

other European powers such as the Russian empire will substantially contribute to the understanding of the causes of the war.

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## **THE TRANSFORMATION OF WAR**

Martin van Creveld  
The Free Press: 1991  
254 pages  
ISBN 0 0293 3155 2  
£19.95

"A ghost is stalking the corridors of general staffs and defence departments all over the 'developed' world - the fear of military impotence, even irrelevance. ...As new forms of armed conflict multiply and spread, they **will** cause the lines between public and private, government and people, military and civilian to become as blurred as they were before 1648. ...One very important way in which men can attain joy, freedom, happiness is (through) war." (Van Creveld, 1991: 1, 226, 227)

These are the words that open and conclude this book whose stated objective is to provide a non-Clausewitzian perspective to 'modern' warfare (p ix). In the first two chapters, Van Creveld perceptively addresses the bankruptcy of nuclear weapons and strategy, the declining utility of conventional armed forces and the resurgence of low intensity conflict as well as the resounding political outcomes accrued through such conflicts. Acknowledging Karl von Clausewitz as an outstanding military theoretician, Van Creveld not only delineates the historical context in which Clausewitz's writings were most relevant, but goes on to evoke the works of Colmar von der Goltz (*Das Volk in Waffen*, 1883) and Erich Ludendorff (*Der Totale Krieg*, 1936) in order to clearly distinguish the concept of a trinitarian war in comparison to those of a total war and non-trinitarian war (p 35, 42, 45, 49). "Involving the surgical separation of the state, society and the military, the trinitarian war is compatible with the Clausewitzian prescription and primary notion of war as a continuation of politics" (p 63). While total war appears to be an extreme and perverted form of trinitarian war - it plays a vital role in as far as it nearly obliterated society, facilitated the rise of totalitarian governments and even precipitated the Second World War. This opened the flood gates for the resurgence of non-trinitarian conflict in which individuals and individual societies (not established armies acting on behalf of governments) take up arms in defense of their lives, property and freedom. Adopting the orthodox label of low intensity conflict (LIC) Van Creveld postulates that LIC's are set to become the way of war in the future for which modern armies are not prepared and to which the orthodox Clausewitzian view of warfare and strategy is inapplicable.

Traversing the Geneva Conventions (on prisoners, non-combatants and weapons) the book continues to show how modern warfare has obliterated the trinitarian notion of social relations and warfare. Since conventions define what war is all about, Van Creveld concludes that without laws, to define 'who is allowed to kill whom, for what ends, under what circumstances and by what means', there can be no war (p 93, 225). The chapter on 'How Wars are Fought' provides valuable insights on the development of strategy; how it is affected by technological advances; on inflexibility, friction and uncertainty as the

main obstacles to the application of strategy; and on the reciprocal dynamics of concentration of force (in space and time) and the attendant dispersion that makes concentration possible. Important, however, is the discussion of what Van Creveld calls the paradoxical logic of strategy, which manifests itself in the non-repeatability of strategy due to its interactive and imitative nature (p 120, 195),

To substantiate and buttress the argument on the decline of conventional military organs and wars as of orthodox, Van Creveld adduces the wars of existence which are not amenable to the cost-benefit analysis approach to the conduct of war (p 143). In such war interest lose their rationality and utilitarian value and to claim that war is a continuation of politics becomes meaningless (p 142). Noting that war begins, not when one kills another, but when one risks being killed in return (p 159), as well as that what is fought for is not always intrinsically valuable (p 167), Van Creveld goes on to deal with the classical wars of the weak against the strong and highlights how the strong are damned if they do and damned if they don't.

A compelling account of the role of women in warfare leads to an equally compelling conclusion - that the unconditional involvement of women in warfare may lead to the demise of military institutions and war making (p 187). This is followed by a seemingly misplaced debate on the emotional and moral bankruptcy of classical strategic thought and literature (p 189, 190). Van Creveld's non-trinitarian/non-Clausewitzian society is precipitated by the 'vice between nuclear weapons and the rise of LIC's' which has castrated the state that is now less able to protect its citizenry.

Beyond the constant romanticisation of the Israeli Wars (1952, 1967, 1972) this book focuses exclusively on the failures of Western states in perceiving the foreseen changes in warfare. Africa and Asia are conveniently mentioned to expatiate some or other issue that, presumably, would otherwise be inexplicable. The book should serve as a wake up call to those who don the highest military awards and take the crucial decisions on war making - it is a plea to them to realise the impending perdition of society should they fail to adapt their views and practices to the prevailing circumstances. Destructive as warfare might be, (according to Van Creveld) it is also the most crucial means of ensuring the continued survival of the human species. Behooved by hindsight - the book is instructive to military scholars and practitioners alike. To philanthropists, historians, sociologists and political scientists this book - which points to the coming degeneration and regression of society to primeval settings - has potential to answer questions that have so far remained unanswered. A great reader!

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