

## **War Transformed: The Future of Twenty-First-Century Great Power Competition and Conflict**

Mick Ryan, 'War Transformed: The Future of Twenty-First Century Great Power Competition and Conflict,' *Naval Institute Press*; (Annapolis, Maryland 2022): 333

**Nimra Fatima**<sup>1</sup>

Mick Ryan's *War Transformed: The Future of Twenty-First-Century Great Power Competition and Conflict* is a well-crafted and insightful analysis of the nature of modern warfare and its implications for global stability in the 21st century. Ryan, a retired Australian Army major general and former commander of the Australian Defence College, brings a wealth of experience and expertise to the subject matter, and his book is a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate about the changing face of conflict.

Ryan's central argument is that the nature of war has undergone a fundamental transformation in recent years, as a result of technological innovation, geopolitical shifts, and changing global trends. He contends that the traditional distinctions between conventional and irregular warfare are becoming increasingly blurred, and that the lines between war and peace are becoming increasingly fuzzy. Ryan sees this as a major challenge for policymakers and military strategists, who need to adapt to this new reality if they are to meet the demands of a rapidly changing security environment.

One of the key strengths of Ryan's book is his ability to synthesize complex ideas and distill them into clear and concise language. He draws on a wide range of sources, from academic research to his own personal experiences, to make his case. He is particularly effective in

---

<sup>1</sup> Reviewer is a Research Intern at Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Pakistan..

*Nimra Fatima*

his analysis of the impact of new technologies, such as cyberwarfare and artificial intelligence, on the nature of conflict. He is also adept at identifying the key trends and patterns that are shaping the global security landscape, and he provides a nuanced and insightful analysis of the implications of these developments.

Ryan's book is also notable for its comprehensive coverage of the subject matter. He covers a wide range of topics, from the role of military power in international politics to the impact of climate change on global security. He also provides detailed case studies of recent conflicts, such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and draws valuable lessons from these experiences. Ryan's in-depth knowledge and his ability to connect the dots between seemingly disparate issues make his book a valuable resource for anyone interested in understanding the complexities of modern conflict.

However, it lacks a clear and coherent framework for understanding the changing nature of war. While Ryan provides profound details about various trends and factors that are shaping the security landscape, he does not provide a clear conceptual framework for understanding how these different factors interact and influence each other. Consequently, making it incoherent and difficult to follow. Moreover, it tends to focus primarily on the challenges and threats posed by great power competition, at the expense of other important security issues. While Ryan does touch on a range of other topics, such as terrorism and non-state actors, these are often dealt with in a relatively cursory manner. This narrow focus may limit the book's appeal to readers who are interested in a broader and more comprehensive analysis of the security landscape.

One of the notable lines in the book are:

*"In the 21st century, warfare will be less about territorial acquisition and more about influence, control, and manipulation."*

This statement encapsulates the central argument of the book, emphasising the shifting focus from traditional military strategies to information warfare and non-kinetic forms of conflict. The author effectively illustrates how the rise of cyber warfare, disinformation campaigns, and economic coercion are reshaping the dynamics of international power struggles.

The book occasionally falls victim to speculative conjecture. For instance, when the author claims, *"Autonomous weapons will dominate future battlefields, rendering human soldiers obsolete,"*

It fails to provide a comprehensive analysis of the ethical, legal, and practical challenges associated with such a shift. While advancements in autonomous technologies are undoubtedly reshaping warfare, the complete replacement of human soldiers raises significant moral dilemmas and strategic considerations that demand further exploration.

Furthermore, the book tends to overlook the complex socio-political factors that shape great power competition. While technology undoubtedly plays a significant role, it is crucial not to underestimate the influence of historical, cultural, and ideological elements that drive conflicts. A more nuanced examination of these factors would have enhanced the book's overall analysis.

Another line from the book states, *"The future of warfare will be defined by asymmetric strategies and non-state actors."*

This observation acknowledges the rise of non-state actors and the asymmetric nature of modern conflicts. The author convincingly

*Nimra Fatima*

argues that traditional state-centric approaches to warfare are increasingly insufficient in addressing the challenges posed by transnational terrorist organizations, insurgencies, and other non-state actors.

The book could have benefited from a deeper exploration of the complexities inherent in dealing with non-state actors. It often simplifies the motivations, objectives, and strategies of these actors, failing to fully consider the local dynamics, ideological factors, and socio-economic grievances that contribute to their emergence and persistence.

Despite these limitations, *War Transformed* is a valuable and thought-provoking contribution to the ongoing debate about the nature of modern warfare. A rich bibliography adds another pearl to the strings. Ryan's insights and analysis are well worth considering, and his book should be of interest to anyone who is concerned about the future of global security in the 21st century. ■