

**DISSERTATION SUMMARY**

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**Fourth Generation Conflicts –  
Lessons and Characteristics**

Summary of PhD Dissertation

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## DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM

Since the end of World War II conventional wars between nation-states have become rare occurrences. Combat between non-state actors and the state's security forces has become the dominant forms of armed conflict. Although these conflicts usually take place within the borders of a nation-state, occasionally they do acquire a significant international dimension as well. Since 1945 80 to 85 percent of armed conflict has been such internal, asymmetrical (according to a fairly recent theory of military science, "fourth generation") war.

So far, fourth generation conflicts have affected primarily the states of Africa and Asia, but several signs point to the possibility of such conflicts also arising in the central regions of Europe. Therefore, it is important to analyze the special circumstances of fourth generation conflict and to discover those principles that a European government can apply to handle such a challenge within its own borders, and at the same time remain faithful to the country's values and laws, and retain its culture, freedoms, traditions and way of life.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

1. Define the nature of fourth generation conflict, describe its social, political and economic roots and identify the reasons for it having become the dominant form of warfare.
2. Verify or disprove the following hypotheses:
  - i. A fourth generation challenge is not a simple law enforcement problem, but it is not a simple military problem either, therefore it cannot be handled by exclusively police methods or by exclusively military means. The challenge can be handled only if society mobilizes its resources and is willing to make the necessary sacrifices.
  - ii. In the course of the conflict international allies can provide valuable support, but all risks, burdens and sacrifices of the fight must be borne by the society under attack.
  - iii. The principles of war apply to the conditions of fourth generation warfare. The failure of the security forces can be attributed to incorrect application of the principles.
  - iv. The security forces cannot settle the conflict – they can only create the conditions for settlement. However, without the security forces the conflict cannot be resolved.
3. Establish those principles which help European governments – primarily the Hungarian government – to face a fourth generation challenge within their own borders.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

I laid the foundation of research by studying the international classics on asymmetric warfare, and surveying the international and Hungarian professional literature on current asym-

metric conflicts. I found qualitative methods, especially case studies, the most suitable approach. I established an analytical framework of seven elements (background to the conflict; space-forces-time-information factors; command and control principles of the belligerents; strategic communications; the legal environment; sequence of events; political settlement) and applied it to compare four conflicts (Rhodesia, 1962-1980, Punjab, 1980-1994, Kosovo 1996-1999, France 2005). Since the focus of my research was on establishing the principles a European government can apply to face a fourth generation challenge within its own borders, I decided to forgo the recent events in Iraq and the current conflict in Afghanistan, where the presence of foreign expeditionary forces is not only a seriously distorting factor, but is actually one of the causes the insurgency.

Structured interviews and informal conversations conducted with Algerian, Serb and Macedonian students of the Zrínyi Miklós National Defence University served to put into sharp context the very special problems inherent in fighting one's own citizens, in defense of other own citizens, within one's own borders. I also had the opportunity to subject my conclusions to practical tests: in 2010 and 2011 I conducted three Command Post Exercises that modeled fourth generation challenges. One exercise was conducted at the 25th Infantry Brigade of the Hungarian Defence Forces, and two were conducted at the Command and General Staff Course of the Zrínyi Miklós National Defence University.

I published partial results of my research in Hungarian and international peer-reviewed professional publications and during scientific conferences.

#### STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

**In Chapter One** I introduce the theory of generations in warfare, the common paradigm of the first three generations, and the fundamentally different fourth generation paradigm. I present the social, political and economic roots of the paradigm-shift, explain why fourth generation warfare has become the dominant form armed conflict. I also explain why regular security forces find it so difficult to respond to the challenge.

**In Chapter Two** I present four case studies, which offer an intercontinental view and cover a broad spectrum of fourth generation conflict, from a difficult police problem (France, 2005) through urban and rural terrorism (Rhodesia, 1962-1980 and Punjab, 1980-1994), to near-conventional warfare (Kosovo 1996-1999).

**In Chapter Three** – following the logic of the analytical framework – I describe the general characteristics of fourth generation conflicts.

**In Chapter Four** – again, following the logic of the analytical framework – I describe specific measures that would allow the Hungarian security forces to prepare to handle a fourth generation challenge.

**In Chapter Five**, which serves as a capstone of the dissertation. I summarize the findings of my research, establish the principles, whose application makes government success probable, summarize the new scientific results and make some recommendations for their utilization. I also identify areas that require further research.

#### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

External and internal social, political and economic factors challenge the legitimacy of the nation-state, increasingly limit its sovereignty, and limit its ability to deploy force against its own internal enemies. Exploiting this, non-state actors successfully challenge the authority of the security forces, because the latter - in contrast with the practice of previous decades - cannot apply unlimited force. This results in a paradigm shift in warfare.

However, the earlier paradigm - the threat of "industrial war" waged by the regular forces of nation-states - has not disappeared. The two paradigms exist side by side, and require different doctrines, different tactics, different training, different equipment - and demand a fundamentally different way of thinking from political decision makers, the commanders of the security forces, and society in general. There is very little common ground between the paradigms, yet the security forces must be ready to fight security challenges according to either paradigm - or occasionally according to both at the same time.

There are fundamental differences in the political and strategic goals, doctrines and procedures of the belligerents:

- The *non-state actor's* goal is to impose his vision on society by generating a societal Stockholm-syndrome and thereby breaking society's will. To that end he integrates combat, legal political action, mass mobilization techniques and continuous strategic communications, and as much as possible attempts to involve the international community as well. He rejects every tradition, law, rule or moral constraint that would limit his freedom of action - he achieves his greatest strategic communications successes by spectacularly deliberate transgression of these limits.
- The goal of the *government* is to restore government authority and national unity, and enforce the state's territorial inviolability – tasks that require a quick end to the conflict and mitigation of the effects of the societal Stockholm-syndrome. In realizing these goals the government cannot ignore (although it can extensively modify) the legal envi-

ronment and - particularly in today's international political environment - cannot employ unlimited military force. If the security forces transgress a (not clearly defined) limit in the employment of force, the government risks armed intervention by the international community.

Based on the case studies we can discern the principles that make the government's success, if not guaranteed, then at least probable in a fourth generation conflict:

- Although the non-state belligerent's initial activities generally involve riots and violent crime, a fourth generation challenge is not just a law-enforcement problem. However, neither is it just a war that can be won solely through military means. But it is not just a political or economic crisis, either. It is all three at the same time, and the government can prevail over the non-state adversary only through the mobilization of all of society's resources and close integration of the instruments of state power.
- The challenge can be suppressed by brute force, but this is not an acceptable approach if society is serious about the values, traditions, freedoms and way of life that define Europe and the European civilization. A political solution must be sought that balances political compromises and combat operations: handling the root causes of the conflict, while suppressing the non-state actor's military capabilities and forcing him to give up violence and seek his interest through political processes instead.
- No matter how desirable it is to seek a political solution to the conflict, it cannot be resolved without combat operations. The doctrines, tactics, techniques and procedures to be followed are determined by the social, political and economic circumstances that led to, and sustain, the conflict.
- Both for the government and for the non-state actor the strategic point of gravity is the support of the population. The non-state actor can hide among the people, obtain resources, recruit new fighters, collect information and disappear after an operation, only if he has the support of at least a significant minority. The state can prevail only if it isolates and protects the people from the non-state belligerent's intimidation and propaganda. This automatically cuts the non-state belligerent off from his social, operational and logistical base. In this contest the people find themselves between two millstones and will support the side which is more certain to punish defiance severely.
- In order to establish and retain control over the population, the security forces must maintain permanent presence of state power and undisputed territorial control. This – especially if the conflict is a protracted one – requires very large numbers of personnel. The required numbers depend on the population of the affected area, and may go as high

as 1:50 – one soldier/policeman/gendarme to every 50 citizens. Unless the security forces can generate such numbers, they must be expanded by conscription, by the recruitment of professionals, or by raising local militias.

- Fighting the armed forces of the non-state belligerent is rarely a tactical challenge for the security forces, but it is very difficult to locate his forces and defeat them without inflicting collateral damage and casualties. Therefore reliable, accurate, fast and continuous intelligence is the lifeblood of operations in an asymmetric conflict. Intelligence must generally be based on local networks of human sources. The twin of effective intelligence must be an equally effective counterintelligence effort.
- Success in the conflict heavily depends on success in strategic communications: the government must convince the world that its actions are not only justified and lawful, but also that they are in the best interests of the people – and that the government is likely to win. Part of this communication must be attacking the non-state belligerent's message, and substituting a more attractive, more convincing "counter-message." The international dimension of today's fourth generation conflicts dictate that the government's strategic communications operations must also reach the international community.
- Interference by other states individually or by the international community as a whole is contrary to the interests of the government, therefore it must use active diplomacy, strategic communications or the adjustment of the intensity of operations to prevent it.
- The security forces require special legal powers in order to prevent the non-state belligerent's use of the law as cover and concealment. These curtail constitutional guarantees and increase the opportunities to abuse power, therefore the government must pay special attention to legality and the security forces' lawful conduct. The other side of this coin is that security forces personnel must also receive positive legal protection.

These principles must be realized simultaneously; their relative importance depends on the actual situation. The historical record shows, that the element that gets neglected will eventually prove to be the most important, because it interferes with the other elements. These principles must be applied within the general framework of the principles of war, just as we would do with the principles of other forms of warfare.

According to the National Military Strategy of Hungary, the military forces of the country must be able to prevail either in conventional or in asymmetric conflicts. This requires significant preparatory work, especially in the areas of force generation, shaping the legal environment and creating the appropriate doctrines.

## FULFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND VERIFICATION OF THE HYPOTHESES

I achieved the research objectives I had set. I summarized the theory of generations in warfare, described the transitions between generations. I identified the social, political and economic roots of fourth generation warfare. Through case studies I defined the nature of fourth generation conflict and identified the causes of the belligerents' success or failure.

Research validated the first hypothesis: *a fourth generation challenge is not a simple law enforcement problem, but it is not a simple military problem either, therefore it cannot be handled by exclusively police methods or by exclusively military means.* The challenge can be handled only if society is willing to make the sacrifices required by the emergency, mobilizes its resources and deploys every instrument of state power.

According to the second hypothesis, *"in the course of the conflict international allies can provide valuable support, but all risks, burdens and sacrifices of the fight must be borne by the society under attack."* I had to reject the first part of this hypothesis, because research did not validate it. I found that – even when it is carried out with the intention to assist the government – the intervention of the international community represented considerable risk. The intervening powers' attempts to impose their values, interests and priorities (which usually differ significantly from those of the society under attack) on the conflict, poses a significant threat to the government. However, this only confirms and reinforces the second, most important part of the hypothesis: all risks, burdens and sacrifices of the fight must indeed be borne by the society under attack.

According to the third hypothesis, *the general principles of war are applicable in the circumstances of a fourth generation conflict, and the failure of the security forces can be attributed to incorrect application of those principles.* Research showed that the principles do hold true, but due to the root causes of the conflict, to the characteristics of the "war amongst the people," and to local circumstances, they can be applied only after serious reflection. Research fully validated the second part of the hypothesis: failure of the security forces can be attributed to incorrect application of the principles.

Research validated the fourth hypothesis: *the security forces can only create the conditions for settlement, but cannot settle the conflict themselves.* However, without the security forces the conflict cannot be resolved.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

1. I identified the political, economic and social roots of fourth generation warfare, and found an explanation for its dominant role in today's conflicts. I identified the differenc-

es between the paradigm of the first three generations and that of the fourth generation. I defined the place of fourth generation warfare within the theory of military cultures, as established by Jenő Kovács. I provided precise definitions for several terms that are necessary to analyze fourth generation challenges.

2. I established an analytical framework that is suitable for studying and comparing fourth generation conflicts. Using the analytical framework, I described four conflicts, and through these I proved that the general principles of war were applicable in the conditions of fourth generation conflict – albeit their application was seriously affected by the root causes of the conflict, the characteristics of the "war amongst the people," and local circumstances.
3. I identified and described those principles that can be followed by European governments – among them the government of Hungary – in order to face a fourth generation challenge within their own borders. I identified the most important areas of preparation for a fourth generation conflict, the most important principles and most urgent elements of preparation.

#### UTILIZATION OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The dissertation can be a starting point and raw material for developing a counterinsurgency doctrine that combat units of the Hungarian Defence Forces, law-enforcement agencies, the militias recommended in the dissertations, as well as the national security organs can use to train their personnel.

Every faculty of the University of Public Service can use it as a teaching tool to show the foundations of asymmetric warfare and a possible method of analyzing and comparing actual conflicts.

It can be used as a teaching tool in advanced courses of the officer corps of the Hungarian Defence Forces and Police.

It can serve as a source of information when planning battalion, brigade and higher headquarters Command Post Exercises that model new military challenges.



## THE AUTHOR'S PUBLICATIONS ON THE SUBJECT

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*Ahol a hadmérnök és a polgár találkoznak: a nemkritikus infrastruktúra műszaki védelmének szabályai és előírásai (Where Combat Engineers and Citizens Meet: Rules and Regulations for the Defense of Non-Critical Infrastructure)*, in Hadtudomány, 2011. internet publication, Budapest, [www.mhtt.eu/hadtudomany/2011\\_e\\_8.pdf](http://www.mhtt.eu/hadtudomany/2011_e_8.pdf)

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