Great Powers, Small Wars

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CHAPTER 1

Origin and Development of the Asymmetric Conflict Concept

POSTWAR PEACE: FROM TOTAL WAR TO ASYMMETRIC CONFLICTS

The two world wars of the twentieth century marked the culmination of the development of international relations involving the great powers and the peak of their interstate aggression. The numbers of the dead tell part of the tale. More than 10 million people perished in World War I, and more than 17 million military personnel and 34 million civilians died during World War II. World War I gave rise to the hope that war on such a scale would never again happen, leading it to be dubbed "the war to end all wars"—only for such hopes to be belied by the horrors and immense resource consumption of World War II. The desire to end all wars has been at least partially fulfilled, as since 1945, the great powers have not gone to war with one another. Competition among Western countries was trans-ferred to the economic realm, while the West and the East have developed certain "rules of the game" intended to prevent military clashes.

The concept of asymmetric conflict emerged because the nature of armed conflicts changed significantly in the post–World War II era. The direct military confrontation of major powers gave way to indirect par-ticipation in armed conflicts on the periphery of the international system.

Several new terms were introduced to emphasize the distinctive features of these conflicts, among them small wars, low-intensity conflicts, local wars, limited wars, counterinsurgency operations, and antiterrorist campaigns. Notably, a significant proportion of the armed conflicts involving the great powers were not classic interstate wars, or wars between parties of roughly equal status and capabilities.

The French philosopher, historian, and political scientist Raymond Aron (1905–1983) was one of the first to point out that the character of war had changed with the emergence of nuclear weapons, and that "nations on the periphery [of the United States and the Soviet Union] acceded to the first rank." In his 1948 book *The Great Schism* (*Le Grand schisme*), Aron coined the popular postwar saying "impossible peace, improbable war."[1] Later, in his 1962 *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations* (*Paix et guerre entre les nations*), this aphorism was elaborated in another memorable statement: "Inter-state relations present one original feature which distinguishes them from all other social relations: they take place within the shadow of war, or, to use a more rigorous expression, relations among states involve, in essence, the alternatives of war and peace."[2]

Aron believed that the main trend in the evolution of wars was their limited character, resulting from the need to avoid total war between two opposing camps, as it "cannot not be atomic." In his 1951 book *Chain Wars* (*Les Guerres en chaîne*) and in the articles "A Half-Century of Limited War?" (1956) and "On War without Victory" ("De la guerre sans victoire," 1951), Aron further developed the idea of the transformation of war from a military-strategic phenomenon into a political one. In his memoirs, he wrote that "the history of war could only be understood in the context of the history of political relations," and that the Korean War (1950–1953) seemed to him to be a turning point, when "for the first time in its history, the United States gave up an annihilating victory. After a half century of total wars, there began the half century of limited war."[3] Furthermore, Aron predicted the binary impact of nuclear weapons in terms of states able to conduct total war versus limited war: "A hierarchy of the regions of the world becomes apparent, with certain regions protected by thermonuclear weapons, and certain objectives worth, in the eyes of both sides, the risk of mutual suicide. Elsewhere, the rivalry will be pursued in traditional ways, with or without the use

of conventional military techniques (with guerrilla warfare playing an increasingly important role)."[4]

Hans Morgenthau (1904–1980), a prominent twentieth-century student of international politics and law, pointed to two mechanisms restraining the bellicose aspirations of nations and contributing to the preservation of peace: first, the balance of power as a spontaneous mechanism of self-regulation of states' behavior in the international arena as states strive to maximize their power; and second, normative restrictions on the struggle for power imposed by international law, international morality, and global public opinion.[5] Furthermore, the balance of power as competition and struggle between autonomous forces or unions of states in the postwar period becomes global, and the existence of a dominant system of the balance of power between superpowers and their allies subordinates and determines the local balance of power systems.[6]

Analyzing the elements of the international system that constrain major powers (international law, international morality, and global public opinion), Morgenthau pointed out that they were primarily relevant for the conduct of "total war." In his view, modern war had become total "in four different respects: (1) with regard to the fraction of the population engaged in activities essential for the conduct of the war; (2) with regard to the fraction of the population affected by the conduct of the war; (3) with respect to the fraction of the population completely identified in its convictions and emotions with the conduct of the war; (4) with respect to the objectives of the war." Morgenthau also stressed that "Warsaw and Rotterdam, London and Coventry, Cologne and Nuremberg, Hiroshima and Nagasaki are stepping stones, not only in the development of the modern technology of war, but also in the development of the modern morality of warfare. The Indochina war for all practical purposes obliterated the distinction between combatants and civilian population."[7]

The prominent American political scientist and foreign relations expert Kenneth Waltz (1924–2013) wrote in 1967 that "the striking characteristics of world politics since the war have been: peace among the powerful; their occasional use of force against others; war at times within and among the weak; the failure of such forces as have been used to lead to wider wars at higher levels of violence." He also noted that "never in this century have so many years gone by without the great powers fighting a general war,"

and that "small wars have been numerous, but somehow violence has been controlled and limited," and "despite dreadful dangers, a relative peace has prevailed." "But," Waltz emphasized,

> by the size of stakes and the force of the struggle, ideology was sub-ordinated to interest in the policies of America and Russia, who behaved more like traditional great powers than like leaders of mes-sianic movements. In a world in which two states united in their mutual antagonism far overshadow any other, the incentives to a calculated response stand out most clearly, and the sanctions against irresponsible behavior achieve their greatest force. Thus two states, isolationist by tradition, untutored in the ways of international rela-tions, and famed for impulsive behavior, soon showed themselves— not always and everywhere, but always in crucial cases—to be wary, alert, cautious, flexible, and forbearing.[8]

The posture of forbearance that Waltz singled out is further supported by the potential for economic loss from warmaking, a matter of concern even to wealthy developed countries. Jack S. Levy, professor of political science at Rutgers University and a specialist in wars between the great powers, has pointed out that the main reason for the decreased frequency of such wars was that the potential gain from war was much reduced com-pared to the economic and human costs associated with it. Military actions are accompanied by numerous casualties and human suffering, the destruc-tion of infrastructure, increasing expenditure on modern armaments, and a growing demand for manpower. Such wars expand by involving new participants, which further increases the costs and reduces the potential gain from the war: either one's costs increase because of the need to wage war against yet another adversary or one is obliged to share the gains with a larger number of allies.[9]

Thus, the great powers, when creating the postwar world order, had to elaborate and adhere to mechanisms of nonviolent conflict resolu-tion, no matter how acute the disagreements dividing them might be. The Australian-born Hedley Bull (1932–1985), a leading international relations theorist of the twentieth century and a dominant voice for the so-called English school, noted that "great powers manage their relations with one

Table 1.1. Participation of Great Powers in Armed Conflicts with Casualties of at Least 25 People, COSIMO Database, 1945–1999

State	Direct participant	Indirect participant	Initiator	Aggressor	Mediator in the conflict settlement
United Kingdom	27	16	14	1	10
USSR/ Russia	17	55	8	3	7
France	17	20	1	3	8
China	16	19	11	1	0
United States	11	78	4	3	33

Note: States are listed in order of their direct participation in armed conflict, from most (United Kingdom) to least (United States), for the period 1945–1999.

Source: Calculations were performed using a database of national and international conflicts from 1945 to 1999 created as part of the COSIMO project at the University of Heidelberg, Germany, under the direction of Professor Frank Pfetch, Cosimo (http://www.hiik.de/en/kosimo/data/). The complete record of data from which table 1.1 was extracted is given in the appendix to this book.

another in the interests of international order by (i) preserving the general balance of power, (ii) seeking to avoid or control crises in their relations with one another, and (iii) seeking to limit or contain wars among one another. They exploit their preponderance in relation to the rest of international society by (iv) unilaterally exploiting their local preponderance, (v) agreeing to respect one another's spheres of influence, and (vi) joint action, as is implied by the idea of a great power concert or condominium."[10]

However, the self-imposed moderation with regard to direct confrontation did not mean that great powers would completely forgo the use of force. Table 1.1 provides data on the participation of states in armed conflicts resulting in casualties of at least 25 people. The first five positions

among the most belligerent nations belong to the great powers. They are all permanent members of the UN Security Council.

These figures highlight the fact that the United Kingdom was the absolute leader in terms of direct participation in armed conflicts during the latter half of the twentieth century. Its leading position can be explained by the rise of national liberation movements in the British Empire's vast colonial possessions and mandate territories after World War II. France and the Soviet Union (Russia) are the two other clear leaders in terms of direct participation in armed conflicts, with 17 instances each. They are followed by China (16 instances) and the United States (11 instances).

Statistics on indirect participation in conflicts, however, offer a different perspective, confirming the widespread assertion that the superpowers actively struggled for influence through indirect participation in armed conflicts in the third world, with the United States engaged in 78 instances and the Soviet Union/Russia in 55. The indirect participation of France and China exceeded the degree of these states' direct involvement in armed conflicts. For France, 20 instances of indirect involvement were recorded, compared with 17 instances of direct participation; for China, these figures are 19 and 16. The United Kingdom is distinguished by the domination of its direct involvement (27 instances) over indirect participation (16 instances).

Patterns of conflict initiation and mediation also speak to the superpowers' further participation in armed conflicts as both instigators and peacemakers. The United Kingdom led among conflict initiators (14 instances), followed by China (11) and the Soviet Union/Russia (8). The United States was the most active mediator (33 instances), followed by the United Kingdom (10), France (8), and the Soviet Union/Russia (7).

Postwar peace turned out to be an illusion for the great powers, but even more surprising was that their power and ability to win wars against weaker opponents also appeared to be illusory. In a number of cases, the great powers suffered political defeat at the hands of adversaries that had considerably inferior power and resources. Major examples include the defeat of France in Indochina and North Africa, the dissolution of the British Empire, and conflicts in which Belgium, the Netherlands, and Portugal lost their various colonial possessions in Africa and Southeast Asia. The outcome of such conflicts demonstrated that military domination

did not always lead to victory, and military success did not ensure political triumph. According to calculations by the American researcher Ivan Arreguín-Toft, an international security expert and specialist in asymmetric warfare, in 1800–2003 the strong won 71.5 percent of asymmetric conflicts, with the proportion steadily falling over the next century: in 1900–1949 the strong won 65.1 percent of asymmetric conflicts, but in 1950–1999 won only 48.8 percent.[11] The political victory of weaker adversaries was reflected in the fact that the great powers were forced to enter into agreements contrary to their interests, which basically neutralized their superiority in the balance of power.

It is possible to identify several distinctive features of armed conflicts in the postwar period that were characterized by ascending asymmetry. In particular, the number of internal conflicts kept growing throughout the entire postwar period. These conflicts took place within the borders of a single state, as opposed to "classic" interstate conflicts. Such internal or national-level conflicts are asymmetric in that they represent a struggle between the whole and its parts (the center and the periphery). Many internal struggles, however, became international with the active involvement of external players or the international community in conflict settlement.[12]

The third world was the scene of most asymmetric conflicts in the postwar period. Internal conflicts in Africa, Asia, and Latin America often took the form of civil wars in which guerrilla tactics and terrorist strategies were used. Guerrilla warfare is not a novelty; its origins can be traced to far-distant historical periods. In the second half of the twentieth century, however, favorable conditions emerged for the broad use of this form of armed struggle as an efficient means to defeat a superior adversary.[13] The great powers frequently became enmeshed in these protracted domestic wars, providing military, technical, economic, and other assistance to one or another of the belligerent parties. However, this assistance did not guarantee victory to the recipients.

The developed countries faced their own internal conflicts during this time and were not always able to resolve the issues without resorting to force. Examples include ongoing actions by the separatist Basque movement in Spain, the activities of the Irish Republican Army in Northern Ireland, and conflicts in Russia surrounding the separatist movement in the Chechen Republic. Such conflicts require long-term efforts to

find a political solution, isolate the radical elements, and "win the hearts and minds" of the separatists.[14] Sometimes, too, national conflicts lead to complications in relations with other countries, such as when migrant communities provide financial support to radical movements in their country of origin.[15]

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the East-West division put at risk the existing balance of power, the system of great power relations, and precipitated a dangerous chaos in international relations. As Kenneth Waltz wrote in 1967, "I am tempted to predict, perversely, that in the coming years students of politics will look back on the era of the Cold War, if indeed it has ended, with the nostalgia that diplomatic historians have long felt for nineteenth-century Europe."[16] The superpower confrontation gave way to new and no less grave security threats.

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Beginning in the late 1990s, mentions of asymmetric threats or challenges started to appear in political analyses. Around the same time, US security and defense agencies undertook a thorough examination of the concept of asymmetric threats.[17] Asymmetric threats were defined as the capability of an opponent weaker in terms of resources and power to strike a significant blow or inflict considerable damage on a superior adversary and thus influence the outcome of the conflict. If asymmetric conflict is understood as conflict characterized by an asymmetry in the power, resources, status, and interests of the parties to the conflict, then asymmetric threats and challenges represent primarily tactics aimed at finding a stronger adversary's vulnerabilities and striking against them. The actions of terrorist groups and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) on the part of economically and politically weaker states serve as examples of asymmetric strategies or threats. The acquisition of WMDs is one of the sought-after ways for some developing countries to gain authority and power.

Asymmetric threats force powerful international actors to reconsider their military doctrines and systems of military personnel training, and to pay more attention to the early detection and prevention of possible dangers. Actors that are weak in respect to power and resources come to rely on asymmetric strategies more and more frequently. At present, most analysts

refer to guerrilla tactics and terrorist strategies as asymmetric. However, this assessment largely reflects the evolution of these tactics and strategies in conflicts between unequal adversaries in the postwar period, rather than the belief that guerrilla warfare and terrorist activities are inherent characteristics of asymmetric conflicts.

The distinctive features of asymmetric conflicts were readily apparent in the wars of the early twenty-first century. The war on terror initiated by the United States in response to the September 11, 2001, attacks materialized in two protracted wars, in Afghanistan and Iraq. The dynamics of the military operation in Afghanistan, launched in 2001, demonstrate that the United States and the NATO countries are far from achieving unequivocal victory over the Taliban and local al-Qaeda cells, despite eliminating their primary terrorist adversary. The Iraq War, launched in 2003, also demonstrates that the strategy of relying on superior power is unproductive. After Saddam Hussein's regime was overthrown, the most powerful states in the world failed to ensure the necessary level of security in the country or to implement a plan for postconflict reconciliation and nation-building. What was supposed to be a war of liberation for the people of Iraq turned into a guerrilla fight against Western occupation forces. This fight relied on terrorist methods of struggle against the occupation forces and local collaborationists.

The volatile Middle East offers other examples of asymmetric conflicts of recent vintage. One such conflict was Israel's 2006 war against Hezbollah in Lebanon, which precipitated a feeling of defeat and a deep political crisis in Israeli society. Though the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah conflict is far from resolved, it already exhibits features that would allow one to characterize it as asymmetric, and to make certain predictions about its outcome based on the asymmetric conflict model. Unrest in North Africa in 2011 and a military operation by Western countries against the authoritarian regime of Muammar Gaddafi and in support of the Libyan opposition forces are other recent examples of great power involvement in domestic conflicts, with the great power here backing the nonstate actors.

Thus, in armed conflicts of the twenty-first century, asymmetry has been evident across the board. Moreover, the manifestations of asymmetry are increasingly associated with a nonlinear sequence of events—that is, sporadic skirmishes in which neither side makes lasting military gains— and a break with the simplistic logic of military power superiority. For this

reason, it is important to pay special attention to the phenomenon and try to evaluate the impact of asymmetry in individual cases of armed conflicts involving the great powers and their weaker adversaries.

Some experts believe that it is not worthwhile analyzing wars according to asymmetry principles, because in almost all armed conflicts, the power and the resources of the adversaries are a priori not identical. Besides, it is held, rooting out an adversary's vulnerabilities so as to inflict maximum damage and minimize one's own losses and costs—in other words, mounting an asymmetric response—is the task of any military commander. From that perspective, the notion of asymmetry is indeed not useful or relevant to an analysis. Analysis within the framework of the asymmetric conflict concept presumes greatly incommensurate power between adversaries. Developed, industrialized countries have state-of-the-art high-tech weapons systems, advanced economies, educated personnel, and advanced transportation and communication networks, while their third world adversaries are disproportionately weaker in military, technical, and economic strength. It is the conflicts (and their outcomes) between two such clearly delineated adversaries that will prove most helpful in developing a robust model of asymmetric warfare, the goal of this book.

The phenomenon of asymmetric conflict and its development in the post–World War II era can be briefly summarized in the following points.

1. In turning to the asymmetric conflict phenomenon, researchers seek to identify recurring patterns in contemporary armed conflicts that cannot be explained from the perspective of existing international relations theories or strategic analysis. The asymmetries reflect chiefly a qualitative rather than quantitative disparity between the belligerent parties. To quickly summarize the argument: Great powers and superpowers possessing enormous military power were forced to constrain themselves in its use after World War II, which effectively ended direct interstate conflicts between the great powers. Thereafter, the international system imposed restrictions on the behavior of the great powers through formal and informal associations, international law, economic cooperation, and the global economy. Nonmilitary factors have played a crucial role in the outcome of post–World War II armed conflicts, for it was after that war that public opinion began to play a meaningful role in the foreign affairs

of democratic countries and the influence of the mass media increased greatly, especially with the widespread availability of television.

2. The direct military confrontation of great powers has given way to indirect forms of armed conflict as the great powers participate in wars on the periphery of the international system. The nature of the warfare, strategy, and tactics; the degree of involvement of a nation's armed forces; and the resources available to the great powers cannot be categorized within the conventional framework of war. The great powers face forms of warfare with which their large armies are not familiar, and must develop special strategies and train special military forces to engage in such wars.

3. The participation of the great powers in armed conflicts in the third world is an important factor contributing to the dynamic character and outcome of such conflicts. Ideological confrontation within an international system consisting of great powers at the center and weaker states on the periphery has enabled relatively weak actors to manipulate the interests of the great powers, drawing the latter into protracted wars and attracting the resources of developed countries to achieve the objectives of the lesser states. Such an intertwining of interests, manipulation, and the cynical use of ideology has created a special environment in which the core and the periphery of the international system interact. The rhetoric of a struggle for ideals and justice has become an integral part of warfare.

4. Most armed conflicts in the post–World War II era do not conform to our customary understanding of war between states, that is, between parties symmetric in terms of status and capabilities. Moreover, symmetry in this context does not imply parity, a simple equivalence of antagonists' forces and resources, which would be a rather basic and uninformed interpretation of equality in international relations. As Brantly Womack, professor of political science at the University of Virginia, puts it, "symmetry does not require absolute equality, but it does imply potential reciprocity in the interaction: what A could do to B, B might likewise do to A." Such an understanding of the relationship between the two parties allows us to take into account the possibility of influence exerted by a stronger party through "soft power" without resorting to

"hard power," while still relying on the existence of hard power and the veiled threat of using it.[18] Thus, conventional wars have been replaced by various armed conflicts characterized by numerous asymmetries.

5. The post–World War II era can be divided into three periods defined by the distinctive features of great power participation in armed conflicts on the world system periphery and of their interaction in the international relations system. The first period, from 1945 until the mid-1960s, was characterized primarily by armed conflicts in colonies struggling for independence against the European great powers, especially the United Kingdom and France. The second period, from the early 1960s to the 1990s, witnessed the intensification of US and Soviet participation in armed conflicts in the third world. The collapse of the Eastern bloc and the dissolution of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of the third period, which has been characterized by deepening economic and political competition between developed states, even as new factors of asymmetry arise from actors on the periphery of the world system. Powerful extrasystemic actors, such as al-Qaeda and other international terrorist groups, have challenged the stability of the post–Cold War period and in doing so have once again raised the profile of asymmetric conflict.

CRITICAL APPROACHES TO THE CONCEPT OF ASYMMETRIC CONFLICT

The literature on asymmetric conflicts is of three general kinds. In the first group are studies investigating specific historical cases that could be regarded as examples of asymmetric conflict. This group constitutes an abundant research literature that analyzes postwar decolonization and includes the memoirs of eyewitnesses, among them military personnel, politicians, and diplomats. The second group includes studies written by political scientists and theorists of international relations and conflict studies; these studies often proceed from specific case studies to generalizations. In the third group are publications that address the problem of asymmetric conflict as one of tactics and strategy, as a need to adapt military strategies and the structure of military forces to wage small wars, as well as efficient counterinsurgency and

antiterrorist campaigns. The writings of politicians, strategists, and revolutionaries from developing countries who elaborate the tactics and strategies of victorious wars against imperialist countries are allied with this group in terms of subject matter.

The term "asymmetric conflict" was introduced by the international relations scholar Andrew Mack in a 1975 article titled "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict." His study, which was supported by the Social Science Research Council of the United Kingdom and the Rockefeller Foundation, aimed "to undertake an analysis of several asymmetric international conflicts in which an external power confronts indigenous insurgents." Mack devoted most of his analysis to the US war in Vietnam; however, he also pointed to several other defeats of developed states that corresponded to the concept he was exposing, namely, the conflicts in Indochina, Indonesia, Algeria, Cyprus, Aden, Morocco, and Tunisia. According to Mack, "Local nationalist forces gained their objectives in armed confrontations with industrial powers which possessed an overwhelming superiority in conventional military capability."[19]

Mack wrote that asymmetric conflicts refuted the experience of great power control over the third world. Furthermore, this experience could not be reduced to colonial domination and its deposition. These conflicts destroyed the "once prevalent assumption—that conventional military superiority necessarily prevails in war." In most of these conflicts, according to Mack, the strong states neither won nor lost militarily, but did lose politically as they failed to impose their will on their opponents. Thus, the main justification for the use of force to achieve one's goals and the rationale for entering the war were lost. Mack argued that in every case, "success for the insurgents arose not from a military victory on the ground—though military success may have been a contributory cause—but rather from the progressive attrition of their opponents' *political* capability to wage war. In such asymmetric conflicts, insurgents may gain political victory from a situation of military stalemate or even defeat."[20]

Mack's article offers hypotheses about the reasons for the paradoxical defeat of great powers, though Mack himself characterized his work as offering a "pre-theoretical perspective." He noted that the defeat of great powers was driven by several factors, among them (1) the loss of political will to continue war; (2) a complex of asymmetric relations between

adversaries, defined by, among other things, the assumption of total war by the weaker party and limited war by the stronger party; (3) the use of strategies of asymmetric struggle (guerrilla warfare); and (4) the impact of nonmilitary factors—domestic, social, and international—on the decision to stop fighting. Following Mack's argument, we can define the essence of asymmetric conflict as the political defeat of a great power in a war against an a priori weaker adversary, under circumstances in which military superiority does not guarantee victory and might even be counterproductive.

Andrew Mack deserves credit for having brought together seemingly isolated facts into a single conceptual model and for offering a capacious and succinct definition of the phenomenon as asymmetric conflict. He applied the term "asymmetric" to both the structural and the dynamic elements of conflict—to resources, status, interests, the ability to mobilize, strategies, conflict outcomes—a move that allows the qualitative changes in a conflict to be explored once the quantitative disparities have been identified. At the same time, he saw the need to wrap the concept of asymmetric conflict in a holistic cover, and invoked an axiom from Aristotle to make his point: "The asymmetries described in this paper—in the interests perceived to be at stake, in mobilization, in intervention capability, in 'resource power,' and so forth—are abstracted from their context for the sake of analytical clarity. But the whole remains greater than the sum of its parts, and it is the conflict *as a whole* which must be studied in order to understand its evolution and outcome."[21] The title of his article contains the key words that Mack's followers often use: *small wars* of great powers, and *why* big nations *lose* small wars. Surprisingly, after the publication of this article, which laid the foundation for the asymmetric conflict concept, Mack seems not to have developed the idea further.

Andrew Mack's biography reflects a uniquely diverse set of life experiences. His pre-academic career included six years in the Australian Royal Air Force, two and a half years in Antarctica as a meteorologist and deputy base commander, a year as a diamond prospector in Sierra Leone, and two years with the BBC's World Service, writing and broadcasting news commentaries and producing the *Current Affairs* program. Later, he studied at the University of Essex, worked at the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute and the London School of Economics, became research director of the Richardson Institute for Peace and Conflict Research in London,

and taught at leading US and Asian universities. In 1998–2001, he was director of the Strategic Planning Office in the Executive Office of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. He then took up an appointment as head of the Human Security Centre at the University of British Columbia, Canada. Since 2007, he has directed the Human Security Report Project at the School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University, British Columbia.[22] Professor Mack presented the Human Security Report 2009/2010 on January 20, 2010, at the United Nations in New York. Some of the conclusions of that report refute received opinion about the dynamic of current armed conflicts, the number of casualties, and the results of peacekeeping efforts.[23]

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Before the 1990s, the concept of asymmetric conflict was not on the charts, though the issues that Mack addressed in his 1975 article—especially the sources of power and influence in international relations and how nonmilitary factors might condition victory and defeat—had attracted the attention of other researchers. The changing character of warfare was a crucial component of the scholarly debate: the transition from direct military confrontation, or conventional warfare, to indirect forms of struggle (guerrilla strategies, civilian participation, terrorism), and the spread of small wars involving great powers on the periphery of the world system (e.g., low-intensity conflicts, limited wars, local wars, proxy wars, counterinsurgency operations, peacekeeping operations) as opposed to big wars between great powers. Thus, it seems that asymmetric conflict, parsed as the paradoxical defeat of a great power by a vastly weaker adversary, was investigated by many scholars who, for one reason or another, did not fully apply Andrew Mack's concept.

In reflecting on the US political defeat in Vietnam, for example, many analysts sought the reasons for such an outcome and tried to draw lessons from it. Such a pragmatic approach led to the conclusions of these studies being applied in political analysis, in decision making, and in military planning. Such well-known scholars as Hans Morgenthau; British historian Michael Howard; Jeffrey Hart, speechwriter for President Richard Nixon; and the researchers James Lee Ray, Ayse Vural, Zeev Maoz, and many others were among those who debated the lessons of

Vietnam.[24] These debates frequently referenced the biblical battle between David and Goliath,[25] which underscores the scholarly interest in conflicts between unequal adversaries, even if Mack's full conceptualization had not yet come to the fore.

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Research using asymmetric conflict as a guiding concept has been pursued in a variety of genres. A vast research literature has been devoted to the US war in Vietnam,[26] for example, including books by Henry Kissinger and Robert McNamara detailing the reasons for the US defeat and the lessons of the Vietnam War.[27] The distinctive features of limited conflicts involving superpowers were actively researched in the 1970s and 1980s,[28] and the topic was still drawing scholarly attention in the mid-1990s.[29]

Other notable case studies of this phenomenon have dealt with the history of British engagement in small wars and the Soviet war in Afghanistan.[30] US, coalition forces, and NATO military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq in the 2000s reminded analysts of the war in Vietnam and the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan, and encouraged comparisons.[31] The war in Lebanon in 2006, the military campaigns in the Chechen republic of the Russian Federation, and other conflicts became the subject of case studies and theoretical analyses in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.[32]

Military tactics and strategy represent a somewhat different area of research, and publications in this field have addressed guerrilla warfare, counterinsurgency operations, the problem of army efficiency in small wars, and the ways in which the great powers revised their military strategies in light of the changing international system.[33] In surveying such works, it becomes clear that the organization of "small wars" and guerrilla and sabotage groups in the adversary's rear, or the same sort of operation undertaken by regular forces in an occupied territory, holds a prominent place historically in the development of the military strategy of many countries. Organizing guerrilla warfare is described in the writings of the French, Russian, and British military strategists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example.[34]

The importance of training military personnel to organize and wage guerrilla warfare or small war varies with the time period, but such training

continued to be an integral part of military theory and practice during the twentieth century. At the same time, guerrilla warfare tactics were studied by the leaders of developing countries, who deemed them the most efficient in the fight against "international imperialism." Prominent among such leaders is Mao Zedong, author of the Chinese revolution, though he preferred discussing the advantages of a protracted engagement rather than guerrilla warfare.[35] Equally famous are the ideas of the legendary Cuban revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara, who believed that revolution could be exported and who perished in Bolivia in 1967 while trying to foment a revolution there.[36] Another example of this genre is provided by the writings of the British scholar and army officer Colonel T. E. Lawrence, the famous Lawrence of Arabia, who wrote an article on the theory and practice of guerrilla warfare for *Encyclopaedia Britannica* based on his experience in such wars in the Arab East.[37] He died in 1935, but books devoted to his legacy are still being published, and he has been called many things, from a genius of friendship and military strategy to "a prince of our disorder."[38]

For the past decade, international terrorism has been the most dangerous adversary of the leading world powers, particularly the sort of terrorism embodied in the al-Qaeda movement and its former leader, Osama bin Laden. Some analysts even began considering international terrorism as an example illustrating the evolution of asymmetric strategies in the era of confrontation between the developed global north and the poor and oppressed global south. Earlier studies of guerrilla movements also highlighted instances of the use of terrorist tactics, but in those cases such tactics were not the key mode of struggle for national liberation.[39]

In the 2000s, the ideologists of the international terrorist movement attempted to equate terrorist actions with the actions of guerrilla groups and conventional forms of armed struggle in order to obtain public approval for such actions and to try to position terrorist acts within the compass of international law. This view may seem absurd, if one overlooks the fact that in the 1970s the actions of guerrilla groups were de facto equated with the actions of regular troops under international humanitarian law, which regulates the conduct of participants in armed conflicts. The 1976 Additional Protocols I and II to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 included provisions according to which participants in guerrilla groups were covered by international humanitarian law. The main idea is that guerrilla fighters are to

follow the rules of military actions and wear insignia distinguishing them from civilians. The issue of whether guerrilla groups should follow these rules is the subject of lively debate among lawyers, politicians, and ideologists of radical movements, as well as their opponents.[40]

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In Soviet science, the victory of relatively weak parties over stronger states was viewed through the prism of research on national liberation and anti-colonial movements, and an understanding of such conflicts was rooted in a class-based approach. Nevertheless, although Soviet and Russian researchers did not propose analytical schemes similar to those propounded in the West (such as a theory of asymmetric conflict, an analytical approach to the problem of defeat of democracies in small wars, the effect of restrictions on military actions in democratic countries, or a complex understanding of power and influence in international relations), they did identify similar patterns that could explain the defeat of developed countries in such wars.[41] Soviet historians often pointed to crucial reasons for the defeat of developed countries in anticolonial wars that Western scholars and politicians did not openly discuss. For instance, Soviet historians paid much more attention than the West to "interimperialist contradictions" with regard to colonies, postwar arrangements, the global monetary system, and the struggle for influence in the third world.

Another reason for defeat, one noted in both the Russian literature and Western studies, though with a certain amount of bias, was of ideological competition and the attractiveness of socialist rhetoric to anticolonial movements. In rereading the writings of Russian and overseas historians of the 1950s to the 1970s, it seems clear that ideological biases influenced the way in which historical events were assessed, often resulting in a deliberate veil of silence or poor coverage, but the level of analysis and argumentation lends undeniable credibility to many papers. Fortunately, researchers today have an opportunity to compare and reconcile the writings of Russian and foreign authors, thus uncovering both persistency and missing links in the historiography.

One aspect commonly mentioned is the superpowers' self-imposed restriction on the use of force during the confrontation era of the 1960s to the

1980s. This voluntary restraint was intended to prevent a direct armed conflict that could escalate into full-scale global war. Western and Soviet research literature are also united by their fealty to the notion of a just war, which touches on the issue of morality. The Soviet interpretation of just war was peculiar, as it secularized this theological concept, which was first suggested by Saint Augustine. Soviet historians instead relied on the understanding of just war promulgated by Vladimir Lenin. The cornerstone of his interpretation was the popular legitimization of violence for the sake of national liberation and revolutionary transformation. By way of comparison, Western literature acknowledged the immorality of war within the pacifist and liberal traditions, whereas Soviet literature condemned the "crimes of imperialism."

From the standpoint of Russian military doctrine, the topic of small wars and guerrilla warfare was viewed primarily as part of military personnel training. Furthermore, the importance assigned to this component of professional military training varied. There were periods of heightened attention to the topic, such as after the Patriotic War against Napoleon in 1812, again in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the Russian army participated in the Balkan wars, and during World War II. However, there is no indication in the open sources that Russian military science would develop strategies to put down insurgencies, though at present that is a crucial task for the armies of all developed countries.

It is difficult to assess how deeply Russian military science investigated counterinsurgency tactics, as the military domain by tradition remains almost entirely closed, so that any existing practical and methodological studies that might have been used to train military personnel participating in local conflicts in the twentieth century are unavailable, though one occasionally comes across references to those writings. It is also true that the writings of military strategists on small wars and guerrilla strategies published in the pre-Soviet period can be found in library collections.[42] The book by Vladimir V. Kvachkov is an exception to the wall of silence surrounding Soviet and Russian military training methods, for it is available both on the Internet and in print. Kvachkov studies the evolution of small war strategies, including special operations and guerrilla warfare, in Russian and Soviet military science.[43]

Until the early 1990s, there were no indications in the Russian literature—at least in the publicly available literature—of the possibility of using the

experience of guerrilla movement organization in military doctrines or that the Soviet army had used such experience in third world countries. However, in the Western literature one finds papers investigating the participation of the Soviet Union and developed countries in organizing guerrilla and liberation movements.[44] Information on such operations was usually restricted, and only after the collapse of the Soviet Union did a significant amount of new memoir and research literature emerge on the extent to which the Soviet Union and its military specialists participated in organizing guerrilla movements overseas.[45] There are also bibliographic materials on Western concepts of limited wars, prepared at the request of the Soviet General Staff.[46]

In the late 1990s to early 2000s, a number of publications devoted to the Soviet experience in Afghanistan appeared. They included books written by participants and eyewitnesses, chiefly military personnel and correspondents; the memoirs of politicians; and the recollections of and interviews with ordinary war participants.[47] At present it is of research interest to compare the Soviet and US experiences in Afghanistan. Although Russian authors tend to believe that the United States repeated the Soviet Union's mistakes, American analysts are not so sure.[48]

In conversation with Professor Tatyana Alexeeva, head of the political theory department at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), I learned that Soviet analysts were familiar with Andrew Mack's seminal article on asymmetric warfare. Indeed, Professor Alexeeva, along with other MGIMO faculty members, had prepared a special executive summary for the country's leadership outlining the key ideas of the article. However, until the 2000s, asymmetric conflict was not a specific research topic in Russia. The collapse of the Soviet system also meant an opening of the country to free interaction with the global research community, and many topics that once were taboo came under the spotlight. Conflict studies and political theory were on the upswing, and asymmetric conflict drew the attention of scholars familiar with Western research in this field.

The concept of asymmetry is used in the Russian sciences to study ethnopolitical conflicts, gender relations, legal and economic relations, and European integration.[49] It is also used in strategic analysis. In this regard, the Russian historian and ethnologist Airan R. Aklaev has articulated a

distinction between symmetric and asymmetric conflicts based on political-administrative differences of the parties to the conflict. Vertical or hierarchical conflicts, or conflicts between actors at different levels of a political hierarchy, such as between a state and an ethnic group,[50] are defined to be asymmetric, in contradistinction to horizontal conflicts, which are symmetric.[51] Aklaev provides examples further adumbrating this understanding of symmetric versus asymmetric relations:

> Horizontal conflicts involve equal-status actors and/or power holders of the same order, such as groups within the ruling elite, moderates and radicals, nonruling parties, or factions of the same political movement. Horizontal conflicts are those occurring between two ethnic groups or political/administrative units when none of the ethnic groups controls the central government (e.g., conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan for Nagorno-Karabakh in the Soviet Union). In vertical conflicts the parties are not of equal status, and there are differences in power, that is, the parties are involved in relations of hierarchy, of domination and subordination, as happens in instances of conflict between an ethnic group and a state, such as when there is an attempt to secede or a unilateral push for autonomy (e.g., Transdnistria and right-bank Moldova, Georgia and South Ossetia, Quebec and Canada, the Basque Country and Spain, the Kurds in the Middle East).[52]

Aklaev's formulation of asymmetric conflict thus invokes a status difference between parties in a hierarchical relationship characterized by relations of subordination and inequality of the conflicting parties. It is worth noting here that unequal status relations between entities already are recognized as part of the political and legal discourse at national and international levels. For instance, an "asymmetric federation," as discussed in the political organization literature, means that units that differ in their legal authority are united under a federal system.[53]

In characterizing ethnopolitical conflicts in the modern world, Aklaev argues that asymmetric armed conflict, the predominant form that such conflicts take, is a complex phenomenon that can be identified "based not only on the participants involved (not two sovereign states but a state and

a rebellious section of politicized identity population groups) but also on other qualitative characteristics ([such as] decentralized decision making by fragmented authorities, armed violence [conducted] not by regular but by paramilitary gunman groups, [or] the widespread use of terrorist methods and guerrilla warfare)."[54]

In Russian strategic analysis, the term "asymmetric" has a specific meaning: it describes the Soviet (Russian) strategies that were developed in response to new military programs and systems of the United States. In particular, the Soviet concept of an asymmetric response evolved in answer to the US Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) of 1983. The concept implied looking for the most vulnerable spots in the antiballistic missile defense system of the United States and developing ways to counter those system components so as to make the SDI redundant.[55] This approach, in its essence, does not contradict the understanding of asymmetric response as a way to compensate for an inequality in power capabilities when it is impossible to achieve superiority over an adversary in an arena dominated by the adversary. Precisely this approach—neutralizing a stronger adversary by seeking out and attacking its weak points—is integral to debates over military strategy and tactics and foreign policy doctrines.

In recent years, several dissertations relying on the concepts of asymmetry and asymmetric conflict have been defended in Russia.[56] Articles on this topic have been published in analytical and military journals,[57] and there are even discussions of asymmetry in college textbooks.[58] At this point, it is hard to predict how valuable and independent the contribution of Russian researchers to this topic will be. Their writings are likely to continue the debate over the changing nature of armed conflicts and the sources of power and influence in the contemporary world system. It is imperative, however, that Russian analysts move beyond a stance of noninvolvement. Further development of asymmetric conflict theory by Russian political scientists should result in identifying both the positive and negative asymmetries within Russian power structures, state institutions, and society. To date, however, statements mentioning asymmetries are predominantly valorizations of Russian power structures that have been victorious in asymmetric confrontations, rather than a critical analysis of the country's internal mistakes and weaknesses. It is possible that in accordance with the Russian tradition, which is dictated to a

certain extent by the Soviet legacy, any discussion of the "weaknesses of strength" will remain an embargoed topic.

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The research literature on asymmetric conflicts as instances of the political defeat of great powers in wars against weaker adversaries appeared almost simultaneously with the articulation of this concept in the mid-1970s. However, as usually happens, a more systemic investigation of the phenomenon, generalization from individual cases, and theoretical work had to wait. Therefore, the phenomenon bears further scrutiny, even if it has already been studied within other conceptual frameworks such as small wars, guerrilla and antiguerrilla strategies, and national liberation and anticolonial movements. Debates as to the relevance of this concept and its analytical significance do not undermine its heuristic contribution to the study of post–World War II armed conflicts. The asymmetric conflict concept brings together in one explanatory construct recurring patterns of behavior exhibited by the great powers and by new actors on the world political stage. When working with this concept, it is important to analyze it in connection with other analytical constructs that allow the identification of interconnected events taking place in different parts of the postwar world.

DEFINING ASYMMETRIC CONFLICT

The concept of asymmetric conflict developed chiefly along one of two paths: the further development of Mack's hypotheses, or a rethinking of existing perceptions about international relations that also took Mack's hypotheses into account. Two major trends in analysis have also emerged: asymmetric conflict is studied either as a tactical and strategic phenomenon[59] or as a sociopolitical phenomenon. The first approach is concerned with strategies of warfare that might account for victory or defeat. The second approach sees war as subordinate to politics, and pays significant attention to the process of foreign policy–making in developed countries, the participation of society in foreign policy decisions, the ways in which the media present the war, and other national, international, and

economic factors. Regardless of their scholarly predilection, however, all authors examining the concept of asymmetric conflict proceed from the foundation of Andrew Mack's pioneering work.

The US literature on military strategic analysis is an example of the consistent development and application of the concept of asymmetric conflict. In the 1990s, the concept gained popularity because of the obvious superiority of the United States after the end of the Cold War and the vanishing possibility of any military conflict based on the symmetric scenario; that is, conflict with an adversary equal in military strength. The concept of asymmetry answered perfectly to the need to understand the US position in the new world system and to assess potential threats. Robert M. Cassidy, a US Army major who holds a PhD in international security, has observed that "asymmetric" became a term du jour in the mid-1990s.[60] Robert H. Scales, commander of the US Army War College, has also noted that "asymmetric warfare" became a Pentagon buzzword in the 1990s.[61] Several different meanings of the term have been codified in military doctrinal documents, and furthermore, changes in the term's meaning can be seen to have tracked changes in the global political environment.

In the early 1990s the term "asymmetric" was used to characterize US Army strategies. To quote from "A Doctrinal Statement of Selected Joint Operational Concepts" (1992), by Colin L. Powell: "When required to employ force, Joint Force Commanders seek combinations of forces and actions to achieve concentration in various dimensions, all culminating in attaining the assigned objective(s) in the shortest time and with minimal casualties. Joint Force Commanders arrange symmetrical and asymmetrical actions to take advantage of friendly strengths and enemy vulnerabilities and to preserve freedom of action for future operations." Another interpretation of the term in the same document turns on the type of force used: "Engagements with the enemy may be thought of as symmetrical, if our force and the enemy force are similar (land versus land, etc.) or asymmetric, if forces are dissimilar (air versus sea, sea versus land, etc.)."[62] The term was used to conjure an indistinct threat in the "U.S. Joint Doctrine" and "National Military Strategy" documents of 1997 ("While we no longer face the threat of a rival superpower, there are states and other actors who can challenge us and our allies conventionally and by asymmetric means such as terrorism and weapons of mass destruction").[63] The following definition

of the term appeared in the *Joint Doctrine Encyclopedia* of 1997, under the authority of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: "Asymmetrical actions that pit joint force strengths against enemy weaknesses and maneuver in time and space can provide decisive advantage."[64] Similarly, the *Doctrine for Joint Interdiction Operations* of 1997 reiterates the need to "arrange symmetrical and asymmetrical actions to take advantage of friendly strengths and enemy vulnerability." It notes that "Joint Forces Commanders must aggressively seek opportunities to apply asymmetric force against an enemy in as vulnerable aspect as possible—air attacks against enemy ground formation in convoy (e.g., the air and special operations forces [SOF] interdiction operations against German attempts to reinforce its forces in Normandy), naval air attacks against troop transports (e.g., US air attacks against Japanese surface reinforcement of Guadalcanal), and land operations against enemy naval, air, or missile bases (e.g., allied maneuver[s] in Europe in 1944 to reduce German submarine bases and V–1 and V–2 launching sites)."[65] This interpretation of the term asymmetric is traditional in strategic analysis and characterizes the choice of an efficient strategy that allows maximizing success and minimizing one's costs and casualties. The essence of asymmetric strategy is to find smart solutions to fighting, and to overcome an adversary's advantages in armaments or strategic position.

This gradual shift in emphasis and interpretation of symmetric and asymmetric was reflected in the new notion of "asymmetric threats." This is evident in the May 1997 *Quadrennial Defense Review*, a six-month analysis of the threats to US national security that also reviewed US defense strategy and programs, including force structure, infrastructure, and readiness. The report was prepared under the leadership of US secretary of defense William S. Cohen and states, in part:

> U.S. dominance in the conventional military arena may encourage adversaries to use such *asymmetric* means to attack. … That is, they are likely to seek advantage over the United States by using unconventional approaches to *circumvent* or *undermine* our strengths while *exploiting* our vulnerabilities. Strategically, an aggressor may seek to avoid direct military confrontation with the United States, using instead means such as terrorism, NBC [nuclear, biological, or chemical] threats, information warfare, or environmental sabotage to

achieve its goals. If, however, an adversary ultimately faces a conventional war with the United States, it could also employ *asymmetric* means to delay or deny U.S. access to critical facilities; disrupt our command, control, communications, and intelligence networks; deter allies and potential coalition partners from supporting U.S. intervention; or inflict higher than expected U.S. casualties in an attempt to weaken our national resolve.[66]

This review is frequently cited, and later documents repeat almost word for word the definition of asymmetric strategies that could be used by US adversaries. In the *Joint Strategy Review* of 1999, asymmetric approaches were defined as "attempts to circumvent or undermine US strengths while exploiting US weakness using methods that differ significantly from the United States' expected method of operation."[67] The term "asymmetric" was used in the same sense in the February 2010 *Quadrennial Defense Review* presented by the US secretary of defense, Robert Gates.[68] Thus, over time, "asymmetric" came to be used to characterize the strategies and tactics of US adversaries of inferior power capabilities. In accordance with this approach, "asymmetric" came to mean the opposite of "conventional," "ordinary," or "traditional" in describing threats, attacks, and military actions.

The problem of asymmetric threats, strategies, and military operations is actively explored by think tanks, at US military schools and academies,[69] and in the pages of professional journals.[70] *Challenging the United States Symmetrically and Asymmetrically: Can America Be Defeated?* was one of the first publications of this kind, appearing in 1998. It explored US military and technical superiority and the changing character of military actions, as well as terrorism, information warfare, and the ability to wage asymmetric wars.[71] Another report, *Asymmetry and U.S. Military Strategy: Definition, Background, and Strategic Concepts*, prepared in 2001 by the Strategic Studies Institute, part of the US Army War College, suggested two kinds of asymmetries: positive and negative. Positive asymmetry is understood as the use of the strategic advantages of the US Army, while negative asymmetry is understood as situations in which adversaries of the United States attack its vulnerabilities. As the report correctly pointed out, there is nothing new about these interpretations from the standpoint of military art; rather, such situations had simply not been characterized as asymmetric before.[72]

The launch of the US war on terror ramped up interest of military analysts in wars against asymmetric adversaries. In the late 1990s, authors looked at the phenomenon from a more theoretical perspective, but the realities of two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq turned their attention instead to actual instances of asymmetric conflicts. In 2003, Robert M. Cassidy published his monograph, *Russia in Afghanistan and Chechnya: Military Strategic Culture and the Paradoxes of Asymmetric Conflict*, in which he viewed the problem of Soviet/Russian defeat through the prism of Andrew Mack's hypotheses. Cassidy thought that the key reason for the Soviet defeat was its backward strategic culture—its incompatibility with the contemporary world. According to Cassidy and other writers, the strategy of "big war" typical of the great powers is anachronistic for strategic culture since it implies conflict with an equal adversary based on a scenario of symmetry.[73]

The term "asymmetric" became the main characteristic of *irregular warfare* in publications of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and in the 2006 version of *Joint Publication 3-0* irregular warfare was defined as "a violent struggle among state and nonstate actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population. Irregular warfare favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capacities, in order to erode an adversary's power, influence, and will."[74] The 2011 revision of this document states that "an enemy using irregular methods often will use terrorist tactics to wage protracted operations in an attempt to break the will of their opponent and influence relevant populations. At the same time, terrorists and insurgents also seek to bolster their own legitimacy and credibility with those same populations."[75] Of note, there is an important shift from the 2006 document to its 2011 revision in the definition of participants in military actions, which in the 2011 report includes both state and nonstate actors, and in the objectives of military actions, which moved from inflicting military defeat on an adversary in the earlier report to earning the trust of local civilians, whose interests the adversaries are trying to protect. In the 1960s, this strategy was nicknamed "winning hearts and minds" in the British literature on counterinsurgency,[76] and this expression is now constantly and predictably used by military analysts in many countries to characterize the goals of the stronger party in an asymmetric conflict.

In 2004, the collection of essays *A Nation at War in an Era of Strategic Change* was published. The essays explore different aspects of US participation in

the war on terror, and the volume title references the words of President George W. Bush on the military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq as a situation of the entire nation being at war. The introduction notes that "the American military needs to think in a more holistic[77] fashion about the conduct of war at the operational level." The volume editor, Williamson Murray, echoes Carl von Clausewitz's nineteenth-century rationale of the use of military force as an alternative method of achieving political goals: "Since war is a political act, the defeating of enemy military forces in combat operations only represents a portion of the far larger mosaic that must include not only the planning stages, but the transition stages from war to peace as well. In fact, as Americans are discovering in Iraq and Afghanistan, the latter may represent as important a component of operational art as the direct battlefield confrontations in securing the political ends for which the United States has waged war. And those political aims are the only conceivable reason that the U.S. military will engage in war."[78]

US military analytics thus evolved from interpreting asymmetry through traditional strategic analysis (that is, as a kind of descriptor for the tactic of producing an efficient nonequivalent response to challenges posed by traditional adversaries), to identifying individual elements of asymmetry in armed conflicts with weaker or nonstate actors (in the sense of asymmetric challenges or military actions), to finally accepting a complex or mosaic of factors as constituting asymmetric conflict and defining a special type of armed confrontation. The special character of the confrontation derives from the need to obtain the support of the population living in the territory where the military actions are taking place, rather than simply to secure a military victory. Thus, American military strategic analysis started by partially accepting elements of the asymmetric conflict concept and then developing a holistic understanding of it in line with Andrew Mack's initial articulation of the concept. It should also be noted that the military services of Israel, Australia,[79] and the United Kingdom regularly use the term "asymmetric,"[80] and these issues are discussed in joint seminars and conferences involving military personnel from different countries.[81]

For military analysts, the problem of asymmetric conflict is dictated by a pragmatic task, the need to understand the phenomenon so as to select the right strategy and tactics. It is not surprising that the military is more interested in understanding armed asymmetric conflicts than in abstract

theorizing about asymmetric relations. The military needs instrumental definitions and operational models. This point—the need for clear and functional language—was underscored in an eloquent epigraph to the article "Unorthodox Thoughts about Asymmetric Warfare," by Montgomery C. Meigs, the American general who commanded the NATO Stabilization Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina from October 1998 to October 1999: "Bad terminology is the enemy of good thinking."[82] The pragmatic turn in the American literature on asymmetric conflict may have prompted Russian scholar Ekaterina A. Stepanova to observe that the American literature "excessively militarizes" the nature of such conflicts, to the point of dismissing or at least downplaying other crucial elements of the concept.[83] However, if one sees asymmetric conflict as armed struggle between adversaries incommensurate in power, resources, and status—and this is in fact the starting point of the concept—then the military usually subscribes to a broader, more holistic approach to the concept and relies on researchers' conclusions. Moreover, some military analysts are fascinated by how asymmetry is constructed, as indicated in the title of British Royal Air Force officer J. G. Eaton's "The Beauty of Asymmetry: An Examination of the Context and Practice of Asymmetric and Unconventional Warfare from Western/Centrist Perspective." Eaton's article suggested a practical model of an "asymmogram" that he believed "would reflect a shorthand notation of the balance of negative and positive asymmetry, thus concentrating defensive or offensive planning."[84]

An interesting footnote is that US military officers often hold advanced academic degrees in international security or international relations. For instance, General David H. Petraeus,[85] who was a commanding general of Multi-National Force in Iraq during the "surge" in 2007–2008 and whose name is associated with a turning point in the situation in Iraq, defended his doctoral dissertation in international relations at Princeton University in 1987. His thesis was titled "The American Military and the Lessons of Vietnam: A Study of Military Influence and the Use of Force in the Post-Vietnam Era." In an article that he published based on his dissertation work, he noted that American popular support for protracted wars is limited, and described an optimal scenario of "nasty little wars": "if the United States is to intervene, it should do so in strength, accomplish its objectives rapidly, and withdraw as soon as conditions allow." Moreover, politicians

should not interfere in the specifics of the operation after agreeing to the use of force and specifying the objective. Petraeus pointed to the inconstancy of politicians, the unclear war objectives they formulate, and the all too common impossibility of achieving the objectives stipulated by Congress or of solving certain problems by military means, which basically makes military personnel prisoners of the situation and forces them to take the fall for a political defeat. He cited a well-known book, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (1957), by Samuel Huntington, who described the armed services' strong preference for peace: "The military man tends to see himself as the perennial victim of civilian warmongering. It is the people and the politicians, public opinion and governments, who start wars. It is the military who have to fight them." Petraeus also recalled the powerful image that General William A. Knowlton introduced into public discourse in a graduation speech to the Army War College Class of 1985 in reference to the US engagement in Vietnam: "Those who ordered the meal were not there when the waiter brought the check."[86] Petraeus is the author of multiple papers on counterinsurgency strategies and actively participates in discussions of counterinsurgency measures in congressional hearings and debates sponsored by independent think tanks.

In sum, academic research, doctrinal documents, and the public speeches of American military experts all underwrite the view that armed conflicts involving the US Army with an adversary significantly inferior in military power and resources are regarded as a qualitatively new phenomenon that needs to be taken into account when developing and implementing military operations. This brief overview of the US interpretation of the concept of asymmetric conflict also highlights the short distance between political science research findings and their practical application in the contemporary United States.

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It took a few years before asymmetric conflict appeared as a distinct field of inquiry; however, the 1990s saw the publication of research papers in which asymmetric conflict was classified as a category separate from other kinds of warfare. Subsequently in the United States, a scientific and

professional journal, *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, started publication in 2008. The mission of the journal is "to contribute to understanding and ameliorating conflict between states and non-state challengers [as] many experts believe that this is the predominant form of conflict in the world today, and will be the predominant source of violent conflict in the twenty-first century."[87]

Unlike military analysts, social scientists have interpreted the notion of asymmetry more broadly and use the term "asymmetric" in nonmilitary as well as military situations. In the 2000s, attempts were made to elaborate a general scholarly approach to the use of the term "asymmetry."[88] On the one hand, the term conjures up the whole complex of asymmetric relations in social interactions; on the other hand, this broad usage creates terminological difficulties—which in turn encourages researchers to try to delimit its meaning more accurately.

Given the traditional understanding of asymmetric conflict as a power imbalance, political scientists focus on instances of aggressive behavior exhibited by weak states, and it is within this framework that T. V. Paul uses the term. Paul, an Indian-born political scientist, is a founding director of the McGill University Centre for International Peace and Security Studies in Montreal, Quebec. In his 1994 book, *Asymmetric Conflicts: War Initiation by Weaker Powers*, he analyzed factors that could account for such seemingly illogical behavior on the part of weak states. Paul examined the Japanese offensive against Russia in 1904, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the Chinese intervention in Korea in 1950, the Pakistani offensive in Kashmir in 1965, the capture of Sinai by Egypt in 1973, and the Argentinean invasion of the Falkland Islands/Islas Malvinas in 1982.

According to Paul, the study of asymmetric wars should demonstrate why simple superiority in power and resources is insufficient to deter the aggression of a weaker adversary. Paul emphasized that the investigation of such cases should include an analysis of the domestic and international factors that exert a decisive influence on the weaker adversary's posture. To this end, he proposes four conditions that must be met before war initiation by a weaker state in an asymmetric conflict: (1) there is a serious conflict of interest; (2) the weaker side places greater value than the stronger side on the issue under dispute; (3) the weaker party is dissatisfied with the status quo; and (4) the weaker party fears an unchanged status quo or a worsening

from the status quo in the future. The following variables then shape the aggressive behavior of the weaker party: (1) a limited aims strategy that employs military forces in battle to achieve limited goals, such goals not being equivalent to the decisive defeat and surrender of the enemy; (2) an offensive weapons system; (3) defensive support from a great power; and (4) a changing domestic power structure.[89] Of these, a limited aims strategy and an alliance with a great power for defensive purposes appear to be the most important conditions. Paul also noted that history offers examples of the weak party realizing the inevitability of its own military defeat but hoping nevertheless for political gains, in accordance with the axiom "One may lose the battle, but not the war." "For some such states," Paul pointed out, "the prospect of a limited defeat is better than living with an unbearable status quo."[90] The short war between Georgia and Russia in August 2008 is perhaps the best example that can be adduced in support of Paul's assertions about the logic of asymmetric wars. In his recent papers, Paul has analyzed the conflicts between India and Pakistan within the framework of asymmetric warfare theory.[91]

American political scientist Michael Fischerkeller, in his 1998 article "David versus Goliath: Cultural Judgments in Asymmetric Wars," similarly considered the situation of weak states being aggressive toward great powers. According to his calculations, 54 percent of all conflicts in which major powers became involved over the period 1816–1996 started in this manner. Fischerkeller stressed that "the aggressive behavior of weaker powers in asymmetric wars is often incongruous with the basic propositions of balance-of-power theories," and also incongruous with traditional assessments based on quantifiable measures of capability, such as troop numbers and military effectiveness. Fischerkeller argued that "a reliance on objective, quantitative indicators places a theorist in peril of deducing unfounded behavioral propositions because subjective, cultural prejudice can play an equally monumental role in the assessment process." His basic proposition regarding asymmetric wars was that "the weaker state's judgment of the target as culturally inferior results in discounted capability evaluation of the quantitatively superior enemy. Viewing itself as culturally superior to its rival, the weaker state is encouraged to sound the trumpets for war when its quantitative inferiority seems to call for a more cautious policy."[92] This argument is based on an analysis of the beginning of World War II and the

cultural assessments conducted by the Axis powers and the future Allies of the opposing side. Fischerkeller formulates two propositions and deduces two hypotheses to explain the logic of perception and the choice of strategy in asymmetric wars:

1. Where a target is reported as possessing superior, similar, or inferior quantitative capability and judged to be equally culturally sophisticated, the quantitative measures will be confirmed as accurate and representative of the overall net assessment of the target. Consequently—and here is the first hypothesis—"the perceiving power is encouraged to adopt a defensive, independent fortress or containment strategy."

2. Where a target is reported as possessing superior, similar, or inferior quantitative capability and judged to be culturally inferior, the quantitative measures will be discounted and represented in a net assessment that paints the target as much weaker than the quantitative measures would suggest. Consequently—the second hypothesis—"the perceiving power is encouraged to adopt an aggressive, imperialist strategy."

The second hypothesis is the focus of Fischerkeller's case studies. He criticized T. V. Paul's research for examining conflicts that are not, in Fischerkeller's view, truly asymmetric "since the weak powers initiated these wars with the understanding that there was a near-equal or preponderant coalition willing to support them if strategic expectations went awry. Through ignoring the contribution of alliance commitments [Paul exhibits] a lack of discrimination between strong and weak powers in his selection which, consequently, confounds the study of symmetric and asymmetric wars." However, Fischerkeller himself examined the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–1905 and Indo-Pakistani war of 1971 as examples of asymmetric conflict in which the warring parties have more comparable political, military, and economic capacities.[93] The thrust of his research is how cultural factors condition aggressive stances. He writes, "Classical realists and other power-determinists have written of such factors as national character and national morale in their conceptual discussion of power. Since these factors are actually derivative of subjective cultural judgments, they should be considered separate from conventional measures of power.

This separation is not merely superficial, it has significant theoretic utility, as the deduced partial explanation for the 'incongruous' weak power behavior in asymmetric wars demonstrates."[94]

Both Paul and Fischerkeller looked at motivations for weak states to initiate aggression against an adversary of unquestioned greater military might and resources. A complementary view, the paradoxical inability of great powers to win small wars, came from the Israeli political scientist Gil Merom in his 2003 monograph, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars: State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam*. Merom was educated at Hebrew University, Israel, and Cornell University in the United States, where he earned a PhD. He currently combines teaching positions at Tel Aviv University and the University of Sydney. In his book, Merom explored Andrew Mack's hypothesis that one of the reasons for the defeat of great powers is the inability of democratic societies to wage small wars. Developed countries, Mack posited, are defeated because of a political and moral self-restriction on continuing the war. Merom argued that to understand the defeat of strong democratic powers, it is necessary to take into account the complex nature of relations between society, state, and war, and set aside the simplified perception of an "amorphous collective of society [that] was by and large considered important only in relation to its potential as a source for men and material needed for war."[95] Rather than regarding the outcome of a war as a foregone conclusion based primarily on the participants' respective military capacities, in which society plays only a passive role, modern concepts of warfare must take a broader view of society's ability to shape the conflict and its outcomes. Merom described the "modern power paradox" as "a struggle between two forces on three realms over three issues." The two forces are the state and "[that] part of the educated middle class which is a proxy of society," and the three realms are the three aspects of warfare: instrumental, political, and normative. Finally, the three issues, or three interrelated dilemmas that democracies are unable to resolve, and therefore prompt democracies to fail militarily and politically in small wars, are the following: (1) how to reconcile the humanitarian values of the educated class with the brutal requirements of counterinsurgency warfare; (2) how to find a domestically acceptable trade-off between the brutality and civilian sacrifices; and (3) how to preserve support for the war without

undermining the democratic order.[96] Merom's argument is consonant with the conclusions of historians about the reasons for developed countries' misfortunes in specific historical incidents. It is also to a large extent congruent with what is often referred to as the lessons of Vietnam, the subject of numerous papers, with new publications coming out every year.[97]

If the strong lose wars for identifiable reasons, can the determinants of success be similarly narrowed down for weak states that win wars? The American political scientist Ivan Arreguín-Toft published an article (2001) and then a monograph (2005) under the title *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*.[98] Arreguín-Toft served as electronic warfare/ signal intelligence analyst at the US Army Field Station, Augsburg, West Germany. He received his undergraduate degree in political science and Slavic languages and literatures from the University of California, Santa Barbara, and his PhD from the University of Chicago. Arreguín-Toft has developed a novel approach that examines struggle strategies as success determinants, on the basis of which he proposes a theory of strategic interaction. He distills the various forms of struggle into two "ideal-type strategic approaches," direct and indirect. Direct strategies are conventional military actions aimed at neutralizing an antagonist's armed forces and destroying an antagonist's *ability* to continue war. Indirect strategies are designed to destroy an adversary's *will* to continue the struggle while avoiding direct clashes. The novelty of his approach, however, lies in introducing *barbarous forms of struggle* as an indirect strategy typical of both state and nonstate actors. He defines barbarism as "the deliberate or systematic harm of noncombatants (e.g., rape, murder, and torture) in pursuit of a military or political objective." There follows a hypothesis: "When actors employ similar strategic approaches (direct-direct or indirect-indirect), relative power explains the outcome: strong actors will win quickly and decisively. When actors employ opposite strategic approaches (direct–indirect or indirect– direct), weak actors are much more likely to win, even when everything we think we know about power says they shouldn't."[99]

Arreguín-Toft tested his hypothesis on five cases representing five historical periods: the Murid war of Russia in the Caucasus, 1830–1859; the South African war or Boer War of Britain, 1899–1902; the Italo-Ethiopian war, 1935–1940; the Vietnam War of the United States, 1965–1973; and the Soviet war in Afghanistan, 1979–1989. In addition to strategic factors, he

considered other reasons for the victory of weaker actors, including those proposed by Andrew Mack, namely, asymmetry of interests, the socio-political nature of the actors (including/encompassing here Gil Merom's thesis that democracies are unable to win out of moral hesitation, to which Arreguín-Toft refers as "democratic social squeamishness"), and arguments over arms diffusion, specifically the supply of weapons to weak actors by their external supporters.

According to Arreguín-Toft, "the problem for strong actors is weak actors who pursue an indirect defense strategy, such as a GWS [guerrilla warfare strategy] or terrorism. This presents strong actors with three unpal-atable choices: an attrition war lasting perhaps decades; costly bribes or political concessions, perhaps forcing political and economic reforms on repressive allies as well as adversaries; or the deliberate harm of noncom-batants in a risky attempt to win the military contest quickly and deci-sively." He believes that his study has an advantage "as an explanation of all asymmetric conflict outcomes, and in particular as a guide to strategy and policy," and thus can be applied to counterterrorism as well as counter-insurgency strategy, both of which US policy-makers must face in the coming decades.[100] Arreguín-Toft concludes with other important reasons for a strong actor's loss, directly addressing the case of the United States, by significantly enlarging his original arguments and supporting his predeces-sors in asymmetric conflict studies:

> If the United States wants to win wars it must build two differ-ent militaries. If it wants to win the peace—a far more ambitious and useful goal—it must support its resort to arms by eliminating foreign policy double standards and by increasing its capacity and willingness to use methods other than violence to resolve or deter conflicts around the world…. The current US government confused military power with state power, and by over-applying the former has actually undermined its interests. If this policy continues and fol-lows the historical pattern of *every previous attempt to accomplish the same ends* (peace) *by the same means* (the overwhelming application of military force unsupported by political, economic, and administra-tive recourses), the result will be costly quagmires such as Vietnam, Afghanistan (1979 and 2002–), and Iraq (2003–), and a future attack

on the United States or its allies that makes the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 pale by comparison.[101]

The writings of T. V. Paul, Michael Fischerkeller, Gil Merom, and Ivan Arreguín-Toft are among those most cited on asymmetric conflicts, along with Andrew Mack's seminal paper. All show different angles of entry into understanding asymmetric warfare; at a common, meta level of analysis, they attempt to develop the theory of asymmetric conflict and identify its determinants. Unlike their military colleagues, who are largely concerned with practical applications, political scientists narrow their research question to establish correlations between certain variables and be able to test hypotheses based on historical material. These publications show that the authors are familiar with their colleagues' work, though some, it must be said (especially Fischerkeller and Arreguín-Toft), turn a more critical eye on the achievements of other researchers and try to highlight the advantages of their own ideas. In doing so, they risk distorting the information supporting their own arguments and seem not to fully recognize their colleagues' achievements.

Another monograph that bears mention for its nod to technology was published in 2007: *Americans and Asymmetric Conflict: Lebanon, Somalia, and Afghanistan*. The author, Adam B. Lowther, a defense analyst of the Air Force Research Institute, holds a PhD in international relations. At the beginning of the book, Lowther related military art and the concept of asymmetric conflict, then analyzed US military operations from the standpoint of that concept. Drawing on a deep historical knowledge of warfare, he argued that the modern concept of asymmetric conflict is merely a "reinvention of concepts developed decades, centuries, and millennia ago. What is often mistaken for innovation is the rediscovery of well-worn ideas modified by the application of technological innovation." He further observed that asymmetric strategy and tactics developed along distinctly different paths in the East and the West. Thus, the West prefers the direct confrontation of opposing armies, while the East has refined the art of defeating an adversary without a pitched battle. However, these cultural predilections do not preclude the development and application of other forms of struggle, as evidenced by classical texts on military strategy.[102] Lowther seems correct in saying that analysts who see the current situation as something new

lack an "understanding of the nature of war, which has changed very little over the past 7,000 years of human history. At the heart of war is the need to overcome an enemy's will to fight. This may be done by destroying an adversary's fighting ability or by overcoming his cost tolerance."[103]

Lowther analyzed specific instances of military actions involving US armed forces that conform to the asymmetric scenario and concludes that the war in Afghanistan is "the most successful major American military operation since the end of the Second World War."[104] In comparing the US and Soviet experiences in Afghanistan, Lowther found that they differed dramatically in a number of ways. "Where the Soviet Union deployed large-scale ground forces … to support an unpopular regime and establish an economic and social system foreign to Afghans, the United States relied and continues to rely on experienced Mujahideen with the aid of American air power and Special Forces to defeat an unpopular fundamentalist regime supported by an even less popular foreign presence (al-Qaeda). Sensitive to the mistakes made by the Red Army, American military planners sought to mitigate many of the problems incurred by the Soviets by limiting the number of American forces used in ground operations, mollifying clan animosities, and providing tangible aid to Afghans." He believed that the United States succeeded in ensuring the support of loyal political forces and in resolving a host of problems, including the repatriation of displaced persons; the reconciliation of feuding tribes; the training of local security forces; the provision of assistance to Afghans in carrying out reforms in the economy, politics, health care, and education; and overcoming the legacy of the Islamist regime's attitude toward women. Lowther emphasizes that the US success in Afghanistan was made possible by an understanding of the essence of asymmetric military conflict as a need to ensure the security of the local population.[105]

Lowther's conclusions on the US engagement in Afghanistan might seem flawless if one overlooked the current state of affairs in that country and ignored the reasons that prompted the United States to choose an absolutely different strategy for Iraq. The Iraq War brought the United States to the brink of its largest military and political fiasco in post–World War II history. A drastic worsening of the situation in Afghanistan in 2009 coincided with the Obama administration's resolve to end the war in Iraq and led to a forced increase in troop size in Afghanistan and the

implementation of full-scale military operations, which were accompanied by numerous civilian casualties. This picture contradicts Lowther's logic of success. Recent developments in Afghanistan, which saw the US administration attempting to engage the Taliban in the peace process, also contradict the initial intentions of American politicians. Such a reversal, however, is in keeping with the logic of asymmetric conflict settlement described in the writings of American experts.

As we turn to the termination of asymmetric conflict, an outstanding voice in the field is that of the Russian political scientist Ekaterina Stepanova. Her recommendations for resolving asymmetric conflicts stem from a specifically structural understanding of asymmetry, which she explores in her book, *Terrorism in Asymmetrical Conflict: Ideological and Structural Aspects*.[106] Published in 2008, the book aims to combine mobilization with a structural approach, drawing on the concept of asymmetry to stress a disparity in the structural arrangement of states and terrorist networks that benefits the latter. She regards terrorism as "the most asymmetrical of all forms of political violence," and tries to explain the great vulnerability of states with regard to nonstate actors. The main argument of the book is that "[even though] within the asymmetrical framework… states and the international community of states are incomparably more powerful in a conventional sense, enjoy a much higher formal status within the existing world system, and remain its key formative units, in the situation of a full-scale conflict of ideologies with violent Islamists they put themselves at a disadvantage." She continues: "It is precisely because of the modernized, moderate, relatively passive nature of the mainstream ideologies of state actors that they cannot compete with a radical quasi-religious ideology. They can offer little to compete with Islamist extremism as a mobilizing force in asymmetrical confrontation at the transnational level. In other words, on the ideological front the state and the international system may be faced with a reverse (negative) asymmetry that favors their radical opponents."[107]

For the international community and world powers that are engaged in a big struggle, Stepanova's research suggests "politicization as a toll for structural transformation." By politicizing radicals she means integrating them into existing political structures, which should gradually destroy the radicals' key networks and other structural advantages.[108] The strategy of

co-opting and pacifying radical elements by integrating them into the political process is well established. Such strategies were used in Northern Ireland, in the Chechen Republic, and in the Middle East settlement. Nevertheless, certain problems emerge when this strategy is implemented, among them the unreliability of co-opted radicals, the difficulty of gaining control over the entire radical network, and, frequently, the high cost attached to such strategies. Furthermore, the issue of morality in politics remains relevant for the leaders and citizens of developed countries since it plays a crucial role in the normal functioning of the system as a whole. The moral hazard lies in the necessity to cooperate with people who are willing to resort to criminal actions (such as terrorism) in the interests of their political goals, and to give up possible moral and juridical restitution as a price for reconciliation and lasting peace.

Scholars and practitioners of conflict resolution have long observed that negotiating rather than continuing an armed struggle is the best strategy for conflict termination. As William Zartman pointed out, "[the military] defeat of the rebellion often merely drives the cause underground, to emerge at a later time." He noted further that "negotiation is the best policy for both parties in an internal conflict" but that it is rarely used and is associated with significant subjective and objective difficulties. He argued that "negotiations under conditions of asymmetry (asymmetrical negotiations) are a paradox, because one of the basic findings about the negotiation process is that it functions best under conditions of equality, and indeed only takes place when parties have some forms of mutual veto over outcomes. Asymmetry means that the most propitious conditions for resolving conflict are difficult to obtain." Negotiations also require reciprocal recognition by the parties, and that in itself is a subject of dispute. There is also the problem of representation in negotiations on behalf of the opposition. It is difficult for a government to acknowledge that such representatives have the right to express group interests, and thus difficult to acknowledge the validity of rebels' claims. The interests of parties to asymmetric conflicts are often caught in a zero-sum game: the weaker party strives to change the existing power structures and the stronger party strives to retain it. Zartman wrote, "The government seeks to turn asymmetry into escalation, to destroy the rebellion and break its commitment, and force the rebels to sue for peace. The insurgents usually seek to break out of their asymmetry

by linking up with an external host state and neighbor, thus internationalizing the conflict. In so doing, insurgents radically change the structure of the conflict from a doubly asymmetric dyad to a wobbly triad of great complexity."[109] Internationalization of a conflict enlarges the number of actors involved. These actors have their own agendas and visions of how the conflict needs to or could be resolved. For state actors, internationalization of a conflict undermines the authority of their central government and its sovereignty in resolving domestic problems. whereas for nonstate challengers the internationalization of a conflict raises their status and the legitimacy of their case.

Christopher R. Mitchell, an expert in conflict resolution and professor emeritus at George Mason University, has examined and identified many key asymmetries in protracted conflicts and peacemaking strategies: asymmetry in capability (e.g., coercive ability, external support, access, visibility, cost experience, survivability, bargaining ability), in structure (e.g., intraparty cohesion, leadership legitimacy, leadership insecurity, constituent mobilization, elite entrapment), in commitment (e.g., goal salience, constituent commitment, external dependency, commitment to change, expectation of success), in interdependence (e.g., isolated or interdependent status, parallelism, historical justification), in legality or status (e.g., representativeness, existence, legitimacy), in morality (e.g., existential acceptance, issue acceptance, goal acceptance), and in behavior (e.g., violence, coercion, persuasion, conciliation, avoidance). Mitchell noted that the weak party strives to reverse the key asymmetries and create conditions of equality. However, in his opinion, "conflicts are essentially dynamic phenomena," and there is "no straightforward, linear relationship between relative coercive capacities and the probability of conflict reduction." In fact, his analyses of real instances support two opposite arguments for stopping conflict. The first argument proposes eliminating asymmetry to stop conflict, as "equals make peace more readily and more easily than unequals." The second, opposing argument proposes retaining asymmetry, as "[a] very high coercive inequality between parties may lead to avoiding or reducing conflict, on the grounds that the weaker may be more ready to end its efforts at protest and coercion, while the stronger may be willing to consider making a more generous offer to avoid the possibility of trouble later."[110] Thus, there seems no sure exit path from conflicts involving asymmetric parties.

As this section has shown, the writings of military analysts and scholars of asymmetric conflict exhibit both differences and similarities. Military art is overall more concerned with pragmatics. Researchers, by contrast, strive to develop a theory expressed in terms of determinants, correlations, and variables, and this stance sometimes forces them to artificially narrow their scope to hypotheses that can be verified by means of existing methods and means of verification. Scholars choose to take the problem of asymmetric relations outside the framework of military conflict and military praxis to develop a broader, truly conceptual understanding of the nature of asymmetric relations in all their diverse manifestations. As a result, the concept of asymmetric relations has been accepted as a useful tool for exploring problems in the social sciences and humanities, as well as in the more obvious fields of economics and international relations.

DEVELOPING AN ANALYTICAL MODEL OF ASYMMETRIC CONFLICT

An analysis of the literature in which the concept of asymmetric conflict is used shows that the theory of asymmetric conflict is underdeveloped, and that researchers prefer to deal with individual aspects of the phenomenon or with the analyzable factors in a small number of cases, rather than trying to derive a full-fledged theory. I propose that asymmetric conflict as a theory should be considered as a suite of variables in which the weight of each factor is rarely predictable in any given case, and in this section I suggest my own model for analyzing asymmetric conflicts. A brief review of the history of the terms will help set the stage for the theoretical work to follow.

For centuries, symmetry was seen as a sign of harmony, balance, order, and norm in the universe and scientific knowledge, while asymmetry was considered a sign of disorder and anomaly. In the nineteenth century, the French scientist Louis Pasteur proved that asymmetry was a norm rather than an aberration, and was in fact one of the main characteristics of nature. Gradually, the understanding of asymmetry as a particular way to organize the organic and inorganic world started diffusing into the arts and humanities. For instance, the notions of symmetry and asymmetry play a pivotal role in game theory and in negotiations. A special use of asymmetry occurs

in logic, where the term indicates two entities that are related but that do not relate to each other in precisely the same way. An example would be the logical expression of a relationship between husband and wife, in which the statement "*Napoleon is the husband of Josephine*" is true but "*Josephine is the husband of Napoleon*" is not true, and the relation "being the husband of" is asymmetrical.[111] There is perhaps a hint of this sense of the word in the structural and cultural differences that divide the participants engaged in asymmetric conflict, where a great power does not have the same relationship with its adversary that it would have with another great power.

In the social sciences, the concept of asymmetry is most often drawn on to study conflicts of various kinds, from confrontations between small groups to global clashes. Christopher R. Mitchell, whose work on conflict resolution was cited in the immediately preceding section of this chapter, emphasizes that asymmetry refers to more than just a power imbalance between parties. He defines asymmetry as "a dynamic as well as multidimensional phenomenon, consisting of a differential distribution of relevant resources and salient characteristics between adversaries in a conflict system."[112] In this way, the concept is extended to cover a panoply of features and affordances, and its inherent elasticity suggests the multiple dimensions for which any theory must account.

Lawyers as well as political and social scientists use the concepts of symmetry and asymmetry to analyze relations between actors in a given system, which might be social, political, or legal. This approach implies that asymmetry is an essential characteristic of relations between participants in interactions in counterpoise: equal versus subordinate, horizontal versus vertical, pluralist versus hierarchical. The struggle is usually initiated by a subordinate party, which seeks to change the situation and achieve symmetry or equality, while the actions of the dominant party are directed toward restoring order and preserving the hierarchical status quo—which is also asymmetric and unequal.

Different disciplines either use the concept to characterize individual elements of conflict[113] or, more holistically, regard the phenomenon as a suite of several asymmetric characteristics subject to differential conditioning. The journal *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict,* for example, emphasizes a more complex approach to asymmetric conflict by considering the status and resources of adversaries as determinants of the phenomenon, as well

as the psychological aspects of adversaries' behavior. Political and military analyses, in contrast, tend to present a narrower vision of asymmetric conflict, and focus more pragmatically on the tactical and strategic aspects of individual conflicts.

Despite such differences in exactly what is meant when analysts introduce the concept of asymmetric conflict in their work, a handful of consistent applications of the concept in conflict analysis can be identified:

1. To analyze confrontations between adversaries characterized by unequal status within one legal system: the political–legal approach.

2. To characterize adversaries' inequality in power and resource capabilities: the traditional approach.

3. To explain the political defeat of the dominant party in an armed conflict: the paradoxical approach.

4. To characterize tactics and strategies that compensate for adversaries' inequality in power and resources: the tactical and strategic approach.

5. To highlight the incongruity of the parties' interests and their attitude to conflict: the subjectivist approach.

6. To assess parties' motivation to continue the struggle: the mobilizational, psychological, or ideological approach.

7. To identify differences in the organization or structure of adversaries, such as a struggle between state actors and nonstate actors—for example, a terrorist organization—with a network structure: the structural approach.

A common aspect of conflicts that are analyzed according to the asymmetric conflict concept is the incommensurability of the adversaries' resources, power, and status. The "system," which represents the conditions under which conflicting parties interact, may be either a single state or a system of international relations within an existing hierarchy of power and state capabilities. The resource and power inequalities represent basic asymmetries,

which often are accompanied by status asymmetry. These main asymmetries give rise to the nonlinear development of events through asymmetric forms of struggle (e.g., guerrilla warfare, protracted wars using terrorist actions). A nonlinear course of events—sporadic encounters, without clear military, economic, or political gains for the stronger party—strengthens asymmetries in relations between fighting parties (that is, their mobilization capabilities) and in their attitude toward the conflict, or will to win. This could result in political rather than military defeat of the stronger party and the victory of its weaker opponent—the paradoxical outcome of asymmetry.

Andrew Mack pointed out the dichotomy in the parties' attitude toward war, whereby the weaker party fights a "total war" (i.e., there is full mobilization of resources for the victory) while the stronger one wages a "limited war." In such a situation, the stronger party is unable or unwilling to mobilize all its available resources to achieve its war objectives. For the United States, the war in Vietnam had limited importance, as it did not affect major US interests and did not seriously threaten national security. For Vietnam, however, the war was total. Under the conditions of a limited war, a large-scale mobilization of resources to achieve victory was impossible for the United States, both politically and logically. The obvious power superiority of the United States made such a use of resources unrealistic.

As Mack observed, the war in Vietnam showed that the theater of military operations is not limited to the actual battlefield and may significantly influence domestic politics and the social situation at home:

> The Vietnam war may be seen as having been fought on two fronts—one bloody and indecisive, in the forests and mountains of Indochina, the other essentially nonviolent—but ultimately more decisive—within the polity and social institutions of the United States. The nature of the relationship between these two conflicts—which are in fact different facets of the same conflict—is critical to an understanding of the outcome of the war. However, the American experience was in no sense unique, except to Americans. In 1954 the Vietminh destroyed the French forces which were mustered at Dien Bien Phu in a classic set piece battle.[114]

In both cases, the French engagement during the 1950s and the US war in Vietnam, the stronger party lacked the political will and popular support to mobilize resources and continue the struggle. A famous moment of such rescission came in 1968, when the United States managed to inflict a decisive defeat on the insurgents, which could have been a turning point in the war but instead became a turning point in a totally different sense. Popular opposition to the war in the United States reached such a pitch that plans to further mobilize resources and deploy additional troops were not approved by the Congress.

In asymmetric conflicts, the perception of the legitimacy of a war and the justification for casualties often change over time. An important requirement for victory is the readiness of the populations of the belligerent countries to accept politically motivated mobilization and possible casualties for the sake of the war cause. The willingness of career military and draftees to sacrifice their lives even if there is no direct military threat to the nation is a crucial condition for continuation of a limited war. Another one is support of war objectives by the population. A society involved in a total war views the issue of national survival in a different way from a nation involved in limited war. The longer the limited war goes on, the greater are its costs. A high casualty count encourages opposition movements, provokes debate over the morality and objectives of war, and visibly divides society along the lines of attitude toward the war. A state involved in a limited war typically finds belief in the war's legitimacy constantly shrinking, and the logic of a protracted war ensues. Henry Kissinger, US secretary of state during the Vietnam War, defined what he called "the basic equation of guerrilla war" this way: "The guerrilla army wins as long as it can keep from losing; the conventional army is bound to lose unless it wins decisively. Stalemate almost never occurs."[115]

One of the most powerful mobilization factors capable of uniting a state is nationalism. Many political scientists pay heed to political mobilization when a nation comes under threat. As a rule, political opponents facing a common external enemy unite and find common national interests. Once the majority perceives that a conflict is a common national danger, the populace becomes ready to mobilize all available resources and to subordinate all other interests to victory over the external enemy. The experience with guerrilla wars also indicates that victory belongs to the party that is supported by its own population.

As Andrew Mack noted, most strategic theorists agree that "in war the ultimate aim must be to affect the will of the enemy. But in practice, and at the risk of oversimplification, it may be noted that it is a prevalent military belief that if an opponent's military capability to wage war can be destroyed, his 'will' to continue the struggle is irrelevant since the means to that end are no longer available."[116] As an analysis of asymmetric conflicts shows, destroying the adversary's will to wage war may turn out to be a more efficient method of inflicting political defeat on an adversary that still has sufficient military power to continue fighting. In this case, if the will of the stronger adversary to continue war is undermined, its military strength does not have a decisive influence. The US defeat in Vietnam came about as a result of the eroded political capability of the United States to mobilize resources and ensure a sense of legitimacy at home for the war's objectives and methods.

Many anticolonial movements are examples of asymmetric conflict in which the parties to the conflict were without question incommensurate in their power capabilities. The key feature of such conflicts is the inability of the stronger participants to impose their will on their weaker adversaries, subdue them, and achieve their war objectives. Thus, one of the most important dicta of politics and military science concerning the strong winning the struggle and imposing its will on an adversary was challenged. But it should be noted that in none of the conflicts in the third world countries were the insurgents able to invade the territory of a major power or wreak significant military or material damage on it. Victory was possible only because the political ability of the major power to continue war was shattered: the stronger party did not have the political wherewithal to continue mobilizing human and material resources and press on with war. It had to cease fighting the weaker opponent and agree to conditions that ran counter to its original objectives of engagement.

Raymond Aron characterized the essence of dissymmetry in a colonial conflict as follows:

The nationalists who demand the independence of their nation (which has or has not existed in the past, which lives or does not live in the hearts of the people) are more impassioned than the governing powers of the colonial state. At least in our times they believe

in the sanctity of their cause more than their adversaries believe in the legitimacy of their domination. Sixty years ago the Frenchman no more doubted France's *mission civilisatrice* [civilizing mission] than the Englishman questioned the "white man's burden." Today the Frenchman doubts that he has the moral right to refuse the populations of Africa and Asia a *patrie* (which cannot be France), even if this *patrie* is only dream, even if it should prove to be incapable of any authentic independence…. The inequality of determination among adversaries was still more marked than the inequality of material forces. The dissymmetry of will, of interest, of animosity in the belligerent dialogue of conservers and rebels was the ultimate origin of what French authors call the defeats of the West.

Aron also pointed out an important feature of such conflicts, namely, their absolute character. The nationalists fight an "*absolute enemy*, the one with whom no reconciliation is possible, whose very existence is an aggression, and who consequently must be exterminated."[117] The longer and harder the struggle, the stronger the conviction of its legitimacy and the greater the solidarity of a nation engaged in total war.

Thus, in keeping with the theory of asymmetric conflict, the key reason for the defeat of the strong power is the dilution of its political will to continue war as a result of domestic economic, political, and social processes. International factors may also place pressure on the behavior of the belligerent parties, thereby limiting the aims and methods used to achieve objectives and influencing in particular the political elite, as well as the populace as a whole.

Andrew Mack referred to his work as providing a pretheoretical perspective, and many of his followers have sought to test the relevance of his hypotheses, studying the impact of individual factors on the outcome of armed conflicts between unequal antagonists. Arguably, however, no one has suggested an alternative parsing of the reasons for great power defeat. This book attempts to do just that, by integrating the factors accounting for defeat into an analytical model of asymmetric conflict, all rooted in the work of Mack and his followers.

In the research presented in this book, asymmetric conflict is understood to be a conflict in which a strong actor loses to a weaker actor in

an armed struggle. Narrowing the field of candidate conflicts to ones in which wins and losses are easily verified, we will consider only those armed conflicts involving the great powers. In the postwar period only five countries have generally been considered to be great powers, and all are permanent members of the UN Security Council: the United States, the United Kingdom, France, the Soviet Union/Russia, and China. Weak parties, on the other hand, may encompass very diverse actors, including, in addition to weak independent states, a political group or movement, a dependent territory, or an extrasystemic terrorist group. These latter nonstate entities may engage regular state troops in armed confrontation, or they may avoid direct confrontation and use indirect tactics to pursue a certain political objective. As a rule, the goal is to establish an independent political entity, either a state or an autonomous region within an existing state. Contemporary international terrorist organizations undoubtedly pursue other political objectives, such as pushing Western countries out of the developing world and eradicating Western ideas from developing countries.

The concept of asymmetric warfare as described above can be tested by verifying the various hypotheses that have been proposed to account for the defeat of developed countries in wars against weak antagonists. These are as follows:

1. A weak adversary wins because of its unyielding will to win and the more powerful opponent's loss of such will. This hypothesis reflects the dichotomy of the small war waged by the strong adversary versus the total war waged by the weak party. This hypothesis pays attention to differences in the capabilities of the state and political elites to mobilize resources (human, material, and nonmaterial) to achieve victory, which differences in turn depend on the importance of the war to the society.

2. A weak adversary wins as a consequence of the stronger adversary's fatigue and unwillingness to expend further resources and human lives in the pursuit of victory. Such a win is not a military victory *per se* for the weaker party, but rather owes to the stronger actor's exhaustion. As Clausewitz put it, this is a strategy aimed at achieving a "negative political action."

3. A weak adversary wins through the predominant use of asymmetric strategies and tactics, such as guerrilla warfare, acts of terrorism, or protracted war.

4. A weak adversary wins because of nonmilitary factors, especially public opinion coalescing against the war in the stronger state and negative coverage of the war by the mass media.

5. A strong party is defeated as a consequence of sharp disagreement among the political elite as to the efficacy and morality of the war and strong opposition from antiwar groups, both of which factors play especially prominent roles during political election seasons.

6. The course of the struggle is largely determined by the actions of external forces rather than by the participants themselves. Such actions may include interference from other countries or the provision of military, technical, or economic assistance to one or the other of the belligerents.

7. A strong party is defeated as a result of the pressure exerted by and the condemnation of the international community.

The dependent variable in all of these hypotheses can assume two opposite forms: the defeat of the stronger party or the political victory of the weaker party in an armed conflict. The fact of defeat or victory is not always easy to ascertain, but in most cases it is possible to do so by comparing the objectives of the parties to the conflict and the situation in which they find themselves when the conflict ends. Thus, it is possible to determine when the weaker party managed to eke out a victory over its stronger adversary and to discern how much influence different factors brought to bear on the outcome.

In this book, the strong party is represented by the great powers, and we will consider the following factors as reasons for its defeat:

1. Absence or loss of the will to continue fighting.

2. A protracted war without clearly defined indicators of success.

3. The difficulty of waging war and achieving obvious victory in anti-guerrilla, counterinsurgency, or counterterrorist campaigns.

4. Support provided by other strong actors to the weak adversary.

5. Negative popular and elite attitudes toward a protracted and unsuccessful war (as evinced in public opinion polls, draft dodging, or shaming in the media).

6. A schism in the political elite, manifested during elections.

7. The economic exhaustion of the strong state.

8. The international community's negative view of the war, disapproval of the strong opponent, and condemnation of the aims and means of the war.

This model is presented graphically in figure 1.1.

The reasons for a weak party's victory can also be considered within the theory of asymmetric conflict. The following factors determine the possibility of victory of the weak over the strong:

1. A steady will to win, reflected in the ability to mass mobilize resources for the struggle for a long time.

2. A protracted war, signaling the absence of defeat in the struggle against a superior adversary.

3. The use of guerrilla and terrorist strategies and tactics.

4. Popular support for the war (with active support provided to guerrilla fighters and terrorist groups, participation in the armed struggle).

5. Unity of the political elite and the whole of society, willing to fight and to overcome disagreements.

Figure 1.1. Factors Determining the Defeat of a Strong Party
(Great Power) in an Asymmetric Conflict
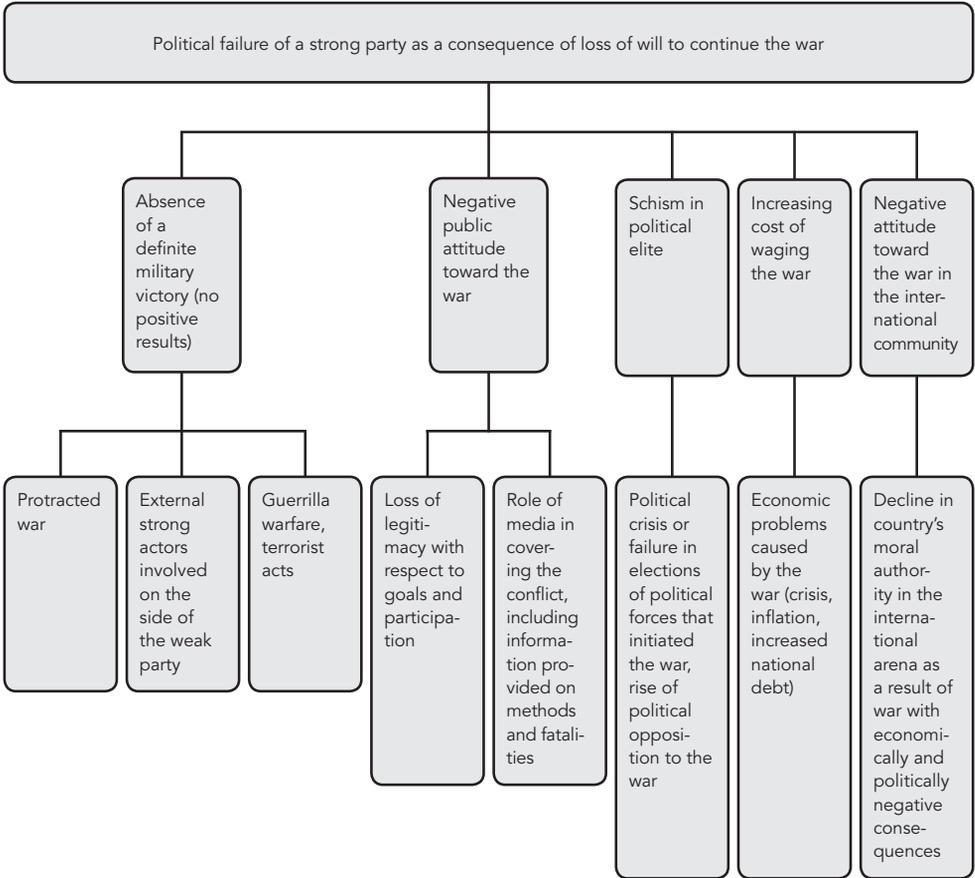
6. Material, military, technical, and other assistance provided by external actors, primarily other great powers.

7. Appeal to the international community for the support of one's just objectives and condemnation of the adversary for its immoral objectives and methods of warfare.

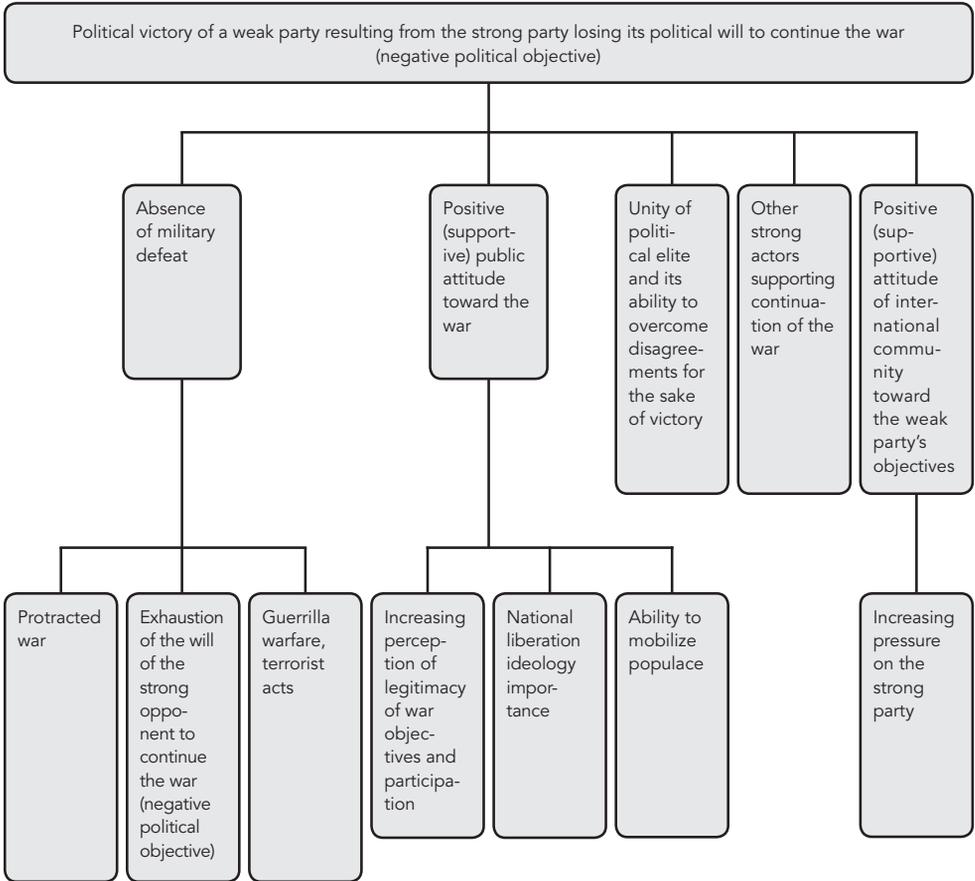This model is presented graphically in figure 1.2.

The schemes are not identical or simply the reverse of each other. In this book, more attention is paid to the factors that determine the defeat of a great power as opposed to those accounting for the victory of a weak adversary, while keeping in mind that the distinction between weak and strong is not absolute.

The distinctive feature of asymmetric conflicts is that they are conducted on an international stage. This is true even of many domestic conflicts, which become internationalized through the direct or indirect participation of other, external actors. Examining such conflicts makes it possible to identify a set of asymmetric characteristics, structural and dynamic, that together form a particular, stable phenomenon in international relations. As a result, it is important to separate the asymmetric conflict phenomenon from a situation of armed struggle between opponents that are unequal in power and status. Describing as asymmetric any confrontation between unequal adversaries does not have heuristic value; most conflicts contain elements of inequality between the adversaries and on that limited ground could be called asymmetric. For this reason, it is important to differentiate the theory, phenomenon, and model of asymmetric conflict, as well as how the concept of asymmetry is applied in analyzing conflicts.[118]

The *concept of asymmetry* is used to analyze individual elements of a conflict to highlight their incommensurability or incongruence between the belligerent parties.

Asymmetric conflict theory seeks to identify recurrent patterns in confrontations between adversaries unequal in status and power (the basic asymmetries) while grounded in a holistic approach, that is, while taking into account all elements of the conflict that may lead to the defeat of the stronger party. This theory, like any other, reflects only the possibility that

Figure 1.2. Factors Determining the Victory of a Weak Party in an Asymmetric Conflict

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┌──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│   Political victory of a weak party resulting from the strong party losing its      │
│   political will to continue the war                                                │
│                      (negative political objective)                                 │
└──────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Absence of military defeat	Positive (support-ive) public attitude toward the war	Unity of politi-cal elite and its ability to overcome disagree-ments for the sake of victory	Other strong actors supporting continua-tion of the war	Positive (sup-portive) attitude of inter-national commu-nity toward the weak party's objectives

Protracted war	Exhaustion of the will of the strong oppo-nent to continue the war (negative political objective)	Guerrilla warfare, terrorist acts	Increasing percep-tion of legitimacy of war objec-tives and participa-tion	National liberation ideology impor-tance	Ability to mobilize populace	Increasing pressure on the strong party

conflict will develop, since asymmetric conflict is not inevitable and does not always end with victory of the weaker party.

The *asymmetric conflict phenomenon* as originally described by Andrew Mack in relation to the great powers has as its leading characteristic the political defeat of the stronger opponent, an outcome that sometimes becomes clear only after the end of the struggle. The indicators of political defeat in an armed conflict that may not coincide with military defeat are cessation of the struggle and relinquishing of the war's objectives, the reasons why the party went to war in the first place.[119] The analysis of conflicts involving great powers, an early step in developing a theory of asymmetric conflict, deals primarily with highly counterintuitive examples of strong actors'—the great powers'—defeat in asymmetric conflicts, though it is also true that statistically, the great powers have been the most frequent participants in such conflicts in the postwar period.

The *model of asymmetric conflict* elaborates a matrix of factors that undermine the will and fighting spirit of the stronger adversary and force it cease fighting, against its own interests. The reasons for the victory of the weaker party can be examined in similar fashion, and there is also an analytical model to aid in the examination.

The present study adumbrates a complex understanding of the asymmetric conflict phenomenon whose most paradoxical feature is the stronger party's defeat in an armed confrontation between asymmetric antagonists. Such an approach includes other interpretations of asymmetry in armed conflicts (traditional, political-legal, structural, mobilizational, tactical and strategic), but the common feature is the great incommensurability between antagonists in power capability and world status. In my view, the asymmetry in resources and power, accompanied by an asymmetry in status, is the main feature of asymmetric conflict. Other asymmetries follow from the basic one and reflect the desire of the weaker party to change the situation of the conflict.

When analyzing the asymmetric conflict phenomenon in specific examples involving the great powers, this book pays special attention to asymmetry in structural characteristics (differences in subjecthood, status, and power capabilities) as well as dynamic ones (differences in strategies and tactics). This is a step toward discovering which asymmetric characteristics or combinations of characteristics proved most significant to the outcome of the conflict. I will use two approaches, one a quantitative statistical assessment of

armed conflicts after the end of the World War II and the other a qualitative examination of particular examples of asymmetric conflict, to judge which asymmetric characteristics had a decisive impact on conflict outcome in the view of conflict participants and experts.

Systemic factors that played a crucial role in the emergence of the asymmetric conflict phenomenon should not be overlooked. International relations in the postwar period contributed greatly to the possibility of political defeat of the great powers in conflicts with incommensurately weaker actors. Systemic factors, therefore, help define the specifics of great power functioning in postwar international relations. In my opinion, it was the combination of international relations and domestic politics that led to the emergence, or more precisely the recognition, of the paradoxical constraints placed on great powers in struggles against obviously weaker adversaries.

This analysis draws on historical methods to test certain analytical constructs suggested by political and social scientists: a hypothesis is formed based on the principles and methods of identifying the most general recurring patterns in different societies. It attempts to expand the range of conflicts usually seen as asymmetric and to analyze critically the asymmetric conflict concept. The concept is examined in a number of post–World War II armed conflicts where the great powers suffered political defeat. It should be kept in mind that military victory is not coterminous with political victory, and in the postwar period a disconnect between military victory and the achievement of the stronger party's war objectives (i.e., political victory) became almost commonplace.

The concept of asymmetric conflict does not imply that all wars involving great powers in the post–World War II period ended with their defeat. That would be a simplification. Nevertheless, the concept emerged because the failures of the great powers were not isolated cases but rather represented a recurring phenomenon observable in the postwar order.

The list of armed conflicts involving the great powers after the end of World War II was compiled from several databases created by leading research centers, among them Uppsala University, Sweden; the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), Norway; and the COSIMO project at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. The list is provided in an appendix to the book, and the conflicts involving great powers that are discussed in the book were drawn from the list.