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## CONCEPT OF AN ASYMMETRIC CONFLICT. GLOBAL POWERS VS. ISLAMIST WARRIORS IN IRAQ SINCE 2003

**Keywords:** *asymmetric conflict, islamist terrorism, unconventional methods, non-state, coalition forces*

### SUMMARY

*Modern times and the post-Soviet era, especially the post-9/11 period, has brought a significant change in the nature of conflict – more and more non-state actors have been entering the stage of war. As the character of such actors has changed throughout the last decades, their tactics, strategy, means and weapons have transformed as well. Being a non state side of a conflict, they also lean towards more unconventional methods such as guerrilla warfare or terrorism which seem to be one of the most characteristic elements of an asymmetric conflict. The conflict of islamist terrorism (in this case – islamist fighters in Iraq) vs. international coalition seems to be a perfect example of asymmetric warfare. The following paper discusses the concept of asymmetric conflict and the way it has been addressed in some European and American publications, listing at the same time the most distinctive features of such conflict. However, most of all, a question addressed in the text is what typical features of an asymmetric conflict might be observed in the above mentioned conflict. Fighting islamist fighters, including the Islamic State (a terrorist organization which claims to be a state) by the western countries coalition, has been given here as an exemplification of an ongoing asymmetric conflict. As a source of knowledge about this conflict, apart from available publications and articles, the author has taken the in depth interviews carried out personally with the ex-soldiers from the Polish special force unit who fought in Iraq in years 2003–2016.*

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## Introduction

There is no one universal definition of an asymmetric conflict and there is no one and fixed set of features characteristic to such a conflict. In the process of time and changing character of war, those features have been developing and expanding their scope. Needless to say, the conflict of Islamist terrorism (in this case – Islamist fighters in Iraq) vs. great powers seems to be a perfect example of asymmetric warfare – on one side a non state actor (terrorists) and on the other the international coalition to combat Islamist terrorism. The following paper discusses the concept of asymmetric conflict and the way it has been addressed in some European and American publications, listing at the same time the most distinctive features of such conflict. However, most of all, a question addressed in the text is what typical features of an asymmetric conflict might be observed in the above mentioned conflict. Fighting Islamist fighters, including the Islamic State (a terrorist organization which claims to be a state) by the western countries coalition, has been given here as an exemplification of an ongoing asymmetric conflict. As a source of knowledge about this conflict, apart from available publications and articles, the author has taken the in depth interviews carried out personally with the ex-soldiers from the Polish special force unit who fought in Iraq in years 2003–2016.

### Asymmetric conflict characteristics

Strategic asymmetry, or asymmetry in the realm of war, is for sure not a new concept. What is more, we might say that it is as old as warfare itself. Even one of the greatest military strategists Sun Tzu wrote in his famous “The Art of War” (dating 5<sup>th</sup> century BC!) about the psychological and informational asymmetry:

“All warfare is based on deception. When confronted with an enemy one should offer the enemy a bait to lure him; feign disorder and strike him. When he concentrates, prepare against him; where he is strong, avoid him”<sup>2</sup>.

Some trace it back to the Christian times of David – a teenage shepherd who defeated his enemy, an enormous warrior Goliath, not with the use of physical strength, but referring merely to his wit and the art of deception. In other words, he identified his rival’s weak point and used that knowledge to his own advantage.

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<sup>2</sup> S. Tzu, *The Art of War*, Samuel B. Griffith, trans., Oxford University Press, London 1971, s. 66.

However, modern times and the post-Soviet era, especially the post-9/11 period, has brought a significant change to the nature of conflict. No longer do we have two more or less proportional military superpowers on both sides of a conflict; nowadays, more and more non state actors have been entering the stage of war. As the character of such actors has changed throughout the last decades, their tactics, strategy, means and weapons have transformed as well. Many military experts and authors, and Col. Vincent J. Goulding Jr. among them, claim that at least in recent history “weak adversaries have always used unconventional tactics to neutralise their enemy’s technological or numerical superiority”<sup>3</sup>.

It is true that the 90s’ was the time when the notion of asymmetry in military conflicts became more popular and widely used in numerous publications on political science and security studies. It was the period of profound changes on the worldwide political scene connected with the end of the Cold War and changes in thinking about national/international threats and security. Yet, I think that one much earlier publication cannot be omitted while discussing the subject of asymmetric conflicts, which means we have to go back in time to the year 1975 when an American scholar and professor Andrew Mack published his article “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars” in the in the journal *World Politics*. This widely cited and well known text uses the term asymmetric conflict in the context of the War in Vietnam which for the author was a great example of two asymmetric actors who fought one of the most exciting conflicts in history. Among the characteristic features of asymmetric warfare, Mack lists:

- disparities in military resources and capability (technological superiority of one side),
- using conventional vs. unconventional weapon,
- striking disparity in manpower,
- guerrilla warfare used by a ‘weaker side,
- polity and social institutions of the superior as a decisive factor<sup>4</sup>.

Mack tries to highlight the fact that is some military conflicts relying too much on military superiority might be counterproductive and attacked as a weak point by the other party whose insurgents “lacking the technological capability or the basic

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<sup>3</sup> V.J., Goulding, Back to the Future with Asymmetric Warfare. *Parameters*. Winter 2000/2001. Vol. 30, No. 4, <https://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-74522162/back-to-the-future-with-asymmetric-warfare> [dostep: 1.05.2018].

<sup>4</sup> A. Mack, Why Big Nations Lose Wars. *Cambridge Core Journals*, Vol. 27 issue 2 January 1975, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/world-politics/article/why-big-nations-lose-small-wars-the-politics-of-asymmetric-conflict/90583542E0F98B15B0A2C37D390C9C41> [dostep: 1.05.2018].

resources to destroy the external enemy's military capability, they must of necessity aim destroy his political capability." So, the target is the "will" of the external power to continue a conflict – if it is crushed, then its military superiority no matter how significant loses its relevance. The so called "weaker party" strategy is often not based on highly advanced technology or strategic plans, but simply on the policy of "refusing to confront industrial powers on their own terms and by resorting instead to unconventional forms of warfare – guerrilla war, urban terrorism or even nonviolent action"<sup>5</sup>. From the today's perspective, one can easily notice that this kind of approach – kind of simple, logical and adjusted to circumstances – has not lost its usefulness and workability, being used by many non state actors such as the Islamic State. Citing the soldier:

"Islamic terrorists know that in open space they are an easy target to be destroyed by manned or unmanned aerial vehicles. That's why they have changed their tactic and came closer to civilians (urban spaces and villages), to places where they feel stronger. In those places we, the coalition forces, have our hands tied by the international law and so on. This is our 'weak' point and they realize that"<sup>6</sup>.

Needless to say, the term asymmetry, in strictly military/legal sources, was first explicitly used in the 90s' also by Americans, and because of that, I will start the following review of asymmetric conflict idea presenting the American point of view first.

In their National Military Strategy from 1995 among the asymmetric threats America war specialists listed: terrorism, the use of weapons of mass destruction, and information warfare<sup>7</sup>. Throughout the next years the new concepts/definitions appeared in the Department of State. On the one hand, they became more and more holistic but on the other, their nature was rather American-centred and restricted to specific, American security threats only. It was well illustrated by a bit limited, but still the broadest at that time, definition provided by the 1999 Joint Strategy Review:

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Interview 1 with a soldier from the Polish special forces conducted by the author on 16 February 2018, Warsaw.

<sup>7</sup> Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States, January 10, Joint Publication 1, 1995.

“Asymmetric approaches are attempts to circumvent or undermine US strengths while exploiting US weaknesses using methods that differ significantly from the United States’ expected method of operations. [Asymmetric approaches] generally seek a major psychological impact, such as shock or confusion that affects an opponent’s initiative, freedom of action, or will. Asymmetric methods require an appreciation of an opponent’s vulnerabilities. Asymmetric approaches often employ innovative, non-traditional tactics, weapons, or technologies, and can be applied at all levels of warfare – strategic, operational, and tactical – and across the spectrum of military operations”<sup>8</sup>.

In the next years, the concept of asymmetry in warfare gained more and more attention. Especially because of the fact, that its significance has enormously increased and gained a completely new scope. The reality of the post Cold War world and galloping globalization has created new threats to international and national securities, majority of which having asymmetric character. Logically, many security and war experts have created more up-to-date definitions of asymmetric warfare and conflict, but I am going to present the one which is not only the most general and complete, but also the most cited in the discipline.

According to Steven Metz and Douglas V. Johnson – two American professors, National Security experts and former soldiers –

### **ASYMMETRIC CONFLICT**

**is distinguished by**



**acting, organizing, and thinking**

differently than opponents in order to

- maximize one’s own advantages
- exploit an opponent’s weaknesses
- attain the initiative
- gain greater freedom of action

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<sup>8</sup> Joint Strategy Review 1999, Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 1999.

**THOSE DIFFERENCES APPLIES TO:**

1. STRATEGY/TACTICS/OPERATIONAL METHODS USED BY OPPONENTS
2. METHODS AND MEANS USED
3. TECHNOLOGIES AND WEAPONS USED
4. VALUES AND NORMS
5. ORGANIZATION
6. TIME PERSPECTIVE
7. LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT<sup>9</sup>

3 LEVELS OF ASYMMETRIC CONFLICT:

1. political-strategic
2. military-strategic
3. operational

As far as others American official documents are concerned, the next which I will refer to is the official NATO dictionary promulgated by the NATO Standardization Agency<sup>10</sup>. The dictionary implies that an asymmetric conflict is the one that “uses dissimilar means or methods to circumvent or negate an opponent’s strengths while exploiting his weaknesses to obtain a disproportionate result”.

Ivan Arreguin-Toft, an assistant professor in Boston University’s Department of International Relations, among strategies used in asymmetric conflicts, mentions particularly terrorism and guerrilla warfare as “strategies of the weak”. Other features mentioned by the scholar concern: (1) asymmetry in willingness to suffer costs, (2) asymmetry in objectives, (3) asymmetry in strategies used<sup>11</sup>.

John Russel, an Irish military, in his publication by the Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, writes about differences between the opponents’ aims, capabilities, courses of action and moral codes<sup>12</sup>. One weaker side must use all available weapons and tactics in such a way to reduce or circumvent the technological superiority of its foe. All prepared attacks aim to exploit vulnerabilities and have a strong psychological and physical impact. Asymmetries listed by the author are:

- Asymmetry of interest
- Asymmetry of will

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<sup>9</sup> S. Metz, D.V. Johnson, *Asymmetry and U.S. military strategy: definition, background, and strategic concepts*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Waszyngton 2001.

<sup>10</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization Dictionary, [http://wcnjk.wp.mil.pl/plik/file/N\\_20130808\\_AAP6PL.pdf](http://wcnjk.wp.mil.pl/plik/file/N_20130808_AAP6PL.pdf) [dostęp: 1.05.2018].

<sup>11</sup> I. Arreguin-Toft, *Contemporary Asymmetric Conflict Theory in Historical Perspective. Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 24, 2012, Issue 4, s. 635–657.

<sup>12</sup> J. Russell, *Asymmetric warfare – the new face of warfare in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, [w:] *The Big Issue: Command and Combat in the Information Age*, red. D., Potts, Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, 2003, s. 243–266.

Asymmetry of values  
Asymmetry of strategies and tactics  
Asymmetry in technologies and capabilities  
Organisational asymmetry  
Asymmetry of time  
Asymmetry of actors  
Asymmetry of weapons of mass destruction or effect, information operations and other tactical concepts<sup>13</sup>

Terrorism is widely used by asymmetric actors – not only on the war theatre, but also in the homelands of fighting sides. It uses “democratic society’s freedoms, openness and legal system as weapons to be used against it”<sup>14</sup>. To illustrate this particular point made by Russell I will quote the words of a soldier from the Polish special forces who fought in Iraq in 2003–2004:

“Theoretically we [the coalition] have airforce, artillery of different kind, which are supposed to destroy an enemy quickly....however, there is this long decision process. This is a trap because it’s enough that somewhere there are some civilians injured by accident, then the long decision making process begins [legal procedures]. It stops the whole operation. And the enemy is not, stupid, they know that now they have some extra minutes to hide guns or vanish. Our actions, because of their complexity and dependency on legal regulations, are ineffective – are our weak point the enemy abuses”<sup>15</sup>.

As for organization and structure, Russel states that asymmetric warfare will be fought not by regular units but mainly by warriors and warlords who do not have to obey any laws of armed conflict or ethics. They avoid an open conflict battle and refer rather to unconventional methods like snipe, ambush, bombs, and IO incidents. Such opponents are very hard to defeat for a Western soldier limited by many restrictions and code of behaviour, states the author.

Other authors sound quite sceptical about the whole notion of asymmetry in war, and call it simply “the contemporary American fascination” or “the latest fashionable Big Idea”<sup>16</sup>. Supposing that asymmetrical means different, never we

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Interview 1 with a soldier from the Polish special forces conducted by the author on 16 February 2018, Warsaw.

<sup>16</sup> C.S. Gray, *Thinking Asymmetrically in Times of Terror. Parameters*. Spring Vol. 32, No. 1, 2002.

have the same belligerents in a conflict and there are always disproportions among them – in thinking, tactics or any other element. Thus, one may say that asymmetry is rather a perennial characteristic of warfare. To support his argument, he notes that all wars waged in the American history have been asymmetrical in their nature – starting from the conflict with Native Americans and ending with the one in Iraq. Despite all this scepticism, Gray does give some characteristics of asymmetric warfare. For example, he underlines that differences and disproportions might be observed:

- on operational, tactical, strategic level
- in the nature of actors (one is very often a non-state actor)
- on organizational level (irregular/guerrilla warriors)
- in unconventional methods used to neutralise the enemy's superiority<sup>17</sup>

According to my respondents, among unconventional weapon and technological devices widely used by Islamist fighters are: car bombs, bombs hidden in walls and pavements, self-made explosives, self-made unmanned vehicles and drones, self-made vehicles.

- in manpower, technology/weapon

Disproportions in manpower are really striking if we cite the official data from the official website of The Global Coalition against Daesh<sup>18</sup> which consists of 75 partners. Thus, on the one side global powers with all their advanced equipment and technology and on the other side a terrorist organization with manpower roughly about 35,000 at the beginning of 2017<sup>19</sup>.

- in culture/religion

Despite being a bit hollow, the concept of asymmetry is useful while discussing the reasons why certain actors engage in warfare in certain ways – what is the biggest determinant influencing the choice of a particular tactic or strategy. Grey in his “Irregular Warfare: One Nature, Many Characters” text highlights cultural differences as those determining the way an enemy fights. Recognizing different societies' understandings of war, and their cultural traditions can explain asymmetry in certain conflicts. It is well visible in all conflicts between Western countries and those from the Middle East, for example, where we usually observe completely different styles, approaches and objectives of the opponents. Gray sums it up in

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Global Coalition Website n.d., <http://theglobalcoalition.org/en/partners/> [dostęp: 5.05.2018].

<sup>19</sup> P.D. Shinkman, *ISIS by the Numbers in 2017*, US News, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2017-12-27/isis-by-the-numbers-in-2017> [dostęp: 5.05.2018].



a great way saying “If one person’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter, so one culture’s asymmetric threat is another’s standard modus operandi”<sup>20</sup>. And exactly this kind of a completely different approach to fight and understanding of war is described in a story taken directly from a battlefield:

„For them [Islamist warriors] changing sides of a conflict is a normal practice. In our culture that would be treason, in their culture it’s something normal. After some secret negotiations whole units during one night decided to cooperate with coalition forces. From one side, we could use it; from the other, it was an element of uncertainty for us. We can never know how long they will stay with us”<sup>21</sup>.

This example given by a soldier illustrates the real scope of cultural differences between the sides taking part in the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. This asymmetry of culture is visible in many various aspects of this war – it determines the way it is waged and cannot be eliminated in any way. For example, unscrupulous using children as walking bombs is justified as giving their lives as a sacrifice in the Holy War in the name of Allah:

“Soldiers have families, so seeing those children activates their family instincts. During operation in villages, there were many of them, walking easily around our vehicles. Sometimes we turned a blind eye at this behaviour. But, our enemy knew that and used it against us. A child wearing an explosive belt was blown up near the cars. Such accidents are quite difficult to eliminate, as we cannot separate from civilians and children, which in result poses a great danger to our security”<sup>22</sup>.

It cannot be denied that generally speaking defining asymmetry in a conflict is very similar amid different countries, and all given definitions have a common point of reference. For instance, a Polish general and national security specialist gen. Tomasz Szubrycht underlines that asymmetry of a conflict depends on the

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<sup>20</sup> C.S. Gray, *Thinking Asymmetrically in Times of Terror. Parameters*. Spring Vol. 32, No. 1, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Interview 1 with a soldier from the Polish special forces conducted by the author on 16 February 2018, Warsaw.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

context and place of reference we use<sup>23</sup>. To illustrate his way of reasoning, he puts forward an example of the imaginative conflict between Monako and the USA. So, if we take into account the character of the two parties according to the international law, this kind of conflict could be referred to as asymmetric because both opponents have the legal status. But, if we take into account the criteria of the potential (military or economic) it would be rather an asymmetric or disproportionate conflict.

The general also points to the fact that the next important factor deciding about the asymmetry of a conflict is the character of subjects taking part in such a conflict. In other words, a conflict might be called asymmetric only under condition that opponents have a different legal status – one of them is not a subject of the international law. In our case, the Islamic State, is only a so called 'state'. In fact, NATO and the US Department of State have designated IS as a terrorist organization.

Moreover, Szubrycht underlines the significance of a time factor in an asymmetric conflict, which in practice means that a state, ally or coalition involved in such a conflict is targeted at winning as quickly as possible. In other case, they are in danger of continuous attacks and losing their manpower. An asymmetric opponent, not limited by obeying the Law of Armed Conflict or any other rules can easily gain an advantage and act freely<sup>24</sup>.

Another military and academic Col. Waldemar Jaruszewski in his article "Terrorism in the Age of Contemporary Conflicts" describes an asymmetric opponent as the one who being aware of its shortcomings in a number of man, quality of equipment and son on, rather avoids

a direct confrontation on a battlefield and uses other nonconventional methods of warfare such as:

1. terrorism
2. cyberwarfare
3. psychological warfare

**which in practice follows to**



- guerrilla attacks on the opponent's infrastructure and citizens with the use of conventional methods (like IED – improvised explosive devices) or unconventional methods (ABC)

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<sup>23</sup> T. Szubrycht, Analiza podobieństw operacji militarnych innych niż wojna oraz działań pozwalających zminimalizować zagrożenia asymetryczne. *Zeszyty Naukowe Akademii Marynarki Wojennej*, Rok XLVII nr 1 (164), Gdynia 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

- cyber attacks destabilizing the opponent’s economy and infrastructure
- media propaganda, social media wars<sup>25</sup>.

An asymmetric character of a conflict is mostly created by an opponent which is not able to confront the other party in a symmetric way, using the same or similar means of warfare, strategies or tactics. In such a situation, an asymmetric side of a conflict tries to fight in a manner which maximally limits the other side’s advantageous military potential. Like it was during the operation of regaining Mosul, one of the most important cities occupied by ISIS in Iraq. As the second soldier describes:

“The coalition forces, due to the fact that the public was watching, were limited by the legal regulations concerning the civilians loss and city damage. ISIS, of course, did not have to take any of these into account. So, they blocked civilians’ way out of the city to have plenty of live shields. They prepared defence in schools, hospitals and places which couldn’t be bombarded by the coalition. In addition, they created the so called civilian umbrellas, meaning that in the places where they had firing posts or resistance points, were also civilians. It led to a minimal use of artillery or airforce by the coalition which was forced to send land forces to minimize the loss among civilians. On the other side, the Iraqi forces suffered. Everything was at the cost of an individual soldier”<sup>26</sup>.

Asymmetric conflicts might be also categorized using a distinction between material and spiritual spheres. Two Polish war specialists and academics Piotr Gawliczek and Jacek Pawłowski in a material sphere list the following forms of a conflict:

- a. An armed conflict – where a dominant side aims at territorial invasion, occupation or a complete control over an enemy
- b. An economic warfare – destructive and subordinating a weaker economy
- c. An economical warfare – destroying an economical base of a weaker party
- d. Cyber warfare – all forms of information war aiming at promoting a particular political, social, economic goal
- e. Science warfare – all actions aiming at destroying the enemy’s scientific base, academic centres and and so on

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<sup>25</sup> W. Jaruszewski, *Terroryzm w dobie współczesnych konfliktów*, *Zeszyty Naukowe Wydziału Nauk Ekonomicznych Politechniki Koszalińskiej*, Koszalin 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Interview 2 with a soldier from the Polish special forces conducted by the author on 16 February 2018, Warsaw.

f. Technological warfare – aiming at getting technological advantage over one’s enemy in the field of used equipment and tactical solutions

Another sphere is a spiritual one, where authors distinguish:

- a. A culture warfare – whose aim is to force on your opponent your own culture and social norms which pose a threat to a national identity of that country
- b. A religious warfare – where an expansive side of a conflict wants to impose its own religious tenet, not tolerating any other forms of religious cults at the same time
- c. An ethic confrontation – imposing your own social values and norms degrading the foregoing social ethos of a society. It often results in a chaos, instability and crime rise in that society<sup>27</sup>.

Marek Madej an academic and author from Warsaw University, points to the fact that asymmetry of current conflicts is not necessarily connected with disproportion in military potential of both actors, but first of all it stems from different methods and technics used by them. In other words, a difference in quantitative potential between opponents is not enough to refer to the conflict as “asymmetric”, and the core thing seems to be an incongruent way of conducting operations. He also stresses the fact of two parties being different and disproportionate. Common situations for such conflicts are: the lack of regular front line and regular battles, irregular forces (guerrillas)<sup>28</sup>.

Another Polish academic and military expert, PhD Jacek Lasota from War Studies Academy, as the most substantial features of asymmetric conflict gives: different tactic, information warfare, psychological warfare, targeting weak points of an enemy and a weapon of mass destruction threat<sup>29</sup>.

As far as weak points are concerned, the major vulnerability and problem of the coalition forces fighting the IS, according to my respondent, is their ‘heaviness’:

“We could talk about heaviness on many different levels: concerning an individual soldier, a unit, a base and so on... We are simply a heavy, unmovable structure. A coalition soldier has to carry so much equipment... In Iraq I had 40kg of equipment and to be honest, I was not eager to walk kilometres in the mountains, check some caves in temperature rising 50 Celsius degrees. After several days you got sick of it and started to do it worse and worse.

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<sup>27</sup> P. Gawliczek, J. Pawłowski, *Zagrożenia asymetryczne*, Akademia Obrony Narodowej, Warszawa 2003.

<sup>28</sup> M. Madej, *Zagrożenia asymetryczne bezpieczeństwa państw obszaru transatlantyckiego*, PISM, Warszawa 2007.

<sup>29</sup> J. Lasota, *Asymetria w walce zbrojnej*, wyd. AON, Warszawa 2014.

And, an islamist warrior wears sandals, has 3 or 4 rounds, does not pay bank loans and so on”<sup>30</sup>.

The above example illustrates a more literate meaning of ‘heaviness’, however, we can also approach it from less literal side. Namely, heaviness might be referred to overall complexity of structure and organization, which the coalition undoubtedly is. For instance, the soldier points out to a decision making process saying: “our actions, because of their slowness and the fact that so many people have to make different decisions, are very often completely ineffective”<sup>31</sup>.

## Conclusions

To sum up, as it is difficult to establish one universal definition of terrorism, it seems unrealistic to do the same with asymmetry in conflict. For sure, asymmetrical warfare is not a new phenomenon; rather, it has been developed and expanded through the ages by implementing more advanced tactics or strategies, cutting-edge technology and weaponry. However, the core has remained the same – it is a conflict between dissimilar powers possessing unequal, different capabilities. And one these is with no doubts a conflict between the Global Coalition and islamist fighters; the conflict which, as proved in the paper, has many features listed by many experts and authors as those characteristic for asymmetric warfare. Since each conflict is asymmetrical to some extent, a level of asymmetry depends on many factors, such as cultural similarity, methods used, objectives on both sides, structure, legal status and so on. Some would say that tactical disparity is only a consequence of inherent/cultural differences between societies waging a war; others would argue that there are more down-to-earth factors that determine the way a party fights, such as funds, number of warriors or technological superiority. All in all, we all have to agree that presently there are more and more wars/conflicts which might be called ‘asymmetric’ which are won by non state actors, very often terrorist groups, fighting as loose guerrilla formations. Being very dispersed, non-defined, fighting with and by unconventional methods, and often completely inwrought in a local community, they constitute a real challenge for Western democracies to cope with. For sure, they are not going to vanish from war theatre in the incoming years or

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<sup>30</sup> Interview 2 with a soldier from the Polish special forces conducted by the author on 16 February 2018, Warsaw.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

even decades, so time will show how effectively the civilized world will adjust and response to this brutal reality.

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**Słowa kluczowe:** *konflikt asymetryczny, terroryzm islamski, metody niekonwencjonalne, niepaństwowy, siły koalicji*

## STRESZCZENIE

*Obecne czasy, a w szczególności okres po 11 września 2001 roku, oraz okres posowiecki przyniosły wyraźną zmianę w naturze konfliktu – coraz więcej niepaństwowych aktorów wkracza na wojenną scenę. Jako że ich specyfika znacznie ewoluuje na przestrzeni ostatnich dziesięcioleci, oznacza to także zmianę ich strategii działania, taktyki oraz używanej broni. Będąc niekonwencjonalną stroną konfliktu, coraz częściej skłaniają się ku niekonwencjonalnym metodom walki takim jak partyzantka lub terroryzm, które zdają się być najbardziej charakterystycznymi elementami konfliktu asymetrycznego. Konflikt pomiędzy islamskimi wojownikami (w tym przypadku tymi z Iraku), a międzynarodowa koalicją, wydaje się być idealnym przykładem walki asymetrycznej.*

*Artykuł porusza koncepcję konfliktu asymetrycznego, wskazując tym samym na jego najbardziej charakterystyczne elementy. Artykuł wskazuje również na te cechy konfliktu asymetrycznego, które można było zaobserwować podczas konfliktu w Iraku w latach 2003–2016. Walka z tzw. Państwem Islamskim została tu użyta jako przykład aktualnie trwającego konfliktu asymetrycznego. Źródłem wiedzy dla autorki, oprócz dostępnych publikacji, były przeprowadzone przez nią wywiady eksperckie z byłymi żołnierzami polskich sił specjalnych walczących w Iraku we wskazanym okresie.*