

Fourth Generation Warfare: Another Look

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Events of the past 5 years have not greatly altered the views of the 'fourth generationists.' They continue to believe that nontrinitarian, cultural conflict, outside the nation-state framework, will be the dominant form of war.

In 1989, we offered some thoughts about where the art of war might be going. We suggested that modern war might be on the verge of a "fourth generation," a successor to "third generation" maneuver warfare.

Interestingly, it was only this year—5 years after the original article—that the first serious commentaries were published in the September issue of the Marine Corps Gazette. LtCol Thomas X. Hammes' article was particularly thoughtful. It offered a deepened historical perspective on the evolution of the fourth generation. We agree with his statement, "The fourth generation has arrived," and with his general characterization of its tactical and strategic aspect (though, as we will discuss below, we would go much further with regard to the latter).

Robert J. Bunker's commentary provides an interesting look at a broader swath of history, although we find his focus on the "energy foundations of civilization" too much a single-factor explanation of historical change. A large problem is that he ends up with two "fourth generations," "Terrorist/LIC warfare" and "Advanced Technology warfare," which never seem to meet. In fact, they do meet often, as in Somalia, and the former usually wins. One or the other will eventually emerge dominant. To relegate the contest between them to a matter of "tactics and doctrines of Advanced Technology warfare" is to miss entirely the sweeping nature of the challenge. If recent events show us anything, it is that advanced technology warfare is largely ineffective against terrorist/LIC opponents. Advanced technology warfare only seems to work when the enemy is willing to play the same game. It appears it can often be negated simply by refusing to play. The reverse does not seem to be true, i.e., that advanced technology warfare can simply ignore terrorism/LIC.

Not surprisingly, in 5 years our own thinking about fourth generation warfare has also developed. We believe most of what we argued in 1989 has held up well in the light of events. To see more clearly where fourth generation warfare seems to be headed, we need to expand upon one of the alternatives we offered then: an idea-based, rather than a technology-based, fourth generation of modern war.

Three central ideas shape what we see as the emerging fourth generation: the nation-state's loss of its monopoly on war, the return to a world of cultures in conflict, and "multiculturalism" in the United States, which is to say the abandonment of Judeo-Christian, Western culture and values here at home.

In our 1989 article, we noted that a fourth generation opponent might have: a non-national or transnational base, such an ideology or religion. Our national security capabilities are

designed to operate within a nation-state framework. Outside that framework, they have great difficulties

That possibility was expanded upon brilliantly by Martin van Creveld in his 1991 book, *The Transformation of War*. Creveld argues that the modern paradigm for warfare, in which nation-states wage war for reasons of state, using formal militaries that fight other organizations similar to themselves, with the people supporting both—but also distinguishable from both—the "Clausewitzian Trinity" of government, army, and people is historically unusual. Through most of man's time on earth, war was nontrinitarian. Families waged war, as did clans, tribes, cities, monastic orders, religions, even commercial enterprises (the British East India Company). They fought for many reasons, not just "rational" reasons of state: for good cropland, for loot, for women (Helen of Troy), for slaves, for sacrificial victims to their gods (the "flowery wars" of the Aztecs), for the purity of their race. Often, there was no formal army with ranks and uniforms, set apart from the people; all males strong enough to carry a weapon were warriors. Indeed, an entire people could be a military instrument; war by migration is no less effective today than it was against the Roman Empire, as both Haiti and Cuba recently reminded us.

In our view, postmodern is premodern. Future war will increasingly be nontrinitarian, and as we have seen most recently in Gaza, formal trinitarian military forces will be ineffective against it. In the Postscript to *The Transformation of War*, "The Shape of Things to Come," Creveld writes:

We are standing today, not at the end of history but at a historic turning point. Just as Alexander's exploits only reached the Middle Ages as a dim, fantastic tale, so in the future people will probably look back upon the twentieth century as a period of mighty empires, vast armies, and incredible fighting machines that have crumbled into dust... As war between states exits through one side of history's revolving door, low-intensity conflict among different organizations will enter through the other ... Extensive conflict of this nature will cause existing distinctions between government, armed forces, and people to break down. National sovereignties are already being undermined by organizations that refuse to recognize the state's monopoly over armed violence. Armies will be replaced by police-like security forces on the one hand and bands of ruffians on the other, not that the difference is always clear even today. National frontiers, that at present constitute perhaps the greatest single obstacle to combating low-intensity conflict, may be obliterated or else become meaningless as rival organizations chase each other across them. As frontiers go, so will territorial states ... As new forms of armed conflict multiply and spread, they will cause the lines between public and private, government and people, military and civilian, to become blurred as they were before 1648.

The question might be asked, What about the war with Iraq? It certainly followed the traditional, "trinitarian" model. While many people see the Gulf War as a prototype of a new kind of warfare, we see it as an anachronism, a throwback to World War II in Europe with updated weapons. Creveld referred to the Gulf War as a "jousting contest," a splendid show that in the end changed little. The wars that actually change things, as Yugoslavia or Somalia or Palestine have been changed, are now almost all nontrinitarian. We would add that generational changes in war are seldom abrupt. Much of the previous generation (or even the one before) lives on long after its military usefulness has diminished or disappeared.

More broadly, the nation-state is losing its monopoly on war, and its hold on its citizens loyalty, in a growing portion of the world. The two are closely related. One of the most important roles of the state is to protect its people. When it loses the ability (or perceived ability) to do that, it will lose the loyalty of the people. People's loyalties will transfer to whatever organizations can protect them.

In much of the world, the nation-state's hold was never strong. A creation of the West, the nation-state never became the primary loyalty in much of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East; in fact, many countries in those regions, while states, were never nation states. Most of their citizens continued to see themselves as members of a clan or tribe or religious grouping, not a nation. As Western power recedes, the old loyalties are reasserting themselves. West Africa, as and the Cold War. We do not usually think of these as civil wars, but in cultural terms that is what they were. Japan played a small role in the first and a larger role in the second. But even in World War II, the Allies' "Germany first" strategy showed where the center of conflict lay.

The damage was incalculable. Tens of millions of Western lives were lost (remember that even under communism, Russia was still part of Western culture), countless marks and pounds and rubles of capital went up in flames and smoke. Most damaging, the West's faith in itself was shattered. After 1918, the modernity that had brought the Somme, poison gas, and "total war" could no longer command men's allegiance.

As is commonly the case with civil wars, the entity fighting them—in this case not a country but a culture—emerged greatly weakened vis-à-vis its neighbors. And those neighbors—Chinese culture, Hindu culture, Islamic culture—have benefited directly from the wars, especially the Cold War, as both Western parties pumped weapons, capital, and the other technical fruits of modernity into them. Most important, these non- Western cultures had not lost their nerve, their faith in themselves. On the contrary, the receding, demoralized West left them invigorated and renewed positioned to combine the technological creations of the West with the fundamentals of their traditional ways.

Now we, the West, find ourselves increasingly under siege, no longer the world's master, merely one contender among many—one sinking down as others rise. Chinese culture, the West's most successful competitor over time, may face us only with a peaceful challenge. China has never desired to rule over non-Han peoples, beyond a few border buffer states.

The most immediate challenger is Islam, and here the challenge is not likely to be peaceful. Islam is today expanding outward in every direction from its traditional heartland: south into black Africa, east into Southeast Asia and the Philippines, north into Europe. And also West: the fastest-growing religion in the United States is Islam.

Islam's thrust northward into Europe, the heartland of Western culture, is worth a closer look. Islamic immigration into France has been so massive as to reverse the verdict of the battle of Tours; southern France now has more mosques than churches. North African immigrants are now pouring similarly into Spain. In the Balkans, Moslem aid, including weapons and fighters, is flowing into Bosnia. Islamic states realize, as we do not, that the Bosnian Moslems are strategically on the offensive, beginning a new Islamic thrust toward the Danube. Most disastrous for the West is the situation in the former Soviet Union. There, our entire flank from the Black Sea to Vladivostok is collapsing under Moslem (and further east, Chinese) pressure.

What is America's response? We condemn European measures to control immigration, threaten the Serbs with war on behalf of the Bosnian Islamics, and caution Russia against any attempt to reassert control to her south. At the very least, this represents a failure to comprehend a changing strategic Situation. Some call it a cultural death wish.

The third idea that shapes our understanding of fourth generation warfare ties in our situation here at home. In the United States of America, our traditional, Western, Judeo-Christian culture is collapsing. It is not collapsing because it failed. On the contrary, it has given us the freest and most prosperous society in human history. Rather, it is collapsing because we are abandoning it.

Starting in the mid-1960s, we have thrown away the values, morals, and standards that define traditional Western culture. In part, this has been driven by cultural radicals, people who hate our Judeo-Christian culture. Dominant in the elite, especially in the universities, the media, and the entertainment industry (now the most powerful force in our culture and a source of endless degradation), the cultural radicals have successfully pushed an agenda of moral relativism, militant secularism, and sexual and social "liberation." This agenda has slowly codified into a new ideology, usually known as "multiculturalism" or "political correctness," that is in essence Marxism translated from economic into social and cultural terms.

This new, cultural Marxism has had remarkable success in discrediting America's common culture and substituting for it cultural fragmentation based on ethnic groups, gender, sexual identity, and class. If this trend continues, Americans will increasingly find they have less in common with each other as Americans. National identity will weaken. Other, mutually hostile identities will strengthen, until the nation comes apart: region vs. region, minority vs. minority, and gang vs. gang. When one nation comes apart at its cultural seams, eventually it turns on itself and fights.

Where does this fragmentation leave the national military, including the United States Marine Corps? As we have seen in Lebanon, Yugoslavia, and elsewhere, when the nation fragments so do its military forces. We could end up with two, three, many Marine Corps: white Marine Corps, black Marine Corps, Christian Marine Corps, possibly even a gay Marine Corps. These fragments would compete with other organizations to provide the security that counts: security for the individual person, family, home, and neighborhood. In effect, the future Marine could be a rent-a-cop.

Thus we find ourselves coming full circle, back to the first idea that, in our view, shapes the fourth generation: the nation-states' loss of its monopoly on armed violence. The point is not merely that America's Armed Forces will find themselves facing non-nation-state conflicts and forces overseas. The point is that the same conflicts are coming here.

The fourth generation heralds the end of modern war and possibly of the modern era as well. The next real war we fight is likely to be on American soil.

4GW – Myth, or the Future of Warfare? A Reply to Antulio Echevarria

By John Sayen

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In the past week or so MILINET has issued two items attacking the concept of Fourth Generation Warfare or 4GW. [The first is by Antulio Echevarria](#) (117 KB PDF) and put out by the Army's [Strategic Studies Institute](#) [Editor's note: Dr. Echevarria is the director of research at the Institute]. The second is by a retired warrant officer who, though undoubtedly earnest and sincere, seems to think that the Napoleonic Wars started in 1648 (!!). He also feels that 4GW advocates should have illustrated their theory with a history of warfare from the Stone Age but not only would this have made it far too long for anyone to read. The past 350 years should be a sufficient database. Current conventional warfare doctrine mostly stems from 1918.

The Echevarria piece, however, is worthy of more detailed consideration. However, he appears to have seriously misunderstood what 4GW is. To explain his view of it he has lifted from Colonel Tom Hammes' recent book, *The Sling and the Stone*, a statement that 4GW is a form of "evolved insurgency." If this were really true, and given that insurgency already has a long history, it would make 4GW meaningless and Echevarria would probably not have to write a refutation of it. However, although Col Hammes claims to believe in 4GW and does in fact agree with certain aspects of it, he was not involved at any stage in its formulation and has never accepted its key concepts. According to its authors 4GW is not about technology (as was Second Generation Warfare or 2GW) nor is it about tactics and doctrine (like Third Generation War, or 3GW). Instead it is about political and social issues that affect who fights and why.

Like many (and even most) new ideas 4GW did not spring, like Athena from the head of Zeus, "fully grown and armed for battle." Although even in 1989 its originators believed that profound changes in how wars were fought were taking place it was only with the 1991 publication of Martin van Creveld's *Transformation of War* that 4GW began to take on a concrete form. Van Creveld pointed out that the nation states that ruled Europe since the 1648 Peace of Westphalia and later came to rule most of the world are in decline. The nation state was a corporate entity established to give its subjects stability and protection from attack. In return the subjects gave the state loyalty (and taxes). Wars not waged by states lost their legitimacy and non-state entities that waged them were treated as criminals. This system began to decline after the world wars and this decline greatly accelerated after the end of the Cold War removed most of the threats to nation states from other nation states. The world wars had exacted a price in blood and treasure that many began to believe too high for the stability and security that states could provide. The advent of the atomic bomb initiated a form of attack that no state or state-sponsored conventional military could defend against.

Before 1648 the nation was not the sole legitimate war-making entity. Tribes, clans, families, cities, trade associations, religious organizations and mercenary bands waged war. The chaos this produced was profoundly felt in the Thirty Years War and the 1648 treaty that ended it

sought to ensure future stability by setting forth principles for the emerging German states to abide by. The treaty's key principles, which in essence gave states the sole right to wage lawful war, quickly spread throughout Europe and, through European colonization, the rest of the world. A state's ability to amass far greater resources than any non-state entity made the latter an "endangered species" and most were soon crushed, though this process did not end in the so-called "Third World" until the late 19th Century.

Today, the pre-1648 status quo is re-emerging throughout the world. The breakdown of the nation state system is most obvious in the so-called "Third World" where the state system was never firmly established in the first place. However, the breakdown is beginning to spread to Europe and even North America as Third World immigrants move into these nations, do not assimilate and retain their connections to their former lives, loyalties and cultures. Some of these acquire no loyalty to the state they have moved to and, in Europe at least, are quite willing to fight against or undermine it.

Besides the presence of nuclear weapons, certain technical advances like cell phones and the Internet have made it easier for "armies" of non-state entities, small and lightly equipped though they be, to tie down much larger and better equipped state forces for extended periods of time. While these non-state forces have not yet been able to win conventional battles they can and do wear out the state sponsored armies and police forces that oppose them with sustained campaigns of raids, ambushes and sabotage that the state forces have been unable to stop. The non-staters' very weakness increases their power by turning their struggle into a David and Goliath contest, and who roots for Goliath? Conventional militaries are fantastically expensive and few states can still afford to maintain them on any scale. Still less can they afford the costs of actually using them. Chechen rebels, for example, have capitalized on low morale in the cash-strapped Russian Army by buying modern anti-armor weapons from Russian soldiers. Former Iraqi soldiers who would not fight for Saddam Hussein are now taking on state sponsored opponents of theoretically overwhelming strength on behalf of the tribes, families and religion.

The fact that nearly all the wars that have been fought in the last 15 years or so have had states involved on no more than one side (frequently the losing side) changes everything. Big-ticket items like warships or fighter jets become, if not altogether irrelevant, much less useful against the highly dispersed and decentralized opponents that have been characterizing 4GW conflicts, making it much harder to justify their cost. Armies geared for conventional combat tend to have difficulty with unconventional. The latter requires a completely new mindset. However, even if non-state entities acquired and used weapons like tanks or jet fighters (at least one drug gang actually did manage to acquire a submarine and Chechen militias even used a few tanks) they would still be engaging in 4GW because what really distinguishes 4GW from earlier generations is not the equipment or tactics but the identity and motivations of the people who fight it.

Professor Echevarria's reaction to this thesis is to deny all of it. He avoids talking about the essentials of 4GW by insisting on using Col Hammes' flawed and erroneous definition of 4GW as his straw man. It is, however, an easy straw man to demolish so the good professor spills buckets of ink in doing so.

However, in a few places in his paper Echevarria actually digresses into some real issues. These issues are (1) the waging of war by non-state actors is nothing new although "globalism" (faster more anonymous communication, easier travel etc.) has enhanced their effectiveness; (2) the "Trinitarian" doctrine that Martin van Creveld espouses in his book is

only a misreading of one of Clausewitz' ideas and (3) that conventional armies, such as those fielded by the United States are perfectly capable of defeating any state or non-state threat if those treasonous politicians and "peaceniks" would only let them get on with it. In addition, Echevarria also attacks the legitimacy of second and third generation war, claiming that "Blitzkrieg" was a myth and that 2 and 3GW don't differ from each other in any material way.

Echevarria's assertion (and that of most other 4GW opponents) that non-state actors have always been with us is perfectly true. Before the establishment of the modern nation state as we know it, and for which 1648 is the benchmark, all armies were non-state (they could hardly have been otherwise). After 1648, non-state forces were soon crushed and marginalized, losing first their legitimacy and soon afterwards their power. In Germany, at least, the bodies of soldiers from the mercenary bands and other non-state groups that had once terrorized the country could be seen dangling from every tree. What the 4GW idea says is that today those non-staters are making a comeback. Unlike 100 years ago, state sponsored forces can no longer deal with them themselves and are even calling on other non-state entities for assistance. Some of this can be seen in the explosive growth of private security, which provides order and protection where the government does not (even criminal gangs are acting as police in many parts of the world). Businesses that hire mercenaries (such as the former "Executive Outcomes" and the companies whose employees are currently guarding oil pipelines in Iraq) are even helping governments to fight their wars. The threats posed by non-state entities like al-Qa'ida, Hamas, Hezbollah and others are causing grave concern and even providing justification for a "War on Terror," although during the previous three or four centuries similar groups could be safely ignored.

Van Creveld's "Trinitarian" doctrine was never meant to be a rehash of Clausewitz but to highlight a key relationship that in Clausewitz' day was taken for granted. That was the relationship that existed in any nation state between the government, the armed forces and the people. The government (which might or might not be elected by the people) made the political decisions, including whether to go to war or not. The armed forces waged wars and the people gave the armed forces the manpower they needed and paid the bills. Today this system is breaking down. In many parts of the Third World (and even parts of Europe and North America) governments are routinely ignored and marginalized by many of their subjects and effectively control only portions of their nominal territory. Colombia, Brazil, Afghanistan and Iraq are excellent examples. Populations are assuming roles that formerly belonged only to the military and police, raising militias and other private armies and buying private security. Many state militaries are having trouble recruiting new members from progressively less supportive populations and governments are finding it harder to collect taxes.

Echevarria's silliest point by far is his assertion that the US military has it all under control (Iraq, of course, being the perfect counterexample). He even makes the quite breathtaking assumption that the world wars and the Cold War were really non-state conflicts because the states that exclusively fought them made (and, whenever they chose to, broke) alliances among themselves! Even today, states rarely obey international authority except when their rulers deem it to be in their own (though not necessarily their subjects') best interests. Attempts by the United Nations to wield military power have almost invariably ended in fiasco except where the United States was legitimizing its own policies by draping them in the UN flag (as in Korea, for example). Even if an international organization acquired real power of its own it would in effect become a "super-state" (better known as an empire). Far from eliminating the state system it would entrench it even more deeply. States, after all, are about

the centralization of power, not its devolution. If a super-state were to fight recalcitrant states that it claimed authority over, it would do it as a state vs. state conflict. Both sides would field conventional armies whose members wore uniforms and presumably expected Geneva Convention treatment if captured. Today's non-state actors are less than states, not above states. They don't devolve power up they devolve it down. A non-state does not need discreet territory, a full-time military or formal government. They are the revolution that the 4GW model depicts. They come from below, not from above. Effective super-states, should any emerge, would not be part of this revolution but part of the reaction to it.

I will not spend much time on Echevarria's denial of any distinctions between 2GW and 3GW because this paper is really about 4GW. Instead, I would invite the reader to compare the results of the British offensives on the Somme and in Passchendaele, which barely got off their starting blocks and the German offensives of 1918, which had the British and French staring defeat in the face until the German attackers outran their supplies and artillery support. Does the reader think it possible that the British and Germans could have been using different doctrine and/or techniques? The reader should also consider the Battle of France in 1940 in which the German Army destroyed a numerically equal French Army in just six weeks (and not because the French Army did not fight; it lost over 130,000 in KIA alone). Does the reader think that there might have been a difference between French and German tactics and doctrine? One might answer that the US Army, whose tactics and doctrine were (and largely still are) mainly derived from the French, defeated the German only a few years later. However, unlike 1940, this was hardly a numerically equal contest, the bulk of German forces actually being in the East fighting the Soviets. When the Chinese intervened in North Korea in 1950 the numeric odds were even more skewed in America's favor. Not only did the US and its allies outnumber the Chinese three-to-two but also, unlike the US and its allies, the Chinese had no artillery, no tanks, no airplanes, no logistical system and no antitank weapons. The Chinese' biggest weapon was a 82mm mortar. Only about two thirds of the Chinese soldiers even had firearms and all weapons were critically short of ammunition. Even so they drove the US Eighth Army completely out of North Korea and took about a third of what is now South Korea before they were finally stopped. Does the reader think that the Chinese might have been doing things a little differently from the US and its allies? Could it be that using 3GW (like the Germans, the Chinese and, to a lesser extent, the Soviets did) rather than 2GW (like the Americans, British and French) could make a difference?

Even so, Professor Echevarria's paper has real value in that it exemplifies the US Army's (and, indeed that of any large bureaucracy's) ostrich-like reaction to the threat of change. Not only was 4GW "not invented here" but also its acceptance could break a great many bureaucratic rice bowls. Power relationships would undergo drastic change. Big-ticket procurement programs, like the ridiculous Future Combat System (FCS) for which the Army is preparing to cut force structure (even while it does not have enough to cover Iraq) in order to save, would be threatened. The other services are preparing to make similar sacrifices to save programs at least as irrelevant and expensive as FCS and have as much interest in killing any ideas that might endanger them as the Army does.

It is not the purpose of this paper to say that the 4GW people necessarily have all the answers. However, they are at least looking for the answers and not hiding from them. Time will tell if they are right.

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