



Executive Summary

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THE RISE OF IWAR: IDENTITY, INFORMATION, AND THE INDIVIDUALIZATION OF MODERN WARFARE

Glenn J. Voelz

The attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11) and two extended counterinsurgency campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan presented the United States with unconventional adversaries for which it was largely unprepared. These opponents did not fight as doctrinal formations or within clearly defined operational boundaries. Rather, they were organized as loose networks, comprised of individuals often indistinguishable from surrounding populations. Without uniforms and flags, the task of identifying and targeting these entities presented an unprecedented operational challenge for which traditional warfighting approaches were largely unsuited. In response, the U.S. military and the broader national security apparatus embarked upon a decade of doctrinal, technical, and organizational innovations premised on the idea that individual combatants had become a salient national security concern and a legitimate object of military targeting. Within this new operational paradigm, the identification, screening, and targeting of individual combatants and their associated networks became the central focus for a new mode of state warfare—iWar.

Over the last decade, this approach to warfighting has emphasized the operational tasks of identifying key actors on the battlefield, penetrating their networks, and isolating them from larger populations, and, when necessary, conducting kill/capture operations against high-value insurgent and terrorist targets. This strategy required the adoption of new doctrinal concepts deeply influenced by network analysis theory and the use of identity-base targeting. These methods emphasized analytical approaches based upon the disaggregation of battlefield threats down to the lowest possible component—often the

individual combatant—and introduced identity as a critical signature of military targeting.

Along with new doctrinal concepts, the conflicts of the last decade also generated a range of technology innovations specifically designed for the informational demands of identity-based operations. These included biometrics, expeditionary forensics, and DNA analysis, to name a few. However, the tools and methods of iWar were by no means limited to use on foreign battlefields. On the domestic front, similar technologies have been used to construct an expansive identity-based screening program that has kept borders, transportation networks, and American cities remarkably safe since 9/11. This achievement depended upon the accumulation of a dense informational base layer designed to support identity management, network analysis, and data sharing across the entire U.S. national security apparatus.

The challenges presented by post-9/11 adversaries were also the catalyst for a major bureaucratic transformation that has gradually eroded many of the traditional lines separating military operations, foreign intelligence activities, and domestic security functions. These changes reflect a new strategic calculus that has placed the threat from nonstate actors and individual combatants on equal footing with adversarial states in the crafting of U.S. national security policy and as a driver of military innovation. This monograph examines the course of this doctrinal and technical transformation over the last decade and considers the implications for the future of U.S. national security strategy and military conflict in the age of iWar.

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