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Nonexplosive Warfare: Is It NEW or Old?

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Abstract. This article provides a contrary opinion to the analysis of the new United States Secretary of the Navy, Richard Danzig, concerning biological warfare agents and computer-attack variants of information warfare. The opinion is based on the perspective of science and technological change within the context of social, cultural, and political phenomena.

On the OP-ED page of the November 15, 1998 New York Times, the new United States (U.S.) Secretary of the Navy (SecNAV), Richard Danzig, maintains that a new military challenge--that of nonexplosive warfare or NEW--confronts political and military authorities in the US and throughout the world. Exemplified by the threats of biological warfare (BW) agents and computer-attack variants of information warfare (IW), NEW allegedly presents a challenge that is qualitatively unique. As one delineates the rationale for Mr. Danzig's assertions, one may well conclude that the challenge is less unique than meets the eye.

As rationale, Mr. Danzig states that NEW weapons can be produced, stored, deployed, and employed without requiring large, expensive, or visible systems or necessarily requiring a long lead time--thus fostering huge problems for authorities seeking to counter NEW. NEW can be most effectively used against civilian populations (that are largely unprotected) and can cause widespread disruption and panic as well as serious injury and death. NEW's severe consequences can occur through relatively small amounts of materiel. NEW can also serve as the catalyst for a sequence of noxious consequences that will be set in motion beyond the threat and employment of NEW agents. Moreover, NEW agents may not be easily thwarted by armies or physical barricades while retaliation may be thwarted because the consequences of NEW may be very difficult to link with only one of the following causal suspects: "political attack," "natural occurrence," and "nonpolitical crime." As well, the knowledge, skills, and materials necessary to gear up for and engage in NEW are obtainable even by small groups or individuals. Thus, successful NEW attacks are inevitable and necessitate very careful planning for management of consequences after attack as well as prevention and deterrence of attack. Finally, NEW exposes and exploits the arbitrariness and "conflictogenic" attributes of boundaries--among the local, national, and international and among various agencies, organizations, and other political entities.

Before the virtually new White House coordinator for domestic terrorism reacts to the SecNAV's analysis with a typical bureaucratic response--the reflexive but unreflective quest for the authorization and allocation of funds--one should note that similar tocsins have sounded throughout history. Yes, the technological change in threat presented by NEW must elicit technological change to counter threat. But the NEW sequence of change then counterchange--often misperceived as advance then counteradvance-- is as old as warfare itself. In this context the newness of NEW as nonexplosive warfare explodes as myth. (See Ali-Gombe, A., Guthrie, E., & McDermott, N. (1996). Mass hysteria: One syndrome or two? *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 168, 633-635; Amin, Y., Hamdi, E., & Eapen, V. (1997). Mass hysteria in an Arab culture. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 43, 303-306; Danzig, R. (November 15, 1998). The next superweapon: Panic. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; MacLachlan, M., B., D.M., & McAuliffe, E. (1995). Epidemic psychological disturbance in a Malawian secondary school: A case study in social change. *Psychology and Developing Societies*, 7, 79-90;

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