

THEORETICAL STARTING POINTS IN CONSIDERING THE CONCEPT OF ASYMMETRIC WARFARE

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Достављен: 25. 09. 2023.

Језик рада: Енглески

Кориговано: 17. 10. 2023. и 30. 10. 2023.

Тип рада: Прегледни рад

Прихваћен: 08. 11. 2023

DOI број: 10.5937/vojdelo2304022B

The issue of the concept of asymmetric warfare is extremely important for modern military theoretical thought, since modern wars are based on the asymmetric strategic relationship of the conflicting parties. The previous concepts of irregular warfare, which dealt with the problem of asymmetry, such as guerilla, insurgency or partisan warfare, do not provide a complete insight into the complex nature of the strategic relationship of the asymmetric opponents. They arise from a one-sided view of the weaker actor in a conflict. The lack of a one-sided approach in the aforementioned concepts can be overcome through the concept of asymmetric warfare, which allows a consideration of both parties in a conflict; this is exactly the analytical value of this concept compared to the previous ones. However, due to its theoretical incoherence, the concept of asymmetric warfare is often criticized for having a small value in use. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to present the essential characteristics of this concept, where Clausewitz's views on war can certainly be used, as well as the mentioned concepts of irregular warfare, and also different views on asymmetric warfare, developed after the Cold War.

Key words: *theory, war, warfare, asymmetry, guerilla, insurgency, terrorism*

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Introduction

The concept of asymmetric warfare is based on the belief that a victory in war can be won by shifting a conflict from the military to other dimensions of war by exploiting one's strengths, and the opponent's weaknesses. Such an approach makes it possible to win against a far comparatively weaker opponent. Regardless of the fact that use of force remains the main content of war, this concept focuses more on the political, ideological and sociological aspects of war. The fundamental theoretical assumptions of this concept are found in Clausewitz's conceptualization of war, so his theory will be discussed in the first part of the paper. In the following part, several of the most important concepts of unconventional (irregular) warfare, such as guerilla warfare, insurgency and terrorism, will be analysed in order to identify theoretical similarities and differences with the concept of asymmetric warfare. In the third part of the paper, the most important theoretical ideas and models of asymmetric warfare have been discussed in order to identify the essential characteristics of this concept.

Clausewitz's conceptualization of war as a theoretical foundation

Despite many definitions of war, the most complete and essential understanding of war is related to the theoretical thought of the Prussian general and theorist from the 19th century, Carl von Clausewitz. Considering the very essence of war, Clausewitz notices that every war has a dual nature, the objective one, which is permanent, unchanging and common to all wars, and the second, subjective one, which is variable and unique to each individual war. In the theory of modern strategic studies, precisely due to its changeability, the subjective nature is also called the "character of war" (Gray, 2007a: 24). While the objective nature of war contains unchangeable elements, which Clausewitz metaphorically calls the "miraculous trinity", then, the "climate" and the "fog of war", as well as "friction" (See: Clausewitz, 1976), the "character of war", on the other hand, represents a set of transitory, conditioned and change-prone characteristics. They are specific to a certain historical period in which war takes place, and are mostly related to the way force is used (Sheehan, 2007: 216).

Clausewitz viewed war not as an isolated armed conflict, but as an instrument of politics. He explained the instrumental subordination of war to politics using the metaphors "logic of war" and "grammar of war" (Herberg-Rothe, 2007: 151-152). The "logic of war", in fact, represents a set of imperatives and principles that characterize political relations between the conflicting parties and define the conceptual limitations of strategy (use of force), through the formulation of the purpose of war, the scope and size of war efforts, the scope and intensity of armed violence. The "grammar of war", or the manner of waging war, on the other hand, is a set of generally accepted military principles, rules and procedures on whose basis the engagement of armed forces in war is managed. It is recognized in military doctrines, manuals and publications, and

also in unwritten, experiential norms that are implemented in military organizations (Echevarria, 2007: 5).

Since war is a complex social phenomenon, the "grammar of war" cannot be reduced only to an armed struggle, as the only content of war. Such an approach to understanding war neglects the logistic, economic, political, informational and socio-cultural context of conflict. A narrow view of war, only through the prism of its military dimension, i.e. use of force, as a rule causes an ineffective strategy, i.e. the defeat of the party that views conflict in this way, regardless of the performance of its military component on the battlefield (Gray, 2007b: 32-33). Namely, the history of warfare shows that war is not only a conflict in the military dimension, although this segment is fundamentally important (Browning, 2002: 2). There are many cases in which the military superior party in a conflict is defeated by the other party that has waged war in all dimensions, aiming to achieve political, and not only military effects (Gray, 2007b: 33). In this regard, the previous considerations point to two main categories of warfare: regular (conventional) and irregular (unconventional). Their essential difference is reflected in the manner force is used. Unlike conventional warfare, in which force is mainly used offensively with the aim of destroying the military capacities of the adversary, in irregular warfare, force is used in a limited way, as a means of exhausting the enemy. The weaker party in a conflict achieves political effects by avoiding confrontation and defeat in the military dimension of war (Gray, 2007c: 44-45). Such a way of using force is considered asymmetric and does not comply with the traditional rules of engagement of regular armed forces.

The evolution of irregular (unconventional) warfare

Regardless of clearly visible differences between regular and irregular manner of warfare, military theory on this issue is still not sufficiently developed. This is confirmed by different views on this issue, contained in many concepts of irregular warfare, such as partisan and guerilla warfare, then in the concepts of the so-called small wars and low-intensity conflicts, insurgency and terrorism. Such a theory problem generates the need for a more detailed explanation of the mentioned concepts in order to understand the evolution of irregular warfare.

Guerilla warfare is considered the oldest form of irregular warfare. In military theory, the term "guerilla" was first mentioned during the Napoleonic Wars, to refer to the activities of Spanish and Portuguese rebels in the Iberian Peninsula against the regular French Army. Today, it is most often used to denote the form of warfare of the military weaker party in a conflict, which, by choosing the way, place and time of attack, tries to retain the initiative, while at the same time avoiding a direct armed conflict with the military superior opponent (Huntington, 1962: xvi). Thus, the military victory of a stronger opponent is challenged, and measures are undertaken towards its exhaustion and weakening (Kalyanaraman 2003: 172). In addition to the term "guerilla warfare", another

term started to be used – “partisan warfare”, which indicated the same problem. This type of warfare has most often meant independent and isolated activities of units of a quasi-military and semi-regular character, carried out deep inside the enemy territory with the aim of exhausting the opponent (Laqueur, 1976: 148). Out of the European continent, guerilla warfare was implemented by indigenous peoples against colonial armies, avoiding an open conflict with the military superior opponent. The British officer Charles Callwell called such conflicts “small wars” (Callwell, 1990: 21).

Guerilla warfare was also used during World War I, especially in the Arabian Peninsula. Using their speed, mobility and knowledge of the local terrain, the Arab guerilla forces successfully threatened the distant Turkish military garrisons, their logistic and transport communications (Laqueur, 1976: 179-171). At that time, the Irish model of guerilla warfare also appeared, as a specific way of waging war in urban areas. The Irish Republican Army carried out an armed campaign by terrorist attacks against the police and representatives of the British regime, their collaborators, sympathizers and spies. Thus, classic guerilla activities in rural areas turned into urban political violence, which caused an excessive violent reaction of the British military and police forces, then the cohesion and general mobilization of the Irish people against the British regime, which ultimately led to the fatigue of the British authorities and the public, and the recognition of the Irish independence (Laqueur, 1976: 177-182).

During the 20th century, guerilla warfare gradually evolved to more complex and developed models of unconventional ways of waging war, primarily to insurgency (Krepinevich, 1986: 7), while, along with technological development, especially in the field of information technology, there was the development of terrorism. Thus, insurgency and terrorism became the dominant forms of unconventional warfare at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century (See: Beriša, Barišić, 2017). What certainly constitutes the common and essential features of insurgency and terrorism are the dominant use of violence for political purposes and secrecy of actions (Marks et al., 2010: 84-85). In the case of terrorism, violence dominates as the “logic” of actions, as the only way to achieve political goals and to force the opponent on political concessions. On the other hand, insurgency uses violence only as one of the available methods (Wieviorka, 1995: 597-606). Unlike insurgency, terrorism is usually separated from wider population, as it does not need its personnel and material support (Crenshaw, 1981: 384), while insurgency often depends on the support of the local population (Marks et al., 2010: 85).

Insurgency should be understood as a multiple more complex and dangerous form of unconventional warfare than terrorism, because it represents a political and military concept in which the struggle for political space between the warring parties is conducted, that is, for legitimacy among the population (McCormick et al., 2007: 322). A particularly effective form of insurgency, which was implemented during the Cold War in China, Cuba and Vietnam, is Mao Zedong’s model of mass mobilization. The essence of this model is the mass mobilization and recruitment of the population. Violence, in this case, is used to create political space, establish control over territory and build counter-state institutions (Marks, 2005: 188-189). The political aspect in this manner of warfare is much more important than the military one, i.e. the focus of war is shifted beyond the military dimension to the political, social and economic dimension (Marks, 2005: 198-199).

Analysing all the previously mentioned forms of irregular warfare, their key characteristic can be noticed - they are all implemented in conditions of marked asymmetry of the power of the conflicting parties. In such a strategic relationship, the weaker adversary is forced to wage war in a way that favours their strengths, while, on the other hand, it exploits the weaknesses of the superior adversary (Gray, 2007a: 246). However, it should be emphasized that none of the considered concepts provides a complete insight into the complex nature of the strategic relationship of asymmetric opponents. They arise from the consideration of a weaker party in a conflict with a comparatively stronger party. However, war is a conflict between two parties of irreconcilable wills; it represents a two-way interactive process, and the explanation of asymmetric warfare requires the knowledge of the strategic reflection and actions of both parties to a conflict. Thus, the lack of a unilateral approach in the aforementioned concepts can be overcome through the concept of asymmetric warfare. By considering the strategic relationship of two conflicting parties of unequal power, this concept provides the necessary theoretical framework for a comprehensive understanding of both the weaker and the stronger actor, through the prism of innovative conceptual solutions in terms of overcoming their weaknesses, and making better use of their strengths.

The origin and development of the concept of asymmetric warfare

In books of classic military thought, asymmetry has most often meant an unequal relationship between the material and human resources of the conflicting parties, their military capacities, war skills, and also political will and fighting morale. However, the first attempts to define asymmetry as a concept of warfare occurred within the US academic and military circles, during the first decade of the 21st century. They were created on the basis of the urgent need of the US Armed Forces to respond to post-Cold War threats from non-state actors, such as Al Qaeda and the Taliban, who challenged their conventional military superiority (Vračar, Tikhova, 2018: 319-324). Such a need has led to generating very different views on the concept of asymmetric warfare, which is confirmed by the use of numerous doctrinal terms, such as "asymmetric threats", "asymmetric actors", "asymmetric means", "asymmetric technique", "asymmetric conflict", "asymmetric warfare", "asymmetric operation", "asymmetric attack", etc. (See: Metz, Johnson, 2001; Buffaloe, 2006; Blagojević, Subotić, 2018; Mitrović, 2017)

The urgency of the need to respond to the threats of unconventional adversaries has led to theoretical inconsistency in the explanation of the concept of asymmetric warfare, which has caused numerous criticisms (See: Blank, 2004; Freedman, 2001:71; Gray, 2002: 14; Lambakis et al., 2002; Stojanović et al., 2019, 15-41). Some theorists believed that warfare has always been asymmetric (Plant, 2008: 6), while others argued that there is nothing new in the concept of asymmetry and asymmetric warfare, since in armed conflicts there have never been completely equal opponents (Gray, 2002: 14). Undoubtedly, asymmetry is a constant determinant of armed conflicts, but the post-Cold War era, including the strong impacts of globalisation and

information revolution, has increased the abilities of the weaker opponents to achieve greater political effects by waging war in all its dimensions and thus challenge the conventional military superiority of the US and other Western military powers. Therefore, the theories of that time, developed on the wave of the idea of new wars, were imbued with attempts to explain the concept of asymmetric warfare.

The German political scientist Herfried Munkler talks about asymmetry at that time as a competition in the speed of actions of the conflicting parties, in which he particularly points out the asymmetry based on strength (*Asymmetrie*), i.e. on the abilities to speed up the pace of combat actions and thereby quickly resolve the war outcome. He also emphasizes the asymmetry based on weaknesses (*Asymmetrierung*), that is, the abilities to slow down the pace of war and prolong its duration. Munkler formulates four main forms of asymmetry: physical asymmetry, which is based on inequality in resources, space, capabilities and technology; doctrinal asymmetry, which is based on differences in doctrines and ways of waging war; asymmetry based on willpower, which is directed towards the collapse and crushing of the will for resistance, and ontological asymmetry, which is considered as a conflict between two systems with different logics of thought and actions (Münkler, 2006).

The US theorists Steven Metz and Douglas Johnson formulated the concept of strategic asymmetry, which they view as a process of maximizing one's advantages and exploiting the opponent's weaknesses in order to gain the initiative and greater freedom of action in relation to the opponent. At the same time, they highlight several dimensions, shapes and levels of asymmetry. In practical terms, strategic asymmetry includes a set of different methods, technologies, values and perspectives that are combined with conventional approaches to warfare (Metz, Johnson, 2001: 5-12).

An important contribution in the attempt to define the concept of asymmetric warfare was made by David Buffalo. According to him, asymmetric warfare is a population-centric and non-traditional manner of warfare between a military superior power and military weak actors. In his model of asymmetric warfare, he points out several important contents, such as assessment of asymmetric threat, implementation of asymmetric operations, cultural asymmetry and assessment of asymmetric costs (Buffaloe, 2006: 15-25).

Asymmetry in armed conflicts is also discussed by the British theorist Lukas Milevski. He believes that every war is asymmetric by its nature and that the essence of every strategy can be reduced to "the generation and exploitation of asymmetry for the purpose of war". According to him, the one who manages to generate the most important forms of asymmetry in relation to the opponent wins a conflict. Depending on the methods of warfare implemented by the conflicting parties, Milevski distinguishes between conventional and unconventional asymmetry, believing that "by creating an effective asymmetry in relation to the opponent, in some space and at a certain time, the effects of one's actions can be multiplied, and the opponent's power can be reduced and limited" (Milevski, 2014: 79-83).

The US theorist John Lewis Gaddis views asymmetry in war as a process of moving a conflict into space or a dimension that is more suitable for the use of one's advantages and exploitation of the enemy's weaknesses (Gaddis, 1981: 80), and Michael Fitzsimmons confirms his views, believing that asymmetry can also be manifested in other dimensions of a conflict (Fitzsimmons, 2019: 96). In the military dimension,

as this theorist points out, asymmetry can be conducted in the form of horizontal escalation, that is, by expanding a conflict to a greater area or through vertical escalation, by increasing the intensity of a conflict (See: Morgan et al., 2008;).

One of the most developed models of asymmetric warfare was offered by the British theorist and officer Jules Eaton. He singles out four main forms of asymmetry. The first form, the so-called asymmetry in configuration, includes inequality between the warring parties in terms of political status, identification of the enemy, organization and logistics, technology and methods of information gathering. He viewed asymmetry in starting points as inequality in culture, political, legal, moral and ethical norms. By asymmetry in stakes, he meant inequality in terms of commitment to goals, determination and perseverance in war. He considered the last form of asymmetry as an inequality in strategy, methods and techniques, which is used to exploit, combine and multiply the effects of all other forms of asymmetry (Eaton, 2002: 54-75).

Despite the fact that there is no single definition of the concept of asymmetric warfare, theorists, as well as military practitioners, share the view that the issue of asymmetric relations in modern armed conflicts is extremely important. Namely, the search for asymmetry is of fundamental importance for warfare (Dunlap, 1998: 1), because an imbalance of forces can create a strategic advantage and thus lead to a final victory (Buffaloe, 2006: 3; Riggs, 2021). Although the previous views on this issue did not give rise to a clear understanding of the mentioned concept, they represent a suitable basis for further research and its improvement based on the already existing models. What can be concluded from these views is that they all come down to understanding the concept by which the conflicting parties of unequal power seek to use their comparative advantages in relation to the enemy's relative weaknesses, whereby the focus of actions of the weaker party is directed to the implementation of unconventional methods of warfare. Such a manner of warfare is usually based on the assumption that a conventionally oriented adversary is organized, trained and equipped to fight an enemy similar to itself, limited in its engagement by certain conventions, rules and customs of war and that, as such, is not ready to wage war in all its dimensions (Mazarr, 2008: 42). Thus, the essence of the concept of asymmetric warfare can be formulated as "organizing, thinking and acting differently from the opponent, with the intention of maximizing one's advantages and exploiting the opponent's weaknesses" (Metz, Johnson, 2001: 5).

Conclusion

Clausewitz's theory of war indicates that war, as a complex social phenomenon, cannot be reduced only to warfare in the military sphere, but also in other dimensions. Any neglect of the mentioned fact, in the end, can cause defeat, regardless of military performance on the battlefield.

The previously analysed forms of irregular warfare, such as guerilla warfare, insurgency and terrorism, do not provide a complete insight into the ways in which multiple inferior adversaries compensate for their resource and military weaknesses and achieve a strategic advantage in an armed conflict. It is exactly the concept of asym-

metric warfare that makes it possible to analyse the opponent from the perspective of their strengths and weaknesses and makes it easier to overcome one's inferiority.

In the first decade of the 21st century, various conceptual ideas regarding the phenomenon of asymmetry arose in military theory, while a theoretical consensus was not reached regarding the unique definition of the concept of asymmetry in armed conflicts. Instead, there is a common understanding of this phenomenon.

In modern military theory, asymmetry is most often explained as inequality in terms of the political and legal status of the actors in a conflict, disproportion in the relative power and capabilities of the warring parties, as well as their strategies and tactics used in a conflict. On the other hand, in military practice, asymmetry is most often understood as the absence of comparison regarding the operational capabilities of the warring parties.

In military theory and practice, the term asymmetry is most often used in the sense of waging war, i.e. asymmetric warfare, denoting the approach by which the warring parties seek to use their comparative advantages in relation to the relative weaknesses of the enemy.

Asymmetric warfare, in the most general sense, includes acting, organizing and thinking differently from the opponent in order to maximize one's advantages, exploit the opponent's weaknesses, take the initiative and gain greater freedom of action. Asymmetric warfare, as a process, can be reduced to generating new and/or exploiting old relative inequalities between the warring parties with the aim of achieving a certain effect of strategic importance.

The previously discussed operationalization models of the concept of asymmetric warfare represent different approaches and views on asymmetry, while their comprehensiveness has only made their applicability in doctrinal practice difficult. However, the analysed models, despite their shortcomings, enable further conceptual abstraction and theoretical improvement, systematization of the most important theoretical assumptions and synthesis of doctrinal practice regarding the phenomenon of asymmetry.

If we accept the position that war and warfare have always been asymmetric, then the search for asymmetry in an armed conflict is an issue of fundamental importance for the warring parties. Therefore, the further development of the concept of asymmetric warfare can be one of the most important problems in military theory and practice.

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Summary

Asymmetry in armed conflicts has been a subject of consideration by the warring parties since ancient times. According to the traditional way of military thinking, asymmetry was reduced to the generation and exploitation of the resource and military inequality, in order to achieve supremacy in a certain area and at a certain time, take the initiative over the opponent and achieve victory.

However, the wars in Algeria, Vietnam, Somalia and Afghanistan indicate that a much weaker opponent can win a victory in conditions of resource asymmetry between the warring parties. The paper starts from the point of view that the concept of asymmetric warfare is still relevant, although, to some extent, it has been replaced by more theoretically developed concepts, such as hybrid, unconventional and irregular warfare.

Bearing in mind that in military theory there is no consensus regarding the essential definition of the concept of asymmetry, the paper considers the most important theoretical starting points and positions on which this concept is based, in order to identify its essential determinants and most important contents.

Clausewitz's theory of war indicates that war has to be waged equally in all spheres of a conflict, not only in its military dimension. Any neglect of non-military fields of an armed conflict can ultimately lead to defeat, regardless of military performance on the battlefield.

Theoretically close forms of irregular warfare, such as guerilla warfare, insurgency and terrorism, do not provide a complete insight into the ways in which asymmetry in an armed conflict is overcome or exploited. It is exactly the concept of asymmetric warfare that makes it possible to find ways of compensating for one's weaknesses, maximizing strengths and exploiting the opponent's weaknesses.

In military theory and practice, the term asymmetry is most often used in the sense of waging war, i.e. asymmetric warfare. In the most general sense, this way of warfare includes acting, organizing and thinking differently from the enemy, with the aim of maximizing one's advantages, exploiting the opponent's weaknesses, overtaking the initiative and creating conditions for greater freedom of action. As a process, it boils down to the generation of new and/or exploitation of old relative inequality between the opponents, in order to achieve a certain effect of strategic importance.

Although there are different approaches and views in military theory that make it difficult to implement the concept of asymmetry in doctrinal practice, the considered models represent a good basis for the further theoretical improvement and systematization of the most important theoretical assumptions of the concept of asymmetric warfare.

If we accept the position that war and warfare have always been asymmetric, then the search for asymmetry in an armed conflict is an issue of fundamental importance for the warring parties. Undoubtedly, understanding asymmetry as a relationship between the warring parties and finding ways in which it can be generated or exploited is a fundamental issue for winning a victory in war. Therefore, the further development of the concept of asymmetric warfare can be one of the most important problems in military theory and practice.

Key words: *theory, war, warfare, asymmetry, guerilla, insurgency, terrorism*

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