

10 Facts about Fifth Generation Warfare

1. The definition of fifth generation warfare is contested, but all agree it is currently emerging.
2. Fourth generation warfare, put as simply as possible, is terrorism: non-state actors versus the state.
3. Zero generation warfare is “chimpanzee genocide,” which is exactly what it sounds like. It’s two groups of chimpanzees fighting until all of one of the groups has been killed off.
4. My favorite definition of fifth generation warfare is Kelshall’s (2019): a struggle between non-state actors within the state.
5. The definition of fifth generation warfare is not about “what” or tactics, but about “who.”
6. The best metaphor that I can give you is that the state is like a seashell. Different groups of people are like crabs and they are fighting for dominance to live in the seashell.
7. Examples of fifth generation warfare include both violent and non-violent tactics. In general, lone wolf tactics are associated with fifth generation warfare.
8. Step one of winning any conflict is knowing that you are at war. This goes double for fifth generation warfare.
9. Fifth generation warfare essentially takes the form of zero generation warfare coming full circle: from chimpanzees to within a formal state. It’s basically the most sophisticated version of “chimpanzee genocide.” Different groups will fight within states. Eventually this will bring about a situation where only one group remains within these states.
10. What I see as one of the catalyst or the environment that is a breeding ground for this fifth generation warfare is when members of a state lose their role. The dominance of their role as the member of a state is somehow diminished in their mind. Their identity becomes more associated with ideas rather than a state. So for example, if someone was an American and they are identifying with being an American versus if someone is a certain ethnicity and they identify more with that ethnicity. So, the ideas can be ethnic, they can be anything. But the point is: the power of these ideas is SO strong. And these ideas fill a vacuum where the person has lost their national identity.