

IN AN AGE OF CIVILIZATIONAL CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT: Given current and foreseeable geopolitical developments, and accelerating rates of destabilizing technological evolution, conflict is inevitable for the foreseeable future. Violent conflict, however, need not be. Better understanding of current challenges and trends has the potential to enable reductions in violence and social and cultural damage, and the encouragement of constructive competition where possible. Military and strategic engagement is necessary in many cases, but it must be augmented by developing a broader and more sophisticated framework appropriate for an increasingly complex, fast-moving, information-dense world characterized by fundamental tensions at institutional, national, and civilizational scales. At the highest level, this requires developing a more robust theory of civilizational conflict, and the opportunities and threats such conflict presents.

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There are few institutions that have been as consistent throughout human history as violent conflict: violence among families, clans, and tribes; violence among institutions, interest groups and classes; violence among kingdoms and states; violence among religions and cultures. Scholars debate whether modern levels of violence are lower than historical trends, and if so by what measures;¹ others argue that war itself, despite being an obvious evil, is in fact good in that it leads to the creation of institutions such as empires or states within which people can prosper far more than in less ordered environments.² Such discussions seem beside the point to the many people who see the world today as chaotic and dangerous, increasingly riven by religious and ideological fundamentalism, with the traditional responses of the state, such as deployment of conventional military power, less and less effective, even counterproductive. With perhaps more justification, those who live in regions characterized by

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1. See, e.g., STEVEN PINKER, *THE BETTER ANGELS OF OUR NATURE* (2011), arguing that violence has declined over long periods of history, including our own time. Gregory Clark points to recent research that shows that violent death in hunter-gatherer societies was far higher than in agrarian or industrial societies, and notes “a transition from early societies, in which interpersonal violence was a major contributor to death rates, to modern ones, in which violence is not an important source of mortality.” GREGORY CLARK, *A FAREWELL TO ALMS: A BRIEF ECONOMIC HISTORY OF THE WORLD* 126 (2007).

2. See, e.g., IAN MORRIS, *WAR! WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?* (2014). The general point that people are better off inside even a bad but strong state than in a state of chaos may be intuited by comparing life inside Russia, a difficult but relatively strong state, with life in Somalia or Mali, where the state has broken down and warlords and religious zealots grasp for such power as they can obtain.

weak or failed states, as in some areas of the Middle East or sub-Saharan Africa, still suffer disproportionately high levels of violence.³

This article will argue, however, that such pessimism is unwarranted. It is indeed true that the world today is marked by violent conflict, with even the few efforts to create moderating institutions, such as the European Union, mired in bickering. Additionally, violence no longer seems to be even remotely tied to traditional state-to-state conventional military activity, leading to perceptions that a natural, more peaceful order has been overthrown. This is, however, historically shortsighted: international institutions such as the United Nations, and the proliferation of international private firms and nongovernmental organizations since World War II have created new sources of order, wealth, employment, education, and supportive infrastructure. Moreover, anarchists and revolutionaries have been violent for centuries,⁴ and Yeats many years ago despaired in his poem “The Second Coming,” written in 1919 as the devastating impact of World War I on the optimism of the Enlightenment became clear, that in his day “the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.”⁵

But it is not only that pessimism is unwarranted; it is a dangerous and self-fulfilling prophecy of doom. For conflict, etiology misdiagnosed and ill-treated, often slides easily from manageable to violent, from containable to chaotic and desperate. There is thus an urgent need to understand the current characteristics of conflict in broad overview, the better to at least partially steer conflict from unproductive—say, the chaotic and violent state of much of the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa⁶—to productive. An example of the latter might be African countries competing to design commercial legal systems so that new businesses can be easily started and funded, thus creating jobs for large populations of adolescent males, a competition—that is, a peaceful conflict—that bears at least the potential for creating economic and social prosperity rather than violence.⁷

3. See SEAN MCFATE, *THE MODERN MERCENARY* 72–89 (2014); see also CLARK *supra* note 1, at 124–128; MORRIS, *supra* note 2, at 3–26.

4. See LAWRENCE FREEDMAN, *STRATEGY: A HISTORY* 220–27, 247–99 (2013).

5. Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon can not hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

William Butler Yeats, *The Second Coming*, in 89 DIAL 466 (1919) (first stanza).

6. McFate and others have suggested that such areas are characterized by “neomedievalism,” where “overlapping authorities and allegiances . . . [create] a durable disorder, in which a single authority can neither impose greater stability nor cause the system to collapse.” MCFATE, *supra* note 3, at 73. See generally 72 et seq. (expanding on the concept of neomedievalism).

7. Organizations such as Transparency International and the World Economic Forum issue public reports on such performance that not only provide rankings, but also encourage better performance. *Corruption Perceptions Index 2015*, TRANSPARENCY INT’L, <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2015/> (last visited July 5, 2016); *The Global Competitiveness Report 2015–2016*, WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, <http://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-report-2015-2016/> (last visited July 5, 2016).

It does no practical good to wish for a world without conflict, given today's realities.⁸ Accordingly, this article will instead seek to illuminate some of the dynamics which characterize current global geopolitical conflict, many of which are indeed increasingly complex, and challenging. The emphasis will be on military strategy and analysis, not because it should be the primary or exclusionary way to approach global geopolitical conflict, but because it is obviously an important perspective, as well as an accessible way into a difficult and multidomain discourse. The article will close by suggesting some ways that civilizational conflict can be conducted to encourage constructive conflict and discourage destructive conflict. Obviously, this is not possible in all cases for a wide range of reasons, not least human psychological and institutional frailty; nonetheless, an important historical opportunity to redirect at least some conflict towards less violent expression currently exists, and should not be squandered.

I. AS CIVILIZATIONS CLASH

In 1996, Samuel P. Huntington published the seminal book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*.⁹ In it, he suggested that the world geopolitical order could be conceptualized as consisting of civilizations such as Western civilization (North America and Western Europe); the Orthodox world (Russia and the Balkans); the Buddhist, Chinese, Hindu, and Japonic civilizations; and the Muslim world.¹⁰ A number of critiques of his thesis followed, primarily charging that he had overemphasized the internal cohesion within each civilization, and underemphasized the transcivilizational contacts

8. See, e.g., Gordon A. Craig & Felix Gilbert, *Reflections on Strategy in the Present and Future*, in *MAKERS OF MODERN STRATEGY: FROM MACHIAVELLI TO THE NUCLEAR AGE* 863 (Peter Paret ed., 1986) ("The collapse in 1914 of the international system that had preserved peace during most of the nineteenth century and the subsequent failure of all attempts to find an effective substitute for it, the paramount influence of ideology upon international relations since 1917, and—despite the definitive defeat of Fascism and national Socialism by a coalition that transcended the ideological divisions among its members—its increased intensity after 1945, the hypernationalism of countries that freed themselves from colonial status in the wake of the second world conflict, and—particularly in the Middle East—the emergence of militant religious zealotry have made the years since 1945 a period of almost unremitting conflict on many levels.").

9. Professor Huntington first used the term in a 1992 lecture at the American Enterprise Institute, *Samuel Huntington, Lecture: The Clash of Civilizations?* (C-SPAN television broadcast Oct. 19, 1992), <http://www.c-span.org/video/?33350-1/clash-civilizations>, and subsequently in 1993 in an article in *Foreign Affairs*, *Samuel P. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations?*, *FOREIGN AFFAIRS*, Summer 1993, at 22, which he subsequently expanded into a book. SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON, *THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS AND THE REMAKING OF WORLD ORDER* (1996). The idea of a clash of cultures was already part of European intellectual history as a result of European expansion during the age of imperialism and the Belle Époque, when Europeans came into intimate contact with new cultures around the world.

10. See HUNTINGTON, *supra* note 9, at 44–47. Huntington treats Persia, and thus Iran, as part of the Islamic civilization. *Id.* at 45. Most of Oceania is considered part of the West. *Id.* at 46. Huntington also identifies a few examples of "lone" countries; such outliers include Haiti and Ethiopia. *Id.* at 136. There are also countries, such as Ukraine and India, identified as "clef" countries because they include large groups representing different core civilizations. *Id.* at 126. Thus, for example, Ukraine is identified as including both Orthodox Christian and Western Christian civilizations, an analysis that aligns with the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine and the effective partition of the country. *Id.* at 166.

among them, and expressing concern that his suggestion that a primary geopolitical divide was between Islamic and all other civilizations could become a self-fulfilling prophecy.¹¹ Nonetheless, Huntington's perspective has over time proven to be useful; Henry Kissinger's newest book, *World Order*, makes the point that Islam is perhaps the civilization least amendable to a world order based on the European secular nation-state model that has dominated global geopolitics since 1648.¹²

At the same time, the constant historical process of geopolitical change and localized conflict has yielded several instances where more than simply regional issues appear to be at stake. The Russian conquest of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine, following on earlier Russian military actions involving Georgia, Transnistria, and other post-Soviet entities, appears to signal a Russian strategy of reassertion of regional control, conducted in some cases through direct military action, but in other cases through more subtle means (and always with the specter of massive nuclear capabilities in the background).¹³ Jihadist Islam continues to challenge nation-states internally and externally through flexible and somewhat inchoate networks with no definitive state-based core.¹⁴ Managing the rise of China in relation to the reigning superpower, the United States, and the evident opportunities for confrontation and misunderstanding in areas such as the South China Sea, raise a number of challenges for both countries, as well as many Asian states.¹⁵ More broadly, significant privatization of governmental functions in both military and nonmilitary domains raises long term implications for governance and conflict that are only now being recognized.¹⁶

Each incident, each conflict, has its own peculiarities and characteristics. However, it is increasingly apparent that the traditional formulations of military competence and strategy, while still valid within the military domain, and still applicable in many conflicts, do not fully capture the challenges of today's geopolitical landscape, nor do they provide a comprehensive framework for addressing them.¹⁷ Jihadist Islam will not fall in a Jominian action by mass forces

11. See, e.g., Amartya Sen, *Democracy as a Universal Value*, J. DEMOCRACY, July 1999, at 3, 16.

12. HENRY KISSINGER, *WORLD ORDER* 120–22, 144–45 (2014). The Treaties of Westphalia ending The Thirty Years War in 1648 are traditionally viewed as laying the legal basis for the state-based international order evident today, which is hence often referred to as the Westphalian order. *Id.* at 2–4.

13. See generally BOBO LO, *RUSSIA AND THE NEW WORLD DISORDER* (2015).

14. See MCFATE, *supra* note 3, at 84.

15. See KISSINGER, *supra* note 12, at 212–33.

16. As pointed out by McFate, the extent of such privatization is seldom recognized even by military personnel: in 2010, at the height of the Iraq War, the U.S. Department of Defense obligated some 366 billion dollars to contracts to private entities, which was over half of their total obligations, and seven times the United Kingdom's entire defense budget. Moreover, even in Iraq, only a third of the armed contractors worked for the U.S. military; the rest worked for nongovernmental organizations, the United Nations, multinational firms, and other clients. MCFATE, *supra* note 3, at 19, 152.

17. See QIAO LIANG & WANG XIANGSUI, *UNRESTRICTED WARFARE* 4–5 (Cent. Intelligence Agency trans., 1999). The CIA translation is available on the web at <http://www.c4i.org/unrestricted.pdf>, and is highly preferable to other versions which distort the original content, such as the book version entitled *Unrestricted Warfare: China's Master Plan to Destroy America*, which

at a decisive point; Russian subversion extended to the Baltic states will be difficult to defeat through deployment of conventional military force; Chinese cyberattacks will not be successfully countered by, in the words of some U.S. officials, putting a missile down a smokestack.¹⁸

It is not that two thousand years of strategic thinking is suddenly invalid. Indeed, military action or the threat of such action remains core to managing an increasingly complex and confusing world. But the strategic question is no longer simply one of coupling political goals to military means. Rather, it is how to define, understand, and successfully manage conflicts between civilizations that will continue, and likely intensify, for the foreseeable future. This becomes especially challenging because, for a number of reasons, it may be the case that civilizational conflict involves less, rather than more, traditional military activity: civilizational conflict, in other words, is not necessarily traditional war at the level of civilizations.¹⁹ If, for example, one considers the rise of China in terms of civilizational conflict, the goal of both the United States and China should arguably be a peaceful evolution of a stable multipower world (rather than, for example, the decades of violence as Germany struggled to assert itself against the then dominant world power, the United Kingdom).

But the state to state conflicts that dominate the headlines are only the tip of an iceberg defined by more fundamental trends. Today's world is characterized by emerging technologies, many of enormous power, that have been, for better or worse, democratized, and are thus available to sophisticated nonstate actors.²⁰ It will be characterized for many decades by conflict and tension arising from the difficult relationship between Russia and the European Union and the United States; the rise of China against the defensive efforts of the reigning superpower, the United States; continuing conflict between Islam and other civilizations, complicated by deep conflict within Islam itself; and the more traditional, if no less dangerous, problems of traditional state to state conflict (e.g., U.S. efforts to manage Iranian and North Korean nuclear weapon programs).²¹ Some areas of the world, especially in the Middle East and Africa, may revert to "neomedievalism," as Westphalian models of state governance

on its surface takes a rational analysis of the United States from a Chinese perspective, and tries to sensationalize it. Citations in this article will be to the CIA pdf version.

18. One U.S. official reportedly stated that "[i]f you shut down our power grid, maybe we will put a missile down one of your smokestacks," a dubious comfort given that any reasonably good cyberattack would be very hard to attribute to a particular adversary, thus making smokestack retaliation problematic. See Chris Carroll, *DOD: Cyberattack on U.S. Could Warrant Deadly Response*, STARS & STRIPES (May 31, 2011, 3:32 PM), <http://www.stripes.com/news/dod-cyberattack-on-u-s-could-warrant-deadly-response-1.145183>.

19. LIANG & XIANGSUI, *supra* note 17, at 6–7. The Cold War, a conflict between two Enlightenment philosophies and thus internal to a single civilization, nonetheless involved very little traditional military conflict between the principals, although it certainly involved a number of proxy actions, such as the Viet Nam War. This, of course, was a deliberate choice on the part of both the United States and the Soviet Union, who feared that direct military engagement might lead to a nuclear exchange. See generally FREEDMAN, *supra* note 4, at 156–77 (discussing the evolution of nuclear strategy and deterrence theory regarding nuclear weapons).

20. See, e.g., BRADEN R. ALLENBY, *THE APPLIED ETHICS OF EMERGING MILITARY AND SECURITY TECHNOLOGIES* (2014).

21. See KISSINGER, *supra* note 12.

fail and a complex mixture of institutions, religions, clans, and interests form a constantly shifting structure of incoherent governance—“durable disorder.”²² In many cases, an informed and sophisticated policy based on concepts of civilizational conflict may be able to minimize the impacts of destructive conflict, or even partially steer destructive into constructive conflict. That possibility is an important reason encouraging development of an informed and explicit theory of civilizational conflict.

II. AMERICAN DOMINANCE IN CONVENTIONAL MILITARY DOMAINS

At this point in history, the conventional military forces of the United States are generally understood to be stronger than those of any other power.²³ Consider, for example, military budgets. In 2012, total direct global military expenditures were approximately 1,756 billion dollars, of which fully 685 billion was accounted for by the United States alone. In contrast, China spent 166 billion dollars, Russia 91 billion dollars, and the United Kingdom 61 billion dollars.²⁴ This disparity in part is a result of the wars of the past century: after World War II, the United States was the only major power not domestically ravaged by war. Moreover, the United States outlasted the Soviet Union in the Cold War, although the latter retains much of the huge nuclear arsenal it developed during that period. Additionally, the United States currently has an experienced and battle-tested military, not just in combat but in equally important domains such as force integration and logistics management, as a result of its wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Bosnia, and elsewhere.

American dominance in conventional military domains has had the obvious effect of driving competitors to seek strategies and domains where they can

22. MCFATE, *supra* note 3, at 72–100. The “Westphalian” world order, generally regarded as deriving from the Peace of Westphalia that ended the Thirty Year’s War in 1648, essentially holds that states are the only recognized actors in international affairs, that all states are legally equivalent, and that states are not permitted to interfere in each other’s domestic affairs. This pure model is modified by international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, NATO, and others, and legally by recent innovations such as the so-called “Responsibility to Protect,” which holds that the international community can interfere in the domestic affairs of an otherwise sovereign state to prevent such activities as genocide. *See The Responsibility to Protect*, U.N. OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL ADVISOR ON THE PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE, <http://www.un.org/en/preventgenocide/adviser/responsibility.shtml> (last visited July 3, 2016).

23. *See* LIANG & XIANGSUI, *supra* note 17, at 24.

24. *See* Anastasia Paris & Panagiotis Cambas, *World Military Expenditure, Turkey and Greece*, 6 GLOB. BUS. MGMT. RES.: INT’L J. 71, 85 (2014); *see also* *The World Factbook: Country Comparison; Military Expenditures*, CENT. INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2034rank.html> (last visited July 3, 2016). Some countries in less settled regions spent much more than the major powers on a per capita basis—Israel dedicated 7.4% of its GDP to defense expenditures, and Saudi Arabia 9.1% of GDP (2012 figures)—but no single power spent anywhere near what the United States did in total. *SIPRI Military Expenditure Database*, STOCKHOLM INT’L PEACE RES. INST., http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database (last visited July 3, 2016). Note that figures for defense expenditures are always estimates and thus will agree directionally but not in detail depending on analysts’ assumptions and methodologies; underlying data are opaque and frequently hidden in many different accounts across national budgets.

avoid direct confrontation to the extent possible, while still asserting their interests.²⁵ This leads to “asymmetric warfare” strategies which emphasize nontraditional domains of conflict such as cyberwarfare where American dominance is less marked, or the United States is more vulnerable, or both.²⁶ More fundamentally, how war and conflict are framed may be modified to produce advantage, resulting in a shift from military confrontation and conflict to what might best be called “civilizational conflict.” The examples discussed further below of the Russian invasion of Crimea, Chinese exploration of “unrestricted warfare,” and jihadist Islam, provide some insight into what civilizational conflict might look like.²⁷ They are used because they illustrate the deep roots and intractable nature of today’s conflicts, and are certainly not exclusive. They suggest, however, that managing conflict by redirecting it to the extent possible from destructive to constructive modes, and reducing its impact when it occurs, is feasible and the only realistic response; vain hopes that conflict can be somehow wished away, or is a result of simple misunderstandings, are inadequate.²⁸ This is particularly true given the inevitability of what might be considered “traditional” geopolitical conflict situations such as the rise of Iran, Israel, and North Korea, each of which is a nexus for conflict that may change in shape and intensity, but shows little indication of being a short term phenomenon.

III. THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF CRIMEA

Many observers have noted that Russian’s Crimean operation, and its subsequent Eastern Ukraine invasion, were nontraditional; indeed, some argue that no invasion, at least as usually defined, even occurred. Although a number of terms are used to describe the strategy—American and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) analysts have called it “Hybrid Warfare,” a form of “unconventional warfare”—Russian military authorities have used the term “New Generation Warfare,” which is as descriptive as any.²⁹ An introduction to the thinking behind the strategy was provided in an article by General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation, who notes that in the twenty-first century there has been “a tendency toward blurring the lines

25. See generally Braden R. Allenby, *The Paradox of Dominance: The Age of Civilizational Conflict*, BULL. ATOMIC SCIENTISTS, Mar. 2015, at 60–74.

26. See FREEDMAN, *supra* note 4, at 220–21; LIANG & XIANGSUI, *supra* note 17, at 24–25.

27. Allenby, *supra* note 25, at 64–69. Historical precursors to civilizational conflict, including guerilla warfare at local scales and the Cold War, of course exist and are important sources of insight in understanding and managing the more complex and multidimensional challenges of civilizational conflict. See generally FREEDMAN *supra* note 4, at 227; KISSINGER, *supra* note 12; Allenby, *supra* note 25.

28. See LO, *supra* note 13, at 231. Russia in general is pursuing an “anti-agenda,” where it cares less about advancing Russian national interests than to blocking the interests of others: “there is almost no area of foreign policy where Moscow has conceived, much less pursued, a constructive agenda.” *Id.* at 210.

29. See H. REISINGER & A. GOLTS, NATO DEF. COLL. RESEARCH PAPER NO. 105, RUSSIA’S HYBRID WARFARE: WAGING WAR BELOW THE RADAR OF TRADITIONAL COLLECTIVE DEFENSE 3 (2014); S.G. Chekinov & S.A. Bogdanov, *The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War*, 22 MIL. THOUGHT, no. 4, 2013, at 12, 12, http://www.eastviewpress.com/Files/MT_FROM%20THE%20CURRENT%20ISSUE_No.4_2013.pdf.

between the states of war and peace,” and that “a perfectly thriving state can, in a matter of months and even days, be transformed into an arena of fierce armed conflict, become a victim of foreign intervention, and sink into a web of chaos, humanitarian catastrophe, and civil war.”³⁰ He emphasizes:

The very “rules of war” have changed. The role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness.³¹

Although Gerasimov was writing before the February 2014 Russian invasion of the Crimea, his article provides the strategic blueprint for Russia’s Ukrainian invasion:

The focus of applied methods of conflict has altered in the direction of the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military measures—applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population.

All this is supplemented by military means of a concealed character, including carrying out actions of information conflict and the actions of special operations forces. The open use of forces—often under the guise of peace-keeping and crisis regulation—is resorted to only at a certain stage, primarily for the achievement of final success in the conflict.³²

This summary, and the term itself, suggest that New Generation Warfare be perceived as a state-sponsored variant of what is occasionally called “Fourth Generation Warfare.”³³ Whatever one calls it, however, the successful Russian use of such a strategy in its Ukrainian invasion is of great interest to those Eastern European countries who fear they may be next. Latvian defense experts, for example, have explored Russia’s combination of psychological warfare, political subversion and penetration, intimidation, bribery, Internet/media propaganda, and minimal formal combat personnel in the Crimean and Ukrainian theatres, and how these various factors were effectively integrated into political, psychological and information strategies.³⁴ This selection of means was deliberate, as the goal was not traditional conventional military confrontation, or the

30. Valery Gerasimov, *The Value of Science Is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying Out Combat Operations*, MIL. REV., Jan.–Feb. 2016, at 23, 24 (Robert Coalson ed. & trans.) [hereinafter Gerasimov, *Value of Science*]. The article was originally published Feb. 27, 2013 in *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kurier* (Russ.) [*Military-Industrial Kurier*].

31. *Id.*

32. *Id.*

33. See FREEDMAN, *supra* note 4, at 225–27. In general, this framing argues that war, at least in the West, has passed through three “generations”—(1) massed manpower, (2) firepower, and (3) maneuver—and has now, at least for some conflicts, entered a fourth generation, which is defined as modern insurgency. A modern insurgency is one where conflict is carried out in numerous traditional and nontraditional domains, including the political, the economic, the social, and the cultural, as well as the military. *Id.* at 178 et seq.

34. JANIS BERZINS, RUSSIA’S NEW GENERATION WARFARE IN UKRAINE: IMPLICATIONS FOR LATVIAN DEFENSE POLICY 4–5 (2014) (Lat.), <http://www.naa.mil.lv/~media/NAA/AZPC/Publikacijas/PP%2002-2014.ashx>.

annihilation of opposing military forces in a climactic event, but rather the destabilization of traditional social and governance institutions, and the subversion and defenestration of any viable opposition.³⁵ Use of the techniques of New Generation Warfare is in turn important because the planned invasion could not be allowed to be understood as traditional military aggression, which might trigger the very conventional military conflict Russia was seeking to avoid.³⁶ For example, Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty that established the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1949 provides that an “armed attack” against one signatory constitutes an attack against all signatories, thus triggering the mutual aid provisions. Does a long-term subversion of a state or part of a state using primarily local assets and subversion and criminal rather than military violence, rather than direct attack, constitute such an “armed attack”? In reality, of course, NATO is quite aware of the implications of New Generation Warfare. The real question is whether the superficial ambiguity of the situation will enable politicians—who do not want to recognize those implications—to refuse to respond to successful Russian initiatives.³⁷

In fairness, however, this form of warfare, which integrates political action, concealed military activities at important leverage points, and sophisticated destabilization initiatives designed for the specific weaknesses of the target polity, cannot be considered “new.” It is solidly within the Marxist tradition: Marx and Engels, in part as a result of their experience with successful state stifling of revolutionary uprisings in 1848 and subsequently, understood conflict to be diplomatic, psychological, economic, social, and only in its last phases military.³⁸ The Crimean takeover was in fact not dissimilar to strategies which the Soviet Union and others practiced internally and externally for many years, and indeed which the United States used to some extent in supporting the Contras against the Sandinista Junta of National Reconstruction government in Nicaragua from 1979 to the early 1990’s (a case of particular interest because the U.S. Administration covertly continued the program even when the U.S. Congress banned it, so it was subverting not just Nicaraguan, but U.S. governance systems).³⁹ It is also a comfortable strategy for a state led by an individual whose experience was in the espionage and state security apparatus, rather than the military per se. It is thus not surprising to see it arise in a new and effective guise. Whatever one may think of it, it is now a proven and effective use of asymmetric tactics to avoid conventional conflict.

35. See Gerasimov, *Value of Science*, *supra* note 30.

36. *See id.*

37. BERZINS, *supra* note 34, at 8 (“Latvia faces the risk of NATO’s military forces being willing to fight for Latvia, but being unable to because of politicians.”); *see also* LO, *supra* note 13, at 221. Lo discusses the European Union’s approach to Russia and explains that “[m]ost EU member-states are looking for an excuse to do the minimum, whether over Ukraine, strengthening the NATO alliance, or increasing their own defense spending.” *Id.*

38. FREEDMAN, *supra* note 4, at 247 et seq.

39. *See generally* Rachel Hunter, *The Iran Contra Affairs: Overview*, UNDERSTANDING THE IRAN-CONTRA AFFS. (2012), https://www.brown.edu/Research/Understanding_the_Iran_Contra_Affair/overview.-pdf.

In one important sense, however, emerging technologies have fundamentally altered the context within which New Generation Warfare operates. Emerging information and communication technologies (ICT), and the effect of moving from information scarcity to information overload, significantly change the ways in which information can be deployed and weaponized.⁴⁰ Eric Schmidt, the ex-CEO of Google, once observed that today humans create more information every two days than was created in all of human history up to 2003.⁴¹ Some disagree with the specifics, but few disagree with the basic point that information growth is accelerating and unprecedented. Modern search engines give everyone with access to the web the accumulated memory of much of humanity; a few over the air television stations have been replaced by YouTube and other video services with rates of information flows that previous generations could not have dreamed of; society is awash in facts, videos, information, tweets, advertisements, analyses, and blogs. This information tsunami in turn creates strong psychological pressures for individuals to retreat to a coherent information structure, supported by powerful filters that limit and shape the information to which individuals are exposed.⁴² The “big lie,” a term coined by Adolf Hitler in *Mein Kampf* in 1925 that depended on complete control of a country’s media and information apparatus to present the desired reality, may not be possible in an information dense world. But the alternative is not informed citizens; rather, it is narratives creating what might be called “ring-fenced reality.”

Ring-fenced reality depends not on control of all information sources, but rather on the creation of a belief system—a powerful and simple narrative—that can be maintained within a much larger chaotic information system by adroit manipulation of culture, psychology, beliefs, ideology, perceptions, and opinions using a wide variety of media tools (e.g., comment boards, blogs, websites, traditional print and broadcast media, manufactured news feeds).⁴³ Russian, American, Chinese, or potential jihadist recruits cannot be blocked from many differing information sources, but that is immaterial if they can be manipulated so that their psychological and institutional filtering mechanisms only troll for that which supports their preexisting worldviews. At least when it comes to information management, then, New Generation Warfare is indeed something new—at least to the extent its practitioners understand and exploit the modern ICT environment. Moreover, it should be no surprise that potential competitors of a conventional power such as the United States should be interested in the

40. Peter Pomerantsev, *Russia and the Menace of Unreality*, ATLANTIC (Sept. 9, 2014), <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/09/russia-putin-revolutionizing-information-warfare/379880/>. Weaponization of narrative and identity through sophisticated management of information streams and technology is more broadly discussed in FREEDMAN, *supra* note 4, at 589–629 and HUNTINGTON, *supra* note 9, at 19–29.

41. See, e.g., M.G. Siegler, *Eric Schmidt: Every 2 Days We Create as Much Information as We Did Up to 2003*, TECHCRUNCH (Aug. 4, 2010), <http://techcrunch.com/2010/08/04/schmidt-data/>.

42. See FREEDMAN, *supra* note 4, at 607 et seq.

43. See *id.*

asymmetric opportunities offered by ICT.⁴⁴ Such a new and rapidly changing domain is exactly the kind of conflict space where existing, powerful, and successful organizations would find it difficult to adapt smoothly and rapidly.

IV. CHINESE STRATEGY: “UNRESTRICTED WARFARE”

Russia is not alone in rethinking their strategy in light of American conventional dominance. Shocked by the success of allied forces in Desert Storm, Chinese strategists have begun thinking along the same lines. Rather than New Generation Warfare, however, the Chinese are developing an overall strategy of “Unrestricted Warfare” based on the perspective that warfare in the twenty-first century is, and will be, qualitatively different than in the past:

[T]here is reason for us to maintain that the financial attack by George Soros on East Asia, the terrorist attack on the U.S. embassy by Usama Bin Laden, the gas attack on the Tokyo subway by the disciples of the Aum Shinri Kyo, and the havoc wreaked by the likes of Morris Jr on the Internet, in which the degree of destruction is by no means second to that of a war, represent semi-warfare, quasi-warfare, and sub-warfare, that is, the embryonic form of another kind of warfare.⁴⁵

Unrestricted Warfare is closer than New Generational Warfare in moving towards a theory of civilizational conflict because it contemplates the inclusion of all dimensions of a civilization in a process of long term, intentional, coordinated conflict, one aspect of which may or may not be conventional combat. As Liang and Xiangsui note, “[a]s we see it, a single man-made stock-market crash, a single computer virus invasion, or a single rumor or scandal that results in a fluctuation in the enemy country’s exchange rates or exposes the leaders of an enemy country on the Internet, all can be included in the ranks of new-concept weapons.”⁴⁶ The implications of such a perspective for traditional military thinking is understood to be profound:

Faced with warfare in the broad sense that will unfold on a borderless battlefield, it is no longer possible to rely on military forces and weapons alone to achieve national security in the larger strategic sense . . . Obviously, warfare is in the process of transcending the domains of soldiers, military units, and military affairs, and is increasingly becoming a matter for politicians, scientists and even bankers. . . . Think about the Lockerbie air disaster. Think about the two bombs in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. Then think about the financial crisis in East Asia. . . . This is warfare in the age of globalization. . . . If those such as Morris, bin Laden, and Soros can be considered soldiers in the wars of tomorrow, then who isn’t a soldier? If the likes of Powell, Schwartzkopf, Dayan,

44. See MINISTRY NAT’L DEF., PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC CHINA, CHINESE MILITARY STRATEGY, (May 2015), http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Press/2015-05/26/content_4586805.htm; Gerasimov, *Value of Science*, *supra* note 30.

45. LIANG & XIANGSUI, *supra* note 17, at 6.

46. *Id.* at 25.

and Sharon can be considered politicians in uniform, then who isn't a politician?⁴⁷

The inclusion of Soros as a “soldier in the wars of tomorrow” is interesting not just in itself, but because it rests on the assumption that financial and other infrastructure systems, as well as social and cultural systems of all kinds, are weapons and, by extension, legitimate targets. Liang and Xiangsui comment that “financial war has become a ‘hyperstrategic’ weapon that is attracting the attention of the world. This is because financial war is easily manipulated and allows for concealed actions, and is also highly destructive.”⁴⁸ An important aspect of this is the potential for deep misunderstanding between Americans and Northern Europeans, who perceive market and financial activities as clearly part of the civil sphere, and “purely commercial,” and the Chinese, who will be inclined to see financial actions by competitor nations such as the United States as strategic moves in a civilizational conflict.

It is important to recognize that in this case civilizational conflict may not be violent, or rely on traditional military operations, at all. This is for several reasons. First, because the ascending power, China, will try to avoid attack at the point of their opponent's strength (American conventional military strength), asymmetric conflict involving cyber and similar mechanisms, and economic and cultural initiatives, is likely to be the order of the day. Avoiding an American military response will in all likelihood be an important element of successful civilizational conflict (although the possibility that bluster, or operational mistakes, trigger armed conflict always exists). Second, there are indications that the Chinese perceive future conflict to be less lethal: “mankind is . . . beginning to learn to control the lethal power that it already has but which is increasingly excessive. . . . Kinder weapons represent the latest conscious choice of mankind . . . thereby giving warfare an unprecedented kind-hearted hue.”⁴⁹

Whether this hopeful vision holds in the real world of maneuver in the South China Sea and elsewhere, of course, is a different question. Thus, the 2015 U.S. National Military Strategy notes that “[w]e support China's rise,” but “its claims to nearly the entire South China Sea are inconsistent with international law.”⁵⁰ Indeed, the doctrine of Unrestricted Warfare does not mean that China has been stinting in its efforts to modernize its conventional forces. Chinese defense spending will rise by 7.6% to 146.7 billion dollars in 2016, following well over a decade of unbroken double-digit jumps in the defense budget, in part to support the country's assertive stance and new construction activities in the South China Sea.⁵¹

47. *Id.* at 221–22.

48. *Id.* at 53.

49. *Id.* at 28.

50. U.S. JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, THE NATIONAL MILITARY STRATEGY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA 2015, at 2 (2015).

51. See *China Defense Budget*, GLOBALSECURITY.ORG, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/budget.htm> (last modified May 3, 2016). Note that this figure is slightly less than that suggested by the sources listed *supra* note 24, in part because there is really no such thing as a definitive security and defense spending number.

V. JIHADIST ISLAM: THE NONSTATE, NONWESTPHALIAN ACTOR

Despite New Generation or Unrestricted Warfare strategies, both Russia and China as successful states are relatively comfortable within, and able to assert their interests through, a Westphalian, state-based world order.⁵² Jihadist Islam, on the other hand, is an example of a powerful civilization that takes a radically different perspective. As Kissinger notes in his recent book on world order:

This body of [Islamic] thought represents an almost total inversion of Westphalian world order. In the purist version of Islamism, the state cannot be the point of departure for an international system because states are secular, hence illegitimate; at best they may achieve a kind of provisional status en route to a religious entity on a larger scale. Noninterference in other countries' domestic affairs cannot serve as a governing principle, because national loyalties represent deviations from the true faith . . . Purity, not stability, is the guiding principle of this conception of world order.⁵³

In this case, one does not find a sophisticated redefinition of conflict in terms of asymmetric power and opportunity, based on the traditional geopolitics and military strategy. Instead, there is a rejection of the entire framework of modernity. Truth and knowledge, for example, are not understood as products of science and applied rationality, but rather as products of faith.⁵⁴ Religious governance systems, not states or secular systems, are the sources of social, legal, and institutional organization. Universalist values do not arise from secular constructs such as "human rights," but from the underlying belief system.⁵⁵

This perspective is not, it must be emphasized, limited to jihadist Islam. Indeed, it is common to virtually all fundamentalist subgroups, including not just other religions but also powerful ideologies such as environmentalism. Moreover, the operational challenge such groups pose seldom arises to the level of conventional warfare, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in this case being an exception that proves the rule.⁵⁶ Most fundamentalist conflict generated by nonstate actors so far has been low-scale terrorist attacks or criminal incidents involving civilians; where a large-scale maneuver has been deployed, as with ISIS and Boko Haram, it has usually occurred where state control is weak or nonexistent.⁵⁷ This does not mean that appropriate conventional military responses such as air strikes are not part of an integrated counter strategy in some cases, nor that complacency is warranted given the potential for terrorist deployment of weapons of mass destruction.

52. See generally KISSINGER, *supra* note 12.

53. *Id.* at 122.

54. See generally THE CANONS OF JIHAD 29 (Jim Lacey ed., 2008).

55. *Id.* at 96–102; MCFATE, *supra* note 3, at 87.

56. MCFATE, *supra* note 3, at 87 et seq.

57. U.S. JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, *supra* note 50, at 3.

But it does mean that such broad-based rejections of modernity cannot be adequately countered through any combination of military means alone.⁵⁸ Rather, any adequate long term strategic response must recognize that such fundamental challenges to world order as it has developed since 1648 arise from deep and multidimensional causes—and thus require an appropriate civilizational conflict strategy. Thus, for example, one stressor for many people and weak institutions is accelerating technological, social, and cultural change which undermines many strong cultural beliefs and social practices. An understandable response is a retreat to faith on the part of those who are unable to keep pace with, or accept the changes inherent in, such a world.⁵⁹ Similarly, the accelerating social and cultural complexity of an increasingly multicultural world may have the same effect by reinforcing the value of mythic cultural stereotypes and “golden ages” of the past as refuges.⁶⁰ This pattern may be evident in phenomenon such as the Tea Party in the United States, the return to tsarist patterns in Russia, and perhaps most obviously in the effort of ISIS to reestablish a caliphate in the Middle East.⁶¹ Certainly the immediate military threat of ISIS can be managed through military responses; the reasons ISIS is there in the first place—the civilizational conflict dimension of ISIS, and many other similar groups—cannot.⁶²

VI. FROM CONVENTIONAL MILITARY ENGAGEMENT TO ASYMMETRIC WARFARE TO CIVILIZATIONAL CONFLICT

There are three fundamental principles of strategy that help explain the evolution towards civilizational conflict as the stable state of the modern world. First, military forces or those fundamentally opposed to the status quo should, to the extent possible, develop tactics and strategies that reflect their relative strengths, and avoid the strengths of their enemies. Second, in the real world it can never be forgotten that the adversary gets a vote.⁶³ This is true not just in combat, but more broadly: conflict is a free-wheeling dialogue, not a script.⁶⁴ Similarly, Clausewitz introduced the concept of friction—the accumulation of inevitable small events and challenges in complex operations in the real world

58. See, e.g., MCFATE, *supra* note 3, at 94.

59. See FREEDMAN, *supra* note 4, at 247.

60. The relationship between fundamentalism and individual identity is crucial to understanding phenomenon such as ISIS, and illustrates how far beyond traditional military responses such movements extend. See Patrick Tucker, *Why Do People Join ISIS? Here's What They Say When You Ask Them*, DEFENSE ONE (Dec. 8, 2015), <http://www.defenseone.com/threats/2015/12/why-do-people-join-isis-heres-what-they-say-when-you-ask-them/124295/>.

61. See Allenby, *supra* note 25, at 65.

62. *Id.*; MCFATE, *supra* note 3, at 94.

63. See, e.g., Hajo Holborn, *The Prusso-German School: Moltke and the Rise of the General Staff*, in MAKERS OF MODERN STRATEGY: FROM MACHIAVELLI TO THE NUCLEAR AGE, *supra* note 8, at 281, 289 (“No plan of operations can look with any certainty beyond the first meeting with the major forces of the enemy.”) (quoting von Moltke).

64. This is emphasized by modern (some say postmodern) strategists such as John Boyd. See generally FRANS P. B. OSINGA, SCIENCE, STRATEGY AND WAR: THE STRATEGIC THEORY OF JOHN BOYD (2005).

which make any strategy, no matter how ornate, inadequate unless constantly revised and tested in real time under actual conditions: “Everything in war is very simple, but the simplest thing is difficult. The difficulties accumulate and end by producing a kind of friction that is inconceivable unless one has experienced war.”⁶⁵

Third, significant changes in military and security technologies often incent asymmetric behavior which in turn creates innovation in military and security technologies—or else, failure. This dynamic can be seen in the case studies above: Russia creates “Novorossiya” as part of their Ukrainian invasion strategy through manipulation of modern ICT environments; China challenges the West generally, and the United States specifically, through deployment of Internet tools intended to steal commercially (and militarily) valuable information; ISIS uses social networking to distribute a potent vision of identity to lost and alienated Muslim adolescents.⁶⁶ And it is true throughout history: in the 1430’s French modernization of cannon in Europe rapidly made existing fortifications obsolete, but within a decade the Italians had figured out how to redesign fortresses with thicker sloped walls and protective fields of fire to be able to counter such assaults (the new style was dubbed *trace italienne*).⁶⁷ Nuclear weapons introduced a technology that, after a period of technological and strategic evolution, was generally considered by the states involved to be so terrible as to be essentially unusable in actual combat.⁶⁸ The result was not a technological response but a strategic innovation, the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD).⁶⁹ After World War II, peoples seeking independence from the dominant conventional forces of colonial governments developed the strategies and tactics of guerilla warfare, in turn spawning the study of counterinsurgency strategies, themselves mixtures of military, policing, and civil development initiatives.⁷⁰

VII. KEY THEMES OF THE RECHARACTERIZATION OF WAR

Given the American dominance in conventional military technologies, it is not enough for a potential competitor to respond with incremental asymmetry. Rather, potential adversaries of the United States have been pushed towards a deep reframing of the idea of war, combat, and conflict, because all the easy or incremental routes for seeking asymmetrical balance of power are inadequate.⁷¹ Once this is understood, a few basic themes common to adversaries of the Americans emerge:

65. CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ, *ON WAR* 119 (Michael Howard & Peter Paret eds. & trans., Princeton University Press, 1976) (1832).

66. See generally Tucker, *supra* note 60.

67. Geoffrey Parker, *The Gunpowder Revolution*, in *THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF WARFARE* 101, 106–11 (2005).

68. FREEDMAN, *supra* note 4, at 145 et seq.; JOHN KEEGAN, *A HISTORY OF WARFARE* 381–82 (1994).

69. KEEGAN, *supra* note 68, at 382.

70. FREEDMAN, *supra* note 4, at 178 et seq. Note that guerilla and insurgency actions differ from civilizational conflict primarily in scale and complexity.

71. See, e.g., LIANG & XIANGSUI, *supra* note 17, at 5–6; Allenby, *supra* note 25, at 66.

1. The role and purpose of military action in conflict are reconceptualized. Both the Russian and the Chinese strategies identify military action as the last step in a particular conflict, to be taken only when victory has already been assured through other means.⁷² Moreover, in a clear break from traditional military strategy, the point of conflict is not mere victory in a particular battle, but rather success in the long term competition between cultures, a process that is viewed as only occasionally requiring conventional conflict.
2. Because traditional conventional military action has become too costly and risky, redefine conflict to include multiple domains such as civilian cyber realms which are more favorable for conflict.⁷³ Use nontraditional opportunities: some jihadist groups, for example, have identified the alienation of primarily adolescent males as a domain where, using social networking tools and relatively sophisticated psychology, they can be far more effective than traditional society.
3. Reject traditional ideas regarding what constitutes a “successful action.” Conventional military dominance defines military success in terms of definitive battles or campaigns. Russia’s Crimea invasion was, however, a significant military success for the Kremlin and New Generation Warfare, despite a notable lack of traditional great power conventional military confrontation, and the doctrine of Unrestricted Warfare supports the apparently successful and certainly notable level of Chinese cyberactivity.⁷⁴
4. Design and operate conflict activities below levels which may trigger conventional military responses.⁷⁵ Here, Russia’s attack on Ukraine was more risky than China’s cybercampaign against American military contractors and corporations generally, but use of New Generation Warfare techniques, including both fairly direct threats to energy supplies and economic interests for Europeans and more subtle development and exploitation of differences between the United States and major European allies significantly reduced the possibility of any united military response.⁷⁶ Russia’s weaponization of Snowden’s activities to drive a wedge between the Americans and the Germans was particularly adept.
5. Integrate conflict activities across society as a whole, rather than isolate them in a dedicated military organization. As Liang and Xiangsui observe, “[T]here is no longer any distinction between what is or is not the battlefield. . . . [S]ocial spaces such as the military, politics, economics, culture, and the psyche area also battlefields.”⁷⁷

72. See LIANG & XIANGSUI, *supra* note 17, at 169; Gerasimov, *Value of Science*, *supra* note 30.

73. See LIANG & XIANGSUI, *supra* note 17, at 68–69.

74. *Id.* In the case of Crimea, it is an entirely different question as to whether such “successes” are actually wise and strategically productive in the long term as opposed to the short-term military success. See LO, *supra* note 13, at 216–17. Excellent doctrine does not compensate for weak planning and opportunistic but misdirected policy. *Cf.* LO, *supra* note 13, at 230, 242–43.

75. See, e.g., Gerasimov, *Value of Science*, *supra* note 30.

76. BERZINS, *supra* note 34, at 8.

77. LIANG & XIANGSUI, *supra* note 17, at 206.

VIII. CIVILIZATIONAL CONFLICT COMPETENCE

Especially since the First Iraq War, innovation in asymmetric competition and conflict, combined with rapid evolution across virtually the entire technological frontier,⁷⁸ has created nontraditional dynamics which in some important ways may favor competitors such as China and Russia (the effect on nonstate and private actors is less coherent). In particular, both these countries tend to have less stringent demarcations among their industrial, civilian, and military domains, and less of an emphasis on the rule of law, than the United States.⁷⁹ Thus, for example, the question of dominance of civilian over military leadership, a constant tension in many states, was explicitly resolved in the American Constitution in favor of civilian leadership. Article I, Section 8, Clause 11 gives Congress the power to declare war; Clause 14 gives Congress the power to “make Rules for the Government and Regulation of the land and naval Forces” Article II, Section 2, Clause 1 makes the President, not the highest military officer, the “Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States” American tradition beginning with George Washington has reinforced this fundamental divide between the military and civilian spheres. This is a fundamental American strength, but it is also a serious potential barrier to active integration of conventional military strength into civilizational conflict capability.

Equally fundamental to governance in the United States, and in some European countries such as the United Kingdom, is the separation of the private from the public sectors, and of the management and direction of commercial activities and firms from the government. Of course there are regulatory structures, joint activities, lobbying, corruption, and the like, but by and large American firms plot their own course, especially compared to firms in Russia, China, and similar countries characterized by a more state-based form of capitalism.⁸⁰

Some adversaries may be potentially far more adept at engaging in long-term civilizational conflicts than the United States. The Chinese, for example, are known for taking a long range view, especially on questions involving their evolution towards superpower status, while nonstate actors motivated by religious perspectives may be similarly capable of maintaining their institutional coherence over long periods of time.

In short, the evolution away from the expression of state-to-state conflict in conventional military terms and towards varieties of civilizational conflict integrating across military, security, economic, civil, and social domains, may challenge entities such as the United States that are characterized by (1) strong and explicit rule of law, (2) explicit constitutional and legal boundaries between the

78. See BRADEN R. ALLENBY & DANIEL SAREWITZ, *THE TECHNO-HUMAN CONDITION* 1–5 (2011).

79. See LO *supra* note 13, at 11; FRANCIS FUKUYAMA, *POLITICAL ORDER AND POLITICAL DECAY: FROM THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION TO THE GLOBALIZATION OF DEMOCRACY* 354–69 (2014).

80. See *The Rise of State Capitalism*, *ECONOMIST* (Jan. 21, 2012), <http://www.economist.com/node/21543160>; *The Visible Hand*, *ECONOMIST* (Jan. 21, 2012), <http://www.economist.com/node/21542931>.

military and civilian sectors, and (3) effective separation of the commercial and government sectors. This challenge will perhaps be more profound as nonstate political, religious, and commercial entities evolve in size and complexity to challenge traditional state dominance of large-scale violent and nonviolent conflict.⁸¹

But the picture is not one sided, either, because the United States does not lack for its own comparative strengths. Most fundamentally, American social, economic, and institutional structures are very innovative and adaptable, and the flip side of more authoritarian states to integrate across their systems more effectively may be the development of potentially costly and insidious “group think” and less agility when faced with unpredictable and rapidly evolving threats. This is the domain of “soft power,” which comes into its own as conflict is redefined away from conventional military confrontations and towards different flavors of civilizational conflict.⁸²

Power in the context of civilizational conflict is in part tricky because it engages the attractiveness of the civil culture as an important element. Thus, the private firms that create American popular culture, packaged and sold through popular music and film, media, and commercial brands such as Coca-Cola, Levis, and McDonald’s, are both globally dominant and an important part of American power projection. The American higher education system taken as a whole remains among the world’s most accessible and best, although constraints on immigration, rapid changes in educational technology, and foreign competition from countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom are eating away at its absolute dominance. The American economic framework supports and rewards individual efforts and entrepreneurship, and provides strong sources of venture capital and managerial support for start-up firms, despite some remarkably short-sighted policies in areas such as immigration. Accordingly, the country remains one of the most attractive environments for innovators and creative

81. Some idea of the rise of the corporate sector may be obtained by comparing revenues of the largest multinationals with GDPs of various countries (comparing tax revenues to revenues is confounded by the complexities of tax flows, differences in compliance with tax requirements between states, fluctuating currency relationships, and other issues). Thus, for example, the top three multinationals in 2015 had revenues, in billions of dollars, of 485.65 (Walmart), 433.31 (Sinopec), and 385.63 (Royal Dutch Shell); the largest manufacturing multinational, Toyota, had revenues of 248.95. *The 100 Largest Companies in the World Ranked by Revenue in 2015 (in Billion U.S. Dollars)*, STATISTA, <http://www.statista.com/statistics/263265/top-companies-in-the-world-by-revenue/> (last visited Aug. 8, 2016); see Liyan Chen, *The World’s Largest Companies 2015*, FORBES (May 6, 2015), <http://www.forbes.com/sites/liyanchen/2015/05/06/the-worlds-largest-companies/>. By contrast, Austria had a GDP of 374.1, Iran 387.6, Colombia 293.2, and Denmark 295 (all numbers in billions of dollars, and for 2015). *The World Factbook: GDP (Official Exchange Rate)*, CENT. INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2195.html> (last visited July 4, 2016). Private military companies, while considerably smaller, have military capabilities that rival those of midsize states, and exceed in some ways those that may be deployed by many nonstate actors and weak states. See MCFATE *supra* note 3, at 96.

82. “Soft power” is “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies.” JOSEPH S. NYE, JR., *SOFT POWER: THE MEANS TO SUCCESS IN WORLD POLITICS*, at x (2004); see also JOSEPH S. NYE, JR., *THE FUTURE OF POWER* 48, 81–109 (2011).

individuals from around the world; Silicon Valley, for example, is a global village that would be difficult to replicate in another culture. The American economy remains globally significant, although—not surprisingly—not as dominant as it was in the post-World War II, post-Cold War years.

The rapidly accelerating complexity of geopolitical and civilizational conflict has several important implications. Perhaps most fundamental is understanding that, because of this complexity and the radically different domains involved in civilizational conflict—from conventional military, to entertainment, to consumer products, to financial and legal structures—centralized, top down control is simply dysfunctional. Any single perspective, no matter how enlightened, is likely to be at best partial and arbitrary. Centralized control, then, is likely to be a failure mode for successful civilizational conflict. In the case of the United States, for example, it is the emergence of positive, and powerful, cultural, social, economic, and technological artifacts from the complexity and chaos of an open society that is one of its great soft power strengths—and a strength that could be jeopardized by inappropriate efforts to control and direct the system. The challenge, therefore, is to create and institutionalize information mechanisms that embed widely distributed signals in the informal and constantly evolving networks that are implicated in civilizational conflict, leading to broadly appropriate behavior that is neither dictated nor even predictable a priori.



At the beginning of this article, it was pointed out that reducing destructive conflict, and encouraging constructive conflict, was an important driver for the development of theories and practices of civilizational conflict. I therefore conclude by noting several potential elements that a successful civilizational conflict capability, in the United States or elsewhere, might include:

1. Explicit recognition of the existence, and the challenges presented by, the doctrines, strategies, and tactics of civilizational conflict, including the difficult task of untangling the many implications. For example, are existing legal structures intended to manage kinetic conflict, such as the existing Laws of Armed Conflict and treaties such as the North Atlantic Treaty, still adequate and if so under what circumstances? What additional legal structures should be contemplated? How can existing laws governing conflict, especially armed conflict, be modernized as emerging technologies and geopolitical developments undermine the assumptions upon which they are based?
2. Development of a sophisticated, conscious coordination across the many domains of society that are implicated in civilizational conflict. The primary goals should be (a) to achieve a distributed but coordinated information structure that enables identification of, and response to, threats and opportunities without damaging performance in each domain unnecessarily; and (b) to encourage constructive rather than destructive conflict.
3. Remembering that civilizational conflict augments, but does not replace, existing military, terrorist, and criminal challenges, a strong strategy

should enable identification, development, and deployment of U.S. military and nonmilitary civilizational conflict assets in ways that facilitate the goals given in item 2 above.

4. Development of a theory, and strategy, of civilizational conflict. This will entail developing a taxonomy of conflict, doctrines, and strategies that suffice for the dramatically increased complexity of a world characterized by civilizational conflict. Traditional control mechanisms are likely to be unworkable given the complexity of the challenge, suggesting that new institutional structures will be required. Indeed, pluralism is a valuable problem-solving mechanism in highly complex systems and contested policy arenas,⁸³ and may thus be an important asset in civilizational conflict environments.
5. Development of a more sophisticated understanding of conflict, remembering that civilizational conflict does not necessarily mean a more violent world; indeed, properly implemented it can be a way of reducing violence. Such a theory of conflict should focus on differentiating between constructive and destructive modes of conflict, and identifying ways to encourage the former and manage the latter.
6. Building the institutional ability to extend operations over the long time frames over which civilizational conflict plays out and protecting civilizational conflict capabilities from the vicissitudes of funding and political turmoil to the extent possible.
7. Recognizing that traditional military assets remain critical to maintaining great power status, but that aggressive actions, such as those by the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, Russia in Crimea, ISIS in establishing a physical “caliphate,” and China in the South and East China Seas, often backfire in the civilizational conflict context. In fact, great powers that are able to provide credible assurances to countries and cultures not directly engaged in civilizational conflict that they will not suffer from the success of a particular power, but will indeed benefit from resultant peace and prosperity, are likely to significantly enhance their soft power, and thus civilizational conflict capabilities.

Conflict is part of the human condition, and given the current period of rapid and accelerating technological, cultural, and geopolitical change, will not diminish in the foreseeable future. That does not mean, however, that it must always be violent, destructive, and mindless. The purpose of studying civilizational conflict is, to the extent possible, to modulate conflict into more ethical, hopeful, and beneficial paths.

83. See ALLENBY & SAREWITZ, *supra* note 78, at 163–64.