readying ourselves for conventional war does not, however, absolve us from undertaking a major transformation in the way we think about the use of military force. The most pressing intellectual task at the crossroad of the old and new centuries is rapid adaptation to new and merging forms of conflict. In the West we have to reconcile how we would like to fight with how we might *have* to fight. We must try to synthesize relevant features from the massive literature on the classical Gulf War/RMA model of warfare with the changing reality of conflict—both conventional and unconventional—as it presents itself. We have to undertake an intellectual exploration of the growing interaction between interstate, substate, and transstate conflict and conduct a rigorous investigation of the phenomenon of merging war forms—internal, international, postmodern, modern, and premodern.

The merging of modes of armed conflict suggests an era of warfare quite different from that of the recent past. Fighting in the future may involve conventional armies, guerrilla bands, independent and state-directed terrorist groups, specialized antiterrorist units, and private militias. Terrorist attacks might evolve into classic guerrilla warfare and then escalate to conventional conflict. Alternatively, fighting could be conducted on several levels at once. The possibility of continuous, sporadic, armed conflict, its engagements blurred together in time and space, waged on several levels by a large array of national and subnational forces, means that the reality of war in the first decade of the

twenty-first century is likely to transcend a neat division into distinct categories, symmetry and asymmetry.³⁰

Indeed, it is arguable that the main reason for much of the intellectual confusion surrounding war at the turn of the century stems from the lack of a conceptual synthesis between the requirements of traditional conventional war and the emerging blend of interstate, transstate, and nonstate modes.³¹ It is no accident that the most productive areas of military theory have been those that have attempted to concentrate on the expanding phenomenon of war. The most interesting new approaches have come from those who have endeavored to examine the growing complexity of conflict, its holistic yet multidimensional character, its sociological as well as technological dynamics. Conceptual progress has come from analytical work into war's connection to society as well as to the state; from assessing the convergence of modes of conflict and the growing requirements to control armed violence in an age of instantaneous media imagery; and from developing multipurpose forces that can wage warfare across the spectrum of conflict.

In short, it is the interactive character of war—Clausewitz's famous chameleon “that adapts its characteristics to the given case”—that has proven the most original avenue for analysis.³² The immediate future of war lies perhaps in two key areas. The first is the realm of multidimensional theories of war and conflict that call for multifunctional forces for intervention missions; the second is the evolving theory of counterwar, or “mastery of violence,” which may assist military practitioners and policy makers to understand and deal with armed conflict as a multifaceted phenomenon.

A Multidimensional Approach to War and Conflict

As twenty-first-century war becomes, in the words of the prominent Russian military theorist Makhmut Gareev, “a multivariant,” advanced armed forces need to develop multidimensional approaches to conflict.³³ The most interesting American and British military theory reflects a growing recognition that in a new age of multiple threats, discrete categories of conventional and unconventional conflict are eroding, along with corresponding legal and moral restraints.

Much of the West's preparation to meet an accelerating convergence of military challenges is shaped by three ideas. First, there is a general acceptance that armed forces must be able to adapt to differing modes of war, to become multifunctional. Second, as questions of both national and societal security merge and interpenetrate, reactive operational strategies alone become inadequate as means of deterrence. Security in the new era of liberal globalism also requires a willingness to undertake interventions, as well as, correspondingly, proactive military forces. Third, if global political and technological conditions

permit radical groups and rogue states to use ballistic or biological weapons to inflict mass casualties on democratic societies, this new challenge must be met by military preemption in ways not seen since the late nineteenth century. In other words, those who espouse the mass murder of innocent civilians in cities and suburbs must be destroyed wherever and whenever preemption is possible. As President George W. Bush put it recently, it is necessary for the West to act decisively against the new threat emanating from “the perilous crossroads of radicalism and technology.”³⁴ Specifically, the diffusion of advanced technology, from standoff missiles to commercial space systems to weapons of mass destruction, into the hands of smaller armies, paramilitaries, militias, and other armed groups puts a premium on Western expeditionary warfare.

Two leading American military theorists, Huba Wass de Czege and Richard Hart Sinnreich, have recently given an unequivocal view of the merging of conventional and unconventional conflict:

Clear distinctions between conventional and unconventional conflicts are fading, and any future major conflict is almost certain to see a routine commingling of such operations. Similarly, once useful demarcations between front and rear or between theater and strategic operations will continue to evaporate as the instrumentalities of war become more interdependent and, as is increasingly true of communications and space systems, less easily separable from their civilian and commercial counterparts.³⁵

As a result, the future requirement will be for joint forces designed for multidimensional, expeditionary-style operations—what the U.S. Army now refers to as “operational maneuver from strategic distance.” Such operations are vital to control theaters where “high-low” threats and varied forms of conflict might be expected. Consequently, the main trends in contemporary Western military theory are toward operations with multinational and joint task forces with simplified headquarters structures—not simply corps and division, but increasingly force and formation. Smaller combat formations, such as the combined-arms brigades to serve modular building blocks for forces in the field, are needed.³⁶ Force structures will become more modular and capable of rapid task force organization from “golf bags” of varied military capabilities.³⁷

In expeditionary warfare, the main need is to reconcile operational versatility with organizational stability. Western forces must be capable of undertaking joint, multidimensional missions ranging from shaping the environment to air-ground operational maneuver, to all-out conventional warfare. The demands of operational versatility are likely to place a premium on organizational change.

Multifaceted Conflict: Counterwar Theory and Mastery of Violence

Recent trends in European-American military theory toward multidimensional operations have also been applied to what some European military thinkers now call “counterwar theory,” or the “mastery of violence” as an operational military strategy.³⁸ In France, the development of counterwar theory reflects the perception that war in the twenty-first century has become “a mixture of phenomena.” Some French military thinkers believe that in contemporary armed conflict it is largely impossible to treat war as merely a clash between rival forces; that the conventional cannot be separated from the unconventional; and that traditional lines of authority between military control and political responsibility are becoming blurred.

A military force may now be required to conduct intervention operations in conditions that correspond to neither classical warfare nor traditional peace-support operations. Extremely complex political conditions may arise in which law and order are lacking but the law of armed conflict must nonetheless, and at all costs, be upheld; in such a case a counterwar strategy, the disciplined control of violence, may have to be imposed. As French military analysts Brigadier General Loup Francart and Jean-Jacques Patry observe, “Military operations are now completely integrated with political, diplomatic, economic and cultural activities. Strategy is no longer simply a matter of defense. The problem is now, more than ever, *to conceive military operations in a political framework.*”³⁹

General Wesley K. Clark, the American commander who prosecuted Nato’s 1999 war against Serbia over Kosovo, has argued that politics in modern war now pervades all of the three levels of war—tactics, operations, and strategy. In the past, politics was mainly a factor at the strategic level, where statecraft guided the military instrument. However, in the early twenty-first century, politics also now impinges on the operational and tactical levels of war, Clark believes, to the extent that it may be necessary to speak of a “political level of war.” If General Clark is right, the implications for future civil-military relations are profound.⁴⁰

In an age of increased military-political integration and twenty-four-hour electronic media, the goal of force may be not annihilation or attrition but calibrated “elimination of the enemy’s resistance” by the careful and proportional use of counterviolence. The use of armed force in a surgical manner—the rapier rather than the broadsword—would require that military thinking and action be politically sophisticated, legally disciplined, and ethically correct. These needs were among the main lessons of the Kosovo conflict.⁴¹ As French military theorists have argued, the aim must be to ensure that the application of force in intervention operations—especially in an age of instant images—can be modulated and shaped by professional militaries to accommodate rapidly shifting politics and flexible operational and strategic objectives.

WARFARE IN 2015: A TENTATIVE ANALYSIS

Given the growing complexity of the military art and of the use of force in statecraft, what are the characteristics of warfare most likely to be over the next decade? Four basic sets can be tentatively offered. First, war is likely to remain a chameleon, presenting itself variously in interstate, transstate, and nonstate modes—or as a combination of these. However, a word of caution is necessary: it would be a serious mistake to dismiss the possibility of interstate conventional war. If in some areas of the world, such as Western Europe, it is highly improbable, in much of Asia and the Middle East it remains a distinct possibility.⁴² Nonetheless, in general terms, the merging of modes of armed conflict does suggest an era of warfare in which national, transstate, and substate forces may coalesce or find themselves in mismatched confrontations. Moreover, the conventional and the unconventional, the symmetric and the asymmetric, may occur almost simultaneously, overlapping in time and space.

Second, advanced warfare will be largely joint-service in character. The revolution in information technology, especially as applied to command and control, long-range precision strike, and stealth, has so compressed time and space in military operations as to create an unprecedented nonlinear battle space characterized by breadth, depth, and height. During the 1990s, the concept of “battle space” replaced the linear battlefield that had defined armed conflict in the Western tradition from Alexander the Great to the Second World War. In essence, the concept of battle space has permitted a shift away from the organization of linear mass toward a simultaneous and “full-dimensional” concentration of *effects*.⁴³ This is especially significant with regard to the cumulative impact of missile firepower from air, ground, and sea.⁴⁴

Third, most Western military experts believe that future operations will favor simultaneous attack by joint air-ground forces that are “situationally aware”—that have substantially complete and current views of the battlespace via computer and satellite. Advanced forces are also likely to be networked from “sensor to shooter”—that is, surveillance capabilities will be electronically connected to strike forces, and all of them to each other.⁴⁵ There will probably be fewer troops deployed on the ground, but the individual soldier—the “strategic corporal”—will have a greater potential impact on events. Growing weapons lethality and increased ability of soldiers to direct long-range precision “fires”—as seen in Afghanistan, where ground forces acted as highly effective sensors for air strikes—are likely to become features of warfare over the next decade.⁴⁶

Fourth, the dominance of surveillance and strike means that joint operations by technologically advanced forces, capable of deep precision attack and quick maneuver, are likely to resemble large-scale ambushes. If an enemy can be remotely located, traditional movement to contact preceded by forward troops

probing for the enemy will be replaced by well-prepared, deliberate, “deep” attacks using tactics that exploit rapid positioning for maximum effect. However, precision munitions are likely to be of limited use in close operations, in which infantry must be employed to finish off adversaries.⁴⁷

In the close battle, armored forces and artillery are likely to remain extremely useful in applying suppressive fire in support of troops in action. In the recent campaign in Afghanistan, American forces put their faith in air cover at the expense of both artillery and tanks. It was soon discovered that while precision munitions delivered from high altitude are effective against known point targets, they are much less useful in area attack, as is necessary against forces that are scattered, not precisely located. The majority of American casualties (twenty-eight out of thirty-six) in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM came from enemy mortar fire that could have been suppressed by armor or artillery. The lesson learned from fierce combat in the complex terrain of Afghanistan’s Shah-i-Kot region is that for area suppression, field guns and tanks remain essential in twenty-first-century warfare.⁴⁸

The likely shape of war in the early twenty-first century essentially reflects the consequences of a bifurcated global system between an older state-centric world, on one hand, and new transstate and substate strata on the other. The West has entered a period in which classical interstate war has been supplemented by borderless threats from nonstate actors operating with the power of modern computers, ease of international travel, and, possibly, weapons of mass destruction, with which they can deal lethal blows to any society.

These trends, particularly the unholy alliance between new nonstate actors and advanced technology, collectively point to an urgent need for new strategic thinking. The shift toward connectedness and nonlinearity at the relative expense of territoriality and linearity has become perhaps the central reality of strategy in the opening years of the twenty-first century. Some international observers believe the strategic shift from territoriality to connectedness will be revolutionary in its consequences:

We are at a moment in world affairs when the essential ideas that govern statecraft must change. For five centuries it has taken the resources of a state to destroy another state; only states could muster the huge revenues, conscript the vast armies, and equip the divisions required to threaten the survival of other states. . . . This is no longer true, owing to advances in international telecommunications, rapid computation, and weapons of mass destruction. The change in statecraft that will accompany these developments will be as profound as any that the State has thus far undergone.⁴⁹

The great danger to Western countries is no longer the threat of military invasion of the nation-state but an assault on the very foundations of our networked society. Western societies are now most vulnerable not from external invasion but from internal disruption of the government, financial, and economic institutions that make up critical infrastructures.⁵⁰

It was this great weakness that al-Qa'ida exploited with such devastating results on 11 September 2001. Increasingly, national security now depends on the protection of a specific set of social institutions and the information links between them. However, our reliance on critical infrastructures vastly exceeds our ability to protect them; it is therefore impossible to protect an entire society solely by "homeland defense."

To defend Western societies, the nation-state model of war based upon threat analysis and against defined enemies will have to be supplemented by new

modes of strategic thought that concentrate on alleviating the vulnerabilities of modern states to new nonstate threats. As the French military analyst Phillippe Delmas has warned, "Today's

The war over Kosovo was, to borrow David Halberstam's ironic phrase, "war in a time of peace."

world is without precedent. It is as different from the Cold War as it is from the Middle Ages so the past offers no basis for comparison. . . . Tomorrow's wars will not result from the ambitions of States; rather from their weaknesses."⁵¹

To meet the challenges of tomorrow's wars, Western countries will need highly mobile, well equipped, and versatile forces capable of multidimensional coalition missions and "mastery of violence" across a complex spectrum of conflict. They will need new national security apparatus for threat and vulnerability analysis and consequence management in the event of traumatic societal attack. They will need enhanced international intelligence and diplomatic cooperation to ensure that military force is employed with maximum efficiency. They will need new norms of international law that allow joint armed forces to be used, when the enemy can be located, in far-flung preemption operations.⁵²

The reality of Western societal vulnerability in conditions of liberal globalism represents a strategic transformation that obliges defense experts and politicians to think rigorously about the kinds of war that might lie ahead. We are confronted with a challenge of finding new ways of using force in merged modes of conflict in an international system that must confront simultaneously both integration and fragmentation.

The problems facing policy makers, strategists, and military professionals in the early twenty-first century, then, have changed dramatically and decisively from those of the twentieth. Military power and capability have expanded into a

network of transnational interconnections. As a result, preparing for armed conflict is no longer only a matter of simply assembling battlefield strength to destroy defined adversaries.

Increasingly, military power is entwined in politics—as an instrument that shapes, polices, and bounds the strategic environment, that punishes, signals, and warns. The task for strategists is now one of disciplining available military power into a broad security strategy—one that embraces also diplomacy, intelligence analysis, and law enforcement—in a calibrated, judicious, and precise manner. In the prophetic words, written over thirty-five years ago, of the British strategist Alastair Buchan, “The real content of strategy is concerned not merely with war and battles but with the application and maintenance of force so that it contributes most effectively to the advancement of political objectives.”⁵³ At the dawn of a new century, of a new and uncertain era in armed conflict in a globalized yet deeply fragmented world, these words aptly describe the many dangerous challenges that lie ahead.

NOTES

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7. Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare* (Beijing: People’s Liberation Army Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999), p. 199.
8. For a useful discussion see Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., and Richard H. Shultz, Jr., “Future Actors in a Changing Security Environment,” in *War in the Information Age: New Challenges for U.S. Security Policy*, ed. Pfaltzgraff and Schultz (Washington, D.C.: Brassey’s, 1997), chap. 1.
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11. David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton and the Generals* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), esp. chaps. 39–43. The Kosovo conflict is well analyzed in Bacevich and Cohen, eds., *War over Kosovo*.
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