

WARFARE GENERATIONS. CONVENTIONAL AND UNCONVENTIONAL IN WARFARE EVOLUTION

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The current article highlights the evolution of warfare generations and how the conventional/unconventional relationship has changed over time. Looking from this perspective, for the time being, no paradigm allows a complete comparative analysis of the armed confrontations. As the humankind has evolved, the conflict has known a continuous evolution, the nature of warfare being in a perpetual transformation and adaptation to the evolution of technology.

The change consists of the fact that the quantitative dimension has decreased in importance, in relation to the qualitative dimension, and information has taken the place of firepower. The information field has become the main battlefield, and remote actions, without direct contact, have become the main means of achieving objectives. In this article, the evolution of warfare is presented in several distinct phases, also called generations. Therefore, each age corresponds to a warfare generation, grouped based on certain common features.

Keywords: generations; conventional; unconventional; evolution; change;

INTRODUCTION

Over time, warfare has known different forms of materialisation; wars have been classified into different typologies, forms of manifestation and ways of being approached. The purpose of this article is to analyse one of these approaches, namely, the generational one.

Once scientists have accepted the notion of “*warfare generation*”, it is obvious that other generations would continue to appear, in one form or another, at a certain rate of recurrence, depending on technological, doctrinal, ideological etc. influences. Generations of warfare will evolve because the war itself has undergone many “*qualitative changes*”. Generally speaking, optimistic analysts support the idea that a new generation of warfare will emerge whenever previously unnoticed issues are discovered: “*...generations will never end. They will continue to appear, one after another, ad infinitum, in all form of defence literature.[...] because enthusiasts will convince themselves that they have discovered a new generation of warfare every time they find some aspect of conflict they failed to notice earlier*” (Haug, Maaø, 2012, p. 49).

The emergence of a new generation of warfare bears the imprint of the previous generation, at least as a term of comparison and is shaped by the “*requirements of the conflict of the new type of society*” (Văduva, 2008, p. 37). In other words, analysed from this perspective, the concept of war “*is shaped according to the configuration of the world and evolves on the main coordinates on which the world actually evolves*” (Ibid, p. 20).

Although the generational approach is not an exhaustive one, it helps us to understand the complexity of the “*warfare*” phenomenon and, once we understand the particularities of each generation, we can also understand the coordinates on which the world evolves. In other words, knowing the directions of conflict development helps us to understand the present and to anticipate the future, within certain limits.

As Gheorghe Văduva mentioned, in a paper published in 2008, “*the knowledge of warfare, especially of the new warfare, i.e. the war or wars of the 4th generation, remains one of the great challenges of the present and the future*” (Ibid.).

This article aims at accomplishing the descriptive analysis of each generation of warfare, to identify the social, political, economic and technological changes that have shaped and customised each generation.

FROM THE FIRST GENERATION WARFARE TO THE THIRD GENERATION WARFARE. THE CONVENTIONAL NATURE OF WARFARE AS PERCEIVED FROM THE CURRENT PERSPECTIVE

The transformation of mercenary armies into national and professional armies was the basis for the emergence of modern nation-states. Therefore, the *“analysis of modern warfare should begin with the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, the settlement that ended the Thirty Years’ War and established the state’s monopoly on war”* (Lind, 2004, p. 12).

Since then, the nature of the warfare has changed, being characterised by: *“manpower”* – 1st Generation Warfare (1GW); *“Firepower”* – 2nd Generation Warfare (2GW); *“Manoeuvre”* – 3rd Generation Warfare (3GW).

To understand the Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW), it is important to be aware of the characteristics of previous generations of warfare. Therefore, the concept of 1GW appears with the advent of the modern state. Among its defining elements, we can itemise: the application of strict orders, culture based on obedience, compact fighting formations etc. The methods used are conventional in nature, emphasising the physical strength of the combatants. Also, the scope of the conventional refers to the existence of *“a military balance from a conceptual, organizational, technological and procedural point of view, a fact marked by violence, destructiveness and relatively long duration of the conflict”* (Mitulețu, 2018, p. 46).

The combat was between two states facing each other on a specific battlefield. The American counterinsurgency warfare specialist, Thomas Hammes, claims that the culmination of the First Generation warfare was the Napoleonic Wars at the beginning of the 19th century (Fridman, 2018, p. 20). At the same time, in the article *“Understanding Fourth Generation War”*, William Lind mentions that *“the main relevance of this generation of warfare springs from the fact that the battlefield of order created a military culture of order”*, as *“most things that distinguish military from civilians — uniforms, saluting, careful gradation of rank — were products of the First Generation and intended to reinforce the culture of order”* (2004, p. 12).

The Motto of the First Generation Warfare was *“close with and destroy”*, and the dominant feature was the strict organisation into line and column formations. *“The most prominent characteristic of first-generation warfare is ‘line-and-column’ tactics, whereby battles were formal and the battlefield was orderly”*. (Ibid., p. 20).

The transition from the First Generation Warfare to the Second was a lasting one, with gradual transformations taking place over several decades. Moreover, *“whereas the first generation of warfare was shaped by the ‘line-and column’ tactic that had required a mass deployment of manpower, the second generation warfare sought a solution in mass firepower, most of which was indirect artillery fire”* (Ibid., p. 21).

The regular armed forces, involved in the conflicts of the Second Generation, represented states, alliances or coalitions and the objectives were coordinated and subordinated by the political factor. At the same time, the patriotic impulse quickly changed the perspective of approaching conflicts: *“...the rise of nationalism, particularly in the period during and after the Napoleonic Wars, generated a patriotic impulse among the citizens of nation-states, ultimately bringing millions of men to the colours; this period of second-generation warfare would eventually culminate in the catastrophic losses incurred during the First World War”* (Hammes, 2004, pp. 18-20).

The most representative war in the 2GW category is the First World War, taking into account mainly the French experience, hence the French saying the artillery conquers, the infantry occupies, defining for the 2GW. The increase in firepower decreases the manpower and ideas begin to play an important role in the development of battle tactics. With the advent of weapons, the specific linear practice of the 1GW disappears, and the focus is on the detailed planning of artillery fire, with the synchronized execution of the manoeuvre. Also, the modernisation of warfare has led to an increase in striking power.

“Centrally controlled firepower was carefully synchronised (using detailed, specific plans and order) for infantry, tanks, and artillery in a ‘conducted battle’ where the commander was, in effect, the conductor of an orchestra. [Therefore] the focus was inward, on rules, processes, and procedure. Obedience was more important than initiative. In fact, an initiative was not wanted because it endangered synchronization. Discipline was top-down and imposed” (Fridman, p. 21). The Motto of the Second Generation Warfare was *“putting steel on target”* (Ibid. p. 21).

The Third Generation Warfare appears as a response to the increase in firepower on the battlefield. The Germans, based on their experience of the First World War and aware of the weak industrial background, decide to develop new tactics. Therefore, the 3GW corresponds to the German doctrine of World War II (Blitzkrieg), defined by trying to dominate the opponent by the manoeuvre. The 3GW is characterised by: non-linear tactics, the ability to engage fire, the execution of fire behind enemy positions, destruction of means of communication and transport, and high manoeuvrability.

“Similar to the first and second generations, the development of the third generation of warfare was not a sudden transformation but gradually evolved, with each military progressing at its own pace” (Hammes, 2004, pp. 23-30)

Based on manoeuvre rather than wear and tear confrontation, the 3GW was the first type of warfare to use non-linear tactics. In this type of conflict, the defence was done in-depth, the small units benefiting from great flexibility in decision making, to face the situations on the ground. The use of intelligent strategies could compensate for the technological disadvantage.

“A Third Generation Military focuses outwards, on the situation, the enemy, and the result then situation requires, not inward on process and method. Orders themselves specified the result to be achieved, but never the method. The initiative was more important than obedience” (Lind, p. 13). The Motto of the 3GW is “bypass and collapse” (Fridman, 2018, p. 22).

“Certainly, so-called traditional types of war, such as World War II, involve the use of every available network, by all principal parties. Even the strategic goals in that war went beyond defeating an opponent’s armed might to convincing political decision-makers that their goals were unachievable” (Haug et al. 2012, p. 52).

Upon a bird’s eye view, the three generations of warfare involved regular armed forces, actions aimed at repelling aggression or conquering territories, were destructive and violent, and battles and conflicts took place in the physical space, bearing a joint characteristic. Each generational change was marked by a large dispersal of the battlefield.

FOURTH GENERATION WARFARE, A COMPLEX AND LASTING CONFLICT OF UNCONVENTIONAL NATURE

At the end of the twentieth century, the confrontation reaches a new generation, the fourth. *“According to the advocates of 4GW, modern warfare is an evolved form of insurgency that employs all available networks—political, economic, social, and military – to convince an opponent’s decision-makers that their strategic goals are either unachievable or too costly”* (Echevarria, 2005, p. V).

There have been many contradictions on the subject of the 4GW. When Colonel T.X. Hammes defines the 4th generation war in his book *The Sling and the Stone as an Evolved Form of Insurgency* (Hammes, 2004, pp. 40), William Lind contradict Stone, claiming that he does not understand the 4GW theory very well. According to Lind, the 4GW is not at all a form of insurgency, but it rather refers to *who fights and what they fight for*. The emphasis is on the moral dimension¹ and not on the intellectual dimension of the conflict (Lesenciuc, 2016). However, Lind’s answer is also not clear, because there is no defining aspect regarding the development of the conflict, HOW? However, the war of the fourth generation concerns the decisions that the enemy makes at the political level. Through political, social and economic networks, as well as through military actions, 4GW actors seek to attack indirectly, aiming at weakening the enemy’s will to fight (remember the role played by the new paradigm of military thinking, defined by the *Strategy of the Indirect Approach* of BH Liddel Hart).

¹ In 2016, Adrian Lesenciuc coined the concept of “moral asymmetry”, in relation to this type of conflict.

Also, the 4GW marks the end of the era of states, and the protagonists of contemporary conflicts are state and non-state actors, the role of regular armies decreasing. The 4GW is characterised by the widespread use of technology, and the fact that many states are modernizing their armed forces can even be considered an “optical illusion”.

The actions of this form of conflict include society, culture, not just physical entities involved. In the 4GW “*the battlefield is the whole of the enemy’s society and the goal is to collapse the enemy internally, rather than physically destroying him*” (Lind et al, 1989, pp. 5, 8). Therefore, most military facilities (aerodromes, headquarters, etc.) are dispersed due to the vulnerability created by their concentration in one place.

The fundamental element of the 4GW is the belief that “*the superior political will on the part of insurgents can defeat a greater economic and military power*” (Sloan, 2008, p. 10). The 4GW-specific tactics and planning are very different from those of a conventional war. These are violent tactics (involving a wide range of actions, from complex low-intensity conflict to beheading videos, attacks on peacekeeping officers, or bombings on oil infrastructure, etc.), as well as non-violent tactics (use of the Internet and other media).

The distinction between peace and war, as well as between civilians and the military, may fade, or even disappear for good. The sphere of influence of the 4GW is reflected in several areas.

In the 4GW, opponents seek to manipulate the media to alter public opinion to the point where the use of psychological and information operations will exclude, in general, the engagement of armed forces into combat. Population support becomes the main target and information the most important operational weapon. Expansion in the media sphere represents a conceptual rupture in relation to classical conflicts.

“Fourth generations opponents are not invincible. They can be beaten, but only by coherent, patient actions that encompass all agencies of the government and elements of the private sector” (Hammes, p. 7).

FIFTH GENERATION WARFARE. ACTION DIRECTIONS OR PURE SPECULATIONS?

The evolutionary nature of the way wars were conducted led military theorists to question the emergence of the Fifth Generation Warfare. At the same time, despite the controversies regarding the clear delimitation of 4GW, some authors claim the existence of 5GW, even 6GW.

Even if the 5GW is less analysed, it is a confrontation involving irregular forces, without a centre of gravity, where state power is declining, while success varying inversely with the military power (Coerr, 2009, pp. 63). Even the use of violence may have some hidden logic because irrational and sudden destruction undermines the idea that nations are viable in the modern world. The 5GW is no longer a war in the true sense of the word. It is a unilateral war, in which it is not known who is “fighting”. The purpose of this type of war is to alter the relations of different natures, first of all, the economic relations. A conflict of the 5th generation carried out discreetly may manifest itself in such a way that the conflict cannot be explicitly understood within the limits of the definition of war. One can easily draw an analogy with the paradoxical explanation of the perfect robbery: *What does the perfect robbery look like? We will never know the answer because the bank will not know that it was robbed either.* Under these conditions, the simplest way to avoid war is the ability of states to produce subtle war, unidentifiable in these terms.

The 5GW could be the time when the future world powers will be able to adopt indirect means in their competition for power. China, Russia, India, the EU, as well as North Korea are also focusing their attention on this aspect of the 5th generation confrontation. The new era of warfare could be characterised by artificial intelligence and cyber warfare.

CONCLUSIONS

Any change, in any field, has effects on the understanding, planning and execution of military operations.

There are many theories about the generations of warfare, with some analysts even concerned with reinventing war so as for them to be one step ahead of the competition. Only critical thinking about the future, by imposing high standards in the military thinking, can avoid embracing *half-grounded theories*. Therefore, a rigorous comparative analysis of the generations of warfare could be a solution to understanding the conflict.

“Debating changes in warfare and how policies and doctrines should adapt to them can be beneficial, but only if we are willing to be rigorous” (Haug et al, p. 51).

Although some analysts argue that the generational approach is misleading, perhaps even artificial, portraying the types of confrontations in generational terms is just a way to analyse and understand how the phenomenon of war has evolved. We consider it beneficial to speculatively prospect the future, and in terms of the future of the military confrontation, this generational approach allows us to explore new perspectives and new possibilities.

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