

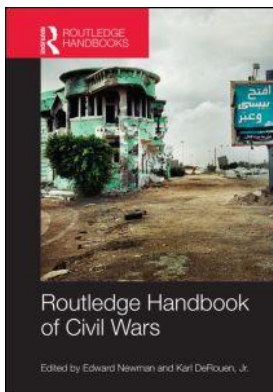
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### **The Changing Nature of Intrastate Conflict and ‘New Wars’**

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## PART III

# The nature and impact of civil wars

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## 17

# THE CHANGING NATURE OF INTRASTATE CONFLICT AND 'NEW WARS'

*Caroline Kennedy and Thomas Waldman*

Since the end of the Cold War specific aspects of international politics have seemed increasingly troublesome and we have become more keenly aware than ever of the so-called 'sub-state' domain, including various forms of intrastate armed conflict. These may be described as ethnic or identity conflicts which tear states apart (such as Yugoslavia in the 1990s), struggles of secession (Chechnya) or struggles against authoritarian regimes (contemporary Syria). The so-called 'new wars' debate, originating in the 1990s, was an important arena in which to interrogate the origins of such conflicts and it has inspired over two decades of discussion about the genesis and durability of small wars and the role of Western states in intervention.

Within this debate we began to ask a set of different questions about war and interrogate the nature of the conflicts which characterised the decade after the Cold War. One preoccupation was why and how states became so weak that the central authorities could not effectively control territory, resources or the instruments of political violence. The work of both Mary Kaldor (2012) and William Reno (1998) pointed to a better understanding of the fragile or failing nature of many governments and the existence of shadow states. Their work highlighted the way in which states no longer controlled the mechanisms of violence and the processes through which national armies degenerated into disparate and locally 'owned' militias. Such occurrences indeed inspired Philip Cerny (1988) in the first edition of the journal *Civil Wars*, to argue that we had in fact returned to a new neo-medievalism.

This chapter, critiquing the 'new wars' debate, argues that at the beginning of the twenty-first century we are seeing a continuing trend that sets its face against traditional lines of international politics, away from a reliance on a state model and into a contested space of messy, ambivalent but enduring conflicts with particular characteristics. The shape of war, we argue, will continue to be that of sub-state wars, so we need to be aware of the shadows that such wars will cast in local and regional politics and the potential challenges for great powers which attempt intervention, direct or indirect, to impose stability.

### **Not so 'new wars'**

The 'new wars' label was in some ways inappropriate as the wars of the 1990s actually came out of the structures of the post-1945 world and the Cold War. After 1989, many expected a new beginning for international relations but the end of the confrontation between East and West

had unexpected legacies: one of which was that Cold War contests continued to be played out, albeit in altered forms, and with important consequences. The bloody civil war in Afghanistan in the 1990s was the result of the withdrawal of Soviet troops in the late 1980s, the actual collapse of Communist power and the pattern of politics which had been established by great power rivalry in the region. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, and, of course, the United States, had all supported different factions. The Taliban were a beneficiary of the implosion of Soviet power. Equally the Balkan wars were the direct result of the failure of the Yugoslav empire. The civil war and subsequent genocide in Rwanda in 1993 did not come out of nowhere and it too was a result of the politics of the great powers in that part of Africa since at least 1945. So to see the 1990s as a *new* start was theoretically correct in terms of a 'new' bipolar international structure but also profoundly mistaken as actually Cold War legacies played out throughout the decade and beyond.

The rise of al-Qaeda, for example, can be traced to the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and other such groups which were affected by the emergence of the Cold War, not least the US/British-backed coup against the Iranian leader Mosaddeq in 1953. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the passions roused by events that followed it such as the Iran–Iraq War were framed by the overarching structures of the Cold War and the decisions taken by those in the Reagan Administration to contest the ideological battles with Moscow, especially but not exclusively those of the Middle East and Asia. The *mujahidin* in Afghanistan – including bin Laden – were supported as mentioned above by the Pakistani intelligence service for largely Islamic reasons, but also supported by the CIA for geopolitical ones. The logic of the Cold War and the contest with Communism therefore had, in some respects, more than a hand in the creation of al-Qaeda, an irony perhaps best summed up in a term used by the CIA: 'blowback' (Johnson, 2001).

Twenty-first century politics also remains deeply affected by the origins and development of the Cold War and by the policy choices made by earlier generations of agents in Washington and Moscow. This is true especially of Africa. As Gettleman has pointed out, Africa had the bad luck of gaining its independence as the Cold War was at its height. East–West rivalries shaped much of the internal politics of the continent with the superpowers propping up brutal, unsavoury and unpopular regimes which in turn co-opted rebel groups and provided supplies of money and guns (Gettleman, 2012). The Cold War and the subsequent withdrawal of support by Moscow and then Washington promoted the demise of many despots. Indeed, it seemed as if a new era had begun with the ouster of Mohamed Siad Barre from power in Somalia and Mobutu Sese Seko in the Congo. Reno argues that Africa became a new market with unpatrolled skies, long shorelines and in some regions vast and valuable resources of gold and diamond mines attracting arms traffickers but also inspiring popular movements designed to challenge the control wielded by rulers who had monopolised economic resources as a way of control through systems of patronage (Reno, 2011).

The continuation of poor governance itself can be explained by a number of factors. Not least we are keenly aware of the often brutal legacies of colonial history and the often violent process of decolonisation through which states emerged after 1945 from British and French rule; after 1975, from the collapse of Portuguese power; and again after 1989 with the implosion of the Soviet Union. The record of post-colonial rule in many cases institutionalised kleptocratic government practices such as one-party rule and authoritarianism and the ensuing lack of governmental accountability and transparency. Poor governance in turn created 'haves' and 'have-nots'. Often the 'have-nots' were the majority of the population. Widespread poverty, unemployment, lack of education and the inability or unwillingness of the government to provide basic functions compounded grievances inspired by patent inequalities. Ironically, in many of these states vast natural resources should have created abundant wealth but resources or

access to resources remained in the hands of the political elites capable of running mines, telecom networks or raising taxes. In many weak states, groups challenged those ostensibly in power and some such as the warlords in Afghanistan acted with impunity across large swathes of territory essentially presiding over alternative forms and structures of authority.

So, the ideological rationales imposed during the Cold War gave way to more uncertain, looser strategic constellations. Once the Cold War geopolitical structure was removed 'established patterns vanished'. Regimes run by former Communist leaders, for example, often reinvented themselves, by setting aside ideological claims to legitimacy and appealing more to ethnic constituencies, religious sentiment or the ability to command resources. Subsequent conflicts were no longer contained or managed by superpower overseers and the wars of proxy common in the Cold War were replaced with different forms of external intervention. What we might designate non-traditional external players have entered into former sites of civil wars such as Angola and begun dominating the economy. Beijing operates over fifty state firms within Angola, oil flows directly out to China and the country rarely benefits. Some scholars see this as a 'transparent looting' of the country's resources enabled, as Kaldor had originally argued, by the process of globalisation which benefits the few not the many (Cardenal and Araujo, 2013).

### **'New wars': a novel description**

Yet even if many of these conflicts emerged out of the Cold War, these 'new wars', as Mary Kaldor controversially dubbed them, seemed to display a disturbing mix of novel characteristics: occurring within and across states; seemingly inconclusive and intractable; often identity-based; a mixture of old and new (primitive and modern); more guerrilla raids and massacres than set-piece confrontations between clearly identifiable armed groups; with battle lines seemingly blurred and high levels of collusion between supposed antagonists. Such wars appeared to discredit leading theoretical and conceptual understandings of war, as most powerfully manifested in the work of the nineteenth-century Prussian general, Carl von Clausewitz. War, scholars such as Kaldor maintained, was no longer war as we know it. Clausewitzian understandings of war as a continuation of politics by other means, where politics was the preserve of states and war the instrument states employed to further national interest through set-piece battles, was irrelevant in the face of such internalised, chaotic and seemingly apolitical conflagrations. Violence was often directed at civilians in the form of massacre, mutilations, rape and pillage to gain and hold territory. Holsti described the situation thus: 'In wars of the "third kind" there are no fronts, no campaigns, no bases, no uniforms ... There are no set strategies or tactics ... the weak must rely on guile, and often crime, to raise funds for bombings, assassinations and massacres' (Holsti, 1996: 36).

Civilian casualties have always formed part of the tapestry of war but by the end of the twentieth century, civilians, as opposed to regular troops, were according to many scholars bearing the brunt of conflict (Black, 2004). Although the actual statistics have been disputed and the overall thesis of civilian as casualty challenged by experts such as Newman (2004), the range of innovative instruments of war appeared shocking. Hostage taking began to be commonplace as innocents such as the children of Beslan were seized (and murdered) in 2004 or foreign nationals captured to make a political point. (The holding and murder of foreign nationals and Christians in Algeria in January 2013 by militant Islamists is part of a trend we can identify from the 1990s, of which more later.) Conflicts throughout the 1990s were, according to Gray, 'in-the-face personally primitive and postmodern. Chechnya, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Somalia comprised a ghastly combination of Homer and Tom Clancy' (Gray, 1999: 168). Other commentators spoke of 'destructured conflict' (Shawcross, 2000). Perhaps the most notorious of groups responsible for such atrocities was the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone which indiscriminately

amputated arms and legs of innocent villagers (Hirsch, 2001). Many thousands of civilians were displaced by conflict, either fleeing to other parts of their country or to refugee camps abroad. The trend of urbanisation also meant that cities expanded as groups displaced from rural living by conflict congregated around the edges of fast growing shanty towns and slums.

Faced with such apparent evidence, it was tempting to conclude that armed groups committing such atrocities were little more than gangs of mindless, remorseless criminals. That civilians seemed to become the main targets of armed groups undoubtedly defied logic: if the stated aim of insurgents is to overthrow a corrupt government in the name of 'the people', why do they resort to massacring the very people in whose name they are fighting? Scholars struggled to explain the grim motivations which resulted in endemic violence.

Psychological analysis became popular. Violence, it was postulated, could be an assertion of power by those who were powerless. Fighters might attempt to transfer deeply held feelings of shame through conducting humiliating acts such as sexual violence, amputations and public ridicule (Keen, 2005) and many may come to see violence as a way of achieving recognition: the gun demands respect. The widespread use of drugs and alcohol by 'fighters' arguably only serves to further destabilise the mindset of fighters. But targeting civilians is also closely related to a number of economic motivations. Greed seemed in many instances to explain slaughter. Abuses were and remain common during the looting of villages and towns, forcing civilians to flee their properties so goods can be stolen with ease. Civilians are also used as forced labour for such tasks as farming, mining and the transportation of equipment. Along with the economic imperative of greed, we should also not discount the importance of political, strategic and ethnic factors motivating conflict. For example, civilians that are seen as supportive of the 'enemy' or those belonging to particular ethnic groups were particularly susceptible to systematic executions and appalling abuses (Keen, 2005; Ellis, 1999).

Part at least of the scholarly endeavours of the 1990s was especially to examine the place of women in these 'new wars' and incorporate them into the narratives of conflict especially but not exclusively as a group on the receiving end of violence. It has been estimated that in 1993 approximately 20,000 Bosnian Muslim women were raped by Bosnian Serb men in rape camps (Stigmayer, 1994). Sex as a weapon of war was brought to the attention of a global audience and it was recognised at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) that rape was used as an instrument of terror. Soldiers, mercenaries, arms dealers and criminal gangs all made their way into the landscape of these 'new wars'; so too did children. Despite various international agreements prohibiting the practice, children especially have become a staple for an ad hoc army bringing with it, in places such as Congo and West Africa, a reliance on magic and superstition. There are perhaps several hundred thousand child soldiers active in the world today. Children became valuable assets for armed groups where supply was not an obstacle. Forced recruitment was practised by groups as varied as the FARC in Columbia, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda. With civilians the main targets and victims of war, huge numbers of newly orphaned and displaced children found their way into the ranks of armed groups. Children are easy for commanders to manipulate and because modern weapons, such as the ubiquitous AK47, are easy to handle they can be operated by young children after only basic familiarisation (Chivers, 2010).

Forced conscription is, however, only half of the picture and ignores the many children who have voluntarily joined armed groups: war can offer displaced youths the prospect of material gain and adventure and even improve individual security when being part of an armed group is wiser than remaining prey to one. Many children who had witnessed brutal abuses committed against their families wished to exact revenge on the perpetrators and for youth, starved of opportunities and held back by societies dominated by tribal elders, fighting constituted an

escape: a way of turning the tables on those responsible for their exclusion and powerlessness. For some, joining an armed group entailed becoming part of a new 'family' with commanders acting as father-like figures (Dallaire, 2010). Methods were used to induce extra courage and fearlessness in children. According to the UNHCR, child rebels are encouraged to spray themselves with magic water to protect against bullets (UNICEF, 2011). Drug and alcohol abuse was widespread.

Children recruited into armed groups in one conflict often end up fighting in other regional conflicts as 'floating warriors' capitalising on porous borders to travel wherever there was a market for their newly learned trade. In certain regions of recurrent conflict, large pools of ex-combatants as well as children exist as potential recruits for armed groups lured by the opportunity to share in the spoils of war. During Liberia's second civil war between 1999 and 2003 it is estimated that well over 1,000 regional warriors took part, with the majority fighting for the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) rebel group. Such dynamics underline the problem of regional zones of instability or 'conflict complexes'. War economies spread beyond borders and networks of mercenaries, illegal trading and organised crime spread instability. So, as a description or catalogue of the horrors of contemporary conflict the 'new wars' thesis seemed compelling. It was not, however, unchallenged. We noted above Newman's contestation of the civilian as casualty thesis. And in a correction to much of the literature on new wars, Stephen Ellis noted that 'Africa's wars are today often erroneously understood as internal, rather than interstate, conflicts' (Ellis, 2005: 141). Conflicts, which may appear on the surface to be of internal struggle, cannot be fully understood in isolation; they are intertwined and interconnected in an extremely complex, multilayered and interdependent fashion. The LRA, which originated in Uganda, survived for many years because of the backing of Sudan but it moved constantly across borders in order to survive. The Mali rebels may indeed have been operating within that country as 2013 began but they also operate across borders into Mauritania and Niger. What is more, informal regional structures, alliances and interconnections are in constant flux. Loyalty patterns shift and it is not uncommon for protagonists to change sides thus complicating notions of what the aims and objectives of the conflict might be or how they should be interpreted.

There was yet another characteristic of these conflicts which was that we appeared to witness a decline in the skill set and level of talent of the guerrilla. Reno observes that during the Cold War guerrilla fighters had to be crafty because they were fighting not just the forces of a dictator but also the might of the superpower sponsoring the regime. Hence, if you were a rebel in Angola you might fight Cuban soldiers but you would have also faced Soviet aircraft and foreign finance. It is also argued that leaders such as Jonas Savimbi of the National Union for the Total Independence of Africa (UNITA) was highly skilled in tactics and strategy and have a clear political agenda which could at least be negotiated (Gettleman, 2012). Throughout the 1990s these types of figures seemed to fade away to be replaced by a disparate and diverse band of fighters with little identifiable political, ideological or strategic direction. While it is quite common to reflect upon the past with a degree of nostalgia and accept the former fighter/rebel/insurgent had at least noble intentions (Tom Wolfe in his 1970 essay famously and ironically referred to the admiration for terrorists/insurgents as 'radical chic') yet is there a difference between the rebel leaders fighting in the cause of nationalism during the Cold War and what many analysts see as a more sinister and widespread anti-Western and perhaps anti-Christian agenda at play?

When there was recognition of religious sentiment as a powerful force for confrontation, this fed into a view about the 'real' nature of the geopolitical conflicts that faced the West at the opening of the twenty-first century: that they were fundamentally civilisational, or cultural (and religious) in character. Civilisation trumped religion in its importance. Among the most widely cited (semi-)academic books of the last twenty years that sought to emphasise this feature of international politics was Samuel Huntington's controversial *The Clash of Civilizations and the*



*Remaking of World Order* (1996). Huntington's thesis is now well known. It is perhaps usual to speak of the inevitable 'clash of civilisations' as a motor of conflict in twenty-first century world politics, and there are echoes of this language in academic, journalistic and political commentary throughout the 'new wars' thesis as, for example, in the collapse and bloody wars of the former Yugoslavia, or even in 2013 in West Africa. Yet religion had been a crucial element – as cause and shaper – of many sub-state conflicts since the end of the Cold War. We need only pause a little to consider the conflicts in Indonesia (Aceh), Philippines, Yugoslavia, Israel–Palestine, Nigeria, India, Pakistan (and Kashmir), Afghanistan and Uganda. Post-independence secular movements holding countries together have become increasingly overlaid with religious differences which often are merged with nationalism and perhaps more sophisticated than the original 'new wars' thesis would allow.

What we must recognise is that 'new wars' were conceived by scholars as such not simply for their apparently changed nature but also for the international reaction they provoked as organisations such as NATO struggled to determine appropriate roles in the post-Cold War environment. With the United Nations at least in theory no longer constrained by the great power politics of the Cold War and a growing global twenty-four-hour media relaying images of suffering from these conflict zones, the pressure among populations within the West to 'do something' increased. However, the 1993 US intervention in Mogadishu demonstrated just how difficult such encounters could be and that failure certainly caused within the Clinton Administration a degree of hesitancy to act on the 'genocide' in both Rwanda and Bosnia. The mixed record and domestic costs of humanitarian engagement provoked debate as to the effectiveness of military intervention to resolve new wars. This fed into a broader debate about the use of force. Much of the legacy of the 'nuclear era' had been premised on the idea of the 'declining' utility of conventional force. Deterrence and the logic certainly of nuclear weapons led many to consider major war as unthinkable. Certainly within the European Union, militaries lost much of their resonance and even within the United States, despite victory in the first Gulf War; there was little enthusiasm for the deployment of troops abroad. None of this meant that wars did not happen, or that states gave up their right to use force in defence of their own interest, but certainly major war seemed to be on the wane. The general assumptions governing this belief were first laid out in the late 1970s by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye. In their study 'Power and Interdependence' they asserted, as one of the three central characteristics of a dawning age of interdependence, the declining utility of military force (Keohane and Nye, 1998). A related argument was pursued by John Mueller whose *Retreat from Doomsday*, first published in 1989, argued that major-power war had gone the way of slavery and duelling; it was a social practice that had simply for Mueller become 'subrationally unthinkable' (Mueller, 1989: 240). The view that the great powers had simply unlearned war remained a powerful thesis consigning war to the realm of the sub-state, the irrational and the primitive. Western war when utilised, as for example in the Kosovo conflict, took the shape of a 'virtual war' in which Western states deployed airpower to subdue and remove a dictator without suffering a single combat fatality. Such seemed to be the technological prowess of Western states 'virtual wars' appeared to be the template for the next century (Ignatieff, 2001) and presented a neat resolution to the complex response which 'new wars' demanded.

### 9/11 and 'new wars'

The events of 9/11 of course changed the Western response overnight. The American intervention to displace the Taliban, the War in Iraq and the subsequent war in Afghanistan demonstrated clearly that, contrary to Keohane and Nye (1998) and Mueller (1989), the great powers, or at least

some of them, had not lost the appetite for conventional war. While it is not the intention of this chapter to go into detail on the course and challenges of the 9/11 wars, there were some significant developments around the events that brought the trends of the 1990s identified as 'new' directly onto the doorstep of the great powers. After 9/11, one of the key questions was how and why al-Qaeda would wish to and could target the United States and the general shock that primitive, ghastly attacks on civilians were not simply the staple of the developing world or on the periphery of Western states. 9/11 brought the United States and its allies into direct confrontation with the trends of the 1990s in a mosaic of counter-insurgency, aid and peace-building.

Western states have thus found themselves embroiled in messy, complex statebuilding missions to prop up weak, newly established regimes, establish some semblance of functioning governance and prevent deeply divided societies from falling apart entirely. This task has been made all the more difficult given that local ruling elites frequently employ undemocratic means to cement their power, publicly denounce their Western patrons and suffer from serious legitimacy deficits among large parts of their populations. Furthermore, the very presence, but also the often neglectful and culturally insensitive actions of large numbers of Western forces have undermined attempts to stabilise such situations, which over time have become increasingly overlaid with ethnic rivalry and sectarian strife. The typical response has been to inject more aid and troops, as typified by the 'surges' in both Iraq and Afghanistan (Suhrke, 2011). But missteps in both contexts have resulted less from any lack of resources but rather from fundamental misperceptions and failures of understanding (Waldman, M., 2013).

A distinctive feature of contemporary war is that humanitarian actors flooded into these zones of conflict; aid workers, NGOs and peacekeepers became embedded in conflict zones, leading some to comment on a 'new Raj'. Indeed, the humanitarian impulse has probably done as much to shape the character of contemporary wars as any other factor but not necessarily or always in a positive fashion. Much has recently been made of the NGO, the private contractors and the associated host of support staff in Afghanistan more concerned about private activities and profit than the well-being of the people (Chandrasekaran, 2012). There is also the question of whether the advancement of Western 'norms' into the post-conflict space is always productive. The 'Liberal Peace' model remains the dominant paradigm articulated by UN agencies and the powerful international financial organisations and states underwriting intervention and statebuilding. Neoliberal policies of open markets, privatisation and fiscal restraint and good governance policies are the instruments of Western governments. Cooper *et al.* have argued that the global economic crisis has discredited precisely such models of liberalism as espoused by the United States and its European allies (Cooper *et al.*, 2011). As one scholar has phrased it, Western strategies in the particular case of Afghanistan mean that

development workers and nation-builders continue to advocate a free-market ideology and offer development projects couched in the rhetoric of tapping into the 'knowledge economy' or producing for 'global markets'. Such rhetoric borders on the incredulous when most countries possessing a far better infrastructure and educational foundation than Afghanistan cannot compete globally given the dominance of the 'West' in high-skill production and China/India in low-skill manufacturing.

(Matsumoto, 2011: 561)

Yet another issue is the question of who benefits from such programmes. Arguably it is elites who already have a degree of power and resources, politicians or the local warlords and strongmen who benefit to the greatest degree from such initiatives and the programmes of aid, opening up resistance within populations aware of the growing gap in material resources coming into the region.

Following on from the 'war on terror', aid towards some twenty-seven developing countries affected by violence has increased over the past decade. In 2007–2008 aid reached \$36 billion for that year. While Iraq and Afghanistan accounted for some 38 per cent of that total, aid was dispensed to the Republic of Congo, Liberia and Sudan. One effect of aid was arguably that the ever-growing gap between the elites and those excluded from the benefits created fault lines. Yukitoshi Matsumoto in an excellent study of development aid in Afghanistan poses the question of how 'we can reconcile huge sums of money spent on security and development in the last ten years with the serious deterioration of security and continued poverty among ordinary Afghans?' (Matsumoto, 2011: 566). There is little space for dissent in the rush for good governance, and as Paddy Ashdown recalls of his experience in Bosnia there needed to be recognition that by 'insisting on accelerated reforms we are often asking local politicians to take responsibility for a level of social disruption which our own politicians at home would reject without a second thought' (Ashdown, 2007: 83). While it is not the point of this chapter to examine the issue of aid as a cause of conflict, what is interesting and missing from the original 'new wars' thesis is the growing resistance to Western-style interventions across a number of conflict zones as well as increasing attacks on UN staff and peacekeepers.

### **'New wars': no longer novel?**

Even before 9/11 prompted a significant shift in global political imperatives, commentators were already beginning to question the whole premise of the concept of 'new wars', and in particular just how novel post-Cold War conflicts actually were. We have already seen how these wars were not really new in so far as they were often the mutated and bastardised remnants of pre-existing Cold War conflicts, but the new features, indeed the changed nature of war claimed by the more zealous new wars proponents could also be seriously challenged from a number of directions. Had war really been 'transformed' so completely as Martin van Creveld had proclaimed? (Creveld, 1991).

The new wars thesis is difficult to critique, and not only due to its paradigmatic prominence in both academic and policy circles. Its central precepts have often been uncritically accepted as 'given' not least because the argument is clear, appears convincing and seems to capture so much about contemporary warfare as relayed to Western publics through the media. Yet, students of war and civil war must remain open to alternative conceptions. Adopting a critical view of the new wars thesis does not necessarily entail abandoning all of its insights, but rather is more about placing some of the central claims and ideas in proper empirical, historical and theoretical perspective. Importantly, some of the substantive claims should also be approached with caution where the empirical evidence supporting them often turns out to be either inaccurate or incomplete on closer inspection, often reflecting a heavy reliance on media reporting, elites in capitals and the second-hand, anecdotal insights of lay authors (Kalyvas, 2001). Moreover, we must be wary about constructing generalisations about contemporary conflict that are based on a limited number of cases. Indeed, the original new wars thesis was heavily reliant on the one case of Bosnia, and while its proponents argued for and sought to demonstrate its wider applicability, it has to be questioned whether its central claims can be applied to the huge variety of modern wars, each driven by contextually specific and historically determined factors.

'New wars' claims generally suffer from historical amnesia, both in terms of their simplistic conception of 'old war' and with respect to the fact that many of the features of the wars they describe have been apparent in most civil wars (not to mention many major state wars) throughout history. So, Newman notes, 'all of the factors that characterise new wars have been present, to varying degrees, throughout the last 100 years' (Newman, 2004: 179). To present old

war as a clear-cut affair conducted between states for rational reasons of national interest and fought between clearly distinguishable armies on distinct battlefields (even if some such wars took place on occasion) overlooks the complexity of past wars and ignores centuries of historical experience which would contradict such depictions. Old war, and Clausewitz with it, is raised up as a straw man which can be effortlessly knocked from its pedestal. And even if major state wars are more similar to contemporary sub-state wars than new wars scholars claim, it could be argued that the comparison is anyway a false opposition, where it would be more appropriate to compare them to old civil wars which certainly displayed many of the features they argue are novel.

The Cold War period witnessed a large number of sub-state conflicts displaying many of the characteristics outlined above and, indeed, high civilian casualties and the targeting of civilians have been recorded in wars throughout the centuries: indeed, such things are one of the distinguishing features of civil war. When such aspects of old war are brought together with corrections to certain of the empirical claims of the new wars theorists, outlined below, the epithet 'new' begins to look a little less appropriate.

Crevelde's argument that many contemporary sub-state wars are apolitical or lack strategic rationale is also difficult to sustain on closer analysis. Most groups have clearly identifiable goals even if they differ from traditional state objectives concerned with national interest – war is not simply an end in itself, however unclear or unreasonable the political ends may appear to us (strategic rationality is not limited to the state). Often it is precisely the political logic of these wars that drives much of the violence against civilians and can, for instance, constitute a means of spreading fear in order to assert control in an area or deter collaboration with the government. Mary Kaldor recognises this, but is wrong to suggest this is somehow new or somehow post-Clausewitzian. The concept of war as a continuation of politics is capable of embracing a whole range of political motives, whether conjured up by state or non-state actors.

We might also question the extent to which the state is no longer the principal or most important unit of reference in understanding contemporary wars (Crevelde, 1996). Isabelle Duyvesteyn's (2005) study into the politics of African conflicts provides important insights in this respect, demonstrating that in fact many sub-state conflicts are explicitly about the state; they are fought precisely in order to wrest control of the state. Even though such conflicts take place in contexts of state breakdown they are not necessarily about 'state breaking' (along identity or ethnic lines), but are battles between different groups to either form new states or capture the reins of power. The state may therefore be the prize.

The various features of the fighting that typified war in the 1990s, rather than simply manifestations of blind violent tribalism, can be explained in strategic terms as resulting from the unique effects of state collapse (the usual context of most contemporary sub-state conflicts). Described by Kalyvas as 'symmetric non-conventional' (2005: 91), sides to the conflict are generally extremely weak and do not possess regular armies (or at least in name only): this balance of (a lack of) capabilities differentiates it from both conventional war (as there are no regular armies fighting set battles) and insurgency (as there are recognisable frontlines in the form of roadblocks, etc.). Contrary to the observations of 'new wars' scholars the distinction between combatants and civilians is clear, private factions are ultimately if loosely controlled by a state and the assumption that avoiding battle is the norm is questioned by the many quasi-conventional features that can be observed (not that avoidance of battle is necessarily a sign of non-strategic behaviour – it has been a serious way of conducting war since Pericles and Fabius).

Furthermore, labelling such wars primitive – as the 'new barbarism' thesis has it – can be attributed more to a failure of understanding culturally defined behaviour, and in wider perspective one has to wonder what exactly distinguishes a machete from a precision-guided bomb in its

ultimate effect, whatever the technological sophistication of the latter (the machete might even limit the amount of destruction that can be wrought). As we have seen, targeting civilians can have brutal logic. There is more than a whiff of ethnocentric cultural stereotyping in depictions of these wars as somehow uniquely brutal or expressions of ancient hatreds. Smith notes that the concentration on the irrational is more 'a means to explain away the essential unwillingness to go through the laborious task of understanding such wars' (Smith, M.L.R., 2005: 51).

With these points in mind, a number of scholars returned to Clausewitz and began to reveal the misleading character of the interpretations of his theory on which the claims of novelty rested (Echevarria, 2007). Careful reading of Clausewitz demonstrated how his theory was more than capable of helping to explain so-called 'new wars'. His ideas were not confined to wars between sovereign states. Most importantly, his famous trinity of passion, chance and politics, when correctly conceived in all its depth and comprehensiveness, was extremely well placed to capture the complexity of contemporary conflicts (Waldman, T., 2013). It is as important to be alive to continuities in war as it is to recognise the changing patterns of why and how it is fought. As Clausewitz himself stated, 'Every age had its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconceptions. It follows that the events of every age must be judged in the light of its own peculiarities' (Clausewitz, 1993: 717). The wars which followed the demise of the Cold War were no different and while their character was of course 'new' in some respects, we should pause before grandly proclaiming that the nature of war itself had changed.

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