



International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science

e-ISSN: 2544-9435

Scholarly Publisher
RS Global Sp. z O.O.
ISNI: 0000 0004 8495 2390

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ARTICLE TITLE	THE PHILOSOPHY OF CONFLICTS AND MODERN WARS
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DOI	https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.3(47).2025.4139
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RECEIVED	12 February 2025
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ACCEPTED	27 April 2025
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PUBLISHED	30 September 2025
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THE PHILOSOPHY OF CONFLICTS AND MODERN WARS

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of science, particularly weapons technology, has transformed traditional wars, commonly understood as wars between two states or between two regular armies, into guerrilla warfare, world wars, preventive or pre-emptive wars, and subsequently into a new mode of warfare, namely, asymmetric wars (Les Guerres Asymétriques). These arise in geographies that enable their continuity and effectiveness, which in turn lay the foundations for failed states (État défaillant, L'État en déliquescence). Within these contexts, parallel armies and terrorist organisations find fertile ground for asserting their existence and ideology, striving to dismantle the nation-state. With these developments in the security and military spheres, both locally and globally, geopolitics assumes a new trajectory in international relations and may even anticipate the redrawing of boundaries.

KEYWORDS

Geopolitics, Asymmetric Wars, Failed State, Terrorism, Guerrilla Warfare, Weapons Technology, War

CITATION

Boumediene Belgharras. (2025) The Philosophy of Conflicts and Modern Wars. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*, 3(47). doi: 10.31435/ijitss.3(47).2025.4139

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1-Introduction

The world continues to experience wars and conflicts despite all advances in science and technology and despite the vast number of lessons and theories advocating for a world united with respect to rights and freedoms, ensuring human security and dignity within the framework of liberty and democracy, an ideal long championed by thinkers, especially philosophers, throughout the ages. However, the culture of domination and the human desire for possession have rendered the world and societies perpetually embroiled in war and conflict. Furthermore, the development of science, particularly in weapons technology, has evolved into traditional wars, which are commonly conceived as conflicts between two states or between two regular armies, into guerrilla warfare, world wars, space invasions, preventive or preemptive wars, espionage wars, and ultimately into a new form of warfare: asymmetric or nonlinear wars. These occur in geographical contexts that allow for their persistence and effectiveness, which in turn gives rise to failed or collapsed states where parallel armies and terrorist organisations find fertile ground to impose their existence and ideology. With these developments in security and military affairs, geopolitics is taking a new direction in international relations and may even herald the redrawing of boundaries.

What are the failed states? What threats do they pose to global security? How serious are asymmetric wars? What are their characteristics, methods, and objectives?

The power and progress of central states no longer constitute the primary threat to global security. The arms race, especially in nuclear weapon technology, and the ensuing Cold War contributed to global instability and created hotspots of tension. This mutual understanding between East China and West China remains ongoing, underlining the necessity of excluding confrontation from the list of available alternatives in their interactions.

However, in the face of scientific and technological advancements and the pressure of seeking new markets for the arms trade and domination, coupled with the utilisation of media intertwined with targeted social media strategies towards countries still searching for development models, and amidst sectarian, tribal, clan, regional divisions, various mafias, parallel armies, globalised terrorism, the creation of suicide operatives, power struggles, and political and economic crises that have weakened states and rendered them vulnerable to asymmetric wars, failure ensues.

The concept of the "failed state" (*État défaillant, États en déliquescence*) is notoriously difficult to define. However, it can be understood by referring to the "First Annual Report" prepared by the Peace Support Fund and the *Foreign Policy* magazine in 2005, which defines a failed state as one resulting from the loss of central government control over its territories or the loss of the state's sovereign right to legitimately monopolise and exercise force, thereby exposing it to disturbances and generating internal civil insurgencies. It may also refer to states incapable of providing social services. Externally, failed states are those whose sovereignty is automatically restricted as a result of economic or political sanctions, the presence of foreign military forces on their territory, or subjection to other military constraints such as no-fly zones within their airspace.¹

Among the most salient characteristics that distinguish a failed state from others, as described by Noam Chomsky,² is the failure to protect its citizens from violence and possibly from destruction, or that its decision-makers regard these concerns as lower priorities in the hierarchy of interests than in the short-term pursuit of power and wealth by dominant state sectors. Another defining feature of a failed state is that it is a "rogue state," whose leadership repudiates international law and treaties with disdain. While these instruments may bind others, they do not bind the outlaw state.³

Indicators of a failed state also include the legitimacy of the government and its acceptance by the population; the experience of economic crises; the widespread prevalence of corruption within state institutions; conflicts among officials in decision-making; and the absence of public security, accompanied by the spread of chaos, gangs, and armed groups. Additionally, there is a failure to provide essential public services such as healthcare and education, a significant disparity between social classes, increased political asylum requests to foreign countries, and mass migrations. Consequently, the state suffers from institutional failure, particularly in the political, economic, and social domains.

As Max Weber observed, such a state struggles to maintain legitimate control over the use of force throughout its entire national territory and within its borders.⁴

The concept of a failed state is neither precise nor well defined, much like the terms "terrorist state" and "rogue state," and it is subject to numerous interpretations. A failed state is commonly described as one that is unable to provide security to its population, guarantee rights both domestically and externally, or maintain practical (not merely formal) democratic institutions.⁵

According to the American perspective that solidified during the Clinton administration, failed states are "states from which we must protect ourselves, and to which we must sometimes extend a helping hand... even if it means destroying them."⁶

Perhaps the most prominent and dangerous feature of a failed state is its inability to exert full sovereignty over its national territory, leading to the emergence of virtual entities and parallel armies such as Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan; ISIS in Iraq, Syria, and Libya; Houthis in Yemen; Hezbollah in Lebanon; and other armed organisations. These groups have come to prominence within these failed states, representing a new global threat through their use of a new form of warfare: asymmetric warfare.

¹ Shahrzad Admam, "The Asymmetrical Nature of New Security Threats," *Al-Nadwa Journal for Legal Studies*, Constantine, Algeria, Issue 1, 2013, p. 46.

² Noam Chomsky, born December 7, 1928, in Philadelphia, is an American linguist, philosopher, cognitive scientist, logician, historian, critic, and political activist. He has been a professor of linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for over fifty years and is the author of more than one hundred books. He is widely regarded as a principal theorist of the left wing in American politics.

³ Noam Chomsky, *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy*, translated by Sami Al-Kaaki, Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, Beirut, Lebanon, 2nd ed., 2007, p. 51.

⁴ Max Weber (1864–1920), a German scholar of economics and politics, was one of the founders of modern sociology and the study of public administration in state institutions. His most renowned works include *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and *Politics as a Vocation*.

⁵ Ibid., 138.

⁶ Ibid., 135.

2- Asymmetric Wars: *Les Guerres Asymétriques*

Asymmetric wars, also known as nonparallel or nonconventional wars, are conflicts characterised by significant disparities between the parties involved in terms of military strength, organisation, armament, and equipment. These wars are fought between regular state forces and irregular armed groups, militias, or organisations that adopt guerrilla warfare and insurgency as their primary strategies for attacks. The control over the location and timing of confrontations also defines them.¹

Some refer to these conflicts as wars of virtual entities or nonsymmetrical wars, whereas the Chinese term for them is "unrestricted warfare." These are prolonged wars of attrition employing tactics unrelated to conventional warfare. In such conflicts, the state often faces a nonarmy; these virtual entities neither possess defined geographical territories nor clear military organisation, making it impossible to definitively eliminate the adversary, who remains embedded within the social system and thus is part of it throughout the conflict period. The Algerian war on terrorism serves as an example.

These wars, which have emerged since the end of the Cold War, represent a new era and a profound transformation in global geopolitics. They have ended the state's monopoly on warfare tools and erased the boundaries and distinctions between military soldiers and civilian citizens, as anyone can be recruited.

Parallel armies or virtual entities recruit civilians into their ranks or utilise them in their conflicts as ordinary citizens, rendering these conflicts more psychological than military in nature.

3-Characteristics of Asymmetric Warfare

On the basis of the text of the "Estimates Board" report at the Pentagon, the features and characteristics of asymmetric warfare are outlined as follows:

1. There is no battlefield where combatants meet face-to-face or engage in flanking manoeuvres.²
2. The weaponry is not symmetrical in terms of either power or equipment.
3. There is no direct connection between action and reaction; actions occur within a specific arena, over which communication takes place.³
4. The weapon and the use of weaponry defy any predictable logic or conception. Although massing forces, speed of movement, and surprise are essential tactics in all types of warfare, they are even more necessary in asymmetric warfare, as they are prerequisites for a mode of thinking about the unthinkable.⁴
5. Its operations are unrestricted, functioning essentially by chance, which it studies carefully, making the prior prediction of its actions a challenging task.⁵
6. Suicide bombings, ambushes, and acts of sabotage are frequently employed in these wars.
7. The targeted individuals are those protected by international law and human rights, mainly civilians; healthcare workers, including doctors and nurses; members of humanitarian and human rights; and charitable organisations, journalists, politicians, and religious figures. Hence, the adversary hides among the civilian population, integrating within the protection of citizens, which places the latter in perpetual danger.
8. The enemy in such wars is characterised by high morale among its members, advanced technology in its operations, and a readiness to accept extreme risks, making the unthinkable plausible even if, by usual standards, it would be considered impossible or insane.⁶
9. It also employs all means, including nonmilitary ones, such as penetrating and disrupting information systems.
10. Biological viruses, computer viruses, and cognitive viruses are also utilised.
11. Both military and psychological warfare are employed.
12. It seeks to transfer the war into civilian spaces without any defined battlefield for several reasons, including preventing regular armies from conducting bombardments and creating a form of ambiguity for the

¹ Turkia Bousaidi, *Fourth Generation Wars and Geopolitical Transformations in the Arab Region*, Master's thesis in Political Science, specialising in International Relations, University of Blida 2, supervised by Professor Nassim Belhoul, 2016/2017, p. 22.

² Muhammad Hassanein Heikal, *The American Era: From New York to Kabul*, quoting Henry Kissinger, Egyptian Publishing House for Arab and International, Egypt, 1st edition, 2003, 117.

³ Ibid., 117.

⁴ Ibid., 118.

⁵ Muhammad Hassanein Heikal, *The American Era: From New York to Kabul*, quoting Henry Kissinger, Egyptian Publishing House for Arab and International, Egypt, 1st edition, 2003, 118.

⁶ Ibid., 119.

military in identifying the enemy. This generates psychological disorder within the regular army and public opinion, which is considered a crucial strategic factor in asymmetric warfare.¹

13. In most cases, asymmetric wars are driven by ideological or religious motives, and they may also be activated in favour of foreign parties as proxy wars. It cannot be excluded that great powers employ this type of war to implement their divisive agendas or to extend their control over natural resources within the framework of conspiracy theories and proxy warfare.

14. These conflicts aim to create and establish spaces for the proliferation of militias, rebel factions, and ethnic struggles, seeking to destabilise the will of the people and control the course of political decisions while exhausting the state militarily and psychologically rather than destroying it.

Thus, to classify a war as symmetrical or asymmetrical, one must study the form of warfare, its leadership, and its methodology. In this new mode of war, the "indirect approach" is employed. This approach aims to target the enemy's weaknesses or vulnerable points, thereby weakening them or continuing to harass them until they are exhausted.²

Sir Basil Henry Liddell Hart³ developed this indirect approach into a theory, notably in his major work, *Strategy*, where he formulated his doctrine of the "indirect approach."⁴ He concluded that this style of warfare is characterised by attacking the enemy unexpectedly when it is unprepared for confrontation. He described it as a manoeuvre aiming to bypass or surprise the adversary.⁵ In general, Gambier and Colonel Soyer view the indirect approach as one that aims to place the adversary in a state of inferiority through actions that erode its moral, psychological, and material strength.⁶

Generally, it is a strategy employed by the weak against the strong, whereby confrontation with the main enemy force is avoided. The sole limitation of this type of warfare is that it cannot produce tangible results except after a prolonged period due to the accumulation of partial outcomes. Its logic thus approximates that of a strategy of attrition (wear and tear).⁷

Since this form of warfare emerged in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, it has coincided with the global development of globalisation and exploited it to its advantage. Its attempt to destabilise the existing order through penetrating information systems leads to severe repercussions and social unrest, particularly if banking systems are targeted, causing economic deterioration comparable to the losses of nuclear warfare.

The criteria for victory in this warfare have changed: military victory is no longer the objective. Instead, the winner is the one who achieves the highest degree of psychological defeat upon the opposing side. The defeat of popular will and the erosion of people's trust in their governments, alongside media responses in reporting war events and the emergence of nongovernmental organisations, are the principal factors influencing outcomes.⁸

These virtual armed entities or terrorist groups do not seek to colonise a specific territory as in conventional wars; instead, they aim to destabilise the state, exhaust its power, and pressure governments by targeting economic facilities, transportation lines, and vital institutions to weaken their strength. They gradually but steadily lead the state towards the status of a "failed state," thereby imposing a new reality in geopolitics and pushing it towards partition as a solution to conflict resolution.

This situation has given rise to numerous global threats, such as organised crime, civil unrest, internal conflicts, human rights violations, and mass genocides, becoming dangers to international peace and security, especially with the spread of illegal mass migrations, incurable diseases, and separatist wars. Consequently,

¹ CIRPES—Centre Interdisciplinaire de Recherches sur la Paix et d'Études Stratégiques, Alexis Baconnet, "Les mécanismes de la guerre asymétrique: Quand la guerre se diffuse au sein des espaces civils," *Le débat stratégique* No. 176, 106, November 2009, 3. https://geopoliticaxxi.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/article_305-guerres-asymetriques-cirpes.pdf

² *Encyclopaedia of Strategy*, supervised by Terry de Montbrial and Jean Klein, assisted by Sabine Janss, translated by Ali Mahmoud Muqallad, Majd University Institution for Studies, Publishing, and Distribution, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st ed., 2011, 232.

³ Basil Henry Liddell Hart (1895–1970), one of the foremost British strategists of the twentieth century, studied at Cambridge and became an infantry officer. In 1918, he was tasked with revising British infantry tactics. His most important work is *Decisions in War*, later republished as *Strategy*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 959.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 233.

⁸ *International Politics Journal*, Zainab Hosni Ezz Eldin, "Military Strategy—The Impact of Fourth Generation Warfare on Arab National Security: A Case Study of the 'Islamic State' Organisation," August 10 2017, accessed March 14 2017, <http://www.siyassa.org.eg/News/15192.aspx>.

these environments have become gateways for the proliferation of weapons and international terrorism. After 2001, following Osama bin Laden's claims of possessing nuclear equipment and materials, terrorism came to be seen as having transcended national borders and constituting a genuine global threat.

With the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, global terrorism, virtual entities, and massive advances in nuclear missiles, major powers such as the United States, Russia, and other nuclear states remain perpetually on high alert against any aggression or threat, with their hands poised on the triggers for launching these missiles. This creates a significant danger of false alarms indicating foreign attacks, which could lead to dire consequences, potentially escalating to an international nuclear war with overwhelming risks that are difficult to comprehend. The consequences and damage to humanity, the Earth, and the international community are devastating, especially considering that a false alarm could trigger such a catastrophe. Certainly, suppose that a nuclear attack was to occur and that such control could fall into the hands of terrorist groups, particularly given advancements in digital technologies. In that case, the information revolution, remote control devices, and viruses within software and computers could be transferred from states to terrorist organisations, making any security system error liable to hold the world hostage to terrorist groups.

It is well understood among planners in Washington that Chechen rebels, who previously stolen radioactive materials from waste facilities and nuclear power plants, closely monitor railway networks and special trains designated for transporting nuclear weapons across Russia.¹

Bruce Blair² cautions that the constant movement of nuclear weapons within Russia poses a danger equivalent to maintaining strategic nuclear forces on high alert. Blair estimates that "hundreds of Russian nuclear warheads are transported through rural areas," and the theft of a single nuclear bomb "could ultimately mean the destruction of an American city. However, this is not the worst-case scenario of this nuclear game." Even more alarming is that "the capture of a ready-to-launch long-range strategic nuclear missile or a set of missiles capable of carrying bombs to target thousands of miles away could represent an apocalyptic event for the entire nation."³

There is also the threat that hired terrorists might infiltrate military communication networks and transmit launch orders for missiles equipped with hundreds of nuclear warheads. This is not mere fantasy, as the Pentagon revealed a few years ago when it discovered serious flaws in its security procedures, necessitating new instructions for the crews operating Trident missile launches from submarines. The control systems in other countries are far less reliable. This constitutes, as Blair described it, "an accident waiting to happen," an "accident" that could have apocalyptic dimensions.⁴

What was once only anticipated is now a reality: on March 24, 2018, numerous ballistic missiles were launched from Yemen by the Houthis towards Saudi Arabia, where they were intercepted and destroyed by missile defence systems. One missile was directed at the capital, Riyadh, which is more than 1,000 kilometers from the launch site, and it was also destroyed. Notably, these missiles have ranges exceeding 6,000 kilometers. While media outlets investigate how Houthis acquired these missiles, the global threat remains significant.

Many Arab countries have experienced what was termed the Arab Spring; some continue to endure all seasons of conflict, such as Libya, Syria, and Yemen, struggling to survive amid ruins. They face statelessness and the absence of a conventional army, making it difficult to distinguish between civilians and terrorists or between peaceful individuals and armed actors. The lines blur, and many innocents pay a heavy price, as the curse of unconventional warfare affects all parties indiscriminately, near and far. This is more of a psychological war than a military one.

Why does the geography of the Arab world so distinctly experience war? It is repeatedly either engaged in conflict or on the verge of it. This may be due to location, strategic importance, geographical significance, or the presence of abundant natural resources.⁵ It has made it a gateway for global political experiments.

¹ Noam Chomsky, *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy*, translated by Sami Al-Kaaki, Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, Beirut, Lebanon, 2nd ed., 2007, 24.

² Bruce Blair is the president of the American Defence Information Centre, a former officer responsible for launching Minuteman missiles, and author of numerous books in the military and strategic fields.

³ Washington Post, September 19 2004; Blair, *Defence Monitor*, January–February 2004; Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire* (Metropolitan, 2004), 288.

⁴ Noam Chomsky, *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy*, translated by Sami Al-Kaaki, Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, Beirut, Lebanon, 2nd ed., 2007, 24.

⁵ Zuhair Al-Yaakoubi, *War: A Political-Philosophical Approach*, Al-Dhifaf Publications, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st ed., 2016, 13.

4-Conclusion

Although the prominent events widely publicised suggest a global struggle for control over economic and political positions, including a cold war even among allies, humanity has nonetheless made considerable progress in the pursuit of the ideals of democracy, justice, and freedom. Those who have established globalisation in its current harsh form must also globalise science, technology, and welfare for societies that have been and continue to be ravaged by asymmetric wars aimed at dismantling the nation-state. There are numerous ways to elevate democracy domestically and extend it to new horizons, and opportunities to do so exist by providing support and opportunities to the nation-state.

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