


Arquilla, John, and David Ronfeldt, "Cyberwar is Coming!" Comparative Strategy, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 141–165 (Summer 1993).


Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Memorandum of Policy Number 30, Washington, D.C., 1993.


NETWAR: Information-age crime and conflict

The information revolution is leading to the rise of network forms of organization, with unusual implications for how societies are organized and conflicts are conducted. “Netwar” is an emerging consequence. The term refers to societal conflict and crime, short of war, in which the protagonists are organized more as sprawling “leaderless” networks than as tight-knit hierarchies.

Many terrorists, criminals, fundamentalists and ethnonationalists are developing netwar capabilities. A new generation of revolutionaries and militant radicals is also emerging, with new doctrines, strategies, and technologies that support their reliance on network forms of organization.

Historically speaking, netwar is about Mexico’s Zapatistas more than Cuba’s Fidelistas, Hamas more than the PLO, the Christian Identity Movement more than the Ku Klux Klan, the Asian Triads more than the Sicilian Mafia, and Chicago’s Gangsta Disciples more than the Al Capone Gang.

Netwar may be the dominant mode of societal conflict in the twenty-first century. This is one conclusion implied by the evolution of societies, according to a framework presented in this RAND study.

The emergence of netwar implies the need to rethink strategy and doctrine to conduct counternetwar. Traditional notions of war and low-intensity conflict as a sequential process based on massing, maneuvering, and fighting will likely prove inadequate to cope with nonlinear, swarm-like, information-age conflicts in which societal and military elements are closely intermingled. Netwar is more like the Oriental game of Go than like the Western game of chess.