

# THE PHENOMENON OF WAR IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

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## ABSTRACT

*War is an ancient human phenomenon, as old as man. Although it is historically destined to halt, its flames nevertheless have not always been put off and man has not been spared from its consequences. By reviewing human history, we find that times of war have overcome times of peace. Wars and armed conflicts on this planet were affected by the periods of time and the prevalent international conditions, and they differ from one region to another. More significantly, features of war changed during the post-bipolar international era with the collapse of the Eastern Bloc led by the Soviet Union. It has become more sophisticated and deadly on civilians in addition to its devastating effects on military personnel and installations. The methods and mechanisms of warfare have also changed in the post-Cold War era; an era in which the so-called international unipolarity prevailed and in which the United States of America dominated as a superpower. The post-Cold War era witnessed an active role for mercenaries and warlords; occasionally referred to as shadow soldiers, establishing insurance companies comprised of mercenaries to provide protection on demand. This is ultimately against the United Nations Conventions which stipulate the prohibition of the recruitment, use, financing and training of mercenaries. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the phenomenon of war in the post-Cold War era, exploring the nature of the new international order and the extent of its contribution to armed conflicts. The study also examines the concepts, methods, characteristics, and objectives of war, in addition to the role of ethnicity in the war in the post-Cold War era.*

**Keywords:** Post-Cold War, International Order, Ethnicity, Mercenaries.

## INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, led by the Soviet Union, ended the international system of bipolar reality. After the end of the Cold War, the world became unipolar, leading to the change of the international political system. Such emerging system was never a coincidence; rather it was the result of reality, circumstances, and certain political, economic, social and military variables contributed to destabilizing the bipolar international system. With the end of the era of the bipolar international order by the end of the Cold War between the Eastern and western blocs, the unipolar international system came into being, with the United States of America positioned as the leader of the Western bloc. This change in the international reality has a direct and clear impact on the idea of war and armed conflicts in the world. Since war is an ancient phenomenon, we find that ancient history often includes accounts of the various battles fought and wars waged by different peoples throughout history as well as myths of victories over other peoples.

In the contemporary world, it is imperative to understand the causes and methods of

armed conflicts. The logic is to adopt new methods in order to limit conflicts and reduce wars to the least possible extent. The overall objective is to minimize the harmful and destructive effects of wars on the planet. In the post-Cold War era, new forms of international conflicts appeared, which are more complex, more deadly and ferocious. Moreover, new trends such as neoliberalism, neo-Marxism, neo-constructivism and feminism appeared, and they are all products of the unipolar system of the new world order.

Hence, this study aims to explain the changes that have occurred in the phenomenon of war in the post-Cold War era, and to show the extent of the impact of international changes on the patterns and methods of war. There appears to be an urgent need to study the phenomenon of war in the post-Cold War era, to demonstrate the impact of the changing features of the international system on the reality of that phenomenon. The change of the international system, which was based on international balances as a result of the presence of more than one international pole, to a system that rests on unipolarity has largely contributed to the change of concepts of war in the post-Cold War era. It also changed many of the foundations that govern war, whether in terms of its motifs, objectives, or parties based on it, and even its scope and legitimacy.

The hypothesis of this study is based on the impact of the change in the international system, from a bipolar system to a unipolar system, on the reality of the war phenomenon in the post-Cold War era, and an explanation of the effect of that change in the international system on the phenomenon of war in terms of its perception, patterns and methods, and the extent to which that system contributes to limiting the phenomenon of war or giving it more legitimacy.

## METHODOLOGY

The analytical method is adopted in this study, with the aim to identify the changes that occurred in the phenomenon of war in the post-Cold War era as a result of the new international order. Therefore, this study highlights the phenomenon of war in the post-Cold War era. In order to achieve the aims of the study, the researcher divided the analysis into sections. The first section under the heading "*Trends of War in Post-Cold Era*" addresses war and its trends after the cold war. Three subheadings are presented in this section. The first is about the time frame of the post-cold war era, while the second discusses the nature of the post-Cold War world order, and the third presents the development of methods and goals of the post-cold war. The second section, under three subheadings, explores the role of the new international order in armed conflicts after the cold war, armed conflicts in the post-cold period and their characteristics, and ethnicity and its role in armed conflicts in the post-cold period.

### War in Post-Cold War Trends

In this section, the time frame of the post-cold war era, the nature of the post-cold war world order, the development of methods and goals of the post-cold war are presented, respectively.

### Time Frame of the Post-Cold War Era

The post-Cold War era can be divided into chronological stages:

## **The First Stage**

The world witnessed at this stage the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the eastern bloc led by the Soviet Union. The collapse of the Eastern bloc resulted in the decline of the communist ideology. This period was characterized by a high degree of unipolarity, and the international power became concentrated in the vicinity of one state (United States of America), dominating the international system and leading the Western bloc. Therefore, politicians and thinkers used to call the year of the end of the Cold War as ‘the year of the clash of civilizations’ and the ‘new world order’ because it represented a clear turn in the international system and international conflicts, especially with the revolution in science and the growth of economic factors. Hence, many considered the United States, due to its powerful position in the last ten years of the twentieth century, as a force that cannot be ignored for the sake of international stability (Guillaume, 2010).

## **The Second Stage**

The stage is called Neo Structural Realism Corm, (1973), relying on the idea of interaction between elements, where the realism approach was renewed by introducing the concept of force into the approach of the chaotic structure of the international system based on the interaction between its parties. In this period, the new realism endorsed the ideology of preserving the status quo, with the emergence of other non-central actors, and thus the existence of an interactive structural international system as the basic unit of analysis.

## **The Third Stage**

In this stage Hassan, (2004), liberal theory developed, and neoliberalism emerged. New adjustments to the methodological rules of liberalism were also made based on the interaction between the new actors in the international system. All this was possible through the European Union treaty, the emergence of China as a country working on huge capitalist investments, the absence of international polarization processes, and the transition from vertical to horizontal interaction in international relations. If the concept of power in the field of international politics goes back to the thought and era of Aristotle, then power is a method of interaction between states, considering the insufficient role of international institutions in solving international conflicts. Nevertheless, international politics in the current era is considered a struggle for supremacy and status by controlling the minds and behavior of others Hati (1985).

## **Nature of World Order after the Cold War**

Nixon believes that the international system represents the patterns of interactions and relationships between political factors of a territorial nature-states-during a specific time. For Martin Kaplan, the international system is the existence of a set of interconnected rules, values and standards that govern the functioning of relations between states and define aspects of regularity and imbalance in it during a certain period (Nixon, 1992). The Malta summit of December 1989 which brought together the two poles of the international system at that time the United States of America Khairi (2003) and the Soviet Union (the Western and Eastern blocs),

was a public acknowledgment of surrendering to the ongoing political transformations and placing the reins of international politics in the hands of one side, which is the United States of America. America was the unipolar active player in the international decision on the political, economic and military levels. This prompted Brzezinski to comment that the absence of the Soviet Union from the arena means that the United States will be the only superpower of international responsibility (Saeed, 1987).

Perhaps what distinguishes the new international order is the agglomeration in the form of major groups. The state alone is no longer a basic building block in shaping the future regardless of its political, military, economic or demographic capabilities. Therefore, the regimes of independent states have nothing but to enter major blocs with the aim of limiting the economic influence of the United States of America. Such blocs began to emerge, for example within the framework of the European Group, constituting an economic weight and creating a bloc that takes the place of the collapsing communist bloc. Another example is the bloc of the independent Commonwealth countries, as well as the group of industrialized countries, and the Southeast Asian countries bloc to carve a space for them among the countries of the New World. Perhaps the economic interests are what have become the affairs of states in their relations with each other almost completely. Nonetheless, these blocs also show considerable desire to transform into major political blocs with economic power, for example European Union.

In the military fields, the most prominent characteristic of the new international order is the preservation of sovereign military power. This power remains a whip waved and sometimes used when required. This is what led to the emergence of new concepts such as terrorism, extremism and others Nabil (2015). More importantly, this power is reflected in the unilateral defining of the concept of terrorism, leading to a lack of clarity of the distinction between it and resistance or legitimate defense. This is due to the deliberate mixing between terrorism and other concepts, as well as restricting the principle of non-interference in internal affairs. Obviously, the interference in the internal affairs of states was demonstrated under the pretext of fighting terrorism, and all of this undermines the sovereignty of the state.

The new international order has changed in the geopolitical and economic fields, and one of the features of the new international order in the military field is the endeavor to deal with problems between countries by peaceful means. This process is known as the peaceful transformation of the systems of government. Perhaps the peaceful changes that Eastern Europe witnessed-except in Romania-indicate the rejection of force in the changes. This shift constitutes a clear example of the effect of this system in solving internal and international political crises. The political and military crises are resolved through peaceful action, while keeping some sites of tension unresolved for specific other purposes.

On the Arab and Middle Eastern side Abdul-Jabbar, (2008), Arab and Islamic self-capabilities have collapsed. The fact that the entry of Iraqi forces into the Kuwaiti territories contributed to the weakness of the entire Middle East region. This involvement resulted subsequently in the destruction and weakening of Iraq's powers which was a force to be reckoned with and a great asset for Arabs and Muslims. This shed light on the undirected and undisciplined military forces in the Middle East and gave justification for the new international order to purge the region of such military forces. The decision was not limited to stripping Iraq of its effective strategic weapons but was extended to every Arab or Islamic power. Perhaps obliging Egypt to sign the nuclear arms reduction treaty, while allowing Israel to continue its

nuclear pursuits is the best evidence of this position. Another example of this is also in limiting Pakistan's role in the nuclear field. There is mounting pressure on Pakistan highlighting this issue as a dangerous phenomenon in the Middle East region, despite Pakistan's repeated attempts to convince the world that this force is for peaceful purposes, while some neighboring countries have preceded Pakistan by possessing the nuclear bomb.

It is no secret that the Arab and Islamic worlds are the most affected by the recent international changes, and this was evident through the peace project in the Middle East. These changes are clearly reflected in the position of the Arab countries, becoming among the most advocates of peace. The unity of the Arab and Islamic regional order has fragmented. In addition, the institutions of the Arab system, such as the Arab League and its specialized organizations, as well as the Islamic Conference Organization, have failed to play their positive role in supporting this system. The indicators of the apparent division began to appear through the position of the influential countries in the new international system. In the statement of the European Community Summit Muhammad, (2007) on February 15, 1995, there was no mention of the term Arabs or Arab countries during the statement. Rather, a division of Arab countries was mentioned on the basis of regional groups. The Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Yemen, Iraq, Jordan and Iran came within the Middle East axis, while Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, countries of North Africa and Turkey were categorized among the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, Sudan, Mauritania, Djibouti, Somalia and Comoros were placed within the axis of the African group.

The emergence of the new international order has led to the growth of neighboring countries, especially those countries that are allied with major countries such as India, Ethiopia and Israel. The competition between these countries increased in order to fill the void left by the weakness of the Arab and Islamic system.

### **Development of Methods and Objectives of the Post-Cold War**

War is one of the forms of organized violence that states resort to. Violence is an action taken by a state, group or individual against another state, group, or other individuals, inflicting verbal, material or physical harm. Modern wars are a mixture of war, crime, and violation of international legitimacy and human rights. Modern warfare developed and there are now types that were not known before, such as air warfare, chemical warfare, biological warfare and fourth generation warfare Ismail (1975). Whereas the war weighs heavily on state budgets, causes scarcity of resources and causes exorbitant social and human losses, in addition to material losses, states in the new international order have resorted to privatizing violence to replace organized violence by using irregular armed group Muhammad (2009) that finances them. It uses abhorrent means of hatred, intimidation, and national, religious, ethnic and sectarian conflict. Accordingly, the irregular armed groups have replaced the regular armies in the war in terms of taking their decisions, launching them and bearing their consequences. Therefore, after the Cold War, the superpowers and the countries with capabilities refrained from financing wars, and the countries sought to use irregular armed groups that finance themselves by means of theft, looting, kidnapping and extortion. Subsequently, the role of international intervention emerges after the irregular groups perform their role, granting the superpowers the necessary justification and legitimacy to intervene in wars in order to reach their goals through international institutions. Therefore, violence and armed conflicts after the Cold War are no longer seen as a manifestation

of war. Rather, they have become a cause for the perpetuation of chaos, in order to reach a specific goal of accumulating wealth through war and profiting through it.

New wars tend to move away from the use of regular armies, and the substitution is irregular armed groups that include mercenaries and former criminals. New wars achieve their goals through ethnic and religious factors, popular support, displacement of the opposing population by killing, ethnic cleansing, and others, unlike traditional wars run by organized armies, in which achieving goals is by gaining the support of the local population, trying to avoid losses in personnel and weapons. Therefore, states in modern warfare try to reduce the costs of war to the least possible extent. International intervention in modern warfare comes in two forms: Political interference by states of high standing profile, and the second is the humanitarian intervention through the relief and humanitarian support teams. There is no doubt that political interference legitimizes the warring parties and opens the door for groups to physically rebuild themselves. Perhaps the Bosnian war is a vivid example of this, in which ethnic cleansing and genocide of Muslims and Bosniaks took place.

The new international order depicts chaos as a benign thing, so international violence only erupts in some specific situations or when dealing with an irrational state. Foreign policy is formed by a largely sound tendency as a response to systemic factors. That is why the realist theory in all its branches (offensive, defensive and neoclassical) is the embodiment of modern and contemporary American political thought from World War II to the present day. It has been consistent with the aspirations of American foreign policy in the changes taking place in the structure of the international system. This theory succeeded in leading the United States to the control of the international system and succeeded in limiting the waging of world wars between the superpowers.

### **The Role of the New International Order in Conflicts after the Cold War**

In this section, there are three subheadings: the new international order as the cause of armed conflicts, armed conflicts in the post-cold period and their characteristics, ethnicity and its role in armed conflicts in the post-cold period.

#### **The New International Order as a Cause of Armed Conflict**

The state is considered the nucleus of the international system, which is the main axis in the interpretation of international relations in cases of peace and war. The new realism in the analysis of international conflicts focuses on the nature of the international system and the main actors in that system, and the motives for conflictual behavior of the state in its endeavor to raise the value of the available gains and reduce the risks, that is; in achieving its objectives which are mainly to ensure security and maintain its presence as independent unit in the international system characterized by chaos (Melhem, 1981). However, neoliberalism Mahdi, (2002) considers the state as a legitimate representative and aligns with the realistic view in emphasizing the anarchy of the structure of the international system in which states interact as sole and rational actors. It also frames the extent to which this causes conflicts at the international level. The ideal approach focuses on the relationship between international wars and the existence of non-democratic regimes, or between wars and the presence of obstacles to free trade movement between different countries.

Morten Kaplan believes that the behavior of states with one another is governed by the nature of the existing international order and its basic features, in terms of the number of basic units and the distribution of power between them. The nature of the system, according to Kaplan, largely determines the behavior of its parties (Ahmed, 1991). While some see that the unipolar international system as the most peaceful, many researchers, such as Kenneth Waltz, posit that the bipolar system is the most stable and of the least conflicts. Waltz points out that the international system in the period of the Cold War was characterized by the absence of direct military conflicts between the two superpowers and the major powers. The conclusion is that those interested in studying the development of the international system, such as Richard Roskerns, Carl Deutsch, David Singer, and Morten Kaplan, considered the bipolar system as more peaceful than any other international structure due to the flexibility to change alliances and the presence of more than one pole. This facilitates the creation of the required balance and thus reduces the number of international conflicts (Mirowski & Harvey, 2008). In this paper, the researcher subscribes to the latter views of multiploidization on the ground that it achieves a state of international stability and peace. Multiploidization reduces the state of international conflicts due to the pressure of the poles against each other and the international balances that this pressure achieves.

### **International Conflicts in the Post-Cold Period and their Characteristics**

In the years from 1990 to 1999, the world witnessed a total of 118 armed conflicts worldwide, which claimed the lives of six million people, ten of which were interstate conflicts Smith (2004). Today, conflicts between countries are very few, and five out of every ten conflicts are considered wars of independence. Therefore, the predominant nature of conflicts has become internal. Moreover, it cannot be denied that some of these conflicts are transnational as in the Congo war, and some are considered regional, such as the war of Angola, Chad, Namibia, Sudan, Zimbabwe against Rwanda and Uganda.

The armed conflicts of the post-Cold War era have been divided into internationalized armed conflicts, purely internal armed conflicts and border armed conflicts. Regarding the characteristics of post-Cold War conflicts, it is noted that conflicts are predominantly within a single state, whether they are purely internal conflicts, transnational conflicts, or internationalized internal conflicts. There is apparently a decrease in international conflicts Clarke (1995). This means the escalation of internal conflicts in a single state that are dominantly ethnic. The ethnic conflicts have reached very dangerous levels of violence. Statistically, it was found that 35 conflicts were led by ethnic groups or at least one of their parties was an ethnic group in 1995, since the collapse of the eastern bloc led to the creation of 15 countries with multiple ethnicities such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Tajikistan and others. Africa was not in a better position as in the ten years following the Cold War; one out of every four African countries was hit by the fire of war. Among the 42 African countries, the war affected 13 African countries in the form of a civil war. Some states participated in a war in a neighboring country, either to extend its influence or to preserve its interests. In addition to religious diversity, Africa has a multilingualism equivalent to 33% of all languages in the world, and the population of Africa was about 10% of the total world population Halliday, (1995).

On the contrary, the post-Cold War era witnessed a decline in pure international conflicts, as a result of the transformations that the world witnessed and as a result of the change

in the international system. With the end of the Cold War, the influence on international relations is no longer the monopoly of the state. Rather, international non-state actors have appeared, such as regional and international governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, criminal networks and drug gangs, ethnic and religious groups, and terrorist groups. They have all blinded us to the existence of the sources of threat to the state in contrast to the external military threat, which is no longer the only source of threat to state security.

Ethnicity is a word derived from the Greek (Ethnos), and it symbolizes the peoples who have not adopted the political and social system of the state that lives on their lands. The ethnic, according to the ancient Greeks, is that person, who is not Christian, i.e., to whom the teachings and customs of the Church do not apply. George Corm defined ethnicity as “*a human group that emphasizes on a specific level and a special quality that its members are endowed upon it and no other groups*” (Gleditsch & Walter, 2002). The two most important characteristics in the ethnic quality are religion and language, because they ensure optimal communication between members of the ethnicity, provided that these two elements are specific, and are not shared by other social groups. Joseph Mazzini defines ethnicity as “belonging of one human group to one nation, provided that they are united by a common history and one language in the land of this homeland (Kaplan, 2005).

Ethnicity is considered one of the most complex concepts in the world system, and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, ethnicity became an important topic occupying concerns and drawing serious attention. It occupied the place of nationalism that it enjoyed at the beginning of the twentieth century. The term ethnicity is associated with a group, and an ethnic group is that group that is distinguished from others by one of the basic features, such as culture, customs, traditions, lifestyle, language and religion. It has a land linked to it historically and is not required to have an independent political entity in the form of a state (Roskim & Michael, 1991). It is unlike the nation, which means belonging, a sense of a common identity, history, language, religion, geographical location, and a common political history. A nation may exist without a political identity or exist without linguistic, cultural, religious or common components like India.

Ethnic conflicts are an old phenomenon but have increased in intensity with the dominance of the global unipolar system. Historically, the world witnessed in the period between 1965 and 1996 a total of 239 wars in which ethnic conflicts were behind them, and between 1982 and 1996 more than 60 ethnic and religious minorities were subjected to wars and genocide. At the end of the twentieth century, racial and ethnic groups were exposed in 116 countries in the world to risks and pressures from their national governments, causing internal rebellions. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, nearly a third of the population of Africa and the Middle East were at risk of ethnic conflicts. Perhaps the problem of ethnic conflict led to the need to reconsider the way of thinking about relations between countries, given that fragile democracies and countries of weak political system in developing countries do not prevent armed conflicts within a single state.

Perhaps the most important demands of ethnicity are their representation in the political system to which they are subject, respect for their identity, and giving them a special status in the country. The more ethnic groups have privileges and imposition of identity, the more they tend to revolt and separate. The Kurdish issue is a present example in the Middle East region, and a living witness to ethnic conflicts, as the Kurdish people have suffered from tribulations and



persecution for decades, such as genocide, the use of forbidden weapons, destruction, sabotage, mass displacement, and other forms of violence Carpenter (1992).

## CONCLUSIONS

1. The international bipolar system is the most stable and of the least conflict compared to the international unipolar system.
2. New wars in the post-Cold War era tend to refrain from the use of regular armies. Irregular armed groups comprising mercenaries and former criminals are used instead. Irregular armed groups have replaced regular armies in wars, both in terms of their decision-making and launching, and in terms of bearing their consequences.
3. The unipolar international system imposed the United States of America as a superpower responsible for the international political, economic, and military decision. This invariably led to the emergence of blocs with the aim of reducing the American economic hegemony.
4. The influence of international relations is no longer the monopoly of the state. Rather, there have appeared non-state international actors, such as regional and international governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, criminal networks, drug dealers, ethnic and religious groups, and terrorist groups.
5. In the post-cold war era, the external military threat was no longer the only threat to state security. International non-state actors such as regional and international governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, criminal networks and drug gangs, ethnic and religious groups, and terrorist groups are all sources of threat to the state.
6. In the post-cold war era, violence and armed conflicts are no longer seen as a manifestation of war. Rather, they have become a cause for the perpetuation of chaos, in order to accumulate wealth through war.
7. The new international order has given rise to new and deadly forms of international conflict.
8. The unipolar international system contributed to the collapse of the autonomous capabilities of Arab, Islamic and Middle Eastern countries in general.
9. The concept of terrorism appeared in the light of the new international order, and there was a clear and deliberate confusion between it and some other concepts, such as resistance and legitimate defense.
10. Internal conflicts have increased as a result of the changes that the world has witnessed and as a result of the change in the international system.
11. Ethnicity emerged as a cause of internal conflicts, and it was the cause of the emergence of a significant number of those conflicts. It was a cause of instability in many countries, due to the desire of ethnic groups to establish and achieve their identity through their representation in the executive, legislative and judicial authorities in the state, or obtaining compensation gains rather than political gains.
12. There is an apparent decline of conflicts that are purely international.
13. Fragile democracies and weak political systems in developing countries have not prevented internal armed conflicts.

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