

On “New War” Thinking: Moving Beyond the Current Debate

“Yeni Savaş” Düşüncesi Üzerine: Mevcut Tartışmanın Ötesine Geçmek

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Abstract

Over the past three decades, “new war” thinking has become a significant focus in military debates. The central contention of “new war” thinking is that post-Cold War conflicts are essentially different from those of the late modern era, such as World War I and World War II. The alleged novelty of post-Cold War has been vehemently challenged. Critics have maintained that “new war” scholars underestimate the lasting influence of the past on today’s conflicts and attempt to radically change the way we think about war without providing empirically grounded arguments. The debate on the nature vs. character of war has significantly enriched the literature on the subject. However, there is a crucial oversight in the current literature: the power dynamics embedded in “new war” thinking. This article critically examines whether they rely purely on academic views of war by comparing Western, Russian, and Chinese perspectives. It argues that most exemplars of “new war” thinking are highly value-laden, based on certain national/civilizational security threat assessments that reflect the narrow strategic concerns of the great powers. So, playing on Robert Cox’s famous dictum on the role of theories, “new war” concepts are generally for some states and for some purposes.

Keywords: New War Thinking, Post-Cold War Conflicts, Power Dynamics, Battle of Narratives, Practitioner-Academics

Öz

Geçtiğimiz otuz yıl içinde, “yeni savaş” düşüncesi askeri tartışmalarda önemli bir odak noktası haline gelmiştir. “Yeni savaş” düşüncesinin temel iddiası, Soğuk Savaş sonrası çatışmaların, I. Dünya Savaşı ve II. Dünya Savaşı gibi geç modern çağdaki savaşlardan özü itibarıyla farklı olduğudur. Soğuk Savaş sonrası çatışmaların iddia edilen yeniliği halihazırda şiddetle eleştirilmiştir. Eleştirmenler, “yeni savaş” akademisyenlerinin geçmişin günümüz çatışmaları üzerindeki kalıcı etkisini küçümsediklerini ve ikna edici argümanlar sunmadan savaş hakkındaki düşünme şeklimizi radikal biçimde değiştirmeye çalıştıklarını savunmuşlardır. Savaşın doğası ve karakteri üzerine yapılan tartışma, konuyla ilgili literatürü önemli ölçüde zenginleştirdi. Ancak, mevcut literatürde ihmal edilen kritik bir nokta bulunmaktadır: “yeni savaş” düşüncesine gömülü güç dinamikleri. Bu makale, “yeni savaş” kavramlarının savaşa dair salt akademik görüşlere dayanıp dayanmadığını Batılı, Rus ve Çinli perspektifleri karşılaştırarak eleştirel bir şekilde incelemektedir. Makale “yeni savaş” düşüncesinin çoğu örneğinin, büyük güçlerin dar stratejik kaygılarını yansıtan belirli ulusal/medeniysel güvenlik tehdit değerlendirmelerine dayalı ve oldukça değer yüklü olduğunu savunmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, Robert Cox’un teorilerin rolü hakkındaki ünlü deyimine atıfta bulunarak, “yeni savaş” kavramlarının genellikle bazı devletler ve bazı amaçlar için olduğunu ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yeni Savaş Düşüncesi, Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Çatışmalar, Güç Dinamikleri, Anlatı Savaşları, Pratisyen-Akademisyenler

Introduction

Over the past three decades, "new war" thinking has become a significant focus in military literature. Initially formulated within Western academic and military circles, the "new war" school of thought has gradually expanded, incorporating a few Russian and Chinese concepts, such as "unrestricted warfare" and "new generation warfare". The central premise of "new war" thinking is that post-Cold War conflicts are essentially different from the wars in the late modern era, such as World War I and World War II. The alleged novelty of post-Cold Wars has already been vehemently challenged. Critics have argued that "new war" concepts are based on a poor understanding of the history of war. According to the critics, "new war" scholars underestimate the lasting influence of history on present-day conflicts and try to essentially change how we think about war without providing empirically grounded arguments.¹ They have also highlighted that "new war" theorists have failed to distinguish the enduring nature of war and its variable character. Hence, they wrongly assume that changes in the character of war can alter its nature.² The debate on the nature vs. character of war has significantly enriched the literature on the subject. However, the normative and political dimensions of "new war" thinking have been widely neglected in current discussions.

So far, "new war" concepts have been viewed as academic endeavors that aim to reveal the changing face of war. This article critically examines whether "new war" concepts rely purely on academic views of war by comparing Western, Russian, and Chinese perspectives. The article argues that "new war" concepts do not rest on a purely academic view of war and generally develop in highly politicized contexts. Most exemplars of "new war" thinking are highly value-laden, based on certain national/civilizational security threat assessments that reflect the narrow strategic concerns of the great powers. In other words, "new war" concepts are deeply entwined in the battle of narratives among great powers, reflecting their strategic interests and threat perceptions. Moreover, most, if not all, of "new war" concepts have been produced by military and security professionals (i.e., military or ex-military officers and national security advisors). Thus, they reflect how "pracademics" or "practitioner-academics" (be they Western, Russian, or Chinese) view and portray the contemporary security environment and its associated threats.

Briefly speaking, a "pracademic" "is a professional with dual identities: practitioner and academic." Pracademics bridge the gap between practice and academia, enhancing both practical and theoretical knowledge, and play a significant role in the national security policy-making process. In this specific context, a pracademic would be, for example, a security/defense expert who may have served in the military and may be working in or out of government, such as in think tanks, consultancies, or universities. Consequently, when considering "new war" concepts, we should bear in mind that they primarily reflect the great powers' threat perceptions and provide potential solutions to such threats.

1 See for example, Antulio J Echevarria II, *From Fourth Generation War and Other Myths*, United States Army War College Press, Carlisle Barracks, PA. 2005, s. 9; Lawrence Freedman, "War Evolves into the Fourth Generation: A Comment on Thomas X. Hammes", *Contemporary Security Policy*, 26:2, 2005, pp. 254-263; Mats Berdal, "The New War Thesis Revisited", Hew Strachan & Sibylle Scheipers (eds.), *The Changing Character of War*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, pp. 109-133.

2 See for example, John Stone, "Clausewitz's Trinity and Contemporary Conflict", *Civil Wars*, 9:3, 2007, pp. 282-296; Andreas Herberg-Rothe and Jan Willem Honig, "War without End(s): The End of Clausewitz?", *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory*, 8:2, 2007, pp. 133-150; Colin M Fleming, "New and Old Wars? Debating a Clausewitzian Future," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 32, 2009, pp. 213-241. Henderson Errol and J. David Singer. "'New Wars' and Rumors of 'New Wars.'" *International Interactions* 28:2, 2002, pp. 165-190. Bart Schuurman, "Clausewitz and the 'New Wars' Scholars", *Parameters*, 40:1, 2010, pp. 89-100.

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to delve deeply into “new war” thinking. It is based on an extended literature review encompassing Western, Russian, and Chinese military scholarship on post-Cold War conflicts. Specifically, this article analyzes seven “new war” concepts: six Western-oriented (“new wars,” “fourth generation warfare,” “three-block war,” “war amongst the people,” “nontrinitarian war,” and “hybrid warfare”), one Russian-oriented (“new generation war”), and one Chinese-oriented (“unrestricted warfare”).³ Data from diverse secondary sources—including books, handbooks, journal articles, and magazines—is rigorously analyzed and synthesized to elucidate key conceptual frameworks and thematic developments relevant to the study’s objectives. By systematically examining and synthesizing scholarly texts, this article aims to provide a nuanced and more realistic understanding of “new war” thinking and its implications for the changing character of war debate.

The rest of this article is structured as follows. First, the article will briefly explain what is meant by the term “new war” thinking in this study. Thereafter, it will examine the significant commonalities among different schools in the broader “new war” thinking. Afterwards, the differences among different forms of “new war” thinking will be illustrated. Next, the article will shed light on the normative dimension of “new war” thinking. Finally, the article will present its conclusions.

1. New War Thinking

Since the end of the Cold War, a large corpus of literature related to the changing nature of war has been produced. Several scholars have claimed that post-Cold War Conflicts cannot be understood and examined through existing conceptual lenses, and thus, they propose new analytical categories. Within this context, a wide variety of concepts have been coined to demonstrate the alleged changes in the nature of war. This debate initially arose within Western academic and military circles, but over time, a few non-Western concepts (i.e. Russian and Chinese) have also been incorporated.

Since the proponents of these concepts have asserted that war has substantially changed, this article uses an umbrella term—“new war” thinking—to group them into a single thematic category. By doing so, this article emphasizes that they belong to the common genus in a broad sense. In this respect, the article considers each of those concepts as a subcategory of the broader “new war” thinking.

It is important to note that in the existing literature, the term “new war” has often been associated with Mary Kaldor. This association arises from Kaldor’s characterization of the so-called “new” type of organized violence that emerged during the last decade of the 20th Century as “new wars”.⁴ She has used the term “new wars” to distinguish post-Cold War conflicts from “classical” inter-state wars. As such, using the term “new war” may sometimes confuse readers. For this reason, it would be helpful to highlight here that there are several forms of “new war” thinking, and Kaldor’s concept of “new wars” represents only one of

3 “New war” thinking in the West is not limited to the concepts mentioned above. However, the chosen six concepts are sufficient for theoretical saturation. That is, collecting and analyzing additional data does not add to this article more about the research subject. For example, Herfried Münkler’s views on the alleged novelty of the war could well have been included in this text. However, as his notion about the alleged novelty of war exhibits notable parallels to Kaldor’s “new war” thesis, his perspectives are not included in this article.

4 See for example, Mary Kaldor, “The ‘New War’ in Iraq,” *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 53: 109, 2006, pp. 1–27; Mary Kaldor, 2010. “Inconclusive Wars: Is Clausewitz Still Relevant in these Global Times?”, *Global Policy* 1:3, 2010, pp. 271-281; Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era*. Polity Press, Cambridge, 2012; Mary Kaldor, “In Defence of New Wars.” *Stability*, 2:1, 2013, pp. 1-16.

them. Hence, in this article, the term "new war" thinking is not only used to imply Kaldor's thesis and/or the debates pertaining to the writers who belong to the "new wars" school of thought but also other schools of thought that aim to describe so-called the "changing nature of war" without really using the term "new wars".

It should also be elucidated that by categorizing various concepts under the same umbrella term, "new war" thinking, this article does not imply that they all share the same line of argument. Quite the contrary, as Fleming rightly points out, "the new war argument is diverse."⁵ To put it another way, although "new war" scholars maintain that there is a wide variety of distinctive features identified in present-day conflicts, they have built their concepts upon different assumptions. Nonetheless, it is still possible to find out some important commonalities among the various "new war" concepts pertaining to broader "new war" thinking. Accordingly, the article will first examine the significant commonalities among different schools in the "new war" literature. Thereafter, the differences among different sub-forms of "new war" thinking will be illustrated.

2. Commonalities in "New War" Thinking

Three major common points among the various concepts pertain to "new war" thinking. First, "new war" scholars have maintained that wars can no longer be won by defeating the enemy's military force. In other words, victory in contemporary wars does not rely on a "battlefield decision", which can be defined as "negating the other side's combat capability."⁶ This is because contemporary threats aim to break the enemy's will to fight through a strategy of attrition rather than destroying its military capabilities.

According to Mary Kaldor, in "old wars", victory depended on the ability to inflict destruction on the opponent's armed forces within the battlefield, whereas in "new wars," warring parties tend to avoid military confrontations and instead control territory through political control of the population.⁷ Thomas X. Hammes has said that fourth generation warfare does not seek victory through the defeat of the enemy's military forces. Rather, it combines guerrilla warfare tactics or civil disobedience with social, cultural, and economic networks, disinformation activities, and sophisticated political subversion to directly undermine the enemy's political will.⁸ Charles Krulak has foreseen that "three block wars" will be asymmetrical and take place in densely populated urban areas, rendering conventional doctrine and organizations potentially irrelevant.⁹ Rupert Smith has asserted that unlike industrial inter-state wars in which the destruction of enemy forces on the battlefield is the main focus, "war amongst the people" does not rely on a battlefield decision. Instead, breaking the will of the political leadership and the general public to make war is crucial for victory.¹⁰ Van Creveld has argued that battles will be replaced by low-intensity conflicts characterized by skirmishes, bombings, and massacres.¹¹ Frank G. Hoffman has stated that the aim of the hybrid warfare approach is not to facilitate the enemy's progression through phases or establish a regular army for a decisive battle. Instead, hybrid adversaries pursue victory

5 Fleming, "New and Old Wars?", p. 215.

6 Avi Kober, "Israeli War Objectives into an Era of Negativism", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 24:2, 2001, p. 187.

7 Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, p. 9.

8 Thomas X. Hammes, "War Evolves into the Fourth Generation", *Contemporary Security Policy*, 26:2, 2005a, p. 206.

9 Charles Krulak, "The Three Block War: Fighting in Urban Areas", *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 64:5, 1997, pp. 139-140.

10 Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, Penguin Books, London, 2006, p. 175.

11 Martin van Creveld, "The Transformation of War: The Most Radical Reinterpretation of Armed Conflict Since Clausewitz", Free Press, New York, 1991, p. 207.

by combining asymmetrical tactics with the most lethal instruments available to attack and achieve their strategic goals.¹² According to Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, “[unrestricted warfare] will be fought and won in a war beyond the battlefield; the struggle for victory will take place on a battlefield beyond the battlefield.”¹³ S.G. Chekinov and S.A. Bogdanov have said that in new generation war, the emphasis will be on information and psychological warfare, with the aim of gaining control over troops and weapons while undermining the morale and psychological resilience of the enemy’s military personnel and population.¹⁴

Second, but relatedly, “new war” thinkers argue that the boundaries between war and peace have blurred. As stated earlier, “new war” scholars assert that a “battlefield decision” that characterizes traditional wars has lost its importance and that the site of conflict has been extended to comprise the people, thus leading authors to call the domain in which “new wars” are fought as the “battlespace”. Kaldor has stated that “the erosion of the distinctions between public and private, military and civil, internal and external, also calls into question the distinction between war and peace itself.”¹⁵ William S. Lind has argued that “in broad terms, fourth generation warfare seems likely to be widely dispersed and largely undefined; the distinction between war and peace will be blurred to the vanishing point.”¹⁶ Krulak’s “three-block war” envisages military operations involving the US forces which should be forced to fight deadly battles against irregular fighters, whilst simultaneously be expected to conduct peacekeeping operations and to supply humanitarian aid within the same area of operations.¹⁷ Smith has argued that the essence of “war among the people” lies in the dynamics of confrontation and conflict rather than in the traditional dichotomy of war and peace.¹⁸ Crevelde has stated that “[a]s 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 as blurred as they were before 1648”¹⁹ Hoffman has argued that stark contrast between war and peace no longer exists in the age of hybrid warfare²⁰. Liang and Xiangsui have highlighted that in “unrestricted wars”, the battlefield will be everywhere.²¹ Valery Gerasimov, whose thoughts on present-day conflicts have been associated with “new generation war”, has declared that “in the 21st Century, we have seen a tendency toward blurring the lines between the states of war and peace.”²²

Third, but also relatedly, according to “new war” scholars, the traditional distinctions between combatants and non-combatants have been disappearing. This shift is based on the

12 Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*. Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, Arlington, VA, 2007a, p. 29; Frank G. Hoffman, “Preparing for Hybrid Wars”, *Marine Corps Gazette*, 91:3, 2007b, p. 58; Frank G. Hoffman, “Hybrid Warfare and Challenges”, *Joint Forces Quarterly*, 52:1, 2009a, pp. 34-39. Frank G. Hoffman, “Hybrid vs. Compound War,” *Armed Forces Journal*, October 1, 2009, <http://armedforcesjournal.com/hybrid-vs-compound-war/>, accessed 26.06.2024

13 Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare* (English translation), Washington, DC: Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), n.d., p. 153.

14 S. G Chekinov and S. A. Bogdanov, “The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War”, *Military Thought*, 4, 2013, p. 16.

15 Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, p. 124.

16 William S. Lind et al., “The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation”, *Marine Corps Gazette*, 73:10, 1989, p. 23.

17 Krulak, “The Three Block War”, pp. 139-141.

18 Smith, *The Utility of Force*, p. 181.

19 Van Crevelde, “Transformation of War”, p. 226.

20 Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century*, p. 7.

21 Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, p. 12

22 Valery Gerasimov, “The Value of Science is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations (Trans. Robert Coalson)”, *Military Review*, 96:1, 2016, p. 24.

observation that organized violence in present-day wars is not directed solely against the opponent’s military forces. Kaldor maintains “[t]he distinction between the military and the civil, between combatants and non-combatants, correspondingly starts to break down.”²³ Hammes emphasizes that “we have seen in Iraq, Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Palestine that most 4GW [fourth generation warfare] casualties will be civilians.”²⁴ Van Creveld states that “all over the world today, the traditional distinction between peoples and armies is being broken down by new and nontrinitarian forms of war collectively known as Low-Intensity Conflict.”²⁵ Krulak remarks that the lines distinguishing combatants from non-combatants will blur.²⁶ Smith states, “Military engagements can take place anywhere: in the presence of civilians, against civilians, in defence of civilians. Civilians are the targets, objectives to be won, as much as an opposing force.”²⁷ Hoffman states that the distinction between civilian and military is being broken down by a multi-modal form of war known as hybrid warfare.²⁸ Liang and Xiangsui argue that “boundaries between soldiers and non-soldiers have now been broken down.”²⁹ Gerasimov asserts that in new-generation warfare, the destruction of critically essential facilities of the enemy’s military and civilian infrastructure is one of the core objectives.³⁰

Having articulated several major commonalities among the different types of “new war” thinking, let us now outline key differences among “new war” thinkers.

3. Differences in “New War” Thinking

As noted earlier, this article does not contend that all concepts grouped under the umbrella term “new war” thinking are unified in the same line of argument. On the contrary, the “new war” argument is a rich tapestry of perspectives, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding. In other words, every concept, with its distinct aim to articulate the evolving nature of war, is underpinned by diverse assumptions.

First, there is no consensus about who the main antagonist will be in today’s wars. Several “new war” thinkers have argued that present-day conflicts will be fought between states and violent non-state actors with differing characteristics. Kaldor argues that “new wars are fought by networks of state and non-state actors.”³¹ The proponents of fourth generation warfare claim that traditional interstate wars are being replaced by challenges stemming from violent non-state actors.³² Krulak asserts, “Our enemies will not allow us to fight the Son of Desert Storm but will try to draw us into the stepchild of Chechnya.”³³ Smith claims, “The sides are mostly non-state since we tend to conduct our conflicts and confrontations in some form of multinational grouping, whether it is an alliance or a coalition, and against

23 Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, p. 27.

24 Hammes, “War Evolves into the Fourth Generation”, p. 206.

25 Van Creveld, “Transformation of War”, p. 73.

26 Charles Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War”, *Marine Corps Gazette*, 83:1, 1999, p. 16.

27 Smith, *The Utility of Force*, p. 4.

28 Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century*, p. 7.

29 Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, p. 222.

30 Gerasimov, “The Value of Science is in the Foresight”, p. 25.

31 Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, p. 215.

32 Hammes, “War Evolves into the Fourth Generation”, p. 206; Thomas X. Hammes, “Insurgency: Modern Warfare Evolves into a Fourth Generation”, *Strategic Forum*, 214, 2005b, p. 6; William S. Lind et al., “The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation”, pp. 22-26; William S. Lind, “Understanding Fourth Generation War”, *Military Review*, 84:5, 2004, p. 13; William S. Lind and Gregory A. Thiele, *4th Generation Warfare Handbook*, Castalia House, Kouvola, 2016.

33 Krulak, “The Three Block War”, p. 140.

some party or parties that are not states.”³⁴ Van Creveld declares that the state has lost its monopoly on the legitimate use of violence and, thus, contemporary conflicts involve not only states but also violent non-state actors.³⁵ Hoffman’s conception of hybrid warfare is remarkably non-state-centric. The only case study in his seminal monograph “Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars” is Hezbollah.³⁶ Hence, we may deduce that Hoffmann aimed to underline that some non-state armed groups have moved beyond traditional forms of irregular warfare by employing advanced conventional weapons that have traditionally been unavailable to many past non-state actors.³⁷

Not all “new war” concepts focus specifically on conflicts between states and non-state actors. Some, such as “unrestricted warfare” and “new-generation warfare”, concentrate on asymmetric inter-state conflicts. According to these theories, states prefer to employ unconventional modes of warfare instead of direct force-on-force confrontation in today’s conflicts. Consequently, they assert that contemporary state-on-state conflicts are essentially irregular in nature and quite different from past experiences. Specifically speaking, the proponents of “unrestricted warfare” and “new-generation warfare” have focused on the so-called “new” American way of warfare. Liang and Xiangsui based the concept of unrestricted warfare on the lessons of the US-led 1991 Gulf War against Iraq. According to Liang and Xiangsui, during the Gulf War, the US not only employed conventional warfare but also conducted diplomatic warfare, trade warfare, and, most importantly, information warfare. For this reason, the authors describe it as a war that changed the war itself.³⁸ Chekinov and Bogdanov think that operations conducted by the United States and its allies in Former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Arab Spring revolutions in the Middle East demonstrate what “new generation warfare” will look like.³⁹ Similarly, Gerasimov labels anti-government protests in North Africa and the Middle East as a clear-cut example of the West’s new approach to warfare.⁴⁰

It is also worth noting that although Hoffman’s conceptualization of hybrid warfare initially tries to explain how non-state actors such as Hezbollah and Hamas wage war against superior military forces, subsequent works use the term hybrid warfare to describe and refer to the methods of warfare carried out revisionist authoritarian states, including the Russian Federation, China, Iran, and North Korea.⁴¹ More precisely, since Russia’s 2014 intervention

34 Smith, *The Utility of Force*, p. 17.

35 Van Creveld, “Transformation of War”, p. 49.

36 Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century*, pp. 35-42.

37 That being said, Hoffman argues that the hybrid warfare model can also be carried out by states. In his monograph, Hoffman says that state actors can shift their conventional units to irregular formations and adopt novel warfighting tactics, as the Iraqi Fedayeen did against American troops in 2003. In his later writings, he cites Russia’s war with Georgia, Iran’s targeted attacks on merchant vessels in the Persian Gulf during the late 1980s, and Iran’s use of high-tech naval swarming tactics (Hoffman, 2016, p. 29) as examples of state-based hybrid warfare. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century*, p. 28; Frank G. Hoffman, “Hybrid Threats: Reconceptualizing the Evolving Character of Modern Conflict”, *Strategic Forum*, 240, 2009b, p. 5; Frank G. Hoffman, “‘Hybrid Threats’: Neither Omnipotent Nor Unbeatable”, *Orbis*, 54:3, 2010, pp. 447-452; Frank G. Hoffman, “The Contemporary Spectrum of Conflict: Protracted, Gray Zone, Ambiguous, and Hybrid Modes of War”, Dakota L. Wood (eds.), *2016 Index of U.S. Military Strength: Assessing America’s Ability to Provide for the Common Defense*, Heritage Foundation, Washington DC., 2016, p. 29.

38 Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, pp. 1-5.

39 S. G Chekinov and S. A. Bogdanov, “The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War”, pp. 14-18.

40 Gerasimov, “The Value of Science is in the Foresight”, p.24.

41 See for example; Arsalan Bilal, “Russia’s Hybrid War against the West”, *NATO Review*, April 26, 2024, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2024/04/26/russias-hybrid-war-against-the-west/index.html>, accessed 17.06.2024; Nils Peterson, “The Chinese Communist Party’s Theory of Hybrid Warfare”, *Institute for the Study of War*, November 21, 2023, https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/The%20Chinese%20Communist%20Party%27s%20Theory%20of%20Hybrid%20Warfare_0.pdf, accessed 20.06.2024; Anthony Cordesman, “Has Iran Chosen Hybrid Warfare?”, *The Hill*, June 14, 2019, <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/448544-has-iran->

in Ukraine, hybrid warfare has been perceived as a weapon of anti-Western countries, and thus, hybrid warfare has become an essential aspect of the topic of “renewed great power competition”.

Second, there is no consensus about when exactly armed conflicts began to change. Kaldor contends that in the late 20th Century, a distinct form of organized conflict emerged, particularly in Africa and Eastern Europe.⁴² Likewise, Lind asserts that the fourth generation warfare appeared in the last decades of the 20th Century.⁴³ Hammes, another notable proponent of fourth generation warfare, argues that Mao-Tse Tung was the first practitioner who both wrote about and effectively carried out the idea of “fourth generation warfare”.⁴⁴ Van Creveld thinks that low-intensity conflicts have been the most dominant form of war waged since 1945.⁴⁵ Krulak uses the term “three-block war” to describe and refer to the challenges of the chaotic post-Cold War world.⁴⁶ According to Smith, “war amongst the people” emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War, but it became the prevailing type of conflict at the end of the Cold War.⁴⁷ At the very beginning of his seminal monograph, Hoffman states that the 9/11 terrorist attacks organized by al-Qaeda marked the end of one era of war and awakened the world to the beginning of a new one, that is, hybrid warfare.⁴⁸ Liang and Xiangsui describe the 1991 Gulf War as “[a] war which changed the world ultimately changed war itself.”⁴⁹ Likewise, Chekinov and Bogdanov state, “[t]he Gulf War may be called the first war of a new age.”⁵⁰

Finally, there is no agreement about the driving force behind the changes in post-Cold War armed conflicts. According to Kaldor, “There has been a revolution in military affairs, but it is a revolution in the social relations of warfare, not in technology.”⁵¹ Lind believes that “both ideas and technology drove the change.”⁵² Krulak focuses on the impact of state failure on post-Cold War armed conflicts.⁵³ According to Smith, the “current shift in paradigm began with the introduction of nuclear weapons.”⁵⁴ In the same vein, Creveld declares that the “spread of nuclear weapons no longer permits most modern armed forces to fight as they used to.”⁵⁵ Hoffman says that “our security is challenged by a violent reaction generated as a side product of globalization.”⁵⁶ Liang and Xiangsui maintain that technology and globalization play an equal role in the transformation of warfare.⁵⁷ The proponents of “new generation warfare” focus on the impact of new information technologies on warfighting.⁵⁸

chosen-hybrid-warfare/, accessed 14.06.2024; Ian Bowers, “The Use and Utility of Hybrid Warfare on the Korean Peninsula”, *The Pacific Review*, 31:6, 2018, pp. 762–786.

42 Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, p. 1.

43 Lind et al., “The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation”, p. 22; Lind, “Understanding Fourth Generation War”, pp. 13-14.

44 Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century*. Zenith Press, St Paul, MN, 2004 p. 44.

45 Van Creveld, “Transformation of War”, p. 18.

46 Krulak, “The Three Block War”, pp. 139-140; Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal”, p. 16.

47 Smith, *The Utility of Force*, p. 267.

48 Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century*, p. 11.

49 Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, p. 4.

50 Chekinov and Bogdanov, “The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War”, p. 15.

51 Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, p. 4.

52 Lind et al., “The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation”, p. 23.

53 Krulak, “The Three Block War”, p. 139.

54 Smith, *The Utility of Force*, p. 2.

55 Van Creveld, “Transformation of War”, p. 117.

56 Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century*, p. 11-12.

57 Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, p. 11.

58 Chekinov and Bogdanov, “The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War”, pp. 12-13; Gerasimov, “The Value of Science is in the Foresight”, p. 24, 27.

In sum, as shown below in Table 1, there is no general agreement among “new war” writers about who the main antagonist will be in today’s wars, when precisely the nature of war began to change, and what the driving forces behind these changes in today’s armed conflicts are (see Table 1). Having articulated the commonalities and differences between various new war concepts, let us now clarify the power dynamics in “new war” thinking, which is the crux of this article.

Table 1. Comparison of Various New War Concepts

Concept	Main Antagonist	When has War Started to Change?	What is the Driving Force?
Mary Kaldor (New Wars)	Non-state Actors	Since the end of the Cold War	Globalization
William S. Lind (Fourth Generation Warfare)	Non-state Actors	Since the end of the Cold War	Technology and Ideas
Thomas X. Hammes (Fourth Generation Warfare)	Non-state Actors	Since Maoist Insurgency	Political, Social, Economic, and Technical Changes
Charles Krulak (Three-Block War)	Non-state Actors	Since the end of the Cold-War	Failed States
Frank G. Hoffman (Hybrid Warfare)	Non-state Actors	Since the 9/11 Attacks	Globalization
Rupert Smith (War amongst the People)	Non-state Actors	Since 1945	Nuclear Weapons
Martin van Creveld (Nontrinitarian War)	Non-state Actors	Since 1945	Nuclear Weapons
Liang and Xiangsui (Unrestricted Warfare)	States	Since the Gulf War	Globalization and Technology
Chekinov and Bogdanov (New Generation War)	States	Since the Gulf War	Technology

4. Power Dynamics in “New War” Thinking

So far, “new war” concepts have been viewed as academic endeavors aiming to reveal the changing face of war. Indeed, they have contributed to understanding recent trends in today’s conflict, such as the decline of traditional force-on-force confrontations, the rise of violent non-state actors, the digitalization of armed conflict, and the increased importance of non-military means. However, a detailed examination reveals that “new war” concepts are mostly based on highly normative discourse. Namely, they have been written with concerns for maintaining/regaining a balance of power or for neutralizing any state (or non-state) actor that threatens the maintenance or increase of their sphere of influence/power, whether it be national, regional, or global. In this respect, “new war” concepts have generally been grounded on dichotomous binary constructs: the West vs. terrorists, Russia vs. the West or China vs. the US.

The concepts of “fourth generation warfare,” “three-block war,” “war amongst the people,” and “hybrid warfare” reflect the West’s security priorities in the post-Cold War period. Proponents of these concepts highlight the increasing participation of non-state armed groups in post-Cold War conflicts. They have primarily focused on why Western states have failed to defeat violent non-state belligerent actors. For example, General Krulak formulated the concept of the “three-block war” based on the challenges the US army faced in failed states such as Somalia and Haiti. Krulak has aimed to provide a practical guide to the US military on confronting emerging irregular threats.⁵⁹ Likewise, Lind, a leading proponent of “fourth generation warfare”, has concentrated on irregular threats, particularly fundamentalist groups, which he has argued pose a vital threat to Western security.⁶⁰ Hammes has focused almost exclusively on non-state groups, such as Iraqi insurgents, the Taliban, Chechen fighters, and al-Qaeda, within the context of “fourth generation warfare”.⁶¹ Hoffman has examined how Hezbollah managed to stand up to the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), one of the world’s strongest militaries.⁶²

So, in the early post-Cold War era, Western “new war” scholars aimed to raise awareness about the rising challenges against the West’s strategic interests and to provide guidance for negating them.⁶³ Nevertheless, with China’s rise and the Russian Federation’s resurgence, the West’s security priorities have dramatically changed. In this regard, renewed great power competition has once again become the crux of Western strategic debates. During this period, Russian and Chinese disruptive activities were considered a “new” form of warfare by many Western defense scholars. In this sense, the concept of “hybrid warfare” has been mainly associated with these states over the past decade-plus. Likewise, in his subsequent work, Thomas X. Hammes has mentioned the state use of fourth generation warfare. Hammes has declared that Beijing’s employment of private military companies

59 Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal”, p. 16.

60 Lind, “Understanding Fourth Generation War”, p. 13.

61 Hammes, “War Evolves into the Fourth Generation”, p. 191

62 Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century*, pp. 35-42.

63 However, in a certain sense, Kaldor’s “new wars” thesis can be considered an exception. This is because, while other conceptual origins of ‘hybrid warfare’ aim to raise awareness about the perceived adversary’s modes of warfare through a realist and strategic point of view, Kaldor attempts to explain so-called transformations in contemporary conflicts mainly from a critical and socioeconomic perspective. In other words, unlike the concepts that aim to delineate new features in present-day wars, Kaldor’s thesis is not based on dichotomous categories. In addition, she is preoccupied with human security considerations rather than with national and/or civilizational security concerns. Furthermore, Kaldor offers a cosmopolitan political response to dealing with post-modern post-Cold War security threats. Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, p. 119.

(PMCs) is a striking example of a state using fourth generation warfare.⁶⁴ These insights further support the article's argument that "new war" concepts are, in fact, value-laden and rest on the West's subjective national or civilizational security threat assessments.

These considerations apply not only to the Western "new war" concepts but also to the broader "new war" thinking. The proponents of "unrestricted warfare" have focused on the so-called "new" American way of warfare in accordance with China's strategic concerns. Liang and Xiangsui based the concept of unrestricted warfare on the lessons of the US-led 1991 Gulf War against Iraq.⁶⁵ The authors did not aim to provide an objective analysis of present-day warfare. Instead, they attempted to find a "war-winning formula" to undermine American and/or Western dominance by taking lessons from the Gulf War. Given the United States military superiority, the authors strongly propose that a challenger, such as China, should employ indirect and preferably non-military methods to challenge and potentially overthrow the existing hegemonic power. As such, in the US military and academic circles, the book "Unrestricted War", published in English with the subtitle *China's Master Plan to Destroy America*, has been perceived as an open challenge to the US and/or Western military superiority. Therefore, the concept of "unrestricted warfare" has generated an alarmist reaction in the US.⁶⁶ Similarly, new-generation warfare, a Russian-oriented "new war" concept, is based on the assumption that operations conducted by the United States and its allies in various parts of the world demonstrate what future warfare will look like⁶⁷. The proponents of this concept believe that Russia needs to catch up, in both doctrinal and practical terms, to the realities of today's conflict environments.⁶⁸

It is also worth noting that most, if not all, of the concepts examined earlier were produced by military and security professionals (i.e., military or ex-military officers and security advisors). For example, "fourth generation warfare" was first formulated by a group of US military officers led by William S. Lind and later developed further by US Marines officer Thomas X. Hammes. The "three block war" was formulated and defined by General Charles C. Krulak when he served as Commandant of the US Marine Corps. The concept of "hybrid warfare" was popularized by former US Marine infantry officer and defense analyst Frank G. Hoffman. The intellectual godfather of "war amongst people" was General Sir Rupert Smith, a retired British Army officer. As for non-western "new-war" concepts, "unrestricted warfare" was coined in 1999 by two Chinese colonels, Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui. "New generation war" was formulated by Russian Colonel S. G. Chekinov and Lieutenant-General retired S. A. Bogdanov. The idea of "new generation warfare" also reflects the military vision of Russia's Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov. That is, while "unrestricted warfare" originates from Chinese military thinking, Russian-oriented "new war" concepts are products of Russian military thought.

Consequently, although "new war" theorists assert that they have attempted to identify changing patterns in today's conflicts, they do not rest on a purely academic view of war, and thus "new war" concepts have generally been developed in highly politicized contexts. That is, most exemplars of "new war" thinking are substantially value-laden and rest on specific threat considerations (be it national or civilizational) that exhibit the narrow strategic interests

64 Thomas X. Hammes, "Fourth Generation Warfare Evolves, Fifth Emerges", *Military Review*, 87:3, 2007, p. 19.

65 Liang and Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, p. 1.

66 Ofer Fridman, *Russian 'Hybrid Warfare': Resurgence and Politicisation*. Hurst Publishers, London, 2018, p. 12.

67 Chekinov and Bogdanov, "The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War", pp. 14-18.

68 Michael Kofman and Matthew Rojansky, "A Closer Look at Russia's 'Hybrid War'", Kennan Cable No. 7, *The Wilson Center*, April 2015, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/7-KENNAN%20CABLE-ROJANSKY%20KOFMAN.pdf>, accessed 01.07.2024.

of the great powers (be it Western or non-Western). So, playing on Robert Cox’s famous dictum on the role of theories, “*new war*” *concepts are generally for some states and for some purposes*.⁶⁹ This is the case both for Western and for non-Western ‘new war’ concepts. Therefore, this article argues that “new war” concepts should not be considered purely academic. Instead, they reflect how “pracademics” (be they Western, Russian or Chinese) view and portray contemporary security environments and associated threats. Thus, when considering “new war” concepts, we should bear in mind that pracademics play essential roles in reflecting the great powers’ threat perceptions and providing potential solutions to such threats.

Conclusion

This study has addressed the normative dimensions of “new war” thinking, which have been widely neglected in current literature. It does so by analyzing several Western concepts (i.e., “new wars,” “fourth generation warfare,” “three-block war”, “war amongst the people”, and “hybrid warfare”) and non-Western concepts (i.e. “unrestricted warfare” and “new-generation warfare”). Generally, these concepts have been viewed as academic endeavors to reveal the changing character of war. Indeed, they have contributed to understanding recent trends in post-Cold War conflicts, such as the decline of traditional interstate wars, the rise of violent non-state actors, the digitalization of armed conflict, and the increased importance of non-military means. Nevertheless, this article has argued that “new war” concepts are primarily rooted in a highly normative discourse.

Western “new war” concepts have primarily been developed to serve American and, more broadly, Western security agendas. Concepts like “fourth generation warfare,” “three-block war,” “war amongst the people,” and “hybrid warfare” reflected the West’s security priorities in the early post-Cold War period. Proponents of these concepts emphasized the increased role of violent non-state groups in post-Cold War conflicts. However, these concepts—except for hybrid warfare—became outdated with the emergence of great power competition with China and Russia. In the 2010s, hybrid warfare has undergone conceptual stretching to explain the foreign policy activities of non-Western and revisionist states. Thus, hybrid warfare has evolved in accordance with the West’s changing security concerns.

Chinese and Russian “new war” scholars have aimed to raise awareness about US military dominance and provide guidance for negating it. China’s “unrestricted warfare” advocates using indirect and non-military methods to undermine US hegemony. Similarly, Russia’s “new-generation warfare” focuses on adapting to modern conflict environments based on the US and allied operations.

Consequently, the article contends that “new war” concepts should not be viewed as purely academic exercises. This is because they do not rest on a purely academic view of war and generally develop in highly politicized contexts. In other words, “new war” concepts are deeply entwined in the battle of narratives among great powers, reflecting their strategic interests and threat perceptions. Thus, “*new war*” *concepts are generally for some states and for some purpose*. Addressing the normative dimensions of “new war” concepts, which have been widely neglected in the current literature, this article provides an alternative perspective on how we should view “new war” concepts: ‘New war’ concepts reflect how “pracademics” (be they Western, Russian or Chinese) view the contemporary security environments and has been written for the purposes of advising how to defeat their enemies’ strategies.

69 Robert W. Cox, “Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory”, *Millennium*, 10:2, 1981, p. 128.

Conflict of Interest Statement:

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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