

ARE CONTEMPORARY WARS “NEW”?

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Abstract:** *This paper will assess the existing perspectives on “new wars” in the literature. It will then analyze the degree to which contemporary wars are “new” by looking firstly at the changing nature of the state. It will not however support the view that state’s weakness is a structural cause of conflict but rather that it is a facilitator one. Finally, it will explore the degree to which globalization has impacted the role Romanian forces have to play in hotbeds such as Irak or Afghanistan. While engaging the existing literature, I argue that we must understand the “new wars” as an adapted form of engagement and not necessarily as a new breed of war.*

Keywords: *contemporary conflicts, “new wars”, globalization, transnational networks, means of engagement, Romanian military strategy*

War waging is a millennia old activity and while ever changing in manifestation it is usually based on the pursuit of power in one form or the other. Some argue that precisely this continuation of core incentives does not make for “qualitatively” new wars. Still, the form of power in today’s world is no longer necessarily linked to state form and therefore it is qualitatively new in this sense. The contemporary conflicts rely on expanded means of engagement and could be viewed as “Meta-Wars” because they mirror the elements of classical wars while adapting to the context of a *Globalized World*. The redefinition of power in the context of a variety of influences and authority structures that forgo known territorial boundaries makes for the novelty of wars.

Globalization has changed war waging in a **two-phase action** (Figure 1).

Firstly, it **eroded the state’s** jurisdiction and its monopoly on the use of force. In consequence, by melting borders and identity divisions, it provided **new means of engagement** and **popularization of particular grievances**. The literature deals with this interaction between global dynamics and local power structures in different ways. Some look at the specificities of conflict dynamics or their historical predisposition. Others address the issue of state weakness as a necessary and sufficient cause for conflict. Finally, a third category goes beyond the analysis of state’s powers or of the wars by themselves, and deals with the overall impact of a globalized world over conflict situations. For normative purposes, Kaldor’s understanding of **globalization** shall be used throughout this paper: **“the intensification of global interconnectedness—political,**

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economic, military and cultural—and the changing character of political authority” (2006:4). By this definition we can therefore consider the changing character of political authority as the first phase of the globalizing action and the intensification of global interconnectedness as a second phase. Nevertheless, one must keep in mind that these are mutually reinforcing processes that only together form the actual process of globalization.

Newman (2004) are the main figures of this approach together with Headley (2006: 155) who doesn’t assesses conflicts like Chechnya to be “qualitatively new”. Historicism is one subfield of this branch of literature. The most prominent figure of this approach is Robert Kaplan who considers ancient hatred beyond any outside control in regions like the Balkans or the Caucasus. Charles King ethnographic account of the Caucasus supports to a certain extent the same take

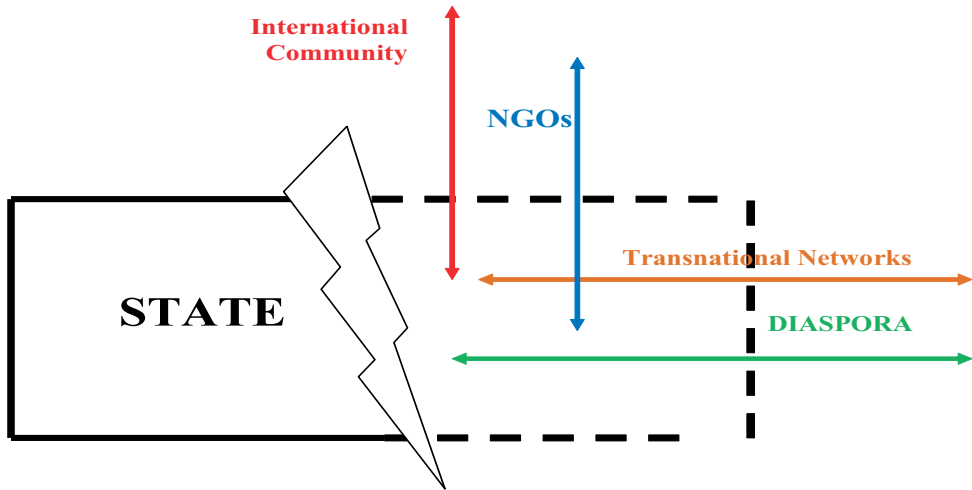


Fig. 1 The Impact of Globalization on the Nature of the State
Source: the author

The Spectrum of approaches on New Wars

A first approach on contemporary wars is represented by the literature that accounts for the **particularities of conflicts**. This literature does not recognize any substantive difference between old wars and new wars and considers the analysis of the particularities of the conflicts to be more useful than generalizations. Kalyvas (2001) and

that historical context leads to nowadays conflicts. He finds identities in the area to have been “always relational” and that imposed distinctions are at the root of today’s confrontations. This view doesn’t deal with the shifting dynamics of new wars nor does it substantively account for potential solutions.

A second take on the subject is a varied critique of globalization. This view considers the **weakness of states** as a central cause of conflict and globalization

as an erosive agent. Dietrich Jung (2003) accounts for “shadow globalization”, while William Reno (2000) talks of “shadow states” in the general lines of State Capture thesis. Martin Shaw (2002) refers to “degenerate warfare” and political economists such as Paul Collier (2000) or David Keen (2000) discuss the profits of war and how they become an incentive for protracted conflict in line with the Greed vs. Grievance Debate. This area of literature moves forward in accounting for potential remedies, but it is still centered on statist measures. It is essential to move passed the dichotomy of strong—weak states and to see the opportunities for peaceful, dynamic co-existence that reside in an open society. The main risk is not the weakness of a state but the application of double standards within the international community.

Finally, a more nuanced category of scholars consider the **globalization** a major factor of change, affecting the structural context in which these conflicts take place. This approach views globalization as a substitutive force that makes the state an obsolete counterbalance agent in the face of growing para-state perpetrators and transnational networks. It therefore encapsulates in its thesis that potential solutions for contemporary conflicts can reside only in global re-action. Mark Duffield(1998: 65) defines the “post-modern” conflict in association “with innovative and expanding forms of political economy”. Kaldor (2006) goes beyond economics, considering these changes and their impact and establishing the traits of “new wars” along the lines of goals, mode of warfare and finances. Munkler (2005) supports her view on the novelty of wars and underlies the fact that contemporary disputes are new in form.

Nevertheless, he considers the claims to be roughly the same and usually ignited by “ethnic conflicts traced back to pre-colonial times”.

1. State’s Demise

The decentralization of statist structures of power is the first phase of changing the setting and implicitly the dynamics of wars. This is not a disintegration of the state itself, but rather a change of the role states play in the global system. In today’s interconnected environment, states can seldom settle conflicts by themselves and therefore their role as guarantor of peace can be maintained only through the support of the international community.

a. Territoriality

The first distinction made between previous wars and contemporary ones was that of jurisdiction: inter-state wars vs. intra-state wars. The **Intra-state wars** are frequently defined as civil wars. This automatic internalization is becoming erroneous as civil wars are increasingly surpassing the respective state’s jurisdiction over the conflict, either geographically (e.g. boarder conflicts) or ideologically (e.g. active support from transnational allies). Most of the new wars aren’t constrained by state boundaries. They follow the lines of ideological communities that often transgress borders. The “territorial state as container of society” (Beck GCS2003: 46) can no longer be found in today’s fluid global society. Through ICTs even the remotest areas of the globe become interconnected. Not even closed, authoritarian regimes such as North Korea can’t really block the insurgency of WWW. A continent

apart may be closer than the neighboring village. Maps are recharted in accordance to the communication infrastructure. In addition to virtual interaction, the physical migration has increased exponentially and transnational networks of aid and crime are taking form.

No more truly symmetrical **inter-state wars** can be found today. While states may be participants in the new wars, they are almost always doubled by sub-state and supra-state actors and networks that complicate and expend the confrontational capacity. This reduces not only the territorial reach of the state, but also its policy space—many functions that were previously exclusive attributes of the state are now externalized (e.g. security agenda, economic policies). Few conflicts today are still covered by Westphalian principle of non-intervention. These are usually territories that belong to “large transition states” that have the power to resist to a certain degree global or regional political integration and to “engage in counter-insurgency in order to defeat extremist networks” (Kaldor 2003: 126-127) within their borders. Examples of such inner-conflicts are Chechnya, Kashmir or Tibet in Russia, India and respectively China. Nevertheless, these conflicts quickly evolved and even without the declared intervention of foreign state actors, the global dynamics play a significant part through diasporas, media, religious and nationalistic support networks and others. Therefore the Democratic Peace Theory is only half right: while liberal democracies are no longer fighting each other, the international networks they’ve put in place—international organizations (e.g NATO, WTO, UN) or NGOs, are active parts in the existing conflicts to the benefit or the deficit of those involved. I

shall further detail, when discussing the contemporary means of engagement, how sometimes precisely aid and assistance can end up being rerouted to further sustain the fighting.

Finally, territorial control as an object of war waging has become rather obsolete. Even in the case of secessionist claims both the state and the sub-state actors fight for political control and only implicitly the surface per se. The role of politics has greatly increased in new wars and has transformed the resolution of the conflict in a matter of infinite debate. Derluguian (1999:26) describes the wars of the end of the 20th cent. as “collective police operations of the core capitalist states in the increasingly volatile periphery”.

b. Historical construction and deconstruction

“...the age of globalization is characterized by a gradual erosion of state authority” (Jung 2003: 2). Without giving in to historical determinism, some scholars argue that due to the erosion of state power and the diminishing influence of empires there is a “throwback to the past, a resurgence of ancient hatreds kept under control by colonialism and/or the Cold War” (Kaldor 2006:7). Duffield (1998) talks of “new medievalism” and Toeffler (1994) of “new dark ages”.

Authors that account for the demise of the state in present times usually observe this symmetry with pre-state formation when mercenary armies were such sub-state actors as today’s paramilitary forces and the borders were as blurred as in most of the “new wars” cases. In reference to the Caucasus, King talks about the **fluidity of borders**—it wasn’t until the first decades of the 20th century that

clearly delineated borders were drawn “along boundaries that had few historical antecedents”(2008:15). He goes on to consider also the **fluidity of identities** “the limits—of an empire, a cultural group, or even a continent—were usually in the eyes of those who believed they had stepped over them.”(2008:21). This historical symmetry does not support the “ancient hatred” thesis, but rather a view that certain structural circumstances facilitate the de-statization of war.

Still, this comparison is limited to the role of the state. Even if in pre-modern times as well as in post-modern times the monopoly of force doesn’t belong to the state, in the first case the conflicts were still territorially bound, while in the latter, due to globalization, the staging of the conflict is world wide.

Nevertheless, the historical context is significant in understanding why in the context of post-colonialism some conflicts resurge and other don’t. The answer to this question depends significantly on how we choose the cases. European countries fought for centuries to establish their shared borders and the long standing of this process assured a mutual recognition of both territory and identity. In the case of the peripheries and colonies, the borders were established by imperial will. In areas where empires were frequently clashing with each other such as the Caucuses, the African continent or even the Balkans, the local self-perception was overruled by the colonial powers politics creating false identities and unrecognized borders. These manufactured delimitations are no longer sustainable in today’s world and the repressed processes of secession reemerge.

Still, these are not always natural and inevitable urges, but rather credible

slogans and excuses used by able leaders who stand to gain politically or materially from conflict. David Keen observes that “there are reasons to believe that Milosevic has seen conflict as inherently useful” because it helped “rally political support behind him” and “provided an excuse to suppress the media and elements of the opposition”(2000: 34).

2. Fruits of Globalization

a. Nationalism and Religious Fundamentalism

The spatial context of a conflict has been for centuries an indication of who the protagonists are. As territoriality is becoming less and less an indication of identity, new forces are binding communities together.

At the center of this reshaping of communities is **identity politics**. Kaldor (2006:80) uses this term as portraying “movements which mobilize around ethnic, racial or religious identity for the purpose of claiming state power”. In the background of the demise of the state and the growing incentives for war, it can be argued that the pursuit of power may or may not aim at a stately form. Most of the religious networks take on great projects such as Islamic unification or the destruction of the West. Such aims are closer to geopolitics than state-formation. On the other hand most nationalist movements do focus on state formation, sovereignty, irredentism or political autonomy, as in such cases as Chechnya, Kosovo or Northern Ireland. Kaldor and Muro (2003: 154) argue why the distinction between nationalism and religious fundamentalism can’t always be made. They refer to Smith’s (2000) “sacred dimension of nationalism” and

consider nationalism as a political, “secularised religion”. Said made a similar connection between nationalism and fundamentalism—nationalism “makes a fetish of national identity and can pull along with it religious sentiment” (Sprinker: 1993).

Whether religious, ethnical or both, transnational network are one of the main empowering agents of “new wars”. Such organizations “often provide the only social safety net available for newly arrived immigrants from the countryside or from other countries”(Kaldor 2006:87). Facilitated by globalization, increasing flows of immigrants are populating metropolises around the world. Such networks provide a sense of belonging to displaced, frustrated individuals while fueling their radicalization. Post (2005:61) reports its interviews with one of the defendants in the bombing of the U.S. embassy in Tanzania. The young man lost his father when he was young and was educated in a madrasa where he “was shown videos of Muslim mass graves in Bosnia” and “the bodies of women and children in Chechnya”. He was persuaded to such a degree that “using his own funds, he went to Pakistan and then to a bin Laden training camp in Afghanistan” to help suffering fellow Muslims in Bosnia or Chechnya. Such a case is a classic example of a fundamentalist network fueling into national secessionist conflicts. It also exemplifies how the conflicts mutate and in cases such as Chechnya shift “from nationalism to jihad” (Hughes 2007). While nationalist conflicts usually have specific demands, the fundamentalist ones are far less reconcilable and often become protracted hotbeds.

Not only Islam has such transnational religious networks. Kaldor (2006: 90)

accounts for a visit at an official’s office in South Ossetia and how “he had a picture of the Bosnian Serb leader Karadzic on his wall”, being given to him by “the delegation from Republika Srpska when he attended a meeting of Eastern Orthodox Christians. In such cases it is hard to separate the political from the religious incentives, but it is obvious that one enforces the other.

b. Intensity and Means of Engagement

Munkler (2005:3) underlies as a characteristic of New Wars “the greater asymmetry of military force, so that the adversaries are as a rule not evenly matched”. Through the lenses of classical military power, one is lead to believe that this asymmetry involves a stronger and a weaker adversary in the conflict and that inevitably the stronger one will prevail even if it is through attrition. Nevertheless, due to the modern methods of engagement (guerrilla tactics, insurgency, terrorism) the adversary that is perceived to be weaker in military capacity is the one that has the greater potential for attrition. Clausewitz defines war as an act of force meant to compel one’s enemy to do one’s will (1989: 75). By this definition, the goal of wars remains the same today in any given conflict, but the means of compelling the opponent are significantly more nuanced. This constitutes the main argument of this paper that is in favor of an ideatic distinction between old, classical wars and new, meta-wars.

Opposed to the Nation-Building Wars of Pre-Modern Europe, contemporary conflicts seem to have less obvious goals and are frequently labeled as “low intensity conflicts”. When in fact we give

them a closer look, we can see that they have complex political motivations and due to their perpetuation they add up to high casualties in deaths and refugees. Another denomination of contemporary conflicts is “small wars” which is generally considered to portray wars fought through **broader means**. It is essential to understand that this broadening is not only **intensification** or **extension** of violence which will further be discussed, but also **diversification** through non-violent means of engagement.

Diversification of the means of engagement sometimes mistakenly leads researchers to believe that wars are both less numerous and less violent. Diplomacy, lobby and negotiations are clearly non-violent means of obtaining the desired results. These are in fact the premises of a Global Civil Society that’s meant to prevent bloodshed through a “plurality of global networks of (a.n. peaceful) contestation” (Kaldor 2008:10). The threat of violence may be another example of possible means of “low intensity” conflicts. Kalyvas (2004:101) supports this distinction by explaining how “terror is not synonymous with mass violence”, but in fact “implies low levels of violence” being considered unsuccessful “if it merely destroys the subject whose compliance is sought”.

Still, this deflating action of diversification and dialogue is surpassed by the intensification and extension of the methods of violence. The first argument against the denomination “low intensity” is the **extension of means of warfare**. Kaldor (2006) portrays the new wars as consisting of **war, crime and human rights violations**. Following through Kaldor’s logic we can see at play both global dynamics and localized action. In terms of war objectives there is a general shift

from territorial control towards political control which sometimes involves more specifically the control of the population. In respect to Liberia, Ellis concurs: “the aim is control of people and acquisition of booty more than control of territory in the conventional military manner” (1995:185). This account touches to another important distinction: control of the population to achieve political goals may constitute a legitimate grievance, while control of the population to obtain political control to “acquire booty” is in line with the “Greed” thesis of predatory war which will be detailed in the following subchapter. From the indiscriminate targeting of civilians as a means to an end derives the change occurred in the extent of Human Rights Violations. If in classical warfare the extent of human right was considerable, it was none the less collateral. Now, the oppression of the civilian population is a specific target of “new” combatants constituting a way to bend the will of the rulers without employing vast military resources. The final dimension of Kaldor’s new wars is that of crime. This again falls into the war economy thesis which will be discussed below and suffers a change in dimension and reach—from local to transnational.

In contradiction to Kaldor, authors like Kalyvas (2001) argue that both crime and human rights violations have been a trait of war since ancient times. Nevertheless, if crime and human rights violations did exist during the World Wars they were actions of the groups or of the individuals engaged in combat and not policies from above. Even more so, because the state was responsible for war waging, rules of conduct were imposed with the aim of maintaining discipline on the front. Given the de-statization of conflict, such high authority capable regulating war no

longer exists. The parties involved are usually loosely organized as networks or gangs. Because new wars are based on radical claims such as ethnic cleansing, they employ violence and sadism as weapons of destruction, often more effective than bullets. Kalyvas (2001:115) himself argues that “the “senseless” violence of new civil wars is often not as gratuitous as it appears”. Munkler (2005:85) explains how “women are no longer just booty, trophies or sex objects; they have rather become the conqueror main target of attack” as part of the strategies of ethnic cleansing, through forced pregnancies or mass deportations. This pattern is unfortunately present in all the contemporary conflict areas—from the Balkans to DRC. Such strategies of intimidation and terror are employed as an equally effective alternative to mass killing and although the Geneva Convention sanctions them as genocidal by intent, they are less obvious and therefore contribute to the difficulty of assessing the true scale of casualties. Because of this broad array of threats, only a “global surveillance infrastructure” (Held 2007:53) could constitute an effective security reinforcement.

Another observable shift in new wars is that of the **intensification** of the means of violence. On one hand there are significant technological advancements that allow big powers to keep their troops mostly off the ground. LIC (low intensity conflicts) which are generally perceived to be the wars where the use of force is discriminately used. The technological advancement would apparently facilitate the discriminate use of force through “surgical strikes”. Nevertheless, however much the military technology evolves, the lack of intelligence generates still high casualties amongst civilians or

non-combatants. The air bombings by NATO in Kosovo or by Russia in Chechnya demonstrate that LIC isn’t an accurate description of the reality on the ground. In fact, the war that is waged on the ground becomes more primitive and brutal and the violence spreads door to door, applied by neighbor to neighbor—as in the Balkans, Chechnya, South Ossetia or Rwanda. In addition to this, the unaccounted for commerce of weapons on the black market neutralizes the advantage of the more developed adversary because both parties can easily acquire highly destructive weaponry. Therefore, the intensification of means of violence is only a zero sum game and not a way of reducing the extent of the confrontation.

In this context of concomitant extension and intensification of the means of warfare, David Keen (2000: 25) makes a useful distinction between Top-Down violence “that is mobilized by political leaders and entrepreneurs—whether for political or economic reasons” and Bottom-Up violence that relies on more immediate incentives of the local perpetrators—whether to assure their own security and survival or to inflict damage to a perceived enemy. In line with his argument one might associate the intensification of the means of violence with the Top-Down mobilization and the expansion with a more informal Bottom-Up action. This distinction is useful in understanding the escalation of the use of violence against civilians. In the background of the state failure, the Bottom-Up violence is harder to control, censure or punish. While both levels of engagement are responsible for human rights violations, the majority of these are perpetrated by loose agents of war.

Finally, in line with the critics of Globalization such as Jung, it must be observed that this process has led to an increasing polarization between North/South, Developed/Developing Countries. The first achieve inclusion and increase of transnational flows, the latter suffer an increasing process of exclusion from the rest of the world and of fragmentation from within. With the collapse of the State-backed Industry of War of the Cold War period and the end of the support it provided for Third World countries, these countries fall increasingly more into another type of war economy based on black market activities and looting. Kaldor (2008:95) also observes that in the new environment, “the war effort is heavily dependent on local predation and external support”. In economical terms the predatory behavior can be easily understood as “Asset Transfer” that is defined as “the redistribution of existing assets so as to favor the fighting units” (Duffield in Kaldor 2008: 108). The motivations behind it are harder to define. In this sense, Kalyvas (2001:103-104) points out that “the concept of looting is analytically problematic because it is unclear whether it refers to causes of war or the motivation of combatants (or both)”. He goes on to draw attention to the “direction of the causality—do people wage war in order to loot or do they loot to be able to wage war?”.

3. Romania's Security Role

Romania has a UN membership for more than a half century—since the 14th of December 1955. On the 29th of March 2004, at the Prague Summit, Romania has joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In 2007, the country also became a member of

the European Union. The Romanian Army has played an active role in several international military operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan amongst others. According to the Ministry of Defense, 1258 Romanian military units have been deployed under NATO, EU or UN missions to date. Given all this, it is only reasonable to consider that the part Romania has to play in the contemporary international security context is a significant one. It has in this quality several duties and it encounters certain risks.

Geopolitically, Romania has always been situated at an inflexion point. The Eastern Europe has traditionally been the transit area between the classical Europe and the Asian powers—Ottomans and Russians. More recently, the Balkan wars have flared up security threats right in the heart of Europe that was simultaneously leading a process of integration and unification. It was then, more important than ever for the West to have a strong and reliable ally in the region. As mentioned before, Romania played its part both in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in Kosovo. After the cease-fire in the Balkans, Maior and Matei explain how ‘(t)he end of overt conflicts in the Balkans has created the basis for the entire region to open itself to broader European security developments, including the new partnership with NATO and the transformation towards new types of military forces’ (2003:67). This ‘new type of military forces’ is the main reform objective of a country engaged in “new wars” such as those in the Balkans, Iraq or Afghanistan. Maior and Matei go on to emphasize how ‘accountability and transparency in armed forces reform have been defined as sine qua non criteria for participating in international security

cooperation networks (as, for example, in joining the Partnership for Peace)’ (2003:67).

As part of an international response force, the Romanian Army has pursued and accomplished a series of objectives in the last 5 years:

- International Civil-Military Cooperation in Security oversight and Defense planning framework (Maior and Matei 2003)
- Coherent Regional Security Plan vis-à-vis the Black Sea area (Maior and Matei 2005)
- Professional Army (forgoing the mandatory military service) (Maior 2009)
- Modernization and Reform at the Logistical and Resource level—both in terms of Human Resources as well as the weaponry (Maior 2009)

While there is still room for improvement, the modernization endeavors that took place so far have maintained the performance level the Romanian Army has to possess in the context of contemporary conflicts.

The strategic and political risks Romania encounters are also derived from the globalization process. On one hand, there is an obvious strategic mission as a bordering EU state with regard to the transnational networks of crime. Unfortunately, as the CIA’s Fact book shows, Romania is still a major transshipment point for Southwest Asian heroin transiting the Balkan route and small amounts of Latin American cocaine bound for Western Europe. Glenny confirms the high debit activity of organized crime networks transiting the Balkans and warns to the important role Romania and Bulgaria, as EU members, have to play in fighting transnational crime in the area (2009). Another risk that Romania faces in terms of military affairs

is that its NATO and UN membership (as well as its bilateral relation with the USA) have brought about hard choices in terms of the extent of involvement in the GWOT. In a 2006 interview with the BBC, the former Minister of External Affairs, Mihai Ungureanu, declared that as “we are all part in the battle against terrorism, cooperation between intelligence services is likely and absolutely normal”. While cooperation is normal, taking part in abuses is not. In the same interview the former minister was confronted with evidence the BBC had about secret CIA prisons on the territory of Romania and rendition programmes that Romania was condoning. Even if Mr. Ungureanu denied the allegations, a year later, in 2007, the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights of the Council of Europe assembled a Report according to which Secret detentions and illegal transfer of detainees was in fact occurring on the Romanian soil as part of a CIA run “HVD” (High Value Detainees) Programme. In the background of increased criminal and destructive capacity of terrorist networks and organized crime groups, such bilateral agreements as the “Agreement between the United States of America and Romania regarding the activities of the United States Forces located on the territory of Romania” (2005), are not only inefficient, but run the risk of damaging the trust and effectiveness of international action plans.

Conclusion

Munkler (2005) describes the *differentia specifica* of the new wars by contrast to the earlier forms of warfare and Kaldor (2006) accounts for an ideatic novelty driven by globalization. From both perspectives, although not explicitly, the

change in state's powers and attributions is central to the change in warfare. This paper has analyzed the changes in the involvement of the state in contemporary wars and the shifts in warfare driven by globalization. It was shown that the consequences of a "smaller" world are most obvious in terms of reasons and means of engagement. The role Romania has to play in this "new" world dynamic is a significant one. Its status as member of the UN, NATO and the

EU brings about certain obligations and certain risks. It is essential for decision-makers to understand that Romania can no longer afford a bilateral policy and, in the context of globalization, it has to act locally, while thinking globally. The contemporary nature of conflicts demands an above-state level strategy and a higher degree of cooperation and integration on the regional as well as on the international stage.

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