
Mission Impossible or the 'So-Called War'¹

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Abstract

In an interview with Marianne Brausch, the French philosopher Paul Virilio claims that with the atomic bomb the word 'end' was written under the term war. Through the invention of the atomic bomb and the experience of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, questions about war and peace must be asked in a new way. The end of the war at the same time stands for the beginning of this work in which the question 'what comes after the end?' is a common thread. Certainly the end of the war does not mean that since the end of the Cold War we have been living in a world of peace. But the classical model of war was detached from new forms of war. These new wars, as Virilio's reference to the atomic bomb shows, are connected to science, to technoscience. Through the invention of the bomb, traditional military terms such as attack and defence, as well as the act of declaring war no longer make sense. The distinction between military and civilian activities became blurred after the Second World War, and we are now faced with an environment, which is neither entirely military nor civilian. Finally the theory that war is the continuation of politics by other means developed by Carl von Clausewitz no longer works. But what is happening instead? Some possible explanations that are more the character of assumptions, will be presented here. My prime intention in this is to reveal tendencies.

The extension of war

If it's not love, then it will be the bomb that will bring us together. (The Smiths: 'Ask')

The atomic bomb created a highly disproportionate relationship between the political aims of war and the means used to achieve political aims. Had the bomb been used during the Cold War, very much more than the intended damage would have been done: in all probability the entire human race would have been wiped out. Indeed, the Cold War was the programming of the end of the world, as Paul Virilio in his theory of the 'Suicidal State' shows (Virilio 1984). The natural and political boundaries of war that Carl von Clausewitz spoke about as frictions, were finally lost with the atomic bomb. Fallout does not care about national borders or

friend/enemy distinctions. Carl von Clausewitz, for whom war was a highly political act, used the term friction to describe a number of obstacles that, for instance, could have geographical aspects, such as mountains or forests, which impair or impede warfare. Polity can also be an obstacle of this kind, because it limits warfare—also due to the fact that through the formation of the modern states warfare has become a technical and professional monopoly of the state. The ‘everyday-wars’ that had flared up ever and again and that were also called private wars, now became forbidden. Through this the civil society came to be excluded from warfare to a great extent (Clausewitz 1996: 216; Foucault 1986: 8 f.). The atomic bomb created a situation in which the effect of a nuclear war could have affected everybody and not just the enemy, and thus the distinction between the military and civilian areas became obsolete. A navy spokesperson explained the new situation in the following terms: ‘There won’t be any non-combat areas left in the world. Everywhere will be potential combat zone’. So, it would seem that in precisely that moment in which war became global, the globe itself shrunk—geographical distances became irrelevant. In this sense the bomb can also be seen as a herald of globalisation. Günter Anders said in this context that through the atomic bomb we are no longer just con-temporaries (*Zeitgenossen*), but also ‘con-toporaries’ (*Raumgenossen*) (Anders 1982: 3).

The Cold War was the programming of the apocalypse, but—and this must be understood—not ‘really’—as Jacques Derrida points out in his remarkable title ‘No Apocalypse, Not Now’. So the bomb, even though this seems paradoxical, made war impossible. The bomb could not be used, because a nuclear war would have brought the death of mankind. A virtual deployment, in the form of a permanent threat, was used instead of an actual deployment of the bomb, and so the age of deterrence began. In the logic of the Cold War the military as well as civilians went to war virtually²—and this marked a new form of warfare, because if the atomic bomb had been dropped, no one would have been left who could have drawn from his or her experiences. So the war experience took place before the actual war, through deterrence and simulation or virtual warfare. The ‘impossible war’ leads to two developments. On the one hand, deterrence and the Cold War emerged; and, on the other hand an implosion in the

civilian area occurred: while the technical-military sector grew immensely, the civil sector experienced a sort of stagnation. The impossible nuclear war produced a 'balance of terror' (Virilio), it created an absolutely new form of war, that soon reached hegemony within warfare: information war. 'While the old technology produced and distributed material resources, the new technology produces and disseminates information. The resources marketed in high technology are less about matter and more about mind' (Wilson 1995).

The importance of information in war was not, of course, a discovery of the 1990s. But, as Friedrich Kittler points out, the only thing unheard of in information warfare is the fact that espionage, communications technology, and war games all fall together in a global network (Kittler 1999: 173). Paul Virilio also helps us to understand that information warfare is a new phenomenon:

We are facing the third historical weapons system. Each system has had its moment of dominance. The first millenary weapons system is the system of obstruction, which dominated in history throughout the history of the rampart, the city, the wall etc., all the way to the atomic bunker. With the invention of artillery, we have moved into the dominance of weapons of destruction [...] This is also the beginning of mobile warfare, as well as the beginning of the end of siege warfare [...] Thus arises the Cold War, a system of non-war that will regulate the systems of nations for 40 years. Today we are entering the third weapons system: weapons of information [...] Arms of communication are beginning to dominate just as arms of destruction dominated in their own time. The Cold War was the advent of arms of communication. (Virilio 1999: 326)

With the new communication technologies, especially television, computer and the Internet, something more happened than just the introduction of new weapons—the combat zone itself was extended. Paul Virilio speaks about a fourth front, which was opened through information: After the land, sea and air fronts the information front arose on the horizon. From the Second World War the distinction between military and civilian fields became obsolete as a result of electronic warfare. Unlike wars of the past that took place in relation to borders and were conducted by military forces, present day information warfare can begin at any desk equipped with a personal computer.³ Thus we might ask

whether we are confronted today with a new generation of civil-servant soldiers; desk perpetrators who are equipped to perpetuate a new form of banality of evil. This new breed of civil-servant soldiers would not be primarily bureaucratically perfect, but technologically perfect instead. An information zone has been extended in recent decades to take the place of the fallout zone of the past. Paul Virilio often quotes Albert Einstein, who already foresaw this situation when he spoke of the three types of bombs: atomic bombs today, information bombs tomorrow, and demographic or genetic bombs the day after tomorrow (Virilio 1999: 327).

The undeclared war

In the past, the declaration of war was linked to the frontier, to real space and to real confrontation, as scholars of World War I and World War II have argued. Since those wars, wars have begun without warning. No declaration of war, but a continuation of war takes places. The permanent preparation and simulation of war leads to a state of war. Ingeborg Bachmann wrote in 1953: 'Der Krieg wird nicht mehr erklärt, sondern fortgesetzt. Das Unerhörte ist alltäglich geworden. Der Held bleibt den Kämpfen fern. Der Schwache ist in die Feuerzonen gerückt' (Bachmann 1992: 21). 'Der Schwache' (the weak) stands for the non-combatant, the civilian, especially women and children, who have increasingly become the victims of war since World War I, as well as also becoming part of a wilful strategy of war that sees the civilians as an indispensable factor in warfare.⁴ In current wars the number of civilian deaths is very much higher than the frontline casualties of past wars that were fought in real (rather than virtual) places. A 1994 study showed that 80 percent of the refugees world-wide (most of whom were refugees of war) are women and children (Yuval-Davis 1999: 36).

Since the end of traditional warfare and the emergence of wars of deterrence and information warfare, the beginning and the end of war cannot be precisely defined. War comes 'over night', like a raid, like a 'technical surprise'. Who, for example, could answer the question 'when

did the war in the former Yugoslavia begin?' With the first armed struggles between the Yugoslavian army and Slovenia on June 26 in 1991? Or had the war already started years before in the media? The Yugoslavian author Slavenka Drakulic makes this point when she writes about the wars in Yugoslavia that war took us for a ride, because its beginning was already incipient in the fact that we expected it (Drakulic 1990: 188), in other words, that we prepared for it. The list of non-declared wars is long, the latest example being the terrorist actions against the United States. These terrorist actions are also an example of how terrorism has become a global event. Thanks to television the 'incident' took place before a global audience, in global time. Who is the enemy? There was no letter claiming responsibility and no state or organisation that declared war against America—and it is not even clear whether this is a war against America. Is it a kind of war against America or against the whole of western civilisation? Or is it even a war between cultures as Samuel Huntington argued some years ago? When war is not declared anymore, the end of war is also no longer fixed. War and peace, instead of remaining two separate phenomena, have become one: We are witnessing today a kind of 'Con-Fusion' as Paul Virilio argues. André Glucksmann brings the situation to the point, he asks a question that is by the way, its own answer: What war and what peace? And he is convinced that the practice of not declaring war is not something new as many theorists and journalists have argued regarding the terrorist actions against the United States. Glucksmann stresses that the phenomenon of the undeclared war has to be seen in the context of deterrence: 'Richtig gehandhabt, offenbart die Abschreckung das verborgene Gesicht des Krieges, sie zwingt dazu, sich das Schauspiel schon vor der Premiere anzusehen, sie führt im großen Maßstab vor, was jeder Krieg im Detail bewirkt, und was ein nächster Krieg en bloc besorgen würde. Sie öffnet die Augen für die Katastrophe (Glucksmann: 1984: 285).

It is obvious that information warfare begins without forewarning. The front, in the new era of the 'balance of terror' is everywhere, but the entirely new factor is that the enemy cannot actually be seen. War becomes intangible. In the 21st century war aims at the power of information, as

the war of the past was aimed at the conquest of land and territory and later on the control of production. The new front is constructed through the global information systems. Information warfare is being developed at full speed following the success of the Gulf War of 1991. It has almost been forgotten today in respect of the Gulf War that the first US bomber squads flew over the Iraqi border shortly before midnight, while the undeclared electronic warfare, which opened up the sky over Baghdad, had started in the early afternoon. Besides a computer-supported war and high-tech weapons, the interest of the military strategists concentrates more and more on 'cyber war', whose ultimate target is the information infrastructure itself (Stocker 1998; Kittler 1999). War erupted in the sky as the Apocalypse correctly states, but war will be continued in the heaven of mathematics (Kittler 1999: 177). Information warfare operates in real time. When real time stands for the globalisation of time, in the sense that something that happens within the information zone happens in world time, in a global time, as Virilio argues, then information warfare takes place simultaneously in every place of this world at the same time. This also means that fights for information can no longer be located geographically. In this sense then, even if there were to be a declaration of war, which would be the nation, the group or the persons that would be informed about the beginning of war, when the whole world is concerned? In this context it is also useful to understand that information warfare is not so much about victory or defeat. Information warfare does not necessarily want to destroy the enemy, because sometimes it is just more useful to make the enemy depend on information and to control it through its dependence on information. So a crucial aim is to take over and to control the information zones. Such aims and operations, this is self evident, do not need a declaration of war.

The privatisation of war

A total transformation of the military system has taken place over the past few years in Europe and over the past few decades in the United States. The army is no longer a traditional national army, but a kind of

enterprise. We have witnessed the privatisation of the military, the end of conscription, the rise of the military profession and the crucial role of mercenaries. To be a soldier in times of economic insecurities means to have a (dead sure) job, to have a regular income. In addition the military sector is ever more comparable to security agencies or detective agencies. These developments are based on the transformation of warfare through technology. The privatisation of the military sector, of course, has to be seen in the context of the process of deregulation and privatisation of formerly state controlled and state aided fields, which began in the mid 1970s and also brought far reaching effects for the political and social sectors. The strategies used and keywords like efficiency, flexibility, mobility, professionalisation, individualisation and mechanisation, which all can be subsumed under the phenomenon of neoliberalism, did not halt before the gates of military institutions. It is a further interesting fact that with the privatisation of the military, the character and the task of the military also seems to change. It sounds strange, but a kind of civilisation can be observed. For example, the soldier has recently been seen as an 'armed social worker' as Ulrich Bröckling writes (Bröckling 1997: 326 f.). The following example illustrates this point: Only a few days before the military action against Serbia started in 1999, the German Defence Minister Rudolf Scharping spoke about 'social, communicative and political competences' the soldier of today must have. Asked what further jobs would wait for the military in the former Yugoslavia, the defence minister answered: 'demilitarise and create security'. He summarised the new challenges for the army, by using the keywords 'efficiency', 'social anchoring' and 'contributions to a modern Germany' in an environment where the German army would become the 'biggest employer' as well as the 'biggest instructor'.

But as Kittler argues, it is not just a privatisation of the institution itself that is occurring, but also a privatisation of war. 'According to the scenarios of Information Warfare, the monopoly on the use of force by nation-states no longer exists. The end of Hobbes' civil wars has itself come to an end with mafias and cartels, NGOs and terror bands. [...] The figure of the artist-engineer reappears, after having been seemingly displaced by the founding of standing (meaning national) armies'

(Kittler 1999: 176). So, with hackers, crackers and cyber pirates post-territorial fights are no longer only in the possession of governments, their defence ministries and intelligence services: Private individuals use the potential of information warfare for their personal interests. Condottieri, the mercenary leaders of the 15th century in Italy, are enjoying a comeback. Again, the terrorist actions against the US on the 11th of September are an example of this transformation of war. Terrorists use civil technology and fight their 'personal' wars in a civil field. Here, of course, the Missile Defence Program is powerless—new strategies are demanded. The value of Special Forces has increased recently. Indeed, Special Forces operate very similarly to the single-fighter terrorists, but if they really are able to stop terrorists and not just react to their actions, is an open question.

The gendered war

The issue of 'women and war' still seems to be a problem for the male mainstream. It is said that women did not go to war, did not fight, stayed at home or just did nursing work. Commonly held views suggest that they were never important for warfare. Quite the contrary is true. First, women fought on the 'real' front and took active part in revolutions and military campaigns, albeit in smaller numbers.⁵ Second, the army and warfare are central fields where distinct masculinities and femininities are created. The army is often defined as a 'school of masculinity' by feminist theorists, because this institution definitely teaches what being a man is often assumed to be: qualities such as fighting will, toughness, courage, resoluteness, strength and endurance are required. While typical feminine coded properties like peacefulness, weakness, uncertainty and domesticity are not valued in the army. After World War II and as a result of the emergence of high-tech war, this military construct of masculinity has changed in some aspects. Even though the crucial characteristics are still part of the idea of masculinity, a new accentuation on technology, the ability to rule and control technology can be located. Technological knowledge nowadays seems to be much more important than enormous

bodily strength. When followed to a logical conclusion this would mean that supposed female weakness is no longer relevant and that women are now capable of fighting as men do. In reality the situation is not like that, of course, because the understanding and the control of technology are also highly gendered—men, as the popular opinion suggests, would be much better in dealing with technology than women.

A law suit about the participation of women in combat took place in the United States at the beginning of the 1990s. The point at issue was whether women could be bomber pilots or not. So far they have not been allowed to be bomber pilots. Women were only permitted to refuel warplanes in the air and this was not defined as a combat task. Finally, after a long process of political lobbying and the formation of an investigation committee, the Clinton administration allowed women to take part in combat missions—apart from participating in the infantry or serving on submarines (Yuval-Davis 1999: 31). Even though combat experience 'on the real front' is a very rare experience for the soldiers of today and warfare is becoming more and more abstract, permitting women to take part in combat missions was a major step. The gendering of combat would still appear to be a very strong tendency. Femininity in largely male dominated fields such as combat, is seen as a disturbing factor for male bonding. So it is not, after all, a mere matter of chance that most female soldiers in the US Army work in the medical corps sectors (Yuval-Davis 1999: 25). This example indicates very well how difficult the transgression of gender borders still is.

The military will continue to construct martial masculinity, but whether or not it also will remain a male domain is uncertain. In the future more women will be trained as soldiers and will participate in combat assaults. It is significant that during the Gulf War the American media spoke for the first time about 'our boys and girls in the Gulf'. These developments, of course should not be seen uncritically as a sign of emancipation, but should be viewed more in the context of the transformation of war and the military itself. Thus the admission of women after the formation of a voluntary army in the United States was pushed ahead in order to avert the increasing entry of black soldiers (Yuval-Davis 1999: 24). Anyhow, the fact that some women are also part of

combat operations shows that 'masculinity' is not just reserved for men. Barbara Ehrenreich speaks about a turnout of the category of gender, even though masculinity remains a desirable quality in the army. 'Die Vertreibung der Kategorie des Geschlechts aus dem Krieg bedeutet nicht, daß Maskulinität keine erstrebenswerte Eigenschaft mehr wäre, sondern nur, daß sowohl Männer als auch Frauen sie besitzen können. [...] Die Aufteilung der Menschheit in 'männlich' und 'weiblich' dürfte weiterbestehen, doch diese Kategorien haben vielleicht immer weniger mit dem biologischem Geschlecht zu tun' (Ehrenreich 1997: 280).

In conclusion, it is always helpful to be aware of the fact that the figure of the high-tech warrior, man or woman, does not stand simply for a military development, but for a figure that can switch between military and civilian fields. The new soldier is also a new model of the human being in general, with a basis of technological knowledge and the ability to operate as a technologically rearmed body. The gender question and the choice of man or woman will probably be secondary in the future, but the question of whether we are connected and have a share of technological knowledge or not will be of substantially more significance.

Notes

- ¹ The American defence minister Donald Rumsfeld described the military attacks against Afghanistan as a 'so-called war' (Brössler 2001).
- ² Of course, there were also a lot of 'Hot Wars' during the Cold War, but it was not a matter of chance that they were called 'Substitute Wars'.
- ³ For instance, one of the Apple computers, the so-called G4 was defined as a weapon. The United States Government has not allowed Apple to export the new G4 systems to some 'sensitive' countries for fear of national security. And Japan has slapped export controls on Sony Corp's new, hugely popular PlayStation2 video game because the machine is so sophisticated that it could be used for military purposes (<http://www.zdnet.com>).
- ⁴ By the way, the term home front was invented during World War I—this also shows the importance attached to the mobilisation of the civil sphere and its affirmation for war in the past and in the present.

- ⁵ The two documented historical cases of substantial organised female participation in combat by state armies are the Dahomey Kingdom of West Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the Soviet Union in World War II. In the Dahomey Kingdom female combat participation lasted longer than the duration of a short crisis period. Women combat soldiers comprised an entire wing of the standing army, sometimes constituting up to a third of the entire fighting force. During World War II at the peak of the Soviet Union's effort about 800,000 soldiers (about 8 percent of the total Soviet forces) were women (Goldstein 2001). And as Hanna Hackers remarkable habilitation shows, the female soldier was not an exception, but a quite normal phenomenon until the invention of the national army (Hacker 1997).

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