FROM MY BOOKSHELF 24.05.2022 | Marius Müller-Hennig

Will traditional wars become rarer?

While the war in Ukraine brutally illustrates the costs of conventional warfare, non-military means are gaining a strategic role in conflicts

When Mark Galeotti called his new book '*The Weaponisation of Everything' and* subtitled it 'A Field Guide to the New Way of War', we immediately understand that it's not primarily about classic armed conflict.

In the first part of his book Galeotti explains why. It is remarkable how important it has become for states to avoid direct military confrontation or escalation even when they are obviously belligerents. Authoritarian states, too, get nervous in light of the financial and political costs of what he calls 'conventional state-to-state wars'.

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In view of the war in Ukraine, some will be thinking that the book, published shortly before the onslaught, has been overtaken by reality and be ready to cross it off their reading lists. They are mistaken. Galeotti does not argue that there will never be any more traditional wars – just that they will become *rarer*.

Although only future historians will be able to judge if his hypothesis was correct, it does make sense. On one hand, the attack on Ukraine most brutally illustrates the huge military, political, diplomatic, and societal costs of conventional wars for all parties. But it also clearly shows that waging a war of aggression with supposedly clear military superiority is no guarantee of coming anywhere near one's political goals.

Interdependencies and war

In the second and third parts of the book, Galeotti sets his main theme to a familiar tune: Strongly interlinked international areas will become the new battlegrounds of wars 'without warfare'. The reasoning behind this

oxymoron is well known. Its tenor is similar to that of Mark Leonard's recent book, *The Age of Unpeace. How connectivity causes conflict*, and the multi-author volume edited by Leonard, *Power Atlas: Seven Battlegrounds of a networked world, published by* the *European Council on Foreign Relations* and Stiftung Mercator.

All three publications correctly warn that we must very seriously heed how interdependencies in a networked world are being exploited beyond classic military tactics. However, it seems doubtful that examining the problem through these authors' 'war glasses' will help much. After all, non-military tools are often chosen precisely because of antipathy to waging 'real' wars.

Galeotti is also a bit sceptical of terminology. He starts by examining a variety of newer terms – from 'hybrid warfare' to 'grey zone warfare' and 'non-linear warfare' – and decides that none is useful. Why should all the ways of exercising non-military pressure and influence that he vividly outlines be subsumed under the concept of 'war' and 'weapons'? Complementing a conflict fought by armed forces with non-military means is also warfare. Where *exclusively* non-military means have the very same effect as an armed attack, using war terminology is understandable – for example, with respect to the 11 September attacks. But to speak of a war where *no* physical force is used does not help much. Galeotti writes that he 'would certainly rather be targeted by disconcerting memes than nuclear missiles'.

Pumping money into the war industry isn't always the answer

Three aspects of his book are pertinent to the current discussion about a national security strategy for Germany and beyond.

Corruption and crime are often used to exert influence on states – and Galeotti demands an intelligent security policy response. For example, very powerful tools have been developed to combat money laundered to finance terrorism, yet they have not been applied to any *other* grounds for laundering money.

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Galeotti also paints a very ambivalent picture of international law – from its misuse in libel suits brought to suppress unpopular criticism at home and abroad, to Interpol 'Red Notices' for persecuting opposition figures and flimsy justifications for behaviour that *obviously*

violates international law. All states – even extremely revisionist ones – contest and seek to exploit international law – and that merits attention. According to Galeotti, although it's easy to undervalue courts and lawyers, one should not minimize the role of these 'borelords': Their part 'in curbing the excesses of the gangster, the kleptocrat, the tyrant and the terrorist ought not to be understated'.

Galeotti quite rightly points out that constant innovations in the military make it difficult for states to allocate limited budget resources. The imperative of flexible and imaginative security policies is opposed by armed forces' departments, agencies and branches that defend and seek to grow their budgets. Especially '[l]arger countries that seek to cover every base may well find that it doesn't matter if you have the latest fighters or even lots of soft power if your infrastructure is especially vulnerable to hackers or your political elite is susceptible to unchecked bribetaking and foreign influence.'

Strategic spending

At the end of his book, Galeotti notes that Great Britain's 'Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy' intelligently sets priorities. This brings us back to Germany's national security strategy. We should go a step beyond Galeotti and not be content to develop a strategy that just *sounds* good. It won't succeed if strategic priorities are not included in the budget. Here, too, we'd be wise to take a look at Great Britain, whose 'Autumn Budget and Spending Review' makes it possible to reconcile strategy with budget planning. Malcolm Chalmers of the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) shows how to interpret such a document to benefit security policy.

Spending Reviews, or topic-based budget analyses, are not unknown in Germany. Obviously, however, they have not been used here as much. That should change, and a good opportunity to do that is approaching: On 22 June, the Cabinet will decide the 2023 federal budget, determining the theme of the next Spending Review cycle. In view of ongoing discussions about Germany's *Zeitenwende* ('turning point'), special assets and national security strategy, its next Spending Review *must* be strategic.



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