

Do new wars pose
difficult challenges
politics essay



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Civil wars in today's modern world have become increasingly described as 'new wars' ever since the end of the Cold War era due to a perceived change in the format of warfare and the emergence of war economies as central to internal skirmishes. Some scholars argue this evolution in warfare and intrastate conflict requires adjustments and changes to the post conflict reconstruction process due to new challenges new wars creates in comparison to the 'old wars' of the past. This essay argues that there is in fact little evolution in warfare since the end of the Cold War and in fact many of the characteristics of the so-called 'new wars' are in fact present in conflicts in the past. It is for this reason that new wars do not pose more difficult challenges any more than the already complicated problems associated with post conflict reconstruction; although some changes are necessary to adjust the course of development, it is in fact the growth and advancement of media and the communications sectors that have led to an increased focus on civil wars that has pushed them into the public arena and granted them a 'new' status. The first part of this essay will analyse the 'new wars' thesis posited by Kaldor and outline the characteristics attributed to 'new wars'; this will be followed by the convincing criticisms by many academics that argue new wars are not in fact new and assists the final section of the essay that discusses the post conflict reconstruction process and argues contemporary conflict does not post a more difficult challenge to the post conflict reconstruction process anymore than old wars do.

The concept of 'new wars' was first written about in detail by Mary Kaldor at the end of the 1990s, as she attempted to define the characteristics of low-intensity conflicts and distinguish them from traditional state versus state

conflicts of the past. Kaldor argues that towards the end of the 20th Century, in particular in the post-Cold War order, a new form of organized violence has emerged, with blurred distinctions between war, organized crime and large-scale human rights violations (2006, pp. 1-2). This thesis has gained considerable academic support as scholars notice the trend in the decrease of interstate wars and the increase in violence within states (Holsti, 1996, p. 40). 'New wars' are characterised as criminal, depoliticized, private and even predatory in their nature, whilst the 'old wars' of the past were ideological, political and noble (Kalyvas, 2006, p. 100). Kaldor thus believes there has been a progression in the nature of warfare and conflict since the Cold War as internal conflicts become the norm and interstate battles become far less common. Kaldor argues that "New wars can be contrasted with earlier wars in terms of their goals, the methods of warfare and how they are financed" (2006, p. 7); these differences will be outlined in the following section to explain the new features of new wars.

The goals of new wars are based on identity politics, especially ethnic identity, rather than ideological differences or geo-political ambitions, and often occur due to the erosion of state autonomy and state failure (Kaldor, 2006, pp. 5-7). Groups will claim control of the state or certain areas of the state in the name of ethnicity, religion or tribe (Kaldor, 2005, p. 212). The Bosnian conflict during the 1990s is often depicted as the archetypal example of a new war as it displays this identity conflict clearly (Kaldor, 2006, p. 33). Due to its ethnic diversity of Muslims, Serbs and Croats (as well as several other ethnic identities), it was no surprise that conflict arose between the groupings as the Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats set about '

ethnic cleansing' in an attempt to establish ethnically homogenous territories (Kaldor, 2006, pp. 34-5). Furthermore, the attrition of state power means the monopoly over violence is severely limited, which leads to widespread skirmishes and conflicts as groups compete to fill the vacuum created through state collapse (Newman, 2004, p. 175). The warring parties in the Bosnian war described themselves as 'states' and made use of the former state apparatus in order to finance, resource and run their campaigns (Kaldor, 2005, p. 214). Globalisation has resulted in a cleavage between rich and poor that results in conflict and structural violence (Berdal, 2003, p. 479) and also a cleavage between cosmopolitanism and the politics of particularist identities (Kaldor, 2006, p. 7). There is a growing 'them' and 'us' divide as identity politics play a more dominant role in how individuals see themselves to each other. This of course increases the inevitability and the probability of conflict among groups of differing identities

The form of combat has also changed as guerrilla and counter-insurgency tactics become the norm (Kaldor, 2006, p. 8), as the nature of conflict adapts a "distinctively politically chaotic and military atrocious character" (Snow, 1996, p. 105). In the past, guerrilla warfare has aimed to capture 'hearts and minds' of civilians and the population; however, the new warfare uses counterinsurgency methods of destabilisation, aiming to create fear and hatred amongst civilians instead, using this to gain support or at least prevent citizens from disobeying orders (Kalyvas, 2001, p. 109). New wars appear to lack military order or discipline (Angstrom, 2005, p. 8) which often leads to extreme violence and barbarism, directed in particular at civilians as a deliberate strategy (Mello, 2010, p. 299). This strategy of civilian targeting

rests in the aim to control populations, inducing destabilization and terror in an attempt to remove those of a different identity through violent and barbaric killings as well as techniques of intimidation (Kaldor, 2006, p. 9).

The genocide in Rwanda or the random atrocities committed against civilians in Sarajevo highlight this dark side of new war (Snow, 1996, p. 105), and in situations such as Bosnia, Somalia, Rwanda and Liberia, the military objective was the “ systematic murder and terrorizing of civilian populations” (Snow, 1996, p. ix). Civilian casualties and forced displacement has increased in proportion to all casualties in conflict since the 1990s, highlighting this deliberative civilian targeting, further assisted by a blurring of boundaries between civilians and combatants as public authority breaks down as part of state failure (Newman, 2004, p. 175).

The final feature that distinguishes new wars from old wars is the form of financing that occurs; war economies of the past focused on using resources to defeat the enemy (Broodryk, 2010, p. 11), whilst the new wars utilise looting, criminal networks, diasporic support and ‘ taxation’ of humanitarian aid to provide resources for their conflict (Kaldor, 2005, p. 216). The simplest form of financing the war effort is through looting, robbery, extortion and hostage-taking and is seen in a number of contemporary wars (Kaldor, 2006, p. 108). However, some war economies utilise

networks of legal and illegal trade, arms and drug trafficking, corrupt governments and supportive diasporas that influence the outbreak and perpetuation of violent conflicts (Mello, 2010, p. 300).

The new war economies involve the fragmentation of the state as it cannot “ monopolise production and employment in order to fund their war cause” (Broodryk, 2010, p. 11). Resources are instead traded outside of the country to private companies lacking any interest in the conflict, only aiming to profit on the internal disruption (Broodryk, 2010, p. 11). Kofi Annan highlights the economic struggle as central to internal conflicts:

The pursuit of diamonds, drugs, timber, concessions and other valuable commodities drives today’s internal wars. In some countries the capacity of the State to extract resources from society and to allocate patronage is the prize to be fought over (Annan, 1999, emphasis in original).

This creates a globalized war economy in which rivalry between criminal groups occurs over resources or “ illegal commercial activities” (Newman, 2004, p. 176). The process of resource capture thus means there is no real desire of victory as groups aim to maintain resource profitability and the power they capture (Newman, 2004, p. 176) – the state of war is preferred to peace as it provides a cover for illegal economic activities by warlords and non-state actors (Melander et al., 2009, p. 511)

However, there are a number of academics that criticise Kaldor’s new wars thesis, arguing that many of the ‘ new’ features of new wars can be found in earlier wars, and that the differences between old and new wars are not as dichotomous as made out and are often exaggerated (Newman, 2004, p. 173; Mello, 2010, p. 305). This essay agrees with this to an extent – a number of the features of new wars that Kaldor outlines in her argument are also present in wars of the past and suggest there is little ‘ new’ about

modern warfare in internal conflict situations, as will be outlined in the following section. In terms of empirical evidence for new wars, Newman accepts that civil war have been more frequent than interstate war, but argues that both forms of conflict have decreased since the mid-1990s, with the exception of a spike in intrastate conflict in the early 1990s (2004, p. 180). This, as Newman believes, shows there has not been an evolution of new wars in the post-Cold War period, and infact, the probability of country being in conflict is not similar to that at the end of the 1950s (Newman, 2004, p. 180). In addition, Melander et al. argue battle severity (the number of deaths in battle) has declined in the post-Cold War era, whilst violence against civilians in civil conflict has also decreased (2009, p. 507).

Kalyvas explores the features of the new war convention, contrasting them to those of old wars, and concludes there are probably more similarities than differences, and that the new wars thesis is flawed in a number of ways. Firstly, he takes the argument that ideological concerns were the motivations of old wars, claiming that in fact, many wars in the past have involved high levels of looting (such as the Russian and Chinese Revolutions) and that many combatants actually made decisions to fight based on local considerations (Kalyvas, 2001, pp. 106-7). Many soldiers are usually stimulated due to group pressures such as comradeship, respect and network ties such as family or friendship ties (Kalyvas, 2001, p. 108). This can be seen in Irish Revolution and Civil War, where often the ideology at the centre of the war was rarely discussed amongst combatants and the conflict was based instead on family factions and old feuds (Hart, 1999, pp. 264-266). Moreover, the depiction of new wars as lacking any ideological

movement can be challenged; many rebel forces of contemporary civil wars have been stigmatised as missing any ideological motivations for combat, but in fact many hold an in-depth understanding of their own participation from a political perspective, as shown in Sierra Leone (Kalyvas, 2001, p. 104).

The portrayal of contemporary warfare existing through a move from chivalrous fighting to that of barbarity by militia and warlords is unfounded (Newman, 2004, p. 181); the use of gratuitous violence can be found in old civil wars such in America, Russia and Spain, whilst the practice of child abduction to create child soldiers may be associated with contemporary Africa, but was common in conflicts in Afghanistan (during the Soviet invasion), Peru, Guatemala and the China (Kalyvas, 2001, pp. 114-5). The horrific violence and barbarism portrayed in Kaldor's new war thesis is also visible in past wars; the deliberate targeting of civilians can be seen in the Mexican Revolution at the start of the 20th Century, whilst World War II represents perhaps the most widespread cases of atrocities in the form of the Holocaust, the German advance into the Soviet Union (with huge civilian displacement) and the Russian advance on Berlin (with numerous cases of rape or sexual brutality) (Newman, 2004, pp. 182-3). It is for this reason that Madame de Staël remarks that " all civil wars are more or less similar in their atrocity, in the upheaval in which they throw men and in the influence they give to violent and tyrannical passions" (cited in Kalyvas, 2001, pp. 114-5). It is also possible to argue that modern intrastate conflicts do not utilise senseless violence, and that actually the portrayal of violence is defined by culture - those in the West find the use machete as more barbaric than mass

killings through bombings (Kalyvas, 2001, p. 115) - who is it to say which is the more 'atrocious' and inhumane? Furthermore, Kaldor contends the violence rebel and militia movements use is not as gratuitous as made out, and in fact it is often strategic and selective - Kalyvas argues the Algeria massacres, or the tactics used by RENAMO in Mozambique were part of larger strategies, whilst the forced amputation of women's hands in Sierra Leone can be seen as calculated to instil fear (2001, pp. 115-6). This is not to deny the acts as barbaric, but it certainly weakens the depiction of the violence as undisciplined and random.

A case study that suggests new wars are not in fact new can be found in the Congo civil war during the 1960s; Newman argues this conflict closely follows the new wars model and identifies with several characteristics of Kaldor's thesis (2004, p. 184). The conflict arose after Belgium withdrew from Congo in June 1960, resulting in a political crisis as the centralised government broke down and disorder erupted. The Katanga province, rich in minerals, declared independence from the Congolese state after receiving support from the Belgian mining companies who were protecting their interests and promoting secession in the background (Newman, 2004, p. 184). Conflict and struggles against the new leadership of the Republic of Congo was motivated primarily by material aggrandizement, particularly amongst militias and private mercenaries; at the same time, ethnic and religious differences stimulated the violence further, with some fighting orientated around clear political agendas (such as the unitary state against Katangan secession), whilst most fighting revolved around the interests of warlords and local factions (Newman, 2004, p. 184). State failure and the

breakdown of authority led to social disorder and the emergence of a war economy as mercenaries attempted to perpetuate conflict due to the benefits they gained not only from their employers but also from illegal activities such as arms sales (Newman, 2004, p. 184). This case study therefore highlights the presence of new war features during the Cold War period, with state failure and collapse leading to social disorder and conflicting identity groups competing for resources. This suggests that new wars are in fact not 'new' but have always been present; it is instead the emergence from the Cold War era that simply brought these conflicts to the fore and the expansion of media and communications that has led to the reporting of the internal disputes around the globe.

The essay will now turn to the question of whether new wars pose more difficult challenges to postconflict reconstruction, and whether new approaches to state rebuilding after internal civil war are required. Although the essay has argued throughout that new wars are not completely new, it has also noted that some characteristics of contemporary intrastate conflict have evolved from those of the past, and there have been some changes in the forms of conflict. It is for these reasons that the post conflict reconstruction process must make a few adaptations in order to assist a state's recovery after civil war. As Newman outlines, evolution and advancement in historical, technological and social-economic terms have meant the nature of conflict has also changed (2004, p. 185), and therefore the reconstruction process will face some new challenges. In many post-conflict nations, the levels of crime and human rights abuses remain high as warlords and militia remain at large, making use of their illegal economies

created through civil war – the are weaknesses in the reconstruction process that mean identity politics and the new wars rebuilding programmes are not tackled head on (Kaldor, 2006, p. x).

At a basic level, post conflict reconstruction must address a wide and complex range of challenges in states ravaged by internal conflict – the prevention of future armed conflict, the rebuilding of effective state institutions, recreation of a social fabric, redressing of human rights abuses and the nursing of a health civil society are all central to the reconstruction process (Call & Cook, 2003, p. 135). The prevention of further armed conflict is particularly important in the case of new wars as it is essential to discourage warlords, militia and other forces from restarting and perpetuating conflict in order to sustain the resource capture that is common in contemporary warfare. This therefore means the war economy that existed during the conflict must be replaced by an effective state economy that has a monopoly of the nation's resources and can prevent resource competition from accumulating and resulting in a fresh break out of conflict. Furthermore, the prevention of future conflict is not simply a matter of removing arms access and taking guns from the combatants, but it is also the establishment of “accountably, transparent, and participatory systems of authority” (Call & Cook, 2003, p. 135). In the aftermath of a new war, it is essential for restructuring forces to quickly create a form of state authority that is accountable to the people and is capable of solving the grievances of those involved in the conflict.

Kaldor stresses the importance for reconstruction to primarily involve the restructuring of political authorities and civil society, in the forms of law and <https://assignbuster.com/do-new-wars-pose-difficult-challenges-politics-essay/>

order and the mobilisation of political groups (2006, p. 145). The integration of all identities is also essential in order to remove the binary 'them' and 'us' dichotomy than can threaten to reignite ethnic or religious differences and disputes. The establishment of law and order requires disarmament, demobilisation, policing or training police forces, arresting of war criminals and the re-establishment of the justice system (Kaldor, 2006, p. 146).

However, it is not that simple; disarmament through 'buy-back' programmes results in the handing back of average or poor weaponry whilst the high-tech arms are held onto (Kaldor, 2006, p. 146). Furthermore, as new wars are essentially a combination of war and criminality, law enforcement must involve both soldiers and police in order to provide adequate security and authority. Infrastructure such as basic services, transport and production needs to be restored at both regional and local levels in order to re-establish the economy and reduce the need to humanitarian aid (Kaldor, 2006, p. 147). Humanitarian assistance also needs to become more targeted in order to remove war economies and their siphoning of aid, and also to prevent over-reliance on aid that means the economy cannot be rebuilt. For instance, in Somalia, food provisions were high and numerous in an attempt to ensure all of those in need actually received the aid; however, this meant food prices in the state fell, creating an environment where it was no longer economically viable for farmers to produce food (Kaldor, 2006, p. 144).

Another example of aid problems can be seen in El Salvador; here, and IMF stabilisation programme attempted to provide monetary assistance for the country to reconstruct. However, the strict spending limits of the IMF

provisions meant the state could not afford to build a civil police force and

enact 'buy-back' schemes for disarmament that was required by the peace
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programme to help reintegrate combatants back into society (Kaldor, 2006, p. 143). In this instance, therefore, humanitarian assistance in post conflict reconstruction needs to become more targeted and utilise local knowledge for it to be effective at rebuilding after a new war.

This essay has only touched on the surface of the reconstruction process after a new war, providing a basic outline of state rebuilding. However, it explains the need to adapt certain procedures uses in reconstruction of the state after a 'new war' - the need to retarget and develop aid provision, the importance of establishing effective authoritarian institutions to enforce security and peace, and the importance of reconstructing state structures that enable grievances to be addressed, civil society to be rebuilt, war economies removed, and the implementation of policies to prevent future state failure and conflict.

To conclude then, this essay points to the need for perspective when approaching new wars and post conflict reconstruction - each struggle will need its own unique form of reconstruction, and therefore the post conflict rebuilding process is a case-by-case thesis, with no singular set of reformation practices or factors and the presence or lack of certain factors associated with new wars is down to the unique contexts and mitigations of specific conflicts rather than linear historical changes (Newman, 2004, p. 180). There has indeed been a decrease in state vs. state conflict commonly associated with the past, whilst globalisation, decolonisation and the following state building, and the resurgence of identity politics have all suggested a shift from warfare of the past and therefore the need to adjust reconstruction policies (Newman, 2004, p. 180), and indeed some changes <https://assignbuster.com/do-new-wars-pose-difficult-challenges-politics-essay/>

are required. However, it is perhaps more appropriate to highlight the rise and expansion of the media and communications as an explanation for the perceived changes in conflict – many of the factors Kaldor outlines in her thesis are not in fact ‘new’ and have been present in past skirmishes – it is simply the prominence and attention these conflicts now receive from the media that has resulted in changes of perceptions and ideas of civil wars (Newman, 2004, p. 179). The first section of this essay outlined the basis of Kaldor’s ‘New Wars’ argument and the factors attributed to contemporary civil war; following this, the essay provided and agreed with the criticisms of the new wars thesis, highlighting the fact that many of the characteristics of ‘new wars’ are not as new as Kaldor makes out. Finally, the essay contended that contemporary wars do not provide many more difficult challenges for post conflict reconstruction in comparison to ‘old wars’, rather small adjustments must be made in order to account for the rise of globalisation and the modern world.