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THE "NEW WARS" AND THE IMPACT ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS[1]

War is a perennial element in the relationship between the multiple actors of the international political system. However, its nature and dynamics have undergone significant transformations in recent decades, including new actors, innovative strategies, and emerging technologies, with new forms of conflict – hybrid, cyber, informational – that shape the "new wars."

Experts consider War to be one of the most complex, relevant, and intriguing phenomena of our society. Among these experts, Gaston Bouthoul[2] (1896-1980) even elevated War to the status of a "Science" and created an airtight set of definitions and concepts that we know as "Polemology," which is the scientific, analytical, and systematic study of war. Gaston Bouthoul's work, initially based on a more social and sociological aspect, has gained special attention and relevance in recent decades, particularly with the emergence of new forms and concepts of war – hybrid, cybernetic, and informational – referred to as "new wars." This is a paradigm that the author somewhat anticipated as a much more complex and relevant phenomenon that has transitioned to a global dimension, and for this reason, is an object of study and a geopolitical instrument of analysis in International Relations.

In this context, modern literature contains a whole body of conceptual and doctrinal standards on war, which also fall within the scope of studies on Political Science, International Relations, Geopolitics, and Geostrategy, ranging from Economics (War Economy) to Sociology (Military Sociology), not to mention the multiple vectors of Military Technology. For this reason, war is a perennial element in the relationship between the multiple actors of the International Political System, and is often seen as an instrument of coercion, negotiation, mediation, pressure, and essentially of the affirmation of Power in its most militaristic form, as advocated by Colin Gray[3] (1943-2020).

Thus, seeking to fulfil this purpose, this reflection contributes to analysing the problem of war, specifically the possibility of discussing "new wars," whether from a more historical and International Relations perspective, a more philosophical and sociological one, or in the areas of defence technologies and military techniques, tactics, and procedures, where the theme of war remains innovative, challenging, and relevant in the context of global security.

To begin this reflection, it is important to know whether the topic of "new wars" constitutes a relevant matter in the scientific field and a pertinent subject in the academic context. And, on the other hand, to know if it is relevant to align the past with the future and uncover whether it was war that evolved in its essence or its more polemological concept that changed? Or, from a scientific perspective, do the "new wars" help us to better understand and uncover new threats, new challenges, and predict the future in terms of strategic analysis?

Let's then look at the concept of war and "new wars" in their most evolutionist and paradigmatic dimension, and let's try to align some concepts and ideas so that readers can better appreciate and contextualize the article, which is dedicated to reflecting on the "new wars" and their impact on International Relations.

War in the Classical Version

War as a social phenomenon eminently results from a substantial disagreement, a fierce competition, or the attempt to safeguard one's condition, status quo, and the privileges obtained... these are eminently rational, social, dynamic, and reflective acts, which involve high resources and mobilize substantial human, material, and financial means.

War is frequently characterised, as noted by Carl von Clausewitz, as the continuation of politics by alternative means. It may also consider the ultimum ratio – the final measure – for defending a nation's homeland, principles, values, and sovereignty. It is regard as a tool for geopolitical and geostrategic purposes used by states, organizations, and other actors that do not conform to conventional standards established by War Colleges; these actors are often described as hybrid, irregular, or transnational.

For this reason, ideological, religious, internal, or "blood" wars are the reason and consequence of the will of the Human Being in its deepest logic and are affirmed in the moral conviction and the defence of their values, beliefs, and perennial interests. According to Clausewitz's view, war is presented as "...an act of violence to compel the opponent to do our will..." and these are the wars that increasingly converge and bring into presence a clash of cultures, religions, and civilizations, in the true assumption of the thought of Samuel P. Huntington[4] (1927-2008).

For this reason, this paradigm largely implies that war must be understood not only as a social phenomenon but as a set of intrasocial and intersocial phenomena, and it is increasingly important to study, analyse, and debate it, especially in the current global context where war is present and conditions our lives, and to engage in an academic reflection on classical war and, especially, the "new wars."

If we analyse traditional war and the new forms of conflict and intend to look at the wars of the 21st century, we find that it has always accompanied the history of humanity and the history of societies, shaping borders, societies, and especially mentalities, convictions, and dogmas. However, its nature and dynamics have undergone significant transformations in recent decades. Classical armed conflicts typically involved direct confrontations between states with regular military forces. In contrast, contemporary conflicts involve a variety of participants, strategies, and technologies, and are often referred to as "new wars" in academic literature.

It is therefore important to discuss the transition from traditional wars to the new forms of conflict – hybrid, cybernetic,

informational, and cultural – seeking to understand their implications for geopolitics, geostrategy, sovereignty, and global security, and especially to uncover if there is a connection between the "new wars" and classical war.

Until the 20th century, wars were predominantly fought between nation-states, and the protagonists were large, uniformed regular armies (usually serving that State with professionalized ties) who fought on extensive physical battlefields with accessible tactical perception, aligned with defined political or territorial objectives, and usually employing explicit rules of engagement (partly influenced, more recently, by International Humanitarian Law). These wars were influenced by military doctrines based on the strategic ideas of Sun-Tzu, Clausewitz, Liddell Hart, and others. Their approaches continue to be studied in military schools and academies around the world.

The most classic examples include, among many others, the Napoleonic Wars (1799-1815), World War I and World War II, and the multiple regional conflicts with global impact such as the Vietnam War (1955-1975) and, more recently, the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). These conflicts, although brutal and disconnected, followed a clear interstate logic and were articulated according to the characteristics we discussed in the previous paragraph... they were the designated "Classical Wars."

The "New" Wars and Their Impact on International Relations

On the other hand, since the end of the Cold War, we have observed a profound change in conflicts and conflictual. Wars have become less frequent between states (interstate) and more common in internal contexts (intrastate), generating asymmetric and more prolonged conflicts (and not necessarily wars). Conflicts that involve new actors, new capabilities, and new combat tactics and techniques. Mary Kaldor[5] (1946) was one of the first specialists to coin the term "new wars" to describe the presence of non-state actors, such as militias, terrorist groups, and private military companies.

These new protagonists were associated with the fragmentation of sovereign authority within states and the use of disruptive emerging technologies, such as satellites, drones, and digital surveillance tools, transporting conflict and wars to the new dimensions of space and cyberspace.

In this context, the concept of "hybrid warfare" emerged, which refers to the integration of multiple forms of conflict in a single operational theatre that has come to have five dimensions (sea, land, air, space, and cyberspace). These conflicts combine conventional conflict (direct military), irregular warfare (use of guerrilla tactics and sabotage), cyberattacks, and disinformation campaigns (information warfare). It also addresses a greater political and economic interference in war, with military leaders having passed the "responsibility" of military decisions to the strategic-political level, and war now being planned, coordinated, and executed from the political-strategic level and not from the strategic-operational level. A notable example is the conflict in Ukraine that began in 2014 with the occupation of Crimea, where Russia was accused of using regular forces without identification, known as "little green men," in addition to fomenting disinformation campaigns on social media and cyberattacks against Ukrainian critical infrastructure that allowed them to shape and operationalize the Soviet offensive campaign against Ukraine that began on February 24, 2022.

> "Wars are no longer fought only between states on battlefields delimited by borders. Today, conflicts explode in cities, flow through the internet, and make civilians central targets. The new wars are diffused, fragmented, and personal."
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> Kaldor, Mary; In "New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era", 1999.

But what are the dimensions and structural characteristics of the "new wars"? The "new wars" involve extensive use of operational methods within the emerging domains of space and cyberspace, as well as varying applications of traditional domains such as sea, land, and air. An example is cyber warfare where the digitalization of war, with the use of artificial intelligence and quantum mechanics, allowed the emergence of cyberspace as a battlefield. In this new scenario, the targets are not only military but also civilian, such as airports, hospitals, power grids, and communication platforms, and the borders of the conflict have become indecipherable.

Cyber warfare is thus characterized by a greater difficulty in attributing the authorship of attacks and in identifying who the true enemy is, or what the real nature of the threat is. On the other hand, there is the use of low-cost and easily acquired means, technologies, and equipment, which are therefore within the reach of small groups and less relevant actors, and also because the response time is almost nil and the effects can be massive and devastating.

In this domain, and more in the aerial aspect, the "new wars" are characterized by the introduction of technologically advanced, relatively cheap, and easy-to-operate means on the battlefield, which not only altered operational techniques, tactics, and procedures, but also altered and conditioned the use of the battlefield itself... we are referring to the massive use of drones and the multiple missions assigned to them, which can be a weapon for reconnaissance and surveillance, or act in offensive operations, acting as an explosive vector or ammunition, where the destructive and lethal power is very significant.

Another aspect of the "new wars" is the so-called "information warfare" where the dispute over certain narratives and perceptions has become central in contemporary wars, in shaping operations and strategic communication (STRATCOM). In this context, governments and armed groups use cyberspace and social media to spread propaganda and convey a narrative that is relevant in the aspect of shaping public opinion and pressure groups, in support of political decision.

On the other hand, there is an attempt to delegitimize opponents by discrediting their purpose through disinformation and the creation of rumours or fake news. And in a more political-strategic aspect, it seeks to influence elections and political decisions or even lead to the mobilization or demobilization of populations for the cause. This war is not fought with conventional military equipment, but with the use of persuasion and psychological warfare, which replaces physical coercion and war in its more belligerent and military aspect.

More recently, the innovative concept of "cultural warfare" has emerged, associated with values and symbols that, in parallel with armed conflicts, lead to cultural disputes (over identity or territoriality) that act focused on the symbolic, religious, and identity level. The so-called "cultural warfare" involves confrontations around national identity and civil rights and inclusion policies, the theme of gender and sexuality, and, very much in vogue, historical (and revisionist) narratives that lead to the re-ignition of latent or frozen conflicts. This form of war manifests itself in personal interaction and social repression, often having in mind the rights of minorities, the freedom to choose religion, and the right to exist and assert oneself, and is often sustained by the clash between a growing need for globalization and the will to defend sovereignty.

The new wars challenge traditional legal and ethical frameworks and embody a change that is vectorial in globalization and that affects Organizations, States, and Society in general. This dynamic now bets on an effective bi multilateralism of strategic cooperation to operate in the new wars, because for complex problems, integrated solutions are required, and "new wars" are very complex problems involving multiple actors and therefore require integrated solutions. In this context, we are witnessing a paradigm of the "dehumanization of war," because with the growing use of drones and artificial intelligence, the distance between the executor and the target has increased, and the risk is the effective dehumanization of the act of killing, transforming war into a computer simulation – which raises profound moral and ethical questions about the nature of the "new wars."

We believe that the next decades should consolidate and expand these trends, and the "new wars" will bring more challenges and greater complexity to the phenomenon that is no longer perfectly understood by Polemology. Of these new paradigms that characterize modern wars, the massive use of autonomous lethal weapons and the use of strategic artificial intelligence, capable of planning, conducting, and operating in conflict scenarios, stand out. And the conflictual over data control (access to information in data centre's and submarine cables) and geospatial intelligence, among other factors. On the other hand, the "new climate wars," caused by resource scarcity and population displacements that lead to a massive flow of refugees or displaced persons and which associate war with the loss of human security in its multiple dimensions, will be a growing reality in the near future.

Contemporary war is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon in constant mutation. By transcending the limits of physical confrontation, it permeates the digital, symbolic, and psychological world – which requires new theoretical and practical instruments for its understanding and management. If in the past classical war was declared with trumpets and dealt with treaties, today the "new wars" silently insinuate themselves into our data, our feeds, and our beliefs, ideologies, and religions. Understanding the "new wars" and perceiving their multiple causes and consequences will be the first step to seeking to avoid them...

Conclusions

War resides in the heart of society as a permanent, interactive, and overly complex phenomenon that pits what the Human Being has of best and worst against each other. This Machiavellian dialectic is centred on the struggle of wills and subjugation for interests, values, or in defence of sovereignty. Throughout the centuries, war has been projected as a geopolitical instrument of social adjustment, the dynamization of techniques and technology, and the affirmation of political-ideological-religious wills... as a rule, in favour of the strongest and most powerful, subjugating the weakest and most inexperienced.

The "new wars," after the cold war period, present themselves as a much more complex, dynamic, and unknown phenomenon, where the affirmation of the weakest against the strongest has become a characteristic of intrastate conflicts. The techniques, tactics, and procedures, that is, the operational art has changed and war has been transported to new domains (space and cyberspace), giving evidence to hybrid conflicts and greater prominence and media coverage to terrorist groups, factions, or liberation movements, as well as stateless and faceless actors who operate in a grey area without rules.

In this context, International Relations have been taking on a large part of the scientific study that Polemology understood as the study of war, allowing for a more comprehensive, multidimensional, and global approach to the phenomena of conflictual, which now has new actors, new causes, new techniques and tactics, and which embody what we know as the "new wars". ●

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Notes

[1] This academic reflection is an adapted summary of the opening note developed for the 16th Edition of the "HOPLOS" Journal of the Federal Fluminense University (UFF) – Brazil, entitled "Classical War... and the New Wars," published on 03Jul25 and which is available at: https://periodicos.uff.br/hoplos/issue/view/3239

[2] Gaston Bouthoul, the French sociologist who founded Polemology, the scientific study of war, was a jurist and sociologist and became known for having created the term "Polémologie," which proposes a scientific and sociological approach to understanding armed conflicts and organized aggression in human societies. Gaston Bouthoul understood war not as an accident or aberration, but as a recurring and functional phenomenon in human societies.

[3] Colin S. Gray was a British-American writer on geopolitics and a professor of International Relations and Strategic Studies at the University of Reading (UK), where he served as the Director of the Centre for Strategic Studies. He theorized about the power of States and defined a methodology for perceiving power in the international context, linking it to both tangible and intangible factors of Power. He was a defense advisor to the British and American governments and served on the Advisory Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament from 1982 to 1987. He published 30 books on Military History and Strategic Studies, as well as articles on the theorization of Power and War.

[4] Samuel Phillips Huntington was an American political scientist influential in more conservative political circles. He became known for his analysis of the relationship between the military and civilian power, his research on coups d'état, , most notably, his controversial theory of the clash of civilizations. This theory, inspired by the Polish historian and philosopher Feliks Koneczny, posited that the main political actors of the 21st century would be Civilizations, not States, and that the primary sources of conflict after the Cold War would be cultural tensions, not ideological ones. The concept of the clash of civilizations first appeared in an article and published in 1993 in the journal "Foreign Affairs" and went on to revolutionize the concept of the "New Wars."

[5] Mary Henrietta Kaldor is a Professor of Global Governance and Director of the Research Unit on Civil Society and Human Security at the London School of Economics (LSE). She is the author of numerous books, including: "The Ultimate Weapon is no Weapon: Human Security and the Changing Rules of War and Peace" and in this context, the work "New and Old Wars: Organised Violence in a Global Era and Global Civil Society: An Answer to War" (1999) is especially noteworthy.

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