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## **The Rise of Intrastate Wars: New Threats and New Methods**

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According to Clausewitz, war is "an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to do our will<sup>1</sup>." War has a unique nature but several faces, which are usually categorized in the form of an adjective—thus, war or warfare can be described as just, necessary, regular, irregular, interstate, asymmetric, civil, humanitarian, extermination, total, limited, nuclear, conventional, movement, electronic, etc. The current strategic debate in France is focused on small or "intrastate" wars. Traditional wars between states are becoming less and less frequent. The corresponding rise in intrastate conflicts may be considered as a symptom of a global decline of the power and purchase of the State, both as a theoretical concept and as a real political actor. The prospect of having to focus primarily on these types of wars in the discernible future should motivate national defense institutions in general, and military professionals in particular, to rethink their methods in order to successfully adapt to a new and unfamiliar operating environment.

### ***The near-disappearance of interstate wars***

Wars between states have declined sharply in number since the end of World War II and the foundation of the United Nations Organization. This is primarily the result of a generalized attempt to avoid further conflicts. Thus, the United Nations' Charter vows to make every effort to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war," by identifying and addressing "threats to the peace," "breaches of the peace," "use of force" or "acts of aggression." In line with these pious intentions, many modern developments seem to have decreased the likelihood of interstate wars. The rise of international and nongovernmental organizations, the establishment of cooperation agreements and confidence-building measures, the development of high-technology global surveillance systems, and the increasing ubiquity of the news media, are all elements that tend to relegate traditional wars to near-obsolescence.

That being said, the decreased probability of a war between states in the modern age has, to a certain extent, been offset by the increase in the destructive power of modern weaponry. Nuclear weapons are a perfect example of this trend. In areas such as Kashmir, where two nuclear powers are in direct competition for disputed territory, the risks associated with war cannot be said to have decreased in spite of mutual deterrence and international monitoring.

As a result, most countries not only still reserve the right to wage war against other states but also spend a significant portion of their budget to maintain large, combat-ready armed forces. Article 35 of the French constitution, for instance, allows the parliament to decide a declaration

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Carl Von Clausewitz. On War. Besides, for Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, war is a continuation of politics by violent means.

of war and the government to intervene in foreign countries, in accordance with the international law. France currently spends in excess of 32 billion euros a year to provide itself with a military force capable of carrying out this kind of actions.

While it does make sense to maintain a combat capacity as a protection against unforeseen threats of a conventional nature, would it not also be prudent and fiscally responsible to tailor national defense forces to address the kinds of challenges they are most likely to face in today's world? To address this issue, we will first need to identify exactly what kinds of threats are currently emerging.

### ***The rise of “war amongst the people”***

“War amongst the people”, which we will refer to as “intrastate war”, is a concept popularized by two European general officers, General Rupert Smith (United Kingdom) and General Vincent Desportes (France). It marks a paradigm shift in the approach to understanding conflicts. Not only is the combat environment different, but also the participants. In intrastate wars, we find civilians both as subjects and objects of armed confrontations. These “small wars” are remarkably different from the “great wars,” also called interstate wars.

Intrastate wars mainly oppose States to feudal<sup>2</sup>, often warlike, organizations or to organizations which seek to usurp State prerogatives. To simplify, these feudal organizations can be terrorist groups, guerrillas, organized crime syndicates or a combination of these types of organizations. This list is not exhaustive. The majority of these are under the domination of more powerful groups whose goal is the conquest of local or national sovereignty—for example, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, Afghan Taliban or the Lebanese Hezbollah. They try to acquire the attributes of State, by elections, violence, corruption, ideological persuasion or political compromise. They hold sway over a territory and its population and set up political, military, social and legal institutions. They use a comprehensive approach or totalitarian methods to fulfill their aim. The smaller ones do not always want to overthrow the State but to substitute themselves to it locally by preserving a less rigid form of governance. They acquire the privileges of the State without its structures and its duties. At the beginning of their action, the biggest feudal organizations do not necessarily need international recognition. These feudal organizations publicly claim sovereignty as a result of divine bequest or ideological legitimacy but understand that the people they plan to dominate may not accept these claims at face value. As a result, they generally need to struggle in order to conquer sovereignty<sup>3</sup> by gaining “the hearts and minds of the population” by any means. Sovereignty is the generic political objective, while the people themselves are the center of gravity these feudal organizations are trying to reach and influence.

The national or international forces which have been assembled to address this threat are generally far more powerful than the feudal organizations they are trying to defeat. To face these forces, the feudal organizations are trying to develop transnational alliances with similar groups and States who share common interests with them. The loose alliances between Al-Qaida, jihadist groups worldwide and the Taliban or also between Hezbollah, Hamas, Syria and Iran are

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<sup>2</sup> By analogy with the legal and social system that evolved in W Europe in the 8th and 9th centuries, in which vassals were protected and maintained by their lords, usually through the granting of fiefs, and were required to serve under them in war. Collins dictionary.

<sup>3</sup> Sovereignty is the only specific attributes of the States in comparison with other types of organization. cf. J-F Guilhaudis, Relations internationales contemporaines, Paris, Litec, 2002.

two recent examples of this trend. These types of alliances may represent hybrid threats<sup>4</sup> against classical international military operations.

The constitution of alliances is complemented by external maneuvers, as defined by the French General André Beaufre in his *Introduction to Strategy*. These maneuvers consist of psychological operations intended to deter the enemy from any action and thus to gain freedom of action. Common deterrence techniques include creating doubt among the enemy's ranks as to the justice of their cause, dividing enemy public opinion in order to exploit a low resilience of the enemy's population, and exploiting any opportunities for mass media communication so as to delegitimize the enemy on the international scene.

### ***How to fight an intrastate war: using a comprehensive approach at all levels***

As mentioned before, the recent evolution in warfare as practiced by non-state actors requires a comparable evolution in the methods used by national defense forces in order to counter this emerging threat.

#### ***Strategic Level***

Coalitions attempting to bring an end to an intrastate war are conducting limited warfare, while their opponents are waging a total war. As a result, stabilization forces must coordinate their efforts vertically (at the strategic, operative, tactical levels), horizontally (by using a comprehensive approach) and externally (by countering external maneuvers by terrorist organizations).

According to the strategy explained by General Beaufre, external maneuvers can only be countered outside of the operational theater. Its aim is to fight against the enemy's critical vulnerabilities at the strategic level. It requires considerable determination and effort, especially in the case of a hybrid enemy (composed of state and non-state actors). It focuses primarily on destroying the enemy's external bases and on winning the battle for public opinion to ensure legitimacy. The current U.S. administration seems intent on adopting a similar approach in its campaign in Afghanistan. Shortly after taking office, President Barack Obama announced a "strategy recognizing the fundamental connection between our war effort in Afghanistan and the extremist safe havens in Pakistan". He also "set a goal that was narrowly defined as disrupting, dismantling, and defeating al Qaeda and its extremist allies, and pledged to better coordinate our military and civilian efforts"<sup>5</sup>. The new American strategy in Afghanistan seems to be following the precepts developed by general Beaufre.

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<sup>4</sup> The U.S. Army Chief of Staff, general George W. Casey Jr., wrote the following in the October 2008 Green Book edition of *Army Magazine*: *Diverse actors, especially nonstate actors, frequently operating covertly or as proxies for states, not bound by internationally recognized norms of behavior and resistant to traditional means of deterrence, will be difficult to discern and will shift their alliances and approaches over time to avoid our strengths. Hybrid threats—diverse, dynamic combinations of conventional, irregular, terrorist and criminal capabilities—will make pursuit of singular approaches difficult, necessitating innovative, hybrid solutions involving new combinations of all elements of national power.*

<sup>5</sup> President Obama's address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Eisenhower Hall Theatre, United States Military Academy at West Point, West Point, New York. 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2009.

### *Operational Level*

Current security and stability operations have a number of points in common: recovering local State sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity. The United Nation, in its Security Council's Resolution 1386, affirms "its strong commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan" and Resolution 1701 "also reiterates its strong support, as recalled in all its previous relevant resolutions, for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon [...]" Coalition forces must thus preserve the legitimacy of their actions and show proper concern for the indigenous population to facilitate the stabilization and normalization of the situation, despite the predatory activity of feudal organizations. In this scenario, the first operational priority is to focus on intelligence-gathering and the development of a nuanced understanding of the complex operating environment and opposing forces or potential opposing forces. In the long term, intelligence would guide the joint action of the armed forces attempting to dislocate and isolate enemy systems and prevent them from regenerating or evolving. Another priority is to develop nation-building projects using a comprehensive approach, with the support of government agencies and non-governmental organizations<sup>6</sup>, to achieve a safe and secure environment, and firmly establish stable governance and the rule of law while developing solid foundations for a sustainable economic development and social well-being<sup>7</sup>.

Thus, the operational level of intrastate war deals with dislocating, isolating and neutralizing the enemy in all areas of operations in order to repair the damage caused by the conflict and prevent the emergence of new opposing forces. At the tactical level, the emphasis shifts to the engagement and destruction of small fighting units.

### *Tactical Level*

While a comprehensive approach requires coalition forces to take on multiple opponents simultaneously at the operational level, at the tactical level, in a limited space and a short amount of time, military forces will only have to face a single enemy. In this context, one of the most difficult tasks will be to avoid collateral damage. On the field of battle, a hybrid enemy—nowadays, the most difficult kind of opponent to take on—may use both conventional and irregular warfare, while receiving support from a large part of the population. The main tactical problem is to conduct effective offensive operations against an enemy imbedded in the local population. The Lebanese conflict of 2006 is a good example of this kind of hybrid warfare. In this case, a traditionally organized military force—the Israeli Defense Force—squared off against the Lebanese Resistance (an all-confession militia), which fell under the leadership of Hezbollah and received the support of Iran and Syria as well as the Lebanese state<sup>8</sup>. In such a situation, the greatest challenge is to discover the enemy's organization and order of battle, especially in a deep defensive zone composed of small strong points. The traditional process—Observe, Orient, Decide and Act (OODA)—is not fully relevant to face hybrid forces<sup>9</sup> whose intimate knowledge of the operating environment, as well as their training and equipment enable

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<sup>6</sup> Reconstruction, disarmament, demobilization, reversion, CIMIC, assistance to the Security forces, etc.

<sup>7</sup> Guiding principles for stabilization and reconstruction. United States Institute of Peace and U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute (PKSOI). Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data. 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Biddle, Jeffrey A. Friedman, The 2006 Lebanon campaign and the future of warfare: implications for army and defense policy. September 2008. <http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil>

<sup>9</sup> Distributed in force packages small enough to exploit terrain and counter its enemy intelligence.

them to defeat traditional intelligence and surveillance assets before a battle. In this cycle, if you observe a little, at the end, you decide a little. As the U.S. Marine Corps' Distributed Operating Concept does, the doctrinal concepts of NATO armed forces could evolve.

One solution would be to change the decision process and to develop other tactics. An AADA cycle (Act and sense, Assess, Decide and Adapt) would be an effective way to combine the advantages of both the OODA and the necessity of reconnaissance. Simultaneously with the joint ISTAR collection process, it encourages leaders to firstly base actions on deception and reconnaissance in force to discover and test the enemy strength, to gain contact, to fix the enemy and to collect information. Communication and information systems allow a decentralized reconnaissance in force with small units, smarm-deployed, supported by joint indirect fires (field artillery, close air support, naval fires, etc.), electronic and cyber attacks and other combat support. Thus, the aim may be to collect a maximum of information on the enemy while isolate its strong points. After a better known of the enemy by a systemic approach, the bulk of the land forces exploit the opportunities offers by the success of the first echelon or concentrate its action on a critical vulnerability of the hybrid enemy. Beyond this example, whatever the tactics used the more important capability for ground forces, and probably for air and naval forces, is the adaptation to the situation: hybrid enemy and complex environment.

## ***Conclusion***

Ultimately, the war among the people rising is really one of the "symptoms" of a temporary global decline of the concept of "State" and of the interstate warfare. An evolution of the political organizations and practices involves a change of the methods to make war. Nobody can really say what will be the face of war during the next decades even if for the next years, the hybrid threats may probably entail new types of operations which will combine counter insurgency, stabilization and interstate war knowledge. A large share of information and the understanding of the environment, the opponents and the populations should be the keys of the future warfare. The greatest armed forces in the world will thus have to train both for interstate and intrastate wars. What seems to be the most important is to adapt all aspects of these forces to intrastate warfare: command and control systems, organization, equipment, and mentalities. Those who dare not to adapt will run the risk of defeat. To paraphrase Charles Darwin, it is neither the strongest nor the most intelligent competitor that survives, but rather the most adaptive to change.

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