

International Progress Organization



Organisation Internationale pour le Progrès

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The New Threat: Hybrid Wars as a Tool of Subversion

Introductory Remarks by the Moderator

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Since, on 24 April 1863, U.S. President Abraham Lincoln enacted the provisions of the so-called “Lieber Code” and, on 24 August 1898, Tsar Nicholas II of Russia proposed a “peace conference” that resulted in the Hague Convention of 1899, the community of nations has sought to **tame** war – the brutality of warfare – by subordinating it to the “dictates of conscience,” i.e. the fundamental principles of humanity.

The evolving corpus of international humanitarian law, culminating in the Geneva Conventions of 1949, and the general ban on the use of force – in the Briand-Kellogg Pact of 1928 and, finally, the UN Charter of 1945 – stand, however, in sharp contrast to the history of modern war and the evolution of the **methods** of warfare.

War still appears to be the *ultima ratio regis* (or, in modern terms: the last resort of power). As *contradictio in adiecto* to resolution of disputes through **dialogue** – the theme that brought us together here at the Rhodes Forum for more than a decade, war is the method to **impose** a state’s, a ruler’s, will upon the adversary – by **all means** at the disposal of the parties in conflict. Thus, war is in itself “total war,” an all-encompassing effort and strategy to achieve what has not been achievable through diplomatic means.

In spite of the solemn declarations and elaborate conventions agreed upon since the second half of the 19th century, the sovereign states so far have had no inhibition to use the very latest scientific and technological innovations, including social techniques, in the service of this truly “comprehensive” effort to **assert their power and interest**. As was stated by Frank G. Hoffmann of the U.S. Marine Corps – the first to have introduced the notion of “hybrid war” in a systematic context, the character of conflict in the 21st century is expressed in “the convergence of the physical and psychological, the kinetic and non kinetic, and combatants and non combatants.”* It is exactly this **convergence**, the “blurring of lines between modes of war,”** that has characterized modern war efforts – by **all** sides, and not the least by the most powerful global players. A few days ago, the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, even spoke of the current mass migration into Europe as “a kind of hybrid war, in which migratory waves have become a tool, a weapon against neighbours.”***

Questions of **morality** – of ethical responsibility in the sense enunciated in the Hague Conventions and later the Geneva Conventions – have always been subordinated to

* “Hybrid Warfare and Challenges,” in: *Joint Force Quarterly* (JFA), Issue 52, 1st quarter 2009, p. 34.

** *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

*** *Address by President Donald Tusk to the European Parliament on the informal meeting of heads of state or government of 23 September 2015*, as released by the Spokesperson of the European Council President, Brussels, 06/10/2015, 10:00.

considerations of **efficiency** in the brutal “struggle of wills” between sovereign states – of which the rather imprecise construct of “hybrid war” describes the ultimate consequence.

One of the most drastic aspects of this approach to warfare in recent history was the use of economic sanctions against an entire nation, a measure implemented in the name of the United Nations Organization. For over more than a decade, the people of Iraq were subjected to an almost total blockade that was an essential part, and also continuation, of the armed action against that country in 1991, and that resulted in the death of over one million people, as documented by independent international observers.* This crime of genocidal dimensions is one of the most extreme examples to date of what **hybrid warfare** may ultimately imply and how **total war** in this sense may not only **destabilize**, but **destroy** a state. (In that regard, we are following up here on our session last year on “World Order and the Politics of Régime Change.”)

It will be up to us, international civil society, scholars and activists, to scrutinize these methods and challenge the underlying doctrines as to their compatibility with the principles the community of states has officially been committed to since more than a century, and even more so since the foundation of the United Nations Organization.

A forum such as ours – that is committed to dialogue – is certainly morally “authorized” to question the **logic of war** as it is expressed in a modern doctrine that emanated from the strategic think tanks of the global power establishment.

* For details see, *inter alia*, “Message of the President of the I.P.O. to the President of the Security Council concerning the humanitarian emergency caused by the sanctions imposed on Iraq (5 February 1999),” in: Hans Köchler (ed.), *The Iraq Crisis and the United Nations: Power Politics vs. the International Rule of Law*. Studies in International Relations, Vol. XXVIII. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 2004, pp. 33-35.