# FOURTH-GENERATION WAR AND OTHER MYTHS

**Antulio J. Echevarria II**

**November 2005**

Visit our website for other free publication downloads
http://www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil/

To rate this publication click here.

*****

The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. This report is cleared for public release; distribution is unlimited.

*****

This monograph is an expanded version of an article entitled "Deconstructing the theory of Fourth-Generation War," published in the August 2005 symposium of Contemporary Security Policy.

*****

*****

*****

# FOREWORD

In an era of broad and perhaps profound change, new theories and concepts are to be welcomed rather than shunned. However, before they are fully embraced, they need to be tested rigorously, for the cost of implementing a false theory and developing operational and strategic concepts around it can be greater than remaining wedded to an older, but sounder one. The theory of Fourth Generation War (4GW) is a perfect example. Were we to embrace this theory, a loose collection of ideas that does not hold up to close scrutiny, the price we might pay in a future conflict could be high indeed.

In this monograph, Dr. Antulio J. Echevarria II provides a critique of the theory of 4GW, examining its faulty assumptions and the problems in its logic. He argues that the proponents of 4GW undermine their own credibility by subscribing to this bankrupt theory. If their aim is truly to create positive change, then they—and we—would be better off jettisoning the theory and retaining the traditional concept of insurgency, while modifying it to include the greater mobility and access afforded by globalization.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.
Director
Strategic Studies Institute

# BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

ANTULIO J. ECHEVARRIA II is the Director of Research, Director of National Security Affairs, and Acting Chairman of the Regional Strategy and Planning Department at the Strategic Studies Institute. He graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 1981, was commissioned as an armor officer, and has held a variety of command and staff assignments in Germany and Continental United States. Dr. Echevarria is the author of *After Clausewitz: German Military Thinkers before the Great War*, published by the University Press of Kansas (2001). He also has published articles in a number of scholarly and professional journals to include the *Journal of Military History*, *War in History*, *War & Society*, the *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *Parameters*, *Joint Force Quarterly*, *Military Review*, and *Airpower Journal*. He is currently working on two books: a study of Clausewitz's ideas, and a comparison of military and civilian visions of future war before 1914. Dr. Echevarria is a graduate of the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College and the U.S. Army War College, and holds M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in History from Princeton University.

# SUMMARY

Fourth Generation War (4GW) emerged in the late 1980s, but has become popular due to recent twists in the war in Iraq and terrorist attacks worldwide. Despite reinventing itself several times, the theory has several fundamental flaws that need to be exposed before they can cause harm to U.S. operational and strategic thinking. A critique of 4GW is both fortuitous and important because it also provides us an opportunity to attack other unfounded assumptions that could influence U.S. strategy and military doctrine.

In brief, the theory holds that warfare has evolved through four generations: 1) the use of *massed manpower*, 2) *firepower*, 3) *maneuver*, and now 4) an evolved form of *insurgency* that employs all available networks—political, economic, social, military—to convince an opponent's decisionmakers that their strategic goals are either unachievable or too costly.

The notion of 4GW first appeared in the late 1980s as a vague sort of "out of the box" thinking, and it entertained every popular conjecture about future warfare. However, instead of examining the way terrorists belonging to Hamas or Hezbollah (or now Al Qaeda) actually behave, it misleadingly pushed the storm-trooper ideal as the terrorist of tomorrow. Instead of looking at the probability that such terrorists would improvise with respect to the weapons they used—box cutters, aircraft, and improvised explosive devices—it posited high-tech "wonder" weapons.

The theory went through a second incarnation when the notion of nontrinitarian war came into vogue; but it failed to examine that notion critically. The theory also is founded on myths about the so-called Westphalian system and the theory of *blitzkrieg*. The theory of 4GW reinvented itself once again after September 11, 2001 (9/11), when its proponents claimed that Al Qaeda was waging a 4GW against the United States. Rather than thinking critically about future warfare, the theory's proponents became more concerned with demonstrating that they had predicted the future. While their recommendations are often rooted in common sense, they are undermined by being tethered to an empty theory.

What we are really seeing in the war on terror, and the campaign in Iraq and elsewhere, is that the increased "dispersion and democratization of technology, information, and finance" brought about by globalization has given terrorist groups greater mobility and access worldwide. At this point, globalization seems to aid the nonstate actor more than the state, but states still play a central role in the support or defeat of terrorist groups or insurgencies.

We would do well to abandon the theory of 4GW altogether, since it sheds very little, if any, light on this phenomenon.

# FOURTH-GENERATION WAR AND OTHER MYTHS

Although the theory of Fourth Generation War (4GW) emerged in the late 1980s, it has gained considerable popularity of late, particularly as a result of recent twists in the war in Iraq and the terrorist attacks in London, Sharm al-Sheikh, and elsewhere. We examine the theory here for two reasons. First, despite a number of profound and incurable flaws, the theory's proponents continue to push it, an activity that only saps intellectual energy badly needed elsewhere. Rather than advancing or reinventing a bankrupt theory, the advocates of 4GW should redirect their efforts toward finding ways to broaden the scope and increase the depth of defense transformation. Second, some aspects of the theory have much in common with other popular myths such as the notion of nontrinitarian war, the impact of the Peace of Westphalia, and the existence of blitzkrieg doctrine—myths that, in no small way, have also influenced thinking about the future of war. Hence, a close examination of 4GW provides us an opportunity to expose fallacies common to a number of popular notions about war—past, present, and future.

Over the decade-and-a-half or so of the theory's existence, 4GW has reinvented itself several times, taking advantage of the latest developments in technology or tactics, and whatever ideas or theories happened to be in vogue. Described in brief, the theory's proponents now claim that 4GW is an "evolved" form of insurgency, much like the one that has emerged in Iraq:

> The first generation of modern war was dominated by *massed manpower* and culminated in the Napoleonic Wars. The second generation, which was quickly adopted by the world's major powers, was dominated by *firepower* and ended in World War I. In relatively short order, during World War II the Germans introduced third-generation warfare, characterized by *maneuver*. That type of combat is still largely the focus of U.S. forces . . . [4GW is an] evolved form of *insurgency* [that] uses all available networks—political, economic, social, military—to convince the enemy's decision makers that their strategic goals are either unachievable or too costly for the perceived benefit [emphasis added].[1]

This monograph argues that we need to drop the theory of 4GW altogether; it is fundamentally and hopelessly flawed, and creates more confusion than it eliminates. To be sure, the concept rightly takes issue with the networkcentric vision of future warfare for being too focused on technology and for overlooking the countermeasures an intelligent, adaptive enemy might employ.[2] However, the model of 4GW has serious problems of its own: it is based on poor history and only obscures what other historians, theorists, and analysts already have worked long and hard to clarify. Some 4GW proponents, such as Colonel Thomas Hammes, author of *The Sling and the Stone*, see the theory as little more than a vehicle, a tool, to generate a vital dialogue aimed at correcting deficiencies in U.S. military doctrine, training, and organization.[3] For his part, Hammes is to be commended for his willingness to roll up his sleeves and do the hard work necessary to promote positive change. However, the tool that he employs undermines his credibility. In fact, the theory of 4GW only undermines the credibility of anyone who employs it in the hope of inspiring positive change. Change is taking place despite, not because of, this theory. Put differently, if the old adage is true that correctly identifying the problem is half the solution, then the theorists of 4GW have made the problem twice as hard as it should be.

**FIRST INCARNATION**

The notion of 4GW first appeared in the late 1980s as a vague sort of "out of the box" thinking. The idea was itself an open box of sorts into which every conjecture about future warfare was thrown. As its inaugural essay shows, it was nothing more than a series of "what-ifs," albeit severely limited by a ground-oriented bias. In its earliest stages, 4GW amounted to an accumulation of speculative rhapsodies that blended a maneuver-theorist's misunderstanding of the nature of terrorism with a futurist's infatuation with "high technology."[4] The kind of terrorists that 4GW theorists described, for instance, behaved more like German storm troopers of 1918, or Robert Heinlein's starship troopers of the distant future. Highly intelligent and capable of fighting individually or in small groups,

these future terrorists would first seek to infiltrate a society and then attempt to collapse it from within by means of an ill-defined psycho-cultural "judo throw" of sorts.[5]

Instead of this fanciful approach, what terrorist groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and (to a lesser extent) Al Qaeda actually have done is integrated themselves into the social and political fabric of Muslim societies worldwide. Hamas and Hezbollah, especially, have established themselves as organizations capable of addressing the everyday problems of their constituencies: setting up day cares, kindergartens, schools, medical clinics, youth and women's centers, sports clubs, social welfare, programs for free meals, and health care.[6] Each has also become a powerful political party within their respective governments. In other words, rather than collapsing from within the societies of which they are a part, Hamas and Hezbollah have turned their constituencies into effective weapons by creating strong social, political, and religious ties with them; in short, they have become communal activists for their constituencies, which have, in turn, facilitated the construction and maintenance of substantial financial and logistical networks and safe houses.[7] This support then aids in the regeneration of the terrorist groups. Hence, attacks by Hamas and Hezbollah are not designed to implode a society, but to change the political will of their opponents through selective—even precise—targeting of innocents. Al Qaeda is somewhat different in that its goal is to spark a global uprising, or *intifada*, among Muslims, and its attacks have been designed to weaken the United States, other Western powers, and Muslim governments in order to prepare the way for that uprising.[8] Pursuant to that goal, it and groups sympathetic to it have launched attacks that in 2004 alone killed about 1,500 and wounded about 4,000 people, not including the many victims of operations in Iraq; one-third of all attacks involved non-Western targets, but the bulk of the victims overall were Muslims.[9] Still, even its tactics are not the psychological "judo throw" envisioned by 4GW theorists, but an attempt to inflict as many casualties and as much destruction as possible in the hope of provoking a response massive enough to trigger a general uprising by the Islamic community.

Moreover, the types of high-technology that 4GW's proponents envisioned terrorists using includes such *Wunderwaffe* as directed energy weapons and robotics, rather than the cell phones and

internet that terrorists actually use today. 4GW theorists also failed to account for the fact that many 21st century wars, such as those that unfolded in Rwanda and the Sudan, would be characterized by wholesale butchery with "old-fashioned" weapons such as assault rifles and machetes wreaking a terrible toll in lives. Even in the so-called information age, the use of brute force remains an effective tactic in many parts of the world.

The theory's proponents also speculated that the super-terrorists of the future might not have a "traditional" national base or identity, but rather a "non-national or transnational one, such as an ideology or a religion."[10] However, from an historical standpoint, this condition has been the norm rather than the exception. Indeed, it characterizes many, if not most, of the conventional conflicts of the past, such as World War II, which was fought along ideological lines and within a transnational framework of opposing global alliances, rather than a simple nation-state structure as is commonly supposed. While states were clearly advancing their own interests, they tended to do so by forming alliances along ideological lines. Nazism was, from its very outset, inimical to Western-style democracy and to Soviet-style socialism. So, even though democracy and socialism are ideologically incompatible, each saw Nazism as the greater threat, and formed a tentative alliance of sorts. To be sure, conventional forces and tactics predominated in this conflict, but unconventional means were clearly important as well. The Cold War is another example of a conflict fought along ideological lines; it followed in the wake of the defeat of Nazism, as the alliance between Western democracy and Soviet socialism ended and gave way to a subsequent realignment along ideological lines; this war was also fought within a transnational more than a national framework, though most of the violence occurred in peripheral wars or in covert operations. The Arab-Israeli wars and the Vietnam conflict, all of which took place within the larger context of the ideological struggle of the Cold War, offer still further examples: they were national struggles on one level, but on another level they served as the means in a larger ideological struggle.

It is more than a little puzzling, therefore, that the architects of 4GW should have asserted that U.S. military capabilities are "designed to operate within a nation-state framework and have

great difficulties outside of it."[11] As history shows, the U.S. military actually seems to have handled World War II and the Cold War, two relatively recent global conflicts, both of which required it to operate within transnational alliances, quite well. That is not to say that the American way of war or, more precisely, our way of battle, does not have room for improvement.[12] Yet, important similarities too often go unnoticed by a facile dismissal of what are often portrayed as conventional conflicts. As with Germany and Japan after World War II, for instance, one-time failed states, such as Afghanistan, where terrorist strongholds have developed, still need political and economic reconstruction in order to eliminate, or at least reduce, the conditions that gave rise to inimical ideologies in the first place.

To be sure, out-of-the-box thinking is to be applauded; militaries do not do enough of it, for a variety of reasons, some legitimate, some not. However, its value diminishes when that thinking hardens into a box of its own, and when its architects become enamored of it.

## SECOND INCARNATION

In the years following the theory's inception, the proponents of 4GW moved from speculating about the future—a fruitful exercise if done objectively—to trying to prove that they had predicted it. By the mid-1990s, the theory of 4GW had taken up Martin van Creveld's egregious misrepresentation of the Clausewitzian trinity and his overemphasis of the significance of the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, both of which appeared in the much lauded *Transformation of War*.[13] Remarkably, the theory's proponents claimed that van Creveld actually had expanded upon "their ideas," especially with regard to the concept of "nontrinitarian" war.[14] By taking ownership of van Creveld's concepts, they actually reinvented their theory, and began proclaiming that the "first idea" that shaped 4GW was the thesis that "future war will increasingly be nontrinitarian and waged outside the nation-state framework."[15] It is tempting to see contemporary terrorist groups as self-sufficient. However, as we have already seen, that is hardly the case. A number of states are clearly supporting terrorist activities with money, weapons, and safe havens, and the terrorists themselves rely on the support, even if

passive, of established communities. Other states are instrumental in interrupting the flow of finances from one institution to another, in restricting the movements of terrorists, in eliminating their safe-havens, in tracking down and arresting their principal leaders, and in driving a wedge between the terrorist groups and the various populations they purport to champion. Indeed, states are key players on both sides of the war on terror: their policies help create conditions that are either disadvantageous for, or conducive to, the growth of terrorist groups.

**The Fallacy of Nontrinitarian War.**

The fundamental problem with the idea of nontrinitarian war is that it does not understand the thing it purports to negate, that is, so-called trinitarian war. The concept of trinitarian war has, in fact, never existed except as a misunderstanding on the part of those who subscribe to the notion of nontrinitarian war. It resulted from van Creveld's misrepresentation of Clausewitz's "wondrous (*wunderliche*) trinity," a construct the Prussian theorist used to describe the diverse and changeable nature of war. Clausewitz portrayed the nature of war in terms of three tendencies, or forces: basic hostility, which if unchecked would make war spiral out of control; chance and uncertainty, which defy prescriptive doctrines and make war unpredictable; and the attempt to use war to achieve a purpose, to direct it toward an end.[16]

Indeed, his portrayal appears accurate, for we find these forces present, in varying degrees, in every war, ancient or modern, traditional or otherwise. From the standpoint of the war on terror, for instance, hostility is quite a strong force indeed. Al Qaeda and more locally-minded terrorist groups, such as Hamas and Hizballah, at times have gone to great lengths to mobilize the hostility of their constituencies. Chance, as Clausewitz used the term, meant not only random occurrence, but also that, from the strategic through the tactical levels of war, armed conflict is a matter of assessing probabilities and making judgments. Recent polls indicate that few people are certain about which side is winning the war on terror, or the war in Iraq; some of this uncertainty has less to do with casualties

inflicted daily by the insurgents than with the perception that Iraqis will not be able to come together to form a representative form of government, thus bringing U.S. efforts to naught.[17] The purposes at odds in the war on terror are both religious and secular in nature. While many identify with the jihadist vision of Al Qaeda, or at least are inspired by it, others pursue political self-determination, or aims that are only regional or local in nature.

These tendencies, as Clausewitz went on to explain, generally correspond to three institutions: the first to the populace, the second to the military, and the last to the government. However, as he also noted, each of these institutions has taken various forms over time; we should not consider them only in terms of those three forms. The term "government," for instance, as Clausewitz used it, meant any ruling body, any "agglomeration of loosely associated forces," or any "personified intelligence."[18] Similarly, the term military represents not only the trained, semi-professional armies of the Napoleonic era, but any warring body in any era. Likewise, Clausewitz's references to the "populace" pertain to the populations of any society or culture in any given period of history.[19] Thus, the government can be a state, such as Prussia, or a nonstate actor, such as a clan or a tribe.[20] In truth, the trinity consists of the actual *forces* or tendencies themselves, which are universal, and not the institutions, which are merely representations of those forces that would have been familiar to Clausewitz's readers. He considered the tendencies themselves to be universal—common to every war—and, indeed, we find them at play in the war on terror.

As we can see, each of the tendencies in Clausewitz's wondrous trinity remains alive and well, even in the war on terror, which is precisely the kind of conflict that scholars such as van Creveld wrongly refer to as "nontrinitarian."[21] Strictly speaking, then, there is no such thing as trinitarian war because, as any review of history shows, the forces Clausewitz described are present in *every* war, not just the wars of nation-states. If they are present in every war, then the term must fall out as a discriminator. In other words, if the basis for making a distinction, any distinction, disappears, then the distinction itself also vanishes. It follows, then, that since there is no such thing as "trinitarian" war, per se, there can be no such thing as

"nontrinitarian" war; the initial concept or idea has to exist before the idea that negates it can come into being. Nontrinitarian war is, therefore, nothing more than the negation of a misunderstanding. The proponents of 4GW failed to perceive this particular flaw in their reasoning because they did not review their theory critically; instead, they attempted to augment it with whatever ideas seemed in vogue at the time.

**The Myth of Westphalia**.

Theorists of 4GW also bit rather deeply into the fruit van Creveld offered them with his exaggeration of the significance of the Peace of Westphalia, the treaty that ended the Thirty Years' War.[22] Accordingly, they asserted that one of the key ideas of 4GW is that the "nation-state is losing its monopoly on war," a monopoly supposedly established by the Treaty of Westphalia.[23] However, what the treaty actually did, aside from granting or confirming the possession of certain lands by Europe's major powers, was to break apart the central authority of the Holy Roman Empire, and in its place grant territorial sovereignty to some 300 German and central European princes. It is more accurate to regard the treaty as a "new constitution" for the Empire, a constitution that balanced religious and political concerns, than as a concerted effort to establish an enduring state system.[24] In any case, the principalities involved were not nation-states by any stretch, and Europe had much further to go culturally and intellectually before the notion of national identity would become associated with the idea of the state as a political organization.

The sovereignty granted to the princes by the Treaty included, among other things, the right to declare war and to enter into treaties with foreign powers; any war that should break out among the princes would, thus, be considered an international affair, rather than a civil war within the Empire. This sovereignty was not absolute, however, despite the teaming rhetoric in much of the contemporary literature that claims the opposite. The princes could not enter into any treaty that was "against the Emperor, and the Empire, nor against the Publik Peace, and this Treaty, and without prejudice to the Oath

by which everyone is bound to the Emperor and the Empire," for instance, and any prince who changed his religion would forfeit his lands.[25] The kind of sovereignty granted by the treaty did not preclude intervention by outside powers, therefore, and did not provide a legal basis for autonomy.

Moreover, what the treaty most certainly did *not* do was give states a monopoly, legal or otherwise, on the waging of war.[26] Even van Creveld admits that "cities and coalitions of cities, religious leagues, and independent noblemen, to say nothing of robbers" continued to make war.[27] Rather, the Thirty Years' War itself showed that war had become extremely costly to wage, even for major powers.[28] Thus, the sheer expense of organized armed conflict tended to push it beyond the capacity of smaller states and many nonstate actors, who sought to avoid it except, of course, to participate as mercenaries. Even larger states had to reorganize themselves in order to be able to continue to wage war, but this reorganization did not produce a monopoly on war.[29] Once again, therefore, the theory of 4GW suffers from poor use of history and lack of intellectual rigor.

## THIRD INCARNATION

In late 2001, 4GW was reinvented again when one of the theory's principal proponents proclaimed that September 11, 2001 (9/11), was "Fourth-Generation Warfare's First Blow."[30] This claim was both clever—in that it exploited a moment of strategic surprise for the United States—and supremely arrogant, revealing the extent to which 4GW theorists had become preoccupied with proving their ability to predict the future, rather than understanding the motives and methods of America's terrorist enemies. The new incarnation professed that 4GW had become "broader than any technique," and, in effect, amounted to the "greatest change in war since the Peace of Westphalia."[31] Forgotten was the fact that the theory initially started out as nothing more than a collection of vague, unrestrained speculations regarding future tactics and techniques.

Unfortunately, this new incarnation repeats many of the theory's old errors, some of which we have not yet discussed. First, its sequencing of the so-called generations of war is both artificial and

indefensible. Portraying changes in warfare in terms of "generations" implies that each one evolved directly from its predecessor and, as it must by the natural progression of generations, eventually displaced it. However, the generational model is an ineffective way to depict changes in warfare. Simple displacement rarely takes place, significant developments typically occur in parallel. Firepower, for example, played as much a role in World War II and the Korean and Vietnam conflicts as did maneuver, perhaps more. In fact, insurgency as a way of waging war actually dates back to classical antiquity, and thus predates the so-called second and third generations (firepower and maneuver) as described by 4GW theorists. Insurgents, guerrillas, and resistance fighters figured large in many of the wars fought during the age of classical warfare.

It is to be expected that nonstate actors—whether insurgents, terrorists, guerrillas, street gangs, or other nefarious characters—would try to use the increased mobility that has come about through globalization to pursue their ends.[32] The literature on globalization now is quite extensive, and while scholars will continue to debate certain aspects of it, there is at least a growing consensus that it has dramatically increased the mobility of people, weapons, and ideas. It was, therefore, almost inevitable—and by no means unforeseen—that a marriage of sorts would develop between terrorism and globalization. This marriage, in fact, is all there is to the phenomenon that 4GW calls a "super" or "evolved insurgency," or a "new generation" of warfare.[33]

Throughout history, terrorists, guerrillas, and similar actors generally aimed at eroding an opponent's will to fight rather than destroying his means; indeed, noted experts on the topic, such as Walter Laqueur and Ian Beckett, as well as others have devoted considerable time and intellectual energy to understanding the various phenomena of guerrilla warfare, insurgencies, terrorism, and their various combinations and evolutions.[34] The difference now is that, with the spread of information and communication technologies and the rise in travel opportunities, all of which have become associated with globalization, terrorists and other nonstate actors enjoy enhanced access to their adversary's political will. The same can also be said, of course, for states. Regardless, the act of

attacking an opponent's will, kinetically or otherwise, still serves merely as a means to an end.

We would, in fact, be hard pressed to find a conventional conflict in history in which the belligerents did not have as one of their chief aims the changing, if not the complete undermining, of their adversary's political will. It is tempting, for instance, to see World War I as little more than a brutal contest of attrition involving waves of men and massive barrages of firepower, which is how 4GW theorists see it. However, that perspective overlooks the fact that the ultimate aim of campaigns of attrition such as Verdun was to break the political will of the other side by demonstrating that the cost of continuing the fight was higher than the ends warranted—much like the definition used by the theorists of 4GW. The problem was that each side tended to miscalculate the resolve of its opponent, believing that the will of the other was just about to break, and that one more major offensive would do the trick. The proponents of 4GW also ignore the many attempts, on each side, to bypass the trenches and attack the will of the enemy in other ways. German air raids on London in 1915 are a case in point; 6 months of bombing caused just over 1,700 deaths, hardly more than a routine day at the front.[35] Yet, the fact that the Germans could strike London at all provoked widespread panic among Britons who, for a time, clamored loudly for Britain's withdrawal from the war. Fortunately, the Germans lacked the means to increase the tempo of such attacks, and the British developed anti-bombing measures effective enough to deter the bulk of German raids.

We should also remember that the notions of airpower theorist Giulio Douhet concentrated primarily on striking at an opponent's will to resist—by bombing his major population centers at home—rather than destroying his combat materiel at the front.[36] In essence, Douhet's theories, aside from being an argument for turning Italy's air arm into a separate service, amount to a case for creating terror on a massive scale. That the terror such bombing caused in World War II fell short of achieving the capitulation predicted by Douhet only proves how difficult it is to calculate the strength of an opponent's political will, or how it might react to certain attacks directed against it. The Vietnam conflict often is portrayed as proof

of a lack of American resolve, but for over a decade the United States remained involved in a war that some of its leading decisionmakers, such as Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, initially assessed as unwinnable unless the South Vietnamese could be inspired to take "effective action." This shows how difficult it is to estimate the will of an opponent.[37]

Indeed, military theorists from Sun Tzu forward have wrestled with the need to understand the relationship between an adversary's physical and psychological capacities to resist. Collectively, theorists typically have affirmed that will is the most important factor in war. Hence, since it is so difficult to assess, most military thinkers, like Clausewitz, defaulted to the aim of rendering an enemy defenseless (*Wehrlos*) by destroying his physical capacity to resist. We would do well to remember that the jihadists and other nefarious actors in the war on terror also face the difficult problem of estimating the will of some of their sworn enemies, the United States and its coalition partners, for example. Underestimating that will, in fact, seems to be a principal characteristic of their ideology.

That being the case, it is rather curious that the history and analyses that 4GW theorists hang on current insurgencies should be so deeply flawed. Fortunately, some of their recommendations for countering the current phenomenon—such as the revitalization of counterinsurgency doctrine; better cultural and linguistic education for U.S. troops; and the greater coordination of political, military, social, and economic efforts—though not entirely original, are surely steps in the right direction.[38]

Moreover, contrary to what 4GW-theorists assert, Mao Tse-tung was not the first, nor even the most important, theorist to articulate the virtues of insurgency, or Peoples' War, as it was frequently called.[39] Sun Tzu, the celebrated Chinese philosopher of war, addressed guerrilla warfare indirectly, discussing principles and stratagems that one could easily apply to that form of conflict.[40] Clausewitz, on the other hand, addressed it directly, calling it a "reality (*Erscheinung*) of the 19th century," and provided some valuable insights into its nature; he even delivered a series of lectures on the subject based on his observations of the French operations in the Vendee and the Spanish insurrection against Napoleon's troops to Prussian officers

at the War College in Berlin in 1810 and 1811.[41] For the most part, the lectures were aimed at educating junior officers on tactics appropriate to countering guerrilla warfare and partisan activities. He did, however, advocate that Prussia pursue a strategy of insurrection against Napoleon after the Prussian defeat at Jena-Auerstadt in 1806; thus, the advantages of such a strategy were clearly known to him. Swiss theorist Antoine Henri Jomini echoed Clausewitz's observations that guerrilla warfare was an effective means of resisting an invading force by disrupting its lines of communication, harassing and attacking small detachments, and destroying supply depots.[42] In the latter half of the 19th century, the British officer, Charles Callwell, took a more systematic view of what he called "small wars"; among other things, he offered the important observation that most wars, in fact, typically devolved into irregular conflicts once an invader defeated the defender's regular forces.[43] More than a century ago, therefore, irregular conflict was thus perceived as a common aspect of regular warfare. T. E. Lawrence's exploits as a British intelligence officer in Arabia at the beginning of the 20th century highlighted, among other things, the significance of the political component of irregular warfare; guerrilla warfare was, in his view, only one-third military and two-thirds political.[44] Thus, the essential elements of irregular conflicts, whether known as Peoples' Wars or small wars, were identified long before Mao adapted them for the Chinese civil war.

The tactics of insurgency did, after all, help the American colonies win independence from the British crown. It also prolonged the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-71 for several months, causing bitter disagreements in the German headquarters and placing enormous strain on the Prussian army and the German economy.[45] It played an important role in the histories of many Latin American states, and in Western Europe and the Soviet Union during World War II, as well as enabling the emergence of the state of Israel in the late 1940s. It has played a prominent role in the struggle for statehood among nations in North Africa and Southeast Asia, all when warfare was supposed to have been dominated by mass, firepower, or maneuver. Far from being merely a weapon of the weak against the strong, insurgency has also been used by the strong against the strong, as it was during

the Cold War when the United States and the Soviet Union sought to undermine each others' influence abroad, but to do so covertly. The theory of 4GW thus reflects a decidedly Euro-centric bias, and a distorted one at that.

Second, even if it were valid to portray major changes in the conduct of war as an evolutionary progression from 1GW to 3GW, the next logical step in that progression would not be the sort of "superinsurgency" that 4GW theorists have tried to depict so opportunistically. Instead, the generation of warfare that succeeds 3GW would actually have to be closer to the technocratic vision of networkcentric warfare once propounded by some within the defense community; that is, of small, high-tech forces networked together in a knowledge-based system of systems that enables them to act rapidly and decisively.[46]

To their credit, the advocates of 4GW rightly criticize networkcentric warfare and its vacuous theoretical offshoots, such as Shock and Awe, for depending too much on high technology and for being too inflexible to accommodate a thinking opponent. Yet, and quite ironically, this is the very direction in which the logic of their particular theory of military evolution would lead them, if they were true to it.

**The Blitzkrieg Myth**.

Early on, proponents of the Revolution in Military Affairs and networkcentric warfare made a point of using the so-called German blitzkrieg model as a way to articulate their transformational goals. They wanted to create a form of super-maneuver, through a combination of new technologies and new operational concepts, capable of rapidly and decisively defeating an adversary. While contemporary military analysts and commentators, such as S. L. A. Marshall, called the German style of fighting a "blitzkrieg," or lightning war, and proclaimed it a revolution in warfare, their rhetoric had little substance and was intended primarily to arouse concern in the United States over events in Europe.[47] In fact, an official blitzkrieg concept did not exist in German military doctrine at the time.

Instead, the methods employed by the German military were a natural continuation of the concept of a war of movement (*Bewegungskrieg*) as opposed to a war of position (*Stellungskrieg*), a distinction that was hammered out in the 1890s, and then revalidated in military assessments that took place after the Great War.[48] The term itself appears to have been coined outside Germany; the picture of General von Brauchitch on the cover of the September 1939 issue of *Time* magazine along with the title "Blitzkrieger" may have been among the first instances.[49] Even Guderian's own concept for the use of armored forces, as outlined in his book *Achtung — Panzer!*, was organized around accomplishing a rather traditional mission, a breakthrough operation, which he saw as *the* most challenging operation of World War I.[50] Hence, Guderian did little more than attempt to improve existing procedures or, in today's phraseology, to refight the last war. In any case, German success on the battlefield depended more often than not on such factors as thorough planning, quality training, and decentralized leadership.

Ironically, the technocratic-style of warfare that Hammes and others rail against, however justifiably, is actually the logical extension of 3GW—and it is, curiously enough, not too far removed from the direction in which 4GW theorists initially were headed. What this means for 4GW theorists, though, is that the train of logic they use to explain key developments in the conduct of war actually undermines their case. That they failed to perceive this flaw in a theory they have been developing—or, more accurately, reinventing—for more than a decade is not a good sign.

Third, by comparing what essentially amount to military means or techniques—such as "massed manpower," "firepower," and "maneuver"—on the one hand, to what is arguably a form of warfare—such as insurgency—on the other, the advocates 4GW only bait us with a proverbial apples-versus-oranges sleight-of-hand. In other words, they establish a false comparison by which they wish us to conclude that most of the wars of the modern age, which they claim were characterized by firepower or maneuver, were narrowly focused on military power and, unlike the superinsurgencies of the information age, rarely involved the integration of political, economic, and social power.

Yet, even a cursory review of the Napoleonic and World Wars I and II reveals that this is not true. Clausewitz thought that Napoleon in fact had brought warfare nearest to its "absolute" form, meaning that Bonaparte had taken war to a hitherto unsurpassed level of violence, mobilized the French populace to the extent possible at the time, and attempted to control information through various organs of the state.[51] In Napoleon, the full political and military powers of the French state were brought together in one person.

The major wars of the 20th century also show that political, social, and economic capabilities were, in many cases, employed to the maximum extent possible. Some historians go so far as to maintain that World Wars I and II were, in effect, examples of "total" war precisely because of the extent to which the major combatants mobilized the elements of their national power.[52] Even the theoretical offshoots of netcentric warfare, which 4GW rightly rejects, recognize the need to integrate all the elements of national power in the pursuit of strategic aims. The problem is that this notion of total integration has become the new mantra; the idea itself has almost been elevated to a panacea for the various ills plaguing the American way of war. The fundamental rub, which even 4GW advocates do not address, is how to coordinate diverse kinds of power, each of which operates in a unique way and according to its own timeline, to achieve specific objectives, and to do so while avoiding at least the most egregious of unintended consequences. It is one thing to assert that all the elements of power must be coordinated to meet the challenges of this century, it is quite another to think through the next level of that problem, and figure out how.

**CONCLUSION**

In sum, there is no reason to reinvent the wheel with regard to insurgencies—super or otherwise—and their various kin. A great deal of very good work has already been done, especially lately, on that topic, to include the effects that globalization and information technologies have had, are having, and are likely to have, on such movements. We do not need another label, as well as an incoherent supporting logic, to obscure what many have already made clear.

The fact that 4GW theorists are not aware of this work, or at least do not acknowledge it, should give us pause indeed. They have not kept up with the scholarship on unconventional wars, nor with changes in the historical interpretations of conventional wars. Their logic is too narrowly focused and irredeemably flawed. In any case, the wheel they have been reinventing will never turn.

## ENDNOTES

1. Thomas X. Hammes, "4th-generation Warfare: Our Enemies Play to Their Strengths," *Armed Forces Journal*, November 2004, pp. 40-44.

2. This tendency was particularly evident in the early white papers regarding rapid decisive operations and effects-based operations. There is some evidence that this technocratic emphasis is changing, however. Greg Jaffe, "Rumsfeld Details Big Military Shift in New Document: Drive for Pre-emptive Force, Wider Influence Will Trigger Changes in Strategy, Budget," *Wall Street Journal*, March 11, 2005. In fact, some proponents now admit that the initial scope of defense transformation was too narrow. Compare Max Boot, "The New American Way of War," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 4, July/August 2003, pp. 41-58, to his more recent argument in Max Boot, "The Struggle to Transform the Military," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 2, March/April 2005, pp. 103-118.

3. Thomas X. Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century*, St. Paul, MN: Zenith, 2004.

4. William S. Lind, Keith Nightengale, John F. Schmitt, Joseph W. Sutton, and Gary I. Wilson, "The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation," *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 1989, pp. 22-26.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

6. In contrast, most government bodies in the Middle East, generally perceived as corrupt and ineffective by Muslim communities, have failed to provide such basics. Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence, and Coexistence*, New York: Columbia University, 2000, pp. 18-26; Sami G. Hajjar, *Hizballah: Terrorism, National Liberation or Menace?* Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, August 2002. Gunaratna, *Inside Al Qaeda*, pp. 55, 227, 230.

7. Ed Blanche, "Al-Qaeda Recruitment," *Janes Intelligence Review*, Vol. 14, January 2002, pp. 27-28; Paul J. Smith, "Transnational Terrorism and the al Qaeda Model: Confronting New Realities," *Parameters*, Vol. 32, No. 2, Summer 2002, pp. 33-46.

8. Cited from "Al Qaeda: Statements and Evolving Ideology," Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, June 20, 2005, p. 13. Kenneth Katzman, "Al Qaeda: Profile and Threat Assessment," Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 10, 2005.

9. U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2004*, Washington, DC: Office of Coordinator for Counterterrorism, April 2005, pp. 7-8; National Counterterrorism Center, *A Chronology of Significant International Terrorism for 2004*, Washington, DC, April 27, 2005, pp. 81-82. International terrorists were responsible for 190 attacks during 2003, down from 198 in 2002, and 355 in 2001; the casualty total was 1,888 in 2003, down from 2,742 in 2002, and 3,875 in 2001. U.S. Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, Washington, DC, 2003.

10. Lind, *et al.*, "Changing Face of War," p. 25.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

12. Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Toward an American Way of War*, Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, 2004.

13. Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, New York: Free Press, 1991.

14. William S. Lind; Major John F. Schmitt, USMCR; and Colonel Gary I. Wilson, USMCR, "Fourth Generation Warfare: Another Look," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Vol. 78, No. 12, December 1994, pp. 34-37, especially 34. Hammes provided some much needed intellectual heft to the theory at this time. Lieutenant Colonel Thomas X. Hammes, "The Evolution of War: The Fourth Generation," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Vol. 78, No. 9, September 1994, pp. 35-44.

15. Lind, *et al.*, "Another Look," p. 36.

16. The trinity is only one aspect of Clausewitz's nature of war; he also described objective and subjective "natures" of war. The former includes those qualities that every war has—violence, chance, and friction—while the latter consists of the means by which wars are fought. Similarly, his representation of the first trinity—consisting of the forces—corresponds with the objective nature of war, while the second trinity accords with the subjective nature of war. Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege. Hinterlassenes Werk des Generals Carl von Clausewitz*, 19th Ed., Werner Hahlweg, ed., Bonn: Ferd. Dümmlers, 1991, Book I, Chap. 1, pp. 212-213. Hereafter, *Vom Kriege*.

17. David W. Moore, "Majority of Americans Maintain Negative Views on Iraq: Believe War has made the United States 'Less Safe' from Terrorism," Gallup Poll News Service, August 9, 2005, *http://www.GallupWaronTerror_aspx.htm*; E&P Staff, "Gallup: Only 1 in 3 Think US is Winning War on Terror," *Editor & Publisher*, July 5, 2005. Recent polls by *Newsweek*, Associated Press-Ipsos, and CBS reflect similar results: Mark Silva and Mike Dorning, "Doubt on War Grows in US: Even Supporters Say Effort isn't Worth Loss of American Lives," *Chicago Tribune*, August 14, 2005.

18. *Vom Kriege*, Book VIII, Chap. 3B, p. 962.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 962, 964-965.

20. *Vom Kriege*, Book I, Chap. 1, pp. 212-13.

21. Creveld, *Transformation of War*, pp. 192-233.

22. The Treaty of Westphalia was actually two treaties: the Treaty of Osnabrück, concluded between the Holy Roman Emperor and the Protestant king of Sweden; and the Treaty of Münster, concluded between the Emperor and the Catholic king of France. The treaties took 7 years to negotiate, and fighting continued up to the last moment.

23. Lind, *et al.*, "Another Look," pp. 34, 35; William S. Lind, "Understanding Fourth Generation War," *Military Review*, Vol. 84, No. 5, September/October 2004, pp. 12-16, especially 12.

24. Stephen D. Krasner, "Rethinking the Sovereign State Model," in *Empire, Systems and States: Great Transformations in International Politics*, Michael Cox, Tim Dunne, and Ken Booth, eds., New York: Cambridge University, 2001, p. 35. For other critiques of the treaty, see Andreas Osiander, "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth," *International Organization*, Vol. 55, 2001, pp. 251-287; Stephane Beaulac, "The Westphalian Legal Orthodoxy—Myth or Reality," *Journal of the History of International Law*, Vol. 2, 2000, pp. 148-177; Derek Croxton, "The Peace of Westphalia of 1648 and the Origins of Sovereignty," *The International History Review*, Vol. 21, 1999, pp. 575-591.

25. Treaty of Münster, Article LXV; and Treaty of Osnabrück, Article VIII.1. The texts of the treaties are available in various sources; for example, *http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/westphal.htm*.

26. Culturally, the treaty does represent a change in attitudes among Europe's elite: it reflected a new willingness to take matters in hand, instead of assuming that nothing could be done. Theodore K. Rabb, *The Struggle for Stability in Early Modern Europe*, New York: Oxford, 1975, pp. 78-79.

27. Van Creveld, *Transformation*, p. 192.

28. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000*, New York: Random House, 1987, especially pp. 58-65.

29. This need to reorganize formed one of the pillars in Michael Roberts' argument that this period saw a military revolution. Michael Roberts, "The Military Revolution, 1560-1660," in *The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe*, Clifford Rodgers, ed., Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995, pp. 13-36; Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800*, 2nd Ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996, pp. 45-82, points to the rising cost of supplying war.

30. William S. Lind, "Fourth-Generation Warfare's First Blow: A Quick Look," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Vol. 85, No. 11, November 2001, p. 72.

31. Lind, "First Blow," p. 72.

32. Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the 21st Century*, New York: Farra, Strauss, Giroux, 2005; and *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, New York: Anchor, 2000, p, 9, which offered perhaps the first definition of globalization: the dispersion and democratization of technology, information, and finance.

33. Hammes, "4th-generation Warfare," p. 42.

34. The following old and new works represent such efforts: Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla Warfare: A Historical and Critical Study*, Boulder: Westview, 1984; Ian F. W. Beckett and John Pimlott, eds., *Armed Forces and Modern Counter-insurgency*, New York: St. Martin's, 1985; Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare*, Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1990; and Rohan Gunaratna, ed., *The Changing Face of Terrorism*, Singapore: Eastern Universities, 2004.

35. James S. Corum, *The Luftwaffe: Creating the Operational Air War 1918-1940*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1997, p. 24.

36. Giulio Douhet, *The Command of the Air*, Dino Ferrari, trans., Washington, DC: Office of Air Force History, new imprint, 1983.

37. Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect—The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam*, New York: Times Books, 1995, p. 263.

38. For a summary of those recommendations, see Thomas X. Hammes, "Insurgency: Modern Warfare Evolves into a Fourth Generation," Strategic Forum No. 214, Institute for National Strategic Studies, January 2005.

39. Mao Tse-Tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, 2nd Ed., Introduction by Samuel B. Griffith II, trans., Baltimore: Nautical & Aviation Publishing Co., 1992; and *Basic Tactics*, Introduction by Stuart R. Schram, trans., New York: Praeger, 1966. Other well-known guerrilla warfare theorists include General Vo-Nguyen-Giap, *People's War, People's Army: The Viet Cong Insurrection Manual for Underdeveloped Countries*, New York: Praeger, 1962; Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, 3rd Ed., Brian Loveman and Thomas M. Davies Jr., eds., Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1997.

40. Philip Short, *Mao: A Life*, New York: Henry Holt, 2000; Sun-tzu, *The Art of War*, Ralph Sawyer, trans., New York: Westview, 1994.

41. *Vom Kriege*, Book VI, Chap. 26, p. 799. For the lectures, see "Meine Vorlesungen über den kleinem Krieg, gehalten auf der Kriegs-Schule 1810 und 1811," in Werner Hahlweg, ed., *Carl von Clausewitz: Schriften – Aufsätze – Studien – Briefe*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966, Vol. I, pp. 208-599.

42. Robert B. Asprey, *War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History*, London: Macdonald, 1975, p. 164.

43. Charles Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, 3d Ed., London: Harrison & Sons, 1906.

44. T. E. (Thomas Edward) Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph*, London: M. Pike, 1926.

45. Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France 1870-1871*, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004, pp. 278-293.

46. David S. Alberts, John J. Gartska, and Frederick P. Stein, *Networkcentric Warfare: Developing and Leveraging Information Superiority*, Washington, DC: National Defense University, 1999.

47. S. L. A. Marshall, *Blitzkrieg: Its History, Strategy, Economics, and the Challenge to America*, New York: William Morrow, 1940; Ferdinand O. Miksche, *Attack: A Study of Blitzkrieg Tactics*, London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1941.

48. James S. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform*, Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1992, pp. 51-67.

49. "Blitzkrieger," *Time*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 13, September 25, 1939, p. 25; Stephen O. Fuqua, "Blitzkrieg," *Newsweek*, September 25, 1939, p. 14; William J. Fanning Jr., "The Origin of the Term 'Blitzkrieg': Another View," *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 61, 1997, pp. 283-302.

50. Heinz Guderian, *Achtung – Panzer! The Development of Armoured Vehicles, Their Tactics and Operational Potential*, Introduction by Paul Harris, Christopher Duffy, trans., New York: Sterling, 1992 (<1937>), especially pp. 178-191.

51. *Vom Kriege*, Book VIII, Chap. 3B, p. 971-973.

52. Roger Chickering and Stig Förster, eds., *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914-1918*, New York: Cambridge, 2000; Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Bernd Greiner, eds., *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937-1947*, New York: Cambridge, 2005. These works are part of a series that recently has problematized both the concept and reality of total war.