

1 Introduction: Motivation, Purpose and Structure of the Book

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Reasoning and Motivation for the Book

The present authors have been collaborating in various research and writing projects since 2005. Most of these have involved various issues at the national (Romania), regional (Black Sea Region) or global level in the practitioner and academic fields of crisis management, politics, international relations, geopolitics and security studies. This collaboration has resulted in a book on crisis management in Romania in 2007 (Chifu & Ramberg, 2007) and followed by a book on the nature of warfare in the twenty-first century (Simons & Chifu, 2017). Different patterns and processes in international politics, international relations and geopolitics were noted in these publications and various research projects.

This has led the authors to conclude that the time is ripe to update the findings of the previous publications and consider the various observable global trends and patterns. There is an especially acute need for consideration of the evolving transformation of the global order and the possible effects of Coronavirus as the nature of risk and threats evolve and multiply in hard and soft forms. There are increasing calls for a reform to the orthodoxy of knowledge and practice in Western foreign and security policy, such as an open call for Joe Biden to reform and not simply restore US foreign policy, away from the cynical and (self-) destructive patterns of the twenty-first century (and even before).¹ This is even more essential when one considers the increased fracturing of our societies coupled with the decreasing level of civility in critical public debates concerning the direction of Western civilisation.

There is a clear and present need to rethink where we are and where we are going with the current state and trajectory of warfare as foreign policy. The authors hold, at times, diverging opinions and understandings of

¹ D. Davis, *Biden Must Not Restore Foreign Policy, but Reform It*, Washington Examiner, Biden must not restore foreign policy, but reform it (washingtonexaminer.com), 11 January 2021 (accessed 11 January 2021).

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these processes that are described above. However, instead of considering this lack of consensus as a weakness and a problem, we embrace the pluralism as a strength. A lively and divergent debate on critical issues has the effect of sharpening one's critical thinking and intellectual senses. Given the timeliness of the current debates, together with the need to not present any form of group think, filter bubble or echo chamber, the qualitative assessments and evaluations of the research can vary between the chapters to present a wide range of considered and weighed views and opinions.

The title of the present book, *Rethinking Warfare in the 21st Century: The Influence and Effect of the Politics, Information and Communication Mix*, may seem to have a rather elusive meaning. But we have a clear reasoned logic and motive for this particular title. The contemporary approach to the operationalisation of warfare, is the subjective (geo)politicisation of armed conflicts through the projection of increasingly relativised and selective information through its interpretation and representation in descriptive and not analytical contexts (before, during and after) of warfare. These relationships and interactions are important to highlight, as information and communication support politics, and it is politics that drives the motivation for, and the strategy and goals of, contemporary warfare.

The real added value of the research is not to be found in the individual parts that make up the chapters of this book, even though these present compelling and illustrative snapshots of various practical and theoretical problems, but rather in the knowledge that is derived from a sum of these parts in the conclusion. The intention is to locate and highlight the red thread that unites these very diverse individual parts in order to highlight and to understand the common lessons, opportunities and threats that transcend the tactical and operational level debates and presented information. It is the intention of this book to engage in understanding the strategic picture of trends and processes of the politics and communication of conflict and warfare in the twenty-first century, rather than concentrating on specific individual tactical or operational-level events in international relations.

Questions for the Book

Each chapter in this book approaches the issue of presenting, analysing and drawing conclusions from the study of twenty-first-century warfare in rather different qualitative ways. Readers may ask, and rightly so, how is it possible to draw general conclusions from the content of this book? The topic is certainly a critical one, but it is also a diversely understood

and operationalised subject. A way around this is to pose a set of theoretically and conceptually informed questions in the Introduction of the book, which cut across all divides. There are three such questions, which are to be answered in the Conclusion, which weigh and analyse the sum of the parts:

- (1) Is warfare in the twenty-first century qualitatively different from earlier periods in human history?
- (2) How do politics and information ‘inform’ and influence twenty-first-century warfare?
- (3) What are the possible trends and transformations of twenty-first-century warfare from this point in time?

In answering these questions in the Conclusion, it is hoped to pull together the common knowledge and lessons that can be drawn from the diverse topics and subjects in the individual chapters. Creating this red thread will unite the key points that are hinted at in the title of this book – the influence and effect of the politics, information and communication mix. Following this thread, one will be able to critically assess, reconsider and rethink the nature of warfare across the globe in the twenty-first century, and to understand where the current trajectory is taking global civilisations and humankind.

The following sections concern various key elements and aspects that will appear across the different chapters of this book and should be taken into consideration when making sense of when, why and how conflicts and warfare begin.

Global Transformations and Changes: Away from a Western-Centric World Order?

The world of international relations and global orders are in a constant state of motion throughout human history; some hegemonies rising, others stagnating and declining, and others that maintain their power and influence. There are even observable variations within a particular branded period of geopolitical history, where a brand name signifies the implied relations between various actors and the balance of power. For example, the Cold War era that signified relations between the US-led West and the Soviet Union-led Eastern Bloc. In this seemingly homogeneous period, until the final collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991 that led to the end of the Cold War, there were attempts to find and label variations, such as the discussions concerning the possibility of the existence of a New Cold War within the ‘Old’ Cold War (Kubalkova &

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Cruickshank, 1986). The ‘victory’ of the US-led West over the Soviet-led Eastern Bloc created a sense of euphoria and self-righteous belief that has created a messianic aura of attempts to spread liberalism and US influence, without any immediate and effective checks or balances by other actors.

As such, it has created a relative complacency in the West whereby the likes of Kissinger (2015) and others have tried to warn against allowing this to become deeply embedded into policymaking and practitioner mindsets. Globalisation was accelerated in the wake of the Cold War, becoming a vehicle for both entrenching and expanding Western global influence and power. However, it is a theoretical construct that is contested intellectually and practically (Germain, 2013). One can also argue that globalisation has presented an opportunity for powers that challenge the hegemonic system to do so.

In 2018 John Mearsheimer published the book *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*, which caused a great deal of debate. He concluded that the liberal hegemony and foreign policy course of the United States was doomed to fail, where liberal hegemony was facilitated by the country’s unipolarity. He argued that the emergence of China and Russia has ended unipolarity and ushered in an era of multipolarity, where realism has replaced liberalism as the objective of an ideologically based grand strategy (of spreading liberalism) with the focus on a balance of power politics.² This is manifested in an increasing level of competition and global instability as the strength and capacity of the current global hegemon is becoming visibly weakened in both a tangible and intangible manner.

Richard Haas has argued that stable world orders are a rare thing, that global orders have come and gone throughout history and that this is an inevitable fate. He also points out the basic fact that, even if one wished to, there is no ability to turn back the clock to an idealised period in the history of the order and freeze time and circumstances. A further point made is that new orders emerge from the ashes of an old one. There are notable signs of decay in the US-led global order, which Haas suggests requires a careful management of its deterioration rather than trying to resurrect what it was historically, and this requires a mixture of compromise, incentives and pushback.³ However, the evolving global order

² R. Vivaldelli, *Interview With Mearsheimer*, <https://lobelog.com/interview-with-mearsheimer/>, 22 March 2019 (accessed 11 April 2019).

³ R. Haas, *How a World Order Ends, and What Comes in Its Wake*, Foreign Affairs, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-12-11/how-world-order-ends, 11 December 2018 (accessed 18 December 2018).

involves much more than merely the influence and effect of politics and geopolitics on the system; intangibles such as culture and perception effectively shape the cognitive realm's interpretation and evaluation of the physical realm.

There is a return, if in fact it had ever departed, to popular geopolitics in influencing people's perception of other countries and parts of the world. This in turn influences their perception and opinion of actors and acts in international relations by creating 'idealised' perceptions through audience exposure to ideas and images (re)produced in popular culture (Szostek, 2017). One of the problems of contemporary Western academia is the absence of culture as a variable affecting international relations scholarship, or at least a sufficiently nuanced manner to understand its effects. Criticism of this basic fact has been noted.

In today's world politics, culture is everywhere. The rise of non-Western great powers, the return of ethnonationalism, violent extremism justified in the name of religion, and so-called white resistance – the list goes on. Yet those who should be best placed to explain it – international relations scholars – are ill-equipped to do so.⁴

As noted by the author above, the main schools of thought retain an obsolete understanding of how civilisations function, which is perhaps a hangover from Fukuyama's triumphant and premature declaration of the 'end of history' in reference to the perceived decisive and all-encompassing victory of Western civilisation (defined as a community of nations) as a unified global culture. This is visualised through how a country views and defines itself as a nation or as a civilisation or something else. As there is a gradual move away from accepting the Western ideology of Liberalism and Globalisation by countries such as China and Russia that define themselves as civilisations (with unique cultural values and political institutions) rather than nations, there is a resulting transformation of geopolitics away from liberal universalism towards cultural exceptionalism.⁵ This is already having a profound impact upon the physical realm of international relations and the informational representations of it.

The population growth and economic rise of some Asian powers, such as China and India, have already culminated in the predictions of a rise in

⁴ Reus-Smit, C., *International Relations Theory Doesn't Understand Culture*, Foreign Policy, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/21/international-relations-theory-doesnt-understand-culture/>, 21 March 2019 (accessed 23 March 2019).

⁵ Pabst, A., *China, Russia and the Return of the Civilisational State*, New Statesman, <https://www.newstatesman.com/2019/05/china-russia-and-return-civilisational-state>, 8 May 2019 (accessed 18 June 2019).

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Asia (an Asian century) surpassing the US and Europe in terms of power and influence.⁶ This fits with the overall strategic picture of the transformation in the global order away from a Western-centric construction. Diesen (2018) notes that China's continued rise through the geoeconomics of the 'One Belt One Road' strategy has the US on the defensive and seeking to push back via expanding the New Cold War to target China as a means of attempting to arrest the rise of China's global power and influence. It has also meant that Russia, as the earlier target of containment attempts in the New Cold War, has transformed the Sino-Russian partnership from a marriage of convenience to a strategic alliance. In doing so, this has broken the long-adhered-to US geopolitical Cold War rule of dividing China and Russia.

The result of these actions and reactions has been to increase the global level of tension and instability that involve various symbolic and actual demonstrations of power and resolve towards the opponent/competitor that has resulted in the narrative of a New Cold War. Some observers have referred to the situation as creating a new global tinderbox.⁷ This situation has in turn created several alarmist political calls to action and mass media headlines. One such example is the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's claim that the US was developing a strategy for China based on the notion that for the first time in US history it was fighting 'with a really different civilisation'; the difference being that China is not a product of Western philosophy and history.⁸ The clear message here is that China is profoundly different in terms of culture and approach and is a grave threat to the continued US global hegemony. A scenario of a Chinese military threat (which runs counter to the narrative of Western military technological superiority) to the US was broached in the run up to the 2020 US presidential elections. Different hypothetical scenarios were posed where US forces in the Pacific region were vulnerable to a sudden Chinese attack; a contest that the US could potentially lose.⁹ These are attempts to prime and rally the public by

⁶ V. Romei & J. Reed, *The Asian Century Is Set to Begin*, The Financial Times, www.ft.com/content/520cb6f6-2958-11e9-a5ab-ff8ef2b976c7, 26 March 2019 (accessed 28 March 2019).

⁷ M. T. Klare, *The New Global Tinderbox*, Le Monde Diplomatique, <https://mondediplo.com/openpage/tinderbox-cold-war>, 30 October 2018 (accessed 31 October 2018).

⁸ J. Gehrke, *State Department Preparing for Clash of Civilisations with China*, Washington Examiner, www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/defense-national-security/state-department-preparing-for-clash-of-civilizations-with-china, 30 April 2019 (1 May 2019).

⁹ J. Gehrke, *Top Republican Senator Fears China Could Defeat US in the West Pacific*, Washington Examiner, www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/defense-national-

inducing fear, which is becoming more commonplace in the practice of international relations in an unstable era.

In 1998, in reaction to the Eastward expansion of NATO, the architect of the US containment of the Soviet Union, George Kennan, declared, ‘I think it is the beginning of a new cold war. I think the Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies. I think it is a tragic mistake. There was no reason for this whatsoever. No one was threatening anybody else.’¹⁰ George Kennan’s analysis and foresight in 1998 seems to have been realised in the opening years of the twenty-first century. In the wake of the Colour Revolutions and the Arab Spring, Russia has been reassessing its position and role in the world and has taken a more assertive stance in articulating and defending its perceived national interests.¹¹ This has resulted in a mixture of cooperation and competition between Russia and other external powers seeking influence in post-Soviet space, where Russia pursues a strongly pragmatic rather than ideological foreign policy line (Wlodkowska-Bagan, 2012; Markedonov & Suchkov, 2020). The leading Western powers also demonstrate an evolving strategy in these times of global transformation.

It is evident that the US-led West seeks to retain its declining position as the global hegemon and the benefits that come with this lead position. However, the tactics employed to achieve this are likely, as noted by Waldman (2021), to have a detrimental strategic effect and consequences that potentially accelerate this erosion. Actions seem to be taken without regard to the longer-term consequences, even if they are supported by eloquent rhetoric. France’s actions in the regime change of Gaddafi during the cover provided by the Arab Spring, and its subsequent actions to gain influence, serve as a reminder that there are consequences in the use of short-term tactics to achieve long-term strategic interests.¹² The US has been suffering the effects of ill-conceived strategies and hastily executed militarised foreign policy operations.

During the period of the Cold War, the US often resorted to the use of covert regime change operations. The reasons for this were: that it

security/top-republican-senator-fears-china-could-defeat-us-in-the-west-pacific, 29 July 2020 (accessed 30 July 2020).

¹⁰ T. L. Friedman, *Foreign Affairs; Now a Word From X*, The New York Times, www.nytimes.com/1998/05/02/opinion/foreign-affairs-now-a-word-from-x.html, 2 May 1998 (accessed 24 March 2019).

¹¹ NAMEA Group, *Uncoiled Spring: Russia’s New View of Its Role in the World*, NAMEA Geopolitical Update, www.namea-advisors.com/blog/namea-geopolitical-update, 30 October 2015 (accessed 9 November 2015).

¹² P. Taylor, *France’s Double Game in Libya*, Politico, www.politico.eu/article/frances-double-game-in-libya-nato-un-khalifa-haftar/, 17 April 2019 (accessed 26 December 2019).

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exposed fewer US service personnel lives to risk; and overt operations may well have triggered a Soviet counter-response that ran the risk of rapid escalation. However, with the end of the Cold War as a result of the Soviet collapse, several overt military regime change operations came into effect (1999 in Kosovo, 2003 in Iraq and 2011 in Libya). However, the outcomes are unpredictable, the lives of citizens in the target country are adversely affected and US interests and reputation can be compromised. Given the costs to political capital from overuse, a return to covert regime change has resumed; such as in Syria, Venezuela or Iran.¹³ This has created a growing backlash against those that champion foreign regime change, which has resulted in the US fighting wars that cannot be won militarily ('Forever Wars') and come with political and financial losses.¹⁴ The open assassination in January 2020 of Iranian General Qassim Soleimani in Iraq, and the subsequent touting of it, was a display of rapid and reckless foreign policy escalation. Such an act would have previously been undertaken by more covert means in order to maintain diplomatic appearances. By breaking this 'rule', the US exposes itself to the risk of the same tactics being used against it, as it has with the use of drones and cyber-attacks.¹⁵ This act of war against another country, carried out under false pretences has not halted the continuing decline of US influence in the Middle East region or the feeling of unease and lack of support by key allies who are uncomfortable with this sort of crude and risky act.

The current global transformation is creating an environment of increasing instability and tensions. This is owing to the breaking up, or at least the weakening, of the old agreed upon sets of 'rules' and guidelines that used to regulate international relations in the era of US unipolarity, and the absence of new 'rules' or guidelines that regulate the new and emerging relations between powers of various sizes. It is a period where international actors are trying to increase or retain their power and influence on the international stage. There are also actors attempting to position or reposition themselves in the marketplace of actors (hegemon, defender, challenger, nicher and so forth) in the global order, as new powers begin to rise and old hegemonies seem to be failing.

¹³ S. Kinzer, *America's Legacy of Regime Change*, The Future of Freedom Foundation, America's Legacy of Regime Change – The Future of Freedom Foundation (fff.org), 10 June 2019 (accessed 18 June 2019).

¹⁴ T. Parsi & S. Toossi, *Beware the Foreign Regime Change Charlatans*, The American Conservative, www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/beware-the-regime-change-cottage-industry, 24 January 2019 (accessed 29 January 2019).

¹⁵ G. E. Fuller, *US Foreign Policy by Assassination*, Graham E. Fuller, US Foreign Policy by Assassination (grahamefuller.com), 4 January 2020 (accessed 7 January 2020); K. Gilsinan, *America's Self-Sabotage in the Middle East*, The Atlantic, U.S. Derails Own Middle East Goals – The Atlantic, 6 January 2020 (accessed 7 January 2020).

Not All Types of Warfare Are Equal

The nature and state of warfare in the twentieth century is a picture of a rapidly evolving and diverse way of engaging an opponent, from clear conflicts such as World Wars I and II, to those much less clear and far more ambiguous, such as the Vietnam War. There were varied elements of national interest, geography, ideology, religion, ethnicity, blood and other reasons underlying those conflicts. Sometimes these were wars of attrition, at other times they were wars of manoeuvre (Harkavy & Neuman, 2001; Maoz & Gat, 2001). The conflicts themselves were motivated and initiated sometimes by reasoned logic and often by emotional logic. Tactics and strategies used by the players were intended to try and utilise one's own strengths against the enemy's weaknesses, and to offset the vice-versa situation.

In 1991, the mostly peaceful collapse of the Eastern Bloc heralded the end of the Cold War and the relative stability of the bipolar global order. It was stable and relatively predictable owing to the balance of power, mutually assured destruction, and gradually established rules of the geopolitical game designed to prevent inadvertent conflict between the superpowers. This collapse of the Cold War predictability ushered in a reassessment of the future of conflict in the context of a unipolar global order, with the United States as the sole superpower remaining (Maoz & Gat, 2001). Therefore, there are less constraints and restraints on the US capability and willingness to engage covertly or overtly in forced regime change operations in the post-Cold War era (Walker, 2019). Wars and warfare moved from the often proxy and insurgency style of the Cold War to the façade of humanitarian intervention and 'preventative' style of the post-Cold War era.

Wars and warfare require political consensus and a certain level of public approval, or at least a lack of resistance, to be effectively initiated and waged; hence the political and social environment need to be carefully cultivated in order that war aims are seen as 'legitimate' at the elite and public level (Western, 2005). There are various and multiple political and military constraints on the enthusiasm and the ability to wage war, especially in nominally democratic countries, where different actors lobby behind the scenes at the national and international level either against, or in order to force, a course of military action (Dixon, 2019). In addition to political opportunity and expediency, there are other environmental elements that need to be considered to persuade and influence an audience into accepting, or at least not offering effective resistance against, a policy leading to war.

One of those elements is a perception of normality versus the abnormality of the represented and interpreted wider political and social human environment. As noted by Brecher (2018), the declaration or

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the actual eventuality of a crisis can potentially create sufficient instability, motive and opportunity for increasing the likelihood of a conflict. This is something that has been observed throughout human history, extraordinary times (whether true or fake), precipitated by the invocation of a crisis, prompt the political rhetorical call and mobilisation for action to nominally resolve the problematic situation; even if, in fact, such calls may exacerbate the crisis event in question, for example the proposal to send arms to one side in a proxy war in order to alleviate a humanitarian disaster. These are misleading interpretations communicated in the information realm that are intended to shape and influence the conclusions created in the cognitive realm of the target audience.

Another element is the role and influence of technology on the physical and cognitive realms. As technology develops increasingly sophisticated and more powerful means of communication to mass audiences, and at the same time weapons systems developed are much more destructive in their capability, Betz (2015) argues that contemporary conflicts are much less a contest of arms and are increasingly a contest of hearts and minds. This situation also allows non-state actors to increasingly challenge the authority and status quo imposed by tangibly powerful state actors. It is also noted by other observers who conclude ‘the practice of military conflicts during the past decade demonstrates that the strategic advantage goes to the actor who first understands and implements new technologies, who can use them as a force multiplier and therefore overcome superior conventional forces – often without provoking a sustained response’ (Danyk, Maliarchuk & Briggs, 2017: 23). Conflict and warfare are gradually moving in a direction that is much less transparent and accountable, and are more for the purposes of short-term political or geopolitical gain.

For example, Waldman (2019, 2021) has noted a gradual transformation of the manner of waging war by the United States in the post-World War II era. This has seen an evolution from conventional deployments and engagements to more covert and secretive military operations, which he labels as being vicarious warfare (please see Chapter seven of this volume for more details). This form of warfare tends to expose US combat troops less to the risks of combat operations, is financially less burdensome, accumulates short-term political capital and is done more covertly in terms of public accountability, and is politically expedient for potential rewards while trying to escape the consequences. All these aspects tend to be tactically advantageous to the political elite to fulfil their ambitions. However, it can be damaging in terms of the hidden costs and the potential for strategic harm that is caused to the national interest.

There are a number of themes that emerge from popular publications (non-academic) on the different aspects of contemporary warfare, which