VOLATILITY, UNCERTAINTY, COMPLEXITY AND AMBIGUITITY: THE
EVOLUTION OF WARFARE THROUGH THE PROCESS OF GLOBALIZATION
by
CHARLES AVERY HEIDBREDER
B.A., University of Wyoming, 2007
M.S., University of Cincinnati, 2010

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Charles Avery Heidbreder

Has been approved for the

Political Science Department

by

Lucy McGuffey, Chair

Michael Berry

Lieutenant Colonel Aaron Roof

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Heidbreder, Charles Avery. (MA Political Science)

Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity: The Evolution of Warfare through the Process of Globalization

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Lucy McGuffey

ABSTRACT

This thesis joins a vibrant conversation in the realm of political science about the challenging nature of warfare and how globalization has completely transformed the operational environment in which war operates. It explores the literary presence of ‘generational warfare theory’ and collectively, articulates the effects that globalization has on warfare and how the state works to mitigate the risks associated with the democratization of technology in order to combat the rising nonstate threat, particularly the rise of the Islamic State in Syria. In order to analyze such a transformation on the politics of warfare, an in-depth analysis of the conflict in Syria was conducted and provides theoretical data that aids in painting a clear image of how globalization has transformed warfare into what is coined the Next Generation (NexGen) of Warfare. Lastly, the discussion will develop around the understanding of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) within the operational environment and how it applies to the development of a new theater of warfare that is no longer confined to a particular battlespace. In the end, the effects of globalization have had a dramatic effect on warfare.

The form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

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CHAPTER I
AN INTRODUCTION TO WARFARE

A cursory examination of warfare reveals that war is not a game of chess, but a vast social spectacle with infinite and ever expanding variables, some of which elude analysis (Galula 1964; Mack 1975). A routine examination of today’s world demonstrates a globe that is in an ominous state; on the verge of a new king of organized violence, a new style of warfare. France and Belgium have been under a state of siege after synchronized terrorist attacks, resulting in a massive manhunt throughout Europe. Ukraine is still reacting to the Russian occupation of the Crimea and the Eastern Frontier. Africa is rebounding from terrorist attacks in Mali, Nigeria, Cameroon, and Egypt. In Southeast Asia, the People’s Republic of China continues to build a chain-of-islands throughout the South China Sea, claiming them as its own sovereign territory, threatening the freedom of navigation along highly traveled trade routes. Lastly, in Southwest Asia, civil wars and proxy wars continue to pull apart the basic fabrics of life. The world is a melancholy place; every continent’s international peace and security is threatened as the world sits on the verge of a new kind of organized violence, on the verge of a new generation of warfare.

War is catalogued as an act of coercion that developed as a by-product of a society’s movement to modernity (Kaldor 1999). The impact of modernity on warfare is the prominent dependent variable, which has transformed, adapted, and evolved warfare over the centuries. This article attempts to provide a theoretical perspective of warfare’s evolutionary transformation, specifically how the institutionalization of globalization and the War on
Terrorism\textsuperscript{1} has resulted in the reshaping of warfare from the perspective of the state.\textsuperscript{2} Utilizing the Syrian Civil War as a case study, this evolutionary transformation of warfare can illustrate how globalization creates a dynamic hybrid warfare, which blends conventional and unconventional strategies and transforms the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of warfare,\textsuperscript{3} and the enemy within warfare. In order to address such a claim the following must first come to fruition before the discussion can turn to the conflict in Syria: 1) defining war; 2) defining globalization; and 3) how globalization has evolved warfare.

**Defining Warfare**

War is complex, “a mere chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to a given [conflict]. As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity, composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity” (Clausewitz [1832] 1993, 86). Comprised of its own nature, war is enduring and involves hostile feelings, hostile intentions

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\textsuperscript{1} War on Terrorism, also known as the War on Terror, is the name given to the military and political actions taken by the United States and her NATO allies in order to destroy international terrorism. The War on Terrorism was initiated in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Since the initiation of the War on Terror, the United States has participated in multiple military campaigns: 1) Operation Enduring Freedom; 2) Operation Iraqi Freedom, and 3) Operation Inherent Resolve. Operation Enduring Freedom (7 October 2001 – Present) comprises of several subordinate operations that encompassed multiple regions throughout Southwest Asia, Maghreb and the Horn of Africa and the Caribbean. Operation Iraqi Freedom (20 March 2003 – 18 December 2011) was the United States military operation in Iraqi to remove Saddam Hussein from power and resulted in the occupation of post-invasion of Iraq for the next decade. Lastly, Operation Inherent Resolve (15 June 2014 – Present) is the United States military operation against the Islamic State of Iraqi and Levant (ISIL, in the vernacular Daesh). Operation Inherent Resolve include the campaign in Iraq and Syria. As of March 19, 2016, the United States has conducted roughly 11,000 airstrikes against ISIL targets and has placed numerous assets into the conflict in order to counter the rise of ISIL.

\textsuperscript{2} Viewing warfare from the perspective of the state limits and brackets the argument down the specifics of how the democratization of technology plays into the development of warfare.

\textsuperscript{3} The boundaries of each level are indistinguishable as they tend to blur together. These levels are concerned with planning, which involves the situation; estimating friendly and enemy capabilities and limitations; and devising a plausible course of action. The strategic level relates directly to the outcome of war, usually, wars and conflicts are won (or lost) at this level rather than at the operational or tactical level. The operational level is concerned with the employment of military forces in a particular operating environment in order to obtain an advantage over an enemy. The tactical level is the combat power and deals with the engagements and are extremely sensitive to the changing environment of the battlefield. This article attempts to illustrate how all three levels of warfare are transformed based on the effects of globalization.
and “the passionate hatred for each other” (Clausewitz [1832] 1993, 84). Aside from its inherent trinity and nature, warfare can be broken down into four distinct generational categories.\(^4\)

Generational warfare characterizes the lines between war, politics, combatants and civilians. Generational warfare, specifically fourth-generation, tries to illustrate the significance of the nation-state’s loss of their monopoly on combat forces, returning the control of conflict to pre-modern times or, specifically, to nonstate actors. According to Lind and associates (2004; 1989), the major participant is no longer the state but, instead, non-state actors.

Generational warfare attempts to illustrate warfare’s dynamic transformation. However, many academic researchers and military advisors, do not believe in the generational war theory, as each generational war attributes always played a role in war throughout history. The notion of generational warfare appears as a vogue “out of the box thinking and it entertained every popular conjecture about future warfare” (Echeverria 2005, v).\(^5\)

\(^4\) Lind and associates (1986) first used the term generational war in order to describe warfare’s return to a decentralized form of conflict. Generational warfare, specifically fourth generation, tries to illustrate the significance of the nation state’s loss of their monopoly on combat forces, returning the control of conflict to pre-modern times. Therefore, according to Lind and associates (1989) the major participants are no longer the state but, instead, non-state actors. Fourth-generation warfare is defined as conflict that involve the following: 1) terrorism; 2) psychological warfare; 3) low-intensity conflict; and insurgency and guerilla warfare. First Generation Warfare is dominated by massive manpower, in which tactics of line and column developed in the aftermath of the Peace of Westphalia. The First Generation War consists of troops that would fight in close order and advance slowly, this tactic began to change as the bow-and-arrow mutated into automatic weaponry. Second Generation Warfare developed during World War I as a solution to massive manpower. This type of warfare is illustrated in the early stages of WWI, troops were dependent on artillery and firepower in order to maneuver troops into battlefield positions. Third Generation Warfare is characterized by maneuver and “war ceased to be a shoving contest, where forces attempt to hold or advance a line “(Lind 2004, 2). War becomes nonlinear and focuses on the tactics of infiltration and destruction of the enemy. Fourth Generation Warfare is characterized by speed and initiative. The state is decentralized as the monopoly of violence is eroded away (Hammes 2004; Echevarria 2005; Kaldor 1999; Lind 2004).

\(^5\) Echeverria continues to argue that “there is no reason to reinvent the wheel with regards to insurgencies—super or otherwise—and their various kin. A great deal of very good work has already been done, especially lately, on that topic, to include the effects that globalization and information technologies have had, are having, and are
Echevarria (2005), however, argues that “a great deal of very good work has already been done” on the effects of insurgency movements but does not, in fact, analyze globalization’s effect on warfare as a whole. However, Lind and associates (2004; 1989) attempts to illustrate globalization’s transformation on warfare through an understanding of generational warfare. Lind and associates (2004; 1989) fail to illustrate the full scope of warfare’s transformation. Therefore, this paper argues that globalization has created a Next Generation (NexGen) of War and has the attributes of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), which has adaptive properties over warfare.

**The Beginning: Conventional Warfare**

Conventional warfare was first truly analyzed by Carl Von Clausewitz ([1832] 1993) at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Clausewitz systematically and philosophically examined warfare in all its aspects and defined war as “an act of force to compel an enemy to do our will” ([1832] 1993, 83). The general purpose of war is to weaken or destroy the opponent’s military through conventional battlefield tactics.

Conventional tactics “encompasses all war short of warfare using nuclear weapons” between two (or more) nation-states (Piddock 2009, 3). In addition, the forces that engage in conventional conflict are well-defined and fight using weapons that target the opponent’s military. The purpose of conventional war, according to Clausewitz ([1832] 1993) is to subject the enemy to the one’s will.

Conversely, Clausewitz’s “concept of war needs substantial modification, though not a complete overhaul,” (Shephard 1990, 98), the warfare in which Clausewitz discusses, the
“organized violence between states, in which the outcome was through the clash of armed forces on the battlefield,” is disappearing (Kilcullen 2009, 2). Therefore, Kilcullen (2009; 2013), Shephard (1990), and Yarborough (1962) witness that globalization and conventional warfare create the opportunity for means of unconventional warfare. In the late 1950s, the Rand Corporation, in conjunction with the United States Department of Defense, substantially revised Clausewitz’s theorization of warfare and redefined warfare as unconventional (Galula 1964; Hoffman & Taw 1991; Mack 1975; & U.S. Army 1992).

The Reinterpretation: Low-Intensity Conflict and Unconventional Warfare

Unconventional warfare was born as an answer to the initial problem of “explaining how military power could be defeated in armed confrontation with the militarily weak” (Mack 1975, 194). The United States Army (1992), in conjunction with Hoffman and Taw (1991), re-visualized Clausewitz’s theory of warfare and adopted it to the proxy wars of the Cold War. Mack (1975), Hoffman and Taw (1991); and the United States Army (1992) labeled warfare as unconventional, also known as low-intensity conflict (LIC). Low-intensity conflict, by definition, “is a politico-military confrontation between contending states or groups. It is below general [conventional warfare] and above routine peaceful competition” (US Army 1992: 1-1).

Unconventional warfare is itself a “part of the broader area known as special warfare—encompassing guerrilla warfare, escape and evasion, and conduct of subversion against hostile states during wartime” (Yarborough 1962, 1). Additional research illustrates that unconventional warfare is not a formulation of war itself but a strategic, operational, and tactical initiative developed as the offspring of conventional warfare, which has been

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6 Insurgency and terrorism are also considered a part of the unconventional warfare realm and will be discussed as an important aspects in the NexGen War.
visualized and institutionalized in order to allow for inferior/weaker militaries to have a more
vital role in localized population.

Throughout conventional and unconventional warfare, the state continues to have a
monopoly on organized violence and plays a central role. However, the designation of LIC
illustrates a fundamental shift in warfare, in which the state plays a less dynamic role in
organized violence and, in turn, changes the generational understanding of war.

Mary Kaldor (1999; 2006) and David Kilcullen (2009; 2013) examine this
generational shift and demonstrate how warfare has changed. Kaldor and Kilcullen see
warfare from the lens of the fourth-generation of war. Kaldor and Kilcullen witnessed the
collapsed state’s monopoly of warfare and rise of identity politics and insurgency movements
in the future of warfare.

The Generational Warfare: New War and the Accidental Guerrilla

Conventional and unconventional warfare study the strategic and tactical importance
of the state in war, further analyzing the importance of military power, attrition rates, land
occupation, and subduction of the enemy. These styles of warfare are enemy- and state-
centric; however, Kaldor and Kilcullen analyzed warfare from a different prism in which the
enemy- and state-centric philosophy was deemed inadequate for the study of warfare.
Therefore, Kaldor and Kilcullen analyzed warfare from a perspective of population-centrism
and decentralization of the state.

Kaldor (1999) and Kilcullen (2009) both study warfare with regards to ethnic strife.
Kaldor (1999) focuses particularly on warfare in the context of failed states; whereas
Kilcullen (2009) focuses on warfare in the context of feral cities, each representing a
breakdown in government functionality or ability to govern. Kaldor (1999; 2006) studied the
ethnic strife and disintegration of Yugoslavia where she discovered a transformation of warfare in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Kilcullen (2009; 2013) studied insurgency and guerrilla warfare in Indonesia, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

Kaldor defines the transformation of warfare as arising “in the context of the erosion of the autonomy of the state,” resulting in the de-monopolization of organized violence (1999:1). According to Kaldor, organized violence was controlled by the state; however, through the process of globalization more prominent non-state actors, such as insurgents, guerrillas or terrorists, played a more vital role (Kaldor, 1999; Kilcullen, 2009). Kaldor, additionally, classified her understanding of warfare as ‘New Wars,’ which she defined as follows:

The ‘new wars,’ in contrast to old [conventional] wars, take place in the context of failed states. They are wars fought by networks of state and non-state actors, where battles are rare and violence is directed mainly against civilians, and which are characterized by a new type of political economy involving a combination of extremist politics and criminality (2006, 1).

Kilcullen (2009) classified his understanding of warfare as “the Accidental Guerrilla,”7 in which he explains that warfare is a complex hybrid of contracting trends that blend the conventional and unconventional warfare with globalization. This hybrid warfare

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7 Kilcullen draws on a public health analogy by defining (and cataloging) Al-Qaida as a dangerous virus that grows into a contagious operational environment. The process of the Guerrilla Syndrome begins with a terrorist organization (in this case Al-Qaida (AQ)) establishing a base of operation in an isolated rural area. This area of operations is usually outside the control of governments organizations. This particular part of the process is labeled as infection. From here, AQ begins to move into neighboring areas and imposes control. This second part of the syndrome is called contagion. From here the government begins to violently react to the spreading of AQ and launches military offensive against the organization. Sometimes the intervention may also come from other non-state actors or the state itself. This part of the syndrome is labeled as intervention. From here, AQ solidifies its base of operations and utilized villagers (elders and imams) and family members to resist government intervention. This last phase is called rejection.
involved “a shifting combination of armed and unarmed, military and nonmilitary, state and nonstate, internal and international, violence and nonviolent means would be the most common form of twenty-first-century conflict” (Kilcullen 2009, 4).

“The Accidental Guerrilla” and “New War” theories seek to understand warfare from a different perspective, which still utilizes conventional and unconventional warfare as strategic and tactical influences. Utilizing globalization, Kilcullen and Kaldor illustrate, additionally, that rational adversaries “choose to compete with the West in ideological or economic terms, since confronting [the West] directly on the field of battle would be suicidal, as any potential enemy would know” (Kilcullen, 2009: 2). However, this article attempts to provide an understanding that the democratization of technology allows non-state groups to field highly lethal capabilities that “were once the sole preserve of nation-state” (Kilcullen, 2013: 65). Consequently, the process of globalization on warfare has become convoluted and complex, resulting in the question, what is globalization and how has it affected past conflicts?

What is Globalization?

Globalization is not a new phenomenon, but has a long and distinct history. Globalization is the embodiment and “transformation in the spatial organization, of social relations, and transactions, generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction and power.” (Held et al 1999, 483). It accelerates and deepens change, creating “more intensive social and cultural contact between societies, fiercer economic competition, new communication media, and social structures that span national borders are all forces that have moved societies and cultures in a new direction” (Bislev 2004, 281-282).
Globalization prompted the emergence of a Western-dominated world culture and creates an interdependent world economy (Kilcullen 2009). However, the central concern of globalization is the “implications of global interconnectedness for the future of territorial based sovereignty—that is to say, for the future of the modern state” (Kaldor 1999, 5), which finds its power being eroded away.

Creating greater interdependence and complicating the external notion of sovereignty, globalization’s centralization of power and distribution of sovereignty favors some states and results in a new form of cooperation “outside the traditional space defined by sovereignty” (Cha 2000, 392), in an essence, globalization creates global players that are both states and non-state actors. This process results in a dynamic battle between nationalism, control, and conflict. As Cha (2000) further explains, under the process of globalization “the nation-state does not end; it is just less in control” and the decisions made by the state actively take place in a post-sovereign space (392). “In a sense, globalization is both a boundary-broadening process and a boundary-weakening one” (Cha 2000, 392). Therefore, understanding that globalization is a process of social change, economic integration, democratization of technology, transcontinental interconnectivity and a boarder-broadening/weakening variables that effect warfare is key.8

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8 Globalization can also be cataloged as the process of international integration that arises from the interchange (and exchange) of world views, products, and culture. The advancements in transportation, steam locomotive, jet engine, container ships and telecommunication all generate further interdependence of socio-economic and cultural activities. This article does not spend a lot of time on the socio-economic or culture aspects that globalization as they have had little effect on warfare.
CHAPTER II
REDEFINING THE RELATIONSHIP: GLOBALIZATION AND WARFARE

The intertwining of globalization and warfare is not a new phenomenon. Globalization’s transformative power on the operational and tactical level of warfare has resulted in a transformation of the way in which warfare is utilized and conducted. The gradual shift between generational warfare facilitates the claim that globalization effects and transforms war. Academic researchers have attempted to provide a theoretical understanding of globalization’s change of warfare; however, these researchers focus on specific social movements within conflict rather than conflict as a whole. The scale of warfare as a whole has completely transformed because of the spatial process of globalization and has redefined the battlespace. Globalization has affected the genres of conflict and can be easily illustrated and explained, which provides a clear understanding of their dynamic relationship.

Generational Warfare: Are the Generations of Warfare Relevant?

“Warfare has evolved through four generations: 1) the use of massed manpower, 2) firepower, 3) maneuver, and now 4) an evolved form of [non-state] insurgency” (Echeverria 2005, v). These transformations are the by-product of globalization. Hartman (2002) argues that this transformation happens specifically because of the tools of information and technology that globalization provides as an aid to change. The benefits of globalization “make it easier to use the tools intended to bring the world closer together to commit” acts of war (Hartman 2002, 43). Therefore, the process of globalization has created a gap between the developed and underdeveloped world, which “fuels the rage of those who intended to cause harm” (Hartman 2002, 43).
The effects of globalization has allowed warfare to become more transformed and blended, a hybrid of all four generations of warfare. Conversely, Echevarria (2005) argues that generational warfare theory is obsolete as the four generations of war have been present throughout history. In addition, Echevarria (2005) argues that research has been done on globalization’s effects on insurgency; however, such a claim ignores the fact that globalization does not only change the non-state actors ability to conduct war but also has a drastic and dramatic effect on the strategic, operational, and tactical significance of warfare in a complex operating environment. Shephard (1990) argues that the “concept of war needs substantial modification, though not a complete overhaul,” because the process of globalization has transformed the world in which warfare has operated (98). Therefore, the process of globalization has transformed warfare and has created a new Next Generation War. In order to understanding this transformation, a clear understanding of how globalization has fostered a generational shift should be clarified.

Theater of War and Operational Environment

The increase of interconnectivity has transformed the theater of war and operational environment in which war is waged. The theater of war is a military term that means “that area of air, land, and water that is, or may become, directly involved in the conduct of a conflict” (Kilcullen 2013 171). Under the terms of conventional war, the theater of war is “the total war area which has protected boundaries and a certain degree of independence. This protection may consist in fortification or great natural barriers” (Clausewitz [1832] 1993, 332). Globalization, however, breaks down these fortification and natural barriers allowing for a more complex strategic environment. According to the Operational Environment to 2028: The Strategic Environment for Unified Land Operations (TRADOC
2028), the strategic and operational environment will always remain complex and ambiguous as “conflict is a constant condition” (2012, 18).

Globalization changes the theatre of war, additionally, this transformation increases the range of threats that are posed against a state in a strategic environment, which include: criminal organizations, terrorists, states and non-state actors, insurgents, transnational groups, proxies, technologically-empowered and paramilitaries (TRADOC 2028 2012). The actors increase in number and capability and may operate as a conventional, unconventional, or hybrid threat that will challenge any conventional military force. In fact, the United States Army (1992) realize that the trends of “globalization, urbanization and failed or failing states can affect land operations” (1-1) worldwide. This transformation in the theater of war has allowed for the movement away from a state-centric generation of warfare and toward a more non-state-centric stylized war. Globalization, however, has not solely changed the operational environment but has allowed for a democratization of technology.

Democratization of Technology

The democratization of lethality, digital connectivity, and technology affects all aspects of human life and begins “breaking down classical distinctions between governments and individuals between zones of war and zones of peace, between civilians and combatants” (Kilcullen 2013, 176). The spatial process of technological accessibility allows for a dynamic shift in the conduct of warfare. For more than forty-years, “American defense planning has been oriented primarily toward fighting a conventional war” where states maneuver against states (Hoffman & Taw 1991, 34). However, the democratization of technology has provided non-state actors the ability to attain war-fighting equipment and wage conflicts of subversion against the state and their conventional military forces.
Thomas Friedman (2005) argues that the era of globalization has been characterized by the democratization of technology, finance, and information, allowing for the rapid expansion of accessibility and changing the way society operates on the global stage. Hoffman and Taw (1991) and Kaldor (1999) determined that this societal transformation is due to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Kilcullen (2009; 2013) argues that the increase of hostilities and societal transformation is due to the fact that economic liberalization has dominated society following the fall of the Soviet Union, resulting in the development of insurgency, guerrilla warfare and terrorism. All of these strategic and tactical implementations are the result of a social movement against the established globalist systems.

The process of globalization has dynamically affected conventional and unconventional warfighting functions, providing the foundation for the development of non-state actors on a transnational scale. As Kilcullen (2013) mentions, the democratization of technology allows for the non-state armed group to have the ability to “field highly lethal capabilities that were once the sole preserve of the nation-state” (64). This further results in the breakdown of the state’s monopoly of organized violence and allows for increased participation of non-state actors in warfare.

**The Accidental Guerrilla and New War**

The fourth generation of war sees the rise of the non-state actor, a decrease in the functionality of the state, and the planting of insurgencies within society. Lind and colleagues (2004; 1989) set the basic foundation for the analysis and discussion of fourth generation war; however, Mary Kaldor (1999; 2006) and David Kilcullen (2009; 2013) are the most influential academia with regards to fourth generational warfare and globalization.
In her work, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, Kaldor paves the way for future research to be conducted with regards to warfare and globalization. Meanwhile, Kilcullen supplements Kaldor with his work, *The Accidental Guerrilla* and *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerilla*, in which he discovered that globalization transformed the theater of war, thereby, transforming the accessibility of warfare to both state and non-state actors. Both researchers, unknowingly, analyze warfare from a fourth generational war perspective.

Kilcullen (2009) and Kaldor (1999) both saw the increase of identity politics as the centralized reasoning behind the fundamental transformation in warfare. Additionally, Kilcullen (2009) saw that globalization afforded its opponents unprecedented access to geographically distant groups “who previously could not coordinate their actions” (10). This accessibility and interconnectivity allows for wars to be “fought by networks of states and non-state actors” (Kaldor 1999, 1).

The difference between Kaldor and Kilcullen, however, lay in the minute details of their respective theories. Kaldor (1999), along with Shafer (2001) and Brzoska (2004) sees that the new wars create a lack of legitimacy for the state and gives an “increased scarcity of political resources” resulting in the breakdown of the state’s warfighting functionality (Shafer 2001, 411). Additionally, Kaldor (1999) sees the fundamental change of warfare happening within the context of failed states and the development of non-state actor’s political economies.

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9 David Kilcullen also argues that aside from the theater of war, globalization effects the socio-economic and cultural aspects of society. These effects breed disenfranchisement within a particular groups and breeds insurgency. This article understands that globalization has a socio-economic and cultural effects on the causation of warfare and that the political economy of non-state groups is of vital importance to the continuation of warfare. However, this article only touches lightly upon these themes as the main focus is on the state’s ability to conduct warfare against a globalized and uncontained threats.
Kilcullen (2013) witnessed the transformation of warfare not within failed states, but aided by the construction of feral cities and globalization’s megatrends: population growth; urbanization; littoralization and connectedness. In both theories, the rise of identity politics and insurgency are fundamental, however, they fundamentally disagree with regards to how movements are organized. This is a fundamental difference that next generational war tries to ratify.

Next Generation War: Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity

Kaldor and Kilcullen lay the basic foundation for understanding warfare and globalization in the fourth generation of war. However, it is the opinion of this author, that Kaldor and Kilcullen should be blended and the development of a new generation of war should be designed in order to explain the current theoretical framework of warfare. Academic researchers, however, lack with regards to the explaining how the operational environment and stylization of warfare that is prominent within many of today’s current conflicts are the by-product of the process of globalization.

The civil war in Syria provides a dynamic framework of illustration on how globalization has transformed the face of warfare. Therefore, the remainder of this article will provide a basic understanding of what warfare is becoming. The importance (or lack of importance) of the state, sovereignty, identity politics, ethno-nationalistic conflict, utilization of conventional and unconventional warfare—as well as the discussion of the political economy, global interconnectivity and fundamental expansion of the theater of war, will all be discussed in order to provide a clear understanding of NexGen war.

The four generations of warfare were each categorized by particular attributes. The first generation of war was the use of massed manpower, the second generation was firepower, the
third generation was maneuver and the fourth generation of war is cataloged as insurgency. It is only appropriate for the next generation of warfare to be cataloged as VUCA. VUCA, volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, was coined by researchers at the Army War College in which they discussed the importance of strategic leadership (Jacobs 2002). While research was geared to the dynamics of an operational environment the acronym should be further utilized in order to portray the next generation of war. Utilization of VUCA claims that the operational environment is more intertwined and blended with warfare.
CHAPTER III

THE SYRIAN CIVIL WAR: THE CASE STUDY

A cursory glance of the *Global Conflict Tracker*, which is manned by the Council of Foreign Affairs, paints a lively picture of the current security situation of the world.\(^\text{10}\) From the slew of possible conflicts anyone can be utilized to provide a theoretical foundation in understanding the next generation of warfare. However, one conflict in particular provides a full sketch of globalization’s consequences and that case is the Syrian civil war. With continuous news coverage and consequentially gathered data, the Syrian Civil War plays into the hands of the NexGen war phenomenon. Accordingly, the conflict will first need to be clarified along its historical timeline, delving into the different players who are participating in the operational environment and their strategic and political objectives within the conflict. An in-depth analysis of the civil war will aid in the understanding of globalization’s transformation of warfare.

**Background: A Brief History of the Syria**

In 1946, Syria gained independence from France; however, the newly independent republic lacked political stability and experienced a series of military coups and destabilization (bbc.com 2016b; Gilsinan 2015). In 1966, Syria’s secular Ba’ath Party sacked the government and in effect took control of the country. Hafez al-Assad became Prime Minister (bbc.com 2016b; bbc.com 2016c). By November 1970, Hafez Assad, an Alawite, declared himself president (bbc.com 2016b). Under his reign, the regime survived a series of insurgency revolts led by Sunni-groups, which were allied with the Muslim Brotherhood (Ajami 2012). In 2000, Bashar al-Assad, son of Hafez Assad, succeeded his father as

\(^{10}\) The *Global Conflict Tracker* catalogues and organizes conflicts based off their significance to United States National Security interests.
President and consolidated his power. The rise of Bashar al-Assad inspired hopes for democratic reforms and relief in ethno-national discrimination, the promise of prosperity carried Syria through the next decade. Unfortunately, it was not enough to avoid conflict. Aside from the political discourse, other causations to the initiation of the Syrian civil war is categorized in two ways: demographics and socio-economics.

Figure one illustrates the complexity of Syria’s ethno-nationalistic background. Prior to the outbreak of the civil war, the Syrian population was estimated to be around twenty-one million (Economic Intelligence Unit 2016). The country’s largest group—shown in yellow—signifies ethnic Arabs who follow Sunni Islam, which is the largest sect of Islam. The Sunnis comprise a majority of the Syria’s inhabited landmass, including the capital of Damascus. To the northeast and northwest, the Kurds—who identify as either Sunni or Shia—controls territory that spreads through parts of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. Syrian Kurds have been disgruntled over ethnic discrimination (Fisher 2013). Lastly, as mentioned above, the al-Assad clan are members of the ethnic Alawite, which comprises an estimated twelve percent of the total population (Ajami 2012). The Alawite are sprawled along Syria’s littoral region and are indicated on the map in a greyish-green hue. The complexity and dynamic of ethno-nationalistic make-up of Syria exemplifies the strategic and tactical implementations within the NexGen War (Fisher 2013).

11 The promise of prosperity came from the understanding that Bashar al-Assad, an Alawite, and his wife, a Sunni, was going to bring a new dynamic to the regime. However, Bashar al-Assad continued his father policies and initiated new policies that worked to consolidate his power.
Aside from political discourse and the ethnic composition of the countryside, Syria has discontent built within Syria’s poor areas, predominantly among Sunnis in Daraa and Homs (Dagher 2009). The socio-economic inequality increased significantly after market liberalization were initiated by Hafez al-Assad in the 1980s and 1990s. The market liberalization benefited minority populations who had connections to the government, specifically the Alawites (Dagher 2009, Economic Intelligence Unit 2016). The regime struggled with a number of interrelated political and economic challenges. Chief among these was “an impending decrease in oil reserve” and interrelated political and economic

challenges and threats, which included an ongoing drought and mismanaged water-supply system that led to the dislocation and migration of thousands of people from the countryside to over-populated and under-serviced cities (Haddad 2011).

Additionally, as table one illustrates, through 2010 and the beginning of 2011, the Syrian economy showed signs of encouragement. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, Syria’s GDP growth expected to rise to 3.9 percent in 2010 and 4.2 percent in 2011. Inflation reached 6.2 percent in 2010-11, “as global commodity prices increased” (Haddad 2011). Syria positioned herself to “attract significant investments to develop and promote high-growth industries such as tourism, finance, insurance, and retail to offset reduction in oil revenues” (Haddad 2011). However, most Syrians did not partake in the macroeconomic gains that country had witness.

Haddad (2011) illustrated that the Syrian GDP per capital “at purchasing-power parity (PPP) had increased to $4,574, compared to $3,999 just four years ago, but the distribution of this growth was not reflected across the population” as Syria witness a 10 percent increase in poverty. By 2011, Syria faced a steep rise in the price of basic market commodities and a clear deterioration in the natural standard of living. The socio-economic inequalities along with Syria’s ethnic composition and political discourse are all underlying reason to the conflict, which boiled out of the 2011 Arab Spring.
Table One: Syrian Economic Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic Indicators</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nominal GDP (US $ m)</td>
<td>28,210</td>
<td>32,786</td>
<td>40,376</td>
<td>49,376</td>
<td>49,442</td>
<td>56,180</td>
<td>63,072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real GDP Growth (%)</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Price Inflation (avg. %)</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current-account bal. (US $ m)</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>-687</td>
<td>-1,269</td>
<td>-1,139</td>
<td>-972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Debt (US $ m)</td>
<td>6,508</td>
<td>6,502</td>
<td>6,732</td>
<td>6,899</td>
<td>6,992</td>
<td>7,206</td>
<td>7,389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population (millions)</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP Per head (US $ at PPP)</td>
<td>3,999</td>
<td>4,191</td>
<td>4,398</td>
<td>4,524</td>
<td>4,574</td>
<td>4,701</td>
<td>4,816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment (avg. %)</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The policies of globalization do not deprive national governments from their autonomy, but lead to the redistribution of social, political, and security roles among states, markets, and civil societies. The Syrian economy developed challenges from market liberalization and the process of globalization, which invoked passive reactions. Syrian exposure to the process of globalization did provide society access to the resources or tools to participate in the globalization process. These Syrian, according to Freidman (2007), are considered the ‘too disempowered.’ In addition, some socio-economic cultures” thrive from collaboration and Syria is not exposed to that opportunity (Siegman 2011). Therefore, the socio-economic, cultural and political problems kept Syria from globalization such as stagnation, corruption, a weak economy, and minority-rule (Rubin 2011) and created a huge disenfranchised population that was ripe for the picking.

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Understanding the Conflict: 2011 to 2016

Boiling out of the Arab Spring: 2011

The conflict in Syria began in 2011 as the country was swept up in the wake of the Arab Spring.\textsuperscript{14} Anti-government protests broke out in Syria’s southern province of Daraa, while hundreds protested for democracy in Damascus and Aleppo (bbc.com 2016a). The protesters called for the repeal of laws that continuously consolidated al-Assad’s power and outlawed oppositional political parties. Demonstrations and civil unrest spread to nearly every city in Syria, specifically those over-populated cities with disenfranchised population and socio-economically underdeveloped area. In Daraa, President Bashar al-Assad responded to protests with security forces, shooting at demonstrators and arresting others. According to the Human Rights Watch, “Syrian authorities repeatedly blamed the protesters in Daraa for initiating the violence and accused them of attacking security forces” (2011), open conflict broke out of the initial protests.

Full rebellion broke out in late 2011 as defecting Syrian Army officer formed the Free Syrian Army (FSA), aiming to bring the regime down with a united opposition force (bbc.com 2015a; bbc.com 2016a). As figure two illustrates, the conflict in Syria would become a medley of insurgencies and rebel organizations.\textsuperscript{15} By August 2011, coalitions could not unite, fractious collection of political ideology, nominal loyal, grass-roots organizers and armed militants divided along ideological and ethnic lines (bbc.com 2015a; bbc.com 2016a;

\textsuperscript{14} The Arab Spring was a revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests that began in December 2010 in Tunisia. The Tunisian Revolution spread throughout the countries of the Middle East—engulfing virtually every country in the Middle East. By February 2012, rules have been forced from power in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen with uprising in Bahrain and Syria and protests in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco and Sudan.

\textsuperscript{15} Many of the rebel groups, which have formed throughout the conflict, operate on a local level. However, a number of groups have emerged as powerful forces with affiliates across the country or formed alliances with other affiliates across Syria.
Jenkin 2015). Comprising of more than a thousand different independent units—many were organized into battalion and brigades sized elements.

Figure Two: Syrian Rebels – Fragmented and Unruly

Many of the soldier in the Free Syrian Army are Sunni conscripts “who oppose the Alawite domination and calculated that the regime would fall quickly” (Kozak 2014, 5). With approximately fifty-thousand fighters nominally under its command, the FSA relied on a nationwide guerrilla campaign that focused on weakening Assad’s forces and their infrastructure but its activity were local and uncoordinated rather than dictated by a grand national strategy.

Therefore, in order to restore order and reestablish government control, Syria forces initiated sieges of urban centers throughout the country. The conflict, however, gradually

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turned into the Syrian military fighting insurgency groups throughout city-centers—such as Homs, Damascus and Aleppo.

The siege of cities and the growing Syrian military engagements was a strategic and political objective of Syria to “preserve Assad’s rule in a post-war Syria through negotiated political solution” (Kozak 2015). However, the Syrian regime faced new challenges on the battlefield as the consolidation of military strength among Salafi-jihadists groups and Syrian-opposition groups resulted in numerous battlefield failures in Aleppo, Idlib, and Daraa (Jenkin 2015; Kozak 2015).

Battlefield failures sparked new opposition for the al-Assad regime, as Syria witnessed an influx of foreign fighters moving into the conflict zone, which fielded “the narrative that the Syrian government faced an invasion of terrorist that poses a transnational threat” (Kozak 2015). Figure two illustrates the most prominent routes into Syria for foreign fighters, as determined by the Harmony Projects: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (2007), in which the reports describes the routes taken by the fighters entering Iraq. Claims that these routes are being used against, only this time, instead of sowing sectarian violence and destabilization in Iraq, these fighters are targeting Syria.

This influx of foreign fighters forced Bashar al-Assad to shift his military strategy from a ‘command-and-conquer’ to a counter-insurgency strategy—projecting the regime’s legitimacy (bbc.com 2015a; Gilsinan 2015; Kozak 2015). Therefore, in order to protect the regime’s legitimacy, al-Assad deployed his military forces around the country in an effort to stem the insurrections.

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17 Salafi Jihadism (and Salafi-jihadists) is a transnational religious-political ideology that believe in jihadism as a way of insuring the establishment of a true Sunni caliphate.
Figure Three: Foreign Fighter Routes to Iraq

Syria’s main forces is its regular army, which comprises of an estimated 220,000 personnel and is distributed between Defense Companies and Conventional Corps. The Defense Companies “account for a full third of Syrian land forces—twelve elite brigades of armor, Special Forces and artillery” (Holliday 2013, 6). Additionally, the Defense Companies’ strength comprises of ninety-percent Alawites and many are selected on the basis of close tribal links to the Assad clan (Holliday 2013).

The units in the Conventional Corps are spread throughout Syria. The al-Assad regime utilized the appearance of enduring military and social control in Syria in order to

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19 The Defense Companies’ 4th Armored Division and Republican Guards performed as Bashar al-Assad’s indispensable elite unit since the onset of the conflict in 2011. These units were “primarily oriented to protect against internal threats” (Holliday 2014, 7). Special Force Units, who are highly specialized in airborne and air assault operations, are considered Syria’s premier elite light-infantry unit.
bolster domestic and international legitimacy in preparation to discuss political settlement. Of course, no settlement has been reached and fighting continued.

**Declaration of Civil War: 2012**

Clashes around Damascus increased dramatically throughout 2012 and resulted in prominent utilization of conventional tactics (i.e. tanks and artillery) against the increasing insurgency threat. Al-Assad’s utilization of these larger-scale artillery operations against the FSA and other groups. However, the utilization of tanks and artillery resulted in the destruction of many civilian homes due to indiscriminate shelling.

The increase in organized violence against civilians resulted, obviously, in a dwindling of the daily protests. However, the spread of armed conflict began to spread from cities to the countryside (bbc.com 2016a; bbc.com 2016b). Nevertheless, by June, the conflict escalated and the United Nations officially cataloged the fighting as a full-blown civil war.\(^{20}\) Coincidentally, by the end of June, Syria saw an increase of hostilities and initiations of combat-action from neighboring countries.

By mid-2012, Gulf States, specifically Iraq and Turkey were being pulled into the fold of the conflict. Turkey was pulled into the conflict on June 22, when a Turkish F-4 Phantom Reconnaissance jet was intercepted and show down by a Syrian MiG. According to reports, the Turkish aircraft was in international airspace when it was shot down; however, Syria claims that the aircraft had violated their sovereign airspace (bbc.com 2013a). The

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\(^{20}\) The United Nations defines civil wars as an armed conflict that meets the following criteria:

1) The war has caused more than 1,000 battle deaths
2) The war represented a challenge to the sovereignty of an internationally recognized state
3) The war occurred within the recognized boundary of the state
4) The war involved the state as one of the principal combatants
5) The rebels were able to mount an organized military opposition to the state and to inflict significant casualties on the state
event would result in an escalation of conflict between the two nation-states. By October 2012, Syrian artillery began to fall across the border of Turkey. The Turks retaliated with saturation bombings and artillery and quickly passing a vote to authorize the use of troops in Syria.

Meanwhile, Iraq, concerned with the crisis in Syria, saw that the increase of activity on the border as FSA soldiers begun controlling border checkpoints between the two countries as they tried to consolidate power and organize a united front against the Assad regime. Therefore, in 2012, at a meeting in Doha, Qatar, “the FSA devised a new five front command structure to unite rebel forces based on the strategic alignment of certain areas into five fighting fronts (O’Bagy 2013, 15). Figure four shows how these FSA in conjunction with the Supreme Military Command (SMC) designed these five area of operations. Known as the Five Front Command, a structure of command-and-control, achieved little strategic and tactical success, “under its coordination the geographical division of Syria into fronts is a precedent that still endures and is a hallmark of continued Saudi influence during its creation” (O’Bagy 2013, 15).

The Gulf States, along with the United States, continued to provide advice and aid to the SMC throughout the process of consolidation. The consolidation enhanced cooperation among rebel groups and created new training course and large fighting units, such as battalions and brigades.
Figure Four: Syrian Supreme Military Command: Area of Operations

These battalions and brigades are part of an operational force that fight in two-phases: 1) war for the airports; and 2) war for artillery and missiles. The sequenced conception of fighting “highlights the area that the rebels identify as the regime’s centers of gravity: its air power and weapons superiority. By targeting the infrastructure of these centers of gravity, rebel commanders are attempting to conduct shaping operations that will ground the Syrian Air Force and limit the regime’s weapon capabilities” (O’Bagy 2013, 23). With approximately fifty-thousand fighters nominally under its command, the SMC has relied on a nationwide guerilla campaign that “focused on weakening of Assad’s forces and their infrastructure, but its activities are local and uncoordinated rather than dictated by a national strategy” (Kozak 2014).

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Victory, therefore, could not be achieved without the projection of land forces against the established enemy (Kozak 2015). Syria’s air force and armored divisions were continuously utilized and, therefore, began to see a decrease in morale and motivation. Therefore, Syria started searching for reinforcement and foreign aid was sought out, which resulted in the call (and formation) of militias.

Militias play an increasingly dominant role in the conflict, mostly because they were formed by the state, but are considered a non-state actor. These militias became a solution to Syria’s manpower and morale problem and were employed to protect pro-government enclaves and drive Syrian opposition and their supports out of contested area, solidifying Syrian control. The use of local militias exploits the sectarian divides and provides additional opportunities to settle ethno-nationalist scores. Local militias operate beyond the rules of warfare and rules of engagement and are supported on the battlefield by government airpower and artillery. These militias slaughter civilians (and anti-government forces) while giving the Syrian regime a thin veil of deniability (Kozak 2015). There are two types of militia in Syria with similar surrounding names but different origins: 1) shabiha (Ghosts) and 2) jaysh al-sha’bi (People’s Army).

The shabiha militia derives from local criminal gangs and engages in smuggling, the theft of antiquities, and other criminal activity (bbc.com 2013a; Kozak 2015). Made up of mostly Alawite, the shabiha-militia are led by relatives of President Bashar al-Assad, who share government profits and provides the militia with military support and protection (Kazok 2015).

Meanwhile, the jaysh al-sha’bi (People’s Army) is a militia that has grown directly out of the socialist Baathist Party and revived Alawite, Christian, and Druze stronghold
against anti-governmental groups (Kozak 2015). These militias have become al-Assad’s shock troops—rooting out rebels fighters throughout their strongholds, “terrorizing suspected rebel supports, and carrying out ethnic cleansing” (Jenkins 2015). The involvement of local militia within the Syrian conflict has had implications for future military intervention, which has resulted in their organization, armament and training by Iran’s Islamic Revolution Guards, Hezbollah, and the Russian Federation (bbc.com 2013a; Jenkins 2015; Kazok 2015).

Because the Syrian Army “is primarily a heavy, mechanized force that lacks the light infantry capability necessary for sustained conflict against lightly armed insurgents” (Jenkins 2015, 22) new strategic and tactical partners were sought out.

**Insurgency to International Crisis: 2013**

By the spring of 2013, foreign assistance began to become a more prominent force as Hezbollah launched an offensive to capture areas near al-Qusay. In addition, countries such as Iran and the Gulf Arab states increased their involvement in Syria.

Iran openly came to Bashar al-Assad’s aid and provided the beleaguered leader with “political cover and financial and military support at a critical juncture when it appeared that the rebel forces had a chance of taking over Damascus” (Jenkins 2015, 5). Syria is vital to Iran’s strategic objectives. “The Assad regime has provided crucial access to Iranian proxies, including Lebanese Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, allowing Iran to move people, weapons, and money to these groups through Syrian territory” (Jenkins 2015, 9).

The Syrian conflict has strained Iran’s influence in the Levant but the fall of al-Assad would reduce Tehran’s ability to project power throughout the region. Therefore, Iran hedged strategic objective to ensure “that it can continue to pursue vital interest if and when the regime collapses, using parts of Syria as a base as long as the Syrian opposition fails to
establish full control over all of Syrian territory (Jenkins 2015, 9). Iran took on a multitude of roles in Syria: 1) advisory; 2) military resupply and 4) paramilitary and proxy.

Iran’s advisory role made a concerted effort to advise the Syrian military in order to preserve al-Assad’s hold on power. The Quds (Jerusalem) Force and elements of Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC) trained and advised elements of Syria’s military in a multitude of different symmetrical and asymmetrical tactics (bbc.com 2016a; bbc.com 2016b).

In addition, conventional ground forces of the IRGC advised and assisted Syria Defense Companies and Conventional Corps in the field of battle. “The January 2013 release of 48 Iranian nationals kidnapped near Damascus in August 2012 revealed that IRGC personnel have been operating inside Syria” (Jenkins 2015, 11).

Aside from fulfilling an advisory role, Iran had provided military resupply, both air and ground. Iran has utilized “aircraft owned by Iranian commercial airlines, the Iranian and Syrian air forces have employed Ilyushin-76s from their own fleet” (Jenkins 2015, 16) bringing in crucial material for the war effort. On the ground, routes between Baghdad and Damascus remain a viable corridor for material support to the regime. “Iran has directly supported a number of Syria’s pro-Assad [militias]. At the same time, Iran’s proxies and regional partners, namely Lebanese Hezbollah and Iraqi Shi’a militant groups, have taken a more prominent combat role” (Jenkins 2015, 19).

Formed in the 1980s, Hezbollah developed largely with aid from Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini in order to spread Islamic Revolution and institutionalize a distinct version of Islamic Shi’a ideology. Since the onset of the Syrian Civil War, Hezbollah has taken on a more direct combat role.
The conflict in Syria, however, has placed Hezbollah on the defensive to protect its support base and ensure that continuation of supply routes from Syria into Lebanon. These supply lines can be maintained by preserving Assad, even if his regime contracts to a defensive posture around Damascus, Homs and the coast (Jenkins 2015, 21).

Aside from an active combat role, Hezbollah’s involvement includes logistical support, training and advising and facilitation Quds and IRGC activity.

Hezbollah’s experience fighting in low-intensity conflict brings supplementary values to Assad’s forces (Jenkins 2015, 22). Therefore, Hezbollah has participated in a number of direct actions in Syria, “including sniper and counter-sniper operations, facility and route protection, joint clearing operations, and direct engagement with opposition forces, often in coordination with Syrian forces and pro-government militias” (Jenkins 2015, 22).

Aside from Hezbollah, Iran supports Shi’a militias that were established by the Quds Force and distributed during the United States counterinsurgency operations in Iraq (Kilcullen 2013; Jenkins 2015). “These loyal and battle-tested proxy militia can likewise help Iran to ensure a permissive environment in Syria even if Assad falls” (Jenkins 2015, 23). The Iraqi Shi’a militias escalated their involvement in the conflict as it descended more and more into civil war—their presence ended in the fall of 2012 with the formation of the Abu al-Fadl al-Abbas Brigade (bbc.com, 2013a; bbc.com, 2015a; bbc.com, 2016a).


In September 2014, the director of the United States’ National Counterterrorism Center, Matthew Olsen, said that the Islamic State (IS) “controlled much of the Tigris-Euphrates river basin,” an area similar in size to the United Kingdom (bbc.com 2015c). The
Islamic State of Iraq and Syria has expanded in Iraq, Syria, and abroad. According to foreign policy experts, to include Kilcullen (2013) and Ignatius (2015), the Islamic State had experiences organized growth in region, expanding throughout Syria and Iraq, as figure five illustrates.

**Figure Five: Islamic State of Syria and Iraq – Territorial Control**

Regional powers are at play in Syria, specifically Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, which have taken reckless action in making the Syrian conflict their own personal proxy war and has offered ISIS a “logistical safe zone” and has allowed the organization to grow unchecked (Ignatius, 2015). The development of feral cities, such as Raqqa, allowed for ISIS to consolidate and institutionalize its power before expanding outwards to the countries. This conception of feral city and failed state will be illustrated below as its plays a dynamic role in the future of warfare.

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The militant group has capitalized on Sunni disenfranchisement in both Iraq and Syria. After rapid expansion through Iraq in much of 2014, ISIS “seemed to run up against its limits as it pushed up against majority Kurdish and Shia Arab regions, where it faced greater resistance from Iraqi forces and local populations, along with US-led air strikes” (al-Khodor 2015). In June 2014, ISIS “overran the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, and then moved southwards toward Baghdad, routing Iraq’s army and threatening to eradicate the country’s many ethnic and religious minorities” (bbc.com 2015c).

After it ISIS captured Mosul, the leaders of the dynamic organization declared the formation of a caliphate and “triggered a surge in the number of foreign fighters traveling to Syria and Iraq to join the group” (bbc.com 2015c). Figure five illustrates the nationalities of foreign fighters that have moved Syria and Iraq in order to aid in ISIS’s military campaigns. Additionally, ISIS has gained control of much of the oil infrastructure in Syria and Iraq—as “oil is thought to be the group’s biggest single source of revenue” (bbc.com 2015c).

“ISIS played a spoiler’s game in Syria. It moved to Raqqa, an area adjacent to its supply lines and into Iraq, and used the city as a kind of logistics base camp for its bigger Iraq operations. Raqqa soon became the capital of the ‘state,’ and the destination for thousands of foreign fighters” (Ignatius 2015). Additionally, ISIS prospered when al-Assad’s air force bombed civilian areas under rebel control. ISIS continues to expand its area of influence, and with it, the multi-nationalism and diversity of their group provides a new view into NexGen War, specifically how the Islamic State has utilized globalization in order to take its conflict into new battlespaces that stand outside that of Syria.

The Islamic State of Syria and Iraq continue to utilize social medial, releasing recruitment videos that are short and flashy. “They feature hip-hop music, promising a
chance to be part of a global cause and, experts say, most importantly target to a vulnerable audience” (Smith 2016), which has created lone-wolf attacks throughout the world. In addition, ISIS has also expanded territorially and economic to countries across the North Africa and throughout the Pacific.

**International Intervention: 2015**

By 2015, the conflict in Syria reached a new level when the United States, along with NATO and Russia, intervened. The United States claims that President al-Assad is responsible for the widespread atrocities that have occurred throughout Syria, to include the usage of chemical weapons. (bbc.com 2013b). As a result, the United States want President al-Assad to go. However, over the course of the conflict, the United States strategic and operational objectives have changed as ISIS has made its quintessential rise in Iraq and Syria.

Supporting the national opposition alliances throughout Syria, the United States continuously provides limited military assistance to a wide-variety of non-state actions that have engaged both physically and psychologically the al-Assad regime, as well as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Resulting in a transformative alliances that have caused fractions and splitting in other alliances, such as the United States’ support of the People’s Protection Union (YPG), which is a Kurdish militia that has had phenomenal success against the ISIS but poses a threat to Turkey.23

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23 The People’s Protection Union/Unit is the armed wing of the Kurdish Supreme Committee and is primarily Kurdish but also had Turks, Arabs, and others within its ranks. The Peoples Protection Union is a democratic people’s army and conducts internal elections. The organization is a member of the Kurdish Workers Party, which was founded in 1978 as a leftist movement. The Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK) is labeled as a terrorist organization by Turkey. Therefore, the PKK (and the YPG) have found themselves being physically attacked by Turkey and Syria. Within the Syrian Civil War, the YPG is a dominate force against the Islamic State; however, the shelling by Turkey has decreased the YPG’s operational value. The United States has politically maneuvered around the issue and has covertly begun supporting the YPG in an effort to stave off further ISIS territorial advancement in Iraq and Syria.
Nevertheless, aside from military aid and strategic alliances, the United States had conducted numerous airstrikes on ISIS targets and other radical jihadist groups in Syria. Additionally, the United States had avoided attacks on strategic targets that might benefit the Syrian regime and her Russian counterpart.

US airstrikes are not centralized specifically to Syria, the United States had endlessly hit ISIS targets in Iraq. “In Iraq, 20 strikes near cities struck weapons factories, propaganda sites and destroyed assemble areas, a mortar position and bed down locations, among other targets” (Cassella 2016). Aside from airstrikes, the United States has strategic aims of training and arming Syrians in the fight against ISIS. However, such programs of armament have had numerous set-backs and continue to be a bewilderment of US operational planners in Syria (bbc.com 2016a). Nevertheless, the United States, as well as her strategic allies, has witnessed the unprecedented growth of the Islamic State and the transformation of warfare—which too has changed the function of war within the United States national security apparatus.

Russia’s motivation “for supporting Assad are complex and include honoring a long alliance, maintaining strategic position, and great power pretensions” (Jenkins 2015, 3). Russia intervened on the behalf of Syria and operated “under the slogan of combating ISIS, but this task became secondary and the war was essentially waged for Syria itself” (Lukyanov 2016). Russia stood opposite of Syria’s major begotten players from the West. As Russia “opposes Western military intervention as a matter of principle. Its affinity toward Christian minorities and its hostility toward Muslim extremists, which is how it sees the Syrian rebels, are deeply ingrained” (Jenkins 2015, 8). Therefore, President Vladimir Putin
stepped up Russia’s military presence in Syria—deploying attack aircraft and bombers. By the end of September 2015, Russia had employed a multitude of military equipment.

Aside from sending conventional ground forces, Russia has continuously bombed ISIS and Syrian-rebel held territory. Bombings are indiscriminate. The United States Department of Defense, on multiple occasions, claimed that the Russians were bombing anti-Assad and pro-United States rebel groups who occupy the Sunni and Kurdish territory. Russian airstrikes have worked and “the intensity of the airstrikes has steadily increased. The targeting by Russia warplanes of supply lines from Turkey has impeded access to weapons as well as food and humanitarian supplies” (Sly 2016) [See Figure 6].

Figure Six: Russian Airstrikes throughout Syria: September 30 to October 12, 2015

CHAPTER IV
NEXGEN WAR: VOLATILITY, UNCERTAINTY, COMPLEXITY AND AMBIGUITY

The theories of Old War, Low-Intensity Conflict, New War, and the Accidental Guerrilla are not obsolete, and instead, these theories play into the dynamics of NexGen Warfare and illustrate how VUCA defines the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of warfare itself. John F. Kennedy spoke at a West Point graduation ceremony and said, “This is another type of war, new in its intensity, ancient in its origins—war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins, war by ambush instead of by combat; by infiltration instead of aggression, seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him” (Fry 2016, 211). Fifty-plus years later, warfare has continuously transformed. In order to fully understand how the conflict in Syria is the beginning of warfare’s transformation the following will be discussed: 1) what does NexGen Warfare really mean; 2) what is VUCA and how does it relate to the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of warfare; and 3) how each level of VUCA plays in the dynamics of NexGen War.

The Future of Warfare: Next Generational War

As discussed above, the conception that war can be broken down into generations was first articulated by Lind and associates (1989). The concept of generational warfare, however, does meet resistance from researches of all shapes and size. Lind and associates (2004; 1989) argue that warfare can be broken down into four separate and distinct generations. Each generation has its own cataloging and dynamic attribute that distinguishes it from other generations. The concept of generational warfare attempted to explain globalization and technology’s adaptive powers on warfare. However, generational warfare
does not do enough to explain the true transformation that globalization brings to warfare and that is the development of conventional and unconventional strategies and tactics in a world dominated by state and nonstate actors.

Researches, such as Echevarria (2005) argue that the generational war concept is a fallacy and that historically, warfare has remained constant. Echevarria (2005) and Lind (2004) both fail to recognize that globalization has transformed warfare from a strategic, operational, and tactics level and has created a dynamic new enemy that operates in and out of the today’s current operational environment. This transformation can only be cataloged as a new generation of warfare, as the next generation (NexGen) of War.

This new style of warfare blends conventional and unconventional warfare. This hybrid style warfare is not a new concept; however, it has becomes more prominently blended in NexGen War, as the enemy and the operational environment within the conflict is transformed by globalization. The conception of this style of hybrid tactics can be easily seen when looking at the Syrian Civil War, in addition, the blending of conventional and unconventional warfare has been aided by globalization’s democratization of technology.

**Understanding the Operational Environment: Defining VUCA**

Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA) is an acronym developed at the Naval War College that is used to describe the general conditions and situations of a particular operational environment. The term has been used within the military and was considered an en vogue term. However, it has been utilized less in less as

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25 Chapter Three lays out the individual players and their strategic and tactical objectives within the conflict. This discussed paints a vivid picture of the conventional and unconventional warfare tactics that are currently being utilized within the conflict.

26 ADRP 3-0, Unified Land Operations, defines operational environment as follows: “is a composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander.”
the United States continues to analyze military battlespace and employ different acronyms and phrases in an attempt to catalogue the future operational environment. Nevertheless, the deeper meaning of each element within VUCA serves to enhance an understanding of the operational environment. Table two breaks down the particulars of the VUCA acronym.

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<tr>
<th>Letter</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>V – Volatility</td>
<td>The nature and dynamics of change. The nature and speed of the change/ transformation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>U – Uncertainty</td>
<td>The lack of predictability.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C – Complexity</td>
<td>The confounding of issues and the unattainable of seeing cause-and-effect, leading to confusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A – Ambiguity</td>
<td>The haziness of reality and the potential to misread a current situation that are a result of Complexity.</td>
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The United States military has utilized the term VUCA in an effort to demonstrate the ‘volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity’ of the operational environment. However, the term needs to be re-constituted as a defining element of the operational environment and the enemy within NexGen War. Additionally, the utilization of VUCA will aid in the understanding of the strategic, objective, and tactical transformations that have changed within NexGen Warfare.

However, before moving on to the discussion of VUCA within NexGen War, a disclaimer must be mentioned in order to provide a clear-cut understanding of how NexGen War fits into the realm of future warfare. To begin, NexGen Warfare is state-centric, meaning that the Next Generation Warfare is utilized by the states, where their central concern with regards to conflict is achieving the political objective and limiting the technological availability to nonstate actors. The discussion below will seem lop-sided, as it
focuses on the United States’ potential threats in the Next Generation of Warfare. Therefore, without further ado, the discussion of VUCA will be discussed in order to illustrate how the enemy and operational environments has been completely transformed by globalization.

**Volatility**

Volatility is “the nature, speed, volume, and magnitude of change that is not in a predictable pattern” and is turbulence, which includes “digitization, connectivity, trade liberalization, global competition, and model innovation” (Lawrence 2013, 5). Volatility can be cataloged and described by the utilization of social networks. The rise of the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq is a prime example. As discussed above, ISIS began expanding because the process of globalization has fostered its expansion and elevated the effects of volatility.

Since 2014, ISIS had used social media in ways that have transformed and expanded the operational environment. Thanks to globalization’s process of spatial connectivity, ISIS recruitment and expansionist strategies have taken to social media, completely transforming the way the Syria war is fought. As seen through empirical data provided by Berger and Morgan (2015), along with Singer and Brooking (2016), the speed, nature and volume of the conflict can be easily illustrated by analyzing ISIS’ usage of social media. Figure seven provides dynamic information on how social media has been utilized by ISIS.

In June 2014, when the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq marched into the city of Mosul, “they did not just march into town—they simultaneously launched a Twitter hashtag campaign, #AllEyesonISIS. It was blitzkrieg with a digital marketing strategy” (Singer and Brooker 2016). Additionally, ISIS utilized social media to expand its war efforts beyond the border of Syria and Iraq, cultivating new soldiers through propaganda and recruitment videos” (Berger and Morgan 2015; Singer and Brooking 2016). The utilization of social
media illustrates how the volatility of the Syrian conflict has been transformed by globalization. The battlespace is no longer confined to a specific theater of war, instead, it expands across borders and erodes the susceptibility of nation-state control.

![Figure Seven: Spatial Representation of ISIS Twitter Accounts](image)

The nature, speed, volume and magnitude of change has transformed the operational environment in which future wars will be fought. This development has resulted in a dynamic misunderstanding of the social media tool in warfare. The rise of ISIS, along with

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terrorist attacks throughout the world, has provided a clear understanding on the publicity social media has as a lethal weapon in NexGen War.

There are a total of 46,000 ISIS supporter accounts on Twitter, not to mention the slew of un-documented Facebook accounts and/or unidentified social media accounts that are not included in this dataset. Berger and Morgan (2015) even believe that the maximum estimate of ISIS supporter social media accounts tops around 90,000. Considering that the strength of ISIS in Syria alone is, roughly, 20,000 these numbers provide a staggering illustration into the volatility that globalization has brought to the conflict.

Additionally, Figure seven illustrates the sparsity of these accounts. Berger and Morgan (2015), gathered data on twitter accounts (and there subsequent tweets) from location-enabled datasets. “The largest cluster of location-enabled accounts (28 percent- was found in Iraq and Syria, mostly in areas either controlled or contested by ISIS […] The next most common location was Saudi Arabia, with 27-percent” (Berger and Morgan 2015, 11).

This data provides an understanding of the spatial organization of social media accounts. Aside from social media, the interconnectivity of globalization has provided ISIS with another dynamic opportunity in today’s age of war, allowing for the organization to formulate a worldwide organization with splinter sells established in a multitude of different countries: Libya, Somalia, Nigeria, Philippines, Indonesia, and France/Belgium. The volatility of the Syrian Civil War, additionally, has been illustrated by the conceptualization that the operational environment is not as centralized to Syria (and Iraq) as the United States and her allies would like to conceive.

28 Since the founding of the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq, there have been numerous organized terrorist attacks, such as the bombings in France (November 2015) and Belgium (March 2016). In addition, there have been numerous lone-wolf attacks throughout the United States (San Bernardino 2015), Australia (Sydney 2014), and elsewhere.
Additionally, as illustrated above, ISIS has utilized social media as a way of increasing its speed and connectivity worldwide and employed this particular strategic into its framework of unconventional tactics. However, ISIS does not utilize these particular skill-sets alone and blends their social media operations with their conventional operating force. In fact, on the eve of ISIS’ invasion of Mosul, a massive twitter campaign was started. However, in order to completely conquer (and capture) Mosul, ISIS fighters needs to move into the city and occupy it.

All-in-all the volatility of the operational environment and the enemy, illustrates that warfare is no longer a game of chess confined to a particular boards. Instead, thanks to globalization and the democratization of technology, warfare (and the fighters within it) have the ability to expand and grow unlike anything that world has seen.

**Uncertainty**

Uncertainty means “the lack of predictability in issues and events” (Lawrence 2013, 5). Uncertainty makes it difficult for future leaders to use past issues of warfare and/or events as predictors of future outcome “making forecasting extremely difficult and decision-making challenging” (Lawrence 2013, 5). Uncertainty has blanketed the conflict and provided doubts within the players that have become involved, both militarily and politically. Uncertainty, however, is not necessarily new to this particular conflict but has a dynamic influence in its overall predictability. In NexGen Warfare, uncertainty is centered on a multitude of issues, some of which will be analyzed below and all affect how the state responds to future threats from an enemy that is volatile and an operational environment that is undefined.
Islamic State’s Political Economy

With the expansion of ISIS, mostly in the late winter and early spring of 2014, the control of Syria’s oil fields and crude production found itself being engulfed within its territorial grasp. Figure eight illustrates the expansive oil fields that have become under the reign of the Islamic State. The significance of these oil fields is that it plays into the political economy of NexGen War, illustrating how war efforts are in-turn paid for. Kaldor (1999) discussed the importance of the political economy in New War, by illustrating that “territorially-based production more or less collapses either as a result of liberalization and the withdrawal of state support, or through physical destruction or because markets are cut off as a result of the disintegration of state, fighting or deliberate blockades imposed by outside powers, or more likely, by fighting units on the ground, or because spare parts, raw material and fuel are impossible to acquire (101).

Figure Eight: Oil Markets: Iraq and Syria²⁹

However, the Islamic State of Syria and Iraq have actually provide an illustration of how globalization’s process of interconnectivity has allowed for political war economies to

continue and flourish. Kaldor (1999) continues to argue that external assistance is utilized to sustain movements as the domestic production collapses. In the case of Syria, we see that not only external assistance as central to ensuring that each and every player continues to fight, but there is an establishment of a uncertainty in the internal assistance that individual groups can establish. In the case of ISIS, this is the establishment of a dynamic black market oil economy and a system of taxation that has allowed for the group to purchase arms, ammunition and other equipment from diaspora groups abroad.

ISIS “sells most of its crude directly to independent traders at the oil fields. In a highly organized system, Syrian and Iraqi buyers go directly to the oil fields with trucks to buy crude” (Solomon, Kwong and Bernard 2016). In order to quell ISIS war economy, airstrikes have specifically target oil manufacturing facilities (to include wells and refineries) in an effort to disrupt the monetary flow that has supplied ISIS with arms and ammunition. However, the vail of uncertainty begin to peel its ugly head back when the realization that ISIS’s has a more dynamic relationship with Gulf States—some that have been accused of providing monetary and military assistance to the terrorist network.

External Assistance

The discussion above with regards to ISIS political war economy is interesting because it highlights the lack of predictability of economic objectives within ISIS and the response to monetary funding to the organization. However, it must also be noted that ISIS received external assistance from Gulf State groups and benefactors abroad whose ultimate goal is to establish a caliphate in the Middle East. This is not the central factor in understanding the importance of external assistance in the conflict—as another major
external assistance issue plays a role in the on-going conflict and that is the unlimited proxy war abilities of all players involved.

Syria has become a haven for the development of proxy warfare, which can be considered a distinct subset of NexGen Warfare. Syria, however, illustrates that lack of predictability of nation-state (and non-state) actors in the conflict. In January 2016, Saudi Arabia and Iran went toe-to-toe over each other’s role in the conflict. Saudi Arabia accused “Iran of having 10,000 fighters on the ground in Syria supporting Assad” (Taylor 2016). Then whole argument and diplomatic outcry was the result of a Saudi Arabian Embassy being fire-bombed in Tehran at the end of December 2015. The lack of predictability in Saudi Arabia’s response was due to the fact that the Saudi Kingdom say the embassy fire was an off-shoot of the conflict in Yemen. Therefore, aside from the open-arguments between Saudi Arabia and Iran, more covert support became increasingly important as a way of off shooting and offsetting each other in the conflict, which is something that Saud’s and Iranian’s have done in Yemen. Nevertheless, this establishment of proxy wars and the actions of individual state in the conflict results in the increasing lack of predictability, which also results in the complexity of the conflict.

**Complexity**

The ‘C’ in VUCA stands for complexity and refers to difficult-to-understand causes and mitigating factors that illustrate globalization’s transformative powers on warfare. The complexity of the Syrian Civil War is not to be undermined or tossed aside, as the complexity of the issues surrounding the conflict are more entwined with the causations of the conflict itself. Additionally, aside from causation, the complexity of the conflict has been agitated by globalization’s process of spatial information connectivity—allowing for mass
populations to see the play-out of decisions made by strategic players in the operational environment. Examples of such complexity are: 1) Russia, NATO and the shooting down of a Russian Jet; 2) Refugees and the interconnectivity of the European Union, 3) social media and the global coverage of the conflict and finally 4) arming rebel groups.

Russia, NATO and the Shooting Down of a Russian Jet

In late November 2015, a Turkish F-16 fighter jet shot down a Russian SU-25 Strike Fighter in Syria, although the two countries differ on the actual location of the incident. Nevertheless, the growing rift between the two countries “reached a new peak as the two countries step up military action in Syria in support of opposing sides, edging closer to direct confrontation in the country increasing internationalized war” (ft.com 2016). In fact, The Washington Times reported that Russia has increased its military presence in Armenia and “threatens to reignite a frozen conflict that has pitted Moscow against Ankara for decades” (Taylor 2016). The downing of a Russian jet illustrates the sear complexity of the conflict, even without such a diverse breakdown of the background. This is the nature of NexGen War, surface waters are rough and the undertow is even stronger. Nothing is calm, such as the dynamics behind the refugee crisis.

Refugees and the Interconnectivity of the European Union

Globalization has created an interconnectivity has created a world in which the importance of the state has been eroded, the border has become less securitized and has resulted in a breakdown of the nation-state. This issue adds to the complexity of future conflict. With the democratization of technology a majority of Syrians have access to freedom of movement, migration, and the ability to seek better opportunities abroad. This increase of connectivity has allowed for the free flow of refugees across natural borders and
the spread of influences that has allowed for organizations such as ISIS to spread beyond the borders of the current operation.

The conflict and destabilization of the Levant “has resulted in the mass displacement of populations and their converging upon Europe is the result of a long-established strategy to eliminate stable, secular regimes in the region” (Bolton 2016). The breakdown of the secure borders (as is the concept with globalization) has allowed such movement to be achieved with little to no resistance. However, as the state has become more aware of the security implications behind the rise of Syrian refugees then more and more policies have been implemented in its place to protect the onset of the state. As Kaldor (1999) discussed, the state holds little importance in the New War. However, both Kilcullen (2006) and Clausewitz ([1832] 1993) argue that the state hold a central role in the war. As within NexGen War, the state still holds importance. Nevertheless, the complexity of the conflict is further exasperated by the armament of conflicting rebel groups.

**Arming Rebel Groups**

“Syrian militias armed by different parts of the U.S. war machine have begun to fight each other on the plains between the besieged city of Aleppo and the Turkish border, highlighting how little control U.S. intelligence officers and military planners have over the groups they have financed and trained” (Bulos et al 2015). In fact, fighting has intensified between CIA-armed groups and Pentagon-armed ones. The revelation of such information lines-up with the complexity of the current conflict, when different forces serve a dynamic principle in the conflict; however, over time the alignment of groups changes and results in-fighting and conflict between groups, and in this case, between policy agencies in the United States.
The same can also be said with the relation to the Syrian Kurdish population, which finds itself being continuously attacked by Islamic State fighters, the Syrian air force, and the Turkish military, however, the organization has received overt and covert support from the United States and Russia. Such complexity only deepen the conflict and ambiguity that has made this conflict.

**Ambiguity**

Ambiguity “is the lack of clarity” in the who, what, where, how and why behind warfare. Unlike volatility, uncertainty, and complexity, which look at the democratization of technology and the spatial organization of information and alliances through globalization, ambiguity illustrates the most elusive variables of the Next Generation of Warfare. In addition, ambiguity aids in understanding the operational environment that will be a baseline of future warfare. Ambiguity can be illustrated numerously throughout the conflict, however, there are certain variables that play into NexGen War and those variables shall be discussed below: 1) failed states; 2) feral cities and 3) identity politics.

**Failed States and Feral Cities**

One of the greatest threats to global security is the rapidly increasing number of failed state and feral cities. Even though there is not agreed upon definition of failed sates, the conception is generally understood that government can no longer provide security to its people and loses control over part of its territory. Kaldor (1999) defined failed states as losing control over and “fragmentation of the instruments of physical coercion. A disintegrative cycle sets in which is almost the exact opposite of the integrative cycle through which modern states were established” (92). Syria is a failed state with the government only controlling a small part of its territory, as Figure nine illustrates. Hundreds of thousands of
refugees fleeing to Lebanon illustrates the dynamic impact of the conflict and the interconnectivity that the globalization has brought to what was a stable countries. Figure six illustrates the spatial-realms of control that is emplaced within Syria.

Syria, additionally, has seen the rise of feral cities within her borders. Feral cities, a concept founded by Richard Norton (2003) and utilized by David Kilcullen (2013), is defined as “a metropolis with a population of more than a million people, in a state that government of which has lost the ability to maintain the rule of law within the city’s boundaries yet remains a functioning actor in the greater international system” (66). Norton (2003) and Kilcullen (2013) see feral cities as a being connected and “don’t just sink into utter chaos and collapse-they remain connected to international flows of people, information, and money. Nonstate groups step up to control key areas and functions, commerce continues, a black market economy flourishes, and massive levels of disease and pollution may be present” (Kilcullen 2013, 66). In today’s globalized society, feral cities seem to thrive, both inside and outside of failed states. For the purpose of NexGen Warfare, however, feral cities go hand-in-hand with failed states in order to illustrate the dynamics of the conflict and the lack of clarity that is provided within society.
The city of Aleppo, in Syria, is an example of a feral city. “The ongoing civil war has degraded Syrian infrastructure so much that no central government would in theory be able to extend its remit to Aleppo from Damascus. So instead of a central government, groups like the Sharia Commission grow stronger and more resilient” (Rosenblatt 2013). Aleppo is a feral city. Kilcullen (2013) argues that feral cities only provide safe-haven for non-state groups/actors to flourish, allowing militia groups to thrive. Aleppo, however, is not the only

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feral city in Syria. In fact, the most prominent feral city is the one that has become the safe
have of ISIS, Raqqa.

Understanding the theory of failed states and feral cities aids in our understanding of
ambiguity. The state controls less-and-less and the sovereignty of Syria is undermined and
questioned on a daily basis. This lack of clarity illustrates how the conflict in Syria has
become dynamic and not easily defined by prior theories of warfare. In fact, Nicholson
(1999) argues that the development of globalization has allowed state and non-state actors
more power to become players on a transnational stage. “The nature of an insecure society is
that there are more casualties and hence greater need for secure social defenses. These
reductions in the powers of government are not necessarily because they have been ceded to
anyone else” (Nicholson 1999), globalization has resulted in Syria’s demarcation of security
and resulted in the society’s civil war. In addition, globalization’s transformation of the spatial
organization of society has resulted in a transformation of the identity politics that has
become central to new war and is still substantially important in the Next Generation of War.

Identity Politics

Identity politics is used “to mean movements which mobilize around ethnic, racial or
religious identity for the purpose of claiming state power” (Kaldor 1999, 77). In the case of
Syria, identity politics is a primary factor in the development of social networks and spatial
organizations that have become centralized to the conflict. In the aftermath of the outbreak of
the Syrian conflict, the power balance between Sunni, Shi’a, and Kurd was redistributed and
redefined, resulting in formulation of new ideologically driven groups: Free Syrian Army;
ISIS, People Worker’s Party and etcetera. As illustrates above with Figure one, the ethnic
composition of Syria has dynamic—the conflict has become drawn along these religious and ethnical lines.

The fact that ethnic and religious groups have become prominent players in the Syria conflict is nothing new in warfare. However, it is globalization’s role in the conflict that has transformed the conflict itself. Globalization has allowed for the creation of dynamic social networks that are able to organize and feed movements abroad. As discussed above with respect to Twitter and Facebook, the Islamic State has been able to formulate a spatial organization that has transnational influences. Figure Ten illustrates the elusive expansion via their social media connections that have been built via globalization.

![Figure Ten: Islamic State of Syria and Iraq: Provinces](image)

The playing fields in Syria have become over-crowded as future wars will illustrate and the strategic and tactical objectives each player will have a diverse effect on the conflict. This ambiguity result in a transformation of warfare as political objective will be harder to achieve and unconditional surrender of the enemy will become more centralized to ensure

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that end of hostilities. In the end, war has become more transparent through globalization and the utilization of social media and international journalism has allowed for clear and graphic images of the war, however, the operational environment that wars operate in are far from clear-cut.

**The Future of War in the Age of Improbability**

Unlike *New and Old Wars* and *The Accidental Guerrilla*, which focus on warfare in failed states (Kaldor 1999) and feral cities (Kilcullen 2013), NexGen Warfare is a blending of the two theories with the additional variables that illustrate the dynamic strategic, operational, and tactical implementations within the operational environment that make up the power of the state. It would seem that every war for the foreseeable future will necessitate a utilization of the VUCA acronym in order to fully understanding not only the operational environment, but the state (or nonstate) actor that will be the primary enemy of the United States.

Although this is not a cure-all for warfare, the deep military significance of Clausewitz, Kaldor, Kilcullen and others constitute theories of warfare that cannot and will not be ignored. Nevertheless, the wide difference of opinion concerning warfare should be highlighted as NexGen with the attribute of VUCA, which blends all theories from the strategic, objective, and tactical levels into a unify understanding.

The utilization of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity to illustrate the conception of warfare illustrates that the nature of warfare is not changing, but the environment and the enemy which operates within it is changing, and fast. Therefore, VUCA is utilized in order to illustrate that the enemy is no longer one-sided, or even three-dimensional.
The transformation of warfare has been aided by globalization through the process of spatial organizations of social networks, which have created an enemy (and conflict) that cannot be contained to a particular battlespace or a singularly tactical employment. The spreading of ISIS throughout the world and the increasing effects of their tactics, both conventional and unconventional, are only the beginning of warfare’s transformation.

This movement away from a defined theater of war and the transformation of the enemy makes NexGen War an interesting and stylized future. It is incumbent upon the theories of warfare to know intimately and thoroughly the nature of warfare and how it has been transformed by globalization so that policy makers can constantly improve conventional military forces, which are not likely to be abandoned but utilized on a global scale in order to curtail the threat posed by the enemies within the Next Generation of Warfare.
REFERENCES


