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The Impact of Globalization on the Changing Nature of War

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Abstract

This paper argues that globalization has eased the proliferation of two antithetical norms: identity radicalism and the protection of human rights. This, in turn, has brought forth two different types of wars – Western liberal wars and non-Western irregular wars – and two approaches to war that no longer share common ground: the Western network-centric approach to warfare and the non-Western insurgency approach. This paper provides some recommendations intended to render the art of war more relevant for contemporary warfare.

Introduction

As Clausewitz put it almost 200 years ago, "war is merely the continuation of policy by other means."[1] With this statement, Clausewitz acknowledged that the essence of war is political. Thus, any analysis of the effects of globalization on war must start with a discussion of the effects of globalization on international politics.

Globalization is commonly associated with the revolution in information technologies. These have unleashed the global spread of knowledge. This phenomenon is not new, in fact it started at the end of the 19th century. However, what is new is that information technologies have increased the pace of the phenomenon through an increasing degree of interconnectedness. Regarding international politics, globalization has eased the proliferation of global norms. Two antithetical norms have gained global influence: identity radicalism, be it religious or nationalist, and the protection of human rights.

The global spread of values has exacerbated the tensions between a global culture and local norms. In response, radical movements defending religious or ethnic values have found new legitimacy in their fight against weak states. Consequently, in some parts of the world, globalization has led to increasing fragmentation, expressed in the rise of civil violence. Thus, 2005 was the first year for which the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) conflict database reported no interstate conflicts.[2] The nineteen reported cases were all intra-state conflicts, which means that they all pitted one or more states against one or more non-state actors. This trend was confirmed in 2006 with the inventory of seventeen intra-state conflicts.[3] Modern wars are located and fought in the local political structure of the non-Western world and reach out to the Western world through the technologies offered by globalization. It is important to note that the current trend does not mean that interstate wars are a thing of the past,[4] but it demonstrates a fundamental transformation in the nature of war.

Policy Challenges

Contemporary wars, which have been described as ethnic wars,[5] wars of the third kind,[6] fourth generation warfare,[7] non-Trinitarian wars,[8] new wars,[9] or wars among the people,[10] exhibit several common characteristics. They involve several actors with different grievances.

In addition to states, these actors are principally non-states groups, which can be national, transnational, or sub-national. Globalization helps them to work as a network. As mentioned above, globalization has bolstered the radical claims of non-state groups, which in turn have resonated well with the fears induced by global norms (mostly Western) in local populations. Thus, the rise of Muslim fundamentalism has benefited from the global platform that communication technologies make available to radical groupings to promote their cause. It is also worth noting that the frequent appeal to the dangers induced by globalization often conceals hidden agendas, such as access to natural resources, wealth, territory, or power.[11] Although globalization can give more prominence to the grievances of radical groupings, paradoxically, the multiplicity of warring parties may deprive them of

legitimate public support. Unlike previous civil wars, which were fought for collective goals and therefore enjoyed strong popular support, modern wars are more often motivated by self-serving purposes and therefore lack public backing. As a result, unbounded violence in the form of mass killings, mass deportation, or mass rapes is used to induce fear in order to compensate for this lack of support.[12] Unlike in previous wars, civilians have now become the primary target of the warring parties. In short, modern wars spread beyond national borders, involve a multitude of actors with different grievances, and mainly target civilian populations.

To sum up the nature of war has evolved progressively after the end of the Cold War. The wars of the 1990's were marked by the need to clean up lingering post-colonial issues as well as reflected the consequences of the dissolution of the blocs. The global insurgency wars from the 2000's adopt the characteristics of those of the 1990s - propagation beyond national borders through a multitude of actors with different grievances and mainly targeting civilian population – but dramatically magnify the role of values. As Prime Minister Tony Blair rightly observed "globalisation begets interdependence and interdependence begets the necessity of common value system to make it work."[13] Thus, the nature of today's wars is marked by the battle for global values.

Responses

In the face of this global insurgency, the international community has responded by advocating the promotion and protection of human rights. Indeed, the globalization of communication technologies has made it almost impossible to ignore human suffering. Public opinion reacts by putting strong pressure on governments to assist and protect the victims of these new forms of violence. Thus, the concept of security has been broadened beyond the strict military dimension to include economic, environmental, and societal factors. As a result, the traditionally sacrosanct norm of state sovereignty has come under increasing pressure. A new norm establishing the responsibility to protect has emerged, forcing states to respect basic human rights.[14] As a consequence, states that deliberately scorn human rights or that are unable to protect their own citizens risk a military intervention by other states.[15] At first sight, one might argue that the effects of the 9/11 terrorist attacks contradict claims as to the altruistic nature of modern interventions. After all, the US wars against Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrate that states still fight to protect their own national interests. Yet, even in these cases, the US government used the humanitarian argument to legitimize its wars, based on the reasoning that humanitarian interventions and the "Global War on Terror" are two sides of the same coin, namely, the protection of the core values of the Western society: democracy, civil and political liberties, human rights, and the rule of law.[16] While interventions are pro-active support for liberal values, the fight against terrorism is re-active and seeks to defend the same values.

The strategies used by Western states in modern wars – whether for protecting human rights or for fighting terrorism – have exhibited common features that can be labelled the Network-Centric Warfare approach. Western states may form "coalitions of the willing" and avail themselves of the technological advantage offered by the emerging Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). The RMA relies on information

technology and network-centric processes. It is underpinned by the operational concept of Effects-Based Operations (EBO), which seeks to produce effects that lead to desired outcomes by disorienting adversaries through a series of rapid actions aimed at their centers of gravity, rather than merely attacking targets or pursuing objectives. EBO assumes that the identification and destruction of the enemy's centers of gravity should achieve effects formerly attainable only after long periods of tactical and operational attrition. In concrete terms, war is waged with a combination of massive use of air power and light ground forces.[17]

The way to combat Network Centric Warfare in the non-Western world is the insurgency approach. The main lesson of the 1991 Gulf War was that confrontations with Western armed forces could no longer be won on Western terms. The insurgency approach instead focuses on breaking the will of decision makers by convincing them that "their strategic goals are either unachievable or too costly for the perceived benefit."[18] It follows that the military-technical dimension of war is no longer the most important one. Rather, warfare has expanded to include the fields of diplomacy, economics, finance, cybernetics, media, and information. This comprehensive vision of war leads to asymmetric tactics aimed at destroying the Western state's center of gravity: its liberal values.[19] Global media exposure for guerrilla tactics means that tactical operations can have a strategic impact. As Michael Ignatieff rightly noted in his study on Kosovo, "when war becomes a spectator sport, the media becomes the decisive theatre of operations."[20] Even the actions of individuals may acquire a strategic dimension. In comparison to the death tolls of World Wars I or II, the number of casualties due to the terrorist attacks against New York, Washington, Madrid, or London is marginal; but those attacks have had an enormous strategic impact by committing Western states to a global fight against terrorism.

The insurgency approach is not only used against states, but also in struggles between various non-state actors. As mentioned above, the common characteristic of modern war is that violence is directed against civilians. The traditional rules of warfare codified in the Geneva Conventions are no longer respected. Violations of basic human rights are shocking, and because of their shock value, they have strategic effects. They can strengthen the resolve for intervention, such as in the Kosovo war and to some extent in Afghanistan, or conversely dissuade states from intervening, as in the cases of Somalia or Rwanda.

Dilemmas and Implications

Modern wars have broadened the spectrum of conflict by merging "complex and overlapping modes of armed conflicts," which includes post-modern network-centric warfare, modern or symmetrical conventional warfare, and pre-modern irregular warfare or insurgency.[21] This increased complexity poses new challenges.

At the political level, modern wars "lack the sense of ultimate, existential danger posed by the major wars of the past" and therefore directly question the relevance of the use of force.[22] As the quantification of risks becomes harder, it becomes increasingly difficult to mobilize the public to

engage in a conflict, and consequently, military operations become more discretionary and states become much more selective in their use of force.

At the strategic or operational level, two conceptions of war compete that no longer have much in common. The technology-heavy Network-Centric Warfare approach was developed for combating a conventional peer competitor on the battlefield. Yet, the insurgency approach does not seek a military confrontation, but tries to affect the next stage, namely the provision of security and the reconstruction of the country.

It follows that new warfare paradigms must be developed at both the political and the strategic or operational levels in order to address the challenges of modern wars. Failure to do so would not only prepare states for fighting the wrong war, but would also directly undermine their security. In order to avoid this situation, a number of essential changes are required.

Policy Recommendations

- **States' grand strategy must focus on shaping perceptions**

As Lawrence Freedman rightly noted for irregular warfare, "superiority in the physical environment is of little value unless it can be translated into an advantage in the information environment."[23] In today's war, the aim is to defend a way of life or a world-view. In order to win the battle of ideas, this fight must appear legitimate. This legitimacy, in turn, requires an appeal to values. It follows that as legitimacy has become the key enabler of political and military success, states must work on changing the perceptions of those who do not share the same values by winning the battle of "hearts and minds," or as General Rupert Smith has put it, "the will of the people."[24]

- **The use of force must strictly respect the framework of the law**

The era of industrial wars, when the use of force was exclusively aimed at defending physical factors such as territory or natural resources, has come to an end. Contemporary wars are about enforcing the world vision enshrined in the United Nations (UN) Charter. This implies that a state's decision to use force, as well as the actual use of force, must strictly follow international law. The struggle for the defense of fundamental liberal values cannot allow exceptions without undermining the purpose for which force is used. International law provides the legality and legitimacy required to use force.

- **The role of the UN as the gatekeeper of international law regulating the use of force must be strengthened**

On the one hand, the UN embodies the fundamental values for which modern wars are fought. On the other hand, it is the only international institution that can provide global legitimacy. Unlike the

outcomes of the 2005 UN World Summit, for instance, which did not manage to spell out any criteria for enforcing the duty to protect – although some had been proposed by the High Panel Commission Report[25] – states must make more efforts to give the UN more efficient working mechanisms to enforce Chapter VII resolutions pertaining to threats to international peace and security. This also implies that states must make serious efforts to pursue the defense of their interests by way of the UN.

- **The notion of military victory must be totally revised**

Success in war can no longer be measured in terms of defeated enemy armed forces. The use of military force alone can no longer decide the outcome, but must create the conditions in which strategic objectives can be achieved.[26] Military victory must prepare a better peace. This implies that endgames and exit strategies, which include the integration of diplomatic, political, humanitarian, and military aspects, must be carefully deliberated and planned before the operation starts. For practical purposes, that implies that military and civilian means must be better integrated through the establishment of civil-military planning cells and the development of doctrines and operational concepts for the combined use of civilian and military assets.

- **Armed forces must become more projectable and flexible**

More efforts must be devoted to the transformation of modern armed forces from static to rapidly projectable military forces. For instance, in most European countries, less than 10 per cent of the armed forces can be deployed in less than 90 days and sustained abroad for one year. In reality, less than 2 per cent of European forces are deployed abroad. Efforts to address this shortfall, such as the development of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) Response Force or the European Union (EU) Battlegroups, must not only be supported, but also be enhanced.

- **Armed forces must become multinational and tailored to the mission**

The complexity of modern warfare can no longer be the business of a single state. The era of national armed forces is over. Today's armed forces must become multinational. Only through the pooling of resources can states expect to exert influence. On the one hand, that implies that national armed forces must acquire specialized skills, so that the use of force can be tailored to the increased spectrum of operations. The development of niche capabilities is also necessitated by the reluctance of states to invest more in military policy. On the other hand, specialization must be accompanied by increased integration. Only through total interoperability can true multinational armed forces become a reality. Multinationality not only enhances operational efficiency and flexibility and distributes defense burdens evenly, it also increases the legitimacy of military operations.

- **The role of regional institutions must be enhanced operationally**

Regional institutions such as the EU, NATO, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Organization for African Unity (OAU), or Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) represent the best fora for achieving multinationality because they offer the opportunity to create effective permanent military structures and strategic commands. Together with common planning procedures and operational headquarters, a common strategic culture can be developed that will blur the national impediments, thus enhancing efficiency. The 2003 EU Security Strategy represents a good step in this direction,[27] and such initiatives should be strongly supported.

Acknowledgements

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[17] RMA and EBO are US concepts that were formalized in the Joint Vision 2010 and Joint Vision 2020 strategy papers. These concepts have also strongly influenced the development of operational thinking in other Western states. They have influenced the French concept of Bulle Opérationnelle Aéroterrestre (BOA), the British concept of Network Enabled Capability (NEC), and the Swedish concept of Network Based Defence (NBD).

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