SYMMETRY AND ASYMMETRY IN MILITARY OPERATIONS

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In the '90s, after the end of the Cold War, a set of events took place, a fact that highlighted the evolution of many states towards democracy. Alliances such as the military and political North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and other organizations extended, by the adherence of new members, most of them Central and South-Eastern European countries.

As far as NATO is concerned, this was a transformation period, not only quantitatively, with reference to member states' territories, but also at a conceptual level - peacekeeping, nation building and encouraging market economy being only a few of the challenges the Alliance had to deal with. Therefore, the dynamics of missions and military operations changed. Open military conflicts decreased in frequency, while the number of interventions other than war increased, the most frequent being peacekeeping missions under UN: the former Yugoslav territory (Bosnia, Kosovo), Afghanistan.

NATO keeps extending its operation area beyond the member states' borders, the greatest efforts focused on areas such as Afghanistan, but also on smaller missions, such as the ones in Sudan, Iraq and Pakistan. Although NATO is involved in missions on four continents, its central elements of strength remain in the Euro-Atlantic space. Thus, the potential challenges, dangers and threats are generated by both institutional factors and random factors, with origins in the situation from the theaters of operations. Within this context, it is necessary to implement some concrete measures in order to enhance NATO's institutional efficiency, regardless of the assumed missions.

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In the last decade, military missions have diversified and have become more numerous and more complicated. They are part of a new type of requirements and demands, imposed by the new expanded area of dangers and dissymmetric threats, notably asymmetric, with the terrorist ones as a distinct category.

To the sphere of dangers, threats and vulnerabilities were added the chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear ones (CBRN), the asymmetrical ones, the ones specific of cyberspace and notably the terrorist one. Their content has considerably developed and the imposed or assumed risks have increased accordingly. Nowadays, in the world there are different threats and dangers, varying from nuclear to terrorist ones, from cyber piracy and cyber terrorism to drug dealers and mob networks, from cosmic to ecological ones, from fundamental religious ones to those caused by ethnic extremism.

As a feature of this beginning of century, we can note that most conflicts, especially the armed ones, continue to have the three major characteristics of any military or civilian-military conflicts: symmetry (proportionality), dissymmetry (non-symmetry, disproportion) and asymmetry (dynamic proportionality)[1]. However, as weapons have been updated and society's vulnerabilities have increased , the state of conflict has significantly turned towards dissymmetry and asymmetry.

There is not a single state in the world, not even the United States of America, which, under these conditions, can provide its own security, a fact which has led to the enhancement of the role of organizations and international bodies, of alliances and coalitions in managing the conflict environment, in making the necessary policies and strategies and, on this basis, in determining the appropriate missions. These organizations, and we notably refer to NATO, are in an ongoing process of change, consequently military missions that are part of NATO (but not only, because the world is interdependent) must answer to this dynamics.

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[1] Symmetry implies, in the conflict field, similar or compatible forces, doctrines, strategies and resources, which give a certain proportion to action and reaction; dissymmetry or non-symmetry generally mean disproportion, incompatibility in every respect (forces, means, technologies, information, doctrines, strategies); asymmetry implies dynamic disproportion, meaning an issue out of compatibility, by using the other's vulnerabilities and even by creating these vulnerabilities in the adversary (it is a return to the art of stratagem, and, on another scale, a return to another part of confrontation).

Table: Transformation of war

	Cold War	War against terrorism	The war of the future
Character	Well defined rules, predictable, parity: - troops vs. troops - power vs. power	Constant action, uninterrupted, anywhere in the theater/world	Force, power, rules, vulnerability search, ongoing change
Defined of	Requirements	Capabilities	Multiplication options Collaboration insurance
Education	Education and training	Learning and thinking	Learning organizations

Likewise, the disappearance of bipolarity after the end of the Cold War has led to the disappearance of strategic symmetry. The chaos created by the implosion of the Warsaw Treaty and the communist system widely opened the gate of asymmetry. There was no need for two arms races. Each side had their own weapons, depending on the vital interests and responsibilities that they assumed or expected. Some were very responsible, even concerned with the world's fate and with its dramatic realities, produced by huge offsets, wealth and poverty bias, by resource scarcity, global warming, proliferation of dangers and threats of all kinds, with anomic processes and ample phenomena, paradoxical border actions and reactions and many more; others waited to see the results. Starting with the '90s, the concept of "asymmetric conflicts" began to gain ground especially among military analysts, who stated that, when the confronting forces are not at the same level of military power, they take up different tactics. To that end, the military objective cannot be the systematic and efficient attack of the enemy any more, but, in most cases, the erosion of popular support of war in the enemy country[2]. Pentagon analysts, for instance, have noticed that there is no clear line of demarcation between governments and citizens, between armies and civilians, between public area and civil, private society. Blurring the perception levels creates a powerful system of pressures against the way a war is carried out. Civil society as a whole has never agreed to war being a solution and therefore will

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[2] http://www.henciclopedia.org.uy/autores/Laguiadelmundo/GlobalWar.htm, *The changing face of war*, published in *The World Guide*.

always oppose it by all means, especially if it is not a defence war against an invader, and parliaments and governments cannot disregard such pressure, otherwise they will be sanctioned by vote.

Asymmetric war is mainly a conflict that dodges both peace laws and war laws, as well as the laws set up by the Nations' League and subsequently by the United Nations Organization. But asymmetric war is as old as war itself, because there has always been a confrontation between the strong and the weak. Asymmetric war includes, for instance, the separatist actions of Chechen militia against the Russian army, those of the Palestinians against the Israeli army, as well as terrorism.

It can be stated that the terrorists attacks of 9/11 2001 against certain objectives in the United States (World Trade Center and the Pentagon building), as well as the quick reply of US by the unexpected and steady bombing of Afghanistan and the initiation of ample actions in order to destroy the terrorists' headquarters and networks, mark a new stage in the asymmetric confrontation. The bombing of Serbia, the war in Iraq, Thasal actions against Hezbollah formations in South Lebanon (therefore attacking this country), as well as the actions of Hezbollah militias against the Israeli army represent, without doubt, violations of international law, asymmetric or disproportionate actions, which have seriously disrupted the security environment, especially after Iraq's nuclear program was brought into discussion.

In the asymmetric type of war there is a confrontation between two unequal forces, both by military means and the way of using them. This definition was proposed by Bruno Modica, Bezier professor, with direct reference to the analyst Jacques Baud's work[3], *Asymmetric War or the Defeat of the Winner*, published in 2003, a realistic approach of this definition being noticed even from the book cover, showing a Palestinian child armed with stones sitting a few meters away from an Israeli tank. In an extremely simplified but suggestive view, this seems to be the essence of asymmetric war: the stone against the tank, the bat against advanced technology, fanaticism against information technology and network.

The essence of asymmetric war cannot be reduced to savagery against civilization, violence against democracy. In our view, this is a far too schematic and superficial way of looking at reality, or even a way of diverting the attention from the real issues that make possible such a desperate war: terrorism, guerilla, insurgency and other forms of asymmetric action and reaction. But not only these. The network significantly reduces the vulnerabilities of the systems and individual

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[3] Jacques BAUD, *La guerre asymmetrique ou la defaite du vainqueur*, Editions du Rocher, L'art de la guerre, Paris, 2003.

processes, but, in its turn, accumulates new vulnerabilities. Anyway, terrorism affects neither well-organized and protected networks nor military and civilian-military systems that, as is known, are very well integrated and strictly organized. Asymmetric conflict consists mainly in protagonists having different ways of understanding, approaching and using war or conflict. Thus, the nature of asymmetry resides in its logic. Guerilla and terrorism, as well as other forms of asymmetric war, persist for a long time. Such forms and formulas were also used in ancient times. The notion of asymmetric war does not have the same content for everyone. In the American military Encyclopedia, asymmetric war is understood as a confrontation with small commando units. Likewise, asymmetric war is the confrontation based on surprise and involving unequal forces.

All these represent, of course, elements or forms and formulas of an asymmetric war that exceeds by far the theatres of military operations. Although further terrorist attacks – in Madrid, Istanbul, London, etc. – are some of those following 9/11, speculations, suspicions and questions cannot be avoided. Or, it is a well-known fact that all these are part of the asymmetric war. The victims of the 9/11 attacks, as well as those in Madrid, Istanbul, London, Moscow, Beslan etc., are also part of the effects of this terrible and endless asymmetric war.

The current armed conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya and the Near East look like disproportionate wars and, at the same time, like asymmetric wars, in which take part, in various roles, four types of entities: modern, professional armies that belong to some great powers or to some developed countries which carry out battle or post-conflict actions, either UN-mandated or by virtue of responsibilities they have assumed; stability multinational forces (stability), which act under UN mandate; governmental armed forces (of the host country), which support the stability process and gradually take over the management of local conflicts, property and citizen protection, and the defence of the rule of law; rebel forces (guerillas, insurgencies, terrorists, drug dealers and mobs etc.), which act exclusively by asymmetric means, usually locally or in border networks.

Therefore, the asymmetric war concept, representative of the Cold War period, implies that the involved parties have some power, an army and similar tactics. Despite the violence characteristic of any type of armed conflict, the asymmetric war obeys some initial rules: the militaries of the involved parties wear uniforms and distinctive insignia that differentiate them as allies/enemies; also, the total of armed forces involved in regard to the noncombatant civilian population. It is a known fact that any armed conflict obeys some laws and international agreements concerning prisoners' capture, the treatment they receive, as well as the use of different types of weapons during the military confrontations. Thus, there are various forbidden weapons that use poisonous gases or biological agents

dangerous to human health, which would affect not only the armed forces in conflict, but also the noncombatant civilian population located in the affected territory.

Even after a symmetric war victory is achieved by one of the parties, it often happens that some groups from the defeated camp do not give up fighting. Considering the fact that they have already been defeated in a symmetric conflict, these groups will change weapons, tactics and the way of carrying out the war, without obeying international rules. Thus, the members of these groups give up wearing the military uniform and choose the place and method of attacking the enemy. It is a fight carried out no longer on the principle of step-by-step recovery of the territory occupied by the enemy in order to force them to retreat, but rather on the principle of reducing the opponent's human and material forces. To this end, the members of these groups pretend to be civilians, strike instantaneously and retreat, the main targets being those who are important for the occupants.

Therefore, we can speak of asymmetric war as a type of conflict deviated from the rule or as an indirect type of action whose purpose is to counteract the force ratio. For this reason, we believe that we can rightfully state that asymmetric war is not a recent invention. Somehow, all wars fought so far have also had an asymmetric side, regarding the political and strategic concept as well as the tactical confrontation.

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