A CONTRIBUTION TO DEFINING THE TWELVE-DAY ISRAELI–IRANIAN WAR OF 2025*

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Abstract: In June 2025, an armed conflict broke out between Israel (and, toward the end of the conflict, also the United States on the Israeli side) and Iran, lasting twelve days. At first glance, this war appears unusual because the two states do not share a common land border or body of water, while the states located between them (Syria, Jordan, and Iraq), at least officially, did not participate in the conflict. This raised the question of whether this conflict could be classified as a so-called sixth-generation war. The concept of the six generations of war was formulated at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one by the Russian general and Doctor of Military Sciences Vladimir Slipchenko, and was also promoted by the admiral of the Soviet/Russian navy Ivan Kapitanets. In their view, this is the most recent generation of war, in which armed struggle is conducted with conventional (that is, non-nuclear) strategic weaponry—cruise/ballistic missileswith programmed guidance, high precision, long range, and great destructive power, as well as unmanned aerial vehicles, both reconnaissance and strike, with the support of sophisticated means for electronic warfare. These are conflicts characterized by the absence of any combat contact on land, in which so-called long-distance strikes prevail, and in which (non-)combat operations unfold in the air, outer space, and cyberspace. By analyzing the content of the armed struggle in the Israeli–Iranian war, the study examines whether, given the actions displayed by the belligerent sides, this war can be classified and defined from the conceptual perspective established by the aforementioned Russian authors. The conclusion is that, by a considerable part of its characteristics, this war can be classified as a sixth-generation war, but that in its entirety it represents a combination of fourth- and sixth-generation warfare.

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The Concept of Six Generations of War

This paper will analyze the recent twelve-day war between Israel and Iran (from 13 to 24 June 2025), taking Vladimir Slipchenko's conceptions of the six generations of war as the theoretical-methodological basis. Major General (ret.) and Doctor of Military Sciences Vladimir Slipchenko (1935–2005) was, at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one, one of the better-known military theorists in the Russian Federation. Following the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian expert circles, both among military personnel and civilian specialists, conducted a years-long debate on the problems of war, strategy, and operational art in the newly emerging circumstances (the end of the bipolar order, U.S. dominance, and the growing influence of modern technologies in warfare).

General Slipchenko was significantly engaged in those debates and, by the end of the 1990s, was gradually shaping his conception of the phenomenon of war and its evolution. He presented his view of the new character of war, as stated in one online biography, in May 1990 at a major international conference in Washington at the National Defense University. In addition to the book that will be cited in this paper, Slipchenko was also the author of the book War of the Future (Voyna budushchego) from 1999 and the book sixth-generation warfare (Beskontaktnye voyny) from 2001 (Dic.Academic, 2025).

His views on these topics were shared and promoted by Russian Fleet Admiral Ivan Kapitanets (1928–2018), one of the leading experts on naval warfare and strategy in the USSR/Russian Federation. The two authors knew each other and cooperated within the Academy of Military Sciences (Akademiya voennykh nauk)—a Russian non-governmental organization whose main goal is to develop scientific research concerning defense issues and, more generally, the art of war.

In the first generation of war (the era of slavery), the Russian admiral argued, armed struggle took place at the level of tactical units, exclusively by means of manpower—infantry and cavalry—equipped with cold weapons. The main objective was the destruction of the enemy. At sea, combat was conducted by oared ships that attacked one another directly (Russian: abordazh). The second generation of war (the feudal period) was marked by a revolution in military affairs—the invention of gunpowder and smoothbore (artillery) weapons. At sea, alongside oared vessels, sailing ships armed with cannons appeared, and, in addition to direct contact with another ship (striking its side with the bow), destruction became possible through fire, that is, artillery. The main objective in this generation of war was the destruction of the enemy and the seizure of his goods and territory. Kapitanets associated the third generation of war with the development of capitalism, progress in technology, and the appearance of weapons with rifled barrels (rifled artillery and repeating small arms).

This revolution in military affairs led to wars being conducted on operational-tactical scales. As far as navies are concerned, in the nineteenth century there first appeared wooden sailing-and-steam ships (combined propulsion), and then armored steamships (Russian: parusno-parovye derevyannye i parovye bronenosnye korabli). Artillery armament, torpedoes, and mines came into widespread use. The main objectives of war in this generation were the defeat of the enemy's armed forces, the destruction of its economy, and the overthrow of its political order. In the mid-twentieth century, according to Kapitanets's understanding (Slipchenko's view here is somewhat different), the fourth generation of wars emerged, and they remain current today. They are conducted at the strategic level (the example being the Second World War), and are characterized by a huge quantity of new weapons and equipment—armored vehicles, combat aviation, surface and underwater vessels, radar, and communications equipment. At their core are operations involving a large number of army units in cooperation with the navy and air force. As for armed struggle at sea, the main role was transferred to aircraft carriers, submarines, and anti-submarine ships. The objectives of wars of this generation are similar to those of the previous one (Kapitanets, 2001, pp. 41–46).

With the use of the atomic bomb in Japan in 1945, humanity entered the fifth generation of war. In all previous generations of (contact) war, Kapitanets observed, the main object of neutralization (Russian: porazhenie—a freer translation, note by N. V.) had been the armed forces of the opposing sides (as a rule, on their own territory), after which one would proceed to destroy the economy and achieve political objectives. Those objectives would be realized through prolonged offensive operations at the operational-strategic level, by occupying the enemy's territory and at the cost of heavy casualties. Missile-nuclear war completely altered this pattern, and the object of attack became not only the armed forces of the belligerent sides, but practically their entire territory and total population as well. In Kapitanets's view, nuclear war is an anomaly in the evolutionary process of the succession of generations of war, because, owing to its immense destructiveness, it cannot lead to the achievement of either strategic or political objectives (Kapitanets, 2001). After the end of bloc antagonism, some armed conflicts of the 1990s (e.g., the First Gulf War or the war against the FRY) manifested the features of the sixth-generation warfare, in which the decisive role would be played by "ordinary" (conventional) high-precision offensive or defensive weapons, rather than by large numbers of ground troops. The aggressor's power would be directed toward striking economic targets from aircraft and unmanned high-precision weapons of various basing modes, in the circumstances of regional or global information confrontation (Kapitanets, 2001, p. 52).

In the theory of war and strategy, the topic of the evolution of war and the identification of its stages/phases was approached not only by Russian but also by Western authors. In the late 1980s, William S. Lind, together with several co-authors, published in the Marine Corps Gazette the article "The Changing Face of War: Into the Fourth Generation," in which the thesis of four generations of war in the period from the Napoleonic Wars to the present day was set out. The first generation of war (symbolized

in technical terms by the smoothbore musket) belongs to the period before Napoleon, and reaches its peak with the wars he fought. The emphasis was placed on personnel drilled to perfection, organized through the tactics of line and column. The second generation reached its culmination in the First World War. Tactics were based on fire and movement, but remained essentially linear. Massed firepower replaced massed manpower. The third generation of warfare (already present in outline by the end of 1918) came to the fore during the Second World War, above all thanks to German tactical innovations. Based on maneuver rather than attrition, the tactics of third-generation war represented the first truly non-linear tactic. Instead of relying on direct destruction, the attack was based on infiltration and bypassing, while the defense was organized in depth.

Finally, according to the American authors, the fourth generation of war will be characterized not by great firepower or the use of mass armies, but by the employment of smaller mobile forces with pronounced maneuver capabilities. In such a war, the distinction between war and peace, front and rear, soldier and civilian will disappear. Psychological operations, information manipulation, and computer viruses will become very important instruments of conducting the struggle against the enemy. The main objective will not be the enemy's physical destruction, but the breaking of his will (Lind, Nightengale, Schmitt, Sutton, & Wilson, 1989, p. 23). A supporter of this concept, retired Marine Corps Colonel Thomas X. Hammes, wrote in 2007 that, alongside the already established fourth generation, a fifth generation of wars was also emerging, one that would be marked by the participation of ever smaller (in)formal groups (as parties to conflicts) carrying out actions against the enemy by using information resources, computer technologies, as well as achievements in nano- and biotechnologies. In that context, he cited the anthrax attack on Capitol Hill (the distribution of letters containing powder with anthrax spores, which can also cause human death, note by N. V.) in October 2001 as perhaps the first fifth-generation attack (Hammes, 2007).

The concept of four generations of war (now already five) has been heavily contested in Western (American) expert circles as insufficiently grounded. Whereas in Slipchenko and Kapitanets the criterion for differentiating generations of war is based on the ever-increasing mutual distance between the opposing sides during the conduct of combat operations (as a manifestation of the technological progress of society and changes in its economic-political and social foundations), in Western authors the yardstick for determining generations of war is "blurrier" and may perhaps be discerned in the increasingly pronounced non-linearity of actions at the tactical and operational levels and the ever greater influence/presence of non-armed contents of struggle.

Vladimir Slipchenko described in detail the characteristics and contents of sixth-generation war. As regards weaponry, he speculated that after 2010–2015 the armed forces of the world's most developed states might acquire strategic non-nuclear forces based in the air force and navy. Their core would consist of numerous unmanned aerial vehicles of different purposes, as well as short-, medium-, and long-range cruise missiles that would be deployed in the air force and navy. Finally, they

would be joined by non-nuclear intercontinental ballistic missiles (Slipchenko, 2002, pp. 32–33). With the contact war of the fourth generation, Slipchenko predicted, the numerous ground forces would gradually wither away as well, because sixth-generation wars would not employ armed manpower, nor would there be cumbersome land operations; or, more likely, such operations would neither be prolonged nor slow-moving (Slipchenko, 2002, pp. 38–39).

It may be observed that the war in Ukraine has refuted this prediction more than two decades after it was made, because for more than three years land operations have been taking place in that war with many features of fourth-generation war (large-scale material destruction, significant losses in personnel and military equipment, an insufficient/slow pace of advance, etc.). Slipchenko believed that the armed forces adapted to this generation of war would consist of two main branches: strategic defensive and strategic strike (offensive) forces (including nuclear ones), some mobile forces, and a unified command-and-control system. Important concepts of military art and strategy, such as strategic deployment (operational deployment, regrouping), strategic attack, or defense, would either lose their meaning or undergo major transformation. Likewise, the occupation of a given territory/state would lose the significance it had in the past. According to Slipchenko's forecast, it would be sufficient to destroy, by means of precision-guided missiles and in a contactless manner, the enemy's economic potential, its economic infrastructure, its energy supply system, and its communications, in order for its political system to collapse on its own (Slipchenko, 2002, p. 123). Kapitanets wrote in a similar tone, stating that those states prepared for conducting a war of the new generation (i.e., the sixth generation) would, for the first time in history, have the possibility of solving the entire range of strategic tasks needed to realize the strategic and political goals of war without direct contact with the enemy, wherever that enemy might be located (Kapitanets, 2001, p. 56).

Many more interesting observations by these two Russian authors could be cited. Reading their books, one may justifiably gain the impression that their "ideal model" of sixth-generation war was the NATO aggression against the FRY in 1999. What is problematic, however, is that they rather uncritically accepted/presented the conduct of aggression solely from the air and sea, without the introduction of the Alliance's ground forces onto FRY territory, almost as a "universal recipe" for future (advanced) wars, without taking into account a number of specific features of that historical moment and of regional geography. Given that the FRY, small in territory (and with very limited defensive capacities), was a moderately developed industrial-agricultural country, considerably urbanized, whose functioning and the welfare of its population depended heavily on the supply of electricity and fuel, it was possible to force it into "cooperativeness" through constant air strikes against critical infrastructure and industrial facilities, without introducing the ground forces of Western states during the war itself (Vuković & Đorđević, 2019).

In a similar way, the Russian authors were also "impressed" by the course and results of the first war against Iraq in 1991, when coalition air power operated independently for more than a month, whereas the ground offensive lasted only four days.

However, already in 2003, in the second war against Iraq, the United States and its allies conceptually returned to fourth-generation war, engaging substantial ground forces that occupied Iraq and remained there for a long time, that is, they did precisely what the Russian authors had assessed as a forthcoming anachronism (the "dying" fourth-generation war). That war also (including the earlier occasional air strikes carried out over Iraqi territory in the period between 1991 and 2003) refuted their thesis that, once the economic/energy/communications infrastructure had been sufficiently destroyed, the political system in the war-affected country would collapse on its own. The Iraqi regime headed by Saddam Hussein was overthrown only through the direct presence of American and allied troops in Baghdad, that is, through the occupation of the country.

In addition to this shortcoming (the absolutization of certain examples for the purpose of drawing almost categorical judgments of general or universal validity, without taking specific circumstances into account), some other deficiencies can also be observed in the views primarily of Slipchenko, but also of Kapitanets, and some of them will be discussed further below. Nevertheless, despite certain weaknesses, this concept may serve as a productive research instrument for identifying the essential features of the Israeli-Iranian war and for facilitating its definition/categorization.

Characteristics of the Israeli-Iranian War Indicating Its Belonging to the Sixth Generation

Hostility between Israel and Iran began with the coup in Iran in 1979 and the enthronement of the Islamic revolutionary regime in Tehran. Presenting itself as the protector of Muslim communities in the Middle East and throughout the world in general (it should not be forgotten that Iran significantly assisted the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims during the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995) (NSPM 2023), official Tehran also strongly committed itself to the freedom of the Palestinian people (assisting Palestinian formations, primarily the military-political/terrorist movement Hamas, politically, diplomatically, financially, and militarily), while at the same time denying Israel the right to exist. The founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, asserted that the Israeli regime was illegitimate and should be eliminated, and that position is also supported by the current ayatollah and political leader Ali Khamenei (Castro Torres, 2025).

Until the war of 13–24 June 2025, the two states had for decades been in a kind of low-intensity conflict, resorting to the use of various instruments from its arsenal (psychological-propaganda operations, cyberattacks, intelligence and counterintelligence operations, as well as sabotage activities that also included the liquidation of several prominent individuals from the worlds of science, the armed forces, and political life, primarily on the Iranian side). The prelude to this war was a series of short-term armed conflicts in the previous year (the Israeli airstrike on the Iranian consular complex in Damascus on 1 April 2024; the Iranian retaliatory attack using drones and missiles

against Israel on 13 April; the attack by Israeli aircraft on Iran, around the city of Isfahan, on 19 April; the Iranian ballistic missile attack on Israel on 1 October; the most massive Israeli air attack, involving more than 100 aircraft, on Iran on 26 October 2024). Besides the fact that in these short-lived clashes the armed forces of the two countries were rehearsing their own actions, they also clearly indicated that in the next conflict the Israeli side would rely primarily on its air force for offensive operations, while in the Iranian armed forces attacks on Israel would be carried out by missile units (using ballistic missiles and, to some extent, unmanned aerial vehicles).

It should be emphasized that these short-lived armed clashes fit entirely into the Israeli concept of the campaign between wars, that is, combat operations between preparation for war and the conduct of war itself (Talbot 2023). In the literature, this concept is also referred to as the "war between wars." The "war between wars" or "operations between wars" is a concept that implies the occasional combat engagement of elements of the Israeli armed forces (most often the air force) through short-term attacks/strikes against military or civilian targets in neighboring countries that most often belong to Iranian military-political outposts (such as the Hezbollah movement).

Such an Israeli approach is often referred to in the literature as "mowing the grass," which points to occasional actions aimed at neutralizing military equipment and personnel (with a pronounced emphasis on the command cadre), in order to deprive Israel's adversaries of the capability to inflict more significant strikes on Israel itself, that is, to initiate a larger-scale war against it (Talbot 2023; Weinberg 2022; Lappin 2019). In essence, these Israeli actions, or the "war between wars," most closely resemble certain elements (strikes, raids, and the like) of so-called peacetime contingency operations—one of the operational categories in the American doctrine of low-intensity conflict, which was valid during the 1980s and early 1990s in the ground forces of the U.S. armed forces.

The immediate trigger for the Israeli attack on Iran (the official name of the operation was Rising Lion) was Tel Aviv's intention to prevent Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Given its geographical position, small territory, and limited population, Israel has always sought to achieve (technological) superiority in conventional armaments vis-à-vis possible or potential enemies in its surroundings. It saw an additional safeguard in the development and production of nuclear weapons.

If any (potentially) hostile state were to acquire nuclear weapons, the Israeli nuclear arsenal, because of the achieved parity, would lose its significance and weight as a deterrent factor, which Israel, from its own perspective, cannot tolerate and seeks by any means to prevent. From this position there developed the so-called Begin Doctrine, named after Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, which was already put into practice in 1981 through the Israeli airstrike on nuclear installations in Iraq during the rule of Saddam Hussein (Talbot, 2023).

According to the so-called Begin Doctrine (which is in fact a simple strategic orientation), Israel cannot allow any regional hostile state/power, committed to the destruction of the Jewish state, to acquire weapons of mass destruction, that is, nuclear weapons (Talbot, 2023; Solomon, 2019). Therefore, if necessary, Israel strikes first

in order to neutralize enemy capacities, capabilities, or technologies. In short, this is the principle of pre-emptive defense, which received the informal name of the Begin Doctrine (Bastardo Martinez, 2025).

A similar scenario occurred in 2007, when Israeli forces destroyed a reactor in Syria during the rule of Bashar al-Assad (Castro Torres, 2025). Iran had for decades sought to master nuclear technologies (even while it was an American ally), and it particularly intensified such efforts in the first years of this century, fearing a repetition of the scenarios from Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) and seeking refuge in deterrent weaponry (Стојановић, 2022, pp. 191–192). Parallel with this, American-Israeli pressure on Tehran also grew, until June of this year, when it was assessed in Tel Aviv that direct military action should be taken.

Thus, the declared primary political-strategic objective of the Israeli attack was the destruction/damaging of Iranian nuclear installations (for uranium processing and enrichment) and the disruption/slowing of the development of the Iranian nuclear program with longer-term consequences, although there are serious objections to this rationale, in the sense that it merely served as a pretext because Iran had already crossed the critical threshold in uranium processing/enrichment (Stojanović, 2025). In addition, the Israeli attack also pursued (or attempted to pursue) several other objectives: the neutralization of Iranian air defense and surface-to-surface missile systems, the liquidation of leading Iranian scientists in the field of nuclear physics and technology, as well as military officers occupying key positions in the Iranian armed forces.

it is possible to agree with the observation that this was “a limited war, fought with limited means, over an even more limited period—which all means that the campaign’s objectives were likewise limited” (Cohen, 2025). In addition to these limits, it should be said that, apart from time, objectives, and means, this war was also limited in space—the theater of war encompassed Israel, Iran, Qatar, Syria, Iraq, and probably Jordan, that is, one part of the Middle East.

The first characteristic by which this armed conflict is most clearly recognized as a sixth-generation war is the engagement of only certain services (the air force and air defense) and branches (the missile branch, or only missile units) of the armed forces of both countries. In the June war, the ground forces of both sides were almost or entirely inactive. The regular ground forces of Iran number around 350,000 personnel (with roughly the same number in reserve), while the ground forces of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps number around 150,000; Israel’s ground forces have 126,000 active personnel and about 400,000 reservists (The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2023). However, despite their size, equipment, and the substantial resources invested in them, in this war not a single tank shell, gun round (unless fired by air defense units), or howitzer shell appears to have been fired, nor were any larger movements of, for example, mechanized infantry or engineering units recorded. The use of ground-force units was not necessary, given that Israel and Iran do not share a common land border, nor do they share a maritime area (for the most part, the navies of both countries also remained passive, except for the Israeli navy, which participated in repelling missile attacks from the air). The straight-line distance

between them is, depending on which points are chosen for measurement, around one thousand kilometers. For that reason, the main carriers of combat operations on the Israeli side were the air force and air defense, and on the Iranian side the air defense and missile forces.

The Israeli Air Force alone, on the very first day, employed around 200 combat aircraft to strike approximately one hundred targets in Iran (Stilwell, 2025). These aircraft used various guided munitions—air-to-ground missiles and precision-guided bombs. In the following days, until the end of the war, the Israeli Air Force continued bombing nuclear installations, air bases, Iranian air-defense firing positions, launchers for surface-to-surface missiles, facilities for the production and assembly of components for unmanned aerial vehicles and missiles, command centers, military bases, Iranian state television, oil transport facilities, natural gas production facilities, and other objects deemed relevant by the Israeli command. Iran responded exclusively with strikes by ballistic missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) against Israel, targeting primarily military and economic facilities. For the entire duration of this war, it is estimated that Iran launched between 500 and 550 ballistic missiles and more than one thousand drones, and that Israel's multi-layered air-defense system, with American assistance, successfully intercepted between 80 and 90% of these missiles (these figures should certainly be treated with caution, both because of the source—Israeli military radio—and because information has since emerged challenging them), while in the case of unmanned aerial vehicles, the interception/shoot-down rate allegedly reached an impressive 99.99% (ISW, 2025a: 12).

At the very end of the war, the United States also became involved in Operation Midnight Hammer, in which B-2 strategic bombers, on 22 June, used fourteen precision-guided bunker-busting bombs (GBU-57) to strike two Iranian nuclear facilities (Fordow and Natanz), while the nuclear technology center in Isfahan was struck from an American submarine in the Indian Ocean with TLAM cruise missiles (Tomahawks) (around thirty) (Cimbala, 2025). Iran responded with a limited missile strike—announced in advance—against the American Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, without any significant consequences for the American contingent (Cimbala, 2025). American official and unofficial sources claimed that the Iranian strike on their base did not cause significant damage, but that the attacks of the U.S. Air Force on Iranian nuclear facilities were destructive/effective, a claim that a number of qualified researchers have greeted with skepticism (Stojanović, 2025; Saab & White, 2025). All Israeli and American offensive actions were supported by the operation of reconnaissance drones, satellites, and airborne early-warning and control aircraft.

The second characteristic of this twelve-day armed conflict that fully fits Slipchenko's concept of sixth-generation war is the selection of targets for strikes, by both Israel and Iran. This feature has already been touched upon in the previous part of the paper, but it should be emphasized further. According to Slipchenko's understanding, in a non-contact sixth-generation war, important targets of attack may include: (a) stationary centers of state leadership, command, control, and communications; (b) strategic aviation airfields and non-nuclear retaliatory missile complexes in the

interior of the country; (c) state communications, radio, and television facilities; (d) national and local energy-supply systems; (e) plants for the production and storage of precision weapons; (f) other defense-industry enterprises not connected with nuclear technology; (g) oil refineries and fuel and lubricant storage facilities; (h) major oil and gas pipelines; and (i) centers for the production of chemical and biological weapons (Slipchenko, 2002: 144). On the other hand, Slipchenko maintained that the armed forces' manpower in general would not be a priority target of offensive actions in a sixth-generation war. When one looks more closely at the targets that both sides—and especially Israel—attacked during this war, one may observe that almost all of them are identical to the elements on "Slipchenko's list," that is, the listed elements and the actual objects struck almost completely overlap/coincide.

On his list of targets for offensive operations, Slipchenko placed centers of state command and control first. On the very first day of the war, in one Israeli air strike, Iran's highest-ranking military official, Major General Mohammad Bagheri, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, was killed, followed by Major General Gholam Ali Rashid, head of the headquarters for the planning and coordination of joint operations of the Iranian armed forces, then Major General Hossein Salami, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, as well as the IRGC Aerospace Force Commander, Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajji Zadeh, and a number of Iranian officers holding very important positions (ISW, 2025f; ISW, 2025d). The consequences of this strike were reflected in a temporary paralysis in the chain of command, that is, in the absence of orders for retaliation and Iran's failure to respond during the first six hours of the war (ISW, 2025b). Israel did not abandon strikes against command centers later either, and toward the end of the war, on 23 June, multiple very senior officers of the Iranian armed forces and Iranian security services (brigadier general rank and below) were killed in air strikes (ISW, 2025c). In addition to military personnel, in the Israeli air strike of 15 June, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian was nearly killed as well while attending a meeting in the Iranian government building. He sustained only minor injuries (Al Jazeera, 2025).

At this point, it is not possible to list in detail all military, infrastructure, and energy-sector targets that were struck, damaged, or destroyed by Israeli aviation during the twelve days of war. However, some of the most striking examples may be mentioned. The building of Iranian state television was struck on 16 June, and all viewers were able to see the interruption of the broadcast live, while an Israeli military source stated that the target had been "the Iranian regime's communications center" (BBC, 2025). After only a few days of war, air strikes were carried out against Iran's main oil and gas facilities/capacities, including the South Pars gas field, the largest gas-extraction field, which provides 80% of Iran's natural gas production. Storage facilities and refineries near Tehran, Bushehr, and Fars were also struck, reducing Iran's processing capacities (GPF, 2025). On the other hand, Iranian ballistic missiles struck and partially damaged the largest oil refinery in Israel, in Haifa (The Jerusalem Post, 2025). During the night of 16–17 June, Israeli air strikes destroyed more than a dozen storage facilities for ballistic missiles, drones, and launchers in western Iran. A facility/

installment where Iran's chemical program had been developed in the city of Karaj was also struck. This research facility is subordinate to Iran's Organization of Defensive Innovation and Research (SPND), whose headquarters in Tehran was also attacked on 14 June (ISW, 2025). In Iranian operations, in addition to the refinery, among the more important missile targets hit were a building within a military intelligence school in the Tel Aviv area, a building near the Israeli General Staff Headquarters (an obvious attempt at a precision strike aimed at neutralizing the "brain" of the Israeli armed forces), and a technology park in the city of Beersheba in the Negev Desert (CNN, 2025b). From this, it is possible to conclude that, according to the criterion of target selection for offensive action—political-strategic, command, economic, infrastructure, and informational targets, rather than ground troops and their equipment—the twelve-day war may be classified as a sixth-generation war.

The third characteristic of this war suggesting that it may be classified as belonging to the sixth generation is the important role of psychological-propaganda operations, information warfare, and cyberattacks. General Slipchenko wrote that, in the future, the battlefield would increasingly shift into the sphere of intellectual action upon human consciousness and emotions. The calibrated broadcasting of provocative material that has been ideologically and psychologically processed, the skillful alternation of true and false information, and the artificial editing of details from different fictitious explosive situations may be transformed into a powerful means of psychological attack. This means may prove highly effective against a country in which there exist social tensions, interethnic, religious, or class conflicts (Slipchenko, 2002: 77). It may be observed that the current social and political moment of both Israel and Iran is marked precisely by some of the conflicts enumerated by Slipchenko. He also believed that, in sixth-generation warfare, such methods of struggle as strategic deception, disinformation, electronic countermeasures, the physical destruction of information infrastructure facilities, attacks on the enemy's computer networks, information operations, and information aggression would also have their place (Slipchenko, 2002: 154). According to his forecast, information strikes could be launched in order to disrupt systems of electricity, water, and gas supply, then communications and transport systems, but also to obstruct financial operations. The actions of both belligerents, especially Israel, show that many of these predictions by Vladimir Slipchenko were realized in the twelve-day war.

The strike on the building of Iranian state television in the midst of what appears to have been a news/propaganda broadcast has already been mentioned and represented a demonstration of Israeli superiority. In the sphere of information, while following the Israeli-Iranian war, for the author of this paper, and in the light of Slipchenko's observations, the activity of, for example, the YouTube news channel Tousi TV was particularly characteristic. It has more than one million followers and is run by Mahyar Tousi, an Iranian from Great Britain who emigrated as a child and became a very active propagandist in the service of Israel, the United States, and the West in general. His "breaking news" reports seemed to be assembled in line with Slipchenko's remarks—localized disturbances among the population and examples of panic

were presented as a general phenomenon through the use and editing of private recordings, most often from mobile phones; he repeatedly announced the collapse of the regime in Tehran and the flight of its leadership from the country, and spread similar rumors. For example, on 16 June, in the midst of the war, one of his YouTube broadcasts entitled "U.S. Troops Ready to END Islamic Republic Of Iran" had around 560,000 views (Tousi TV, 2025).

A special type of psychological action was represented by an operation at the beginning of the war, on 13 June, when Israeli operatives speaking Farsi/Persian called the mobile phones of more than twenty senior Iranian leaders after the liquidation of most members of the military leadership, threatening them and their families with death if they continued to obey the Iranian regime and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Reportedly, some senior Iranian officials were required to send a video message to Israeli operatives within twelve hours in which they renounced the Iranian regime. It is not known what effect this action produced, but according to what was published in The Washington Post, the goal was to intimidate/deter and confuse officials/commanders within the Iranian regime system (ISW, 2025c).

During this war, pro-Israeli hacker groups carried out cyberattacks against Iranian financial and media institutions. One of the targets of these attacks was the Iranian state-owned Bank Sepah, whose clients, as a result of the cyberattack, were unable to access their accounts, conduct transactions, or withdraw cash from ATMs. The Iranian state television was also the object of a cyberattack—through one of its channels, a hacker group broadcast anti-government video content calling on Iranians to take to the streets (ISW, 2025e).

In this war, Iran conducted a more passive form of defense in the field of psychological and information warfare (along with less successful cyberattacks)—it temporarily cut off/restricted internet access for its own population (so that they would not succumb to rumors and disinformation), while state media disseminated false information in order to raise the (combat) morale of the public and members of the armed forces. One such piece of information concerned the alleged shooting down of Israeli combat aircraft and the capture of their pilots. It is certain that (pro-)Iranian hacker groups also carried out numerous cyberattacks against various targets in Israel (ranging from hospitals, the electricity distribution network, and the files of oil companies, to government services, defense institutions, and security cameras). Nevertheless, although the number/scale of such attacks and activities exceeded the Israeli ones, Iranian hacker groups did not achieve any significant successes (Sharma, 2025). Iran, moreover, possesses excellent capabilities and operatives for cyberattacks and information warfare (its victims range from the countries of the Persian Gulf and their civilian institutions to Albania) (Mako, 2025); however, the impression is that during the twelve-day war, in this field as well, it encountered a more capable and skillful opponent.

Characteristics of the Israeli-Iranian War That Refute Its Belonging to the Sixth Generation

The first characteristic manifested in the twelve-day war, but not mentioned/predicted in General Slipchenko's concept of sixth-generation warfare, is Israel's conduct of sabotage operations at the very beginning of the conflict. To recall, these are actions carried out in the enemy's rear for the purpose of inflicting human/material losses and creating insecurity, confusion, and disorganization. In order to facilitate and secure the penetration of Israeli combat aircraft into Iranian airspace, to achieve air superiority, and to reduce Iran's capacity for retaliatory (missile) strikes, members of the Israeli intelligence network in Iran and commandos of the Mossad intelligence service acted with miniature attack unmanned aerial vehicles (which had been smuggled—and even assembled—inside Iran well before the outbreak of the conflict, at concealed locations) and high-precision guided projectiles against Iranian air defense systems (surface-to-air missiles), as well as firing positions/launchers for ballistic missiles. Israeli sources state that the intelligence network had gathered information for years (which enabled, among other things, the liquidation of a large number of senior officers of the Iranian armed forces, as well as eleven Iranian nuclear physicists), and that Mossad commandos also operated in the Iranian capital itself (CNN, 2025a). The consequences of these more than successful actions were obvious: a significantly smaller number of Iranian ballistic missiles launched toward Israel compared to the original plan (around 500–550, as opposed to the projected 1,000) (ISW, 2025a); a delayed Iranian missile counterstrike on the first day of the war (only six hours after the first Israeli strike) (ISW, 2025f); and the achievement of air superiority over western Iran, including the capital Tehran, as a result of the destruction of around eighty different air defense batteries (Fabian, 2025).

It seems that the Israeli Air Force would not have been able, during this short war, to attack more than 900 targets in Iran (Goller & Landay, 2025) had it not been for the previously described "contact" action "at close range" by members of the Israeli intelligence service against the positions of Iranian air defense. However, Slipchenko's book does not mention at all the use of sabotage groups/detachments in sixth-generation sixth-generation warfare. He was entirely focused on the description and analysis of the use of long-range, high-precision missile weaponry, as well as systems for surveillance and missile guidance, which, as he argued, exclude the human being from the process of "reconnaissance – target designation – strike" (Slipchenko, 2002: 64). Moreover, Slipchenko predicted that sixth-generation wars could begin and end solely through the execution of a prolonged aerospace-maritime strike operation, together with an electronic warfare operation, that is, without the action of manned aviation over enemy territory (Slipchenko, 2002: 138). Evidently, this criterion for classifying a war as sixth-generation warfare was not fulfilled and, therefore, in this respect, the twelve-day war between Israel and Iran cannot be categorized as such. The war the world witnessed in June 2025 was not a conflict "without people," an impersonal clash, or a mere contest of the material-technical means of the two sides—at least not as far

as Israel was concerned. Many of its intelligence officers, agents, and commandos, as well as pilots, assumed a considerable risk of injury, capture, or death, and in that sense this conflict did not move conceptually or operationally very far beyond the fourth generation of warfare.

The next characteristic of this conflict that does not fit within Slipchenko's conceptual framework of sixth-generation warfare concerns the outcome of the conflict, as well as the strain and capacities/means employed by the opposing sides. In Vladimir Slipchenko's vision, sixth-generation wars can, solely through the crippling of a country's economic potential, produce such a state of public sentiment that the fall of the political regime becomes almost inevitable (leading to the submission of both the population and a "new" government to the demands of the stronger aggressor). At one point, Slipchenko states that in sixth-generation warfare, "victory can be achieved only through the destruction of the enemy's economy. Its armed forces, deprived of an economic base, will collapse on their own, and the political system will most likely be overthrown by the people of that state themselves" (Slipchenko, 2002: 129). Earlier, he also argued that at the very beginning of a sixth-generation warfare, due to sudden massive high-precision strikes against command-and-control structures, the enemy's command system could be completely disrupted. If those forces are organized according to outdated concepts, they would, even without direct engagement, become demoralized and lose the ability to conduct any form of armed struggle (Slipchenko, 2002: 124). The question is whether these predictions were confirmed in the Israeli-Iranian war.

There is no doubt that during the twelve-day war, the ruling regime in Iran was subjected to a serious test. Israel's evidently deep intelligence-sabotage penetration, the elimination of numerous top-ranking military officers and prominent nuclear physicists, and, finally, the unimpeded operation of Israeli aviation over Tehran itself, accompanied by expected panic and confusion, seriously shook the entire political system and security apparatus of Iran. Opposition Iranian media, mostly based in the West, reported that former Iranian President Hassan Rouhani allegedly held a meeting with senior clerics in the city of Qom, with the intention of persuading Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to yield to key Israeli and American demands. Additionally, according to some unconfirmed sources, a group of Iranian leaders had developed a plan for governing the country in the event of the death or informal removal of the Supreme Leader, which included the formation of a leadership committee and negotiations for a ceasefire with the United States and Israel. In that context, Rouhani was also mentioned (ISW, 2025c). However, despite turbulence within the political-military leadership and signs of panic among its members, the Iranian regime essentially remained intact, albeit compromised by very visible signs of weakness. There was no recorded case of any high-ranking individuals or groups initiating actions resembling a violent overthrow of the government; no attempts at fleeing the country or seeking asylum among senior officials were registered; nor was there any indication that any military or police unit refused obedience. After the initial shock, Iran began responding with missile strikes.

As already noted, the Israeli Air Force struck more than 900 targets during the war. However, this was not sufficient to generate significant instability within Iran. There are interpretations suggesting that the objective of Israeli military actions was not so much the overthrow or substantial destabilization of the Iranian regime, but rather the demonstration of a credible threat to its stability. According to these views, policymakers in Tel Aviv calculated the extent to which Tehran would be inclined toward a ceasefire, and the scope and intensity of air strikes against the centers of coercive power (security forces) depended on Iran's willingness to move toward peace (ISW, 2025a).

A (rhetorical) question arises as to how long and how intense attacks from the air would have to be in order to create the conditions or assumptions for a change of the ruling regime in a country such as Iran (of similar size, population, and defensive capability). This question problematizes another important element of Slipchenko's concept of sixth-generation warfare, namely the capacities and quantities of the most advanced weaponry that states capable of sixth-generation warfare would have to possess. Slipchenko predicted that in the period 2015–2020, countries capable of waging a sixth-generation war, in the echelon tasked with neutralizing the air defense of the defending state alone (emphasis added by N. V.), at the beginning of an aerospace-naval strike operation, could possess several tens of thousands of high-precision unmanned systems, while support would be provided by dozens of electronic warfare aircraft, and electronic warfare unmanned aerial vehicles could also be widely employed, likewise in the tens of thousands (Slipchenko, 2002: 169). It should be clarified here that Slipchenko had in mind long-range unmanned aerial vehicles/systems of greater destructive power, not the so-called kamikaze drones with a range of several dozen kilometers and a tactical purpose, which today are produced in the millions in Ukraine and Russia. In addition, he forecast that strategic offensive operations in sixth-generation warfare in the period 2010–2015 would last up to 30 days, and even 90 days after 2030–2040. He also argued that after 2010 the quantity of high-precision cruise missiles could become so great that every economic facility intended for destruction could be targeted with them (Slipchenko, 2002: 179).

Slipchenko's faith in the power of modern technologies and production processes in the defense industry was so strong that, at times, in his book, his intriguing observations grew into speculation characterized by, for now, unfounded optimism, both regarding technological progress and regarding the quantities of sophisticated weaponry in operational use. The twelve-day war significantly exhausted both sides and their capacities. It showed that possessing the most advanced weapons in large quantities, the ability to conduct prolonged operations with such weaponry, and the financial sustainability of such programs/actions are goals that are difficult, almost impossible, to reconcile.

Slipchenko's enthusiasm strongly resembles the zeal shown, in the interwar period, by the Italian theorist of air power Giulio Douhet, who speculated that combat operations would be carried out mainly or exclusively by the air force, bringing wars to a victorious conclusion; or, as he liked to emphasize, to be defeated in the air means to be definitively defeated, that is, left at the mercy of the enemy without any chance

of defense and compelled to accept whatever terms the enemy dictates (Douhet, 1983: 23). When Douhet's writings on air warfare and air superiority are compared with Slipchenko's book on sixth-generation warfare, important similarities can be observed: a conception oriented toward future, rather than present or past wars; faith in the colossal capacities/possibilities of existing/future military technology (in Douhet's case, piloted aviation; in Slipchenko's, unmanned systems, as well as various types of guided munitions); a pronounced prophetic tone in both works; and, at times, an overextended projection of future forces/systems and operations.

A feature of this war that also negates its belonging to the sixth generation concerns the weaponry used and its mode of employment (tactics). Iranian attacks on Israel with ballistic missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles, when viewed superficially, appear to follow the pattern of sixth-generation warfare. However, according to some sources, the Iranian missiles were not high-precision weapons (the systems most likely used were Fattah 1, Haj Qasem, Kheibar Shekan 1 and 2, and Emad—all medium-range missiles, from 1,300 kilometers onward, with payloads ranging from 500 to 1,000 kg) (Hinz, 2025). The circular error probable (CEP), according to available evidence, for Iranian ballistic missiles ranges from 20 to 500 meters, which suggests that these missiles are rather inaccurate in comparison with precision-guided munitions, that they are generally inefficient, and that they are not suitable for smaller-scale military targets (i.e., pinpoint military targets) (ISW, 2025a; Goller, Landay, 2025). Iranian tactics were based on launching as many projectiles/unmanned aerial vehicles as possible with the aim of saturating/overloading Israeli air defense and in the expectation that a certain number of them would "survive" and cause at least some damage on Israeli territory. However, according to some assessments, Iranian missile attacks did not have sufficient "density" to cause major destruction (Goller, Landay, 2025). More recent research nevertheless shows that Iranian tactics, as the war progressed, made increasing sense, that is, that Israeli air defense was becoming increasingly porous. According to research by CNN, a significant share in Israeli missile defense operations was also played by THAAD systems (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) for intercepting medium-range missiles and aircraft, which U.S. forces in Israel employed together with the Israeli armed forces. However, despite the joint effort and the significant expenditure of costly interceptor missiles (according to one source, U.S. forces used as much as 25% of their total arsenal), the percentage of Iranian missiles striking Israel increased (8% in the first week, 16% during the second week, and as much as 25% on the last day of the war) (CNN, 2025b). Such Iranian tactics, however, even in the best-case or broadest interpretation, fit only superficially into Slipchenko's concept (essentially, they do not).

On the other hand, although the guided munitions launched by Israeli combat aircraft were certainly superior to Iranian missiles in terms of precision and sophistication, they were used by the Israeli Air Force mostly over Iranian territory, so the global public witnessed the application of the principles of classical Western—or, more precisely, American—tactics and operational art of older origin: above all, the achievement of operational air superiority, so that ground targets could later be struck without

obstruction. The early neutralization of Iranian radar systems and air defense assets enabled the Israeli Air Force to conduct long-range operations with minimal resistance (Saab, White, 2025). However, the fact that Israeli aircraft still had to enter Iranian airspace in order to strike ground targets points more toward the armed combat of fourth-generation, rather than sixth-generation, warfare.

According to John A. Warden, theater-wide air superiority implies that one's own aircraft can operate anywhere within the entire theater of war, whereas local air superiority provides basic freedom of air movement over a limited area for a certain period of time (Warden, 1998: 10–11). The Israeli Air Force achieved an intermediate result—it completely dominated the western part of Iran; however, its central and eastern parts were much less exposed, or not exposed at all, to strikes from the air. This fact runs counter to Slipchenko's idea that, in a sixth-generation war, strikes are carried out simultaneously from air/space against the entire territory of a state, that is, against all important targets located on it. The enormous size of Iran (around 1,648,000 km²) in itself represented an advantage for the defender and an obstacle for the attacker (due to the considerable distance between the targets and the airfields from which Israeli aircraft were based, despite aerial refueling). Since Slipchenko's concept was grounded in the idea of the "subjugation of geospace" by modern ("smart") military technology, it became clear that, neither paradigmatically nor operationally, had the twelve-day war fully "matured" to be assessed as an example of sixth-generation warfare.

Conclusion

By comparing what has been written/normatively defined (theory) with what was manifested in the (non)combat actions (practice), this paper sought to determine whether the twelve-day war between Israel and Iran can be classified as a sixth-generation war according to the concept developed by the Russian general Vladimir Slipchenko. The characteristics that qualified it for such categorization are as follows: (a) the otherwise numerous ground forces were not engaged, or their role was secondary, that is, there was no combat contact between their elements due to the political and strategic geography of the region; (b) the main bearers of combat operations were the air force and air defense (on the Israeli side), and missile units and air defense (on the Iranian side); (c) electronic warfare, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets played a significant role; (d) guided munitions were used on a massive scale (mainly by the Israeli side); (e) the criterion for target selection was dominated by targets of strategic and politico-economic significance; and (f) psychological and information operations, as well as cyberattacks, assumed an important place in the war.

On the other hand, in certain respects the twelve-day war remained within the framework of fourth-generation warfare, that is, it was "contact-based" by its nature. General Slipchenko did not foresee sabotage actions at all in his concept, nor "classical"/field (counter)intelligence operations, and yet such content was abundant in this war. The success of Israeli sabotage actions at the very beginning of the conflict

largely determined the course of this short war. Israeli aircraft also operated over Iranian territory, which is a feature that, according to Slipchenko's vision, belongs more to wars of the past than to wars of the future. Israel's effort to gain air superiority and subsequently conduct unimpeded combat operations from the air against Iranian targets does not differ in essence from some earlier examples from both recent and more distant history. All of this supports the view that, to a significant extent, this war belongs more to the fourth than to the sixth-generation warfare. Iranian ballistic missile strikes against Israel resemble Iraqi attempts in 1991 to do the same—the difference lies in quality (Iranian missiles have a significantly or far lower circular error probable) and quantity (the Iranian arsenal is more numerous). Israel employed an entire spectrum of guided munitions both in offensive actions against Iran and in defending against Iranian missile and drone attacks, but after only twelve days it had significantly depleted them. This is a fact that unquestionably problematizes Slipchenko's predictions about the duration of sixth-generation warfare lasting 30, 60, or even 90 days.

Taken as a whole, the twelve-day war between Israel and Iran represented a "mixture" of fourth- and sixth-generation warfare, even though, at first glance, it may create the impression that it was almost entirely a sixth-generation war.

For Serbian military thought, as well as for bodies responsible for strategic and operational planning within the defense system of the Republic of Serbia, this war should, without any reservation, become a subject of detailed research, but also a source of inspiration for thinking about and projecting possible/probable politico-strategic scenarios. Ballistic missiles launched from Iran toward Israel, depending on the target, covered the distance (at minimum) in 10–12 minutes (De Vega, Gutierrez, 2025). Military technology will continue to advance and spread through military-technical cooperation, and therefore it is not at all impossible that, in the coming decade or the one after, more states in the Middle East or North Africa may acquire even faster surface-to-surface missiles, which would likewise need only about ten minutes of flight time to reach our country. Such missiles of (pseudo)strategic purpose could serve as a means of coercion (extracting political concessions in exchange for refraining from, for example, the missile terrorizing of cities). The entire network of security challenges and threats would become considerably more complex, and this scenario should already begin to be considered now.

The successful Israeli operation aimed at eliminating the leadership of the Iranian armed forces and Iran's scientific elite demonstrates how the lack of a security culture, negligent performance of entrusted duties, political divisions within society, and accumulated individual discontent can, in combination, inflict serious damage on a state. That lesson, too, should be taken into account and conclusions should be drawn from it. It was for that purpose that this paper was written—to better and more thoroughly understand the war we recently witnessed, and to learn from the mistakes, but also the successes, of others.

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Summary

The Twelve-Day War between Israel and Iran (13–24 June 2025) attracted attention for several reasons. One of the most significant concerns the fact that during this war there were no combat engagements between the ground forces of the two countries, although this branch of the armed forces in both Israel and Iran is numerous (and, in terms of personnel, clearly dominant in relation to the other branches) and well equipped with a wide range of combat and non-combat equipment. Given that the distance between the two opposing states is around one thousand kilometers, the principal actors in combat operations were the Israeli Air Force and air defense, and the Iranian missile units, as well as air defense. At first glance, this war appeared to fit entirely into the concept of the Russian General Vladimir Slipchenko on the sixth, or non-contact, generation of wars. According to his understanding, throughout the history of humankind wars were characterized by a certain symmetry: the armed forces of one country or coalition fought against the armed forces of another country or coalition. These wars usually involved bloody fighting on land, numerous casualties, and the occupation of (part of) the enemy's territory. In the sixth-generation warfare, asymmetry is present: the armed forces of a technologically advanced country, using only sophisticated weaponry and equipment and without fighting on land, can wage a victorious war through strikes from the aerospace domain against the enemy's vital economic and other facilities. These and other ideas of Vladimir Slipchenko and his colleague Admiral Kapitanets served as the basis and guideline for the analysis of the twelve-day Israeli-Iranian war.

The analysis of this war has shown that, although at first glance it strongly resembles the pattern of non-contact war as formulated by General Slipchenko, it does not belong entirely to the sixth generation, but rather represents a mixture—both conceptually and operationally—of fourth- and sixth-generation warfare. In the classification of General Slipchenko and Admiral Kapitanets, the model of fourth-generation war would be represented by the Second World War and later conventional conflicts (such as, for example, the Iran-Iraq War of 1980–1988). The fifth generation is represented by nuclear war. Through the examination of different contents of combat operations and the manifested actions of the two sides, the final conclusion was reached that the Twelve-Day War contains both advanced elements of the sixth generation and certain features or properties of fourth-generation war. It can be observed that especially in the actions of the Israeli armed forces and elements of the U.S. armed forces, the characteristics of sixth-generation warfare as described by General Slipchenko can be recognized. On the other hand, it was precisely the Israeli side in this war that also resorted to classical sabotage activities and field (counter)intelligence operations (recruitment of local agents, smuggling and hiding of small unmanned aerial vehicles, and other activities), which suggest that this is a form of warfare belonging to the past and the present. The Iranian side had no agents of its own in Israel and carried out strikes with ballistic missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles. The ballistic missiles did not demonstrate particular precision, while the drones, because of their lower speed and the great distance they had to cover, were easily detected and intercepted. In that technological sense, Iranian actions also cannot be equated with the characteristics

of sixth-generation warfare. Although this conflict does not represent a pure example of sixth-generation war, in the coming years it will certainly represent a paradigm or matrix of technologically (partially) advanced conflicts and will serve as one of the conceptual and operational signposts for defense systems in countries around the world.

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