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THEMENSCHWERPUNKT

Report of the International Workshop ‘Sliding out of control? Consequences of changes in warfare by major military powers from the ‘Global North’ for the containment of warfare’

Michael Brzoska, Hans-Georg Ehrhart, Maxim Kuzmin

1. Problem, state of research and guiding questions¹

The wars in the Middle East and in Ukraine demonstrate that Karl W. Deutsch’s statement is still valid: “Nothing less than this – the understanding of war and the possible ways to its abolition – is on the agenda of our time” (Deutsch 1965: XI). However, in order to be abolished, war “must be understood” (Deutsch 1965: xii). This statement is especially challenging given the fact that practises, concepts and technologies of warfare seem to be constantly changing. From a peace research perspective, a continuous effort is needed “to rethink war”, as formulated ten years ago by Anna Geis (Geis 2006). Important areas that have to be illuminated in the pursuit of that effort include the conduct of warfare, the role of new technologies and their risks as well as, more fundamentally, the

assessment of what constitutes war, or, put differently, the fuzzy borders between peace and war in the 21st century (Ehrhart 2017). While these research questions do not directly tackle the multitude of causes of war, they address dynamics inherent to warfare. Studying these dynamics can contribute to learning more about the prevention of warfare. Furthermore, these elements cover the form and extent of violence in warfare and are therefore fundamental for the study and promotion of the prevention of war and the containment of violence in warfare.

While there has been much debate on the consequences of warfare resulting from trends in developing countries, or the ‘Global South’, culminating in the contested concept of ‘new wars’ (Lake/Rothchild 1998; Kaldor 1999; Jung/Schlichte/Siegelberg 2003), less attention has been paid to actors in the ‘Global North’ – particularly the militarily most powerful, highly industrialized states – and their changing ways of warfare and how these relate to existing instruments for the

¹ The workshop took place at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH), 11-12 May 2017.

prevention of war and containment of warfare. Certainly, some recent developments, such as drone warfare or cyberwar, have instigated contentious discussions (Baseley-Walker 2011, Schörnig 2013, Neuneck et al 2013); however, these have tended to remain focused on tailored measures to contain them. Often, the dominant question has been whether and how existing instruments of humanitarian law and arms control can be applied or if new instruments need be developed (Kaag/Kreps 2014; UNIDIR 2013).

The goal of the international workshop was to attempt to put recent and anticipated future changes into a common perspective. The workshop brought together experts who looked at three elements of these changes (recent warfare, doctrinal developments and use of technologies for military purposes) to shed light on the evolving characteristics, drivers and paradoxes of these processes. The primary objective of the workshop was to discuss commonalities and differences which result from these different perspectives. The second objective was to conceptualize the empirical observations. Particular attention was given to the drivers of recent developments, primarily technological but also social trends. A common set of questions on the nature and extent of changes as well as their driving forces and consequences was presented to participants beforehand. In the final panel, conclusions were drawn with respect to the appropriateness of current instruments of the prevention of war and containment of warfare.

The theme of the conference was, on the one hand, set within a broader debate on the changing face of warfare and, on the other hand, combined a few current, viral debates on more limited issues. Its originality lies in four facets: its assumption of evolving ways of warfare focusing on warfare, doctrines/operations, and technologies; its actuality, given the ongoing violent conflicts in the Middle East, in Ukraine and in Mali; its analytical perspective of focusing on major military powers of the 'Global North'; and its combination of four current strands of discussion rarely examined in combination: The debate on 'new', 'postmodern' and 'hybrid' wars, the discussion of the role of technological developments for changes in warfare, the military interventions by major military powers of the 'Global North' and challenges to existing instruments of arms control.

2. Summary of panel contributions

The first panel dealt with recent and ongoing warfare in Mali, Ukraine and Syria. Regarding Mali *Hans-Georg Ehrhart* (IFSH) presented the differing perspectives of the actors on the ground: For France and the international community the conflict is an anti-terrorism operation within a non-international armed conflict. The insurgents saw it either as war of secession (MNLA), anti-regime war (Ansar Dine) or ideological war (AQIM, MUJAO). As to the kind of warfare, a variety of practises could be observed. On the one hand, it was an expeditionary coalition warfare combined with stabilization efforts, on the other hand, the insurgents practised guerrilla warfare, followed by Blitzkrieg warfare and terrorism. Several innovative tactics could be identified: the use of IEDs, suicide bombers, GPS, and modern communication devices on the part of the insurgents,

and the use of indirect tactics via drones and special forces on the French side. Internal Malian drivers of conflict were the post-colonial legacy, immense governance deficits and competing ideologies. Main drivers for France were the perceived security challenges for Mali, the region and France proper such as the radicalization of the African Diaspora. Main regional drivers were the war in Libya and the resulting exodus of the Tuareg, the flow of armaments and competing ideologies. As main international drivers, Ehrhart identified the 'Global War on Terror' and NATO's intervention in Libya. Consequences for future warfare by France include the growing relevance of C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) and the ability to cooperate with partners, the lack of transport and refueling capabilities as well as the importance of information operations.

Pavel Felgenhauer (Carnegie Foundation, Moscow) dealt with the role of Russia in the Ukraine conflict. He characterised the conflict as a politically sophisticated and militarily limited war. Neither side aims to win in the classical understanding, i.e. militarily. While everyone is stalling and maintaining current positions, there is a possibility of a serious escalation. Russia's hope that the Ukraine would collapse did obviously not materialize. At the beginning, the Ukrainian army was disorganized, well-motivated but badly trained and very corrupt. However, it improved rather quickly. Russia's way of warfare can be dubbed hybrid warfare. Russia did not use its powerful airforce because this would undeniably reveal its participation in the conflict. However, it did utilise modern means of warfare. Russia invests enormous amount of money in the Glonass system to improve situational awareness of Russian soldiers, who early in the conflict did not use GPS systems fearing to be tracked. The main driver of Russia's annexation of the Crimea and its covert engagement in Eastern Ukraine stemmed from a threat assessment that is dominated by military and geostrategic thinking. The Russians were afraid that NATO was going to take control of Crimea by expanding its area of influence eastwards. By taking Crimea, Russia established itself as a dominant power in the Black Sea region and by covertly intervening in Ukraine, Russia created a stalemate, not a frozen conflict.

Walter Feichtinger (Landesverteidigungsakademie Österreich) gave an overview of the protracted conflict in Syria. This violent conflict, which is totally out of control, is a war with many facets. It is a war between the regime and the opposition, i.e. a civil war. It is also a regional war, because regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Israel and the Gulf states etc. also participate in the conflict in one way or another. There are also external, non-regional actors involved such as the Russian Federation, the US and the international coalition. Every actor of the conflict pursues its own goals. The opposition is fighting for a system change. Regional powers are fighting for regional dominance. Turkey is eager to prevent the creation of a Kurdistan in Syria. Israel is trying to prevent proliferation of weapons to Hezbollah. The international coalition wants to prevent the expansion of the Islamic State. Some engagement for human rights can be added. Russia wants to support its ally in the region and force its own position on the international arena, i.e. keeping Assad in power. Sometimes the war seems

to be a conflict of 'everyone against everyone and everything'. Feichtinger identified that the full spectrum of warfare is applied in the conflict. The actors use traditional, chemical, proxy, psychological and shock warfare as well as terrorism. At the same time, actors tend to ignore any international law. The real novelty of this conflict lies in its high degree of complexity. There are more than a hundred state and non-state, regular and irregular armed forces fighting in Syria and coalitions change almost constantly. That explains why negotiations have not succeeded much so far, for it is very difficult to define the parties who can be engaged to negotiate. The war has some characteristics which can be used for identifying trends in future armed conflicts. First of all, it is very interesting to research the role of religion in this conflict. Even though the temptation to call the war in Syria a religious conflict should be resisted, for the Islamic State religion is a very important means to mobilize external fighters. Second, the containment of conflicts like the war in Syria is illusory. Third, International Humanitarian Law is increasingly questioned in practice. International mediation has not succeeded so far as well. Major military powers do use new technologies in this conflict but with no chance for victory. They are just making the situation more complicated.

The second panel dealt with military doctrines of the US, Russia and France. *David Ucko* (National Defence University, Washington) analyzed the US way of irregular warfare. Starting around 2005 a brief counterinsurgency era began, mirrored in new field manuals and doctrines. This era ended in 2014 when the Quadrennial Defence Review stated that the US will no longer conduct large-scale stability operations. Consequently, the US ability to counter irregular warfare remains underdeveloped and deeply inadequate given the threats and challenges the US is facing. The reasons for these deficits are manifold. They lie in the US's military orthodoxy favouring traditional conventional warfare, overwhelming force and the related metrics which do not fit well with less sophisticated non-state threats that are often ambiguous, more political than military, and more long-term oriented. Another reason is the military's reluctance to overcome its institutional hindrance and blockade regarding organizational learning. In addition, the US failed to build capabilities for engagement in irregular warfare in areas such as education, training, organizational structures, resourcing and culture. The argumentation against counterinsurgency rests on a presumed bifurcation of irregular scenarios on the one hand and conventional operations on the other hand. However, irregular and regular challenges should be understood as overlapping because this is the way future wars can be expected to be fought. Instead, lacking a clear strategy, the US currently tends to rely on drone and proxy warfare. A better way forward would involve three steps: First, the US must to do all it can to prevent terrorist attack domestically but not overreact when one occurs nonetheless. Second, internationally the focus should not just be to eliminate key terrorist leaders but to create the conditions where insurgent groups cannot thrive. Third, the US should create the wherewithal and acumen required for global leadership in dealing with irregular warfare.

Johann Schmid (IFSH/Bundeswehr) analyzed the Russian way of hybrid warfare starting with an overview of the events in Ukraine in 2014 which led to a regime change, Russia's annexation of

the Crimea and its covert military involvement in the Eastern part of Ukraine. To answer the question how Russia's behaviour can be explained, Schmid drew on the so-called 'Gerasimov doctrine' as laid down in an article published in 2013. There, Gerasimov who is the Chief of Staff of the Russian Armed Forces stated that the 21st century is marked by a tendency toward blurring the lines between the states of war and peace. Wars are no longer declared and, having begun, proceed according to unfamiliar templates. Non-military instruments such as political, economic and informational means have become more important than military ones. Based on the analysis of the revolutions in Eastern Europe and Northern Africa, Gerasimov states that foreign interventions can turn a thriving state into an arena of armed conflict and civil war by influencing and using the protest potential of the population. From this basis he concludes that Russia has to create a comprehensive theory of asymmetrical forms and means of warfare, to control its own territory, to strengthen its defence in the international arena as well as bolster its informational defence. Gerasimov's ideas are no real doctrine but resemble more a Russian variant of a comprehensive approach combining conventional and unconventional instruments in a modular way to exert effects on the center of gravities of the opponent. This is the Russian way of hybrid warfare as seen in Ukraine. It is a game changer for security and defence in Europe.

Elie Tenenbaum (IFRI) gave an overview over the evolving French doctrine of counterinsurgency. France has a long counterinsurgency experience, starting with the Second World War and cooperation within NATO in the 1950s, where French, British and US operatives collaborated, and France's wars in colonies. On the one hand, the military doctrine of France was very much influenced by the American doctrine. On the other hand, France itself has famous counterinsurgency scholars, for instance David Galula. The historical concept of 'guerre révolutionnaire' followed the idea to impose a temporary totalitarian control over the population to sever any possible ties with the rebellion. In the 1960s and 1970s irregular warfare disappeared from the doctrinal landscape but remained present as a practise among the Foreign Legion and the marines who were to be employed in small-scale operations. While the 1980s marked the nadir of French irregular warfare, it took greater significance over the course of the 1990s when violence in Africa and the wars in the Balkans led Western countries including France to reintroduce irregular warfare tactics and new forms of civil-military cooperation. The war in Afghanistan led to the decision to officially reintegrate irregular warfare and counterinsurgency into the French doctrinal toolbox. Thus, there is convergence of doctrine development of the Western states. This includes light footprint operations, cooperation with local forces and the growing role of special forces.

The third panel focused on the technological dynamics of modern warfare. *Mika Kerttunen* (Cyber Policy Institute) analyzed the role of cyberspace as a relatively new and man-made domain of warfare. Cyber warfare has a lot of important functions: it is cheaper, faster and more effective than conventional warfare, which is the main reason, why many states invest impressive amounts of money to build their capabilities in that area. But while there may be many cyber incidents, actual cyber wars are

extremely rare. Amidst all insecurity, it is useful to recognize that while being vulnerable and valuable are prerequisites for potentially being targeted, both prerequisites do not pose reasons to wage war. On the contrary, being mutually vulnerable can encourage caution or even cooperation. Possessing cyber capabilities does not make states randomly belligerent, on the contrary, governments use them in the context of political disputes, confrontation or conflicts. Being attacked in cyberspace does not translate to war albeit in war computer network attacks, electronic attacks and propagandist information operation will take place. Cyber capabilities offer seemingly easy ways to promote one's political and operational objectives in disputes and conflicts. In the absence of clear understanding of what constitutes responsible and acceptable state behaviour as well as uncertainty which kind of international law can be applied in cyberspace, such use comes with high risks of escalation, even unintentional. The possibility to conduct effective activities in and through cyberspace does not replace physical violence nor reduce the attractiveness of physical violence when vital interests are threatened. Furthermore, major characteristics of war, such as violence, chance, (im)probability and instrumentality remain unchanged. Three moves would take national and global cyber security ahead. First, the adoption of national cyber security strategies should become the norm, since this would stabilize expectations of responsible state behaviour and heighten government accountability before the people and the international community. Secondly, governments need to subscribe to the notion of due diligence in cyberspace. Thirdly, a more determined take on confidence and security-building measures is needed. In short, governments need to recognize the value of rule of law and stop devaluing the international legal order through opportunistic propositions and destabilizing practises.

Niklas Schörnig (PRIF) dealt with the issue of drones, robots, autonomous weapons and the future of warfare. Military robotics is a vast field. While many observers automatically think of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) as the most important category of military robots, one should not forget that unmanned ground vehicles (UGVs), unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs) or unmanned surface vessels (USVs) also fall into this category. It is fair to say that all branches of the military are working on and working with military robots. Over the last years, most critical observers did not focus on military robots in general but so-called 'autonomous weapons' – or lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS) – in particular. Two key aspects of this definition are relevant and worth noting: First, the most important aspect of an autonomous weapon system is its ability to select and engage targets without further human input. Second, it makes no difference whether a human being is at least involved in a supervisory capacity, or whether the human is completely 'out of the loop'. It is probably most appropriate to understand current developments as the unfolding of a broader spectrum of 'war' based on new and more 'scalable' forms of violence. Instead of writing off traditional interstate war as something from the past, it is more likely that different forms of military engagements and 'war' will coexist and be fought simultaneously: In the future, a state might be engaged in targeted killings with drones in a relatively calm theatre while fighting an asymmetric war in

another and possibly being caught in a classical interstate war at the same time. At the moment, military robots and drones are limited to certain scenarios. With the advance of information technology and processing power, however, military robots will become more important in classical scenarios as well. The result will be a general acceleration of war, decreased crisis stability and a higher likelihood of war. The intensified focus on the individual as well as the asymmetry of humans versus robots on the battlefield, however, could intensify the debate about our classical understanding of International Humanitarian Law and the status of the combatant.

The fourth panel discussed the perspectives of warfare and the changing boundaries between war and peace. *Hakan Gunneriusson* (Swedish Defence University) focused on the Russian way of warfare. Starting with the 2007 cyber attack on Estonia, the Gerasimov doctrine and Russia's involvement in Ukraine, the panellist stated that Russia is waging hybrid warfare along asymmetric lines of conflict. The worrying elements used in this 'new war' are: the non-declaration of war, the use of armed civilians, non-contact clashes like the blockade of military installations by 'protesters', the use of asymmetric and indirect methods, simultaneous battles on land, air, sea and in the informational space and the management of troops in a unified informational sphere. This way of warfare amends the rules of war. The present legal concepts of warfare have become relatively anachronistic and should be adapted. The West's reaction followed its logic of economic rationality by applying measured sanctions and blaming and shaming. For the panellist this was an insufficient response. Russia's hybrid doctrine includes the weaponization of the society in Russia and the exploitation of Western weaknesses, as seen in the Ukraine and Syria conflicts. Western unwillingness to recognize Russia's hostility turned to be a tool against the West. What could be our next steps? Russia does not seem to understand our willingness to communicate. That is why we should introduce a comprehensive approach. The first steps of this approach should be to strengthen awareness in society and to strengthen political awareness.

Rob Johnson (Oxford University) dealt with the future of warfare. He argued that it is always difficult to discern what changes will affect the strategic level, especially when attention is focused on particular wars and technological novelties. The only thing to do in his view is to reflect on experiences, build scenarios and make hypothesis. If we look at recent wars – in Afghanistan, Libya, Syria – they have much in common with conventional wars. For instance, each side was prepared to sacrifice resources and people. But we cannot know how many of us will be ready to sacrifice in the future. We should definitely revise and rethink what we actually think about the future. What will be important and what will remain? Can we simply project in the future our way of thinking from today? What will be the role of international law and is it possible to make it matter? Currently, international law is in a major crisis. The conflict in Ukraine demonstrated this clearly. However, the world has been in crisis almost throughout history. For most of those interested in security matters, every age is an age of uncertainty. This makes predictions always hard. The panelist argued that three main school of thinking about the future can be distinguished. The first one tends to

explain future scenarios of war through the lens of the fight against terrorism. The second one relies on technology. Its proponents assert that future war will be influenced by major weapon development. Thirdly, traditionalists assert that we can project the current thinking on war into the future. We need always to ask critical questions and avoid the noise of current affairs. Not much is predictable. The panelist diagnosed a further weakening of international institutions. Furthermore, with new technologies, unilateralism and bilateralism may become more common features. Cyber systems, which combine espionage, communication and sabotage, offer the opportunity for deniability and concealment. The arms race of encryption and decryption is set to accelerate. Values that prevail in societies will change. In consequence, the security of populations is likely to decrease and attacks on domestic infrastructure are much more likely.

Anne Dienelt (University of Hamburg) elaborated on the legal consequences of new ways of warfare. She argued that it is very important to look at the future of warfare from a legal point of view. The setting of norms results in law. Treaties usually consist of several norms. Lawyers work with written norms but international lawyers also with unwritten norms, i.e. international customary law. Law in general is a written norm that fits many situations. But how do new forms of warfare using new technologies fit into existing norms? International Humanitarian Law normally is tailored to conflicts fought by organized armed forces. This is not usually done anymore because now war has different actors and different means. Some types of modern weaponry, such as drones and autonomous lethal weapons, challenge the basis of law. The panelist, however, saw no fundamental problem in finding new legal ground guiding states and their behaviour in new wars with their new structures and weapons. A fundamental question is whether the current legal order needs to be transformed or only adapted. The panelist expressed optimism to create better functioning legal constraints on warfare in the future, despite the current experiences in Ukraine, Iraq and Afghanistan. She particularly emphasized her confidence that war criminals will not go unpunished once the conflicts are over and that this will increasingly shape the behaviour of political decision-makers.

3. Overall points of discussion

- Besides all the differences in terms of practises, drivers and contexts, the three case studies of Mali, Ukraine and Syria demonstrate that the states of the 'Global North' adapt their way of warfare by the increased use of indirect and covert approaches, the application of high-tech, and/or the use of information operations.
- All three cases are of a high complexity, mixing local, regional and global dynamics, actors and interests that make political solutions extremely difficult.
- Non-state actors such as militias and insurgents play an important role regarding both drivers of conflict and partners for interveners.
- Irregular warfare is likely to be a central component of future warfare in all forms of warfare.

- An alignment of doctrines of irregular warfare can be observed. For the future, complex combination of conventional and unconventional practises can be expected.
- Future warfare of the states of the 'Global North' will be strongly influenced by new civilian and military technologies such as the cyberspace, drones and autonomous weapons.
- While cyber operations will be crucial in warfare, cyber war by itself is unlikely to occur. In the past, cyber incidents fell short of the threshold of violence, death and destruction marking warfare. This will continue to be the case in the foreseeable future.
- With the advance of information technology, military robots will become more important. Likely results are a general acceleration of war, decreased crisis stability and a higher likelihood of war. The intensified focus on the individual as well as the asymmetry of humans versus robots on the battlefield, however, could intensify the debate about the classical understanding of International Humanitarian Law and the status of the combatant.
- Governments need to recognize the value of rule of law, the democratic rule of law, and stop devaluing international legal order through opportunistic propositions and destabilizing practises.
- Worrying elements of future warfare include clandestine forms of warfare, the use of armed civilians, non-contact clashes like the blockade of military installation by 'protesters', the use of asymmetric and indirect methods, simultaneous battles on land, air, sea, and in the informational space, and the management of troops in a unified informational sphere. These elements raise the question of whether and how to adapt the present legal order of warfare.
- It is always difficult to discern what changes will affect the changes will affect the strategic level, especially when attention is focused on particular wars and technological novelties. The only thing we can and should do is to think and build scenarios and make hypothesis on future warfare.
- International institutions remain critical for the containment of warfare, while strong forces are currently undermining their credibility and effectiveness.
- The existing legal order of warfare needs updating. There was no agreement among the workshop participants whether this is likely to occur.

4. Open research questions

- Are there better modes of interventions in violent conflicts which combine the containment of violence with improving the prospects for stability and welfare in the territories where they occur? For example, can no fly zones or safe zones improve the situation?
- Which kind of actors on the ground are involved in indirect strategies, what role do they play, and how effective are they?
- Do military interventions make sense at all given the complexity of the problems and the multiplicity of actors and interests?
- Is the concept of the comprehensive approach of countering armed violence implementable and effective?

- How can the complexity of current violent conflicts be reduced?
- How can the role of regional and international organizations be strengthened?
- How can international law be improved given the ongoing changes in warfare and the resulting blurring of boundaries between war and peace?



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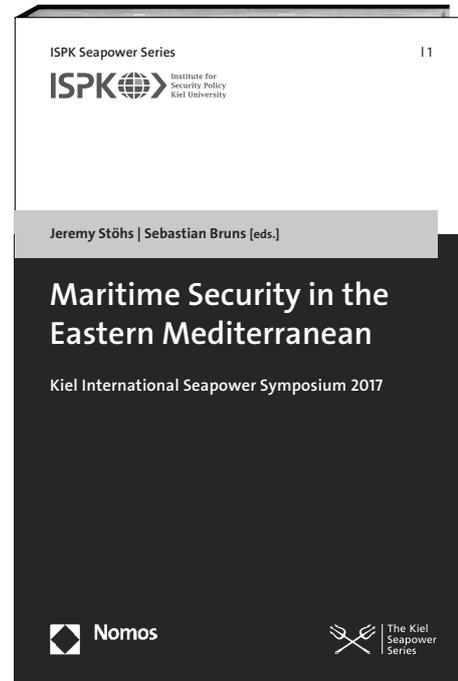


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