

## The Relevance of Clausewitz's Theory with Fourth Generation Warfare in the Context of Asymmetrical Wars

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores the relevance of Clausewitz's theory of warfare with the concept of Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) in the context of asymmetrical wars. Clausewitz, in his work *On War*, focuses on war as a continuation of politics by other means, while 4GW introduces a more complex approach involving non-state actors, asymmetrical tactics, and blurred political goals. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method with a literature review approach to analyze how Clausewitz's theory remains significant in understanding modern conflicts characterized by the dynamics of fourth-generation warfare. Through the analysis of literature on 4GW and Clausewitz's theory, this paper aims to reveal the connection between traditional strategies and contemporary challenges, and how military doctrines can be adapted to asymmetrical warfare contexts.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the persistent security threats on the international stage is the conflict of interests between nations, which can escalate to war. War itself can be said to have existed as long as human societies have existed (Lele, 2014). However, the dynamics of security threats faced by state actors, such as war, are inseparable from the impact of the overwhelming currents of globalization (Ningsih & Nurbaiti, 2024). The complexity of problems and warfare in the present and future will continue to evolve rapidly compared to previous periods. Currently, security threats such as warfare are shifting from large-scale wars involving military strength, such as artillery and troops (conventional), conducted by state actors, to smaller-scale attacks that have impacts no less significant than military attacks (contemporary). Furthermore, the actors involved in these conflicts are no longer limited to state actors but also include non-state actors, both domestic and international (Ningsih & Nurbaiti, 2024).

The evolution of war and conflict in human history demonstrates significant changes in strategies, tactics, and the actors involved. From conventional wars between states to conflicts involving non-state actors, this evolution demands a comprehensive understanding of various generations of warfare. One of the most influential thinkers in war theory is Carl von Clausewitz, who, in his work *On War*, introduced the concept that war is a continuation of politics by other means. Clausewitz's theory emphasizes the importance of political objectives in war and the relationship between military strategy and tactics (Paret et al., 1986). However, with the emergence of asymmetric conflicts and Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW), the relevance of Clausewitz's theory is often questioned in the context of modern warfare.

Fourth Generation Warfare, which began to be recognized in the late 20th century, is characterized by the widespread use of non-state actors, asymmetric tactics, and the blurring of lines between war and peace (Simons, 2010). 4GW not only involves direct military conflict but also leverages media, economics, and cultural aspects to achieve often ambiguous political objectives. In 4GW, actors such as terrorist groups, insurgents, and militias have become more dominant, and wars often take place in urban areas with a focus on public opinion and global perceptions (Beyerchen, 1992). This presents new challenges to military doctrines rooted in conventional war theories, such as those proposed by Clausewitz.

In reality (*das sein*), modern warfare is currently dominated by non-state actors and asymmetric conflicts, where traditional approaches to warfare, as taught by Clausewitz, are considered less effective in addressing new challenges (Bassiouni, 2008). In the era of Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW), conventional strategies emphasizing state military power often fail to counter guerrilla tactics, propaganda, and cyberattacks employed by non-state groups. 4GW also underscores the importance of societal psychology and public perception, which are often overlooked in conventional warfare (Echevarria, 2005).

Normatively (*das sollen*), a more adaptive and flexible understanding of warfare is required to address the challenges posed by 4GW. Military doctrines must evolve to incorporate non-conventional aspects, such as managing public opinion, utilizing social media as a weapon, and developing more coordinated

anti-terrorism strategies (Forest, 2009). Clausewitz's theory remains relevant regarding the concept of the political objectives of war; however, its tactical and strategic approaches need to be expanded to encompass the new dimensions of asymmetric conflicts (Herberg-Rothe, 2007).

The gap between Clausewitz's traditional war theory and the realities of Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) is one of the greatest challenges in modern military doctrine. On one hand, Clausewitz's theory provides a critical framework for understanding the political objectives and strategies in war. On the other hand, the emergence of non-state actors and asymmetric tactics in 4GW demands more flexible and innovative approaches, which conventional war theories have yet to fully address (Meilinger, 2007).

Therefore, the problem statement in this research is how the relevance of Clausewitz's war theory can be applied in the context of Fourth Generation Warfare and asymmetric warfare. This study aims to answer the question: How does Clausewitz's doctrine on war remain relevant, or need to be adapted, in addressing the challenges of Fourth Generation Warfare involving non-state actors and asymmetric tactics?

Through a literature review approach and qualitative descriptive methods, this study will explore the relevance and limitations of Clausewitz's theory in the context of modern conflicts, particularly asymmetric warfare, and investigate the potential development of military doctrines to respond to the changing character of warfare in the modern era.

## **THEORETICAL REVIEW**

Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) represents a significant evolution from previous forms of conflict, where the role of the state as the primary actor begins to wane, while non-state actors, including terrorist organizations and insurgent movements, become increasingly prominent. Simons (2010) explains that within the context of 4GW, the shift in conflict actors necessitates a different approach, as traditional methods of warfare articulated by Clausewitz now require reinterpretation to address these changes. Asymmetric warfare blurs the lines between conventional warfare and conflicts involving non-conventional tactics. This literature emphasizes that Clausewitzian approaches remain relevant for assessing and understanding modern dynamics, particularly in situations characterized by uncertainty and high complexity.

### ***Clausewitz's Theory about War***

Clausewitz's theory of war emphasizes that war is the continuation of politics by other means. According to Clausewitz, military strategy must always be directed toward achieving political objectives, and warfare cannot be separated from its political context (Paret, Craig, & Gilbert, 1986). Clausewitz's ideas remain a foundational framework for understanding conflict, although in the modern era, characterized by asymmetric warfare, his theory requires reevaluation to account for the role of non-state actors and non-conventional tactics.

Herberg-Rothe (2007) highlights that Clausewitz's concept of the "Wondrous Trinity"—involving the interaction between the government, the military, and the people—remains relevant for understanding contemporary warfare. However, adaptations of this theory are necessary in the context of modern warfare, where conflicts no longer occur solely between two states but also involve non-state groups and terrorist organizations.

#### ***Fourth Generation Warfare***

The term Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) refers to a type of conflict that emerged in the late 20th and 21st centuries, where non-state actors, asymmetric tactics, and the use of media and propaganda play a central role in altering the dynamics of war (Simons, 2010). This form of warfare often involves cyberattacks, propaganda, and psychological operations aimed at influencing public opinion and international perceptions. The concept of 4GW challenges many traditional theories of warfare, which emphasize formal military power and conventional tactics.

According to Beyerchen (1992), one of the main challenges in understanding 4GW is the uncertainty and non-linearity of conflicts. War can no longer be predicted using mathematical models or strictly planned strategies but must be viewed as something flexible and dynamic. Additionally, non-state actors such as insurgent groups, terrorists, and criminal organizations exploit state vulnerabilities to achieve their political objectives through unconventional means (Echevarria, 2005).

#### ***Asymmetric Conflict and Non-State Actors***

In the modern era, an increasing number of conflicts involve non-state actors such as terrorist groups, insurgents, and militias, who employ guerrilla tactics and asymmetric methods to challenge militarily superior states. Bassiouni (2008) observes that one of the greatest challenges in these conflicts is the violation of international law by non-state actors, who often disregard conventional rules of warfare, such as the Geneva Conventions.

Asymmetric warfare often focuses on controlling public opinion and engaging in information warfare. Forest (2009) explains that modern terrorist groups use propaganda and information as weapons to instill fear and create instability, enabling them to achieve political objectives without engaging in large-scale military conflict. In this context, Clausewitz's doctrine, which emphasizes the importance of military dominance, must be expanded to include the dimensions of information and psychological warfare.

#### ***Use of Technology and Cyber Attacks in Modern Warfare***

Technology has transformed the way wars are conducted. The use of cyberattacks and drones by non-state actors exemplifies how technology can be leveraged in Fourth Generation Warfare. Haugstvedt and Jacobsen (2020) highlight in their study how insurgent and terrorist groups have begun employing drones as tools to carry out attacks on both military and civilian targets, adding to the complexity of addressing modern security threats.

Furthermore, Anderson (2016) hypothesizes that cyber capabilities have become a critical component of military strategy, with states and non-state actors

utilizing cyber technologies to disrupt critical infrastructure and influence the outcomes of conflicts. Cyberattacks represent a form of non-conventional warfare that necessitates new approaches to understanding security threats and developing defensive strategies.

### *Crisis of Compliance with War*

Bassiouni (2008) highlights that in modern conflicts, non-state actors often do not adhere to international laws, such as the Geneva Conventions, which regulate conduct during armed conflicts. This creates a crisis in the enforcement of the laws of war, as numerous violations committed by non-state groups are difficult to prosecute or address through existing international mechanisms. This research underscores the urgent need to reformulate the framework of international law to accommodate the evolving nature of modern warfare.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Research Design*

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design, aiming to depict existing phenomena based on data drawn from relevant literature. Descriptive research is a type of study used to provide detailed explanations of the phenomena addressed in a research project, offering an accurate depiction of the context, relationships, and characteristics of the phenomena under investigation (Silalahi, 2006). According to Sugiyono (2016), descriptive qualitative research seeks to understand social phenomena from the participants' perspective, utilizing non-numeric, narrative data. In this case, the study aims to understand how Clausewitz's theory of war can be applied in the modern context of Fourth Generation Warfare.

### *Data Collection*

Data collection in this study was conducted through a literature review. The literature used includes journal articles, books, and documents related to Clausewitz's theory, Fourth Generation Warfare, and the concept of asymmetric warfare. Bungin (2015) explains that a literature review is a data collection technique that involves examining previously published theories, concepts, or research findings. This study relies on secondary sources to gain a broader understanding of the topic under investigation.

### *Data Analysis*

After the data was collected, the analysis process was conducted using thematic analysis. Moleong (2018) explains that thematic analysis is a qualitative research technique used to identify patterns or themes that emerge from the collected data. In this study, the documents analyzed were selected based on their relevance to Fourth Generation Warfare and Clausewitz's theory, and the relevant data was systematically organized.

### ***Data Interpretation***

After the data analysis was conducted, the next step was data interpretation. The data that had been identified and analyzed was used to understand the theoretical context in applying Clausewitz's theory to Fourth Generation Warfare. Burhan Bungin (2011) states that in qualitative research, data interpretation is carried out to understand the meaning behind the data discovered, not merely to describe it.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS**

This study examines the relevance of Clausewitz's theory in the context of Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW) and asymmetric warfare through a comprehensive literature analysis. From the various literatures reviewed, it was found that Clausewitz's theory of the "Wondrous Trinity," which encompasses the relationship between the government, military, and society, remains relevant, although 4GW marks a shift from conventional warfare to more complex forms of conflict, where non-state actors play an important role (Herberg-Rothe, 2007). In Fourth Generation Warfare, characteristics such as non-linearity, information warfare, and asymmetric power dynamics become dominant elements (Beyerchen, 1992).

This study also identifies that Clausewitz's concept of total war needs to be reinterpreted in the context of modern asymmetric conflicts, particularly in battles that do not involve states as the primary actors (Saint-Amour, 2014). Non-state actors such as terrorist groups and armed militias have now become dominant players in global conflicts, which in turn presents new challenges to traditional theories of warfare (Bassiouni, 2008).

Based on the INEGMA research report written by Jahangir Arasli (2011), this can be seen by looking at the end of the 1990s, when the Cold War ended, and the global system in the international world continued to evolve. Several determinant influences from this process can be found in various factors such as:

- The increasing fluidity and uncertainty in the dynamics of state movements in the international arena.
- The impact of the high flow of globalization, which affects all domestic, regional, and international sectors such as information, transportation, and the continuous development of technology.
- The Westphalian system, which has lasted for so long, begins to fade due to the diminishing threshold of nation sovereignty as a result of the standards of international law and various international regimes in place, effectively "discounting" state sovereignty".
- The emergence and development of non-state actors oriented toward large-scale violent and anarchic actions, and the shrinking role of states due to globalization.
- The loss of the monopoly by states over organized violence and the emergence of a specific category for the collection of the previous points, namely Violent Non-State Actors (VNSA).

- The changing dynamics of global conflicts, indicated by the decline in armed warfare between states, alongside the increase in internal armed conflicts within states.

Fourth-generation warfare that is currently occurring shows how the dynamics of warfare have transformed into a decentralized form without the war boundaries that have long been referenced in the Westphalian Treaty or existing international law such as International Humanitarian Law. The boundaries of the targets and actors in this war have become increasingly unclear, such as in domestic politics, combatants, and those involved in the conflict in the context of the war being discussed. The changes that have occurred also become more abstract because they can no longer be identified as in the past. The form of warfare strategies has become disorganized, without the attachment of the rules of war, rebellion, the use of network systems, either domestic or transnational, and the exploitation of legal and security system gaps, both exposed and unexposed. The infiltrated domains have also become increasingly extensive, such as politics, ideology, religious culture, law, and even the national economy, without the extended time to identify the threats that emerge. Fourth-generation warfare itself contains various methods, such as the use of physical power, psychological tactics, and the utilization of cyberspace (Ningsih & Nurbaiti, 2024).

To further examine the relevance of Clausewitz's theory in fourth-generation warfare, which in this study refers to asymmetric warfare, it will be easier to look at real-life examples of the interaction between the two actors involved in asymmetric warfare. The author will use the case of the spread of radical violent ideologies (terrorism) that occurred in Indonesia to analyze the interaction between the Indonesian state and radical violent groups in Indonesia.

One of the national security threats that occurs in Indonesia is the crime committed by non-state actors, with one of the most frequently encountered being Transnational Organized Crime (TOC). Terrorism is one of the forms of TOC that has been globally identified and has become a security issue in many countries (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2010). Over time, the motives and modus operandi of terrorist acts have evolved in line with the times. One of the trends is the radical ideology held by non-state actors, who even spread their ideology to the global public. ISIS is one of the terrorist organizations that has been present and a problem for Indonesia for quite some time. Between 2014 and 2019, many Muslims, both in Indonesia and other countries, went to Syria to become part of ISIS and join this radical terrorist group (Putri & Wahyudi, 2019). According to records by the UNODC in 2015, there were at least 40,000 'fighters' from 120 countries who came to Syria to join ISIS. By 2019, when ISIS was on the verge of total defeat, many ISIS members from other countries returned to their respective countries, whether as fighters or sympathizers. ISIS called on its sympathizers to carry out terrorist actions and spread its teachings in their own countries, which ultimately became a threat to national sovereignty, such as in Indonesia (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021). The spread of radical ideologies and the terrorist actions launched by ISIS members taught them to continue spreading terror against governments and societies that

opposed their radical ideology, and these actions were carried out not only directly or physically, but also by utilizing technological advancements such as the internet.

The Indonesian government has identified this threat, and based on the White Paper of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Indonesia (2015), terrorism and radicalism are real threats that are prioritized in their handling. It is stated that global terrorism with radical movements such as ISIS is clear evidence that terrorism has become one of the forces using violence to carry out attacks against regimes with paradigms differing from their own beliefs. Therefore, the Indonesian government has adapted to the terrorism trends that are affecting the security and sovereignty of countries through changes in the legal framework for handling terrorism, strategies, and optimization of the terrorism handling agencies. The approach taken by the Indonesian government to handle terrorism, which is largely based on the ideology of radicalism, uses a soft approach known as deradicalization. The implementation of security enforcement related to this trend is recognized as not only requiring physical action but also the need to address the ideologies, in this context, radical ideologies (Hardiogo & Syafrinaldi, 2022). Through the establishment of two new directorates within the Special Detachment 88 Anti-Terror Police of the Republic of Indonesia, namely the Directorate of Prevention and the Directorate of Identification and Socialization, the police in Indonesia have undertaken various efforts such as counter-narratives to prevent the spread of radical ideologies and to carry out deradicalization of terrorism actors with radical beliefs.

Based on the example discussed earlier, it can be concluded that currently, security threats not only occur between states but also involve non-state actors (in the case above, ISIS). The power disparity between conflicting actors (asymmetric) leads inferior actors to use new methods such as the spread of radical ideologies to win over public support, destroy national unity, and alter public opinion about the current government. The use of technology, such as the internet, also becomes a medium exploited by inferior actors to carry out their strategies through the dissemination of propaganda and recruitment to turn the public against the state where they reside.

The following table shows a comparison between the elements of war according to Clausewitz and the characteristics of fourth generation war:

<b>Elemen</b>	<b>Clausewitz (Conventional War)</b>	<b>4GW (Fourth Generation Warfare)</b>
Actor	State	State & Non-State (Terrorists, militias)
Tactic	Centralized, frontal	Asymmetric, decentralized
Target	Military and strategic infrastructure	Civil society, public opinion
Technology	Conventional Weapons	Information technology, unconventional weapons (UAV)



Elemen	Clausewitz (Conventional War)	4GW (Fourth Generation Warfare)
Military-Society Relations	Focused on state power	Fragmentation of military and societal relations

Source: Compiled based on research by Beyerchen (1992), Herberg-Rothe (2007), and Bassiouni (2008).

Based on the table presented above, there are differences in the elements found between Clausewitz's theory and fourth-generation warfare. First is the actors involved. In Clausewitz's theory, the actors involved are explained as state actors, while in fourth-generation warfare, non-state actors play an active role, such as terrorist groups, militias, and other non-state actors. Second is the use of tactics, where Clausewitz's theory explains that tactics are centralized and frontal. In fourth-generation warfare, however, an asymmetric power factor between actors is evident, and the warfare is decentralized. Differences in objectives are also found between the two concepts, where Clausewitz's theory targets military forces and critical infrastructure as the core objectives to achieve victory, whereas fourth-generation warfare utilizes civilian populations and public opinion to achieve its political goals.

In terms of technology, conventional weapons with destructive physical power are characteristic of conventional warfare (such as firearms, artillery, combat forces, biological weapons, and others), while fourth-generation warfare takes advantage of information technology such as encrypted communication tools and the internet, as well as non-conventional weapons (UAVs) such as drones and signal jamming devices (RF jammers, GPS jammers, drone jammers, etc.).

Regarding the relationship between the military and society, in Clausewitz's theory, war is a political instrument regulated by the state, so the relationship between the military, government, and society will focus on the sovereignty and power of the state. The military acts as an instrument of the state, functioning under centralized political control with direct support and involvement from the society, mediated by the government. On the other hand, in fourth-generation warfare, the relationship between the military and society becomes fragmented. Non-state actors such as militias, terrorist groups, and guerrillas do not have formal ties with the state, thereby weakening the state's role. In such a situation, society can become part of the conflict, either directly involved with non-state actors or through disinformation and propaganda. The fragmentation that occurs creates a situation where the military and society become detached from the control of the state.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that Clausewitz's theory remains relevant in understanding the dynamics of modern conflict, but it needs to be adapted to the characteristics of 4GW, which are significantly different. Herberg-Rothe (2007) emphasizes that Clausewitz's "Wondrous Trinity" remains significant, although in 4GW, the relationship between state and non-state actors and society

becomes increasingly blurred. War is now more focused on controlling information and influencing public opinion (Forest, 2009).

Clausewitz viewed war as a phenomenon aimed at achieving a political objective. In his writings, Clausewitz explains that the political goal, which is the fundamental motivation behind a war, influences the movement of the military to achieve its goal, regardless of the extent of effort required. Ultimately, war is defined as the effort made using available force to compel the enemy to do what is desired (Čajić, 2016).

Fourth-generation warfare also demonstrates that the battlefield is no longer limited to the physical realm but also encompasses cyberspace and media (Anderson, 2016). In this context, the use of UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) by non-state actors illustrates a new development in war technology that Clausewitz did not anticipate (Haugstvedt & Jacobsen, 2020). The expansion of warfare's spectrum does not end with guerrilla tactics or conventional warfare movements but also involves ideology, religion, economy, and culture as objects of power struggle among the actors involved in the conflict. This development shows that while the basic principles of Clausewitz on total war and political warfare still apply, they must be adapted to emphasize non-military aspects such as psychological and political influence. The use of propaganda or acts of terror to undermine political power and state sovereignty will ultimately involve each actor's ability to set the "rules of engagement" in the ongoing conflict. Given the characteristics of fourth-generation warfare, such as strategically moving to oppose or force decision-makers to follow the will of the inferior actor through both direct and indirect confrontation, it is essential to adapt Clausewitz's theory, which was originally built during a time when previous generations' wars were still dominant and relevant.

From these findings, it can be interpreted that changes in the form of conflict do not negate Clausewitz's theory, but rather expand its application to asymmetric warfare, which has a broader spectrum, such as cyber warfare and the use of propaganda in conflicts (Stoker & Whiteside, 2020). A successful leader is one who can create the "rules of engagement" through their intelligence. This is what keeps Clausewitz's theory present and relevant in fourth-generation warfare today. The greatest challenge faced now is how traditional theories can remain relevant in the era of technology and asymmetric warfare.

### ***Practical and Theoretical Implications***

The practical implications of this study emphasize the importance of modern militaries not only focusing on physical force but also mastering information technology and non-conventional warfare strategies. This aligns with Schnauffer's (2017) view on the significance of understanding "gray-zone conflict," where the distinction between war and peace becomes increasingly blurred.

Theoretically, this research supports the need for an update in the approach to war theory to better encompass non-conventional and asymmetric elements that dominate current conflicts. Clausewitz's theory needs to be reformulated to account for new elements in modern warfare, such as the use of non-state actors, digital technology, and cyberattacks (Echevarria, 2005).

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study successfully demonstrates that Clausewitz's theory of the "Trinitarian Trinity" remains relevant to the phenomenon of Fourth Generation Warfare (4GW), particularly in the context of asymmetric warfare, although its implementation requires adjustments to address the challenges of modern conflicts involving non-state actors and the use of advanced technologies such as cyber warfare and UAVs. The key finding confirms that the shift from conventional warfare to asymmetric warfare does not reject the basic principles of Clausewitz, but necessitates an update in how the theory is applied.

In fourth-generation warfare, information and influence on public opinion play a crucial role, shifting the focus from physical combat to cyberspace and media. This study suggests that modern militaries must prioritize non-conventional strategies and information control to cope with the complexities of asymmetric warfare.

Although this study provides important insights, its limitation in using secondary data and the absence of empirical case studies indicate that further research is needed to enrich understanding of the application of Clausewitz's theory in real-world conflicts. Future research recommendations include a more in-depth study of developing military technologies and the influence of non-state actors in various global conflicts.

Thus, this research has answered the research questions and achieved its objective of exploring the relevance of Clausewitz's theory in fourth-generation warfare, while also providing suggestions for the further development of theory in the context of modern warfare.

This study has limitations in terms of reliance on secondary sources. Since it uses a literature review, the data obtained is limited to theoretical interpretations and does not include direct interviews with participants in modern warfare or empirical field data analysis. Additionally, this research does not include an in-depth analysis of wars in contemporary conflict zones such as the Middle East, which could provide additional insights into the application of Clausewitz's theory in real-world contexts.

## **FURTHER STUDY**

Future research is recommended to incorporate a case study approach involving actors of Fourth Generation Warfare across various global conflict zones. Further studies should also focus on the implications of advanced technologies, such as cyber attacks and the use of AI in the military, to gain a deeper understanding of how technological advancements continue to reshape the landscape of modern warfare.

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