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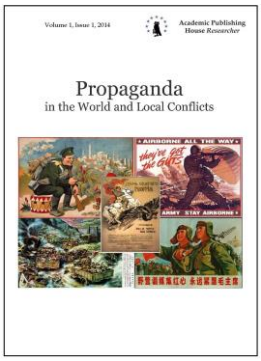

Hybrid Tools for Proxy Warfare

Andrii E. Lebid [a, *]

[a] Sumy State University, Ukraine

The supreme art of war is to subdue
the enemy without fighting
(Sun Tzu)

Abstract

Of relevance to modern military doctrine is the concept of hybrid (or proxy) warfare, i.e. a combination of conventional, irregular, and asymmetric ways of conducting war, including manipulation of political and/or ideological conflicts and engagement of special operation forces, conventional armed forces, intelligence agents, political agent provocateurs, and mass media outlets. Among the tools employed quite actively in modern proxy warfare are economic blackmail, cyber-attacks, proxy servers and surrogates, paramilitaries, and terrorist and criminal elements.

Keywords: hybrid tools for special operations, proxy warfare, information-based special operations, asymmetric conflict, irregular warfare.

1. Introduction

Conventional warfare is becoming a thing of the past. Modern warfare is like radiation – one cannot feel it, but its deadly effect is there. Modern warfare is, for the most part, proxy warfare with hybrid tools employed in special operations. Of particular importance in the process of the development of proxy warfare is the fact of emergence and spread of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction. Quite low is the likelihood of conflicts between two or more high-tech armies. In the view of J.S. Levy, the cause of the recent upsurge in irregular proxy warfare is the possibility of incurring significant physical losses and damage while deriving potentially minor gains from waging a regular war (Levy, 1983).

Since the end of World War II, the world has witnessed the following fact: two thirds of all armed conflicts were between small and medium-sized states, with the superpowers acting, for the most part, as their initiators, but by no means their participants, with a focus on providing remote support in the form of asymmetric influence. The three regions that have become the world's major conflict zones are Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. From this perspective, the overwhelming majority of armed conflicts today are intrastate conflicts with elements of proxy warfare (Smith, 2004).

Essentially, proxy warfare is warfare conducted via third parties with "passive" participation from the key actors[1], which is accompanied by information, political, economic, and cyber

* Corresponding author
E-mail: schwarzschwanenreich@gmail.com (A.E. Lebid)

[1] Proxy warfare can be employed not only by states but by coalitions thereof, as well as multinational corporations.

operations and involves the provision of military, organizational, resource, and other types of support on their part under the pretense of helping resolve an "internal conflict" in the third country. In other words, a proxy war is nothing other than a war fought by the hands of others, a "war by proxy", or a civil war with hybrid tactical attacks, of strategic significance in which is the destabilization of the socio-political situation for the purpose of replacing the government, cultivation of manageable chaos, and use of other destructive factors, which involves the use of information tools designed to alter human behavior and relationships.

A proxy war is an international conflict between two actors which are pursuing their geopolitical interests through military actions in the territory of a third state and using the latter's resources. A formal smokescreen to justify such actions is assistance in resolving the third state's internal conflict, which, once again, is being fuelled by the proxy war's key actors.

A characteristic of proxy warfare is the fact that it, first of all, is conducted not via the armed forces of the key actors but those of a third side, which can be represented not only by state military units but private military companies, security contractors, terrorist organizations, rebel groups, or tribal or religious irregular armed groups; second of all, military actions as part thereof tend to, again, take place in the territory of a third state supported by the actors. Of interest is the following characteristic of the evolution of proxy warfare: a state "participating" in the conflict gets substituted by all kinds of foundations, civil society institutions, political forces, etc. In this context, we are talking about "double proxy wars", which are waged through the use of information-based special operations and disinformation.

2. Materials and methods

This study has drawn upon data from a set of research projects on gathering information in the area of international and domestic conflicts, namely: UCDP (Uppsala Conflict Data Program), COW (Correlates of War), and KOSIMO (Conflict Simulation Model).

These projects are focused on the pursuit of a set of objectives related to the search for consistent patterns in data arrays and monitoring and prevention of conflicts.

3. Discussion

Scholar A.A. Stepanov has proposed several conceptual dimensions for the terms 'war' and 'peace', which are as follows: formal-logical, existential, ontological, axiological, praxeological, and gnoseological (Stepanov: 30).

In the formal-logical dimension, the term 'peace' is conceptualized in negative form, as the opposite of war, whilst the term 'war' has positive, direct definitions and is often used in a broader sense, as a synonym for 'struggle', 'conflict', and 'confrontation'.

In the existential dimension, war is, supposedly, associated with death, whilst peace, accordingly, is linked with life. However, paradoxically, the concept of 'war' is connotatively linked with life, or existence on the border between being and non-being (Heraclitus), whilst peace is associated with death as absolute rest.

In the ontological dimension, we observe the following paradox: 'war' is immanent and phenomenal, whilst 'peace' is transcendental and noumenal. The former is associated with movement, change, and making, whilst the latter is linked with invariability, quiescence, and perpetuity.

In the axiological dimension, 'war' is viewed as absolute evil, and 'peace' is seen as absolute good.

In the praxeological dimension, 'war' is viewed as a means, and 'peace' is seen as an end.

In the gnoseological dimension, the term 'war' is the subject of research in empirical sciences, whilst the term 'peace' is explored without invoking empirical reality, exclusively through the lens of the speculative.

Based on the above, war may be regarded as a multi-vector and multi-factor phenomenon, which is not limited to the conduct of actual military actions exclusively. In this context, what is also obvious is the diversity of theoretical substantiations of war as a complementary phenomenon. The first attempts to create a universal theory of war can be traced to Ancient China, and are associated with Sun Tzu (Sun Tzu, 2007).

Among the military theoreticians of the Middle Ages, worthy of special mention is N. Machiavelli, credited with setting out the key tenets of organizing, training, and arming an army,

as well as some of the key requirements to commanders (Machiavelli, 2003). Machiavelli is known to have borrowed many of his ideas from Vegetius, a source he consulted in adapting the military experience of Ancient Rome to whole new historical realities. The aim of warfare was defined to be the following: to develop the capacity to withstand any opponent and then come out victorious in a decisive battle.

In 17th century Europe, the phenomenon of warfare was conceptualized based on the interests of monarchs and was limited objectives-wise, central to analysis of warfare being military maneuver strategies. A significant landmark in warfare research is associated with input from Prussian military theoretician C. von Clausewitz, who regarded war as a tool for national policy (Clausewitz, 1993). Another Prussian military theoretician, A.H.D. von Bülow, the author of "cordon strategy", believed that a war can be won through focusing on defensive actions around crucial communications hubs and refraining from engaging in a major battle (Bülow, 1926).

By contrast, military theoretician and historian General A.-H. Jomini was a proponent of the theory of strategic victory over the opponent via all-out offensives. French military figure and theoretician Marshal F. Foch viewed fighting a battle as an indispensable condition for the conduct of warfare, its objective being the destruction of the enemy's organized forces.

The concept of total warfare propounded by German military theoreticians in the early 20th century viewed warfare as war between nations, not armies. The suggested formula for winning that kind of war was the mobilization of all resources, with comprehensive pressure exerted on the enemy for the purpose of disheartening it.

During the 1920s, English military theoretician and historian L. Hart proposed a strategy of indirect actions, whereby the idea is to try to avoid an all-out collision with the enemy, try to disarm it, and try to undermine its morale and fighting spirit, which is to culminate in a decisive blow (Hart, 1967).

Modern polemological research takes account of factors such as the technological evolution of arms, the possibility of mass destruction, and the protracted nature of war. These are the factors that have predetermined our reflections on the future of mankind, the unprecedentedness of nuclear weapons being owned by several states, and the effectiveness of drawn-out local conflicts. Each war theory, doubtless, has a rational kernel of its own, but the latest geopolitical realities are giving relevance to a somewhat different conceptualization of war, including its goals, objectives, strategies, tactics, means of achieving the objectives, tools, mechanisms, etc. In particular, the conceptualization of military trends and global trends of modernity has been explored in works by M. van Creveld (Creveld, 2005), A. Toffler (Toffler, 1993), M. Kaldor (Kaldor, 2012), M. DeLanda (DeLanda, 2014), and others.

The WMD factor[1] is what has determined the nature of future warfare: in modern warfare, moral-psychological pressure on the opponent is prioritized over just plain, physical, destruction thereof. In today's new realities, warfare is seen as a complex information-technological, cognitive-psychological, and virtual phenomenon. Modern wars are conducted at the level of consciousness and ideas, and that is where they are won too. The result of modern warfare is a certain preset state of individual (collective) consciousness. Thus, the efficiency of modern warfare depends on that of information operations at all levels of warfare and across the entire spectrum of armed military actions.

Another key concept related to future warfare is network-centric warfare, which is about boosting the combined combat power of one's military units by joining them up into a single network, which is characterized by speed of command[2] and self-synchronization[3]. The network makes it possible to bring geographically dispersed forces representing the various military arms and branches together in an integrated operation and, based on an information advantage,

[1] WMD is the acronym for weapons of mass destruction.

[2] Speed of command is achieved based on an information advantage through the implementation of new systems of administration, surveillance, intelligence, control, and computer modeling. As a result, the opponent is deprived of the ability to conduct effective operations, as all of its actions are preempted by those of the opposite side.

[3] Self-synchronization implies the ability of the organizational structure of military units and of the forms and methods of their execution of military missions to transform at their own discretion but in alignment with the needs of the Higher Command. As a result, the military actions may take on the form of continuous high-speed actions.

use them with greater effectiveness through ensuring a unity of opinion amongst the military leadership in terms of the content, role, and place of interaction in an operation, as well as through getting the actions self-synchronized in the interests of achieving the common objectives for the operation.

Table 1. Four Generations of Warfare

	1GW	**2GW**	**3GW**	**4GW**
Ways of conducting warfare	Preindustrial era warfare Participants – states Main tactics: firing lines and assault columns Relatively small armies and a relatively small combat area Short-lived (except for sieges)	The conflict engaging numerous troops over a large area Long, intense battles Defense prevailing over offense Development of techniques related to camouflage, field fortifications, and intelligence equipment	Maneuver-based warfare with increased dynamics and great firepower Warfare grounded in new ideas, not technology Time prioritized over place. Initiative prioritized over discipline Self-discipline prioritized over coercion	Modern warfare of an asymmetric nature A decentralized, cross-border, and quasi-state conflict base The civilian population acting as the target of tactical actions, with the media involved No front and no rear. No decisive battles

Present-day realities are attesting to not only a change of the world's geopolitical picture but changes in means and tools used to transform it. Worthy of a particular mention in this respect is the Fourth-Generation Warfare (4GW) phenomenon, which implies the conduct of proxy warfare using hybrid tools in the physical, information, virtual, and cognitive dimensions of a conflict. These tools include the following:

1) investments and funding for the political forces in third countries;
2) putting together a lobby in the political environment of third countries (including using corruption mechanisms);
3) infiltrating the government in third countries in order to conduct intelligence activity;
4) making use of unresolved ethnic conflicts;
5) fostering propaganda in the information space in third countries; engaging targeted media support;
6) orchestrating coordinated cyber-attacks, etc.

In recent years, one has witnessed an expansion and enhancement of hybrid warfare tools with a focus on the use of "soft power", with deception, disinformation, and manipulation regarded to be much more efficient than the use of regular troops. Consequently, belligerent rhetoric, cyber-attacks, trolling, and mass production of fake news along with disinformation have become an innovative instrumental basis for propaganda and political technology by the key actors inclined to employ proxy warfare as a tool for global hegemony, which encapsulates the know-how required for furthering their information-psychological aggression.

It is information aggression that proxy warfare begins with, and that is what it ends with as well, with information pressure and information-psychological impacts being its major attributes. It is warfare not for the victim state's land but for the consciousness of its people, with a focus on generating manageable chaos in it. And, since just about any war today is information-based, it is the information component that acts as the key aspect of influence through denial, the use of false information, subjective judgments of the events, etc. Information operations in the context of

proxy warfare can perform several functions: (1) attack "hostile" and support "friendly" sources of information; (2) drag the opponent into an information arms race; (3) create a sustainable system of semantic impacts for the purpose of generating new identities.

The above may result in a state of deprivation, when people are unable to satisfy their mental needs, provoking thereby negative pressure on their thinking, which may subsequently result in neurosis. This kind of state may urge one to search for and consume some other type of information, something habitual and simple. With that said, the rational component of choice is minimized when there is no information alternative. In this context, it is worth noting the effective conduct of information-based special operations at the global, regional, and local levels concurrently.

S. Blank cites, among other nations keenly employing hybrid warfare tools, North Korea and Iran (Blank, 2014), although this list may and must be expanded to include other global and regional players. In particular, there is China, which is a powerful geopolitical player interested in a swift shift to modern methods of command and ways to conduct hybrid warfare and which has long stopped regarding the "doctrine of popular war" as relevant and aligned with the modern realities of the geopolitical balance of power.

In China, the "doctrine of popular war" has been replaced by the "doctrine of active defense", which implies delivering preventive local strikes in the event there is any threat to the interests and security of the Celestial Empire. Along with this, the new doctrine implies the use of diplomatic, legal, information, and other means of neutralizing a threat (China's Military Strategy, 2015). China's military doctrine has been predetermined by the possibility of future military conflicts, with a focus on the coordination of the nation's aerospace forces and intelligence and operation control systems.

This way to articulate the issue obviates the very concept of front and rear areas, which are perfectly acceptable when it comes to classic warfare scenarios. Moreover, the actual reality becomes amorphous, distorted, and diffuse. With this in mind, China's new military doctrine implies boosting its presence on the Internet and amplifying its focus on virtual warfare. Worthy of separate consideration in the context of China's new doctrine, the "doctrine of active defense", is the growing role of information warfare and special operations, with a parallel focus on the creation of special military units concerned with propaganda activity. Thus, the Chinese model treats hybrid warfare as unrestricted multi-vector warfare with limited objectives and unlimited resources (Kilcullen, 2006).

As mentioned earlier, one of the more effective hybrid tools for conducting proxy warfare is cyber-attacks. We are living in an era of networking, of the dominance of networks, of interlacements, and of rhizome (Ferguson, 2018). Surprising as it may sound, the evolution of networking in a global context is indeed posing a threat to national security. Cyber-defense is way behind cyber-offense in development, for which reason replacing the "iron curtain" with the "virtual" one may well help resolve the issue of the intellectual arms race, a key objective behind which is to create an efficient doctrine and system of information, cyber-security, and information resource security.

Criminal groups, terrorist organizations, hacktivists, and biohackers are becoming increasingly instrumental in tapping into areas such as robotics, synthetic biology[1], and artificial intelligence, acting as an agent of future influence, threats, and crimes, an effective instrument in proxy warfare. The criminal world, which incorporates terrorism, is migrating from the physical into the virtual space, with the presence of the above tools in it only increasing (Goodman, 2016).

Proxy warfare is profitable to the actors for a number of reasons, which are as follows:

[1] Synthetic biology is a new area in genetic engineering which is focused on creating whole new, more enhanced living systems. An example of this is the production of programmable organisms whose behavior, characteristics, and functions can be pre-set at the moment of their creation. Among the possible areas where synthetic biology could be employed is pharmacology, where it will be possible to create the "right" bacteria for the production of the "right" pharmaceuticals. Synthetic biology could provide a basis for new forms of bioterrorism, with the wrongdoer capable of creating their own microorganisms which could "hack" the human brain to control the mind (similar to the way it is done with hacker attacks).

–it is cheaper[1];
–it is more convenient[2];
–it is more effective[3];
–it is more stable[4].

At the same time, proxy warfare has a number of drawbacks as well, which are as follows:
–Dependence 1[5];
–Dependence 2[6];
–the conflict lasting for too long;
–the latent subjectedness of the third states.

Throughout history we can find many examples of proxy warfare. The concept entered particularly wide use in the second half of the 20th century, when proxy warfare became an effective means of orchestrating international conflicts. For instance, on the African continent proxy warfare started to gain topicality subsequent to the gaining of independence by African nations after the 1950–60s. The reasons were several and included the following: (1) a weak government in the newly-formed states; (2) political instability; frequent coups; (3) ethnic, religious, and racial tensions. These factors have turned Africa into a permanent conflict zone and an arena of strife between the key actors focused on maintaining or amplifying their influence in the region, with hybrid warfare tools employed at that. It is support from the key players in a conflict that has served to change the balance of power in and prolong such conflicts.

4. Results

An example of this kind of warfare is the Chadian-Libyan conflict, which involved a series of sporadic clashes in Chad between 1978 and 1987. The conflict was preceded by the Chadian Civil War (1965–1979), which initially was fought to overthrow the dictatorship of President F.Tombalbaye, and afterwards as a struggle for power amongst the opposition. During the conflict, the various sides involved were supported, on the one hand, by Libya under the wing of the USSR, which supplied the Libyans with military machinery, arms, advisors, and specialists, and, on the other hand, by France and the US, which provided air defense systems and financial support. What is more, to Libya's direct intervention the French responded with the entry of their troops into Chad. Thus, it is clear that the Chadian-Libyan conflict had the nature of a proxy war, as it displayed all the attributes inherent in this type of warfare. A noteworthy characteristic of proxy warfare illustrated by the above conflict is that a nation weakened by domestic issues and conflicts is still perfectly capable of beating the aggressor in proxy warfare – obviously, provided there is support on the part of a more powerful player.

[1] It is worth noting that the low cost of a proxy war is determined not only, and not so much, by expenditure on the direct employment of regular troops but by the political consequences of employing them. Take, for instance, the Propaganda-200 ("coffin-based propaganda") phenomenon, employed for fostering negative public opinion with regard to war, like it was done during the US-USSR standoff in Vietnam. In present-day conditions, the extensive use of regular troops may be viewed as economically unsubstantiated (of course, we are not talking here about the use thereof in defensive warfare), when a more advisable option is relying upon local human resources or enlisting the services of a private military company.

[2] This can be influenced, for instance, by the political situation in the region, territorial-geographic characteristics, etc.

[3] Proxy armies are better familiar with the regional characteristics of the operational theater. Also, one must not rule out the factor of minimization of the risk of a surge in nationalist sentiment as a reaction to the intervention.

[4] By not acknowledging officially their participation in a conflict, its actors manage to evade accusations of military aggression against a third state, while maintaining the illusion of peaceful relations.

[5] A proxy war is alive as long as it is still of benefit to and is, thus, being funded by the actors. Otherwise, there is a grave danger of a real civil war, an armed collision between the conflict participants, involved in the conflict against their will as a consequence of geopolitical games.

[6] Formally, an independent state that is the victim of a proxy war can remain viable only as long as it continues to receive financial, resource, and military, or other types of, support from one of the war's orchestrators. Otherwise, there is a high possibility of loss of statehood by the state, including due to weak internal structural-systemic linkages within it.

A classic example of proxy warfare is the war in Vietnam. Subsequent to the end of the Indochina War (1946–1954) and the signing of the Geneva Accords, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam started to build the "foundations of socialism" after the Soviet template and with comprehensive support from the USSR. In 1955, a referendum held in the south of the country sealed the fate of pro-French emperor Bảo Đại, who was ousted. Power in South Vietnam was assumed by pro-American generals. A new state was established – the Republic of Vietnam, its government focused on pursuing a clearly anti-national tack and protecting the monopolistic capital of the US, Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Germany which was present in the region.

In response to that, there sprang a movement of resistance to the ruling regime – the National Liberation Front (established in 1960), which sought to put an end to the pro-American regime, unite the nation, and create a democratic state. The National Liberation Front interacted with the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and received assistance from it on a regular basis, which posed a direct threat to the Saigon regime and the "vital interests" of the US in the Southeast Asia region.

Starting in 1961, the US was engaged in "special warfare" in Vietnam in alignment with the Stanley-Taylor Plan and the McNamara Plan. And as early as 1965, the US started an open war in South Vietnam and an air war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. With support from the USSR, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam put in place an effective air-defense system. By the start of 1969, the Vietnam war had engaged nearly half a million American soldiers, the Seventh Fleet of the United States, which numbered a couple of hundred military ships and 80,000 marines, as well as the military forces of the military-bloc allies – Australia, Thailand, South Korea, the Philippines, and New Zealand.

The obvious dragging out of the conflict, sizable losses on both the military and political-diplomatic fronts, the unpopularity of "dirty warfare", and spikes in protest sentiment would eventually render the further conduct of military actions impossible. It was decided to now focus on "Vietnamizing" the war, which would subsequently involve the withdrawal of the American troops, a process which started in late 1968 and ended in 1973 with the signing of the war-ending Paris Peace Accords.

Other noteworthy examples of a proxy war in world history include:

–the India and Pakistan confrontation;

–the war in Korea;

–the war in Angola;

–the war in Afghanistan;

–the war in Lebanon;

–the war in Libya;

–the war in Iraq;

–the war between Sudan and Uganda

Between 1989 and 2005, a total of 121 conflicts were recorded around the world, of which 90 were domestic, including 46 which had all the attributes of a proxy war and 16 which were of a proxy nature in the intrastate stage already. Just seven were classic conflicts, regular interstate wars, four of which had the attributes of a proxy war.

5. Conclusion

Thus, most armed conflicts in today's world are not conventional and occur in an uncustomary form of confrontation between various states. There is every indication of the asymmetric nature of such conflicts, which is construed not in terms of resource, or some other type of, superiority but in terms of the means of achieving the objectives employed, when hard power gets effectively replaced by soft power. Conventional warfare is being supplanted today by armed conflicts with multiple asymmetries.

Today, many armed conflicts can no longer be viewed as classic interstate conflicts. New-generation conflicts can be characterized by a whole array of terms, including 'low-intensity conflict', 'limited armed conflict', 'small war', 'local war', etc. Wars of this kind tend to occur in third-world countries mostly.

In new-generation wars, a direct military confrontation between the key actors is supplanted by new, indirect, forms of collision, like information-based special operations, spreading

disinformation to demoralize the enemy, cyber-attacks, intelligence activities, funding the political opposition, etc.

Consequently, in today's warfare, more specifically proxy warfare, of great significance is non-military factors governed by the underlying rules of the existing world order.

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