

Hot War

Union of Saints

A **hot war** is the opposite of a **cold war**. It refers to active, direct military conflict in which armed forces engage in open combat.

A concise definition is:

A hot war is an active, armed conflict between states, governments, or organized armed groups involving direct military operations and the use of force. Unlike a cold war, a hot war is characterized by open combat rather than indirect competition.

Common Characteristics

- Direct military engagement.
- Armed combat between opposing forces.
- Air, land, sea, or cyber attacks accompanying military operations.
- Occupation or seizure of territory.
- Casualties among military personnel and often civilians.
- Use of conventional or unconventional weapons.
- Military campaigns and battles.
- Declarations of war or sustained armed hostilities, although a formal declaration is not always present.

Examples Commonly Cited

- World War I
- World War II
- Korean War
- Gulf War

Cold War vs. Hot War

Cold War	Hot War
Indirect competition	Direct armed conflict
Propaganda and influence operations	Military battles
Espionage and intelligence	Combat operations
Economic pressure and sanctions	Armed attacks
Proxy conflicts	Open warfare
Cyber and information campaigns	Territorial occupation and military campaigns

Political scientists sometimes describe conflicts as existing on a spectrum rather than fitting neatly into one category. A rivalry may begin as a cold war and escalate into a hot war if direct, sustained military hostilities break out between the principal adversaries.

Our Assessment

In our assessment, the current security environment exhibits characteristics of a full scale Cold War, alongside politically motivated violence and other forms of direct conflict that we characterize as elements of a "Hot War," occurring both overseas and within the United States.

When the fight against human trafficking, historical invasions, street crime, and politically motivated violence are considered together, these elements may form a pattern that feels like a full blown Hot War, even though these events are not experienced as conventional warfare between traditional armies.

The combination of strategic rivalry, politically motivated violence, organized crime, human trafficking, cyber operations, and information campaigns creates a security environment that resembles wartime conditions, even though much of the conflict occurs outside of conventional military operations.

The term "**Hot War**" is traditionally considered a term of military art and is generally reserved for direct, sustained armed conflict between states or organized armed forces. As a result, it may not be the technical term to describe the current security environment.

Terms Currently Used:

- Hybrid warfare
- Irregular warfare
- Unrestricted warfare
- Political warfare
- **Fourth generation warfare (4GW)**
- Gray zone conflict

4GW

Fourth generation warfare (4GW) is a form of conflict in which states, nonstate actors, terrorist organizations, insurgent groups, criminal networks, and other organizations compete through decentralized, irregular, political, psychological, informational, economic, and military means rather than relying primarily on conventional battlefield engagements.