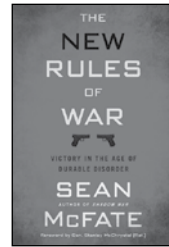

The New Rules of War: Victory in the Age of Durable Disorder

Sean McFate

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In the book *The New Rules of War* the author Sean McFate a former paratrooper and contractor, who later became a professor, writes that in the changing world order, war remains a constant—but warfare is evolving incessantly. States that used to be the sole legitimate entities in warfighting tend to hire new actors to fight on their behalf based on ideologies or other interests. Similarly, defeating an enemy does not remain confined only to conquering territories and killing their troops but to influencing others quickly by using tools, mediums and cunning strategies. It seems modern war is one-step ahead of the traditional way of war-fighting, as it is ‘more than warfare and more to warfare than killing’.

By acknowledging this emerging war-fighting trend, the author focuses on a few critical questions: why has America stopped winning wars, why the West continues to lose wars, and what are the new rules of war the West should adapt to for winning modern war/conflicts? Introspecting the historical accounts of wars since the end of WW II until today, it is tough to exemplify any winning war fought by the West. A point in case is wars in Korea, Vietnam, Panama, Somalia, Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria where despite having the strongest militaries

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and sophisticated weapons victory was partial or incomplete. The author opines that this is because of strategic atrophy or strategic incompetence, since the West still believes in the model of fighting conventional wars. Winning a war by killing more enemies or seizing territories is irrelevant today. Instead, the author asserts what matters is where you are when the war is ended. A noteworthy point, which the author stresses, is the lack of knowledge about the contemporary war ideology among the war futurists of the West. Influenced by Hollywood they find it difficult to comprehend wars where bullets are no longer as effective as non-kinetic elements such as information warfare and influence operations.

The author highlights ten *New Rules of War* the West needs to be trained in to prevail in the age of durable disorder and win modern wars/conflicts. In *Rule 1: Conventional War is Dead*, McFate urges the West to change their old method of war-fighting approach. Non-state actors through terrorism, ethnic cleansing, and other forms of violence have adopted a new war-fighting style surpassing conventional war. Rivals of the West, such as Russia and China, no longer fight conventional wars. In *Rule 2: Technology Will Not Save Us*, the author asserts that technology is no longer the decisive weapon; instead, low-tech will be used in future wars. He cautions that if the West invests in sophisticated weapons and neglects to invest in humans, they will lose in modern war. *Rule 3: There is No Such Thing as War or Peace—Both Coexist Always*, says that war and peace co-exist and conflicts hibernate in peace. Countries like Russia and China use disguised war as peace to achieve their political interests. They use non-military tools to conceal their action in the war. Russia calls it ‘New Generation Warfare’, and China, the ‘Three Warfares Strategy’ and its brinkmanship tactics or the escalate-deescalate method—to confuse the West. *Rule 4: Hearts and Minds Do not Matter*, critiques the West’s assumptions of ‘winning hearts and minds’ as counterinsurgency (COIN) tactics, which is irrelevant today. In other words, the West will not win the people’s hearts by providing social services such as building and

rebuilding nations, roads, and hospitals. If such was the case, why has the West lost wars in Afghanistan and Iraq despite their huge investment in humanitarian aid and social services. The author suggests new COIN strategies the West needs to focus on and states that building foreign legions can be another alternative, as they can provide long terms boots on the ground. *Rule 5: The Best Weapons Do Not Fire Bullets*, highlights that in modern warfare, the utility of force has been declining as countries like Russia use refugees as effective weapons rather than firepower. A point in the case is the bombing of Syria by Russia to send a stream of refugees to Europe—to destabilise Europe. That is the indirect way of winning a modern war. In the new war, influence is more powerful than bullets. Therefore, the West should use influence as weapons and a superior narrative of the conflict as weapons, to win against its rivals. *Rule 6: Mercenaries Will Return*, underlines the increasing involvement of mercenaries/private military companies/private security companies in modern warfare. The author argues that mercenaries are going to stay for fighting in non-conventional wars and in fact, they will change the course of modern warfare.

A new security vacuum is created with the erosion of states, especially in weak, fragile or failed states, hence *Rule 7: New Types of World Powers Will Rule*, highlights the emergence of new elites such as insurgents, caliphates, narco-states, warlords' kingdoms, and mercenary overlords to fill this void. Gradually, they might breed into regional superpowers to rule in these states. In *Rule 8: There Will be Wars Without States*, the author problematises how the West fails to see a real war; instead, they portray or assume it as a law enforcement challenge. McFate opines that narco-war is as bloody as terrorism. Narco-war is an actual war in modern times without states involved in it. Another is the privatised wars fought by mercenaries or private forces as they fight a real war without any states involved. South America and Africa provide classic examples of these forms of war.

Rule 9: Shadow Wars Will Dominate, is the extrapolation of Rule 8. Private forces or mercenaries are offered plausible deniability, which is more influential than firepower in this day and age of information. In the shadow wars, ‘information is used as a weapon, plausible deniability as a tactic, and subversion as a strategy’ by states, which the West fails to accept. For instance, Russia is a disinformation superpower in the battle of narratives. In *Rule 10: Victory is Fungible*, the author elucidates how winning a battle differs from winning a war in modern-day warfare. One can win a battle militarily but lose the war. A point in the case is the US where it along with its allies lost in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. In modern warfare, tactical dominance is insufficient and tacticians need strategic education.

Sean McFate gives a holistic view and an extensive account of the subject, based on his personal experiences. He cautions that states exploiting conventional tactics tend to lose maximum wars. He affirms that if the West does not adapt to the new rules of war, there will be more defeats than victories in the coming days. Hence, to win a future war, he gives a few suggestions: jettisoning the concept of war; understanding modern warfare; adopting plausible deniability; using non-kinetic weapons like deception and influence; using mercenaries and offering a strategic education and increasing the number of war artists who understand these concepts. The book reflects the author’s in-depth research and reproduces his vast experiences with detailed relevant illustrations. This book benefits young scholars working on security studies and refreshes the minds of serving officers, veterans and war strategists by helping them think out of the box.

The book is a case study of the US and West’s experience in war fighting. It cannot generalise the same method to every country, especially the smaller and developing countries. The methods may be compatible with the global military aims of a superpower like the United States. But for others, the methods may need application after modifications due to

regional or local dynamics. Another limitation of the book is regarding Rule 1. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis is a full-fledged conventional war fought by mercenaries or private forces, which falsifies Rule 1.

In a nutshell, the book is all about why the US or the West fails to win modern wars against rivals, what other countries can do is learn from and adapt to these new rules of war and in this manner prepare themselves for modern-day war fighting.

