

Militia: the dominant defensive force in 21st Century 4GW?

By Fabius Maximus*

How can we fight and win 4th Generation Wars?

Projects such as the 4th Generation Warfare Seminar (4GWS) address a question of the highest importance: how can western civilization successfully adapt to an era in which 4GW is the dominant form of war?

Unfortunately in such projects there is a natural tendency to propose expanding on our strengths rather than addressing our weaknesses, taking us further down a dead end road.

Several recent articles on the DNI website describe programs to improve the training of US troops, in the hope that we can win by fielding troops in which – to caricature it – each NCO and officer has the skills of Green Beret.

Imagine such a force: multilingual troops, all of whose leaders have a sophisticated understanding of foreign cultures, and the ability to not only lead US troops but also navigate within foreign communities – gathering and using intelligence, playing both its elites and common people as an experienced angler does trout.

At some point this becomes a search for the “super soldier serum” familiar to all who read *Captain America* comic books in their youth.

Greg Wilcox is obviously an experienced and intelligent man, but his article “Fourth Generation Warfare and the Information Arrow” illustrates the strange course of recent 4GW writing. He describes how we can build a 4GW legion to fight abroad. It has many brilliant insights and good ideas, but is the overall concept valid?

By far, the most effective weapon in the arsenal of 4GW is information. I choose to call this barbed weapon the “Information Arrow”. ... We fail to integrate all the various informational components into a strategic whole. We treat each bit as a separate entity and hope that they somehow come together at the right place and the right time. ... We have to “operationalize” all of their (intelligence) efforts into a synergistic output. We need to provide a coherent information arrow for the commander to use along with his other weapons – or in some cases in lieu of his other weapons.

Here are two almost trivial but highly specific examples from this thought-provoking and original work. They do not represent the range and depth of Wilcox’s analysis, but perhaps illustrate the outer boundaries of its applicability.

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Wilcox wants to start language training in 3rd grade at American schools, so our expeditionary forces in far-off lands can manipulate their media and play psy-ops.

Eleventh century England mandated training for young men in the long bow, a successful measure with large results. That precedent does not make such measures easy or likely to succeed.

To address just one problematic aspect of this: adding anything to our education programs means eliminating something else.

If only Wilcox would propose ways to reform our schools, so that our children learned to speak and read English. Next he could work on math and history. If successful, these reforms would help America far more than any conceivable military reforms.

He tells an anecdote from the Iraq war:

A group of U.S. soldiers in Baghdad were looking at a group of young Iraqi teen-age girls who were clearly checking out these young GIs. The minute one of the soldiers put on his sunglasses, the girls immediately crossed their chests and sank into a crouch. The rumor was that the GIs' sunglasses gave them x-ray vision and they could see through clothes. There is nothing more important to an Iraqi male than protecting his family, and the thought that GI sunglasses had x-ray capabilities clearly attacked the honor of Iraqi men. The rumor was designed to make Iraqis hate Americans. It worked.

Followed, of course, with a prescription how to prevent these incidents in our next war.

Such social conflicts are an unavoidable consequence of fighting in strange lands, part of the cost to the package. It's unrealistic to expect otherwise.

If we were to focus our military preparations on combat in one region -- such as Latin America -- we might train our troops so that they can work and live easily with the locals.

The British have managed this in Northern Ireland. As William Lind observed, they "win" by taking more casualties than they give. It took them only 400 years -- and the loss of Southern Ireland -- to achieve this sophistication. If we're fast learners, we'll be ready in the year 2200.

As for increased use of psy-ops ... despite much practice over many decades, our Government has yet not learned to lie well to its own people. As the saying goes, don't believe rumors about the US Government until our Officials deny it for the second time.

Successfully "manipulating" strangers must be in the advanced course, scheduled for our leaders sometime in the middle of this century -- or the next.

Real Troops, Real Problems

We already have some of the best-trained soldiers that America has ever fielded, certainly among the best trained and educated in world history. Is increasing their effectiveness by adding even

more intellectual skills the best course, or have passed the point of diminishing returns to training?

However desirable a goal, adding to our strengths detracts attention from critical weaknesses in our current force structure. Seeking to increase our troops training and skills is nice, but the process has severe and perhaps immediate limits.

Worse, there are more important issues facing us today. Can we attract and retain people willing to fight? Can we afford the cost?

The latter is the easier to see, building on the wealth of analysis already on the DNI website. However massive the operating expenses of the Iraq war, that's only the first layer of its costs.

Whatever the ending, it will require the early replacement of a significant fraction of the US military's equipment, especially aircraft and vehicles. Their replacements will be ruinously expensive.

Nor does the personnel cost end with the war due to the "long tail" of pension and disability costs. Our troops have earned every nickel, but the total costs might be far larger than anticipated.

This is the first long war fought by this generation of Americans. Litigious, aggressive in obtaining every possible entitlement, aware of the grey areas in definition of mental and physical disabilities. Our new force structure includes large numbers of women and middle-aged men, which might prove "poster children" for the large bills to come.

Anyone who has run a business, dealing with workers' compensation and sexual harassment claims, will understand without additional explanation.

In brief, the after-action costs following three or more years of high-stress 4GW in the desert might prove large, even for the USA.

And like medieval kings, we are financing our wars with loans from foreign bankers – much of it from the Central Banks of Japan and China.

Moving on, we also await the answer to the 30 years of debate as to how can America field legions to fight overseas wars, with such wars' strategic but difficult to publicly explain goals.

The next few years will show if the Volunteer Army plus large reserve combination lives up to its designers' promises.

Our troops have fought well in Iraq and Afghanistan, as they did in Vietnam. Will the Army require ten years to rebuild, as it did after Vietnam? Can we field disposable armies?

If not, we have a serious problem with no "Plan B."

Perhaps we can find another strategy that requires fewer foreign wars. That seems desirable in an increasingly multi-polar world, facing strong regional powers plus many non-state foes.

A possible solution

4GW opponents thrive on the mistakes of their State opponents. In this sense 4GW thrive on their home court advantage vs. an aggressive enemy.

Gordon R. Dickson describes this as the “Tactics of Mistake” in the sci-fi novel of that name.

"I need to get him involved with me, said Cletus, "so I can make use of him. Unless I can make him annoyed enough to thrust, I can't parry. And only by successfully continuing to parry every attempt he makes can I finally get his whole attention ... (and) use his cumulative errors of judgment to destroy him."

William Lind's articles about defensive strategies and militias suggest another approach, the opposite solution. To quote from my previous article “Thoughts on the 4th Generation War Seminar”:

Is the Home Court advantage decisive in 4GW? Can we win with a defensive posture – second strikes only, but responding without restraint?

Game theory suggests that “tit for tat” is one of the most effective tactics.

History shows us times when a defensive posture was stronger than offense. Since Westphalia in 1648 few invaders have achieved profitable victories; all of the most prominent aggressors have lost.

To quote Lind quoting Carl von Clausewitz in On War:

“... defense is simply the stronger form of war, the one that makes the enemy's defeat more certain. We maintain unequivocally that the form of warfare that we call defense not only offers greater probability of victory than attack, but that its victories can attain the same proportions and results.”

A defensive war denies foreign 4GW foes both an aggressor and the home court advantage. When attacking us, they bear the high costs and frequent mistakes typical of overseas adventures.

This works well with Lind's recommendation to de-escalate. Treat users of terrorism as criminals wherever possible, in the sense of avoiding use of soldiers unless necessary. Avoid engaging them massively and directly – unless they attack first.

The right tool for the right war

Lind's reports from the Modern Warfare Symposium describe a mechanism with which to win a defensive war. We need large numbers of “Fast” Responders at home, in every community.

We need militias. Locals, trained and equipped to fight, able to sometimes prevent and always respond to the almost limitless ability of 4GW foes to strike at America.

Lind explains how light infantry are the key to expeditionary warfare, and militias perhaps the key to defensive warfare.

This not a survey of the literature on history and future of militia, a brief on the history and nature of militia, and their potential advantages and disadvantages for America as we enter the age of 4th Generation Warfare.

Definition of Militia

Origin: Latin, military service, from *milit-*, miles

1. A part of the organized armed forces of a country liable to call only in emergency.
2. The whole body of able-bodied male citizens declared by law as being subject to call to military service. (From the Merriam-Webster dictionary)

We need #1 now. The second becomes our “Plan B”, if engulfed in violent and widespread 4GW. The etymology of militia evokes its origin in the days of primordial war, when every able-bodied man fought for the tribe or city.

History of the Militia

Militias have their origins deep in western history, back to the 7th Century Anglo-Saxon *fyrd* – with military service obligatory for every able-bodied freeman. Membership in the *fyrd* constituted one of the 3 “Common Burdens” owned to the King by landowners in 8th century England (plus repair of fortifications and bridges)

The Assize of Arms by Henry II of England, 1181

1. Whoever holds a knight's fee must have a hauberk and helmet and shield and lance, and all knights should have as many hauberks and helmets and shields and lances as they have knights' fees within their lordship.
2. Whichever free laymen who have chattels or rent of 16 marks should have a hauberk and helmet and shield and lance; whichever free layman has chattels or rent of 10 marks must have a light hauberk [aubergel], an iron cap and a lance.
3. Likewise all burgesses and the whole body of free men must have a gambeson [wambais], an iron cap and a lance.
4. To that end everyone must swear an oath before the Feast of St Hilary [Jan 13] that they will have these arms and will carry them faithfully for our lord king Henry, son of the Empress Matilda, and that he will be armed according to this order in allegiance to our lord king and his realm.
10. Also let justices cause to be said in every county through which they travel, if any does not have arms in accordance with this order, the king shall take his life and limbs and not only his land and chattels. ...

From www.minarsas.demon.co.uk/harn/lionheart/armsassize.htm

Especially note section 4. Militias have an inherently problematic loyalty to the central Government. Unfortunately, having them swear an oath might not guarantee loyalty and obedience in today's secular culture.

Militias were the only defense for Britain's North America colonies. After the Revolution militia formed the basis of America's voluntary mobilization system, providing the majority of men until after the Spanish-American War (along with the structurally similar National Guard).

For example, in the late 1850s American had approximately 75 thousand uniformed and self-financed militia. Drawn from a population of under 30 million, that's equivalent to approximately 750 thousand today.

Other than the occasional war, our 19th Century militia served in much the same way as our National Guard, providing added force in national disasters and civil disturbances.

The history of militia in post-medieval Britain and later America has two themes. First, growing central control. Second, militias were seen as a "constitutional force" to guarantee liberty, as a counter-balance against the State's standing army.

Am American militia for the 21st Century

What are militias in this conception?

1. Armed forces, loyal to the State, with some degree of training and central control.
2. Volunteers authorized to bear and use arms at the direction of the State.
3. Operating with some degree of self-organization and local control.
4. Drawn from and operating in a small area, able to mobilize quickly when and as needed.

Strengths of militia

1. Work for the United States by mobilizing in its defense the strong social cohesion of our local communities.
2. Defending their home communities, militia might display exceptional resilience under horrific circumstances, like that of the elderly and boys defending Berlin from the Russians in the closing days of WWII – who fought as determinedly as the Wehrmacht's professionals at Stalingrad, elites troops in the annals of world history.
3. Almost self-organizing, although not self-supported – much like the local battalions that allowed the rapid buildup of both sides during the Civil War.
4. Trusted by and familiar with their community, hence able to spot strangers, gather and process local information.

5. Trusted by the community, and with greater ability than strangers to use force when and to the degree necessary. That is, they might have the ability to use appropriate force while retaining public confidence.
6. A low cost alternative to a massive, full-time, unionized, professional force.
7. A hybrid or intermediate form between regular Army and local police.

Weaknesses of militia

1. Ineffective against conventional military, but hopefully useful vs. 4GW forces and following disasters (natural or otherwise).
2. Local organization and control inevitably creates wide variation in unit quality. Standardization might prove difficult to achieve in key aspects, such as recruitment, doctrine, equipment, and training. Especially if militia are financed by local governments or their own members.
3. Focus and seriousness often prove difficult to maintain in units that do not see action. Nineteenth Century militia often degenerated into social clubs.

Role of an American Militia

What will they do during an emergency?

We already have local police, state police, National Guard, Federal law enforcement agencies (such as the FBI and ATF), State and Federal disaster response organizations (e.g. FEMA – the Federal Emergency Management Agency), and even the Reserve and Regular military. Plus a host of international and non-governmental agencies.

Does it help to add another organization to this mix during a disaster?

Militias need not have their own command and control hierarchy. They could be limited to providing people to work under the direction of the professionals.

Providing skilled bodies under the control of others is a reasonable role for militia, but not glamorous. It might prove difficult to raise a volunteer militia who operate strictly as an adjunct to Police or National Guard.

Who controls the Militia?

An equally difficult question: who controls the militia? In addition to the professionals, we have many layers of political authority who might consider themselves fit for the job. Mayors, County Supervisors, Governors, Cabinet Secretaries, the President – each with their accompanying advisers/critics in the Legislature.

Lind suggests that Congress administratively control the militia, and that local sheriffs operationally control it.

The first is not only explicitly unconstitutional; it's probably also unworkable. Congress is a committee, and could not – by design – successfully run a lemonade stand. Congressional control would mean creating a powerful new small group in Congress to command this military force, in opposition to the primary forces of our Government. This creates a strong centrifugal force at the center of the US polity.

The second violates deep American traditions of both law and politics. Should we create local generalissimos? Will local executives (e.g. mayors, governors) allow such potentially powerful tools to slip out of their control (more on this below)?

What does the Militia do? Limits of Militia.

This debate goes back to the Revolution. Since George Washington, American army officers have believed that militia not directly under their control could not be relied upon in combat.

But the “Cold War” National Guard, equipped and trained for combat, proved unprepared to deal with the urban riots of the 1960s.

Given their limited training, militias can probably only prepare for a narrow range of tasks. A clear vision, without romanticizing their role, seems essential when designing their mission, training, and organization.

A militia consists of armed citizens. Restraint when using force is a discipline resulting from training and experience, both probably in short supply among militia.

The development of SWAT teams throughout America offers a cautionary example. SWAT teams are better trained than any likely militia. Yet the large number of lawsuits alleging (and often proving) excessive force suggests severe limitations to the use of deadly force by Government agents, both in terms of financial liability and public tolerance.

Considering the State’s exposure to litigation from use of poorly trained militia, perhaps they should deploy with arms only under martial law.

A 4GW-capable militia probably needs less combat training and more in “softer” fields such as intelligence, riot-control, and military policing. Perhaps a militia will work best as a police-military hybrid or intermediary force.

Politics of Militia

Militia units have been and could become important social and political groups, supporting goals unrelated to their stated purpose. Their leadership positions become steppingstones for local politicians, or adornments for résumés of prominent citizens. Local militias could become powerful political tools if organized upon ethnic, creed, or ideology lines.

To the extent they have any paid support staff, militia become opportunities for patronage -- as do any large local operations, such as civic convention centers. Their budgets become rewards in the local and national government contractor sweepstakes.

Nor will militia exist outside of existing social structure. Like every other entity, we can expect militia to attract well-meaning social engineers – an opportunity to train the New American Men and Women – and become enmeshed in America’s racial-ethnic-gender battles.

Effectiveness might become secondary to Political Correctness. In strictly military terms, the ability to recruit and train – even unit cohesion – might suffer trade-offs vs. political and social constraints, such as requirements for ethnic diversity and the role of women.

... at least until trumpets sound and blood flows. Then we’ll learn the limits of local militias’ ability to adapt and function under severe stress.

We might see the cruel logic of evolution in action. In an age of active 4GW, perhaps communities with good militias survive while other communities suffer.

Militia as a Dangerous Innovation

As with any powerful tool, militias offer new and serious dangers to the State. Under stress militias’ loyalty to the polity (central authority) might diverge if they place the interests of their home communities first.

If under local control, militias act in their traditional role as a counterweight to the central Government and its standing army. That sounds good, but they might act as a centrifugal force, putting armed troops in the hands of those not loyal to the State. Look at Iraq, perhaps another example in the long list of States fragmented by growth of militia.

Militia under tight central control gain in effectiveness but perhaps move us closer to a police state.

We face this dilemma in every aspect of their operation. If we train them to watch for potentially dangerous activities and people – acting as eyes for the State – we gain powerful tools but at fearful cost.

It’s easy to see why western Governments have de-emphasized militias during the past century.

Militia as nucleus for vigilantes

Armed forces of the State – military and police, both regular and reserve, are rigorously indoctrinated against “inappropriate” activities and loyalties. Governments also keep them under tight supervision and control.

This seems more difficult to achieve with an armed militia. What that might mean in the context of American society?

A strong militia, like the best of the 19th Century, with quality volunteers and competent elected leaders, is effective – but ultimately under the control of its leaders and membership.

There are few precedents in American history for rebellion. There is a long tradition of local citizen-run law enforcement. These kind of social activists are called vigilantes.

The danger of vigilantism exists because we face threats that our national elites do not choose to recognize, let alone engage.

Not for the first time. During the 19th century America's leaders ignored the need for law and order on our large frontier, forcing people to act on their own. Canada learned from our sorry example, extending the reach of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and other governing institutions as the frontier grew.

To mention just one of today's so far unrecognized threats, note the flow of criminals, terrorists, and what we might call "undesirables" across our open borders. This occurs at considerable cost, mostly unreported in the national media, to those living on the border

Strong events -- not limited to a terrorist attack -- might spark local forces to act to defend their community in the absence of or in defiance of instructions from the lawful higher authorities. The strong internal cohesion and ties to the local community that make militia effective can easily lead them into vigilantism.

Private Military Companies (aka mercenaries, in a new form for the age of 4GW)

Let's digress for a moment to consider the wider context in which militias might flourish.

The historian Michael Roberts observed that military revolutions throughout history coincided with the rise and sometimes dominance of mercenaries.

After 500 years of Great Nations efforts to control or eliminate mercenaries, the modern rise of mercs perhaps began with the creation of private firms, such as Executive Outcomes in 1989, from veterans of the South Africa Special Forces after the regime change there.

In the Iraq War US has greatly accelerated the formation and income of mercenaries -- or, as many prefer to be called, Private Military Corporations. The dangers of this have already become apparent.

Our finest troops now have an alternative market in which to sell their skills, one paying far more than America. It will likely move beyond our control, as markets usually do. We have created a conflict between our soldiers' patriotism and their families' needs, a challenge whose dimensions cannot yet be seen -- only imagined.

At the very least, we're now bidding against ourselves in Iraq.

Worse, many years have passed since building patriotism was an important goal in most American schools, or a vital force in the overwhelming majority of American homes. Let's not kid ourselves that patriotism arises autonomously, magically in every soldiers' hearts.

Once the Iraq War ends, what do they do? Re-enlist for a fraction of the current pay, or find another employer? Once a soldier kills for a dollar, unconnected to a national army, an invisible but real line has been crossed.

Inevitably many of our finest will eventually be working outside of our control; some will work directly against us

Furthermore, knowledge moves with people. Hundreds of years of State-developed of tactics and training will become available to our 4GW enemies, those with the wit to take advantage of this opportunity. Only small numbers need “defect” for this to occur.

Much of our most advanced military technology is also available to all. That is, everyone with the necessary money.

That some American mercs will serve our enemies is a near certainty. El Cid, hero of the Reconquista (d. 1099), worked as a mercenary for both Christian and Muslim rulers, although apparently never against Castilian interests. Mohammed II hired Christians, such as Urban of Hungary, to forge and operate the great cannon that broke the triple walls of Constantinople in 1453. Countless other examples can be cited throughout history.

Decline of the State

Both the rise of mercenary units from our own armies and the creation of militia are large steps toward the decline of the State, as seen by Martin van Creveld.

They represent two aspects of the same centrifugal forces. Armies form the core of the modern state, some of whose elite soldiers now spin off to operate on their own. The armed but unorganized citizenry might coalesce to form militias in order to provide for the common defense, previously a core function of the State.

Here we see the possible end of the State’s monopoly on the legitimate use of force, end of the era established in 1648 with the Treaty of Westphalia.

Conclusions

The rise of mercenaries and militias both foreshadow, in their own ways, the dominance of 4GW.

Both are dramatic evolutions in military affairs, and also represent a shift of power from the center to the periphery of our society.

Both potentially valuable to America. Both potentially dangerous to America.

How we adapt to these developments determine not just how militia (and mercenaries) serve America, but what American becomes in the future.

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