

CLAUSEWITZ AND HYBRID WAR

Samuel Žilinčík, Ivo Pikner

Abstract: The aim of the article is to discuss the nature of war and its implications for the concepts such as hybrid wars. In the first section authors argue that objective nature of war remains stable with regard to the elements of which it consists. In the second section authors characterize the elements of war which are changing in the information age. In the conclusion authors summarize the implications of their findings.

Keywords: Hybrid War, Clausewitz, Concept

1. Introduction

For the last two decades security and strategic experts have been debating the new perspectives for understanding the phenomenon of war. Security experts struggle to identify, describe and conceptualize the changes that have occurred in warfare. Many artificial categories have emerged. The most recent one is the Hybrid War (Hoffman and Mattis: 2005 18-19). These experts argue that the hybrid war is a new phenomenon which is bound to become the norm in the future. These are strong claims requiring strong arguments and evidence.

The author of this article claims that in war much more remains similar than is subject to change. Emotions and hostility, chance and probabilities, reason and political goals are present in every war. War still remains the dialectics of two or more opposing wills, trying to force the opponent to accept the other's will. The decisions in war are made under the climate of fear, danger, friction and physical exertion. However some things do change. These changes are brought by new technologies and new political and social developments in the societies. These changes are not insignificant, however, the author argues that they don't deserve new categories of war. Rather, it is much better to examine each war as a unique phenomenon. This is the best way to approach the challenges because it forces the experts to avoid monistic solutions to what seems as similar wars.

2. Hybrid war

The concept of the hybrid war emerged in the first half of the previous decade. Its purpose was to explain the changes that had occurred in warfare due to the technical, tactical and operational revolution in military affairs. The concept was introduced by Frank Hoffman, an officer in the marine corps of the US armed forces. To illustrate the changing face of warfare, he examined several instances of non-state actor's successes in contemporary military conflicts. According to Hoffman, what makes war the hybrid one is coordinated utilization of various types of warfare, both military and non-military in character, for the purpose of attaining synergistic outcomes in both physical and psychological dimension of conflict (Renz and Smith 2016: 2).

The concept gained widespread popularity after the Russian operations in the eastern

parts of Ukraine. Indeed, the concept became the explanation for Russian success. However, in recent years the concept's borders have become blur and the hybrid war began to perform an umbrella term for various kind of threats: "low-intensity conflict, kinetic as well as non-kinetic threats to international peace and security, cyber war, asymmetric conflict scenarios, global terrorism, piracy, transnational organized crime, demographic challenges, resources security, retrenchment from globalization and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction". (Bachmann and Gunneriusson 2014)

3. War

War is a phenomenon with dual nature. The one is objective and the other one subjective. The objective nature consists of emotions and hostility, chance and probabilities and reason and political goals. These elements are present in every war, although they may differ in scale. The subjective nature describes the weapons, technologies, doctrines, goals, ways and tactics used in each war. These vary widely from one war to another. The elements of subjective nature interact with the elements of objective nature and this gives war its unique character. This interaction is an endless process throughout war, which means that the character of war can change many times during the war (Echevarria 2012: 90-91).

The Clausewitzian understanding of war is equally relevant today as it was in the 19th century. War remains "only" war regardless of the ways the actors pursue their political goals. War is still about fighting. War is still combat-centric. Everything in war revolves around the combat, whether real one or just the possible one. Combat therefore serves the similar role to the sun in the heliocentric model of our galaxy (Echevarria 2007: 142).

Combat is inevitably related to violence. There are many reasons for this. Sometimes strategies demand the destruction of the enemy forces. In some cases, the destruction of the enemy forces is easier than complex, sophisticated and time-consuming operations aiming to disrupt the enemy. Another reason is control, which is essential element to any strategy. In order to gain control of the territory, it is usually necessary to use force to remove enemy forces. Finally, even if one side strives to avoid violence, the other side may not and the interaction then cascades into the ever increasing spiral of violence (Lonsdale 2004: 169). Violence further affects emotions of the participants and their decisions.

This leads to the fact that war is still organized violence between competing wills with the aim of achieving some political goal. It does not matter whether the opponents are Athens and Sparta, Americans and Vietnamese, or Islamic State and Kurdish forces. Michael Howard is right when he says that despite the difference between the wars in history, wars still resemble wars more than any other human activity. In all the wars huge numbers of people try by force (or the threat of force) to compel the enemy to submit to their will. Also, in all the wars there occur incidents which would be unthinkable in any other activity (Howard 1983: 215-216).

War still emerges as a consequence of political intercourse. It is always caused by some political conditions and at least partially rational goal. It still remains the „duel on a larger scale.“ (Clausewitz 1976:83) It is essentially an interactive phenomenon. In war the actor doesn't affect an inanimate object. Instead he interacts with other human beings, who react differently than he anticipates (Clausewitz 1976:136-137). This interaction is crucial to understand that on the highest level of war, every war is hybrid one. At this level, the actors utilize any means which they consider proper to reach their

political goals. It is not wise to differentiate between Clausewitzian and hybrid war. Every war is a hybrid one while also being Clausewitzian.

4. Changes in the subjective nature

In order to understand contemporary military conflicts, it is necessary to acknowledge the significant changes in the subjective nature of war. Changes affect the military instrument itself, but they are brought by broader political and social (Gray 2004: 6).

On the physical battlefield the changes occur due to the application of new weapon systems and technology and the use made of these by regular, irregular and non-state forces. Different kinds of guided missiles offer new possibilities and high firepower not only for their own troops but also for the enemy. Weapons systems are now capable of achieving disproportionately high strategic effects.

Another important change in the subjective nature of war is the measure in which information can directly influence the outcome of operations. While gathering and assessment of information has always been important, it is now absolutely crucial. This is caused primarily by new developments in technology. New sensors enable greater speed of information transfer horizontally and vertically (Lonsdale 2004: 175). They provide all the combatants with shared vision of the battlefield, which gives them an advantage on unprecedented scale.

Another change related to the development of technology is the widespread use of internet network, which enables propaganda on the unprecedented scale. This change is of such a great importance that it may deserve a whole new dimension of strategy - the infosphere. As in any other dimension, the goal of the opponents is to gain and maintain control of the dimension (Lonsdale 2004: 176). Infosphere is an entity in which information exists and flows. Part of the conflict inevitable occurs in this dimension, whether one prefers it or not. However, the strategic effect of information operations is as always depends on the reactions of the opponents (Lonsdale 2004: 148).

The information power operates via the infosphere. This power is characterized by its availability and flexibility. The mixture of these characteristics gives information power a great potential for utilizing in the broad range of activities (Lonsdale 2004: 153).

However, as any other dimension, infosphere too has its limitations. Cyber-attacks are not directly violent. The ones which have the potential to cause harm are violent only indirectly. This violence is indirect in at least four ways. First, it is less physical than direct violence. Second, it causes less emotional reactions. Third, the symbolic value of the cyber violence is significantly less than in the case of direct violence. Finally, this kind of violence is less instrumental. Whether violent or not, cyber-attacks have potential to enable the reaching of political goal, especially by disrupting the trust in institutions, systems and organizations. It is in these particular cases, where infosphere really have the potential to be decisive dimension of strategy. That is because while conducting operations in the infosphere, it is easy to conduct swift attacks and yet remain invisible and untouchable (Rid 2013: 12).

But changes are also brought by social and political developments. Emergence of new alliances or the dissolving of the old alliance structure has a great impact on how individual states think about and conduct wars. Internal struggles and political conflicts within the European Union augmented by the ongoing migration crisis affect the character of the war in Eastern Ukraine. Failure of many developing states to function properly leads to the emergence of many non-state actors, who use peculiar methods of warfare to fight the conventional enemies. All of this is further augmented by the policy of open borders within European Union, which gives non-state actors perfect opportunity to conduct terrorist attacks on the territory of its enemy.

5. Artificial categories

For many experts and especially politicians, it may be tempting to presume that there exist general operational solutions for artificial categories of challenges such as terrorism, conflict of lesser intensity or a hybrid war. But this in turn leads into the development of dogmatic and noncreative approach for solving these challenges. Noncreative approach is the very opposite of what both politicians and strategists should strive for. Doctrinal monism is a risk not worth taking, but artificial categories support such an approach (Smith 2005: 36-37).

Hybrid war as well as other concepts mentioned above is a mistaken analytical abstraction. The fact the actors use combinations of terrorism, guerrilla warfare and information operations while using conventional forces mostly to deter the enemy, does not make war hybrid one. At best it can constitute hybrid approach to war, but the author is not persuaded that this category is very useful either.

All the wars are unique in their context, time and space. All have different causes, different course and different outcome. In all of them different weapons are used in different ways and many times for different effects. It is not helpful to develop a set of predetermined categories (Smith 2005: 50- 51). Much more important is to understand both objective and subjective nature of a war as a general phenomenon and to be able to apply this framework on the war that we are embarking on (Echevarria 2012: 70-74). This is truly the “comprehensive” approach that is essential for the effective conduct of strategy. Only by appreciating differences and similarities in each war is it possible to develop goals, allocate resources and identify the best ways to conduct the war.

6. Conclusion

Clausewitz and his framework are as relevant for contemporary wars as they have ever been. The crucial difference between objective and subjective nature of war must be understood in order to craft an effective policies and strategies. On the contrary, development of artificial categories of war may be harmful in this regard. These categories are bound to lead to political, strategic and operational monism. They distort our perceptions of reality, while giving us nothing in return.

The authors argue that it is essential to understand that many elements in war are always present. While they may sometimes seem absent, they only vary in scale. It is not possible to entirely remove emotions, chance or reason from war. Understanding how these elements interact with each other and with tactics and weapons systems used in contemporary conflict is the truly comprehensive approach the experts should strive to utilize.

References

- [1] BACHMANN, S.D. and GUNNERIUSSON, H. 2013. Terrorism and cyber attacks as hybrid threats: Defining a comprehensive approach for countering 21st century threats to global risk and security, *The Journal on Terrorism and Security Analysis*, 9: 27-36.
- [2] CLAUSEWITZ, C. v. 1976. *On War*. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (eds). Princeton: Princeton University Press. ISBN 0691018545.
- [3] ECHEVARRIA, A. 2007. *Clausewitz and contemporary war*. 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 0199231915.

- [4] ECHEVARRIA, A. 2012. Principles of War or Principles of Battle? In: Rethinking the principles of war. McIvor, A (ed). Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. ISBN 1591144817.
- [5] GRAY, C. S. 2004. Clausewitz, history and the future strategic world. In: Contemporary Essays, Occasional Paper 47. Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, Shrivenham, UK, pp. 1-24. ISBN 1874346370.
- [6] HOFFMAN, G.H. and MATTIS, J.N. Future Warfare: The Rise of Hybrid Wars. Proceedings, Vol. 131, No. 11, November 2005, pp. 18-19. ISSN 0041-798X.
- [7] HOWARD, M. 1983. The causes of wars and other essays. London: Temple Smith. ISBN 9780674104174.
- [8] LONSDALE, D. 2004. The nature of war in the Information Age. London: Frank Cass. ISBN 9780714684291.
- [9] RENZ, B. and Smith, H. 2016. Russia and hybrid warfare – going beyond the label. Helsinki: Kikimora Publications. ISSN 1457-9251.
- [10] RID, Thomas. 2013. Cyber War Will Not Take Place. London: C. Hurst. ISBN 0199330638.
- [11] SMITH M.L.R. 2005. Strategy in an age of ‘low-intensity’ warfare: why Clausewitz is still more relevant than his critics. In: Rethinking the nature of war. Duyvesteyn, I. and Ångstrom, J. (eds). London: Frank Cass. ISBN 9780415354622.