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Future Military Conflict and Their Characteristics

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Abstract. *This article analyzed future military conflicts, defines development trends in combat operations. And also revealed their influence on the nature and nature of war in future military conflicts.*

Keywords: *military conflicts, wars of the future, the nature of the war, artificial intelligence, information operations, regional unions, weapons systems, military operations, diplomatic response.*

War has never been static. It evolves with political shifts, technological advances, and shifting global power structures. Today, we stand at a crossroads where traditional definitions of war, victory, and even truth are increasingly blurred. The wars of the future will not be fought with weapons alone. They will be shaped by information warfare, economic warfare, and strategic alliances. The legal and moral foundations of war are also being reinterpreted, making conflicts more difficult to define and more difficult to resolve.

In this article, we examine the transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world, the role of technology in shaping war, the rise of regional alliances, the blurring of the lines of war, and the impact of all of the above on the nature and character of war. How should states prepare strategically for these challenges, using their diplomatic, informational, military, economic, and legal systems?

Changing the World Order: From Unipolarity to Multipolarity For decades, the United States dominated global affairs after the Cold War. The “unipolar world order” has influenced the global governance of Western institutions such as NATO, the UN and the IMF. However, today we are witnessing a clear shift towards multipolarity. It is worth noting that new centers of power have emerged:

China’s economic and military rise has challenged US dominance with assertive actions in the South China Sea and investments under the “Belt and Road” initiative;

Russia’s resurgence has reshaped European security, especially through its actions in Ukraine;

India, Brazil and regional powers are increasing their influence in global affairs;

The decline in the authority of international organizations such as the UN/NATO has led to unilateral military interventions and conflicts outside the traditional framework of international law.

At the same time, the rise of nationalism and right-wing movements around the world has led to the primacy of sovereignty over global cooperation. Countries are increasingly willing to act unilaterally or through regional alliances, without relying on traditional institutions. For example, in April 2025, President Donald Trump announced “Freedom Day” tariffs, imposing a universal 10% tariff on all imports and a 34% tariff on Chinese goods in particular, in an attempt to reduce the trade deficit and restore US manufacturing competitiveness. China responded by imposing

matching tariffs and restricting exports of rare earth minerals. Similarly, the recent rise of the Fatherland Party in the UK, the AfD in Germany, and Viktor Orbán in Hungary are just a few examples that highlight a broader global trend in which national interests are increasingly taking precedence over multilateral cooperation and shared governance. These shifts are creating a more fragmented and unpredictable global security landscape, where conflicts are shaped not by a single dominant power but by regional ambitions.

Technology as a Decisive Factor in Future Wars Technology has always been a decisive factor in warfare. The 21st century has seen the emergence of artificial intelligence, cyber warfare, autonomous weapons, and space capabilities that are reshaping the battlefield.

(a) Artificial intelligence (AI) and autonomous systems. AI-powered drones and robotic combat systems are changing the pace and nature of military engagements. Example: In the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (2020), Azerbaijan used AI-powered drones to neutralize Armenian forces, demonstrating how technology can be used to bypass conventional military forces.

(b) Cyber warfare and information operations. Modern conflicts involve not only physical battles, but also cyber campaigns that can disrupt a country's economy, disrupt communication networks, and spread disinformation. Example: In January 2025, Iran launched coordinated cyberattacks targeting Israeli water treatment infrastructure and air traffic control systems.

(c) The new command post will control satellite communications, navigation, and missiles in future military conflicts. Future conflicts are likely to include attacks on space assets. Example: The growing space capabilities of the US Space Force and China indicate that warfare beyond Earth's atmosphere is becoming a strategic priority.

The rise of regional alliances. As global institutions weaken, regional alliances are becoming the dominant military framework. Instead of large-scale global wars, future conflicts are expected to be localized but supported by strong alliances. For example:

(a) The Quad (US, India, Japan, Australia) acts as a counter-China force in the Indo-Pacific;

(b) The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) strengthens ties between China, Russia, and Central Asian states;

(c) The Israeli agreements are reshaping the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East and have brought Israel and Arab states closer to defense cooperation.

The Blurred Lines of War: Hybrid, Gray Zone, and Multi-Domain Conflict Modern conflicts are no longer confined to traditional battlefields. Instead, they encompass military, economic, cyber, and information domains. This concept is evident in the rise of hybrid warfare, gray zone conflict, and multi-domain operations.

Misinformation and disinformation campaigns are being used to influence public opinion and destabilize governments. Example: In the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war (2022 to present), Russia has widely used hybrid warfare tactics, including cyberattacks on Ukrainian infrastructure and coordinated disinformation campaigns on social media. Influencing hostilities through the deployment of platforms and unspecified paramilitary units. Artificial intelligence makes it increasingly difficult to prove the truth, as manipulated images, deepfakes, and false information are indistinguishable from the truth. The legal ambiguity of war. Legal definitions of war are being used. Russia called the Ukraine war a "special military operation" to avoid international legal consequences. China's naval actions in the South China Sea were characterized as defending national interests rather than military aggression. Modern conflicts increasingly blur the line between state and non-state actors. Russia's use of the Wagner Group allows it to conduct military operations while maintaining deniability. Similarly, Ukraine has relied on foreign volunteer fighters operating outside of formal command structures. These circumstances complicate attribution and accountability.

Impact on the nature of war. The nature of war remains the same – it is a fierce contest of political will. However, we should note two important points:

(a) Victory is becoming increasingly difficult to define. In Afghanistan, the United States had a significant military advantage but failed to achieve a clear victory. In the Ukraine conflict, even after three years and a month, success is measured not only in territorial gains but also in economic stability and information dominance.

(b) the continuation of protracted warfare. Despite advances in military technology, the idea of rapid and decisive wars has been rejected. The protracted conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza demonstrate that even high-tech wars cannot easily resolve deep political struggles, making modern wars more involved and complex than expected.

Impact on the nature of war. While the nature of war remains violent, the tools and strategies used in it are evolving:

(a) Wars are moving from the physical to the intangible domain (cyberspace).

(b) Information warfare is a central part of military strategy.

(c) Weapon systems are evolving rapidly (hypersonic missiles, laser weapons, AI-guided combat systems).

From the above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

To address these changes, countries need a strategy that combines diplomacy, information, military, and economic tools. These four elements are interconnected and must work together to ensure national security and strategic advantage.

(a) Diplomatic response. Diplomacy must go beyond traditional negotiations. Nations must build strong regional and global alliances that can act as force multipliers in times of crisis. Strategic partnerships with like-minded countries can enhance security, improve intelligence sharing, and deter potential adversaries. Efforts should be made to establish clear international norms and rules, particularly in the areas of cyberwarfare and the use of AI-based weapons.

(b) Information warfare. Countries should invest in digital literacy, cybersecurity, and AI-based disinformation. Strategic engagement should be proactive, not reactive. Governments should anticipate and counter adversary propaganda before it is deployed. Cybersecurity infrastructure should be strengthened to protect critical military and civilian networks. Information warfare is no longer limited to the dissemination of misinformation and disinformation; it now includes the challenge of proving the truth. With the rise of AI-generated content – deepfakes, synthetic voices, and fake news – it is becoming increasingly difficult to determine the authenticity of even the most accurate information. In future conflicts, trust itself will be the battlefield, where proving that a genuine innovation is authentic may require as much effort as disproving a lie.

(c) Military Adaptation and Readiness. Modern militaries must be prepared for multi-domain operations (land, sea, air, space, cyber, and cognitive domains). To remain competitive, it will be necessary to invest in autonomous weapons, unmanned systems, and artificial intelligence-based combat platforms. Military readiness must focus on asymmetric and hybrid warfare tactics that enable forces to operate effectively in contested environments. Resilience to cyberwarfare, space-based threats, and military deception must be built into military strategies.

(v) Increasing joint operational capabilities across land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace will provide a more agile and flexible force.

(d) Economic Warfare and National Resilience. States must reduce economic dependence on adversary forces to avoid strategic vulnerabilities. Investment in critical supply chains reduces the ability of adversaries to exploit their economic capabilities. The use of financial instruments as weapons, such as sanctions, trade controls, and investment restrictions, must be carefully calibrated.

(e) Legal and ethical warfare strategies. The weaponization of international law is already evident, with countries using legal frameworks to shape global ideas. Countries must ensure that their military operations are consistent with international law, while also being prepared to confront the legal challenges of adversaries. The development of laws and policies to govern AI-based warfare,

cyberattacks, and space-based conflicts will be crucial in shaping the battlefield of the future. But its nature is rapidly changing due to technological advances, the rise of hybrid warfare, and the growing importance of information and economic tools. In this evolving security landscape, states that can adapt, innovate, and anticipate will have a strategic advantage. Wars are no longer won through military might alone, but through a combination of diplomacy, economic power, information control, and technological superiority. How nations prepare today will determine their security tomorrow.

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