

Conflicts and Instability in the Contemporary Security Environment*

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Abstract: While current doctrines try to separate conflicts within two distinct categories – conventional versus irregular, there are, however, a series of contemporary conflicts that challenge this western view on war showing that the disjunctive manner of classification in ‘big and conventional’ versus ‘small and irregular’ is limited and simplistic. The military strategists as well as the academics used a series of concepts in order to describe the main shifts in the character of war – from the Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) and ‘new wars’ to hybrid wars. This article aims to identify these mutations in war evolution in the new, post-Cold War international context. The traditional image we have on this well-known ‘labor division’ within the military field no longer reflects reality.

Keywords: war, conventional war, new wars, 4GW, hybrid wars

Introduction

When a war comes to an end, military strategists wonder what the next war would look like, what shape would it take and how the next enemy would fight. The same thing happened when the bipolar confrontation between USA and URSS ended. In the absence of a direct military confrontation, the superpowers of the Cold War have repeatedly come up against one another in a series of proxy wars, by means of allies and their own satellites. Even if for almost five decades the world has not witnessed a direct military conflict, this has been a period characterized by intense militarisation, major investments in the military sector, massive arming, nuclear arsenal development and competition for global supremacy. It's no secret to anyone that a potential armed conflict between the two actors would have taken the form of a large-scale conventional war, fought by national armies, in a symmetrical war on a specific ground – the plains of Western Germany. With the end of the Cold War and the avoidance of the ‘inevitable,’ the optimism emerged – among theoreticians, politicians, the public opinion and sometimes even among military experts. The military superiority of the United States was beyond question, the great winner in the competition for the global supremacy. There were no enemies left capable to face a conventional attack of the American army, the world's most potent army. The first war in Iraq

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was nothing but a confirmation of this state of affairs, respecting all the rigors of a conventional war fought by the book. Nevertheless, 'the book' would very soon prove its limits, unable as it was to predict a series of military conflicts that did not fit within the moulds of the conventional war. The war in Bosnia, the military intervention in Mogadishu, the war in Kosovo, the terrorist attacks that hit the United States on their own territory and the Global War against Terror initiated in response – all these events have challenged the traditional thought in the military domain and have questioned the manner in which the war was understood as a phenomenon in the new post-Cold War context. We have become undeniably the witnesses of certain mutations emerged in the manner of fight, organization, force deployment and war character. What exactly has brought about these transformations? Are they final? The large-scale conventional war fought by the national armies of the states is now history? What does the future war look like and who are the new combatants? These are only a few questions that will guide our approach which aims at following the evolution of war in the post-Cold War era and at identifying the shifts emerged in the new international context. The objective of such an approach is to contribute to the understanding of the character of the wars which keep on defying the international peace, the understanding of the forces that determine the new combatants to prefer certain fight strategies and to contribute to the outlining of a picture of future war, including a series of possible solutions available to the international actors.

The End of the Cold War and the Trends of a New Strategic Environment

In a complex analysis of the war phenomenon and of the transformations registered in the new context, Gat and Maoz identified, in 2001, three scenarios on the future of war (Maoz and Gat, 2001, 1-3). The first scenario considers war an outdated and useless instrument, subject to the possibility of transformation and the risk of disappearance as any other social institution (e.g. slavery or duel). Modern societies regard the war as an instrument incompatible with the new economic conditions, social norms, given in particular the enormous destructive capacities it supposes. The fact that during the years of the Cold War there was no major war between the powers is considered an indicator of the tendency to give up war as instrument of conflict resolution. The second scenario starts from the observation that war is a social institution as old as humanity, which permanently accompanied the individuals along their history and that almost 50 years of peace cannot represent a serious indicator attesting the elimination of war from the international practice. Even if war is influenced by the social, economic, technological and political developments suffering thus transformations in time, the phenomenon in itself and its essential forms of manifestation do not disappear. Thus, in summary, the second hypothesis argues that the essential structure of war will not change in the future. The third scenario seems to capture better the post-Cold War reality and starts from the

ascertainment of the fact that the world has faced fundamental transformations since the second global conflagration in all the domains of the human existence – political, economic, social, technological, etc. The same thing can also be said about war and the fight manner – though it has not disappeared, war has suffered dramatic transformations (Shultz and Dew, 2006, 1-17). If in the past the interstate symmetrical wars implying large-scale manoeuvres and conventional weaponry predominated, nowadays there can be seen a regionalization of conflicts, noting in particular the increase in the number of civil, ethnic and local conflicts, low-intensity conflicts implying guerrilla fights, attrition warfare and terrorist actions carried out by asymmetrical combatants. In conclusion, the two authors consider that war will not disappear but it will suffer a series of mutations adapting itself to a new context. Starting from this last finding related to the impact of context change on the form of manifestation of war as phenomenon, we shall try hereinafter to identify the main transformations suffered by the international post-Cold War environment that determined the increase of the conflict potential and favoured the transformation of war.

The disappearance of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar order had the impact of a major geopolitical seism. Numerous ethnic or national groups felt the opportunity of liberation and recognition and the elimination of the 'cover,' the withdrawal of the support, the absence of constraints and control from the part of the superpowers opened a veritable Pandora's box. A series of regional or local conflicts, kept previously under control, burst violently, unleashing frustrations and complaints, following ideological and nationalist objectives. In another category were the states whose leaders had privatised the power transforming the institutions, the citizens and the resources of the country into personal goods and in relation to which the superpowers had shown either an artificial support or disinterest. With the change of power balance at the global level, the internal groups of rebels overtook power imposing the same type of inefficient and dangerous government, perpetuating the cycle of violence and greediness (Zartman 2007, 4).

The new international context is marked by the rampant evolution of the globalisation phenomenon which supposes, *inter alia*, the elimination of all obstacles to the creation of a total freedom of economic forces, commerce without frontiers and the elimination of commercial barriers in order to open the territory towards the global movement of capital, goods and services. The rhythm of globalisation determines the reduction of the states' sovereignty and the emergence of new international actors, powerful players within the system; it determines the permeability of the national frontiers, the loss of the legitimate monopoly on coercion held traditionally by state actors; it also supports the processes of linguistic and cultural homogenization invading all life sectors. This phenomenon does not have only supporters and winners, determining the increase in the number of threats and in the degree of insecurity, creating an

environment characterised by the lack of certainty in a predictable future, essentially, of mitigation or loss of a distinct identity. All these aspects shape numerous frustrations, creating tension and amplifying the tendencies of localisation and isolation in relation to the 'Other,' the stranger. In these conditions, many of those feeling threatened by the economic and cultural impact of globalisation fall into the trap of radicalism and religious extremism (Williamson 2009, 13-14), a major threat to international peace and a source of conflict in the new security environment. The fast-growing rhythm of the population in certain areas of the world, especially those affected by poverty, the rapid urbanization within these regions concomitantly with the lack of decent life conditions contribute to the accumulation of pressures and the exacerbation of instability. And when these tendencies are doubled by the scarce presence of water, food or energy resources, violent conflicts are inevitable.

Another characteristic of the new international environment which contributes to the increase of the conflict potential refers to technological development, especially in the military domain. Although the increase of the global connectivity can bring numerous benefits for the states, individuals and for the international community in general, sometimes, it can generate a series of pervert effects, unwanted and extremely difficult to control – the export of terror and extremism, the increase of access to all forms of weapons of mass destruction, the use of internet in order to carry out cyber attacks, the manipulation of mass-media, etc.

A reality of the post-modern world, with deep implications for the security environment, is related to the presence of weak, failed or rogue states within the international system. Extremely vulnerable, incapable of ensuring internal order, exporters of instability and violence (Buzan 2000, 106-109), these states become genuine sanctuaries for criminal groups and extremist organisations, offering both a suitable ground for training and organisation and a rich area for recruiting new adepts.

In conclusion, we live now a 'new normality.' The international security is threatened by terrorist groups and organised crime, by weak and failed states incapable of ensuring the basic needs to their own citizens, by the absence or the scarceness of the vital resources. The concept of national sovereignty is the target of some unprecedented attacks, the entrance into a post-Westphalian era being brought into discussion; the technological evolution in the domain of communication, transport and global networks continues to render the frontiers more and more transparent; the economies – more interconnected and the access to information – possible in an unprecedented way. These effects of globalisation generate powerful pressures and contribute to the increase of the regional instability (Olson 2009, 3) and to the outbreak of some bloody conflicts. All these changes leave their mark on war producing significant shifts.

Distinct Visions on Post-Cold War Wars

With the end of the Cold War, numerous academics and experts in the field have reflected on the shifts suffered by the international environment, in an attempt to catch the impact of the transformation of the international strategic environment on war and the fight manner. Thus, a comprehensive process of analysis and re-conceptualisation began, the major stake being the identification of the main features of future war. Such an approach may and must allow mainly state actors, exposed to new threats, to prepare for future fights against asymmetrical, inventive and flexible enemies. If military specialists agree on the reference points of the new security environment and on the threats which contribute to context transformation, the opinions diverge when trying to conceptualise the future post-Cold War wars. While some people consider that we are confronted with a 'fourth generation war' (4GW), others argue that the term 'new wars' is the most adequate to describe the new realities. Another trend is represented by the military strategists opting for the concept of 'hybrid war' in an attempt to explain the mutations suffered by this phenomenon in the new context. Irrespective of the concept preferred, all these authors have contributed to the understanding of the global context, emphasizing the characteristics of future wars.

The Fourth Generation War

In a study on the evolution of modern war, the theoreticians and military analysts have defined four development stages. The first generation of the modern war, following the Westphalian peace was dominated by mass wars, culminating in the French revolution wars and the Napoleonic wars at the beginning of the 19th century. The second generation was characterised by the increase of the firepower and the manoeuvre capacity culminating in the First World War. The development of the manoeuvre capacity and the revolution initiated by the German army through the blitzkrieg tactics during the second world conflagration represent the distinctive features of the third generation war. Beginning with the end of the 1970s, following the Soviet-Afghan and American-Vietnamese wars, the fourth generation of wars registered a significant evolution, highlighting the capacity of a non-conventional enemy of exploiting for his own benefit the transformations from the political, economic and social environment (Frunzeti 2006, 96-97).

Even though the term is introduced in literature only in 1989 by William Lind (1989), this concept proves successful in the first years following the Cold War. The proponents of this concept argue that the development of the fourth generation war was favoured by the lost of the monopoly on violence by the nation-state, the appearance of non-state actors eager and able to challenge the legitimacy of the state, the evolution of globalisation and particularly of the advanced technology, the outbreak of cultural, ethnic and religious conflicts

(Robb 2004). In the framework of these conflicts, the borders between war and politics or soldiers and civilians disappear (Hoffman 2007, 18). The targets are both soldiers and non-combatants, religious ideas, political power, economic activities, international agreements but also people's minds. The fighters' actions target not only the physical destruction but also the mental and moral impact on the opponents (Williamson 2009, 3). The theoreticians of the new concept consider that the strategies and tactics of this new type of war appeared as almost a necessity, being triggered by the major discrepancies between state and non-state actors, as far as resources are concerned. In a disadvantaged position, non-state actors need to adopt irregular and asymmetrical methods in their attempt to avoid the military force of the enemy and to hit his critical political, cultural, communication points in order to affect the morale of the population and to destroy the leaders' will to continue the fight (Robb 2004). These asymmetrical fighters are willing to die for their beliefs, do not wear national uniforms, easily mingle among civilians being thus difficult to identify, are creative, always looking for innovative methods and tactics and do not take into account the international norms. Their attacks contribute to the creation of an atmosphere of uncertainty and distrust of authorities' capacity to ensure the protection of citizens, stress the divisions created within the civil society, affect the economic activity and destroy the internal cohesion of the society (Williamson 2009, 4). The fourth generation war is not a new form of war but rather a return to the war fought before the emergence of the nation-state. Neither tactics are new; they seem to be rather terrorist or guerrilla tactics but using modern technology (Williamson 2009, 7). In this case, the novelty is represented by the pattern of the combatants (states or non-state groups) and what motivates them to fight (Lind 2004, 7).

New Wars

The change of the international context with the end of the Cold War and the high number of bloody conflicts that burst on the African continent determined a series of authors to focus on the distinct realities within weak states, with a poor governance, considering that we are the witnesses of some significant shifts in the deployment manner of the war in these regions. One of the concepts that enjoyed success and visibility, especially among the academics, was that related to the 'new wars.' In order to understand the essence of this phenomenon, we will try to underline, briefly, the specificity of the 'old wars.' The origin of the old war must be found in the Western Europe of the 16th – 19th centuries, the evolution of this modern fight manner being closely linked to the development of the state as the main form of political organization within the international system. Building on the observation of the Prussian military strategist Carl von Clausewitz on the political character of war (and the famous theory of the 'remarkable trinity') as well as on Max Weber's conception on the essential characteristic of the state of representing the only form of organization holding

the monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, both internally and externally, we are able to outline the essence of this phenomenon attesting the fact that the modern war was the result of a rational calculation and that it was fought by, through and in the interest of the states. Mary Kaldor considered that old wars were at their peak at the middle of the 20th century when the use of science and technology for killing, doubled by the extraordinary capacity of massive mobilisation of the states led to unimaginable destructions. From this point of view, the author considers the Cold War a method of maintaining the idea of old war alive (Kaldor 2010, 15).

However, with the end of the Cold War and the fundamental change of the social relations that supported the old understanding of war, we witness today a dismissal of the Clausewitz/Weberian logic. The new, postmodern wars are based on three important assertions which seem to define them – the conflicts increasingly imply other actors than states, for other reasons than the traditional national interests, using tactics and instruments different from those associated with regular, professionalised armies (Butler 2009, 57). These are disorganised, even chaotic conflicts, powered by identity problems, fought by a wide range of combatants, supported by transnational networks illegally trafficking money, arms, people, by groups of organized crime, etc.

The catalyst of these new wars is globalisation, with its simultaneously integrative and disintegrative tendencies, the clear-cut economic disparities, the negative perceptions that it creates and most of all with the two serious crises it generates – state crisis and identity crisis (Butler 2009, 58-59). Leaving the states in an incapacity of controlling their relations, domestically and externally, contributing to the lost of the monopoly on the use of organised violence, emphasising a series of transnational phenomena beyond the state control, the state faces some major challenges which question its survival, determining the entrance into a post-Westphalian era. As products of a complex interdependence, the new wars emphasise this existential state crisis, representing serious threats to the security of millions. Unfortunately, the state crisis is doubled in the current context by an identity crisis. While the old wars were fought in the name of the national interest, calling for either the national identity or certain ideological principles such as liberalism, socialism or fascism, in the case of the new wars we can observe major transformations. At a time when the globalisation phenomenon challenges in a fundamental manner the state eroding its power, the national cohesion and the individuals' loyalty towards the state significantly diminish. In this case, it becomes obvious that citizens will look for what they have lost in other sources and the national identity associated to a declining state will be replaced by an ethnical, religious identity specific to a sub-group.

Thus, the new wars represent the actions of some sub-state groups enjoying the support offered by different transnational networks, actions aiming at contesting, eroding and replacing the state authority. The actors involved have

an interest in obtaining power and in ensuring economic gains without taking into account the lack of legitimacy of their actions or the restrictions imposed on using brute force. Often, these types of wars suppose a high degree of violence and brutality, violence being both a means for the achievement of the final objective and the objective in itself. The new type of war elevates the demonization of the Other to the level of a deliberate strategy and massacres, genocide, criminal activities, systematic violation of human rights are some of its frequent manifestations (Butler 2009, 60). The technological development does not play an essential role in these conflicts. The combatants largely rely on light but extremely bloody rudimentary weapons; the privatisation of arms production as well as arms trafficking favoured by the dismantling of the Soviet Union represent specific opportunities of which these forces take full advantage. In the place of professionalised hierarchically-organised armies, new wars imply irregular forces, paramilitary groups, mercenaries, organised crime unions. Civilians are usually the target of these groups and the differences between combatants and non-combatants, between barbarity and civilised behaviour, on which the modern society is based, become irrelevant (Butler 2009, 60). Unlike old wars which ended with a victory or a defeat, the end of new wars is not expected equally rapidly: different combatant parties have an interest in continuing the violence, both from a politically and economically point of view. Moreover, they have the tendency to infiltrate among refugees, deployed persons and criminal networks and to propagate the ideologies they produce (Kaldor 2010, 13). The supporters of the new wars concept also agree that these are not, actually, new. The novelty element is related to globalisation and this one, in turn, is linked to the changes occurred in the role of the state (Kaldor 2010, 23).

The Hybrid War – a New Paradigm

While, as we could notice, some authors consider that the post-Cold War wars represent the fourth generation wars or they share the belief that the term of new wars is more appropriate to describe the transformations occurred in the new international order, there is another category of authors that have reflected on the mutations suffered by the strategic environment and on their impact on the evolution of war. It should be noted that the latter group is formed by military strategists, former fighters or troop commanders (especially within Marine Corps), active participants in difficult missions of the US army that identified in the recent history a series of atypical missions which cannot be understood using the traditional language. The interventions in Mogadishu, Kosovo, Fallujah, Afghanistan, the war between Hezbollah and Israel from 2006 present a series of characteristics hard to explain by the military handbooks. These authors try to outline the mutations suffered by the war in the post-Cold War era opting for the use of a concept that has started to enjoy success and that can be found in the discourses of the officials as well as in a series of official documents and military strategies (American, British, Australian). Recognising

the significant dissipation of the differences between inter-state and intra-state conflicts, between combatants and civilians, between peace and war, military experts such as Frank Hoffman or James Mattis partly retake certain ideas that define the concepts of 'the fourth generation war' and 'new wars' and develop, in return, the concept of 'hybrid war' in order to describe the post-Cold War evolution. Starting from the recognition of the complex character of threats to the international security, threats determined or favoured by globalisation, arms and technology proliferation, the violent transnational extremism but also the resurrection of the former rival powers, Hoffman uses the term 'convergence' in order to describe war transformation – the convergence of the physical and psychological, combatants and non-combatants, violence and nation-building, the kinetic and nonkinetic (Hoffman 2009, 34). In an attempt to identify the reference points of the new international context and its impact on the US army, the two experts consider that the net conventional superiority of the American army determines other state and non-state actors to move out of the traditional military logic and seek some niche capabilities or some unexpected combination of tactics and technologies to gain an advantage (Mattis and Hoffman 2005, 1). Although the conventional war has not disappeared from the mix of instruments used by the international actors, Mattis, who led the American forces in Fallujah in 2004, declared: "I think the nation-state and conventional war is in a state of hibernation. I don't think it's gone away, but the most likely threats probably today are not going to be conventional or from another state" (Barnes and Spiegel 2008). This statement seems to be supported by recent evolutions registered by the institutes for conflict analysis. For example, according to the most recent HIIK study – Conflict Barometer 2014, during the last year there was no inter-state war (HIIK 2015, 16). And if the chances of engagement in a conventional symmetrical war are reduced, we must expect an increase of the visibility of irregular challenges – terrorism, insurgence, unrestricted warfare, guerrilla war or coercion by narco-criminals (Mattis and Hoffman 2005, 1). Future wars will not observe the clear-cut distinction between conventional/irregular, combatant/non-combatant. The future opponent will choose from the existent 'menu,' a mix of tactics and instruments that will allow him to avoid the direct confrontation in our terms, by our rules. As Hoffman argues, the future will be marked by hybrid wars in which states and non-state actors will use simultaneously more fight types – conventional, irregular, terrorist, disruptive and criminal aiming at destabilising the existent order. Evans, summarizing the new tendencies, argued that "symmetric and asymmetric wars merge and Microsoft coexists with machetes and stealth technology is met by suicide bombers" (Evans 2003, 140). Used both by states and non-state actors, by separate units or even by the same fight body, hybrid wars suppose the simultaneous use of a combination of conventional capabilities, irregular tactics, terrorist attacks and elements of organised crime in order to obtain a synergetic effect (Hoffman 2007, 14). The term hybrid is

applicable both at the organisational level (where we can find simultaneously a hierarchical political structure and decentralised cells or networks of tactic units) as well as at the level of the means used. The hybrid opponents will exploit the access to modern and sophisticated military capabilities, combining the lethal character of the state conflict and the fanaticism of the irregular wars (Hoffman 2009, 38). Thus, the future does not necessarily imply the increase of the threats number but the convergence of the existent threats in a hybrid form of war. The most important mutation in the war character implies the dissipation of the borders delimitating the different fight methods and their simultaneous combination.

Among the victims of the terrorist attacks from 2001 we can also find the feeling of invulnerability of the United States along with the West preference for conventional wars. That was a lesson for everyone – allies or enemies, state or non-state actors. The terrorists' success represented a proof of the mutations occurred in the fight manner showing the necessity of adaptation to the new context – a conceptual, strategic, operational adaptation. The obstinacy of persisting within the same intellectual and institutional borders is nothing but a losing solution in relation to a potential enemy not suffering from our handicap – the intellectual rigidity. The term 'hybrid war' describes the increasing complexity of the future conflicts and the necessity of flexible military forces able to easily adapt. Nowadays combatants (especially states) wishing to gain hybrid wars must learn to strike a balance between the conventional capabilities specific to the Cold War and the fight style specific to small-scale irregular wars. Troops must be prepared to fight and, at the same time, to carry out missions of peacekeeping, reconstructions, stability, international aid, etc. When the enemy acts on a multidimensional level, the national armies of the states trying to maintain their position in the military hierarchy and to obtain the victory must do the same. The future wars will require flexible 'multi-purpose' units and an essential role will be played by the leaders of these units who will have to prove innovative thinking and an increased capacity of adaptation in a complex and changing environment. The future enemies will not adopt tactics specific to the weak and they will not retreat into the mountains. On the contrary, they will choose "tactics of the smart and agile, presenting greater reach and lethality. They may attempt to operate within heavily populated cities, and use the networks of an urban metropolis to maneuver within as well as to sustain themselves" (Hoffman 2007, 43). As demonstrated by the Hezbollah fighters in their fight against the much more powerful Israeli army in Lebanon, by a series of small-scale Jihadist organisations or, more recently by the pro-Russian troops in the east of Ukraine, some extremely disciplined well trained and spread out cells may contest and challenge the modern conventional forces by using an innovative and concurrent mix of guerrilla tactics and performing technologies within the densely populated urban centres. In a study on hybrid wars, colonel John McCuenn argued that for winning this new form of war, the West must

obtain simultaneous victories on three battle fields – on the conventional battle field, through the conventional operations conceived with the aim of achieving long-term objectives, on the field represented by the indigenous population from the conflict area through some strategies of the type ‘clear, control and counter-organize’ and on the battlefield represented by the indigenous population and the international community through actions aiming at winning and maintaining war support and legitimacy (McCuenn 2008, 111). The conclusions of the military expert emphasize a distinctive feature of the new wars – fights are fought not only physically, on a traditional battlefield but also, and maybe in an equal measure, among the indigenous populations, home front, and international populations. Understanding this state of affairs means understanding both the threat and the solution. By ‘clearing, controlling and counter-organizing’ the population simultaneously with conventional operations, insurgencies and civil wars could be prevented. Essentially, these actions seek to ensure stability, promote local values, identify and train potential leaders, support the bottom-up development, protect the indigenous population and contribute to the reduction of the attractiveness of the insurgent organisations offering alternatives (McCuenn 2008, 111-112).

Conclusions

The wars of the future will be difficult to label as conventional or irregular. The transformations suffered by the international context and the war as a phenomenon will determine the blurring of the demarcation line between the two classic fight manners. It’s highly probable that the great majority of future conflicts will take the form of hybrid wars. The traditional form of conflict implying two national armies will be less predominant in comparison to the non-traditional types. This is particularly the case of the United States of America. Very few armies may hope to obtain a victory against the American troops using only the traditional fight methods. It is inevitable that those state actors or even non-state entities willing to contest their supremacy to opt for hybrid forms of fight in order to achieve their own objectives.

The hybrid war, without being an abnormality, will represent an essential characteristic of the future security environment. Though it does not exclude the outbreak of traditional, conventional, symmetric wars, the hybridisation tendency of the war will be a major challenge for the international actors of the 21st century. Disregarding this mutation and focusing exclusively on the development of the conventional arsenal is nothing but a losing solution. No state army has recently succeeded in obtaining victory against a non-state enemy, in a non-conventional war. The evolution of war requires the increase of the flexibility and adaptability degree. Future enemies will not fight by our rules, the wars we choose. The first lesson of the military history – ‘the enemy gets a vote’ – continues to be currently relevant and the soldiers hoping to obtain

victory against an apparently weaker, but at the same time more flexible, innovative, sophisticated and determined enemy must be aware of this.

If these mutations in war evolution are based on the universal crisis of state legitimacy we can conclude that all states are vulnerable to the new hybrid threats.

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