David Patrikarakos, *War in 140 Characters: How Social Media is reshaping Conflict in the Twenty-First Century*, [Basic Books, 2017], 301.

David Patrikarakos is a British journalist, author and TV producer. He is the author of *Nuclear Iran: Birth of an Atomic State*, a contributing editor at the *Daily Beast*, and a contributing writer at *Politico, Foreign Policy* and several other publications. *War in 140 Characters* explains the changing nature of conflict after the inception of social media. The book contains accounts of several individuals and networks, that became significant actors in 21st century conflicts. It also elaborates how the Clausewitzian idea of war has become less relevant, as apart from the physical dimension, war has become a clash of narratives on a virtual battlefield as well. The author has relied on his own reporting from war zones and on firsthand interviews with important players in different conflicts, as primary sources to support his findings.

The book consists of eleven chapters and each chapter offers a distinct insight on the role that social media played in the conflicts studied by the author. He talks about four main trends in the present day conflicts. The shift of power from established structures to individuals and networked citizens, the enhanced relevance of narrative dimension of war, the involvement of non-state actors as important actors in modern conflicts, and the blurring boundaries between war and peace, politics and war, & victory and defeat.

In the first chapter, the author describes the role played by Farah Baker, a 16-year-old *Homo Digitalis*, who mobilized social media to reach an audience of millions worldwide. Using her Twitter account, she sensitized the world about the suffering of Palestinians at the hands of Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). Her weapon was just a smartphone and she was able to profoundly impact the virtual battlefield of information warfare without leaving the confines of her home. From social media, her coverage of Palestinian civilians' plight

was noticed by the mainstream media and her narrative instigated international outrage against Israel on political level.

In the next two chapters, the author compares the response of Israel Defense Forces to Farah's use of social media and that of thousands like her. IDF slowly realized the role of social media in present day wars and started to utilize social media for the propagation of their narrative. During the Operation Protective Edge, IDF Spokesperson Unit's social media arm worked round the clock to challenge Palestinians in the domain of information warfare. As the author states, "The IDF had become the first state military in history to fully harness power of *Homo digitalis* within its own ranks during wartime. *Militia digitalis* had been born". Israel's information campaign was basically designed to impact the war at discursive level to secure political support from the global audience. The author goes on to assert asserts that IDF can no longer function without its social media arm, as the virtual battlefield now holds as much salience as the physical component of a conflict.

Chapters four and five present the case of Anna Sandalova, who despite being an ordinary citizen, played such a significant role in the Ukraine crisis that even the government and military were unable to match. She used Facebook to build networks, which were used to raise money initially to feed and clothe Euromaidan protesters. And later on, to buy food, uniforms and even equipment for the under-resourced Ukrainian army fighting the pro-Russia rebels in the east. She was able to collect finances from sympathizers to the Euromaidan cause that the state apparatus, which was mostly corrupt and inefficient, couldn't. She subsequently expanded her activities and even delivered the much-needed food and equipment to the units and brigades fighting on the frontlines herself, which raised the morale of soldiers. The pictures she took and posted on Facebook became a means of verification among the donors, that their money is being utilized for the purpose for which it was donated. She became what the author calls a virtual government minister, with a direct impact on

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the physical battlefield. She was what a CIMIC liaison officer termed "perhaps a new kind of soldier" (122).

Chapter six talks about Vitaly Bespalov, a journalist who was inducted in a "troll farm" in Moscow, with the main aim of spreading propaganda and disinformation regarding Ukraine by writing fake articles and creating memes. He realized soon enough that he had unknowingly enlisted in an all-out information war against Ukraine and even though he neither carried a gun nor wore a uniform, but still had played a significant role in the virtual battlefield of information warfare.

In Chapter seven, Vladimir Putin is discussed as a post-modern dictator who understands well, the dynamics of contemporary warfare. The author gives the example of the Russian annexation of Crimea and the pro-kremlin propaganda campaign launched in the aftermath of the downing of MH-17 airliner, to support his claims.

The next two chapters present a case of Eliot Higgins, an obsessive gamer who subsequently founded the investigative website *Bellingcat*. Using just an internet connection and open-source information, he was able to establish that the Russians had supplied the pro-Russian separatists with the Buk missile that was used to shoot down flight MH17 over Ukraine. He and his team were able to directly challenge a state in the information sphere and were able to accomplish what even well-established sophisticated intelligence agencies couldn't.

Chapter 10 explains the use of social media by ISIS. It is explained how ISIS was able to lure Sophie Kasiki, a thirty-four-year-old French woman, to travel all the way to Syria with his child, unbeknownst to his husband, only by using social media applications. Chapter 11 talks about the role of Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) at the US Department of State- whose efforts were aimed to counter jihadi propaganda online.

The book conclusively establishes that information technology has reshaped many aspects of war, as we knew it. Social media has empowered individuals to unimaginable degrees and *Homo digitalis* (Networked citizen) has become an important actor in 21st century conflicts. However, this is empowering and exploitative at the same time. Its dual use potential makes it a dangerous tool at the hands of autocratic states and the non-state actors such as ISIS. Furthermore, due to decentralization of information flows and the trans-national nature of social media, it poses a direct threat to established hierarchies and state structures.

As said by Emile Simpson, Social media has changed the conflict in terms of time, space and methods. States may now win the military dimension of war and lose the informational one, as was the case in respect of Israel during operation protective edge. In the current world, narratives transcend facts, people emote rather than debate and algorithms shape our view of the world.

The book provides its readers with an in-depth understanding of how social media has completely transformed the dynamics of conflict in the contemporary world. It brings into focus the impact of narratives in shaping today's reality. New wars have in fact moved beyond the Clausewitzian idea of a face to face military battle between adversaries to grey zone conflicts with and even the distinction between victory and defeat has blurred. The conclusions and concepts drawn by the author are based on conflicts and occurrences that took place in the recent-past. However, shedding light on the grand canvas, the book explains a dire need to understand the enormous power of social media and its implications in the times to come.

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