

BEZPIECZEŃSTWO / SECURITY

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**THE ROLE THE ARMED FORCES LIKELY TO PLAY
IN FUTURE CONFLICTS****Introduction**

The military planners have always been wrestling with the problem of predicting the future security environment and conducting force planning in the best way. The predictions are never reliable, but much better than playing by ear. Because without evaluating the situation, it is difficult to make a viable plan in order to achieve stated goals. The security environment has evolved into a volatile, unpredictable and increasingly grey area of war and peace over the last three decades, from high-tempo, maneuver-based operations to low intensity and asymmetrical conflicts. A long-standing challenge for future Armed Forces will be how to understand and synchronize actions across multiple domains (land, air, sea, as well as cyberspace). A successful picture of the anticipated future security environment depends on how we assess the changes in current security environment. The application of military forces is the synchronized use of all forms of tactical actions in time, space and purpose to achieve strategic objectives, completely or in part. There are several options available to a government seeking to achieve its political objectives. These options might include the use of soft and hard power through diplomatic, economic and military means. Regarding the political and military goals, Sun Tzu wrote already in 513 B.C.: “The supreme art of war is to conquer the enemy without battle”¹.

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¹ A. Jaeski, *Hybrid Warfare on the Rise: A New Dominant Military Strategy?*, <<https://www.stratcomcoe.org/article-deputy-director-aivar-jaeski-hybrid-warfare-rise-new-dominant-military-strategy>>, Access date: 24.11.2015.

There are a plethora of reasons to believe that, whether we like it or not, ground warfare does have a future, and a very significant one at that. Approximately 15 million out of world's 20 million full-time military personnel, are in their nations' respective armies. Today wars are mostly fought within states by ground forces². Even though interstate wars are rare, they might happen, and then neighboring states will definitely be involved with heavy concentration of ground combat.

1. Anticipated character of future conflicts

The war has a constant nature, but an ever-changing character. Therefore, there are not exact templates for different wars happening in the world. That obligates us to be prepared for the evolving character and diverse forms of future warfare³. In order to describe the actions that Armed Forces can take in future conflicts, we must understand the environment, or the context, in which military operations might take place. An incomplete understanding of operational environment will complicate the military leader's decision-making process. Useful predictions should be made to portray the environment before open conflict kicks off, and to describe how a conflict progresses. Having juxtaposed the past (at least 20 years back) and current security environments we can be sure that we will continue to be surprised in future. What has really changed over time? What could change further? The answer is clear-cut. The rise of well-armed non-state actors has challenged the conventional security environment and old concepts of war along with limiting the individual states to respond to them. Now it is more difficult to recognize your enemy than it was three decades ago. Knowing and countering an adversary strategy is fundamental as per Sun Tzu, but having categories for enemy tactics of war encourages "formulaic doctrinal responses keyed to the tactical character of the enemy's chosen behavior"⁴. Both old and new concepts of war will coexist in the future operating environment too. Thus, while some adversaries will use new weapon systems and information operations, some will attack infrastructures and attempt to mobilize populations using ideological grievances, but others will physically dig trenches and fight at close quarters. Each and every conflict will have its own context⁵. What is important is to know your adversaries. In addition, future conflicts will also require a detailed understanding of the strategic objectives of the enemy. Sun Tzu proposed the timeless theory, "know

² M. E. O'Hanlon, *Revisiting the roles and missions of the armed forces*, <<https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/revisiting-the-roles-and-missions-of-the-armed-forces>>, Access date: 05.11.2015.

³ F. G. Hoffman, *Thinking About Future Conflict*, "USMCR, Marine Corps Gazette; Quantico", Vol. 98, Iss. 11, <<https://search.proquest.com/marinecorps/docview/1619980305?accountid=48498>>, Access date: 11.2014.

⁴ F. G. Hoffman, *Ibid*.

⁵ R. A. Johnson, *Predicting Future War*, "Parameters" 44(1), Spring 2014, pp. 65–76, http://www.defence.gov.au/ADC/ADFJ/ Documents/issue_196/Johnson_April_2015.pdf.

the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril”⁶. This theory is applicable to any war, but is critically important to combating a dynamic and unpredictable threat. Understanding your enemy thoroughly leads to a clear strategy and makes a resounding success more viable than we think. That is why it is essential to describe the environment before open conflict. Terms such as the “gray zone”, “ambiguous”, and “hybrid” warfare attempt to delineate such environments.

The concept of a “gray zone” between peace and war is not a new phenomenon. For example, the 2010 United States Quadrennial Defense Review mentioned challenges “in the ambiguous gray area that is neither fully war nor fully peace”. The Gray Zone hits on following ideas: it is between war and peace, it avoids triggers to military response or diplomatic intervention, and it involves “intense competition” that avoids a conventional military response⁷.

Ambiguous warfare provides another way to describe an environment before open conflict occurs. “Ambiguous warfare” has no formal definition, and, although the term has been around since at least the 1980s, it has seen a recent increase largely due to Russia’s actions in Crimea and Ukraine. Ambiguous warfare is applicable “in situations in which a state or non-state belligerent actor deploys troops and proxies in a deceptive and confusing manner – with the intent of achieving political and military effects while obscuring the belligerent’s direct participation”⁸.

“Hybrid warfare” refers to the blending of methods of war, where any adversary simultaneously employs a tailored mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal behavior in the same time and battle space to obtain their political objectives⁹. As we have discussed, such approaches currently fall best into the ambiguous warfare or Gray Zone category, while hybrid warfare involves open conflict and bloodshed.

Today’s Armed Forces are more or less optimized for the conflicts that we fought in the past. Therefore, there is a growing sense that modern Armed Forces are lagging pretty much behind time. Future conflicts will be increasingly hybrid in character. This type of conflict is transcending our conventional understanding. It has rendered the security environment on a global scale far more complex. Our adversaries are almost changing their mindset. They are aiming to exploit our weaknesses using a wide variety of hybrid techniques. That means if the Armed Forces does not brace itself for this type of war, then the consequences will be dire for certain countries. It is clear that the challenges

⁶ J. R. Davis Jr., U.S. Army, *Defeating Future Hybrid Threats: The Greatest Challenge to the Army Profession of 2020 and Beyond*, “Military Review”, September–October 2013, pp. 21–29, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/e44e/6d71a2cf93ce67397479275a5fe93910fdb8.pdf>.

⁷ D. A. Broyles and B. Blankenship, *The Role of Special Operations Forces in Global Competition*, 2017, https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/DRM-2017-U-015225-1Rev.pdf.

⁸ D. A. Broyles and B. Blankenship, *Ibid.*

⁹ E. Nasirov, K. Iskandarov, *Looming hybrid threats in Europe and NATO’s deterrence*, w: *Съвременни предизвикателства пред сигурността и отбраната. Сборник доклади от годишната научна конференция на факултет «Национална сигурност и отбрана», 18–19 май 2017 г., София 2017, pp. 22–27.*

of the future will demand to adapt new approaches if we want to succeed. As Michael Howard mentioned: 'No matter how clearly one thinks, it is impossible to anticipate precisely the character of future conflict. The key is to not be so far off the mark that it becomes impossible to adjust once that character is revealed'¹⁰. It necessitates taking stock of security challenges arising from both hybrid wars and hybrid threats in the South Caucasus region.

As we mentioned above, anticipated future military demands are absolutely determined by current conditions. The adversaries who are evolving in this environment will operate in places where we may not expect or prefer. They will base themselves in locations that are not strongly governed and will connect with one another across the global commons. They will operate in vast urban settings where dense population, built-up terrain, and transportation and communications networks intersect, and they will make it difficult to discriminate between civilian and military personnel and assets¹¹. Nevertheless, a well-developed and detailed future hybrid threat model is difficult to create because each hybrid war will be unique. The evolution of the threat and its truly "hybrid" nature will always create new enemies for us to fight based on the actors involved¹².

Some nations have taken the asymmetric approach a step further and are seeking the ways to achieve warfare objectives without ever entering into open conflict. These countries have focused on winning today, before conflict begins, and in fact, they actively avoid open conflict in order to prevent a likely loss in further stages¹³. Therefore, without scrutinizing the approaches the adversaries apply today it is a pipe dream to carve out a conclusive success in future operations. So, the future conflicts seem to be complex, yet feasible that usher in coexistence and interaction of multiple state and non-state actors. We may coin it with a term "hybrid warfare" which is not limited to the physical battlefield, thus, is a far cry from the conventional wars the world has undergone. It may entail the application of conventional forces, nuclear intimidation, economic and energy pressure, propaganda and disinformation, cyber-attack and destabilization. That is the reason future role of Armed Forces cannot be conceptualized on the past or current security environment.

¹⁰ J. Jones, *Wisdom in doctrine? Success, the role of force, and the unknowable*, <<https://warontherocks.com/2014/11/wisdom-in-doctrine-success-the-role-of-force-and-the-unknowable/>>, Access date: 12.11.2014.

¹¹ J. Becker, *Contexts of Future Conflict and War*, "Joint Force Quarterly" 74, <<https://ndupress.ndu.edu/JFQ/Joint-Force-Quarterly-74/Article/577523/contexts-of-future-conflict-and-war/>>, Access date: 01.06.2014.

¹² J. R. Davis Jr., U.S., *Defeating Future Hybrid Threats...*, pdf.

¹³ D. A. Broyles and B. Blankenship, *The Role of Special Operations Forces...*, pdf.

2. Expected changes in capabilities

The main theme of expected changes is the proliferation of technology. Emerging technologies, for example robotics and artificial intelligence will both increase and challenge the capability of the future Armed Forces. The development of novel weapons and munitions will continue. Cyber capabilities will continue to increase in importance. Computer network attacks will remain attractive. The number of deniable computer network attack operations conducted by states will continue to increase, though attacks designed to cause network destruction will likely remain the course of last resort for state-based actors¹⁴.

There will be a need for multiuse platforms, able to operate on land, sea, and air, and electronically, and there will be smaller numbers of highly trained, well-equipped, and versatile Special Forces, whose vulnerability will be compensated by a range of support options (in transport, intelligence, fires, expertise, and logistics), but in all these state operations, the emphasis will be on greater precision alongside concealment, dispersion, and adaptation to the threats of clandestine attack posed by non-state or proxy forces¹⁵.

As digital technologies accelerate and our dependence on them deepens, future conflict between advanced actors (state or non-state) will also increasingly involve elements of cyber conflict. In contrast to traditional military thinking, in cyberspace it is much easier to attack than to defend, since attackers have multiple potential points of entry¹⁶.

Though geopolitical rivalry will continue to spark conflicts, the confluence of technological development and changes in the rules of war will be a singular factor in determining how the future Armed Forces will fight. The application of new technologies will be a double edge sword presenting both opportunities and challenges. Accelerating scientific work in emerging technologies (robotics, nanotechnology, unmanned air and sea vehicles, artificial intelligence and etc.) will of course present new opportunities for improving security. But they will also pose new threats with the potential to wreak untold havoc¹⁷. To take advantage of the opportunities and successfully confront the challenges, the Armed Forces will need to evolve and adapt across each of the inputs to capability. Given these opportunities and challenges it is anticipated that the future Armed Forces will require a diverse set of capabilities – some of which are not currently available. The greatest threat will be actors who combine strategies of subversion and destabilization with ambiguous approaches to warfare and combinations of highly sophisticated and low-cost weapons. These actors will have advantages in terms of gaining access to and manipulating the battle space and exploiting

¹⁴ *Future Operating Environment: 2035*, AO CSC RAN, 60 p., p. 20, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/646821/20151203-FOE_35_final_v29_web.pdf>, Access date: 03.12.2015.

¹⁵ A. Kaspersen, *What will militaries of the future look like?* <<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/08/what-will-militaries-of-the-future-look-like/>>, Access date: 12.08.2015.

¹⁶ A. Kaspersen, *Ibid.*

¹⁷ A. Kaspersen, *Ibid.*

opportunities for gain on a “prepared” informational landscape¹⁸. However, the allocation of funds to train for multiple mission sets will be a hard budgetary sell. The Armed Forces may find itself strained to find innovative ways to train for more, with fewer resources. Units will face adversity training for both conventional warfare and irregular warfare to be considered experts in both disciplines. The knowledge of doctrine, strategy, and tactics for both forms of warfare will still exist, but the individual and unit training required converting that knowledge into expertise may not¹⁹.

The place of information in modern war fighting will be further consolidated. Advances in information technology will create new synergies amongst combinations of advanced precision weaponry, improved C4ISR (command, control, communication, computer, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) systems and an expanded use of artificial intelligence and robotics. As an enabler of modern war-fighting, information and data transmission structures (civil and military) will be an important target in future conflicts, as will the social, cultural and political effects of information itself. Adversaries are likely to deploy weapons designed to deceive, degrade, disable or destroy information, networks, sensors, and communication systems²⁰.

The full potential of the mobile internet is yet to be realized. Mobile internet has the potential to bring two to three billion more people into the connected world over the coming decade, mostly from developing countries. The prospect of such a vast number of consumers joining in the digital economy could represent an unprecedented growth opportunity; but it could also fuel significant transformation and disruption²¹.

Finally, urbanization and continued population growth mean that cities are increasingly likely to be playgrounds for conflicts²². Since controlling and influencing the people has become a center of gravity for operations, the urban environment is likely to be a key arena for especially an armed conflict, turning into the battlefield for many opponents. By 2040, two-thirds of the world’s population will be living in cities²³. Is the Armed Forces equipped and the society prepared to conduct urban operations in the pursuit of stability and security? The armed forces might not have a choice in future crisis management operations, but to engage in urban operations.

However, we have to bear in mind that the defense priority should not be investing solely in hardware. The balance ought to be struck between technology and people. For instance, according to colonel T.X. Hammes, an expert on irregular warfare, the US (with the most developed army of the

¹⁸ *Future Operating Environment: 2035...*, Access date: 03.12.2015.

¹⁹ J. R. Davis Jr., U.S. Army, *Defeating Future Hybrid Threats...*, pdf.

²⁰ *Future Operating Environment: 2035...*, Access date: 03.12.2015.

²¹ *Future Operating Environment: 2035*, Ibid.

²² B. Giegerich, *European military capabilities and future conflict*, “Egmont, Royal Institute for International relations”, Vol. 8, No. 7, <<https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/european-military-capabilities-and-future-conflict>>, Access date: 08.03.2016.

²³ *The future of war*, <<https://www.economist.com/special-report/2018/01/25/the-future-of-war>>, Access date: 25.02.2018.

world) administration's vision of transformation placed too much faith in technology and simply disregard any action taken by an intelligent, creative opponent to negate our technology, in fact they seem to reduce the enemy to a series of inanimate targets to be serviced. This target-centric approach focused on winning battles, not wars²⁴. Thus, in order to achieve stated objectives the Armed Forces desperately need skilled personnel, both military and civilian.

3. Implications for future Armed Forces

Modern Armed Forces of some certain countries might be second to none on the conventional battlefield but are far less prepared to deal with the emerging irregular or nontraditional challenges they are most likely to confront for the foreseeable future. Preparing for future war is predicated upon transformation more than adhering to the immutable realities of war. We must delve into the history in order to deduce results from past precedents. At the same time we must look forward in order not to be caught off-guard in future conflicts. The Armed Forces' first and foremost priority is and will certainly be to ensure the safety and security of the nations it belongs to and defend the country's sovereign territory, population, and interests within its internationally recognized borders. However, oceanic distances and international borders do not insulate the homeland from the global trend of increasingly permeable trade, travel, and money movement illicit or otherwise. Free and open access to the Internet means adversaries can communicate directly with agents and sympathizers within the country²⁵. In the future, non-state actors will have more access to capabilities that previously were only available to the Armed Forces. Thus, a modern military force capable of waging a war against a large conventional force may find itself ill prepared for an unconventional or irregular war conducted by a small and lightly equipped force. The financial and economic sanctions, cyber defense, reconnaissance, and police investigations as well as information campaigns are to be synchronized as best as possible through networking in line with an effective defense strategy²⁶. The changing character of the conflict (for instance, the anticipated cyber-attacks) highlights a looming challenge, which in turn necessitates the need for the military personnel to develop particular skills.

We cannot afford optimization across a narrow band, a doctrine devoted to one method of fighting, or a capability set constrained to only those enemies we desire to fight²⁷. It is therefore alarming that the vast majority of nations' military doctrines are apparently unprepared when it comes to hybrid threats. Changes in threat perception will have a significant impact on the transformation

²⁴ L. J. Korb, M. A. Bergmann, *Restructuring the Military*, "Issues in Science & Technology", Vol. XXV, No 1, Fall, 2008, <https://issues.org/korb>.

²⁵ J. Becker, *Contexts of Future Conflict and War...*, Access date: 01.06.2014.

²⁶ F. G. Hoffman, *Thinking About Future Conflict...*, Access date: 11.2014.

²⁷ F. G. Hoffman, *Ibid*.

of the Armed Forces. That means the transformation has to entail the integration of military doctrines, technology and personnel in order to develop a lethal, connected and advanced force capable of dominating the battlefields of the future. Since the rule of law and Geneva Conventions do not limit a hybrid threat's operations, future forces must be versatile, responsive, and decisive while remaining affordable to the nations. Contexts of future conflict and war help bring together disparate trends, clarify likely emerging military challenges, and encourage new combinations of capabilities that our current approaches and mindsets may overlook or discount. The essence of our innovative combinations of capabilities should serve to hold adversary sources of power in order to nip the threat in the bud²⁸.

In order to defeat an irregular force or win an unconventional war the Armed Forces should keep its finger on the pulse and control the security environment. Following activities are to be consistently carried out:

- contesting ideological conflict over global networks;
- defending the homeland and providing support to civil authorities;
- ensuring access to and protection of the global commons;
- protecting forward bases and partners or controlling key terrain;
- stabilizing or isolating failed and failing states and ungoverned spaces.

The Armed Forces will find itself in increasingly sharp competition with other state actors, therefore has to improve its warfare techniques. In the future, cyberspace will increasingly claim similar importance and status as central elements of national power, wealth, and security, requiring the Armed Forces to play its role to protect and assure access to it.

Shared security challenges, regional military modernization, and partnered responses to multiple crises will provide opportunities to establish and deepen regional and global military-to-military relationships. As far as force planning is concerned the future forces planners should make all prudently permissible allowance for future uncertainty, while making suitable definite preparation with military capabilities that could meet a wide range of possibilities²⁹. An emphasis should be placed on quality over quantity, especially in this fiscally restrained budget environment.

Future forces will make use of stealth, systemically operating through communications networks and through the exploitation of the vulnerabilities of society. They will use information warfare to spread fear and panic, but also wage kinetic warfare on and among civilian populations. The aim will be to destroy financial systems, infrastructure, and the willingness to sustain resistance. This unconventional warfare will be more frequent than the sustained, high-intensity wars of the past. To meet these threats, states have to identify their own vulnerabilities, and take steps to address them, even if this means the reorganization of their armed forces³⁰.

²⁸ J. Becker, *Contexts of Future Conflict and War...*, Access date: 01.06.2014.

²⁹ F. G. Hoffman, *Thinking About Future Conflict...*, Access date: 11.2014.

³⁰ R. A. Johnson, *Predicting Future War...*, pdf.

However, it doesn't matter how professional the Armed Forces is, it can not solely stave off future threats and finally eradicate them. It is a war of the nation, and has to be fought by the nation. Hence, under the concept of "whole-of-nation" approach synergetic application of all elements of national power in sync with each other is not only desired but is crucially required. A comprehensive national response is the only way to manage hybrid threat in order to make the state secure, stable and resilient. Concept of countering hybrid threat revolves around protecting the society by mitigating the vulnerabilities and enhancing its confidence therefore strong political will and national solidarity are imperative for implementation of the comprehensive national response with ready and arrayed military forces to deter the threat is essential, if it transcends to war/conventional intervention. Trust from soldier to soldier, soldier to officer, civilian leaders to Army leaders, and between citizens and the Army creates mutual bonds of confidence in the actions of the other. Skepticism and doubts wreak havoc on the bonds of trust critical for the Armed Forces to fully function. In the 2006 Second Lebanon War, broken trust between the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) and the Israeli people were broadcast across country. Front-page stories in newspapers questioned the IDF decision-making process, failing goals in the war, and army performance. As a result, the Israeli public was demoralized and frustrated³¹. It has happened throughout history and can happen again. Therefore, the Armed Forces must develop a more integrated approach across all government agencies, as well as civilian population.

Conclusion

Since conventional wars are less feasible especially between global and regional powers and nuclear exchange is unthinkable, we may suppose that future adversaries will wage hybrid war against each other or instigate irregular or unconventional war in the third (mainly in fragile and failed) countries to sap each other's strength, since some states continue to strive for maximization of power at the cost of other states. Most probably for the foreseeable future the armed forces will have to be enmeshed in hybrid scenarios where the boundaries between war and peace appear strangely blurred. Nothing seems clear, only one thing is certain: in this form of warfare, the military will supposedly be no longer dominant. The use of civilian methods and means to achieve political goals will apparently outpace the classical categories of military thought and actions. This will not necessarily lead to the marginalization of the Armed Forces. It will have the paramount importance but new approaches should be adopted. Because for future Armed Forces it will be impossible to react to various threats with one-size-fits-all campaigns. Covert operations combined with economic pressure, deliberate disinformation and propaganda, stirring up social tensions in target areas, finally overt use of professional

³¹ J. R. Davis Jr., U.S. Army, *Defeating Future Hybrid Threats...*, pdf.

soldiers without insignia and building up military forces close to borders will be the intrinsic elements of future conflicts. It stipulates the personnel of the armed forces to be intellectually prepared for unlimited political character of hybrid conflicts. Nations will have to conduct continual self-assessments in order to understand their vulnerabilities. Armed forces will be obliged to adapt to new security environment. One way to improve the ability to adapt is to emphasize the importance of innovation, improvisation and adaptation, and use the past as a critical guide for educational development and institutional change. Future generations of soldiers will have to do much more than simply fighting in a conventional battlefield. Therefore, the wars in the future will require more technician-warriors, able to operate various devices both in defense and offense.

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THE ROLE THE ARMED FORCES LIKELY TO PLAY IN FUTURE CONFLICTS

SUMMARY

Throughout history, changes in the character of war have always been difficult for contemporaries to identify and assess. The context of future conflicts and wars can help the nations to make sound decisions on designing the tasks and missions of future forces. This paper offers a view on the character of future conflicts, seeks to describe what Armed Forces are likely to experience in future conflicts in light of dynamic changes in current security environment, and provides recommendations on the areas with the shortfalls, which could be essential to their success. It assesses how we think about future war, drawing attention to its associated caveats, obstacles, and intellectual problems. The author focuses attention on the issues related the activities referred to as "hybrid", and the possibility of using the Armed Forces' potential in terms of identification and elimination of threats. The conclusion of the paper presents a clear picture of future generations of the soldiers based on the requirements predicted throughout the article.

KEY WORDS: future conflict, hybrid warfare, Armed Forces, gray zone, asymmetric warfare

