

FROM FOURTH GENERATION WARFARE TO HYBRID WAR

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

FROM FOURTH GENERATION WARFARE TO HYBRID WAR

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ABSTRACT

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In the late 1980s, Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) theorists began to recognize a shift in warfare which they assumed was both in the character and nature of war. Their ideas and publications triggered a captivating dialogue on how warfare was changing. This debate helped prompt the U.S. military to recognize the change and begin its transformation. However, over the ensuing years, a number of military thinkers and strategists demonstrated that the 4GW theorists did not get it all right. They set the stage for a generation of subsequent theorists to follow with their own predictions of future warfare. Frank Hoffman entered the scene near the end of the future war debate. He compellingly argued that warfare is converging, blending into a hybrid form, wherein adversaries will use all capabilities at their disposal. The key to success in such a period of change and persistent conflict is an agile strategic approach that relies on a wide array of capabilities. Accordingly, the U.S. must review and adjust its national strategies, warfighting concepts, and force structures. The nation must be able to adaptively and effectively combine these new capabilities to prevail in the hybrid conflicts that will dominate the near to mid-term.

FOURTH GENERATION WARFARE TO HYBRID WAR

As ideas and technologies forge change throughout history, the ways humans wage war change accordingly. This perpetual change has recently accelerated with a major geopolitical shift in which the fall of the Soviet Union ended a bipolar world; many ethnic and national groups quickly sensed a new opportunity for freedom or recognition. We should not be surprised by these actors' innovative methods and techniques of warfare as they release pent-up energy and pursue long-held ideological and nationalistic objectives. In the context of the information technology revolution of rapid globalization, of ethnic and nationalist struggles and reactionary religious movements -- all layered against the back-drop of the end of the Cold War and the subsequent break-up of a familiar geopolitical and balance-of-power dynamic -- a concept like Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) would inevitably emerge. In the late 1980s, a group of U.S. Marines observed what they believed to be a monumental change in the way in which some groups, many of whom were enemies of the United States and its allies, engaged in warfare. It is important to determine if this apparent change in warfare is solely a product of the short-term environment or whether it is a true transformation in how humans are waging war now and into the future.

This strategic research project (SRP) first describes 4GW and discusses its origins. It then traces the evolution of the concept from Lieutenant Colonel William Lind and his fellow theorists' initial presentation of their views in an October 1989 *Marine Corps Gazette* article entitled "The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation." Next, this SRP reviews the issues and controversies that have led to increasing deliberation and wider acceptance of the viability of the 4GW concept. Capitalizing on

these professional dialogues, this SRP subsequently outlines several resultant views on future war as well as theories originating outside the 4GW discussions. Both groups seemingly point toward the new and complex concept of hybrid war. Finally, this SRP examines hybrid war and its resultant strategic, conceptual, and structural implications for the U.S. military.

Fourth Generation Warfare Defined

William Lind begins his initial work on 4GW by declaring that “the peacetime soldier’s principal task is to prepare effectively for the next war. In order to do so, he must anticipate what the next war will be like.”¹ To aid in this process, Lind continues by describing what he and his colleagues see as three distinct generations of warfare throughout modern history, followed by an emerging fourth generation. This last emanation of warfare, Lind asserts, builds somewhat on the first three, but clearly differs in its intent, motivations, and approach.

The four elements that Lind believes carry over into 4GW from the earlier generations are: (1) *Mission orders* that enable small groups of combatants to operate within the commander’s intent, yet retain a necessary level of flexibility. Local flexibility directed by general guidance is essential to 4GW, which is mostly fought in a dispersed manner throughout the whole of the enemy’s society. (2) *A decreasing dependence on centralized logistics* that facilitates the more dispersed conflict and higher tempo. 4GW warriors must be able to fend for themselves in whatever environment they operate. (3) *More emphasis on maneuver* over firepower that negates the traditional requirement of massing of soldiers and weapons. Instead, 4GW relies on employing “small, highly maneuverable, agile forces”² that can blend into their environment and avoid being

targeted. (4) *Collapsing the enemy internally rather than destroying him physically* requires that 4GW leaders have a keen ability to identify and target their enemy's centers of gravity. Lind asserts that in 4GW, the enemy's population and even the culture itself become the targets.³

In general, 4GW blurs the lines between war and politics, conflict and peace, soldier and civilian, and battlefield violence and safe zones. This new form of warfare has arisen from the loss of the nation-state's monopoly on violence; from the rise of cultural, ethnic, and religious conflict; and from the spread of globalization, particularly advanced technology.⁴ It is conducted in an increasingly decentralized manner, dispersed throughout a region or even the world. It has no defined battlefield; instead 4GW is conducted simultaneously in population centers, rural areas, and virtual networks. It moves constantly to avoid detection and to target its enemy's vulnerabilities. As Lind explains, "Actions will occur concurrently throughout all participants' depths, including their society as a cultural, not just a physical, entity."⁵ Fourth Generation Warfare's targets are not just soldiers, but also non-combatants, religious ideas, legal frameworks, media outlets, international agencies and agreements, economic activities, political power, and the minds of the people. Accordingly, targets are selected not just for physical destruction, but more for their mental and moral impact on an adversary. In the end, 4GW's goal is to exploit an adversary's weaknesses and undermine its strengths in order "to convince the enemy's political decision-makers that their strategic goals are either unachievable or too costly for the perceived benefit."⁶

Fourth Generation Warfare theorists believe that the substantial disparity between the philosophies and resources of nation-states and non-state actors has produced the strategy and tactics of 4GW. In conflict, these apparent mismatches entice decentralized, non-state actors to adopt irregular and asymmetric methods in an attempt to circumvent their military opponents' strength and strike directly at their opponents' critical political, cultural, or population targets. Sometimes supported by rogue nation-states, these non-state actors recognize that their attacks against markets, communications, and cultural icons can have a dramatic affect on the psyche of their adversary's populace.⁷ Their aim is to demoralize the people and destroy their leaders' will to fight.⁸

Profiling 4GW warriors, Chuck Spinney, a Pentagon analyst and 4GW advocate, offers this description:

They usually present few, if any, important targets vulnerable to conventional attack, and their followers are usually much more willing to fight and die for their causes. They seldom wear uniforms and may be difficult to distinguish from the general population. They are also far less hampered by convention and more likely to seek new and innovative means to achieve their objectives.⁹

To succeed, 4GW warriors must destroy the moral cohesion that binds a society. They do this with menacing attacks that threaten the very basic of human instincts for survival, by creating mistrust and divisions among internal societal groups, by producing uncertainty in the political system's ability to support its people, and by undermining the economic system to reduce confidence in its viability.¹⁰

4GW: Mainstreaming a Remote Theory

When William Lind and his group first introduced the concept of 4GW in 1989, their ideas attracted little attention. Marine Colonel Thomas X. Hammes was one of the

few who joined the discussion with a subsequent article in the September 1994 *Marine Corps Gazette*, "The Evolution of War: The Fourth Generation of Warfare." Hammes continued to be an advocate of the concept over time as he attracted a wider and more influential audience with a number of ensuing articles further defining and explaining 4GW and with his 2004 book *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century*.

Hammes believes that the al Qaeda attacks on America validated 4GW theories. Accordingly, Hammes is disappointed that few military analysts or leaders have taken 4GW seriously and instead continue to view warfare and its prosecution in accord with what he regards as the increasingly less relevant theories of Clausewitz and Jomini. Instead, he claims, the only place 4GW was apparently considered seriously was in the caves of Tora Bora and on al Qaeda websites after the group's leaders posted the 4GW articles for discussion.¹¹

Hammes notes, however, that this neglect started to change in late 2004 when the coalition campaigns against al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Iraq began to falter. He was encouraged that the discussion widened, particularly because he saw 4GW evolving beyond what he originally anticipated. Accordingly to Hammes, the first major development in 4GW came with a change in strategy: 4GW campaigns "shifted from military campaigns supported by information operations to strategic communications campaigns supported by guerilla and terrorist operations."¹² Only through information could the 4GW warriors change peoples' minds and achieve their objective of defeating their enemies from the inside out.

Another significant advancement is found in what Hammes calls the insurgents' organizational shift. They have morphed into a complex coalition that is "networked,

transnational and even trans-dimensional.”¹³ Fourth generation warriors have further expanded their view of operating in the shadows of society by taking full advantage of the sanctuary, anonymity, and effectiveness the virtual world provides to insurgent warfare.

Similarly, Hammes believes the executors of 4GW are shifting demographically. Beyond recruiting selected individuals, 4GW leaders are now building their own partnerships by establishing links with other groups that share their goals and grievances. But the motivations of these new groups can vary widely, resulting in a highly diverse 4GW coalition. Some reactionary organizations respond out of the fear of being threatened either physically, economically, politically, religiously, or culturally. Opportunistic groups, which are usually criminal in nature, seek to take advantage of the power voids in ungoverned spaces or failing states. Ideological factions in the insurgency believe their “cause” justifies their alliance with a terrorist group. Many times, these groups claim they are being guided by and answer only to a higher power such as religion, a god, or a “divine” leader. These groups tend to foster an absolute approach to duty, so their ideological followers are highly creative in their attacks and resilient in the groups’ defense.¹⁴ Hammes asserts that 4GW’s leaders’ ability to combine the forces of the differing groups can coalesce their objectives and produce an even more lethal form of 4GW.

Furthering Hammes’ concepts, William Lind published additional articles in 2003 and 2004 to expound on the theories he introduced in 1989 and the 1990s. He extends his comments about the changing nature of warfare by noting a “growing contradiction between the military culture and the increasing disorderliness of the battlefield.”¹⁵ Both

theorists are disappointed with what they claim is the U.S. military's continued efforts to counter this new warfare with its outdated combination of Second and Third Generation Warfare force structure. Fourth Generation Warfare is not new; Lind clarifies, but a return to warfare before the emergence of the nation-state, mostly characterized by cultures in conflict. Many groups will wage war, not just nations. These wars will be fought for many reasons, some beyond the Clausewitzian explanation of war as an extension of politics by other means. Thus Lind endorses Martin van Creveld's concept of non-trinitarian war, introduced in his 1991 book, *The Transformation of War*. Today's warring groups will use all means at their disposal, some of which will not be recognized as traditional military forces or methods.¹⁶

Lind also states that the 4GW tactics are not necessary new. They are similar to standard guerilla and terrorist tactics, but carried out with modern technology at the operational and strategic level. Most importantly, Lind asserts that "what will characterize [4GW] are not vast changes in how the enemy fights, but rather in who fights and what they fight for."¹⁷ Lind warns of the internal 4GW threat to Western nation-states. Because of relaxed immigration laws, archaic political systems that do not address all the people's concerns, and the ill-intentioned ideology of multiculturalism, he sees European nations and the United States as prime targets for 4GW on their own soil.¹⁸

Finally, Lind offers some recommendations for waging the current fight against al Qaeda. First, he believes the U.S. military should restructure its antiquated force structure and modify its capabilities to counter this new approach to warfare. He thinks that one key to success when combating 4GW might be to "lose to win." In an

environment in which the state is in decline, Lind believes that “if you destroy a state, it is very difficult to recreate it.”¹⁹ All efforts should be placed across the spectrum of capabilities – military, economic, political, diplomatic (with the military playing a smaller role) – to uphold the state even when the goal is to defeat its current regime.²⁰

Fourth Generation Warfare – the Critiques

In response to Lind’s and Hammes’ continued insistence on the threat of 4GW, Antulio Echevarria, Director of Research and National Security Affairs at the Army’s Strategic Studies Institute, offers a methodical critique of the theory. Echevarria’s opinions are best summarized by Douglas Lovelace’s forward to his critique of 4GW:

The proponents of 4GW undermine their own credibility by subscribing to this bankrupt theory. If their aim is truly to create positive change, then they – and we – would be better off jettisoning the theory and retaining the traditional concept of insurgency, while modifying it to include the greater mobility and access afforded by globalization.²¹

Echevarria challenges the 4GW theorists’ uses of history. He claims they have relied on false assumptions and faulty logic. He asserts that 4GW theory is flatly incorrect and steers military thinkers in the wrong direction. First, it is obvious that the 4GW theorists continue to modify their theory over time, depending on the insurgents’ changing tactics and use of technologies. To be valuable, theories must endure the winds of ephemeral change.²² They cannot be written in a catch-all predictive manner and then altered as more specific circumstances arise. However, the questions and concepts the 4GW thinkers have posited are relevant and do warrant study. Even so, Echevarria believes the mental effort to describe and counter 4GW would be better spent devising a clearer understanding of insurgency and counter-insurgency.

A key substantive challenge to 4GW theory is Echevarria's discounting of the desire of the post-modern warrior to infiltrate a society and then attempt to collapse it from within. He cites Hamas and Hezbollah as examples of groups that have *integrated* themselves into a society. Rather than collapsing these societies from within, these groups have established political, social, and religious ties with the people, thereby becoming "activists for their constituents."²³ In return, these groups have garnered the support of the people, which has enabled them to further strengthen their power base. At no time are Hamas' or Hezbollah's attacks intended to collapse the society in which they operate. Instead, theirs is the classic insurgent goal of trying to change the political will of the people and thus discredit their opponent.²⁴ Echevarria explains how al Qaeda is somewhat different because "its goal is to spark a global uprising... among Muslims, and its attacks have been designed to weaken the United States, other Western powers, and Muslim governments in order to prepare for that uprising."²⁵ Al Qaeda's aim might be world-wide, but it is still classically insurgent in nature. Echevarria believes we should focus our intellectual efforts on learning more about al Qaeda's global reach and better understanding the phenomenon of globalization.

Echevarria also rejects the 4GW theoretical contention that somehow 4GW warriors are the first to fight wars for other than "traditional" national motives or identity. The 4GW proponents state that one of the main differences of this new warfare is that it is waged for "non-national or transnational [reasons], such as ideology or religion."²⁶ Echevarria points out that even the apparently pure nation-state conflict of World War II was as much about ideological differences between liberalism, socialism, and Nazism as it was about nation-state interests. He makes similar comments about the Cold War,

which continued the ideological struggle of modernity, this time as liberalism and socialism battled it out for supremacy.²⁷

Echevarria follows with an indictment of the 4GW theorists' understanding of the Clausewitzian trinity. In calling 4GW non-trinitarian, van Creveld and subsequently Lind completely misinterpret the fundamentals of this concept. They view the trinity too simplistically as an interaction among the people, the military, and the government. This reductive approach denies the Clausewitzian truism that portrays war in terms of three forces: basic hostility, chance and uncertainty, and the element of subordination or rationality. These forces are present in all conflicts and do not always materialize as the people, the military, and the government. In fact, Echevarria believes that if the 4GW thinkers had thoroughly studied *On War*, they would have found Clausewitz' clarification that the "people" are the populace of any society or culture in any given period of history.²⁸ Similarly, the term "military" can refer to any warring body, not just the armies of nation-states. Likewise, Clausewitz expanded the term "government" to designate any controlling entity, an "agglomeration of loosely associated forces" or any "personified intelligence."²⁹ There is no doubt that these Clausewitzian tendencies are evident in today's insurgencies and in terrorism. In fact, by studying the interactions of these forces, military thinkers can better comprehend the motivation and actions of today's insurgents and terrorists.

Inevitability, globalization and terrorism would join to form a dangerous combination. Echevarria calls this a marriage of sorts.³⁰ However, this volatile combination is not new. Terrorists and insurgents have always searched for means that would enable them to more successfully attain their objectives. But military thinkers

must now appreciate the magnitude of the dangers posed by the lethal combination of terrorism and current technology. “With the spread of information and communication technologies and the rise of travel opportunities, all of which have become associated with globalization, terrorists and other non-state actors enjoy enhanced access to their adversaries’ political will.”³¹ Fourth Generation Warfare theorists have also failed to note that historically most wars have usually turned into irregular warfare after the invader has defeated an adversary’s regular force. In the case of the West’s current adversaries, they either did not have a regular force to start with or the one they had was defeated quickly and decisively. The aforementioned mismatch of resources practically forced these adversaries to employ insurgent and terrorist strategies from the start.

In his concluding observations, Echevarria claims that we do not need another label, or a corresponding incoherent logic, to complicate what many have already made clear. What we must do is understand the effects that globalization and information technologies are having on political movements and warfare.³² So we should take what we can learn from the 4GW ideas and ensuing discussion and integrate it into a greater awareness of insurgencies and potential adversaries.

There are several other valuable criticisms of 4GW that reveal some of its strengths, but also cast some doubts on the concept.³³ Tim Benbow’s article “Talking ‘Bout Our Generation? Assessing the Concept of ‘Fourth Generation Warfare’” in the March 2008 issue of *Comparative Strategy* outlines many of the charges against 4GW. The first is that the 4GW theorists overstate the success of their theoretical form of warfare. Benbow cites many cases in which “so-called 4GW techniques were not

successful.”³⁴ It is more useful for military thinkers and leaders, believes Benbow, to understand that adversaries like those described in 4GW pose a significant challenge to the U.S. and its allies. Historically, such adversaries have confounded Western nations, leaving them unable to adapt. However, he concludes that 4GW warriors can be confronted and overcome with a calculated policy and strategy.³⁵

Other challenges to the 4GW concept include its overly broad definition of warfare. Interpreting every social, economic, and political dispute as a vestige or act of war is misleading and perhaps dangerous, particularly if it triggers a military response.³⁶ Additionally, Benbow and others such as Colin Gray believe that the 4GW proponents exaggerate the decline of the state and minimize its continuing centrality in warfare.³⁷ In fact, Gray finds the assumption that the power of the state is waning as the main vulnerability of the 4GW concept.³⁸ Although *some* governments are losing in the balance of power between the state and non-state actors, the “state remains central to the international system, both in supporting terrorist groups and insurgents and also in countering them.”³⁹

Benbow then emphasizes another criticism of 4GW: the widely held belief that the concept does not identify anything truly new.⁴⁰ He reaffirms that unconventional warfare is the only form of conflict that works against strong and established powers. Insurgents, terrorists, and other asymmetrical fighters have always employed the best technology and methods available – at least the good ones have – and the world-wide networked one we are currently facing has learned quite well from the past. In his work “Elegant Irrelevance: Fourth Generation Warfare,” Kenneth McKenzie levels substantial criticism against 4GW, but believes its greatest fault is its assertion that socio-political

change is warfare.⁴¹ The 4GW theorists counter by stating that the inclusion of political, cultural, social, and economic elements in conflicts has significantly changed the character of warfare. Because of these added dimensions of war, they predict a wider spectrum of conflict with an extensive range of opponents and activities, making future warfare more broad and dynamic than ever. According to Hammes, globalization and other current environmental forces have distressingly exacerbated the potential influence of asymmetric and non-state actors.⁴²

The New Strategic Environment

Although some question the 4GW construct and its predictions, few challenge the assumptions regarding a changing world environment. Scholars of future wars believe that it is within this complex and dynamic setting that a new form of warfare is materializing. Many see a prospect of enduring conflict ahead in which state, non-state, and individual actors increasingly resort to violence to pursue their political and ideological goals. Over the ensuing decades, particular global trends will merge with existing local and regional tensions to fuel the frequency, intensity, and extent of conflict around the world.⁴³

One of the most prominent global trends is the advancement of *Globalization and Technology*, which has led to increased global connectivity and scientific advances that are driving world-wide prosperity, yet also underscoring disparities in wealth and power among populations. These two 21st century phenomena, working in tandem, have inadvertently provided the means to export terror and extremism around the world.⁴⁴

Additionally, several cultures have seen an increase in *radicalism*. In today's post-modern world, those who feel victimized or threatened by the cultural and

economic impacts of globalization have become increasingly attracted to radical and religious extremist groups. Aided by the power of many followers, the motivations and activities of radical groups, particularly religious radicals, are difficult to moderate and often intensify and lengthen a conflict.⁴⁵ In addition to radicalism, looming *population trends* portend a growing instability in several less-developed countries as they will likely almost double in size. Volatility will also increase in urban areas as they grow to contain almost 60% of the world's population by 2025.⁴⁶ Other dangers lurk in *safe havens* when states, many suffering from the pressures of population explosion, are unable or unwilling to exercise control within their borders. These sanctuaries allow criminal and terrorist groups to effectively operate within the states' territory to exploit ungoverned spaces, the austere environment, and the anonymous urban areas.⁴⁷

Competition for resources – water, energy, commodities and food – is also fueling the potential for conflict. The existential character of the competition for these basic resources will make the choice of violence increasingly frequent and will increase the likelihood of regional instability. Also, *climate change and natural disasters* are destabilizing phenomena. They both exacerbate infrastructure vulnerabilities in many developing countries and increase the likelihood of humanitarian crises, the potential for epidemic diseases, and the prospect of regionally destabilizing population migrations.⁴⁸

Lastly, *proliferation of or increased access to all forms of weapons of mass destruction* increases the potential for catastrophic attacks. Even the prospect of these attacks can be destabilizing because such attacks dramatically increase the number of potential victims and the scope of damage. To avert such attacks, national leaders may likely sanction preemptive or even preventive military operations.⁴⁹

The United States no longer operates strategically under the planning assumption of a “known” threat.⁵⁰ It now faces a wide range of adversaries, each with different capabilities and divergent purposes. The list of most likely and dangerous threats facing the U.S. begins with violent extremist groups and their ideology. These separatist or nationalist groups and religious radicals gain their strength from the urbanized and deprived regions of the world. Within these areas, a disenfranchised and economically disadvantaged youth, actively seeking change, are being empowered by technological progress and influential non-state leaders.⁵¹ These unconventional actors with a substantial following from the masses, some of whom belong to global networked terrorist groups, operate beyond state control and regularly disregard international boundaries, norms, and agreements. Many work alongside criminal groups to fund operations and destabilize targeted regions even further. These groups have become masters of the “battle of narratives” – a struggle beyond the physical elements of a conflict in which the manipulation of the media, the use of the internet, and the integration of information operations with a strategic communication program are as important as weapons systems or even success on the battlefield.⁵²

Other threats to stability include weak and failing states. Many of these are located along the “arc of instability” that already provides environments for extremist and criminal activity. Collapse of these states would likely lead to sustained violence and bloody civil and sectarian wars. Rogue states still pose a threat to the United States. Many actively work to counter U.S. interests around the world, exploiting their unique diplomatic, economic, informational, or geographical strengths. Others act more indirectly by supporting destabilizing groups and activities to pursue their own interests.

The last group is more confrontational; they build military capabilities directly against the will of the international community.

Although an unlikely threat to U.S. interests in the near-term, rising military and economic powers could possibly come into conflict with the U.S. in the years to come. Current interstate or ongoing security concerns – such as Pakistan and India, North Korea and South Korea, China and Taiwan, or Israel and the Palestinians – could potentially flare up and force world and regional powers to select sides. The race for diminishing resources could pit nations against one another, and current regional engagements and economic concerns from the recent financial down-turn could lead to increased criminality and disputes that can be settled only by war. The U.S. must understand that after years of fighting, most potential adversaries have studied and are aware of the nation's warfighting capabilities. As a result, they have "adapt[ed] their techniques to overcome their disadvantages"⁵³ and to exploit our vulnerabilities. Many have become effective at capitalizing on global access to information, availability of advanced weaponry, and their transformation of other military and non-military capabilities to counter U.S. strengths.⁵⁴

The Resultant and Emerging Views of Future War

New and significant intellectual constructs generally surface when complex threats arise and when fundamental change or shifts become apparent. These theories are essential in helping interpret and deal with a new reality that seems to deny older theories.⁵⁵ Over the past two decades, many prominent scholars have evaluated the changing strategic environment's significance for future conflict. Some have engaged in

the 4GW dialogue, many have not. However, all have contributed to the understanding of the new global context, showing how our adversaries intend to fight in the future.

Mary Kaldor, author of *New and Old Wars*, assigns many 4GW attributes to her “New Wars”. She sees future wars as highly focused on the political element, waged in the context of the disintegration of states and the spread of globalization. Violence employed by networks of state and non-state actors is frequently directed against civilians with the intent to undermine the current order and construct new sectarian identities.⁵⁶ The new political communities emerge along divisive lines through the creation of fear and hate, thereby continuing the cycle of conflict. Kaldor contends that these new wars have much in common with the wars in the pre-modern period of Europe. She claims adversaries intentionally prosecute them to counter the conventions of *Old War* – “war between states fought by armed forces in uniform, where the decisive encounter was battle.”⁵⁷ She concludes that attempts to understand the new environment through the lens of *Old War* will impair the strategist’s ability to address the realities of today’s globalized world. Defense planners can only create strategies for new wars if they comprehend how different these struggles are from previous conflicts.⁵⁸

In *New Wars*, Herfried Muenkler agrees with Kaldor. He also believes that future war is similar to the wars before states had a monopoly on the use of violence. Groups – large or small; state, non-state or transnational – fight for ethnic and cultural reasons, religious convictions, and social ideologies. A multiplicity of actors fight asymmetrically with no designated fronts, few confrontational engagements, and violence purposely directed at civilians.⁵⁹ Rupert Smith in *The Utility of Force* adds that

conventional force-on-force war no longer exists. In fact, he believes that in many cases force does not produce the results necessary to succeed in current or future conflicts. Instead, people, particularly selected segments of the population, are the battlefield and the objective of the conflict. These wars amongst the people tend to be timeless and possibly unending. So strategists must have an acute appreciation of the political context in any war.⁶⁰ Another useful work on future war includes Mats Berdal and David Malone's *Greed and Grievance*, which focuses on the importance of economic agendas in warfare. They discuss how grievances – real or perceived – can lead to powerful economic motives and agendas. The spread of globalization has amplified economic differences by increasing the number of stakeholders and raising the stakes.⁶¹

In *Another Bloody Century: Future Warfare*, Colin Gray warns us that “the character of warfare in a period is shaped, even driven, much more by the political, social, and strategic contexts than it is by changes integral to military science.”⁶² Because of the anticipated further blurring of warfare categories, he asserts that war cannot be separated from these other contexts. Defense establishments must stop attempting to develop military solutions to the challenges they *prefer* to solve instead of addressing the way their adversaries will *most likely* engage in conflict. Gray believes that “danger, exertion, uncertainty and chance” remain permanent characteristics of war, but he stresses that clever adversaries will evade the strengths of our transforming military. It is likely that “most of America’s enemies in the near future will continue to be at least as...inconveniently asymmetrical as they have been over the past 15 years.”⁶³

Gray asserts that the conflicts and other international events of the past 15 years manifest a strategic balancing of power. Since the U.S. is still the world's lone super power, there is a natural tendency for nations and other groups to challenge its strength. However, because the U.S. retains such a large imbalance of military power, potential rivals will avoid any actions that might lead to direct hostilities. In the short term, this ensures that adversaries will engage the U.S. asymmetrically or through proxies. But "when great-power rivals feel able to challenge American hegemony," Gray claims, "interstate war will return."⁶⁴ In fact, he believes that beyond 2020, the most likely and dangerous threats will come from the renewal of great-power geopolitical rivalry combined with an accelerating global environmental crisis.⁶⁵

Predicting some of the capabilities of future warriors, Richard Shultz and Andrea Dew in *Insurgents, Terrorists and Militias*, believe that these armed adversaries will be very flexible, adaptable, and able to perform diversified operations.⁶⁶ Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui in *Unrestricted Warfare* assert that future warfare will not be limited to the military realm. Instead, adversaries will employ unlimited measures – military, economic, informational. They will attack from all directions – from outside a nation, from within a nation and its people, through air, space, and cyberspace. A multi-dimensional coordination by the military, government, corporations, and private entities will conduct synchronized operations to completely destroy the enemy. Or they will use their collective power to assume control of a particular strategic entity or process.⁶⁷

These scholars and many more like them predict a future of war that is more complex, interconnected, dynamic, and volatile than ever. Most tend to agree that within the current and future strategic environment, the character of war continues to

evolve. Most see the probability of major state-on-state conflict as low in the near term. Instead, the U.S. will face mostly non-state and individual actors. These adversaries will use a full range of capabilities, including all political, economic, informational and military means available. In doing so, we can expect that they will not be bound by limits on the use of violence.⁶⁸

These groups will wage war increasingly among indigenous populations rather than around them, and outcomes will be measured in terms of the effects on the populations.⁶⁹ These adversaries will use asymmetric approaches, likely in combination with traditional military capabilities, to counter our military advantages. Lastly, and a distinction which is becoming more clear, operations will occur across the entire spectrum of conflict, leading to a form of hybrid war where adversaries attempt to simultaneously employ traditional, disruptive, catastrophic and/or irregular capabilities to attain their objectives.⁷⁰

Hybrid War Surfaces and Gains Recognition

In explaining the concepts supporting the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) and subsequent National Defense Strategy (NDS), Nathan Freier claims that we have undoubtedly learned that the strategic environment is more complex and dangerous than expected: “We are apparently more vulnerable to purposeful irregular challengers than previously anticipated.”⁷¹ Like most strategists, Freier believes that the threats the U.S. faces will likely be irregular in nature. But he also asserts that the nation cannot lose sight of the increasing catastrophic, disruptive and even conventional threats. He foresees and clearly lays out four categories of threats against the U.S. and its allies: irregular, traditional, catastrophic and disruptive. He assesses these threats in

terms of their likelihood and the extent of our vulnerability to them. Freier's comprehensive threat analysis adds fuel to the future war debate, promoting an asymmetric versus conventional warfare discussion that does not focus on the disjunctive extremes.

More and more military scholars now see a potential future of multi-modal war, in which adversaries employ various capabilities depending on the environment, their own strengths, and their enemy's vulnerabilities. This form of war is not new. In his book *Triumph Forsaken*, Mark Moyer explains the Vietnam War as a *compound war*. The North Vietnamese very effectively employed a combination of irregular and conventional forces to achieve their desired end state. In fact, "historians have noted that many if not most wars are characterized by both regular and irregular operations."⁷² Compound warfare strategy enables military leaders to take advantage of the strengths of each kind of force, thereby increasing pressure across the spectrum of conflict. In most cases throughout history, although various types of forces have fought simultaneously under strategic coordination, they were usually employed in different locations across the area of operations.⁷³ Compound wars create a strong strategic synergy, but many have begun to see a way to enhance warfare even further. Both Colin Gray and Max Boot argue that there is going to be a further blurring of warfare categories.⁷⁴ This blending of capabilities is being hailed as *hybrid warfare*.

Initially cited in a few references in selected writings and assessments, the concept of hybrid warfare has now been introduced into a number of U.S. defense assessments: the QDR and the NDS mentioned previously, as well as the latest Joint Operating Environment. The formal acceptance of the concept is underway, but has the

U.S. military truly understood the implications of how to fight such wars and achieve enduring success? As John Arquilla mentions in “The End of War as We Knew It,” understanding these emerging hybrid forms of conflict is going to require some innovative thinking.⁷⁵

Frank G. Hoffman, a research fellow at the Marine Corps’ Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities, offers a clear explanation of hybrid warfare and its challenges. His concept builds upon the ideas included in “New Wars,” “Wars Amongst the People,” Fourth Generation Warfare, and “Unrestricted Warfare.”⁷⁶ He agrees with his 4GW predecessors that the U.S. faces a complex future, complicated by globalization, the proliferation of advanced technology, and violent transnational extremists. Different from the 4GW theorists, however, Hoffman claims this future also includes potential resurgent rival powers.⁷⁷ As he describes hybrid warfare, Hoffman uses the term *convergence*. He discusses the convergence of the physical and psychological, of the combatant and noncombatant, of violence and nation-building, of the kinetic and informational approach. Hoffman believes that the most significant convergence, however, is within the modes of war. He foresees hybrid conflicts during which states and non-state actors simultaneously exploit all modes – conventional, irregular, terrorist, disruptive, or criminal – to destabilize an existing order.⁷⁸

Hoffman defines a hybrid threat as one that can “incorporate a full range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder.”⁷⁹ Hybrid war can be conducted by states, a variety of non-state actors, or a combination of the two. The increasing frequency and lethality of this blended warfare

poses significant challenges to the United States. Hoffman believes we should anticipate adversaries who will use multiple types of war, perhaps simultaneously, to exploit our vulnerabilities by using an optimal blend of tactics and techniques that leverage their own strategic culture, geography, and goals. Unlike compound wars, hybrid war combines the multi-modal forces together within the same battlespace to achieve a synergistic effect and to force a decisive outcome.⁸⁰

Hoffman asserts that Hezbollah in the 2006 Lebanon War exemplifies the prototype hybrid force. In its fight against the Israeli Defense Force, Nasrallah's forces proved to be highly disciplined, professionally trained, and able to operate in distributed cells throughout all types of terrain. Hezbollah combined a perilous "blend of the lethality of the state with the fanatical and protracted fervor of irregular warriors."⁸¹ They clearly demonstrated non-state actors' ability to study and probe the weaknesses of a Western style military, and then devise appropriate countermeasures.⁸² Hoffman concludes that this conflict is not an anomaly, but a harbinger of future wars.⁸³ As the National Defense Strategy predicts, future adversaries will do anything possible to evade our military advantages and pursue alternative approaches. Such a future has the potential to further complicate U.S. military planning and execution.⁸⁴

Implications of Hybrid War

Indeed the rise of hybrid warfare presents complications for the U.S. military, whose focus remains on outdated distinctions between types of warfare. Yet the emerging fusion of war that hybrid warfare portends reveals that the future cannot be captured with a single approach to defense planning.⁸⁵ The more likely combination of warfare modes and actors requires the U.S. to modify and expand its conventional

mindset. The nation's existing national strategies, warfighting concepts, and force structures are ill-suited for this emerging blend of warfare. The nation and military remain intellectually and institutionally unprepared for the changes in war.⁸⁶ The U.S. must address this mismatch by relooking these three areas of national security to better balance its approach to the changing threat and character of war.⁸⁷

To confront adversaries that intend to employ the entire range of options to counter U.S. interests and strengths, the nation at the highest levels must better fuse all elements of national power in the nation's strategic plans and actions. The national leadership must encourage and resource a whole-of-government approach to deter conflicts through statecraft, while also developing and maintaining a robust military capacity to defend our vital interests.⁸⁸ The first step should be to restore the standing and competence of the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development and then use public diplomacy to drive our future foreign policy and international engagements. Military power should then support this effort and be designed to promote better governance, economic development, and efforts to address grievances among the discontented. To reduce the nation's repeated need for direct engagement, the U.S. should employ all elements of national power to pursue indirect approaches such as building the capacity of partner governments and their security forces to prevent problems before they become crises. This will serve to isolate the threat by attempting to shape, influence, and stabilize the global environment through partnership and engagement.

These efforts should always be executed jointly amongst the services, while the nation must continue to establish and maintain close relationships with friends, partners,

and allies. In the more complex and interconnected future, to acknowledge common interests and build legitimacy for its actions, the U.S. should better appreciate and capitalize on the benefits of engaging multilaterally and with the support of critical intergovernmental organizations.⁸⁹ Looking internally to expand its ability to address the non-military aspects of conflict, the government must improve the interagency planning and integration process by coordinating military efforts with appropriate civilian agencies and by engaging expertise in the private sector, including non-governmental organizations and academia. Beyond diplomatic and military power, the U.S. must build a better and more integrated stabilization and reconstruction capacity by first fully resourcing and then coordinating the efforts of the State Department's fledgling Office of Coordination of Reconstruction and Stabilization with the military services.⁹⁰

At the operational level, the U.S. should review and refine its warfighting concepts to address the changing character and hybridization of warfare. The military must reassess its operational art and attempt to seamlessly incorporate more elements of national power into its operations. Critical to achieving this crucial objective is preparing the military's highest leaders with a holistic grasp of the profession of arms and its relationship to strategy and policy. In facing the challenge of preparing for conflicts that are uncertain in form, location, level of commitment, contribution of allies, and nature of the enemy, U.S. military planning must be more adaptive and responsive to the strategic context. Staffs must engage in more inclusive planning methods that seek to gather a wider range of advice.⁹¹

To maintain a relevant force to engage the potential range of adversaries in the complex global environment, the U.S. must continue to realign and reposition its global

defense structure to generate a more flexible expeditionary force.⁹² Essential to success in the emerging hybrid warfare environment is the nation's ability to continue to control the global commons and recognize that they have now expanded beyond the traditional land, sea, and air dimensions to the cyber and space domains as well. The military and critical interagency members will equally need enhanced force projection capabilities, an uninhibited capacity for forcible entry to potential areas of conflict, and an unmatched ability to logistically sustain the force along long supply lines.⁹³

As the U.S. engages either directly or indirectly, it will need professionals at all levels that can perform in decentralized, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous circumstances. Senior and junior leaders must understand that human dimensions matter more than any other factors in war and that, while technology is important, it is rarely decisive. Moreover, our leaders should be prepared to form and lead effective coalitions, while understanding partners' and adversaries' history, politics, culture and psychology.⁹⁴ The complexity of hybrid threats makes it essential that our future leaders understand the implications and trade-offs between preparing for and performing counterinsurgency, partner building, stability operations and maintaining our conventional warfighting edge. The nation will have to determine what level of improvement in knowledge and capability is needed to effectively balance its ability to address all threats and develop the necessary corresponding capabilities.⁹⁵

To create more rounded leaders able to confront future strategic and operational challenges, the national security community must fundamentally change its training and education programs. The military and critical interagency partners should revamp their current institutional culture and education, training, and engagement programs to

produce more culturally attuned and internationally savvy leaders with a wider range of language and interpersonal skills. Leaders need a stronger intellectual education to confront the challenges of war, change, and differing cultures in today's world.

Education and training must extend beyond traditional military and government schools to include the study of history, anthropology, economics, geopolitics, culture, law, and strategic communications. Accordingly, the government should reach out to academia, think-tanks, and advisors to develop this more holistic educational foundation. While expanding their intellectual horizons, leaders must continue to understand the profession of war and the projection of military force, while also improving their ability to think critically and creatively in acquisition and resource allocation.

In conjunction with reviewing and adjusting the nation's strategies, warfighting concepts, and capabilities, the defense community must reevaluate the force structure needed for future conflicts. With a wider range of threats that may require the need to employ various capabilities simultaneously, the U.S. military must continue its effort to strive for greater joint operations and possibly interdependence. It must transform its industrial-era organizational structures into more agile, information-, and knowledge-based enterprises.⁹⁶ This requires a large investment in ideas, technology, and people. While the U.S. military will continue to be technologically enhanced, it becomes even more important that it is well manned with trained and ready personnel.

Leaders, staffs, and conventional forces must be more capable of performing across the spectrum of military operations. To do so, the force needs a command and control structure that is net-centric with built-in redundancies. There must be a larger investment in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets, particularly human

intelligence capabilities. Also, the nation must be able to collect and fuse information from a wider variety of sources and establish systems to share intelligence across services, the government, and with partners. Added to these capabilities, the military, in order to address the wide variety of future threats, must develop a greater precision targeting and engagement capability while ensuring a high level of protection for its forces, supporting civilians, partners, and U.S. citizens.

The force necessary to provide these capabilities must be a balanced and versatile force, not a single-mission force.⁹⁷ The military should accelerate the growth of its special operations forces and the transformation of its general purpose forces to a professional, more agile, “multi-purpose” force with flexibility and credible combat power, able to conduct conventional and irregular, and to perform partner security force assistance, reconstruction, stabilization, and peacekeeping simultaneously. This enhanced force must be capable of operating independently at increasingly lower echelons, with or without support from civilian agencies.⁹⁸

Conclusion

Future challenges may look somewhat different than the conflicts that our nation has faced over the past two centuries. However, war has been an agent of change over the course of history, so there is no reason to think that the future will differ. The fundamental nature of war will not change. War remains chiefly a human endeavor of violence – its nature eternally centered on political, social, and cultural struggles.⁹⁹ The character and conduct of war, however, is likely to change, particularly in the new ambiguous and dynamic environment the world will likely face in the years to come.

We must be able to distinguish between the nature and character of war. In fact, over the long haul, our national survival depends on this distinction. In the late 1980s, the 4GW theorists began to recognize a shift in warfare, and they assumed that it was both in the character and nature of war. They believed the impacts of globalization and technological advancements were fundamentally changing the ways and reasons that nations, groups, and people engaged in conflict. Their assessments and ideas triggered a decade-and-a-half dialogue on how warfare was changing. This debate and discourse prompted the institutional military to recognize the change and begin its transformation.

Over time, a number of military thinkers demonstrated that the 4GW theorists did not get it all right, particularly on the changing *nature* of war. Moreover, these scholars and strategists set the stage for a generation of subsequent military theorists to follow with their own appraisal and predictions of modern and future warfare. The new group had the luxury of witnessing the post-Cold War era with its small engagements in the 1990s and the larger wars of the early 21st century. The ability to watch modern warfare emerge in this period helped many of these theorists develop a more comprehensive vision of war to come.

Frank Hoffman came on the strategic scene near the end of the future war debate. He compellingly argued that future warfare will not diverge into different modes, fought by different groups for different reasons. Instead, he claims warfare is converging, blending into a hybrid form, wherein adversaries will use all capabilities at their disposal. In fact, he contends, advanced technology enables them to employ these capabilities simultaneously and, in many cases, in the same location. Hybrid

practitioners intend to overwhelm or smother their opponent before it can adapt.

Hoffman states that these adversaries will use any form of warfare that can circumvent Western military strengths to exploit their vulnerabilities. Accordingly, he declares that conventional warfare is not a thing of the past. Following the principles of hybrid warfare, potential adversaries will resort to the more traditional forms of warfare when they have determined it is advantageous to engage more advanced militaries directly.

The key to continued success in such a period of change and persistent conflict is an agile strategic approach that relies of a wide array of capabilities. Accordingly, the United States must review and adjust its national strategies, warfighting concepts, and force structures. It must develop enhanced interagency and multinational capabilities and coordination; dynamic public diplomacy and statecraft; partnership building capacity; superior expeditionary power projection; continued access to the global commons and potential areas of conflict; realignment of its global defense structure and positioning; more adaptive planning and a reconsideration of operational warfighting art; enhanced training and educational programs; more agile, professional multi-purpose forces; and a renewed appreciation of and capacity to wage irregular warfare. The nation must be able to adaptively and effectively combine these capabilities to prevail in the hybrid conflicts that will dominate the near to mid-term.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, the U.S. must seek a proper balance of military capability that assures the ability to win the major traditional wars that could directly threaten our vital national interests in the longer term.

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