

# **Presentations**



## Will Hybrid Warfare Come to Japan?

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In northern Virginia, on the swampy banks of the Potomac River surrounded by vast parking lots, there stands a mighty dream factory. From its offices, which are staffed by both military personnel and civilians, issues a stream of new and unprecedented kinds of war so large and so constant as to make writers of science fiction blanch. The following is just a small selection. Limited war and brushfire war (both in the 1950s); guerrilla war (the 1950s and 1960s); low intensity war (the 1960s and 1970s); fourth-generation war (the 1980s and 1990s); asymmetric war (the 2000s); terrorism, insurgency, and counterinsurgency (ditto); spacewar and infowar (ditto), and cyberwar (from 2010 on). And this is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. More than enough other forms of war have been, and still are being, invented and publicized to make one's head spin.

In theory, the objective of the exercise is to improve national security by anticipating, preparing for, and, if necessary, countering and waging the new kinds of war. In reality, it is to make Congress, which is located on the Mall just two miles away, open the money spigots. With great success, as the Pentagon's budget—\$ 612 billion at last count—so clearly shows.<sup>1</sup> Currently, indeed, America's defense budget equals that of the next ten countries combined. Never mind that, owing to its peculiar geographic position, the U.S is less vulnerable to attack and safer than any other empire in history.

Some of these new kinds of war, notably spacewar and cyberwar owe their birth to advancing technology. Others, such as fourth-generation war, are rooted in the preferred modus operandi of this or that belligerent. As the frequency with which they are mentioned in the literature shows, both of these approaches are not without merit. On the other hand, both also have the very great disadvantage that they ignore what is probably the most important, and certainly the most famous, sentence ever written about war; namely, that it is the continuation of politics by other means.

Considered from this *political* point of view, there are only two kinds of war: trinitarian and nontrinitarian.<sup>2</sup> The former is waged by states against each other. On each side, it is based on a clear division of labor between the government which directs, the armed forces which fight and die, and the people (also known as noncombatants) who pay and suffer. Good examples are World War I and II, the Korean War, the Arab Israeli Wars (1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973), the Indo-Pak Wars (1947, 1965, 1971), the Falkland War, and the Iran-Iraq War.

By contrast, nontrinitarian war is waged by, or against, other kinds of political structures or organizations. All have this in common that, with them, government, armed forces, and

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<sup>1</sup> SIPRI, Data for All Countries from 1988-2016 in Constant (2015) Dollars, at <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Milex-constant-2015-USD.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> See, on the nature of "trinitarian" warfare, M. van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, New York, NY, Free Press, pp. 33-62.

people, instead of being clearly and deliberately separated by their judicial status and (in the case of the armed forces) the clothes they wear, are so closely intertwined as to be almost indistinguishable. To provide just two examples, neither the FLN in Algeria nor, in our own day, Hamas in Gaza had or has a government. All they did or do have is a “political arm” which, located abroad so as to escape the long arm of their opponents, exercised or exercises limited control over the “fighters” in the field. The “fighters,” in turn, did or do everything they to conceal themselves among the people even to the point of merging with them. Had they not done so, then given the fast discrepancy of force between the two sides they probably could not have survived even for a few hours.

To put it in a different way, trinitarian war is waged by governments that make one army against another so as to see who is the strongest; nontrinitarian war, by doing what one can to avoid such a contest. The words of Mao Tze Dong, perhaps the greatest exponent and practitioner of nontrinitarian warfare, though written as far back as the 1930s, still apply: “when the enemy advances, we retreat; when the enemy halts, we harasses; when the enemy retreats, we pursue.”<sup>3</sup> Trinitarian war relies, ultimately, on making one force counter another and overcome it; nontrinitarian war, primarily on stealth, dispersion, and surprise.

Starting with the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), first in Europe and then in other continents which came under the latter’s sway, the dominant form of war had been the trinitarian one. In other words, it was mostly by means of trinitarian warfare that the most important Powers tried to make good their claims on each other and, in general, settled their differences. Never more so than in 1914-45, when a handful of such Powers fought over all continents but one (the exception was South America) as well as every sea and ocean.

This long tradition explains why, after World War II had ended, most people expected it to continue in the same form, more or less. Yet that did not happen. Looking back, it is easy to see that the reason why it did not happen was the development, introduction, and subsequent proliferation of nuclear weapons. Militarily, nuclear weapons made it impossible for regular, state-owned, armed forces to apply the first rule of strategy, which, as Clausewitz says, is to be as strong as possible, first in general and then at the decisive point. Politically—and here I am following Nobel-Prize winning political scientist Thomas Schelling—they cut the age-old link between victory and survival.<sup>4</sup> Instead, there came into being a situation whereby even an overwhelming victory by one side might result in his being annihilated at the hands of the vanquished second-strike. As time went on, the stronger a Power the less able it was to wage war against other powers similar to itself. As the current standoff between the U.S and North Korea shows, very often great powers were not even able to wage war against much weaker ones, provided only the latter had a credible second-strike force at their disposal.

Nuclear proliferation, and not various other reasons dreamt up by political scientists,<sup>5</sup> explains why, out of over 200 armed conflicts waged all over the world during the last seventy years, only about one in ten were trinitarian. Also why, of those that were, not a single one

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<sup>3</sup> Mao Tze-Dong, “A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire,” *Selected Works*, Eng. ed., FLP, Peking, 1965, Vol. I, p. 124.

<sup>4</sup> See Th. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, New Haven, Ct, Yale University Press, 1965, chapter 1.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. J. Mueller, *The Remnants of War*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2004.

was fought between two major, or even medium, powers. However, the “long peace,” as it has been called, did not mean that warfare was coming to an end. What it meant was that the place of trinitarian war, waged by states either already in possession of nuclear weapons or easily capable of producing them, was increasingly taken by nontrinitarian war.

Both before and after 1945, one outstanding characteristic of nontrinitarian war was that the organizations that waged it were unable to lay their hands on any number of the most powerful, most advanced and most sophisticated, weapons and weapon systems. Not only were such weapons, such as tanks and aircraft and warships, too expensive for them to acquire, but they presupposed an administrative, technical and logistical infrastructure which terrorists, guerillas, insurgents, and other kinds of nontrinitarian organizations did not have. By enabling nontrinitarian organizations to command much larger, and, more accurate, firepower than they used to technological advances, starting in the invention of the microchip in 1979, have caused this situation to change. Subsequent developments in the field of computers continued to push in the same direction.

Look at Hezbollah, Hamas, ISIS, the Huthis, and many similar organizations around the world. There was a time when they relied on knives, home-made bombs, and Kalashnikovs. Now all employ their own GPS-guided missiles, drones, and cyberwar capabilities. Consequently all, in many ways, are able to wage war *as if* they were states. The outcome, hybrid warfare, is simply nontrinitarian war waged, in addition to the traditional light weapons, with microchips and GPS.

On the whole, states’ attempts to use their armed forces in order deal with nontrinitarian warfare, and its latest branch, hybrid warfare, have not exactly been a resounding success. To the contrary, the list of failures—starting with the British in Palestine in 1947-48, passing through the French in Algeria and the Americans in Vietnam, and ending, for the time being, with the Americans in Afghanistan—is long and expanding. Briefly, owing to nuclear proliferation on one hand and technical progress on the other, there is little doubt that hybrid warfare, and behind it nontrinitarian warfare of which it is an offshoot, represents the future. Which is precisely why an analysis of how it might affect Japan is necessary and interesting.

In publications that deal with nontrinitarian/hybrid warfare, whether academic or general, Japan is only rarely mentioned. The reasons for this are clear. First as history shows, most post-1945 wars of this kind originate either in civil disputes or in countries whose inhabitants are, or consider themselves to be, under foreign occupation. Japan, however, has an exceptionally strong government which does not look as if it is about to give up its near monopoly over violence. To be sure, modern Japan has had its share of terrorist organizations, notably Aum Shinrikyo of the Tokyo underground sarin attack fame. So far, however, their attacks have been sufficiently limited to be handled by the police using normal legal and juridical tools. Of a coordinated terrorist campaign, let alone incipient civil war, there can be no question.

Second, Japan, following its defeat in World War II, does not have any colonies or any other territories it occupies against their inhabitants’ will—a blessing in disguise, if ever one there was. Third, it is an island. Given how capital-intensive naval war is, and how transparent the maritime environment in comparison with the land one, serious hybrid warfare on the high seas is hard to imagine. At best non-state organizations can try to deny their opponents

command of the sea at specific times and places. But they cannot wrest it for themselves.

True, Japanese history has had its share of non-trinitarian war before it was brought to an end by Tokugawa Ieyasu at the battle of Sekigahara in 1600. Also, between 1937 and 1945, in China where Japan saw fit to fight not only the government of Chang Kaishek but any number of militias, big and small, nationally-based or local. Currently, though, Japan is one of the richest, most peaceful, most secure, and, above all, ethnically most homogeneous countries on earth. The latest available Ginni coefficient figures (2008) show that, in terms of equality/inequality, Japan occupies a middle position among developed country.<sup>6</sup> Democracy, involuntarily adopted after 1945, seems to be established sufficiently firmly to nip any attempt to change the prevailing political order in the bud. So how might the country become involved in such a war?

An answer to the question is provided by looking at the country's extreme dependence on foreign trade. In the whole of history, probably no great power has been more so; practically all raw materials, and a high percentage of energy sources, have to be imported.<sup>7</sup> Some of the trade routes in question pass near or through ethnically and religiously diverse regions where government is relatively weak and the rule of law indifferently enforced. Attempts to interfere with those routes, particularly in Southeast Asia, may very well end up by making Japanese military intervention necessary at some point. Should that happen, then the war will almost certainly be a hybrid one. Including, besides simple piracy, mining of the waters through which trade has to pass; attacks by armed drones; shore to ship cruise missiles; and the like. All accompanied by intense cyberwarfare, of course. And all launched, at least at first, not by governments but by other organizations with or without government support.

Owing to long-term political and technological developments, hybrid war, best understood as a technologically-driven offshoot of nontrinitarian war, is now the dominant one on earth. So far Japan has been able to avoid becoming entangled in it; however, there is a fair chance that it will no longer be able to do so in the future. In that case naval forces will be critical, but they will not be enough. Air forces, space forces (reconnaissance satellites), and ground forces (Marines) to clear pirate nests and the like, will all be involved. It is also very likely that Japan will wage its war not on its own but with the support of allies in the same way as is currently the case in places such as Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq.

As I have pointed out, since 1945 the record of states' attempts to deal with this kind of war has been very bad indeed. Yet whereas almost all those attempts have taken place on land, the challenge to Japan appears to be primarily a maritime one. So the decisive question is, can Japan devise new kinds of waging nontrinitarian war so as to avoid the fate of its predecessors?

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<sup>6</sup> DIR, "Japan's Economy," Monthly Review, October 2016, at [http://www.dir.co.jp/english/research/report/jmonthly/20161021\\_011342.html](http://www.dir.co.jp/english/research/report/jmonthly/20161021_011342.html).

<sup>7</sup> See, for a short overview of Japan's foreign trade, Observatory of Economic Complexity, undated report, <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/jpn/>