



The Transformation of War: The Most Radical Reinterpretation of Armed Conflict Since Clausewitz

By Martin Van Creveld

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At a time when unprecedented change in international affairs is forcing governments, citizens, and armed forces everywhere to re-assess the question of whether military solutions to political problems are possible any longer, Martin van Creveld has written an audacious searching examination of the nature of war and of its radical transformation in our own time.

For 200 years, military theory and strategy have been guided by the Clausewitzian assumption that war is rational—a reflection of national interest and an extension of politics by other means. However, van Creveld argues, the overwhelming pattern of conflict in the post-1945 world no longer yields fully to rational analysis. In fact, strategic planning based on such calculations is, and will continue to be, unrelated to current realities.

Small-scale military eruptions around the globe have demonstrated new forms of warfare with a different cast of characters - guerilla armies, terrorists, and bandits—pursuing diverse goals by violent means with the most primitive to the most sophisticated weapons. Although these warriors and their tactics testify to the end of conventional war as we've known it, the public and the military in the developed world continue to contemplate organized violence as conflict between the super powers.

At this moment, armed conflicts of the type van Creveld describes are occurring throughout the world. From Lebanon to Cambodia, from Sri Lanka and the Philippines to El Salvador, the Persian Gulf, and the strife-torn nations of Eastern Europe, violent confrontations confirm a new model of warfare in which tribal, ethnic, and religious factions do battle without high-tech weapons or state-supported armies and resources. This low-intensity conflict challenges existing distinctions between civilian and soldier, individual crime and organized violence, terrorism and war. In the present global atmosphere, practices that for three centuries have been considered uncivilized, such as capturing civilians or even entire communities for ransom, have begun to reappear.

Pursuing bold and provocative paths of inquiry, van Creveld posits the inadequacies of our most basic ideas as to who fights wars and why and broaches the inevitability of man's need to “play” at war. In turn brilliant and infuriating, this challenge to our thinking and planning current and future military encounters is one of the most important books on war we are likely to read in our lifetime.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Most wars since 1945 have been low-intensity conflicts and, according to the author, incomparably more significant than conventional wars in terms of casualties suffered and political results achieved. Citing the dismal record of regular forces vs. irregulars in Vietnam, Lebanon, Afghanistan and elsewhere, he suggests that as small-scale wars proliferate, conventional armed forces will shrink and the burden of protecting society will shift to the booming security business. Van Creveld, who teaches history at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, argues that the theories of Karl von Clausewitz, which form the basis for Western strategic thought, are largely irrelevant to nonpolitical wars such as the Islamic jihad and wars for existence such as Israel's Six-Day War. In the future, he prophesies, wars will be waged by groups of terrorists, guerrillas and bandits motivated by fanatical, ideologically-based loyalties; conventional battles will be replaced by skirmishes, bombings and massacres. Weapons will become less, rather than more, sophisticated and the high-tech weapons industry (which "supports itself by exporting its own uselessness") will collapse like a house of cards. A bold, provocative, frightening book.

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Users Review

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