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The Transformative Dynamics of Military Strategy in the 21st Century: Rethinking Military Strategy and the Contemporary International System

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Abstract: The present research delves into the evolving nature of military strategy in the 21st century, with a specific focus on the interplay between various factors such as cyber warfare, technology, military intelligence, politics, lawfare, propaganda, and other non-conventional warfare strategies, culminating in the concept of hybrid warfare. By employing a blend of qualitative and quantitative research methods, including historical analysis, case studies, and simulations, this research aims to assess the efficacy of unconventional warfare as a 21st-century military strategy and its interconnectedness with the international system. The primary objectives encompass examining the pivotal technological and political trends that are reshaping military strategy, analysing the influence of globalisation and emerging technologies on the conduct of warfare, exploring the role of non-traditional threats, and evaluating the implications of these transformations for the international system and the future of warfare. Furthermore, the research seeks to identify and comprehend the fundamental patterns and changes in unconventional warfare, along with its impact on international defence and security strategies, ultimately endeavouring to propose recommendations for the development of new approaches to military strategy.

Keywords: Alliance Politics, Coercive Diplomacy, Conventional Warfare, Cyber and Technological Warfare, Defence Strategies, Economic Sanctions, Foreign Economic Diplomacy, Geopolitics, Global Environment, Global Warfare, Hybrid Warfare, Intelligence, International Cooperation, International System, International Relations, International Defence and Security, Interdependence, International Isolation, Military Intelligence, Military Strategy, National Defence, National Security, Politics, Sovereignty, Strategic Diplomacy and Unconventional Warfare.

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INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, military strategy has evolved significantly, transitioning away from traditional models to embrace a more comprehensive approach that integrates unconventional warfare, conventional warfare, intelligence warfare, and cyberwarfare, among other influencing strategies. This amalgamation of strategies, known as hybrid warfare, has become increasingly prevalent in the modern international system, necessitating a corresponding adaptation of military strategies by nation-states to address new challenges and threats. This research seeks to enhance understanding of unconventional warfare and its impact on the existing international system, while also providing insights into how nations can strategically adapt to these 21st-century challenges and threats. To effectively navigate the complexities of modern warfare and international conflict, a holistic approach to military strategy is essential. By adopting such an approach, nations can better safeguard their national interests, promote peace, and prevent the escalation of conflict. The research examines contemporary cases, such as the employment of soft power and unconventional warfare strategies by Russia, China, the United Kingdom, Iraq, and the United States. The analysis draws on theories from grand strategy, game theory, adverse partnerships, realism, statecraft, and diplomacy to aid in understanding the

evolving nature of military strategy and the challenges it poses to national security and defence.

The research also highlights the use of military intelligence, strategic and coercive diplomacy, lawfare, propaganda, and the deployment of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and multinational corporations (MNCs) as proxies to intervene in foreign electoral processes, as well as the deployment of other coercive measures involving inter-governmental organizations such as NATO, the United Nations, SADC, the International Court of Justice, the International Criminal Court, and the European Union in hybrid warfare. These developments underscore the need for a new paradigm to understand and address the challenges of contemporary conflict and warfare. Therefore, this research provides a framework for comprehending the evolving nature of warfare and the necessity of a more comprehensive approach to military strategy. By examining contemporary cases and drawing on established theories, this research aims to offer insights into how nations can better navigate the transformative dynamics of military strategy in the 21st century, safeguard their national interests, and promote peace.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the realm of politics and international relations, nation-states navigate the intricate process of establishing, maintaining, and modifying fundamental norms that govern their interactions. This process is inextricably linked to the phenomena of conflict and cooperation, thereby, reflecting the intricate nature of global politics and international relations. At its core, international politics and strategy can be perceived as an ongoing endeavour to resolve disputes while advancing national interests in an international system that is characterized as amoral and self-interested. This perspective is underscored by the realist school of thought, as exemplified by the recognition of the state as the primary actor by influential philosophers such as Thucydides, Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Max Weber, and Lord Palmerston. The realist ideology emphasizes the perpetual pursuit of national interests, as articulated by Lord Palmerston's postulation that "We have no everlasting allies, and we have no permanent adversaries. Our interests are eternal and immortal; it is our duty to follow them." This notion is further echoed in the works of realist pioneers such as Niccolò Machiavelli, who in *The Prince* (1532) contends that "politics is not the realm of morals, but rather the realm of national self-interest." According to realism, nation-states consistently seek to enhance their authority to safeguard their national interests and protect themselves from other states, as evidenced by Thomas Hobbes' proposition that "the state of man is a condition of war of everyone against everyone," highlighting the complex nature of the international political order and the growing importance for the implementation of effective military strategies to guarantee national defence and security.

Thomas Schelling, a prestigious military strategist, underscores the intricate nature of modern warfare, asserting that attaining political objectives through the mere application of military force can be difficult. In this regard, state leaders must be well-versed in military strategy and learn how to employ force persuasively to coerce opponents into accepting concessions due to the fear of military retribution, a concept known as "risk manipulation" by game theorists. This primes the emergence of "deterrence" as an innovative approach to military strategy in the current international system, as demonstrated by the existing tensions between North Korea and the West. Specifically, on February 12, 2023, North Korea held military exercises, claiming that the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) exercises were intended to enhance its "fatal" nuclear strike capability, threatening more severe measures in response to anticipated military drills between the US and South Korea. In response, the United States deployed long-range supersonic missiles during joint drills with South Korean and Japanese aircraft, showcasing their commitment to their allies' national security.

International relations specialists proclaim that North Korea's efforts to expand its nuclear arsenal are aimed at gaining leverage in future engagements with the United States. The U.S. Indo-Pacific commander, Adm. John Aquilino, declared on February 28, 2023, that the United States was prepared to "immediately" intercept any intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) launched over the U.S. territory of Guam or into the Pacific region. In response, North Korean President Kim Jong warned on March 7, 2023, that such interceptions would be construed as a clear declaration of war against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). These developments underscore the importance of a sophisticated military strategy in the modern era, where deterrence plays a critical role in averting the escalation of conflicts and serves as a tool for national defence and security, while also advancing a nation's strategic interests. This is evidenced by the ongoing dynamics between North Korea and the United States, where the possession and potential use of nuclear capabilities have become central to their strategic calculations. The interplay of deterrence, military posturing, and diplomatic manoeuvring in this context exemplifies the complex nature of contemporary international relations and the imperative of understanding and navigating these dynamics effectively. This brings to light the evolving nature of military strategy in the modern international system.

Realism and the International System

Realism, a prominent theory in international relations, encompasses two primary perspectives: structural realism and human nature realism, which offer insights into the dynamics of the international system in shaping contemporary military strategies of the 21st century. Structural realism contends that a state's behaviour is largely shaped by the anarchical nature of the international system, emphasizing the influence of the system's structure over foreign and domestic military strategies. The absence of a central authority in this system fosters an environment of chaos and violence, leading to mutual paranoia among world leaders. This phenomenon arises from the lack of an established mechanism for states to seek protection or assistance when threatened by other nations, resulting in a breakdown of trust and cooperation among states. This underscores the need for effective mechanisms to manage conflicts and promote cooperation among nations, given the significant implications for global security and stability. The structural realist perspective is consistent with the ideas of Kenneth Waltz, who in his work "Theory of International Politics," emphasizes the significance of the international system's structure in shaping state behaviour.

On the other hand, human nature realism posits that individuals have an inherent predisposition to use power to pursue their interests. The relevance of human nature realism is echoed in the writings of John Mearsheimer, particularly in his book "The Tragedy of

Great Power Politics," where he discusses the role of power and security dilemmas in driving state behaviour. Recent events, such as the Russo-Ukrainian War, exemplify the resurgence of geopolitical rivalry, driven by national defence and security concerns as well as the desire for cultural hegemony. This underscores the importance of understanding the motivations and strategies of state actors in the face of military strategies of the twenty-first century, emphasizing the relevance of this perspective in contemporary international relations. This is further evidenced by Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, which is thought to be motivated by Vladimir Putin's growing distress of suffering the same fate as Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, both of whose political downfalls are attributed by political analysts to a Western hybrid warfare attack. Although the use of military force to achieve political objectives continues to be a recurring theme in contemporary international relations, the Russo-Ukrainian War serves as a transformative departure from classical models of military strategy to a nuanced approach of non-conventional military strategies.

Adverse Partnerships and the Balance of Power in the 21st-Century International System

The balance of power model is another concept fundamental to realism's perspective on global relations that portrays a world where governments constantly seek to bolster their capabilities while undermining those of others, ostensibly creating a "balance" of power (Mearsheimer 2001). However, Keohane (1984) notes that this portrayal fails to fully capture modern politics and international relations. Realism's emphasis on the temporary nature of regional and international cooperation, largely based on Cold War alliance analyses, has drawn further criticism of the theory. While the theory's proponents often overlook the possibility of alliances shifting their focus, the reality of post-Cold War geopolitics demonstrates that repurposed alliances are more common than complete dissolution. This brings attention to the concept of transient or "adverse" partnerships in modern military strategies, where states cooperate only as long as it serves their national interests, leading them to continuously invest in their military capabilities to defend against former adversaries. A historical example of this is the evolving relationship between Iraq and the United States since the mid-1900s, shaped by shifting international dynamics such as the fear of Soviet expansionism and the desire to contain communism. This complex and evolving nature of international alliances and partnerships, however, highlights the inadequacy of the balance of power concept in fully explaining the intricacies of the modern international system.

In the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli War in 1948-49, the United States government took measures to stabilize Iraq during the late 1940s and early 1950s. One of their efforts was to facilitate the withdrawal of Iraqi

military forces from the Palestine theatre, as part of a broader initiative to end the first Arab-Israeli conflict. Additionally, they encouraged the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) to increase oil production and share more of the profits with the Iraqi government. The US also provided economic and military aid to the Iraqi government. By 1955, Iraq had become a founding member of the Baghdad Pact, an anti-Soviet defence alliance that included Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and Britain, with informal American support. The US appeared to have found a successful strategy for ensuring Iraq's long-term stability and anti-communism. However, this perception was short-lived, as a group of Iraqi military officers overthrew the king in a violent coup d'état in July 1958. This highlights a new approach to 21st-century military strategies in the form of coup d'état and assassinations. The new regime as a result of the coup, was openly hostile to the West, and President Eisenhower responded by sending US Marines to Lebanon to prevent a similar uprising. However, he rejected the idea of military intervention in Baghdad, citing tactical and diplomatic challenges, reflecting the significance of the need to adopt contemporary military strategies to meet the complexities of the contemporary international system.

Redefining Military Strategy in the Contemporary International System

Carl Von Clausewitz, a prominent military strategist, provided a comprehensive definition of military strategy, emphasizing the management of finite resources across various domains. In his publication "On War," Clausewitz contended that strategy is the art and science of effectively utilizing a nation-state's limited resources to gain a competitive advantage in pursuing its national interests, which are inherently constrained by finite resources. He further asserted that war is not just a political act, but a genuine political instrument, representing the continuation of political relations through alternative means. This proposition underscores the close relationship between war and politics, with strategy serving as the mechanism to achieve political objectives through warfare. Additionally, Clausewitz's insights have contemporary relevance, particularly in the context of strategic diplomacy, limited war, and hybrid warfare, which encompass a spectrum of military strategies aimed at realizing political goals within the modern international system. The concept of hybrid warfare, as articulated by US Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel Frank G. Hoffman, encapsulates the integration of conventional and non-conventional warfare, blurring traditional domains, and employing diverse elements such as religious, cultural, political, economic, military, and media aspects in a coordinated manner to advance a state's national interests. This multifaceted approach reflects the evolving nature of military strategy in addressing political objectives within the dynamic global landscape.

Clausewitz's proposition that war is a continuation of strategy by other means serves as a base of analysis for specialists such as Thomas Schelling, who emphasizes the idea of limited war. This perspective supports the assertion that the purpose of war is fundamentally political, rather than the application of overwhelming force. Schelling asserts that "the grammar of war is for the generals, but its logic for the politicians". This implies the integration of military strength with economic, political, and psychological warfare in the context of contemporary global dynamics, departing from traditional models of military strategy. The concept of limited war is of paramount importance as it challenges the traditional understanding of war and highlights the need for a more nuanced approach to military strategy. It is important to recognize that the character of war is not static and that nations must be prepared to adapt to new and unconventional threats that encompass a wide range of strategies, including the use of special operations forces and military intelligence, cyber operations, information operations, as well as hybrid warfare tactics. By integrating political, economic, and military considerations, states can develop more effective and flexible strategies to address the complex and dynamic nature of modern warfare.

The Transformative Dynamics of Military Strategy in the 21st Century

In contrast to the prevailing credence that military action is central to twenty-first-century international politics, contemporary international relations specialists accentuate the preferment of non-military strategies over classical armed conflict by contemporary world leaders in the advancement of national defence and security. This transition towards a soft power military strategy mirrors the evolving nature of global politics, where military intervention is often considered a last resort. Joseph Nye (1990), a prominent figure in international relations, defines soft power as the ability of a state to influence others through appeal and persuasion rather than coercion. By employing these non-military strategies which include intelligence warfare, strategic diplomacy, deterrence, cyber and technological warfare, as well as alliance politics, states can achieve their objectives without resorting to violence, thereby avoiding significant human and economic consequences. This is in line with Sun Tzu's assertion that "In war, better take a state intact than destroy it. Ultimate excellence lies not in winning every battle, but in defeating the enemy without ever fighting." Consequently, states can be seen prioritizing non-conventional and soft power military strategies over military warfare to attain their national interests. This is illustrated by the growing reliance on military intelligence by countries such as Israel through its Mossad special operations forces and Russia through its KSSO.

The Evolving Role of Military Intelligence in Contemporary Military Strategy

In the twenty-first century, nation-states face evolving challenges and must adapt their military strategies to effectively address these challenges. Kozub (2011) argues that traditional military models need to be reoriented, and "best intelligence" approaches should be developed to meet contemporary threats. The United States military intelligence corps (MIC) divides military intelligence into strategic and tactical branches, emphasizing its role in guiding decision-making processes for commanders and government officials through information collection and analysis during international conflict and engagements. The significance of special operations forces and military intelligence alternatives in modern military strategies is underscored by recent events, such as the dismissal of top Russian military and intelligence officials following poor intelligence in the lead-up to Russia's "special" military operation in Ukraine on March 11, 2022, which Russian president Vladimir Putin attributes to Russia's failure to achieve its intended goals in Ukraine ahead of schedule. This highlights the critical role of military intelligence in informing strategic decisions. Furthermore, the importance of military intelligence in warfare is not a new concept and has been emphasized by ancient military strategists such as Sun Tzu. The current Russian approach towards Ukraine also reflects the significance of military intelligence, as it is suggested that Russia's political objectives have shifted towards preventing Ukraine from becoming a model for an alternative political and economic path for Russian citizens, rather than solely seeking subjugation. Therefore, the reorientation of military strategies towards "best intelligence" approaches is an essential alternative approach to military strategy in modern international politics.

The conflict in Ukraine has also highlighted the blurred line between conventional and unconventional military operations, encompassing a wide range of measures. Russia's approach has extended beyond military force and encompasses a coordinated utilization of various instruments of power, including military intelligence, diplomacy, cyber campaigns, economic warfare, as well as the use of proxy forces, with the aim of compelling Ukraine and its Western allies to accept the current situation as a new reality. This multifaceted strategy reflects the evolving nature of military strategy in the twenty-first century, where attrition has emerged as a predominant approach. The implications of Russia's actions in Ukraine are profound, significantly influencing the future of international relations and the regional balance of power. This underscores the importance of comprehending unconventional warfare and its impact on shaping the contemporary international system.

In the context of modern politics and international relations, the ability to gather and analyse intelligence is crucial for the success of military operations. Drawing on various concepts, including

deterrence, limited war, grand strategy, realism, game theory, strategic diplomacy, geopolitics, statecraft, adverse partnerships, alliance politics, and coercive diplomacy, it is evident that effective intelligence-gathering and analysis capabilities are essential for informed decision-making and responding to emerging threats. Sun Tzu, a renowned military strategist, emphasized the importance of intelligence in warfare, stating that "the highest form of warfare is to attack strategy itself. The next is to attack alliances; the next is to attack armies. The lowest form of war is to attack cities. Siege warfare is the last resort." This hierarchy highlights the need for military strategists to prioritize the development of intelligence-gathering and analysis capabilities. By doing so, they can ensure a more effective response to emerging threats and maintain a competitive edge in the ever-changing landscape of international relations.

The increasing significance of military intelligence in 21st-century military operations is further underscored by the announcement of the North Korean president's plan to deploy three additional military reconnaissance satellites into space in 2024. This development reflects a broader global trend towards the integration of advanced technological capabilities, such as satellite-based surveillance, in national security and defence strategies. As observed by defence analysts, the use of military spy satellites enables enhanced monitoring, communication, and reconnaissance, thereby influencing the dynamics of modern warfare and geopolitical competition. This shift towards space-based intelligence assets aligns with the evolving nature of contemporary security challenges and the growing emphasis on information superiority in military planning and decision-making. Notably, the deployment of such satellites exemplifies the intersection of technological innovation and defence priorities, shaping the strategic landscape of the 21st century.

Additionally, the integration of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities can enhance the planning and conduct of military operations, as well as improve the effectiveness of diplomacy and economic sanctions. A prime example of this is the integration of ISR capabilities into the planning and conduct of military operations during the Gulf War, which resulted in inestimable benefits for military decision-makers and contributed to the rapid liberation of the Kuwaiti territory. This demonstrates the significance of intelligence gathering and analysis in shaping the outcome of military operations and maintaining global peace and security.

Integrating the Concept of Deterrence with Military Strategy

In his renowned 2019 speech, former U.S. Army Staff Sgt. David Bellavia, known for its coldness, Bellavia emphasizes the unwavering commitment of the U.S. military in the face of adversity. He highlights the

importance of not underestimating the capabilities and resolve of the U.S. military, comparing it to a cable catfish TV show, which, despite its popularity, should not be taken lightly. Bellavia's speech underscores the U.S. military's transformation into a highly efficient, lethal machine that should not be trifled with. He emphasizes the U.S. military's steadfastness in the face of conflict, stating that while they have seen war and do not desire it, they will not back down if provoked. This stance reflects the strategic use of deterrence as a military tactic by the United States, ensuring that potential adversaries understand the consequences of engaging in hostilities with the U.S.

Deterrence, as a strategic concept, involves the communication of the capacity to inflict harm on a potential adversary, to prevent conflict or compel the adversary to accede to the deterrer's terms. Schelling posits that deterrence is effective by discerning one's own and the opponent's intentions to gauge the adversaries' behaviour. However, interpreting adversaries' intentions, as proposed by Schelling, is intricate, as exemplified by China's construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea and the 2015 Russian weaponization of cyber espionage, including the alleged hacking of the Democratic National Committee and the U.S. presidential elections. The recent accusations by the United Kingdom against Russia's Special Operations Forces, the FSB, for conducting cyber-hacking operations further underscore the complexity of interpreting adversaries' intentions. Schelling's game theoretical concepts are pertinent not only to military strategists but also to the decision-making processes of political leaders, as evidenced by the aforementioned events. This demonstrates the integration of intelligence and cyber warfare tactics in 21st-century international military strategies, as illustrated by the alleged theft and subsequent leak of documents on US-UK trade from Conservative MP Liam Fox by Russia.

Strategic Integration of Diplomacy and Military Strategy

The challenge of military strategy and national security has been the lack of mutual integration between military and diplomatic planners, thinkers, and decision-makers at strategic and operational levels. The current strategic setting demands increased mutual understanding and synchronization of multi-functional diplomatic and military actions. Integrating beyond the status quo could generate advantages and better integrate diplomatic and military power. To achieve this, the Ministries of Defence (MOD) and Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MOF) of any country should consider interagency plans and planning organizations. At the strategic level, integration would occur within an "Office of Strategic Diplomatic-Military Planning," while at the operational level, integration would occur within a more distributed network under an "Office of Operational Diplomatic-Military Planning." Diplomatic-military planning cells would exist at MOD Combatant

Commands and Embassies abroad. The National Military Strategy (NMS) employs three strategic ways to foster national security: integrated deterrence, campaigning, and building enduring advantage. The NMS provides the focus for military activities by defining a set of interrelated military objectives. Combatant command strategies bridge national strategic guidance and join. The strategist must recognize the nature of warfare and understand its implications for how. The character of warfare at any point in time and in any area reflects the nature of the political, social, and economic conditions that exist. Therefore, the integration of diplomatic and military planning at strategic and operational levels is crucial for military strategy and national security.

In the contemporary political international system, strategic diplomacy has thus emerged as a widely recognized and effective approach to addressing international conflicts and disputes. This strategy, as proposed by Sun Tzu, emphasizes the importance of seizing the opponent without even fighting, thereby minimizing the psychological, economic, and political consequences associated with traditional armed combat. Scholars such as Jack S. Levy and Alexander George offer support for this argument, underscoring the strategy's effectiveness in reducing human and financial costs of warfare. Hlabiso A. (2023) emphasizes the significance of strategic diplomacy in the practice of military strategy and statecraft, which is essential for the survival of states in an increasingly hostile international order. The integration of strategy into diplomatic procedures is advocated to facilitate well-informed policy decisions and the assessment of international threats to national defence and security. These threats include great power conflicts, economic interdependence, peacebuilding, climate change, and non-traditional threats such as pandemics. Hlabiso's research, supported by Prantl and Goh, underscores the need to contextualize concerns such as power dispersion, citing examples like the US-China trade war and Huawei's involvement in deploying 5G technology in Europe. This reflects a shift from traditional warfare to intelligence-centred technological warfare. Resultantly, Hlabiso urges officials to embrace a nuanced strategic approach in their military strategies to safeguard and advance national interests in the contemporary global international system. This perspective is crucial for navigating the complex and dynamic global landscape, as evidenced by the evolving nature of international relations and security challenges.

The Complex Dynamics of Coercive Diplomacy in Military Strategy

Coercive diplomacy has also emerged as a prevalent military strategy in 21st-century international relations, offering the potential to achieve political objectives without armed combat. Coercive diplomacy achieves its objectives by employing the threat of force and various measures, such as political repercussions and economic sanctions, to attain foreign national objectives.

Its success hinges on various factors, including effective intelligence, a favourable strategic environment, and specific circumstances for the coercing power. These circumstances encompass having higher interests at risk than the opponent, clearly communicating the intention to escalate, and possessing the material capabilities to make threats credible. This approach is exemplified by the successful handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis by J. F. Kennedy, where a naval blockade and a commitment to peaceful negotiations temporarily averted a full-fledged war. This example highlights the significance of coercive diplomacy as a military and conflict-management strategy, emphasizing strategic restraint and crisis management in the modern international system.

The use of coercive diplomacy is often associated with the management of risks through limited probes or controlled pressure strategies. George and Smoke (1974) argue that the perception of manageable risks is essential for a choice to challenge deterrence, and the miscalculation of an opponent's risk calculation and risk acceptance can lead to deterrence failure. They exemplify this by discussing the misjudgement of Soviet intentions by American authorities during the Cuban missile crisis. Specialists suggest that deterrent threats may be more successful if accompanied by efforts to persuade the opponent that the dangers are calculable and sufficiently severe to be unbearable. However, they also note that if an enemy is prone to taking high perceived risks, as in the case of the Japanese calculations leading up to the Pearl Harbor assault, a deterrence approach is less likely to be effective.

The efficacy of coercive diplomacy is influenced by a myriad of factors, including the nature of provocation, the intensity of conflicting interests, the urgency of time, the presence of allies, the effectiveness of leadership, and the desired post-crisis relationship with the adversary. Coercive diplomacy is considered a peaceful option that emphasizes affecting the enemy's will rather than inflicting extensive damage, and its use of force is limited and selective. It is often employed during crises and peace operations and is combined with soft power, intelligence, and economic sanctions. Negotiations and bargaining are essential tools in this approach, which relies on clear communication, signalling, and bargaining to make the opponent aware of one's intentions, motivation, and credibility at every step of the ongoing crisis. Coercive diplomacy is a complex and multifaceted strategy that requires a deep understanding of the adversary's risk calculation and risk acceptance, as well as the careful management of risks and the communication of credible threats.

The art of coercive diplomacy, as highlighted by academic research and real-world examples, underscores the intricate interplay of various elements and the need for a nuanced understanding of the adversary's behaviour and motivations. Its effectiveness

is contingent on a delicate balance of factors, and its application demands a comprehensive grasp of the dynamics at play in a given situation. By integrating insights from scholarly works and practical instances, it becomes evident that coercive diplomacy represents a sophisticated and calculated approach to military strategy and international relations, necessitating a judicious assessment of risks, clear communication, and strategic manoeuvring to achieve its objectives.

The Evolution and Implications of Hybrid Warfare as a Contemporary Military Strategy

Hybrid warfare is a term used by senior military officials to describe the blending of conventional, unconventional, and irregular approaches to warfare across the full spectrum of conflict. Hybrid attacks blur the boundaries between war and peace, exploiting the opportunities of an interconnected and globalized world to weaken the adversary. The concept of hybrid warfare has been around since the period of reflection following the so-called revolution in military strategy defining moment following Operation Desert Storm in 1991. Hybrid warfare has taken on a much wider conception in mainstream discourse, describing the revisionist grand strategy that employs a comprehensive toolset that ranges from cyber-attacks to propaganda and subversion, economic blackmail and sabotage, sponsorship of proxy forces, and creeping military expansionism blended in a synchronized manner to exploit the vulnerabilities of an adversary. Hybrid warfare often takes place below the traditional threshold of war, and it is difficult to detect, deter, counter, and respond to hybrid threats as it operates in a grey zone.

Contemporary military strategy has thus evolved from the operational-level use of military action and methods towards the strategic-level use of non-military means consisting of all the domains of Hybrid warfare. This poses new challenges and implications for modern defence and security strategies as it breaks the traditional lines between military and non-military means of action. The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 marked a critical event in the ongoing discussion of hybrid warfare, as it highlighted the use of non-military means at a global international level to achieve strategic objectives. The research established that this shift requires a re-evaluation of the conventional understanding of warfare and the development of new approaches to counter hybrid threats. The European Union and NATO have recognized the importance of hybrid warfare and have used the concept to develop new ideas and policy recommendations for addressing these challenges. However, the West and NATO have also been notorious for employing these same strategies against adversaries to push for their national agendas.

Hybrid warfare, a concept first proposed by Frank Hoffman, has sparked significant debate among academics and practitioners. It is characterized by a blend of conventional, irregular, and asymmetric

warfare, as well as criminal activities, propaganda, and cyber operations, all aimed at achieving political objectives. This approach has been documented in various conflicts, including the Russian military operation in Ukraine, where information, media, and political warfare have been employed. The use of propaganda to influence public opinion and incite unrest, as seen through the Al Jazeera documentary on the African gold mafia, has the potential to lead to civil strife and violent protest, as observed in the ongoing civil war in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique. Additionally, the use of social media campaigns to mobilize opposition and incite unrest, as evidenced in the case of Zimbabwe, is a common tactic in hybrid warfare. Furthermore, the potential for military intervention by foreign powers in the name of restoring law and order, peace, and democracy is a concern in hybrid warfare, as seen in various conflicts, including the Syrian civil war, the Libyan invasion, and the United States war on Iraq. Despite the disputed constitutive elements and alleged historical distortions, the concept of hybrid warfare has gained relevance in modern international politics, particularly after it was adopted and adapted by NATO in 2014. The complex and multifaceted nature of hybrid warfare has led to a range of policy and strategic responses being proposed to detect, deter, counter, and respond to hybrid threats meticulously.

The hybrid warfare waged on Zimbabwe by the West and its allies ahead of the 2023 general elections is a significant concern for international relations specialists. This form of warfare combines conventional armed conflict with strategic tools such as information, media, and political warfare, with the potential to incite civil strife and violent protest, leading to foreign military intervention. The economic and ideological components of this hybrid war can be linked to neo-colonialism, creating a dependence syndrome on the Global North for foreign aid, hindering effective governance and sustainable development in African nations. Joseph Stiglitz's assertions further highlight how international funding organizations' policies aim to deepen poverty and perpetuate reliance on the Global North. The conditionality tied to foreign aid, as seen in the case of Zimbabwe, has led to detrimental consequences such as widespread unemployment, illiteracy, and poor life expectancy. This has been utilized by the opposition as a campaign strategy to undermine the present administration and incite violent protests, potentially impacting the 2023 national election results. The use of sanctions and foreign assistance conditionality has exacerbated the economic crisis, providing a platform for the opposition as a proxy of the West to contest the election results. The situation in Zimbabwe exemplifies the impact of hybrid warfare on a nation's stability and governance, reflecting the broader implications of such conflicts in the African context (Stiglitz, J. E. 2002). This highlights a shift from classical models of military strategy to a new approach to military strategy in the form of economic warfare as a domain of hybrid warfare.

The case of Zimbabwe exemplifies Joseph Stiglitz's assertion that the conditions attached to foreign aid to Africa are designed to undermine African nations. This is evident in the requirement for Zimbabwe to abandon beneficial policies, such as free educational assistance grants and healthcare, in exchange for financial assistance from the World Bank and other foreign financing agencies. Additionally, the Zimbabwean government was compelled to downsize its state personnel. These conditions led to widespread unemployment, illiteracy, and a decline in life expectancy. Historical events, like the French and Russian revolutions, demonstrate that deteriorating economic conditions fuel political instability and revolutionary sentiments. The conditionalities of foreign aid can be interpreted as a campaign strategy by the opposition to alienate citizens from the incumbent administration, as evidenced by social movements like the "This Flag" and "Tajamuka" protests from 2016 to 2017. The opposition has leveraged the economic crisis, exacerbated by sanctions and foreign aid conditionalities, to foment violent protests and portray the government as unwanted, thereby laying the groundwork to dispute the 2023 election results. Furthermore, Nelson Chamisa has consistently advocated for the maintenance of ZIDERA sanctions by the West. This multifaceted approach underscores the shift from traditional military strategies to a nuanced approach incorporating economic warfare as a domain of hybrid warfare in contemporary international politics.

The involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Trust Africa in Zimbabwe reflects a political strategy utilized by the United States and leveraged by the opposition as a hybrid warfare tactic against the ruling government. Unlike traditional NGOs focusing on development and cooperation, Trust Africa is distinct in its support for revolutionary movements aimed at challenging existing governments. This underscores the use of NGOs in the internalization of economic cooperation and global governance to influence foreign policy. For instance, the 2016 "Tajamuka" movement, allegedly supported by international proxy NGOs, led a campaign against the Zimbabwean government, citing issues such as regulatory changes impacting duty rebates and product imports. These actions were perceived as part of a hybrid warfare approach, intending to destabilize the Zimbabwean economy and foment a larger revolt as supported by research by academics such as Dr Tendai Murisa. The opposition's alleged capitalization on these hybrid attacks, including financial support for state terror and dissemination of misinformation, further underscores the influence of organizations like Trust Africa and donors like George Soros in the transformative dynamics of modern military strategy in the twenty-first century.

The political tensions between the Zimbabwean government and various civic organizations, including

labour unions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), independent media, and churches, have deep historical roots, particularly before and during the 2000 general election. The government's accusations against NGOs and its pledge to deal with those violating the Private Voluntary Organizations Act 1 have contributed to the ongoing conflict. This conflict is significant as it highlights the role of NGOs as a domain of hybrid warfare, involving political, economic, and information propaganda, which the United States and its allies allegedly utilized to influence global governance and economic linkages. The conflict can be traced back to the late 1900s, during the tenure of former President Robert Mugabe, and the constitutional reforms initiated by the ruling ZANU PF party. The proposed reforms, which would have affected President Mugabe's term limits and the land reform program, were viewed unfavourably by the West, leading to a regime change agenda. The involvement of NGOs in the political landscape, particularly in the 2000 constitutional referendum, and their alleged financial backing from the West, further emphasizes the significance of NGOs as agents of hybrid warfare. This is because the MDC was formed as a coalition of several NGOs and civil society organizations to fight for a "No" vote in the 2000 constitutional referendum. Throughout this campaign, the MDC obtained financial backing from the West through several NGOs. The outcome of the referendum, with the majority of Zimbabweans voting against it, reflects the perceived success of the campaign.

Zimbabwe's ruling party has repeatedly accused non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of supporting the Western agenda of regime change, with the ultimate goal of repealing the land redistribution legislation. This claim is supported by evidence that some NGOs and foreign observers regarded the 2000 general elections as unfair and unfree, following the triumph of the "No" vote in the constitutional referendum. Western nations subsequently imposed ZIDERA sanctions on Zimbabwe, citing reports from multiple NGOs that the government had violated human rights. This can be seen as a form of hybrid warfare, using proxies and the media to spread information in favour of the Western agenda against the Zimbabwean government. The ultimate goal of these sanctions is to force the Zimbabwean government to conduct constitutional reforms, including readdressing the land redistribution act, which would not be in the best interest of the Zimbabwean populace. This is intended to create disgruntlement among Zimbabweans and provide a campaign platform for the opposition to de-campaign the sitting government. The evidence suggests that NGOs are being used as a tool to achieve Western objectives in Zimbabwe, rather than serving the interests of the Zimbabwean populace. This further highlights a new military strategy in the contemporary international system.

The clandestine execution of a hybrid warfare offensive is essential for its efficacy, enabling the

aggressors to preserve their advantage and yield delayed rather than immediate outcomes. The political upheavals in Zimbabwe during the early 2000s can be interpreted as components of a broader assault on the Zimbabwean government, the repercussions of which became apparent in the 2023 general elections. The enduring impact of the economic sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe during that period remained a contentious issue as the country prepared for the recent elections, underscoring the protracted effects of hybrid warfare as supported by S. M. Chabata. Furthermore, the utilization of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) as a surrogate for Western interests to discredit the 2023 general elections under the leadership of Hichilema further accentuates this point as detailed in the publication *Regional Organizations and Western Interests* by A. B. Smith. The ramifications of hybrid warfare on nations like Libya and Iraq also manifested over time, as will be evidenced in the subsequent paragraphs. These instances underscore the significance of comprehending the long-term effects of hybrid warfare and the necessity for effective contemporary military strategies.

The NATO intervention in Libya has been widely regarded as a significant example of hybrid warfare. While the intervention was justified by accusations of tyranny against Moammar Gaddafi, it is argued that it served the interests of Western powers, particularly in terms of oil extraction and regime change. This perspective suggests that the invasion was a tactical move, facilitated by the use of propaganda and proxy organizations such as NGOs. Human rights organizations and NGOs were implicated in this narrative, as they allegedly supported the invasion by highlighting human rights abuses. This portrayal underscores the role of NGOs as a form of soft power and a component of hybrid warfare, influencing global governance and economic relationships. For instance, the involvement of NGOs in the conflict can be seen as a means of promoting economic linkages and pluralism on a global scale. This interpretation is supported by the work of scholars such as Aras and Dagher, who have analysed the use of soft power and hybrid warfare in international conflicts.

During Moammar Gaddafi's rule, allegations of human rights violations surfaced, with the West interpreting them as a ploy to retain power. Some political analysts suggested that the West supported protests against Gaddafi to foment violence and force a harsh response, resembling elements of hybrid warfare. While the Gaddafi regime did use significant force against certain protesters, reports by *The Guardian* alleging the controversial mass rape and use of Viagra as a weapon of war by the Gaddafi regime were reportedly unfounded thereby indicating elements of propaganda elements intended on turning public international opinion against the Libyan regime. NATO's intervention is, thus, seen by some as an attempt to shift power in favour of the insurgents believed to be proxies of the

West and to create political instability for resource exploitation under the guise of restoring democracy and human rights. This has led to perceptions of NATO and its allies actively pursuing regime change in anti-Western governments through grand strategy and hybrid warfare, including political espionage and media propaganda. This is proved further by the capacity of British Prime Minister David Cameron, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to urge and approve a resolution granting NATO legal authority to enforce a no-fly zone over Libya. The complex interplay between military, political, and economic interests in the Libyan intervention exemplifies the multifaceted nature of modern warfare and global power dynamics.

The United States' utilization of "war on terror" declarations during the Iraq invasion can be interpreted as a strategy to manipulate the international system and justify military intervention in the region. Hlabiso A.'s 2023 study proposes that the US employed propaganda and misinformation to persuade the international community that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction, thereby legitimizing their actions in the Middle East. This can be viewed as a form of hybrid warfare, as Iraq did not possess such weapons, as later confirmed by the BBC and CNN around 2023. In response, Iraq adopted its own hybrid tactics, using non-state and international actors to counter the ISIL. The US also acted as a hybrid participant in this conflict, employing a combination of traditional air power, advisers to Iraqi government troops, Kurdish peshmerga, sectarian militias, and trained opposition forces within Syria. This demonstrates the complex and interconnected nature of hybrid warfare, where state and non-state actors collaborate to achieve their objectives. The invasion of Iraq and the subsequent rise of ISIS have had enduring consequences for the region and US foreign policy. This use of hybrid warfare underscores the significance of comprehending and addressing the complexities of modern warfare, where traditional military power alone may not be adequate to achieve desired outcomes. Instead, a combination of conventional and non-conventional tactics, as seen in the US's approach, may be necessary to effectively address threats and accomplish strategic goals.

CONCLUSION

The modern international system has witnessed a substantial evolution in military strategy, demanding more sophisticated and flexible approaches to align with contemporary military dynamics. This evolution encompasses a diverse set of strategies, such as military intelligence, strategic diplomacy, technological diplomacy, grand strategy, adversarial partnerships, and cyber and technological warfare. The shifting landscape of warfare and the growing significance of technology across multiple domains has given rise to new warfighting approaches, necessitating innovative

thinking and strategies to safeguard the security of nations and their interests. This transformation is evidenced by the increasing integration of technology into military operations and the growing emphasis on non-traditional security challenges, reflecting the need for adaptive and multifaceted military strategies in the 21st century.

The importance of intelligence gathering and analysis in informing military decisions and addressing modern threats in international relations cannot be overstated. Prioritizing these activities provides military organizations with a deeper understanding of the strategic environment, enabling them to adapt their approaches and enhance the success of their operations, thereby contributing to global stability as well as the effective implementation of coercive diplomacy, strategic diplomacy, grand strategy and adverse partnerships. Academic research supports this, demonstrating that effective intelligence analysis improves decision-making and operational outcomes. Moreover, the advancement of science and technology can significantly enhance these capabilities. Investment in this area of cyber and technological warfare facilitates the development of tools and techniques that can bolster the accuracy and speed of intelligence activities, ultimately benefiting military outcomes. Therefore, it is imperative for military entities to prioritize the development of robust intelligence capabilities and invest in science and technology to ensure their operational success and global stability. NATO's strategy in countering hybrid warfare and strengthening national resilience further underscores the significance of this approach in addressing modern security challenges.

The strategic integration of diplomacy and military strategy is also crucial for enhancing military strategy and national security. The National Defence Strategy (NDS) offers a comprehensive approach to achieving this integration, focusing on key principles such as partnerships, deterrence, diplomacy, integration, and values. By devising an ends-ways-means-risks/costs relationship that reconciles the ends with the means and ways, the goal of Full Spectrum Dominance can be realized, ensuring the ability to control any situation or defeat any adversary. Maintaining and increasing the qualitative military advantages countries such as the United States currently enjoy requires intellectual and cultural changes across the joint community.

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