

Fourth-Generation Warfare (4GW) and the Slow Erosion of the Sudanese State

(Translated)

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When logic fails and rational argument is absent, and when individuals are unable to secure or safeguard their rights, they resort to force. This is how wars arise among humans, whether as individuals, groups, or nations, even as the means and instruments of warfare undergo significant transformation.

Public international law defines war as an armed conflict between two or more parties, specifically between distinct states, during which each state defends its interests, objectives, and rights. War has thus been an integral part of the history of nations and peoples. With the evolution of methods, tactics, and technology, the patterns and forms of warfare have shifted, giving rise to new terminology; most notably, the concept of generations has been adopted to distinguish between the tools, management, domains, and types of warfare. Each generation denotes a specific era characterized by a particular mode of combat involving specific means and methods. Among these is the concept of “first-generation warfare,” also known as Napoleonic warfare, which emerged in 1648, the year the Peace of Westphalia was signed.

Second-generation warfare emerged following the Industrial Revolution, which introduced diverse firepower options through steam technology and mass production, alongside advancements in weapon and artillery design. This type of warfare relies on wearing down the enemy until collapse; prime examples include World War I and the American Civil War.

Third-generation warfare did not differ significantly from its predecessors, though it was far more brutal and destructive, World War II being the quintessential example.

The most dangerous and insidious form of warfare is known as “fourth-generation warfare.” This term describes a new paradigm aimed at weakening an adversary through unconventional means, avoiding direct combat in favor of media manipulation, psychological warfare, rumors, propaganda, political influence, the creation of irregular armed groups, and the exploitation of societal divisions.

The term first appeared in 1989 in an article published by the “Marine Corps Gazette” titled “The Changing Face of War - Into The Fourth Generation (4GQ)” by William S. Lind. In 2006, retired Colonel Thomas X. Hammes USMC expanded on the concept in his book “The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century.” He characterized fourth-generation warfare as complex, protracted, and reliant on terrorizing the population. It is decentralized, shifting from location to location, and multinational in scope, often involving acts of genocide and the violation of personal sanctity within a guerrilla warfare context. Furthermore, it signifies the nation-state’s loss of its near-monopoly on combat forces, marking a regression to a pre-modern era, and aims to destroy states from within by toppling institutions and sowing chaos.

As the war in Sudan enters its fourth year, it serves as a practical case study illustrating the concepts presented in a lecture delivered on December 1, 2018, by Dr. Max G. Manwaring, a military strategy expert at the U.S. Army War College’s Strategic Studies Institute. Attended by senior officers from NATO and the military of the Jewish entity, the lecture argued that conventional warfare had become obsolete, giving way to “fourth-generation warfare.” Manwaring defined this as “coercive warfare aimed at causing the collapse and destabilization of an enemy state, followed by the imposition of a new reality that serves and secures our interests.” He explained that the objective is a process of slow yet steady attrition and erosion. This begins with destabilization carried out by local actors, whom he later described as fierce and ruthless indigenous fighters, such as the Rapid Support Forces militia in Sudan, and involves the gradual, quiet destruction of infrastructure, including electricity, water supplies, hospitals, and educational institutions, until the enemy “wakes up dead.”

When asked why a strategy of exhaustion and slow erosion was chosen instead of toppling the state in a single blow, he replied, “If we were to topple the state all at once, its infrastructure and the foundations for its recovery would remain intact. Slow erosion, however, creates a failed state through the gradual destruction of cities and by turning the population into

wandering herds and lines of displaced persons. This paralyzes the state's ability to meet basic needs, effectively turning the resulting shortages into another facet of the war, and uses displacement camps to foster a new culture. Furthermore, these shortages generate public opposition to the government; the lack or total absence of essential services drives people to flee their cities and villages. This operates through a mechanism of shifting the conflict from one area to another, extinguishing the fire in one city only to ignite it in another, thereby draining the state's capabilities."

He adds, "In wars like this, you will see dead children, the elderly, and lines of displaced and homeless people; you must not be disturbed by this. We must press straight toward the goal." He concluded by saying, "We must manage the crisis, not solve it."

Anyone following the war in Sudan finds it a prime example of "fourth-generation warfare," encompassing all its associated methods and tools. The media war waged across various platforms proved even more ferocious than the actual fighting on the ground. Meanwhile, so-called civil society organizations play a significant role in the conflict under the guise of supporting women and youth through training and funding; in reality, these activities serve to groom operatives within the state to carry out foreign agendas. Indeed, many government ministers and officials emerged from the programs and organizations in question.

The consequences have been devastating: over 160,000 people killed and tens of thousands wounded or injured. Educational institutions have been destroyed or converted into military barracks and shelters, leaving millions of students out of school. More than 40% of healthcare facilities are out of service, and critical infrastructure, including electricity, water systems, bridges, and roads, has suffered massive destruction; the power sector alone has seen 60% of its infrastructure ruined, and key bridges in Khartoum have been struck. All this is compounded by mass displacement, the refugee crisis, and widespread poverty. This is the senseless war ignited by the United States, a conflict that, from day one, Washington predicted would be protracted and incapable of a military resolution.

Therefore, we must be fully aware of this vile method of warfare adopted by America in Muslim lands and focus on upholding the pillars of society in accordance with Sharia rulings, so as to thwart the conspiracies and machinations of the disbelieving West. These measures are as follows:

1. Prohibiting and criminalizing military militias, and rejecting demands pursued through armed action.
2. Prohibiting ethnic, nationalist and sub-nationalist rhetoric and criminalizing tribal partisanship, while eliminating anything that fosters racial discrimination, whether based on tribalism, nationalism or regionalism.
3. Prohibiting drug use and criminalizing drug trafficking, recognizing them as tools to destroy the youth and undermine society's highest values.
4. Prohibiting and criminalizing the entry of foreign non-Muslim organizations, foremost among them feminist and gender-ideology groups, as well as aid organizations.
5. Prohibiting and criminalizing any ties between political parties or individuals and Western embassies, and regarding anyone who frequents them with suspicion.
6. Refusing to allow Western powers to interfere in our affairs; Allah (swt) says: ﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا عَدُوِّي وَعَدُوَّكُمْ أَوْلِيَاءَ﴾ **"O believers! Do not take My enemies and yours as trusted allies,"** [TMQ Surah Al-Mumtahanah 60:1] and He (swt) said: ﴿إِنَّ الْكَافِرِينَ كَانُوا لَكُمْ عَدُوًّا مُّبِينًا﴾ **"Indeed, the disbelievers are your sworn enemies"** [TMQ Surah An-Nisa 4:101].
7. Working earnestly with Hizb ut Tahrir to establish the Khilafah Rashidah (Rightly-Guided Caliphate), as it is the guardian of the Muslims and the Shariah method for ruling by Islam.

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