

# Who Will Prevail in the Third World War? - Mehmet Ögütçü



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Rest assured, the prospect of a Third World War is not as daunting as it sounds. No, my optimism is not baseless. In my view, the global community has been embroiled in what can be considered the Third World War for quite some time now, albeit in more nuanced and covert forms that may not be immediately apparent to everyone. In today's world, the complex interconnections invalidate the idea of there being a clear winner from this global conflict. The outcome will be more of a "lose-lose" scenario rather than a classic "win-win" situation.

When we think of war, we envision millions of lives lost, cities turned to ashes, economies in ruins, and peace treaties imposed by victorious countries. However,

although traditional war tools such as tanks, machine guns, F-35s, nuclear missiles still possess significant power, warfare has evolved and become unrecognizable with the advancement of technology. Today's conflicts are often waged by states through proxy wars using mercenaries such as Wagner, Blackwater, and legionnaires, as well as via advanced technology war machines.

The rise of private military contractors has transformed warfare into a massive global industry with budgets reaching unimaginable figures. The actions of these warriors often fall outside traditional rules of warfare, leading to political debates based on the loyalties and nationalities of these private armies.

Debates continue on issues such as regulating private military entities, curbing the expansion of military companies, ensuring adherence to ethical standards, and preferring regular armies based on military doctrines rather than financial interests. Unfortunately, the use of shadow armies and mercenaries seems to increase, accompanied by unpredictable deaths and atrocities.

[Official reports](#) indicate a significant increase in the number of contracted soldiers working in non-combat roles under the U.S. Central Command. For example, since 2002, the number of contracted personnel involved in military operations in Afghanistan has reached approximately 90,000, with a cost of around \$108 billion. Entities like Blackwater (now known as Academy) provide the U.S. with flexibility and capacity beyond traditional military capabilities, especially in politically sensitive areas where direct intervention is not desired. We recall that the roles of private military organizations, particularly in regions like Iraq and Afghanistan, have often led to ethical and legal controversies. The Wagner Group in Russia also presents itself as a significant arm of Russia's foreign policy. This private military structure enables Russia to advance its interests through indirect activities in various countries. At one point, it became so empowered that it threatened Putin's power until its commander was eliminated in a plane "accident." Its interventions in conflict zones like Syria, Libya, the Central African Republic, and Mali have enhanced Russia's geopolitical influence. In future war scenarios, alongside wars between traditional and mercenary forces, conflicts involving robotic and drone technologies with low

casualty but high destruction potential could occur.

## **The Emergence of a New Global Order**

Throughout history, world order(s) have been established and enforced by powers emerging victorious from wars. Think of Versailles, Yalta, and Bretton Woods. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a transition period was envisaged toward a new order without armed, bloody conflicts. That didn't happen. The realization of this vision remains suspended due to conflicting interests of various global powers. As conflicts of interests escalate, hybrid wars emerge, shifting from direct conflicts to proxy wars, economic embargoes, and propaganda battles worldwide. While local conflicts persist, we are living through a period overshadowed by a global economic cold war.

The expansion potential of the Third World War, which has been ongoing at various intensities and geographies since 1991, may manifest globally in various forms and consequences, surpassing the borders of Ukraine in the upcoming period. Setting aside long debates, developing a perspective focused on "who is losing and who is winning" could provide a clearer understanding. The current conflict highlights a tough struggle among currencies like the US dollar, Euro, Rouble, Yen, and Renminbi. Economic weapons are strategically employed in hybrid warfare. However, sanctions imposed against Russia, especially in the context of Ukraine, are backfiring. These sanctions pose a higher risk of inflicting more damage to the U.S. and Europe, eroding moral superiority, and, more importantly, strengthening calls for the restructuring of the international order with the participation of non-Western powers. In addition, the strategic alliance between China and Russia emerges as a significant balancing factor against the Western bloc led by the U.S. Regional powers such as Indonesia, Iran, India, Brazil, South Africa, and Turkey are also gaining greater influence. It is being discussed that the new global order could take shape independently of U.S. hegemony.

The diminishing dependencies of global economies, increasing tendencies

towards economic nationalism and protectionism, also indicate the end of the era of globalization. Countries are increasingly seeking self-sufficiency and sustainable ways. Recently, Larry Fink, CEO of the world's largest asset management firm, BlackRock, [stated that](#) globalization has come to an end and geopolitical orders will change.

The leadership maintained by the U.S. with its dollar and naval power is diminishing in the face of production and innovation capabilities in Asia. While the U.S. accounted for half of the world's production in the 1950s, today China alone controls about 60% of global manufacturing output. Russia may contribute minimally to the global economy, but it retains its position as a global player with its vast territories, natural resources, and advanced missile technology.

Under the framework of the "[2049 Peaceful Rise Strategy](#)," China is advancing towards global leadership and targeting the U.S. alongside Russia, despite strains from the conflict in Ukraine. The most significant power element Washington uses to maintain its global dominance is still the Pentagon and its unmatched military presence.

## **Wars and Warriors Are Changing**

The statement made by the German military strategist Carl von Clausewitz in his book "On War" published in 1832, "War is the continuation of politics by other means," still holds validity. A modern interpretation by sociologist and political scientist Claudia von Werlhof emphasizes that wars are not only political but also extensions of the economic structure.

Modern conflicts have surpassed traditional war fronts, encompassing not only trade, technology, energy, water, currency, intelligence, cyber, psychological, biological but also space warfare. In the shadow of asymmetric warfare, asymmetrical and hybrid warfare forms, where weaker parties employ unconventional tactics against stronger opponents, are widely observed.

Cyber warfare emerges as a frontline where nations launch digital attacks on each other's computer systems, often causing damage, disruption, or instilling fear. Cyber attacks targeting state networks, financial infrastructure, and vital services have the potential to create chaos on an unprecedented scale.

Another dimension of cyber warfare is targeting financial critical points like banks or stock exchanges. Such attacks can destabilize economies, create uncertainty, and result in significant financial consequences. The goals of cyber warfare include data theft, economic disruption, service interruption, or instilling fear in the public. Although akin to the destruction of traditional warfare, the appeal of cyber warfare lies in cost-effectiveness, anonymity, remote execution, and low accountability.

## **America Stumbles**

Despite being involved in hybrid conflicts for a long time, the United States has not achieved sufficient success in its recent endeavours. Interventions carried out since 1945 have resulted in millions of casualties; operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, and Yemen have yielded mixed results. The onset of the Arab Spring highlighted American intervention as a symbol, revealing the country's covert engagements.

Under the ambitious leadership of Putin, Russia is pursuing a globally dangerous path. Putin's policy of territorial expansion, showcasing resurrected Soviet geopolitics, has raised alarm bells, especially in regions like Georgia and Ukraine. Annexations of territories and threats to neighbouring countries symbolize Russia's aggressive stance, causing concern in Central and Eastern Europe.

Putin's challenge to NATO, coupled with nuclear threats, intensifies conflicts. Equipped with next-generation hypersonic missile technology, Russia emerges as a strong rival to the West. Collaborating with Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, and Iran, it shapes the world energy markets.

In summary, the current Third World War being waged in trade, technology, and economic domains extends beyond specific geographies limited to tanks and missiles to a broader spectrum on the global stage. And it seems to continue until the balance of power is restored.

It's a fact that in these modern conflicts, there won't be a single victor; however, it's becoming evident that the hegemony of global capitalism is slowly eroding, and a redefined era of the Third World War is emerging. We face a labyrinth of various types of disasters, from natural calamities to socio-political turmoil, climate change, wars over energy-water-food, a dystopian future, and the shadow of new nuclear deterrence. Let our collective wishes resonate for a secure emergence from this tumultuous juncture, as global citizens, nations, and stewards of the world.



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**To cite this work:** Mehmet Ögütçü, "Who Will Prevail in the Third World War", *Panorama*, Online, 6 September 2024.

<https://www.uikpanorama.com/blog/2024/09/05/tww-mo/>

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