



CONTEMPORARY CONFLICT & THE FIFTH GENERATION OF WARFARE

Date: February, 22nd 2018

Disclaimer: this briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented throughout the evening and does not exclusively represent the views of the speaker or the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.

KEY EVENTS

On February 22, 2018, CASIS Vancouver held its first event that featured a presentation by Simon Fraser University Adjunct Professor Candyce Kelshall on “Contemporary Conflict, and the Fifth Generation of Warfare.” Following the presentation, a question period provided insights into how to classify and identify fifth generation warfare (5GW) as opposed to the previous four generations of warfare. The roundtable discussion period focused on a case study of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and their persecution of the Yazidis in order to illustrate the distinctive nature and character of 5GW.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Kelshall’s presentation gave an in-depth explanation of the previous four generations of warfare, analyzing the previous state-centric character of war, as well as the ‘win by defeat’ nature of war. Kelshall illustrated how the character of war is changing in conjunction with the hybrid, net-centric, and cyber characteristics of contemporary war. The presentation also defined and described 5GW by looking at it through a neomedieval lens as a return to the pre-Westphalian order of groups and clans where external state aggressors may enable polarization. Such polarization can lead to the disintegration of cohesive unified nations, weakening them from within. The roundtable discussion focused around the case study of ISIL and its persecution of the Yazidi and questioned whether or not this was an example of 5GW due to the group versus group nature of the conflict. The goal of ISIL is to eradicate other forms of Islam and is therefore identity targeted – a form of 5GW.

BACKGROUND

War is state-centric and is focused on maintaining dominance. When states are at odds, or have disputes with one another, they go to war as an extension of politics by other means. The nature of war is consistent; it is constantly focused on state-based dominance and warfare against enemies of the state and its sovereignty with the aim of defeating those who wish to harm the state. The character of war, although, is constantly changing at a radical pace to match technological advances. An example of this is the Revolution in Military Affairs.

There are four prior generations of warfare: First Generation involves mass manpower. Second Generation is mass firepower that replaced mass manpower where movement became based on advancing lines of firepower. Third Generation involves qualitative maneuver opposed to quantitative fire. Lastly, the Fourth Generation represents insurgency. In Fourth Generation we see global insurgency involving franchises on non-state actors acting in coordinated concert against the state-based system. This entailed psychological warfare and the fighting against the technology of westernized, developed states where groups, such as al-Qaeda, thrived.

5GW involves conflict between identity-based groups, which broadly includes cultural, social, economic conflict. This can be seen as warfare designed to end democracy. It is not aimed at the state, but is focused on the erosion of state institutions, and weakening the bonds that hold states together. 5GW can therefore be used by a state, but equal, represents a move away from the state towards a particular cause empowered by its populations.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION AND WEST COAST PERSPECTIVES

The key points of discussion and west-coast perspectives regarding Kelshall's presentation – how to identify and characterized 5GW – include the following:

- Polarization and disintegration, coupled with growing intra state violence, calls for an answer to the following question: is 5GW an evolution in the character of war or a revolution in the nature of war?
- The first three generations of warfare mirror the evolution of Westphalian order and state versus state conflict.
- Fourth Generation Warfare is an attempt at insurgency.
- How does a state protect itself from its own populations?
- Transnational nature of a “cause” asks us to look beyond the “state” for understanding.

- Conflict is intra-group based and therefore can be considered population centric.
- Individuals engaged in 5GW now show greater allegiance to a cause than to a state identity
- A reversal of nationalism could therefore, be argued to be occurring.
- Criminal syndicates are now replacing the state, and when the state fails to protect or provide for its populations, these groups step in.
- Arguably, non-state actors such as ISIL, Somali Pirates, MS13, narco-gangs, etc., are replacing the state, and receiving greater allegiance from vulnerable populations.
- The biggest distinction between 4GW and 5GW is a lack of focus on attacking the state, as 5GW is mainly group versus group conflict.

The key points of discussion and west-coast perspectives regarding the roundtable discussion – focused on the case study of the genocide of the Yazidi – include the following:

- ISIL is big on theatrics employing violent acts; and its persecution of other groups is not restricted to the Yazidi people. ISIL defines opposing groups as containing either pro- or anti-Islamic State elements. This includes the Islamic population of the world who practice Islam differently from their radical interpretation of true Islam.
- A primary goal of ISIL is to eradicate other forms of Islam. Communities targeted, therefore, are not necessarily ethnic communities, which displays 5GW traits.
- ISIL has widely disseminated material on its atrocities against the Yazidi through prolific media campaigns. Arguably, these media campaigns are to provoke a response from the international community, and possibly be used as a recruitment tool.
- ISIL employs the elements of net-centricity in order to be effective.
- Lone wolf actors may include ethnic members of 5GW groups, or others who wish to identify with a particular ideological movement; such actors are transnational in nature.
- Recurring questions regarding lone wolf attacks include: what are the objective of lone wolf attacks? Are lone wolf actors more dangerous than a group? One response is that in 78-88% of lone wolf attacks, at least three family members or close friends notice something different about the actor in question. However, these concerns are never communicated upwards to police or other security services.

- The need for community policing is identified as important to be able to detect and pre-empt potential lone-wolf attacks; however, this is a very difficult objective in Canada, given its large terrain with minimal forces to patrol these areas.
- Limited community focus in policing leaves a gap where the threat of individual lone wolf violence may emerge.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

© CASIS, 2018

Published by the Journal of Intelligence, Conflict and Warfare and Simon Fraser University

Available from: <https://jicw.org/>