Call for Papers: The Future of War Conference, Amsterdam, 5-7 October 2022

Organised by the War Studies Research Centre of the Netherlands Defence Academy & the Changing Character of War Centre, University of Oxford.

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One fundamental question has captured the attention of professionals and scholars since the dawn of war: what does the future of war look like? In today's military-strategic context, this question has gained renewed urgency because of surging tensions between major military powers and rapid advancements in the military tools at their disposal. War is and has always been a reflection of the technological, economic, social, and political context in which it is waged. Some believe that the future of war will be radically different from wars in the past. They conjure up images of robots doing battle on isolated fields, cyber warriors crafting weapons from zeros and ones, and mosaic units fighting at hyper speed. Others believe that the more changes, the more remains the same. They emphasise that war will continue to be defined by polities applying violence in the service of political objectives; will be based on passions and emotions; and will be clouded by uncertainty and friction. If one thing is certain, only the dead have seen the end of war. Yet, even if fundamental principles of war endure, war undeniably varies in frequency, prevalence, and character – geographically as well as temporally. This conference seeks to move forward the discussion between the futurists and the traditionalists, and examines how the character of future war is likely to evolve over the course of the next decade and beyond.

The Future of War Conference is a joint initiative of the War Studies Research Centre (WSRC) of the Netherlands Defence Academy (NLDA) and the University of Oxford's Changing Character of War (CCW) Centre and takes place on 5-7 October 2022 in Amsterdam. It brings together academics and professionals from different disciplines and geographical backgrounds. The organising committee, consisting of Tim Sweijs (Netherlands Defence Academy), Martijn Kitzen (Netherlands Defence Academy), and Rob Johnson (University of Oxford), welcomes proposals for panels and individual submissions on the following themes:

1. Imagining Future War and Warfare
2. Why We Fight and Who Does the Fighting?
3. The Essence of Force
4. The Meaning of Strategy and Victory
5. How We Fight: Military Strategy and Operations
6. The Future of Command
7. Preparing for War: Military Innovation and Defence Planning

Submission details, descriptions, and guiding questions for papers and panels are provided below.

Submission details

The committee invites you to submit your proposal before April 1, 2022 via warstudies@mindef.nl. Paper proposals should contain an abstract of no more than 250 words outlining the main arguments and contribution of the paper. Panel proposals (500 words maximum) elaborate the specific theme, its rationale, and the main questions to be addressed.

Descriptions and Questions for Papers and Panels

1. Imagining Future War and Warfare

The future war landscape is diverse. Images of future war and warfare range from the futuristic to the atavistic, alternating between high end interstate conflict at a galactic scale to limited, localised skirmishes between non-state groups. Even though the future is widely acknowledged to be unknowable, this has certainly not stopped war defence communities from trying to decipher the writing on the wall. In anticipating future war and warfare, an ever-expanding methodological toolbox is deployed in both professional and academic settings. Overall, the objectives of anticipatory exercises range from prediction and explanation to communication and agenda setting. These exercises yield images of future war and warfare that undoubtedly shape preparations for future war, but the degree and the manner in which they do so is unclear. Questions to be addressed include:

- What are prevailing images of war and warfare, how have these images evolved, which ones are dominant, and why?
- How do Western images of future war and warfare differ from non-Western (e.g., Arabic, Russian, Chinese) images of war?
- What methods are developed to generate images of future war and warfare, and what are their advantages and disadvantages?
- What has been the track record of future war and warfare predictions, in terms of accuracy and policy impact, and how can this be improved upon?

2. Why We Fight & Who Does the Fighting

Polities, political leaders, and groups will undoubtedly continue to fight for fear, honour and interest to compel their enemies to do their will. The ostensible purposes and the concrete objectives for which they fight are bound to change, however. A mixture of political, social, economic, and normative developments affects the incidence of (different forms of) war in the system and shapes the actual behaviour of participants in war. Over time, war has come to be viewed as an illegitimate instrument to attain political objectives. War's deglorification, and its stricter codification in international law, has become more deeply entrenched. But while the attractiveness of territorial conquest for economic riches and glory has largely diminished for many polities, control over territory in the service of balance of power continues to feature in strategic decision-making. In fact, large scale intergroup violence has definitely not withered away. Where some ascertain a growing taboo on war, others observe sources of primordial

violence and reasons for war lurking beneath a shallow layer of varnish. Questions to be addressed include:

- How will views on the legitimacy of war evolve in an era of intensified interstate competition?
- How is the 'willingness to fight' evolving across the globe? What will be the primary strategic, political, economic, and social drivers of future political violence?
- If every age has its own kind of war, what is the relationship between material contextual factors and ideological incentives for groups and individuals to wage war in the future?
- How will changes in the role of geography and time shape the future war landscape, and how will they affect strategic considerations concerning issues such as access and control?
- How will developments in artificial intelligence (AI) and biotechnology affect the classical trinity and what are the implications for the future of war?

3. The Essence of Force

Military innovation is giving birth to new forms of power projection and force application. It is driving experimentation with new operational concepts (e.g., all domain, mosaic), tilting existing mainstays of strategic thought, and pushing the exploration of new theories of victory. At the same time, the very essence of how force can serve the purposes of war may well be changing because of social and technological change, as well as wider societal shifts from the physical to the virtual world. War strategists struggle conceptually with these changes and grapple with their implications for warfare. Questions to be addressed include:

- What are the implications for military-technological and social change on the effective application of force?
- What are critical components of future military power and what are potential metrics to assess the effect of new forms of firepower?
- How will emerging technologies affect global and regional balances of power and strategic stability?
- What is the impact on key tenets of current strategic postures and warfighting strategies (e.g., deterrence, escalation dominance etc.)?

4. The Meaning of Strategy and Victory

To paraphrase the late Colin Gray, the effective application of force in the service of political objectives continues to be challenging. The praxis of strategy has been muddled in many recent interventions in which the absence of explicitly formulated political guidance has hampered the formulation of effective military-strategies. In many of these interventions, operations have indeed devoured strategy. The problem was partly that clear theories of victory with specific mechanisms to defeat opponents were absent, and partly that if they were present, they were failed to be carried out to logical completion. That may have been due to normative considerations (i.e., fighting with one hand tied on the back) and the lack of political will and public support, but also the complexity of many internationalised intrastate conflicts featuring multiple adversaries and no single centre of gravity. Yet, strategic sepsis has not affected contemporary war actors

equally. A cursory glance at recent conflict theatres reveals that also today it is possible to execute military strategies to attain political objectives. Questions to be addressed include:

- Grand strategy: grand illusion?
- What lessons can be learned from strategic practices from contemporary war actors?
- What constitutes victory in future war, and how will future wars end? Do we need theories of victory for war and theories of success for low intensity and hybrid conflicts? What are the mechanisms of defeat/success?
- How will changing notions of space and time affect the political objectives and the concomitant strategies of future war actors?
- What does the evolving character of armed conflict imply for how to structure the civil-military nexus in the context of strategy-making?

5. How We Fight: Military Strategy and Operations

Warfare has evolved from pitched battles in Ancient Greece to modern campaigns that feature the simultaneous application of force across multiple domains. Today, military strategy and operations are deliberately designed to obtain effects in the physical, cognitive, and virtual dimensions, and the synergetic execution of operations are considered key to military success. Meanwhile, the proliferation of military technologies is empowering lesser military powers and non-state actors, altering military balances and levelling – if only to a degree – the military playing field. It is contributing to stalemates in many intrastate conflicts and further prolonging conflict duration. Regardless of whether the next decade features a revolution or an evolution of military affairs, the import of these developments for future military strategy and operations is likely to be considerable – although as of yet shrouded in speculation. Will 'mass' truly be consigned to the dustbins of military history or will it incarnate in other forms? Will the future battlefield be characterised by localised clashes under intelligentised conditions? And what is the role of the human in all of this? Questions to be addressed include:

- How to design military strategy to obtain effects in the future physical, cognitive, and virtual dimensions?
- What will future military operations in the various domains (land, sea, air, space, cyber) look like, and how can they be combined in an effective all-domain approach?
- How can new technologies be translated into future operational concepts? What is the role of the human on the future battlefield? And what are the appropriate legal frameworks?
- After two decades of stabilisation missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, what type of operations are we likely to see in (internationalised) intrastate conflicts in Africa and the Middle East?

6. The Future of Command

Modern information and communication technology has allowed for the revolutionary acceleration and augmentation of command & control. Popular culture has been quick in portraying how operators at home can command unmanned systems and effectively coordinate with military units in the area of operations. Capable networked battlefield management systems and communications systems have been introduced that have allowed for sensational decreases

in *sensor-to-shooter* time. These developments render small groups of well-connected soldiers capable of wielding historically unprecedented amounts of fire power. With further synthetic developments in the fields of AI and human augmentation expected, this trend is expected to continue. Recent experiences already revealed that shorter ties between tactical units and strategic commanders have brought the politics of command to those fighting the war on the ground. Although traditional command & control structures are still kept in place as a measure of resilience, they increasingly risk to become obsolete in light of new technologies that allow for operational concepts (such as swarming). Questions to be addressed include:

- What does the future of command & control look like?
- How will the politics of command shape command & control in future war?
- Will future command & control allow for the development of new forms of mission command including modernised forms of *Auftragstaktik*?
- How can secure command & control be guaranteed even in non-permissive environments? How to address issues of resilience and redundancy?
- How can intelligence chains be effectively integrated in the organisation of command & control?

7. Preparing for War: Military Innovation and Defence Planning

Current military-strategic trends indicate that military organisations need to strike an appropriate balance between force renewal and force modernisation in order to effectively manage continuities and discontinuities in the waging of war. Developments not only touch on the *effectors in warfare* but also the *enablers of warfare.* Overall, it fundamentally changes how military organisations plan, prepare, equip, and train for fight war. Defence planners are only starting to consider the appropriate balance between old and new instruments in their force packages, as strategists are weighing how these new instruments can be put to use in- and outside of war. Questions to be addressed include:

- What is the appropriate mix of forces and balance between maritime vs land (and air, space, cyber) in an era of great power competition?
- Are we at the dawn of a Revolution of Military Affairs (RMA), or is the previous RMA only starting to materialise?
- In light of continuities and discontinuities, what is the optimal balance between renewal and modernisation for military organisations in their short, mid to long term capability planning?
- How will changes in the meaning of distance and time affect the basing and balancing strategies of major, middle, and small powers and their associated force profiles?