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## The asymmetric nature of armed conflicts

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The article describes the concept of an asymmetric war, an armed conflict, reveals the essence of this concept, using the example of the Syrian armed conflict.

**Keywords:**

Asymmetric war, armed conflict, terrorist organizations, regular armies, irregular armed detachments.

Forecasting trends in the changing nature of wars and armed conflicts, the development of forms and methods of conducting armed struggle has always been, is and will be one of the most important problems of military theoretical thought. The solution of issues of military security of the state is impossible without a clear understanding of the nature of modern military conflicts that may threaten this state.

Based on data on the nature of possible military conflicts, answers to vital questions are clarified: with which enemy; for which possible military conflicts the country needs to be prepared; which armed forces and military-economic potential the state should have and in which direction their preparation should be carried out to repel possible aggression; how to use armed forces to solve strategic tasks and finally, what kind of tension will these conflicts require from the entire people.

Miscalculations in the early resolution of these issues are extremely dangerous for their correction with the beginning of a military conflict, there may be neither time nor opportunity to eliminate them.

Assessment of the nature of modern wars, analysis of their content are of great practical and methodological importance for the construction of the Armed Forces, the calculation of their mobilization resources.

At the end of the XX century, the "cold war" was replaced by a war of an unconventional nature, in which, as practice shows, non-standard forms and methods of conducting armed struggle are needed.

In official documents of the United States, threats to national security are divided into three categories: regional (armed conflicts), transnational (drug trafficking, illegal arms trade, international crime, piracy, environmental threats, etc.) and asymmetric.

Asymmetric is considered a war in which one of the parties has a significant superiority in something in relation to the other.

There is another concept of asymmetric warfare, but the essence does not change from this. Asymmetric warfare is unexpected and non-standard forms of struggle of the weak side against a stronger opponent and vice versa.

"Strong" are regular armies equipped with modern weapons and equipment, maintained by States and performing tasks to protect their interests within and outside the borders of States.

"Weak" - irregular armed detachments (guerrillas, rebels, mercenaries), bandit formations of international terrorist organizations that do not have an organized systematic nature of actions.

Most often, the concept of asymmetry is used to characterize the relationship between opponents who are not comparable in strength and status. Also, asymmetry, as a rule, indicates the paradoxical nature of relations in which a weaker opponent is able to cause serious damage and even impose his will on a stronger one, and a strong opponent cannot always defend his interests and subdue a weak one.

The analysis of the strategy and tactics of the struggle of the weak against the strong is the essence of the study of asymmetric wars.

In my article, I would like to consider the main trends in the development of tactics of rebel formations in the Syrian armed conflict. The civil war in Syria is an armed conflict between the Syrian government forces and their "strong" allies, and the "weak" Syrian opposition fighters (most of whom are Islamists of various persuasions, from moderate to radical, including members of groups associated with Al-Qaeda). The Kurds, who have created an autonomous region in the north-west of the country with their own government, act as a third party to the conflict. On the side of the opposition, foreign fighters from more than 70 countries of the world are participating in the fighting, on the side of the government - militants of the Lebanese organization Hezbollah and Iraqi Shiite groups.

The war was preceded by massive anti-government unrest and riots in various cities of Syria, directed against President Bashar al-Assad and to end the long-term rule of the Baath Party, which in June - July 2011 turned into an open armed confrontation.

At the end of 2012, a UN report described the war as an "openly religious conflict" between the Alawite militia and its

Shiite allies, fighting mainly against predominantly Sunni rebel groups. This opinion is disputed by both sides of the conflict.

In logistical terms, the anti-government militants were supported by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, the United States and some other states, the Syrian government - Iran, Russia, North Korea and Venezuela.

On June 3, 2014, presidential elections were held in the territories controlled by government forces, following which the incumbent President Bashar al-Assad won. The election results were not recognized by the opposition (both "moderate" and Islamist), and also received limited recognition from the international community.

The conflict in Syria has led to a serious destabilization of the situation in neighboring States, in particular in Iraq and Lebanon. Some armed groups are simultaneously engaged in hostilities in Syria and Iraq.

Having considered the features of the structure and armament of rebel formations in Syria, we can come to the following conclusions that the rebel formations waging an armed struggle against the regular army of Syria at the beginning of the armed conflict were represented by the Syrian Freedom Army (FSA), which subsequently represented the Islamic Liberal Front and consisted of the groups Jaish al-Islam, the Shaman's Falcons brigade, Liwa al-Tawhid. The creation of the MTR was announced on July 29, 2011, when a group of deserting officers published a video message in which they called on the soldiers of the Syrian army to come over to their side.

Also, rebel formations waging an armed struggle against the regular Syrian army were represented by the Syrian Islamic Front, consisting of the Ahrar al-Sham and Ansar al-Sham groups.

Since the beginning of 2012, the Al-Qaeda - al-Nusra Front group has been operating in Syria.

The members of the Front are Sunni Muslims. Syrians are fighting in its ranks, as well as citizens of Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Pakistan, Lebanon, immigrants from the Central Asian republics, France, Great Britain, etc., united by Salafist ideology calling for the construction of

an Islamic state on the territory of not only Syria, but also the entire Islamic world.

Also, the rebel formations leading the armed struggle against the regular army of Syria are represented by the Syrian Islamic Front, consisting of the groups Ahrar al-Sham, Ansar al-Sham, Liwa al-Haq.

Since the beginning of 2012, the Al-Qaeda – al-Nusra Front group has been operating in Syria.

Initially, the FSA and the al-Nusra Front cooperated with each other and were in close contact, but later an ideological conflict broke out between them. The prerequisite for it was the sudden expansion of the Victory Front, on September 25, 2013, the thirteen most effective military groups of the Syrian rebels refused to support the National Syrian Coalition, broke with the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and formed their own formations, which since the beginning of 2014 have been fighting both against government troops and against each other.

And earlier, one brigade from the FSA joined the Front in Aleppo. All this was part of the proposed merger of the two largest anti-regime forces in Syria. All this resulted in a conflict with the secular FSA, from which religious Muslims fled en masse and settled in the Jabhat al-Nusra li-Ahlishsham organization. Subsequently, this resulted in local collisions.

"Islamic State" ("IG"; formerly "Islamic State of Iraq and Sham", "ISIS", "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant", "ISIL", "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria", "ISIS") - an Islamist terrorist organization operating mainly in Syria and Iraq.

It was formed in 2006 in Iraq by the merger of eleven radical Islamist groups led by a local al-Qaeda unit. Today, ISIS is a "semi-real quasi-state" with a Sharia form of government, which partially controls the territory of the "Sunni triangle".

In 2013, ISIS militants entered the civil war in Syria against the regime of Bashar al-Assad on the side of anti-government forces, where the group gained a reputation as one of the most violent. The Organization has been repeatedly criticized by international human rights organizations for numerous war crimes and crimes against humanity. The group

conducts active extremist activities and is responsible for many terrorist attacks against American and NATO forces in Iraq, the Iraqi military, as well as against civilians and facilities. The goal of the organization is to create an Islamic Sunni state on the territory of Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. Despite the fact that this movement imposes strict adherence to Islamic laws, it primarily represents a coalition of opponents of the Shiite authorities of the country, which includes both Islamists and former officers of the Saddam Hussein regime.

The group became widely known in the summer of 2014, when the militants began a full-scale attack on the northern and western regions of Iraq. The radicals managed to take control of several cities within a month: on June 10, they captured Mosul (the second largest city in Iraq), the next day — Tikrit, and a few days later they came close to Baghdad. At the end of June, the terrorists announced the creation of their own quasi-state (the so-called "caliphate"), stretching from the city of Aleppo in northern Syria to the province of Diyala, in eastern Iraq. On August 3, the terrorists managed to take control of two large oil fields. The leader of the militants, Abdullah Ibrahim al-Samarai, also known as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was declared the "Caliph". After the proclamation of a state that was not recognized by any country, the group formerly known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant dropped the geographical reference in its name.

The armed group Islamic State and the al-Nusra Front at the very beginning of the political crisis in this country acted as one front, but now there is no unity between them. Although these groups have disagreements among themselves in terms of leadership, they still follow a radical course, therefore, despite the lack of agreement on a number of issues, they are far from uniting with the secular, liberal and nationalist currents of the Syrian opposition.

Priority - strict discipline, Sharia court for friends and enemies (this is in order to reliably weed out a large number of people and there was order on the ground), private sponsorship, ranging from Arab countries,

Africa, the European Union and ending with the Pacific region, reliance on local tribes and influential sheikhs, constant mutual assistance, training camps, Islamic ideology based on unquestioning obedience to the leadership and its representatives on the ground, the organization from the very beginning has a so-called "foreign legion" of volunteers from all over the world, including Chechens from Turkey and the Caucasus, has many suicide bombers. He is fighting against the representative of Al Qaeda in Syria, Al Nusra, in Deir ez Zor, but has close contacts with it in Damascus and others, mainly in the southern provinces.

At the initial stage of the civil war, the FSA played a leading role in resisting the regime, but against the background of a number of its defeats and losses, Islamists began to advance to leading roles, and after the summer 2014 offensive operation "Islamic State".

The remnants of the FSA, the formation of the Syrian Islamic Front has an umbrella structure and consists of small local units operating throughout Syria. In fact, the real command of the units is carried out by field commanders on the ground. The difficulty of determining the number of these groups is in constant losses and transition in various situations either to the side of government troops or to the side of the Islamic State.

Groups with one, or, more often, different types of weapons are combined into a squad. At the same time, in each particular case, the name of these groups of 10-20 people can be very different.

The number of groups in the detachment can be any, but the total number does not exceed three or four hundred militants. In some cases, detachments are combined into brigades, depending on the financial viability of a particular family (territorial) clan. As a rule, a combat detachment includes management, up to 10 combat groups, 1-2 reconnaissance and sabotage groups, a fire support group and a supply group.

In the *Islamic* Front, the structure and composition are almost the same. For example,

the *Ahrar Al-Sham* movement consists of 3,000 to 5,000 fighters: the brigade is divided into 5-6 battalions, each of which has 250-900 Mujahideen (or 2-6 companies).

The most effective weapon of modern insurgents are improvised explosive devices. However, the role of small arms is very important for them.

Machine-gun grenade launchers are usually used as substitutes or reinforcements for machine guns. Mortars and artillery pieces are used at the maximum possible distances according to the instructions.

The personnel of the armed opposition usually have light automatic small arms, which are the property of the owner.

As in Libya, the rebels installed a 12.7 mm Degtyarev-Shpagin heavy machine gun (DSHK) or a 14.5 mm Vladimirov machine gun (KPV) in the back of pickups, as well as their analogues, twin, quadruple machine guns. The pickups were equipped with homemade launchers for 57 mm aviation NURS, as well as for Egyptian 122 mm unguided missiles and Chinese 107 mm MLRS "Type 63".

The Islamic State detachments have heavy weapons and equipment captured from the Iraqi government forces (tanks, howitzers and Russian-made Scud tactical missiles, a large number of MANPADS and ATGMS).

The regular armies of the states of the largest players in the international arena also use non-standard forms and methods of using weapons borrowed from the rich experience of Syrian militants.

The essence of "asymmetric warfare" is that the superior armed forces of a large state or a coalition of states invade the territory of a weaker State or territories controlled by non-state structures.

History knows many examples of how great powers and empires were defeated in asymmetric wars: the Romans in the Teutonic forests, the British during the American Revolution, the French in Indochina and Algeria, the Americans in Vietnam, the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, Russia in Chechnya. And although the causes, roots and the course of hostilities were different everywhere, what unites them is the recognition that the most

powerful power may not be able to resist the irregular formations of a weak enemy.

Harvard University researchers, in their current study of asymmetric wars, also found that more and more often strong players lose to weak ones. Previously, in military conflicts, the dominant factor was the strength and definition of forces in the general understanding that has developed over the past two hundred years, which absorbed the size of the armed forces, the level of technology, population and geographical size. This has determined the victories and defeats of strong players over the past two centuries, and it was clear that great strength gives an advantage over the opponent in the fight and is a "thing" that must be had. It should be added to this that strong states in these conflicts had an advantage in strength (where power is measured by armed force and the number of people) ten times or more over their opponents.

In terms of wins to losses, the overwhelming advantage was on the side of strong players. But, the striking fact attracts attention that in almost 28.5% (the percentage of victories in asymmetric conflicts, in the period 1800 - 2003), weak players won the conflicts.

The main reasons for the defeat of the strong in asymmetric wars, according to military experts, lie in the fact that, firstly, after the Second World War, its main participants - Western countries followed the path of democracy, where society became more sensitive to human losses and economic costs, and the protracted nature of asymmetric wars began to bring more losses and expenses that deprived the political will of the strong to win, while the weak did not consider losses, it even strengthened their spirit and the struggle became more fierce.

Secondly, strong, excellently armed numerous armies were preparing for a symmetrical war, where there was an equal opponent or close to it in strength, scope for deployment and conducting operations, compliance with the laws of war. The weak are usually poorly armed, have no territory, ignore everything that concerns the laws and rules of

war, the main thing for him is to gain time and not lose the war.

Thirdly, the killing of the weak (the destruction of non-equals), poorly armed, uneducated and "half-starved" demoralizes the personnel of the strong, because the strong begin to feel guilty for their actions, and the phenomenon of "from bombing to hugging" appears, i.e. compassion towards the enemy appears.

Asymmetric wars, being a very special type of violence, are characterized by the following properties:

- asymmetric wars presuppose a qualitative difference in the means and methods of struggle between the opposing sides, with their similarity both in the desire for a "point" nature of strikes (both from terrorists and from states using "particularly precise weapons"), and according to completely opposite declared results, in both cases the perpetrators of violence are mostly destroyed, and the civilian population is not always "spot-on";

- asymmetric warfare is characterized by a qualitative difference in the forces of the opposing sides with the ability of each of them to have a comparable impact on the opposite side;

- asymmetric wars often lack not only a front line, but also a theater of military operations localized in space, they are characterized by a point-network structure of military operations (both acts of terror and "missionary" wars are now breaking out in almost any part of the globe).

Based on all that has been said above, a fair question arises, are the strong doomed in asymmetric wars or are there other ways of waging such wars? What useful conclusions can we draw, or how should we act in the event of such wars?

Studying the experience of wars and armed conflicts shows that the strong can win in an asymmetric war. This is evidenced by the Russian experience in the second war in Chechnya, as well as the Syrian experience.

So, the generalization of the above material gives grounds to draw the following conclusions:

-the experience of conducting asymmetric wars has shown that the most prepared for the conduct of such wars were mainly special forces;

-the presence in the modern world of many contradictions of various nature causes the likelihood of non-traditional military conflicts, in which, along with traditional armed struggle, economic, ideological, peacemaking, informational, psychological and other specific forms of struggle have become widely used;

-the military and political leadership of many states are taking urgent measures to adapt their armed forces and countries as a whole to new conditions and are comprehensively trying to take into account the realities of military conflicts in the XXI century, in which there is a steady trend of increasing the importance of so-called unconventional military operations as the main form of the use of troops (forces);

-one of the distinctive features of modern non-traditional military conflicts has become their pronounced terrorist nature, and their main content has become the fight against guerrillas, insurgents, armed formations of militants of terrorist organizations;

-a significant role in preparing the state for the decomposition of nutria is assigned to non-governmental foreign organizations operating on the territory of this state, these organizations often pursue the following goals: the creation and financial support of the opposition to the existing government and provoke revolutions;

asymmetric conflicts of our time are characterized by extreme cruelty and intransigence of the parties. They are conducted for a long time and to no avail, drawing into their orbit many participants, not only the armed forces and forces to maintain order, but also the civilian population. As a rule, the roots of these conflicts are deeply hidden in the history and culture of the belligerents, which often makes it impossible to resolve these conflicts in traditional ways.

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