# VIOLENT TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL CONFLICT

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This paper takes the perspective that violent transnational social movements (VTSMs) have profoundly impacted contemporary conflict scenarios. Social movements, underpinned by ideology, create partisan, transnational echo chambers, and communities, which are in the process of 'changing the weather' in contemporary social interactions. Transnational advocacy networks work in tandem to 'create the message' and perpetuate narratives. Where extremist dialogue crosses over into violence, we argue that a new form of conflict emerges. Such conflict does not have the preservation of the state as a territorially important factor or reference point, but rather, the preservation and promotion of a cultural identity. Where 'other' identities also co-exist, as in multicultural societies, these extremist views, and the crossover to violence from extremist rhetoric, arguably create a new type of warfare which we label fifth generation.

Fifth generation warfare (5GW) is a complex idea. It is at best ill-defined and mis-understood. It is often confused or conflated with evolving methods of warfare. (Layton (2017), Alderman (2015) Reed (2008). It has also been used to describe what waging future war may look like. It has been envisioned variously as networked, within a combat cloud, fusion based and multi-domain in nature (Layton, 2017). It has also been described as non-contact warfare (Alderman, 2015). Reed (2008) refers to 5GW as states fighting enemies without always knowing who the enemies are and crafting strategies to exploit weaknesses of enemies using asymmetrical methods against the state. (Reed, 2008, p. 685) It could be argued that the first two conceptualisations, referred to above, do not denote a significant change in warfare but rather, the continuation of the development of weapons, ways, and means, with which to fight conventional and unconventional third generation wars. Third generation wars might be described as those which utilise technology and kinetic means to dominate other states or state enemies.

The third conceptualisation (Reed, 2008) might be described as referring to fourth generation warfare - which is state based in nature - as it seeks to address threats which might be defined as insurgent. By insurgency we mean non-state actors which may or may not be transnational and who seek to remove, overthrow or destabilise state governments for political, religious or ideological reasons.

This paper argues that an understanding of fifth generation warfare takes as its base the focusing of attention not on the tactics of war but on the combatant.

In this sense, fifth generation warfare is not a continuation of the ways and means of waging wars against states but rather a new type of warfare which exists within the state but not necessarily waged against the state. Instead, groups fight other groups in a competition for cultural dominance and values-based legitimacy and authority. Fifth generation conflict does not have economic motivation as a primary incentive but economic disenfranchisement, as a result of the institutionalised cultural dominance of one group over another, might be a significant driver. However, 5G warfare instead might be viewed as struggles for dominance within the state, conducted by groups competing amongst themselves.

In figures 1, 2, and 3 below, the differences between the first three generations of state-based warfare, insurgency (fourth generation) and fifth generation warfare are summarized. Distinctions are drawn between (A) the rationale for engaging in warfare, (B) the combatants, (C) the nature of the weapons used, and (D) the key objectives, or purpose of the violence.

**Figure 1**

*State Based Conventional Warfare 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Generations*

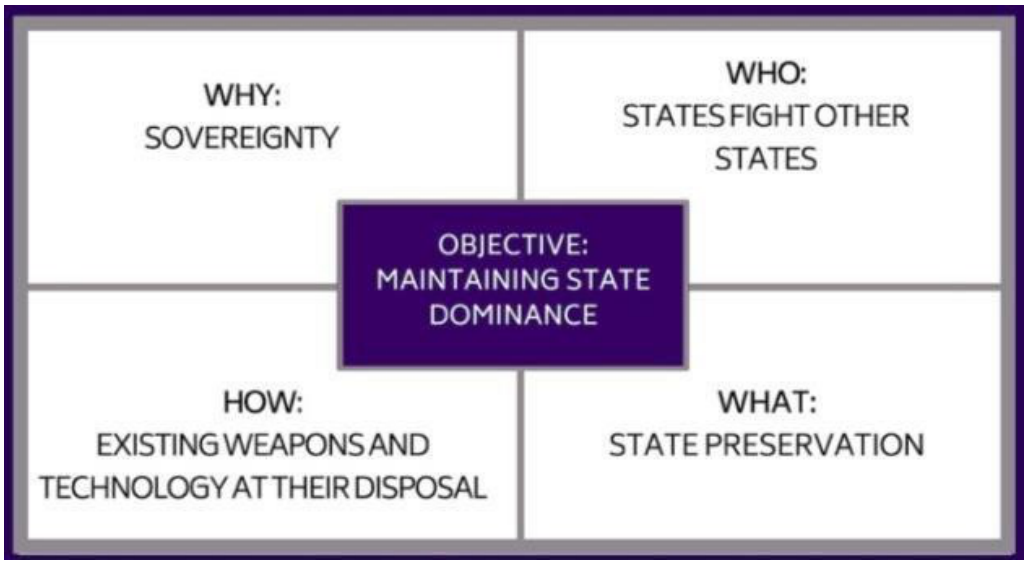


**Figure 2**

*State based Unconventional Conflict (Insurgency): 4th Generation*

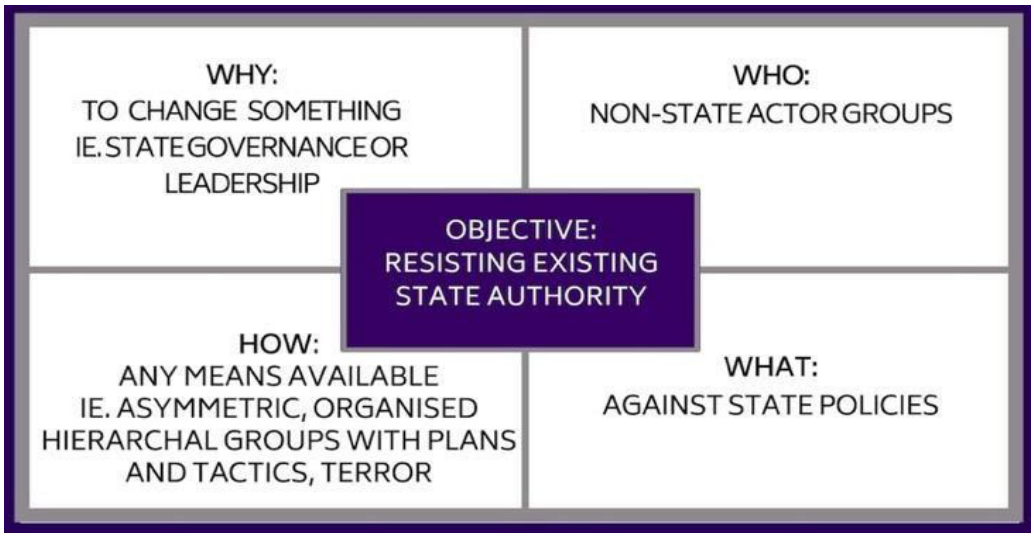
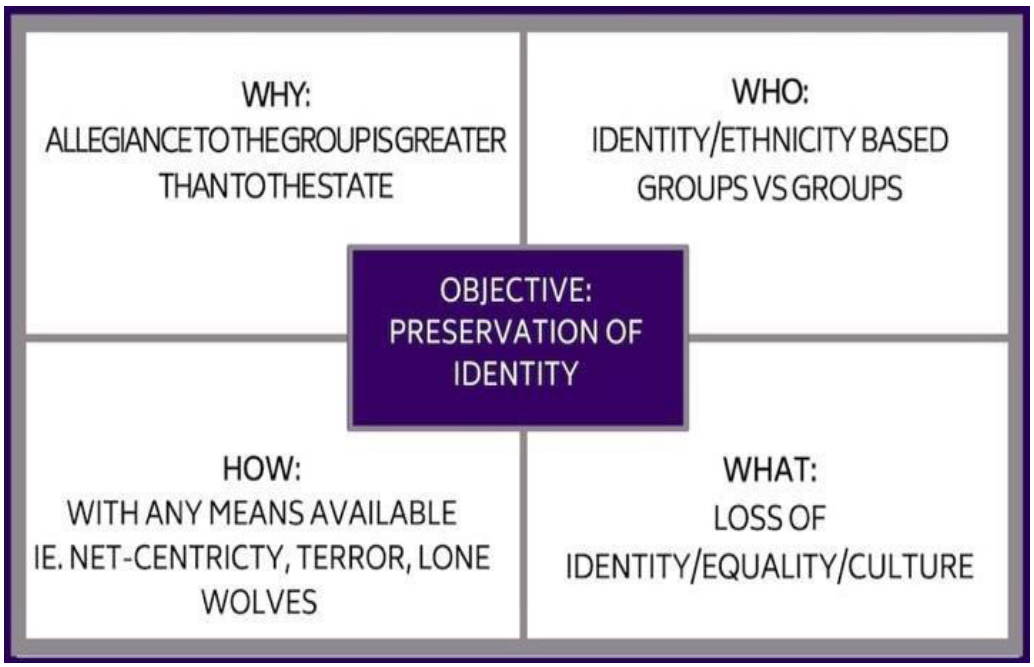



**Figure 3**

*Contemporary Conflict: 5th Generation*



## Definition

Fifth generation warfare is conflict which has moved beyond the territorial boundaries of states and into the realm of non-territorially bound, non-political causes but more importantly, it focuses on self-identification created by the individual and shaped by an idea. 5G fighters might then be better understood as social actors united by a set of core beliefs which become more than just political or religious tenets, but which shape both the identity of the individual and the nature of the collective they are a part of. The preservation of this identity becomes the basis of which movements are formed and violence engaged in. 5G warfare is therefore not defined by the state. It might be described as post-state (Bennett, 1998) This post-state nature distinguishes 5G warfare by the fact that it is conflict conducted both within and without the state and not against or for the state.

By 'post-state' we mean that violent 5G actors are less like terrorists seeking territorially or state bound political objectives and more like violent social movements which may or may not transcend the boundaries of the state. 5G actors may utilize terrorist means to achieve recognition and survival of a socially and culturally defined way of life. 5G actors might be best described as "trans-dimensional, transnational actors." (Hoffman, 2007, p. 78). It might be argued that 5G conflict is less political issue driven and more a question of 'belonging' driven in terms of the motivators which inspire the actions of 5G actors who join violent or other transnational social movements which have at their core cultural underpinnings. A violent transnational social movement might be defined as transcending the boundaries of single states, uniting many subjective perspectives into one social and social media driven movement, in order to address culturally specific issues. There may be a multiplicity of perspectives on the issue but a homogenous conceptualisation that some aspect of social or cultural importance is under an existential threat.

## Identity as the Basis of Conflict

Cerise (2015, 2018) applies polemology (the study of war) as a means of understanding factors which lead to war and by extension the means by which identity might be viewed as a conflict factor. (2018, p. 1) The possibility that polemic or extremist values might be amplified to such a degree as to enable social conflict which is sufficiently divisive, that the promotion of one group's values become so urgent, that violent expressions might ensue, is an important point in 5G warfare. Such differences might be manipulated to impact the

cohesiveness of plural or multi-cultural democratic states. Polemic rivalries in this regard might then be considered mimetic rivalries (Girard as cited by Cerise 2018, p. 1). Such rivalries arise when individuals willingly form bonds with each other on the basis of a voluntary 'affirmation of superiority' over other groups. (Grasset, 1978, p. 406). These mimetic rivalries, one could argue, might lead to a situation that could be described as a cultural 'security dilemma' between different groups within society.

This binary approach implicitly communicates the options available for other social groups in the community - dominate or be dominated, survive or be subjugated in a cultural reality which impinges upon values, behaviours and beliefs. In turn, other groups assert their mirrored affirmations in a socio-cultural security dilemma of escalating tensions between groups within the state. This can also apply to trans-national groups who self-identify with the values, behaviours and beliefs of social movements which are designed to escalate or amplify, the importance of affirmation and thus inclusion, in a movement which is bigger and more meaningful than an individual solitary life, on the fringes of society or acceptance. Inclusion in groups which proclaim cultural superiority offers the sensation of strength and unity in numbers for the disenfranchised, the outsider and the loner.

## Ethno-Cultural Securitisation and Violent Social Movements

Given the motivation for conflict outlined above, culture might be seen as the catalyst which incites the conglomeration of like-minded individuals into polycentric, reticulate, and segmentary social movements as a means of the preservation, protection and promotion of an existentially threatened identity as perceived by the members of that community. Cultural 'securitisation' might therefore be considered the root of contemporary social conflict. We might argue that identitarianism has arisen as a mimetic and polemic response to the high-profile nature of ISIS inspired and Jihadist movements. Further we might define ISIS inspired and Jihadist actors as violent transnational social movements (VTSM). An additional consideration would be understanding that members of VTSMs arguably display behaviour which might be considered as a distinct ethnicity. We might, in this case, define ethnicity as belonging to a social group that has a common cultural traditional, or beliefs and practices, and which may or may not have common ancestry. In this sense we might consider that VTSMs take on the characteristics of civic nations. We might describe civic nations as those bound only by a belief in shared common bonds (Horowitz, 1985). "The civic nation is consequently "open," inclusive: one can become a member by free-

choice" (Zubrzycki, 2002, p. 278). We might also consider ethnicity as a social construct which the members of a group agree to be bound within, by adopting, perpetuating, and maintaining the common characteristics which set the group apart from other groups (Camoroff, 2009). Civic nations are merely groups who have a subjective belief in their common descent which could be based on either, or both physical similarity and perpetuation of similar customs. The mutual acknowledgment of a shared bond and shared belief is important for group formation or identity. It does not matter whether an objective blood relationship exists in order for a civic nation to be formed. Taking the above into account, an argument can be made that 5G conflict might be viewed as ethnocultural in nature and based on culturally distinct nations competing for dominance within the state.

Where the prevailing dominant culture is challenged violently by other cultural warriors (5G actors), is it possible that we incorrectly define it as terrorist? Are the definitions applied to terrorism apt? It could be argued that such actions might instead be considered identity-based conflict. What we define as terrorist might possibly be the development of a new form of warfare with new combatants fighting for non-political objectives which involve the preservation of, or reaction to, an existential threat to a set core of culturally sensitive beliefs and patterns of behaviour.

## 5th Generation Warfare

5G warfare might therefore be defined as group against group, not against the state necessarily. It could be argued that it has been enabled by shifts of political and social loyalties to 'causes' and polemic identities, and away from the dominance of state legitimacy and authority. 5G groups are comprised of like-minded people, with no formal organization who may be loosely related or not related at all but who choose to adopt violence in the pursuit of the preservation or promotion of an identity or way of life (Minhas, 2016). The shift in the nature of the combatants and 'objectives of war' in the fifth generation of warfare is a return to group, tribe, ethnic, family or gang based functional and protective units, which resemble most pre-Westphalian conflict groups. There is one significant difference between these pre-Westphalian group conflicts and 5G war - In the past groups fought against groups and not against the state as a territorially sovereign entity. The state did not exist. Instead, city states and feudal land-based conflict was territorially oriented and religious wars were for the benefit of winning territory, to expand or curtail the reach of religions but was still territorially focused. Economic as well as territorial benefits were the key drivers of pre-Westphalian conflict. Contemporary social conflict (5G

warfare) is not concerned with the central issue of territory or, arguably economic benefits. We might argue an example of which was the increased danger and uncertainty of ISIS inspired actors increased as its territorial reach reduced. Al Qaeda objectives did not and do not include territorial gain or economic benefits in order to exist, or as the reason for existence.

5G conflict might be described as "post state" in that for the first time since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, war does not necessarily involve a state actor, i.e., state against another state, as displayed by 1st, 2nd, and 3rd generations of war or against the state itself in an insurgency action such as 4th generation war (Lind, 2004). The fifth generation of warfare instead is focused on other groups within the state, in a struggle for dominance within the state or across the borders of states. It might also be viewed as a continuation of the crisis of legitimacy which catalyses 4th generation insurgencies (Lind &Thiele, 2015, p. 6).

**Can we apply the term 'warfare' to contemporary social conflict?**

5G warfare is best understood in the context of conflict. Conflict, as defined by Folger, Poole, and Stutman (1997) is the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals. It might also be perceived as a divergence of interest, or a belief that the parties' current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously. (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986)

The application of the term warfare to 5G conflict might be considered problematic if established laws of war and definitions are used to interpret the actions of 5G actors. Alternative perspectives are required to understand the distinctions which emerge in the security problem presented by 5G actors. It might be argued that Clausewitz's trinitarian model (people, army, and government) does not account for low intensity conflict and in particular asymmetric, hybrid and unconventional warfare. (French, 1992) This may be largely due to the fact that Clauswitz implies that war must be pursued in the context of state dominance. War might be seen in this case as a political act in pursuance of state policy directives. Clauswitz's perspective that war is a continuation of politics or policy implies statehood as an imperative. (Clauswitz, 1997, p. 22) From this perspective it would seem that legally and historically war is an act which can only be fought by states. If this is so, then intra group conflict might not be referred to as warfare.

Van Creveld, however, indicates that intra state wars are possible, as distinct from Civil War. Intra-state wars seek to create separate states - and governance -

within a state, unlike civil war which is fought to assume control of the state (Van Creveld, 2017, p. 173). This implies the possibility that war can be fought by an entity which is not itself a state.

French (1992) suggests that 'through history, the role of states could be taken up by various leagues, associations, city-states, religious orders, and other entities, which throughout history, can and have conducted war" (French, 1992, p. 3).

War can be an end in itself rather than a means to an end (Van Creveld, 2017). In this context, cultural dominance conflict, may not necessarily have an end, except for addressing the existential threat to a culture or a perceived distinct civic nation. Throughout history war has also included "struggles for national or ethnic existence which became much more than mere means to an end" (French, 1992, p. 4).

Viewed in this light, the term warfare might be considered valid as applied to 5th generation actors. The distinction between these conflicts of the past in the pre-Westphalian period (the period before 'states') is that 5G warfare is fought not with armies, and thus not part of the Clauswitz trinitarian model but by groups against groups who are civilians and not professional fighters, as in an intra state war. Van Creveld does not entirely agree that this can be termed warfare, but Lebow (2008) does. Lebow sees culture as a legitimate basis upon which war can be fought. Culture, defined as "relationships among individuals, groups, ideas and identities" has been a basis for fighting war. (Lebow, 2008, p. 269) Warfare might therefore be seen as the friction and attendant violence which accompanies the struggle for the preservation, maintenance or creation of cultural ways of life under an existentialist threat. We might therefore view 5G warfare as non-trinitarian warfare - a term coined by Van Creveld (1992, p. 49), since he explains that war is not necessarily fought between two states (Van Creveld, 1992, p. 41). "War may be conducted by entities other than states and by means other than armies" (French, 1992). Referring to Van Creveld's non-trinitarian theory of warfare. "For a thousand years after the fall of Rome armed conflict was waged by different kinds of social entities" (French, 1992). The distinction here is that these while being motivated by territorial, geographic, or economic concerns, were nevertheless engaged in warfare. Thus, we can apply the term warfare to 5G cultural fighters with the distinction that the cultural imperative distinguishes pre-Westphalian groups from contemporary 5G fighters and the lack of state or geopolitical focus which was the primary driver of the previous 4 generations of fighters.

5G warfare also need not be kinetic but can be fought in informational domains. In the current context 5G warfare might be seen to be conducted more or less in the domain of non-professional fighters. While contemporary terrorist attackers are often scrutinised for links to military training or engagement in battlefields in far off lands, the reality is that this is increasingly not the case. There are only three recent European examples of attackers who may have had military training or experience: the Manchester concert bomber Salman Abedi (reportedly had relationships with Libyan ISIS); Anis Amri (the Berlin Christmas market attacker who had joined a group led by Abu Walaa, an alleged ISIS recruiter); and Najim Laachraoui (the Paris and Brussels attack bombmaker who allegedly had relationships with Syrian ISIS operatives). Other contemporary 'terrorist attacks have not demonstrated military training or professional military contact or relationships beyond 'inspiration'. More troubling is the inclusion of alt-right extremists such as Incel alt-right attackers: Elliot Ledger, Alek Minassian, David (Ali) Sonboly, an Iranian and reportedly a white supremacist famous for shouting "I am a German" during an attack in Munich 2016, and Norwegian Anders Breivik also a white supremacist. The 2017 New Mexico school shooter, William Atchison, reportedly was a frequent contributor to Alt-Right forums including "The Daily Stormer" and 4chan and was allegedly a member of an anti-refugee online club called Steam which also featured Ali Sonboly. Parkland shooter Nikolas Cruz also had a disturbing online presence espousing alt-right views. (MacLaughlin & Park, 2018) These men did not have military training or professional military relationships. They espoused and violently acted on extremist cultural social 'movements.' 5G fighters can conduct warfare with unprecedented reach and sophisticated poise.

The Lind Grid, (see below) is a checklist for those operating in 4th generation warfare theatres. Lind and Thiele (2015) conceptualised the grid as a means of determining the moral impact of kinetic operations against insurgencies as this was deemed important in winning hearts and minds- a key factor in counter insurgency operations (COIN). It is designed to help commanders gauge the outcomes of kinetic actions against insurgent communities. It can also be applied to military operations other than war. The Lind grid (figure 4) helps tactical decisionmakers to determine the moral and mental wins for any given tactical operation.

We adapt the Lind Grid (see figure 5) to consider the cultural and social impacts which will allow tactical and operational decisionmakers to factor in the impact on social movements, and identity-based extremist groups within populations. When an action is undertaken by the state against a 5G group, there are two

indicators which might be used to judge the impact. This grid identifies those indicators so that any kinetic or other action undertaken by the state can be assessed in advance. The grid in Figure 5 is designed so that operational and tactical decisionmakers can predict the possible outcomes of state-based activities against 5G groups, where the state determines that the actions of these 5G groups present a threat to state legitimacy and sovereignty. Tactical or kinetic actions can be judged based on whether they increase or decrease tribal bonds or increase or decrease identity affirmation.

Tribal bonds might be defined as the cultural narrative which unifies and strengthens group relationships. Identity affirmation might be defined as things that contribute to the development of positive (and strong feelings) and a sense of belonging (Ghavami, Fingerhut, Peplau, Grant, Wittig, 2011). Where tribal bonds are increased, actions are not advisable. Tribal bonds are the glue that bind social movements together via the perception of a threat to their particular group.

**Figure 4**

*The Lind Grid (Lind & Theile, 2015) is a checklist for those operating in theatre, to help gauge the outcomes of actions.*

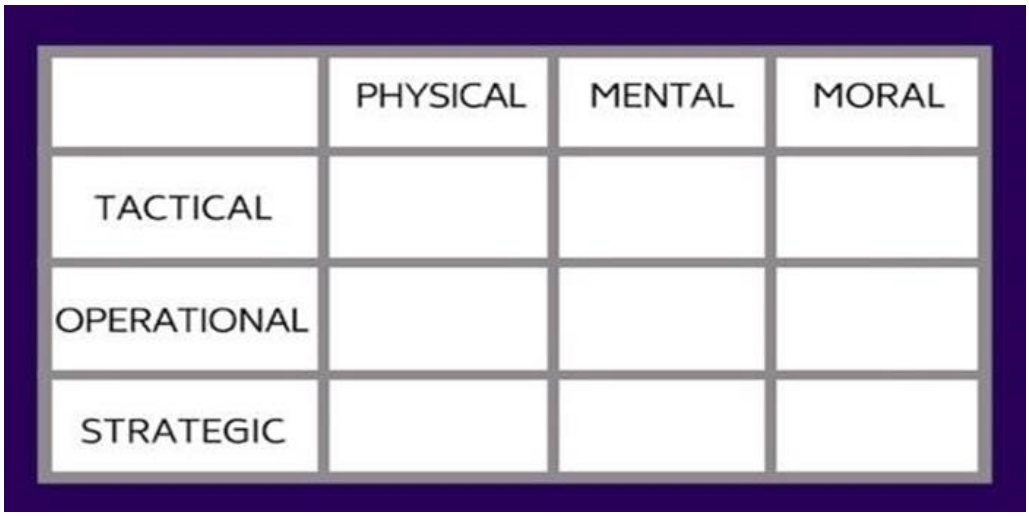
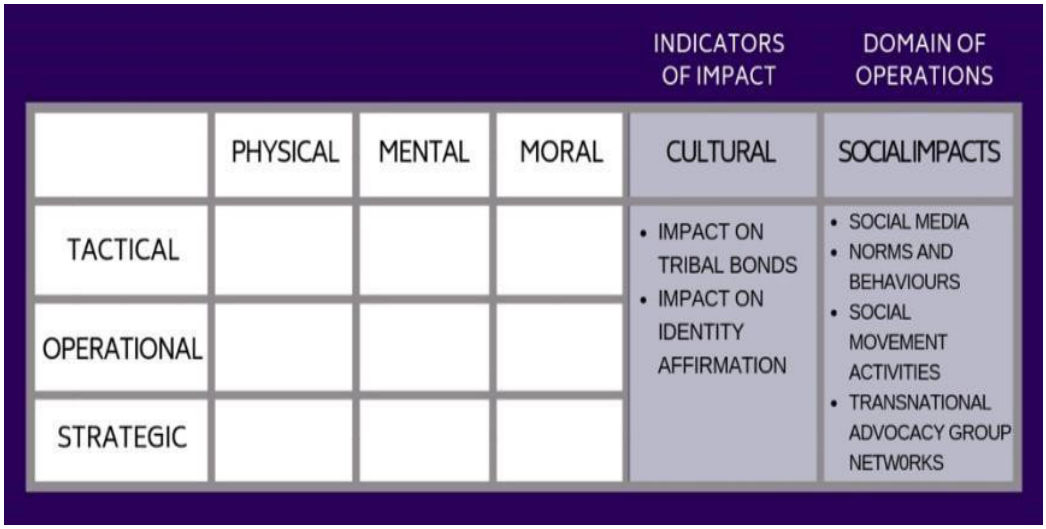


**Figure 5**

*5G Impact Indicator (Cultural Matrix) An adaptation from Lind & Thiele 2015. The 5G impact indicator matrix addresses two additional considerations for kinetic and other state-based activities in 5G warfare theatre. The matrix helps to assess and weigh the actions of state-based operations on 5G actors using two key indicators of impact: tribal bonds and identity affirmation.*




## Conclusion

Fifth generation warfare suggests an evolution whereby it is not the professional soldier which wages war but the citizen. To refine the idea further it occurs at the point of friction where groups of citizens compete for legitimacy with the state but not from or for the state and amongst themselves. This war is engendered by the narrative of social movements which may be expressed in mob or pack circumstances. The term violent transnational social movements comes to mind. When applied to instances of contemporary conflict, this paper suggests that the term terrorism might be a misnomer. Terrorists fight for a political concept - politics being the struggle for influence of the interests of a section of a population ***being impacted by actions of the state or by state policy***. A terrorist is therefore using violence to create fear in the pursuit of a political objective. A specific objective relating to the way the interests of this section of the population is either being ignored or not acted upon ***by the state***. Insurgency is most easily described as the actions of a group either armed or unarmed specifically intending to overthrow the governing apparatus **of a state**. Both these definitions refer to the state as the entity the 'enemy' is fighting against. It also helps to highlight the reluctance of Westphalian state governments to define native/domestic violent actors as ideational terrorists (the implication of the state's inability to address

the specific needs of sections of the population). 5G warfare might be considered a ‘vortex of violence’ (Beebe 2009) where the boundaries between ‘battle space’ and civil society, as comprised of social movements and cultural causes as well as identity driven collectives, begin to blur as a result of frustration. In this blurring is the space where future war will be fought.

“The first duty of any social entity is to protect the lives of its members. Either modern states cope with low intensity conflict or else they will disappear” (Van Creveld, 1991, p. 224). We argue that this disappearance takes the shape of the increasing relevance of, and allegiance to, groups and causes versus towards the state. 5G warfare might thus be considered identity-based war in an attempt to dominate the opposing culture or “other” culture. The transnational nature of such warfare and its combatants distinguishes previous state-based generations of war from 5G warfare. Violent transnational social movements based on identity, thus play a significant role in contemporary conflict, and arguably change the shape and nature of contemporary warfare by introducing a new generation of war which does not use the state or territory as a reference point.

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

Available from: https://jicw.org/