

States vs. Non-State Actors: Asymmetric Conflict of the 21st Century and Challenges to Military Transformation

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A successful asymmetric opponent seeks to fight a major conventional power above and below its level of conventional competence and superiority (A. Cordesman)¹

INTRODUCTION

Asymmetric Warfare (AW) is one of the most serious challenges that states and their militaries are facing in the contemporary complex, rapidly evolving and the not too predictable global security environment. This Special Report in two parts is addressing different aspects of this issue. The **first part** identifies the problem by providing an outlook at the strategic landscape, rise of violent non-state actors and defines asymmetric warfare. The **second part** is focused on different practical aspects of AW, as well as responses of the state military systems on the challenges posed by it.

GLOBAL SETTINGS

Since the late 1980s–early 1990s, when the bipolar system of the world ceased to exist, the global landscape has been continuously evolving. The major determinants of this process are as follows:

- High fragmentation, fluidity and unpredictability patterns of global dynamics.
- Overwhelming impact of ongoing **globalization**, both positive and negative, associated with the deformation of notion of geography and distance due to information and transportation revolution(s), and growing influence of technology.
- Gradual diminishing of the **Westphalian system**² and centrality of nation-states, correlated with a declining threshold of national sovereignty, resulted, beyond other reasons, from the rising bar of international law, spread of common values and norms of international behavior.
- Emergence of a multiple and diverse pool of violent and defiant Non-State Actors (NSA), empowered by the globalization impact and diminishing role of states, and enabled by radical ideologies, access to finance and open-source technologies.

¹ Anthony H. Cordesman, "The Lessons of the Israeli-Lebanon War," *Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy, Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 2008, slide 13.

² Named after the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) that ended the Thirty Years War in Europe, the system is based on the recognition of a state as a primary actor in international relations.

- A resulted loss of monopoly of states on mass organized violence and resurgence of the specific category from the above mentioned pool – Violent Non-State Actors (VNSA).³
- Change in the global conflict dynamic with the reducing number of interstate wars (armed conflicts) and the parallel rise in number of inter-state wars (armed conflicts).

The last point is important from the perspective of this essay. The wars and armed conflicts between states that were common during the Cold War (and the previous three centuries) and were fought for the national interests (such territory, resources and power) and appear to be in a sharp decline nowadays:⁴ So far in the previous decade (2000-2010) only three intrastate wars took place (Ethiopia – Eritrea in 1999 – 2000, USA – Iraq in 2003 and Russia – Georgia in 2008). Instead, since the 1990s they were largely replaced by intrastate conflicts, involving mostly sub-national interests (such as ethnicity, religion and culture); consequently, in this kind of conflict the politico-ideological causes common for the CW period are largely replaced by the matters that make more complex, bloody and harder to solve.⁵ These settings are further aggravated and influenced by international terrorism, failed or failing states, violent organized crime activities and other, often interrelated factors. The crucial and omnipresent participating element emerged in the described conflict environment are VNSA. They constitute a pool of real or potential adversaries, and this is important from the perspective of the current analysis.

VIOLENT NON-STATE ACTORS

VNSA is an “old-new” phenomenon.⁶ It refers to an existing constellation of terrorist, insurgent, guerrilla, extremist political or religious, resistance, and organized crime structural units (such as quasi-states, movements, organizations, parties, groups, even the empowered individuals), operating worldwide. What makes them different from the Cold War-era is almost complete disappearance of “patron – proxy” relationships with the states.⁷ VNSA became **independent actors** in global politico-military settings. Below is a selected empirical evidence, driven from disparate geopolitical regions and conflict settings that provide some understanding of the physical capabilities and strategic outreach of certain actors from VNSA domain vis-à-vis the nation-states.

- The so-called “Karabakh Defense Forces” of the “Nagorno-Karabakh Republic,” an ethnic Armenian separatist entity created on the occupied part of territory of Azerbaijan, reportedly have 316 Main Battle Tanks (MBT) in its order of battle (as for 2004).⁸ It possess more MBTs than such NATO members as Canada, Belgium, Norway, Denmark or Portugal have.

³ States maintain a right to a legitimate violence since the emergence of the Westphalian system in the 17th Century, operating in the framework of international law. As far as the non-state actors are concerned, they were engaged in violence earlier; however, the contemporary level and magnitude of violence, projected by NSA, make it compatible with the state and gives a reason to treat the state monopoly on violence as broken. It should be also noted that VNSA can also include resistance movements such as Hizbollah.

⁴ Charles Kurzman and Neil Englehart, “Welcome to World Peace,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 30, 2006.

⁵ *Challenges of Peace Operations: Into the 21st Century: Concluding Report Executive Summary*. 1997 – 2002 Seminars in Peace Operations, 13.

⁶ For more details see: Phil Williams, “Violent Non-State Actors and National and International Security,” *ISN* (2008), <http://se2.isn.ch/serviceengine/FileContent?serviceID=ISFPub&fileID=8EEBA9FE-478E-EA2C-AA15-32FC9A59434A&lng=en> (accessed February 13, 2009).

⁷ That said, the nexus between states and VNSA still remains, but the modalities have been changed, as it is indicated further.

⁸ *The Military Balance 2004 – 2005* (London: Routledge for the International Institute for Security Studies, 2004), 82.

- The Colombian drugs cartels' "navy" has presumably the third largest submarine force in the world, after the U.S. and the Chinese.⁹ Though they could not launch torpedoes or cruise missiles and are used for covert cocaine shipments, being submersibles rather than real submarines, nonetheless their existence uses up sufficient resources of the USN and the Latin American militaries.
- The Lebanese Shiite movement *Hezbollah* has emerged as a first non-state actor processing "strategic missile forces." By a sustained and massive use of "dumb" unguided missiles (based on the World War Two constructive design) during the Summer 2006 armed conflict in Lebanon, the mentioned entity was able to influence the perceptions of the domestic, adversary's, regional and international audience, creating at least the strong impression of strategic "victory" over Israel, which was not achieved by its foes in the previous six decades of conventional warfare in the Middle East.¹⁰

There are two dimensions among others that are important to keep in mind when analyzing VNSA as a generic challenge, and calculating the possible response. Those dimensions are structural and territorial. From the **structural** standpoint, leaving aside the traditional "hierarchical" organizational structure, that is gradually becomes a matter of the past, it is possible to identify too the most challenging models of organization. The first is a modular structure that encompasses diverse components, operating under the same umbrella: a military wing (often hybrid, merging guerrilla forces with terrorist cells); a political wing (i.e., front organization, often legal), social committees (targeting the groups of population viewed as a basis of support), logistic networks (for sustainment and fundraising, often combining legal businesses with organized crime components), a media bloc or a propaganda wing. The examples of such "onion" structures consisting of multiple "layers" and broad *modus operandi*, ranging from classical terrorism and insurgency to legal political activities are the large VNSA entities such as HAMAS (Gaza), Hezbollah (Lebanon), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Kurdish Workers Party (a.k.a. PKK, Turkey) or Tamil Tigers (a.k.a. LTTE, Sri Lanka). However powerful, these and similar entities have a physical signature, certain hierarchies and centers of gravity to address, such as leadership, which neutralization would help at least to reduce their capabilities and impact.¹¹ The second model – horizontal networks – being centered on the autonomous entities, united by ideology, shared goals and common vision of the enemy, but operating separately from each other, is more challenging and harder to deal with. Having no robust and overarching operational C2 structure, low physical signature and no center of gravity, they represent a significant threat.¹²

The second dimension – the **territorial** is related to a trend of VNSA taking over the non-governed territories across the world (be it failed states, lawless areas, or other kinds of 'grey zones'), converting them into safe-heavens, staging bases, operational hubs and zones of illegal economic activities, such as drugs production. VNSA are growingly investing into legalization through creating

⁹ David Kushner, "Drug-Sub Culture," *The New York Times*, April 23, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/26/magazine/26drugs-t.html?pagewanted=1&_r=2 (accessed February 18, 2010).

¹⁰ Tom Nelson, "The Second Lebanon War: Three Perspectives," *Joint Center for Operational Analysis Journal XI*, Issue 2 (Spring 2009), 6.

¹¹ For example, the elimination of the LTTE leadership has significantly contributed into end of conflict in Sri Lanka.

¹² An example of such entity is Al-Qaeda v2.0 (i.e. post 9/11) that adopted itself to the sustained pressure from the states, taking to account lessons learned from Al-Qaeda v1.0 experience in Afghanistan (2001), where its more traditional hierarchical system ceased to exist after the coalition invasion.

quasi “states”¹³ that replicate real ones; moreover, they already create shadowy alliances of such entities, like so called CIS-2 (“Community of Improvised States”)¹⁴ consisting of self-styled “republics” of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Transnistria, which succeeded by force from their “parent” nation-states. Another eloquent example is the so-called HISH (HAMAS – Iran – Syria – *Hezbollah*) alliance, a constellation of two states that often operate as “terrorist” entities, and two resistance entities that pretend to act as states. These two particular examples illustrate further the ascending curve of VNSA, as well as how patchy, complex and diverse the security environment, compared with the period of the Cold War.

Yet, notwithstanding the current intentions, ambitions and capabilities of particular non-state actors, in general, the entire category remains essentially **weaker** than nation-states. The disparity transforms the nature contemporary military conflict, involving the non-state actors, into the **asymmetric** mode. This brings us to the issue of definition of the problem.

ASYMMETRIC WARFARE

Like many other broad and differently viewed notions (for example, terrorism), asymmetric warfare (AW) lacks a “unified” or commonly agreed definition of the issue; rather, there are many of them. However, there is a common understanding of the phenomenon. It might be explained as a **willingness and ability of an inferior (weaker) adversary to apply all its strength available against softest points of a superior (stronger) adversary for the sake of accomplishment of the desired strategic ends by delivering any physical, political, economic and mass psychological damage or disruption possible to a latter side.**¹⁵ Still nebulous, this impromptu definition needs some further elaboration.

Basically, **all** wars are dissimilar as adversaries have a different set of advantages and disadvantages *vis-à-vis* each other. However, not all are asymmetric. They turn asymmetric when one of the participating sides starts to use unconventional means and methods in an attempt to mitigate the emerging overwhelming superiority of the adversary. History of modern warfare provides some examples of this kind, most notably the use of kamikaze pilots and human torpedoes by the Japanese at the final stages of the War in the Pacific. However, most of the nation-states are still locked in the conventional “force-on-force” fighting conceptual loop, save the lower spectrum of warfare (i.e. unconventional operations). However, there are certain indications of a departure from traditional thinking. For instance, Iran became perhaps the first nation-state that officially declared its reliance on the asymmetric strategies and doctrines to counter perceived threats, and Venezuela also moves the same direction. On the other hand China, in more tacit way, develops the *de facto* AW capabilities, such as a pool of state-supported but formally independent cyber-hackers. Yet, since the focus of the Special Report is non-state actors, there is a need to assess the specifics of asymmetry in relation to this specific category.

¹³ Examples are the Sahara Arab Democratic Republic (a.k.a. Western Sahara) and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

¹⁴ This designation is by the author, as opposed to the officially existing post-Soviet CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States).

¹⁵ This provisional definition is by the author, based on the compilation of multiple definitions of AW, found in official documents and research publications.

What is asymmetric in the state vs. NSA conflict? The answer is – everything: goals and objectives, strategies and tactics, quality and quantity, means and tools, resources and potentials, legal norms and moral values. The asymmetry is build along the following lines:

| Domain | Nation-states | Non-state actors |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Societal | Post-modern / Post-industrial | Traditional |
| Organizational (structural) | Hierarchical structures | Net (horizontal) structures |
| Technological | Hi-tech | Low-tech |
| Normative | Disparate legal and ethical standards | |
| War-fighting | Instrumental | Expressive |
| Personal | Soldiers | Warriors |

*This matrix should be treated as a generic template with numerous exceptions, depending on each specific case.

Asymmetry in the state – non-state conflict setting transcends tactical, operational, strategic and political levels and involves physical, conceptual and moral components of warfare. Before addressing these issues, there is one more point left to address, and it is relationship between the notion of asymmetric warfare and Fourth-Generation Warfare (4GW). They are surely interrelated, yet not similar. AW might be in simple terms described as a strategy (see an improvised definition above), while 4GW is a categorization of conflicts, where non-traditional (i.e. non-state foes) are aimed not on a classical victory over the state adversary, but rather at sliding into the disruption mode. In such settings the absence of victory for a state is a defeat, and absence of defeat for a non-state actor is a victory.

POLITICAL WILL AS A CENTER OF GRAVITY

Political will of an adversary is the ultimate Center of Gravity (COG) for a non-state actor, involved in asymmetric conflict. By manipulating political will, the latter side might hope to mitigate or even negate the technological superiority, numerical strength, professionalism and skills of the former, achieving a desired end. This is especially true for VNSA fighting the Western democracies with the established electoral cycles, governments’ accountability, legislative oversight and judicial control, free media and civil societies. By multiplying negative effects and rising cost of military operations for the other side, primarily human lives loss (both enemy military personnel and local civilians), VNSA might successfully manipulate the other side’s public opinion, and through it further change perceptions and behavior of the political echelon, eventually diminishing its will for continuity. The apparent example of such impact into the political sphere is a “Blackhawk Down” event (Somalia, 1993), where a single tactical episode caused a nation-wide outcome, resulted in wrapping up the U.S. engagement and the entire U.N. mission.

In simple terms, the above said might be illustrated by the following imaginable situation. The Venezuelan leader Chavez, obsessed by the *idée-fixe* of the future “U.S. invasion,”¹⁶ buys sophisticated weapons in Russia, such as SU-30 jet fighters and improved *Kilo* class submarines for

¹⁶ The (ir)rationality of such thinking is not discussed here and presented just for the sake of example. By the same token, though Venezuela is a nation-state, the same line of logic (i.e. influence on the adversary’s softest point) is applicable to VNSA’s asymmetric strategy.

defense purposes. However, in case of real invasion this hardware would hardly help him to counter the overwhelming American military might, and likely be rapidly wiped out. However, such simple weapons as 100,000 AK automatic rifles distributed among local militia unit, might give Chavez a hope to send a certain number of “invaders” back home in body-bags, causing a pressure on the domestic public opinion and consequently on the political system, potentially converting the inevitable U.S. tactical (battlefield) successes into a lost war. For this reason, the **political domain** should be considered not just as additional, but even the most important war-fighting domain above five others (i.e. land, air, maritime, space and cyberspace).

Insurgents should move among people like fish in the sea (Mao Tse-Dung)

TACTICAL LEVEL¹⁷

At the tactical level, asymmetric warfare has several distinctions, as follows.

- **Improvisation.** Non-traditional, unconventional approach is a trademark of AW that helps to mitigate the technological gap between state and non-state forces. The violent non-state actors (VNSA) often implement “do-it-yourself” (DIY) track.
- **Simplicity.** Asymmetric adversaries use simple, cheap, but still effective solutions or weapons. They are not restrained or rigidly guided by standard operating procedures; rather, operate in a free mode.
- **Adaptability.** Asymmetric combatant are highly adaptable to a rapidly changing operational environment, countermeasures and pressure; they operate in the “learning-by-fighting” (LBF) mode.
- **Low visibility.** Asymmetric combatant have small physical signature; they are well blended into human terrain in the zone of conflict.

An example that confirms all above mentioned four points is drawn from the recent international coalition experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. Insurgents do not have heavy artillery. However, they use exhausted artillery shells to build roadside bombs (IED). If in conventional warfare an artillery shell, fired from a cannon, moves toward his target by ballistic trajectory, in asymmetric warfare target itself moves towards a shell placed in a designated point of attack. However, in both cases an intended outcome is the same – to cause the harm to the foe. Analysis of the pattern of use of the IED by the Iraqi insurgents demonstrates wide application of improvisation, simplicity and adaptability. In just a few years they were able to develop a broad family of explosive devices, such as body-borne (BBIED), vehicle-born (VBIED), radio-controlled (RCIED), suicide vehicle-borne (SVBIED), explosively formed projectiles (EFP), anti-helicopters mines, etc., that were effectively applied against the coalition troops due to protective characteristics of human terrain. Another, perhaps even more eloquent example of how the four above mentioned distinctions are used by non-state actors, is the suicide bomber. Suicide bombers, by far, are a **smart weapon** which combines both a delivery means and a guidance system in a human body. He/she delivers the weapon to a target and takes a decision on detonation based on the current “moment” environment.

¹⁷ The facts and findings in this and the next sections are driven from the presentation by Jahangir Arasli, “States vs. Non-States Actors: Asymmetric Conflict in the 21st Century,” delivered to the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy on May 7, 2008. If otherwise, additional footnotes are included.

The use of such improvised “weapons” at the tactical level that raise the number of the military and civilian deaths might eventually accumulate a strategic effect. They might not influence decisively the situation in the area of operation; however, they generate political blowback in the capital located thousands miles away.

OPERATIONAL LEVEL

The operational level of the asymmetric conflict has three noteworthy distinctions.

- **Unpredictability.** Insurgent and terrorists are operating in the asynchronous mode. Surprise and uncertainty are the key elements of an asymmetric *Modus Operandi*. The “fog of war” in the asymmetric warfare is much thicker.
- **Decentralization.** Asymmetric adversaries are often represented a loose constellation of autonomous networks with no central command authority. That means they do not have a clearly defined center of gravity to address in order to defeat.
- **Self-sustainment.** Asymmetric adversaries largely do not depend on vast logistic networks. They outsource materiel support from the population they belong to.

A particular example of the explained features of AW is driven from the Tamil War in Sri Lanka. In March 2007 the international airport of Colombo was attacked by two light aircraft that dropped several improvised bomb without causing much materiel damage.¹⁸ The aircraft were procured in the Czech Republic from a private source, delivered via the third party, and then converted to improvise bombers locally. However, the tourism revenues dropped in a single first month by \$38 million. Thus, unpredictable high-visibility attack, multiplied by media, converted a self-sustained logistic effort into a strategic success at that time.

STRATEGIC LEVEL

Some aspects related to this level were addressed in Section 5 of this paper. In addition to that, there are the following features of AW.

- **Ambiguity.** In asymmetric warfare all distinction lines are blurred. The said is true in regard to lines between war and political domains, peace and conflict, combatants and non-combatants, battlefield and safety, etc.
- **Shift in center of gravity.** The primary goal of asymmetric non-state adversaries is to defeat the political will of the states (societies) they fight against. The main effort usually targets political domain, and the described pattern of inflicting casualties to state is an effective lever to influence political will. Another possible strategy is the system disruption; yet it requires an adversary to operate **inside** the targeted state.
- **Human terrain.** Human environment, beyond immediate tactical and operational advantages (safe-heaven, recruitment pool, logistics and supply, intelligence) provide VNSA its core advantage, - legitimacy in form of moral and political support

¹⁸ “Situation at Katunayake Brought Totally Under Control,” *Ministry of Defense of Sri Lanka*, April 1, 2007, http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20070326_01 (accessed February 27, 2010).

- **Cost-effectiveness ratio.** Asymmetric warfare is characterized by relatively low cost for the “inferior” side of conflict that nonetheless often results in high outcomes when applied effectively against the “superior” side.

The 9/11 terrorist attack represents a classical example of AW in general, encompassing the features from the tactical, operational and strategic domains. Below is a matrix that links certain aspects of this attack to abovementioned features.

| Consideration | Feature of AW |
|--|---|
| Time lag between 2001 and the previous 1993 attacks against the World Trade Center, was more than eight years. | Asynchronous mode and unpredictability |
| The jetliners hijacked by the Al-Qaeda (AQ) operatives were used as the <i>de-facto</i> manned cruise missiles to defeat high-value targets. | Improvisation and simplicity |
| An energy equivalent of impact of 2 aircrafts + burned fuel + collapsed buildings = 0,2 kT, or two small tactical nukes. By fact, a crude substitution of WMD was used. | Lethality |
| The estimated cost of the operation for AQ was around \$1 million, while the cost of direct damage only amounted \$30–40 billion, not to mention much higher associated cost of indirect damage. | Low cost – high effectiveness ratio |
| The attack was planned and executed by the geographically disparate cells operating in Afghanistan, Germany, the U.S., and other countries across the globe. | Low visibility, decentralization, self-sustainment, and outsourcing. |
| The eventual outcome for the targeted country was essentially political, rather than materiel, since it altered the entire strategy and policy of the United States. | Political will is a center of gravity of asymmetric adversary’s effort. |

STRATEGIC MULTIPLIERS AND ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Since the main effort of asymmetric warfare as well as a main argument of this Special Report, are centered on the political domain, there is a need to consider several aspects that might be considered as “strategic force multipliers” of non-state adversaries. This is especially important because the democracies consider the issues listed below as their success and strength; however, the “other side” believes that those features are exactly of **their** multipliers and advantages in the ongoing conflict. Among those multipliers are the necessity of preserving standards of democracy, complying with formal legal procedures, role of public support of government’s actions, need to facilitate multilateral coordinated actions on the international level, intolerance to casualties, budget restraints, and critical stance of media. While the other side does not has equal checks and restraints, and maintains a low moral and legal threshold. For instance, by deliberately placing themselves out of the domain of the law of the armed conflict, it is free to put operational

considerations far ahead of humanism, and apply a white flag or an ambulance car to cover the attack or ambush, use civilians as human shields, or convert cities and towns into military bases (examples: al-Fallujah, Gaza, and Grozny). Below are several considerations on this issue, selected from a much broader set.

Legal factors. The states are bound by international law, and in particular, by international humanitarian law that regulates the conduct of warfare by imposition of strict restraints aimed to reduce a harmful effect. The VNSA are out of this grid. Though the Geneva Conventions hold them accountable for potential war crimes, in reality they are not restrained at all. It was particularly demonstrated during the Israeli operation Cast Lead in Gaza (December 2008 – January 2009), triggered by the HAMAS missile attacks from Gaza against Israeli civilian targets. An extensive use of “human shield” tactics by the HAMAS and high death toll associated to it caused a huge international criticism towards Israel, who is a “soft target” as a nation-state with clearly defined physical and legal signature. On the other side the HAMAS with the obscure status and no international legal obligation, which leadership is hardly able to be deterred by the International Criminal Court, effectively used that multiplier to convert the Israeli tactical and operational success on the ground into a political setback. Situations similar to the above mentioned case produce the “reverse asymmetry”¹⁹ in the international law that de-facto holds the states more accountable for violations compared with the VNSA perpetrators. The use of human shields and other similar patterns also reflects the fact that most of the VNSA operate out of the existing normative system and moral values (or, perhaps, within their own that differs from the states’ one).

Media factor. Media are frequently and effectively used by asymmetric adversaries as a force-multiplier. Though the media in Western settings are not necessarily supportive or sympathetic to the “other” side, the relationships between them are often symbiotic by nature. The media needs a “story” to sell their product; the best-selling story is negative. The non-state adversaries (terrorists, insurgents, and resistance movements) need publicity to present their cause. The role of the Israeli media during the conflict with Hezbollah in 2006 represents an example of undermining the war effort by publicly revealing shortfalls of their side **during** the hostilities. Needless to say, the other side takes as its advantage. The “CNN effect” is gradually substituted by the “Al-Jazeera effect.”

NGOs factor. This factor has appeared underestimated; yet, it might have an adverse impact on warfare by the state. For example, an anti-anti-personnel mine initiative, launched in early 1990s by a small women’s NGO, has been spread into a worldwide campaign that culminated in the Comprehensive Landmine Ban Treaty in 1997, virtually exterminating the entire class of weapon from states arsenal, while leaving VNSA intact. The same transformation is taking place now with cluster munitions. The lawsuit by environmentalist groups seeking protection of the sea mammals from the sonar effects substantially complicated training of the U.S. Navy, not to mention associated financial cost.²⁰ There is a growing pressure from some NGOs supported by some politicians and parliamentarians, especially in the European countries, to prohibit UAVs as indiscriminate weapon.²¹

¹⁹ On the notion of “reverse asymmetry” see Boaz Ganor, “A Call to Revise the Geneva Conventions,” *SFGate.com*, January 15, 2009, http://articles.sfgate.com/2009-01-15/opinion/17196144_1_hamas-supporters-gaza-israeli-operation (accessed January 31, 2010).

²⁰ Kori Calvert, “Active Sonar and Marine Mammals: Chronology with References,” CRS Report for Congress, June 22, 2005, <http://ncseonline.org/NLE/CRSreports/05Jun/RS22158.pdf> (accessed February 15, 2009).

²¹ For a variation example of anti-UAV views see, Gary Solis, “CIA Drone Attacks Produce America’s Own Unlawful Combatants,” *The Washington Post*, March 12, 2010, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/11/AR2010031103653.html?nav=rss_opinion/columns (accessed March 12, 2010), and Robert Verkaik, “Top Judge: ‘Use of Drones Intolerable,’” *The Independent*, July 6, 2009,

All the above mentioned examples are representing variation of “*lawfare*,” i.e., legal pressure on the militaries conducted (for whatever motivation and reason) by the actors that are supposed on their own side. It is also an illustration of ambiguity and blurred lines of AW.

The Internet factor. The Internet is the product of human progress, a tool of the globalization, and an enabler of freedom of information. However, on the dark side of it, the Internet is a strategic force multiplier for VNSA. They use the net for strategic communication, propaganda, indoctrination, recruitment, knowledge dissemination (i.e., handbooks, manuals),²² intelligence gathering,²³ operation planning, and command and control. The Google Map, chats, Facebook are already in extensive use for practical purposes of “open-source warfare,”²⁴ as well as GPS, satellite phones and other fruits of technological revolution. For instance, when AQ lost its training ground in Afghanistan in 2001, the distribution of terrorist knowledge and insurgent skills was transferred from physical into virtual domain, by creating Internet-portals designed for training purposes, such as the *Camp al-Battar*.

The VNSA activities in the worldwide web might be grouped in three broad and interrelated categories:

- disruption (i.e., cyber-terrorism against adversary’s critical infrastructure).
- sustainment (i.e. propaganda, recruitment, training, etc to sustain own effort).
- “hacktivism” (i.e. personal contribution based on the commonality of ideological views that makes individuals or groups of individuals possible to participate in activities falling into two previous categories).

The last point might be illustrated by the so-called “Bronze Soldier Riot” in Estonia in April – May 2007, which is regarded as the first cyber-war in history. The mass attack against the Estonian government virtual infrastructure involved nearly one million computers from nearly 75 countries around the world. It partially paralyzed for a while the Estonian government, demonstrating the inherent vulnerability of modern Western societies for such kind of hostile actions. It also proved the potentially destructive effect of the state – NSA nexus (in this specific case, an alleged coordinating role of state security services in manipulation by nationalism-driven ‘hacktivist’ groups). In a related case of the Russian–Georgian war in August 2008 the individuals believed to be recruited by the state security via social networks conducted the DDOS-attack, shutting down 54 key Georgian websites, including those that controlled a strategic Baku – Tbilisi - Ceyhan oil pipeline.²⁵

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/top-judge-use-of-drones-intolerable-1732756.html> (accessed February 22, 2010).

²² On the example of knowledge dissemination by the Global Islamic Media Front, see Abdul Hameed Bakier, “Jihadis Offer Training in Evasion of Police and Security Forces,” *Terrorism Monitor* 7, Issue 23 (July 30, 2009), http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/archivesgta/gta2009/?tx_publicationsttnews_pi2%5Bissue%5D=23 (accessed February 13, 2010).

²³ For the potential use of the Internet for intelligence gathering, see “Danish Troops in Afghanistan Get Facebook Warning,” *Reuter*, July 17, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE56G3OQ20090717> (accessed February 19, 2010).

²⁴ On this and other features as well as a definition of “open-source warfare,” see John Robb’s website (<http://globalguerrillas.typepad.com/>).

²⁵ David A. Fulghum, “Cyberwar is Official,” *Aviation Week*, September 14, 2008, 54-55.

CHALLENGES TO DEFENSE TRANSFORMATION

Asymmetric warfare poses a huge challenge to the states and their militaries. The asymmetric way of war tends to mitigate or even negate quantitative, qualitative organizational, technical, resource superiority of the adversary, which enjoys benefits of the Revolution in Military Affairs. It might be allegorically described as a “**Counter-Revolution in Military Affairs.**” Beyond that, there are other factors complicating response to that challenge. First, the rise of asymmetric non-state adversaries does not diminish probability of conventional (state-on-state, force-on-force) wars. Second, a growing number of countries are embracing the asymmetric options in the anticipated conflicts with other states (most eloquent example is Iran and Venezuela; China also integrates elements of AW into its war-fighting doctrines). Third, each state has a **single set of forces** for the widening range of tasks beyond conventional and irregular warfare (for MOOTW, such as peacekeeping, law enforcement, disaster-management, etc). The missions’ spectrum is increasingly blurred. Finally, the issues of inadequate political will, wrong prioritizing, outdated mentality paradigms, ideology-induced strategies, financial restraints and bureaucratic complexities place additional stress and impediments.

Normally, the development of warfare (i.e., forms and technologies) throughout the entire history of humankind was driven by a repetitive “challenge – response” cycle. The said is true for the age of AW. For instance, when the use of the old technology-based unguided missiles by HAMAS posed a threat to the urban areas in Israel, the latter responded by developing brand new, sophisticated “anti-missile” missile systems, such as *Stunner* and the *Iron Dome*.²⁶ Initially sustaining heavy losses due to speedboats by the Tamil Tigers, the Sri Lankan Navy created the Rapid Action Boat Squadron (RABS) which successfully employed the same “swarming” tactics of the enemy, eventually defeating them.²⁷ Those examples illustrate that states are able to meet the challenges posed by asymmetric adversaries.

However, success demands changing the reactive approach to a more proactive and cultural-philosophical shift. Structures, concepts, doctrines, strategies and policies should be revised and adopted towards rapidly evolving, complex and unpredictable environment. The forces should be trained to operate in the multinational and multiagency context. The priorities should be made on the C4ISR, SOF, power projection and expeditionary capabilities, jointness and interoperability, cultural awareness and intelligence. Beyond all that, the resurgence of a **moral component** is essential. A reflection of growing understanding of this fact is particularly reflected in the *Asymmetric Warfare & Australian National Asymmetric Advantages: Taking the Fight to the Enemy*,²⁸ that stresses the national competitiveness and the will to win.

²⁶ “Air Defense: An Israeli Stunner,” *Strategy Page.com*, February 10, 2010, <http://www.strategypage.com/htm/htada/articles/20100210.aspx> (accessed February 11, 2010).

²⁷ Sergei Desilva-Ranasinghe, “Lessons in Maritime Counter-Insurgency,” *Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter* 35, no 10 (December 2009 – January 2010), 50-53.

²⁸ Chris Field, *Asymmetric Warfare & Australian National Asymmetric Advantages: Taking the Fight to the Enemy*, Working Paper 136 (November 2009) (Dunctorn, AU: Land Warfare Studies Centre, 2009), 17.

CONCLUSION

- * Asymmetric warfare is a dynamic and evolving phenomenon.
- * It is a single and indispensable opportunity for non-state actors to bridge the capabilities gap. It relies on an unlimited number of scenarios, methods, tools and means.
- * It is now a factor of strategic significance. It will remain an essential component of any future conflict involving NSA. It works!
- * It poses great challenges to defense transformation. To answer the challenge requires a shift in paradigms. The political domain should be considered the sixth and the most important of domains of warfare. On the practical level, the most effective way of response would be pro-active counter-asymmetry by “taking the fight to the enemy.”

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