

# CHANGING NATURE OF WAR

*The character of war, its expression and form continually change due to geopolitical, social, demographic, economic and technological developments. Shifts in spheres impacting warfare coupled with the very rapid advancements in technology have increased the frequency of change in the character of war. We therefore need to be conscious of the implications and critically reexamine our operational models and transform accordingly*

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War used to be easy to define. Once, we could say with confidence whether we were at war or peace. There now seems to be widespread agreement that the character of war is changing but little consensus as to exactly how. New terms have proliferated. Some of these focus on speed, like “hyperwar.” Others allude to the co-mingling of old and new tactics: “hybrid war or ‘grey zone’ where the ambiguity is even greater. War today can be nonlinear, fifth-generation, next-generation, even contactless. Some even add “meme wars” and “like wars” and talk of the weaponisation of social media as threats in our networked world.

## Character & Nature of War

However, the answer to the three fundamental questions will guide you regarding the future of war fighting; What are you fighting over? Who will do the fighting? And With What will you fight? The first question maybe the easiest to answer, from plunder, religion, resources, ideology and safeguarding ones territory wars are now also fought for preservation of values. The second question has seen conflicts increasing against non-state actors, the visibility of the opponent is no longer transparent and we are operating in a "grey zone" and the last question has seen the effect of technology and media on the battlefield.

Armies, the world over have invested significant time and thought into examining the character of war. While the nature of war; the use or threat of violence, as an extension of politics, to compel the enemy to our

will within the fog, friction and chance of combat is immutable, the character of war its expression and form changes due to unique geopolitical, social, demographic, economic, and technological developments often unevenly, over time.” Shifts in the character of war offer an opportunity. These need to be anticipated or at least recognized, to enable us to adapt proactively, maintaining or regaining overmatch and forcing competitors to react to us.

According to Clausewitz, the nature of war “is fundamentally political”. He believed that its nature will never change, and these fundamental components will always be at the heart of warfare. However, he stated that the character of war, a subjective component of war’s nature, can vary. This has occurred over time through the information-led revolution in military affairs (RMA). Clausewitz’s view holds merit as the fundamental basic features of war haven’t changed, whilst the character of war has through states having a better understanding of the moral, tactical and geographical aspects of modern war whilst also reaping the benefits of new technological innovations.

Presently, we are on the cusp of a fundamental change in the character of war. Technology, geopolitics, and demographics are rapidly changing societies, economies, and the tools of warfare. They are also producing changes in why, how, and where wars are fought--and who will fight them. The significantly increased speed and global reach of information (and misinformation) likewise will have unprecedented effect on forces and how they fight.

## Historical Perspective

There are commonly-held views about what defined each



*The rise of violent non state actors has impacted the character of warfare*

age of warfare. In the 1920s, Basil Liddell-Hart's advocacy of air and armoured technologies as permanent solutions to the killing fields experienced in the First World War appealed to professionals eager to avoid the repetition of that costly conflict. After 1945, the advent of nuclear weapons created the assumption that conventional wars were too dangerous to be fought because of escalation risk, and the assumption was that the nature of war was a choice between nuclear annihilation or limited conflict.

Mary Kaldor in her 1999 book "New and Old Wars" which she described as wars of the era of globalization and offered an interpretation of the character of conflict to understand the post-Cold War international order; namely that the end of the Cold War marked the demise of the interstate war and initiated conflicts from civil strife instead. Peter Singer, among others, captured the popular imagination with his illustration of war fought with cyber, electronic and robotic systems, while Chris Coker has argued that, with the rapid development of AI, this may be the last chance that humans have to determine the nature of war. Nevertheless, scholars of strategic culture are aware that relics of the past linger on and some characteristics are enduring.

### **Transformative Changes**

The character of conflict - how war is fought - always changes as thinking and technology advances. The arrow gave way to the bullet, the horse to the tank, the battleship to the aircraft carrier: these inflection points occur throughout history - and today the power of information (in data, processing, connectivity, AI, robotics, bio-science, materials, autonomy and all the rest) is the latest inflection. Throughout history, the introduction of new technologies and techniques has been heralded as transformative.

In the 21st century, the empowerment of non-state actors, led to judgments that war's nature was irrevocably

changed and defined by these actors. Within two decades, this assertion was replaced by the notion that electronic communication systems, robotics and artificial intelligence would be so radically different that the essence of war would be determined by them.

Despite these assertions, the fundamentals of war have not changed. War is still driven by fear, honour, interest, survival, uncertainty, domestic pressure, perceived injustice, reaction to incursion, ambition or opportunism, and error as misunderstanding or prejudice. It still consists of violence, enmity, passion; chance and friction; rationalised political objectives; dynamic interaction and unpredictability; and there is still a recognisable trinity of government, military, and the people each with differing reactions to war, and a corresponding trinity of forces.

The proliferation of effective long-range radars, air defense systems, long-range precision weapons, and electronic warfare and cyber capabilities are fast changing the battlefield milieu. Warfare is becoming more lethal and precise. Crises are unfolding rapidly, compressing decision cycles, and heightening the risks of miscalculation or escalation. Conflict is placing a premium on speed of recognition, decision, assembly, and action. Ambiguous actors, intense information wars, and cutting-edge technologies are further confusing situational understanding and blurring the distinctions between war and peace, combatant and noncombatant, friend and foe--perhaps even humans and machines.

All domains are being viciously contested. Forces are operating under increased public scrutiny, persistent enemy surveillance, and massed precision long-range fires with area effects. Close combat on sensor-rich battlefields of the future will be faster, more violent, and intensely lethal and operations will likely occur in complex, densely-populated urban terrain. However, multi domain warfare



requires the right capability to achieve ones aim.

The term hybrid warfare first appeared as early as 2005 and was subsequently used to describe the strategy used by the Hezbollah in the 2006 Lebanon War. Hybrid and asymmetric warfare are an everyday war that developing countries are facing in a military and economic competitive environment. It is difficult to categorise hybrid war as a military or quasi military challenge but it has elements of military and non-military domains.

To react to such a threat, where lines of peace and war are blurred, India must build hybrid warfare capabilities for dynamic response to ambiguous and alternative wars. The threat may be kinetic, non-kinetic, political, cyber, transnational organised crime, global terrorism, asymmetric conflict, threat to resources, to diaspora and to key infrastructure. Hybrid war cannot be fought in silos; it requires integration of all elements of hybrid war



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for offensive and defensive operations. Therefore, India needs to develop asymmetric edge and build capabilities to fight ambiguous and amorphous adversaries by synergised application of intelligence, information, cyber, and electronic, conventional and unconventional means. Development of hybrid warfare capabilities is imperative because, we may be under attack but unaware of who is attacking, what is he attacking and how is he attacking.

The Grey Zone lies between war and peace where hybrid warfare is conducted. Ambiguity lies everywhere; be in international laws, with actions and attributions or even where the impact of the activities may not elicit a response. This has resulted in an increase in the number of players, their agendas and capabilities. It is a space contested through unregulated means, proxies,

information and its manipulation, cyber and economic. It generates options for pursuing strategic ends just below the threshold of traditional armed conflict

In our context we have to contend with a form of Chinese grey-zone operations, a tactic that does not involve non-state actors or kinetic attacks. For the past decade, China is known to have actively used the three warfares (3Ws) strategy—media, psychological and legal warfare—to weaken our resolve. The Chinese 3Ws strategy goes beyond propaganda wars and misinformation campaigns. Expanding conventional war dynamics into the political domain, the 3Ws aims to undermine our organisational foundations.

Ambiguity is a key characteristic of modern day warfare. We need to be confusing so that the enemy is not able to gauge our intentions. The world woke up to passenger planes being used with devastating effect on the twin towers, leaving everyone dumbfounded.

In the past, combat's immediate goal was military: to damage the other side's ability to fight. Now, however, an attack's immediate purpose is often to produce news reports that will put pressure on enemy decision-makers without actually reducing their ability to fight. The target is the enemy's will rather than capability.

## Conclusion

We must remember what Secretary of Defense Robert Gates told West Point cadets: "When it comes to predicting the nature and location of our next military engagements, since Vietnam, our record has been perfect. We have never once gotten it right.

The range of means being used to project state power is wide and the tempo fierce, but that does not mean that a state of war exists. The contestation we are seeing through unregulated means, in particular in the field of information and subversion, might be what the new peace looks like.

However, as we grasp these implications it is imperative that we critically reexamine our operational models. The advent of new technologies and the rising importance of virtual domains like space and cyber are evolving the relationship among soldiers, machines, and software. As the character of war is undergoing a fundamental change, we need to develop and sustain new forms of maneuver, mass, and mutual support. The speed of implementing changes will be the key determining factor in the next war. SA

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