

# THE IMPERATIVE OF INTELLIGENCE TRANSFORMATION IN CONTEMPORARY WARFARE

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## Abstract

*Warfare has been a consistently evolving phenomenon, and kept transforming according to the dictates of prevalent combat environments, shaped by the global political, economic, technological and strategic dynamics. Consequently, warfare has morphed from conventionally waged large scale conflicts to modern-day hybrid, asymmetric and mostly grey zone battles, where it is hard to differentiate between war and peace. Evaluation of combat modes dictates revolution in the response methodologies as well, and thus realignment of strategy, resources and orientation becomes inevitable. A state's entire national security hierarchy, especially a vital stakeholder like the intelligence, would need to decisively adapt for the impending challenges, mainly transpiring in the unconventional modes. Notwithstanding consistent revolution in the military affairs, there has not been compatible reforms undertaken to transform intelligence beyond conventionally oriented structures and functional modalities. This paper contends that national security intelligence has to evolve in compatibility with the changing modes of modern warfare.*

**Keywords:** *Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), Intelligence, Hybrid Warfare, Cognitive Domain, Influence Campaigns*

## Introduction

The current global security dynamics are characterized by the declining threat of conventional war, but with ever rising hazards that were barely contemplated during the earlier conflicts. The probability of a major war in the developed world, appears to be diminishing - a significant transformation of human nature or significant

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deviation from the prevalent global political structure.<sup>1</sup> The scenes of large scale armed conflicts, are now swapped with multifaceted security challenges such as failing states, terrorist activities, asymmetric conflicts, political subversions, trans-border crimes and humanitarian crisis. The evolving national security paradigm not only requires to be acquainted with the plethora of emerging threats, but also aligned to counter any exploitable vulnerabilities by the adversaries. Policy makers would need, not only to assess the existing capability of the state against unconventional threats, but also anticipate essential restructuring of the security institutions. This paper argues that the structural and functional modalities of national security intelligence must undergo transformation to maintain relevance in the face of evolving, non-conventional warfare.

The 'Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA)' is a paradigm shift in the military organization, strategic culture - and political strategy - the factors essential for anticipating the potential transformation in the art of warfare.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, transformative strategies have been correspondingly responded with counter reformations at the opposing end, generally with innovative combat methodologies and modes. In the post-cold war global arena a process of transformation in military technology, outlook of the armed forces, as well as the nature of warfare is taking place.<sup>3</sup> This transformation is not only well-pronounced and rapid in certain domains, but also seamlessly altering the conventional modes of conflict. While RMA has been a widely deliberated subject, there is little debate about the 'Revolution in Intelligence Affairs (RIA), a domain equally crucial for national security.

It has been contended that states may not be the solitary actors alone, since greater human loss is caused by ethnic conflicts, global pandemics, or incessant proliferation of small arms, compared to interstate wars.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, given relatively diminishing prospects of conventional wars, the proliferation of non-state groups, operating independently or with a state's connivance, is on the rise. Few of these non-state forces may initiate armed struggle against either, the elites in the underdeveloped world, or the developed nations on premises such as

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<sup>1</sup> John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War*, (New York: Basic Books 1989), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Artur Gruszczak, and Sebastian Kaempf, eds, *Routledge Handbook of the future of warfare*, (London: routledge, 2024), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Hirst, *War and Power in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The State, Military Conflict and the International System*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 7.

<sup>4</sup> Elke Krahmman, *New Threats and New Actors in International Security*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 3.

environmentalism, religious extremism and nationalist secessionism.<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding, debate over the rise of unconventional warfare or peripheral nature of traditional warfighting, the role of intelligence would continue to be vital. However, for an effective response to the evolving security threats, intelligence organizations would need to transform structurally and functionally. This paper contends that with the evolution of warfare, intelligence hierarchy needs to realign itself for the impending security challenges.

## Literature Review

Evolution of warfare and national security intelligence, both in own right, are among the extensively deliberated subjects in the western world. There is ample debate on the evolving nature of warfare and inevitability of corresponding transformation in the response strategies as well. However, deliberations about the emerging modes of combat, especially its unconventionality, and consequential necessity of intelligence reforms, continue to be relatively occasional. This paper endeavors to interlink widely undertaken work on both the domains, and seeks to find connectivity in the two mainly individual trajectories.

Transformation of warfare and decline of conventional conflict has been a widely debated subject. The Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA)' is regarded as a paradigm shift in military organization, strategic culture and political strategy by Artur Gruszczak and Sebastian Kaempf. Gruszczak and Kaempf identify social, cultural and economic factors as the sources of turmoil, and violence, suggesting that warfare is facing an accelerated transformation. Discussing the evolution of warfare, John Mueller thinks that large conflicts among developed world are becoming obsolete.<sup>6</sup> Paul Hirst is of the view that with evolving military technology, the outlook of the armed forces, and the nature of warfare and balance of military power is changing.<sup>7</sup> He goes on to suggest that now, non-state forces can start armed struggle against the elites in developing world. Robert Dover and Michael Goodman, suggest that threats are no more confined to any specific jurisdiction and proliferate every human sphere.<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Sims

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<sup>5</sup> Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, 3rd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012)

<sup>6</sup> John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989)

<sup>7</sup> Paul Hirst, *War and Power in the 21st Century: The State, Military Conflict and the International System* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 99

<sup>8</sup> Robert Dover and Michael S. Goodman, *Spinning Intelligence: Ethical and Strategic Dilemmas* (London: Hurst & Company, 2009)

talks of traditional power shifts caused by wealth redistribution, and demographic changes.<sup>9</sup>

There has been an extensive debate over the rise of non-state actors and hybrid domains in the post-cold war world. State is no more regarded as the solitary actor by Elke Krahnemann, as ethnic conflicts, pandemics, or the small arms proliferation are new and devastating threats. Likewise, to Mick Ryan, progress in technology impacts geopolitics, demography, as well as climate issues. Discussing changes in the security paradigm, Dan Caldwell and Robert Williams, claim that security cannot be restricted against military threats alone. Iulian Chifu and Greg Simons, opine that during irregular conflict, non-standing army is used for secretive military activities, labeled as 'vicarious warfare'. Thomas Rid, highlights covert support of dissident entities among adversaries; Christopher Coker claims 'irony' as the most striking feature of contemporary warfare, while Sean McFate, underlines as to how various actors define modern warfare. Lucas Kello talks about physical over virtual and interstate over sub-threshold and introduces terminology of the 'state of unpeace,' while for Chris McNab, Russians employ 'hybrid warfare' for military objectives.

Discussing evolution of modern warfare further, Leszek Sykulski claims that Russian Colonel Yevgeny Messner introduced 'rebel wars', involving diversion, terror, partisanship, and insurrection. Various terminologies describe contemporary warfare; Sean McFate's 'nonwar wars,' and David Kilcullen's use of 'liminal warfare' space term, are among these. Chinese Liang Qiao and Xiangsui Wang suggest that there is no domain modern warfare cannot use; Sarah Bressan and Mari-Liis Sulg opine that violence in the grey zone has substituted conventional war, while for Philip Kapusta, present conflict is characterized by ambiguity. Geraint Hughes believes the grey zone helps avoid overt warfare, while John Mueller thinks that due to intolerable cost, war has lost its appeal. Richard Ullman warns against defining national security in military terms alone, with Dan Caldwell and Robert Williams suggesting that insecurity transcends socioeconomic and geographic constraints. James Rosenau adds that security agenda has expanded, while Mary Kaldor thinks military technology has rendered symmetrical war unlikely. David Carment and Dani Belo declare that present geopolitical conflicts have an ambiguous point of victory, whereas according to Mohammed Ayoob, security concerns of weak states are 'internal in character.'

Technological disruption and intelligence adaptation with the evolving national security threat matrix is also among the well-researched

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<sup>9</sup> Jennifer E. Sims, "The Global Context," in *The Oxford Handbook of National Security Intelligence*, ed. Loch K. Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

topics. William Lahneman, thinks that revolution is a constant of human endeavor, hence, the intelligence enterprise cannot not be immune to change. Andrew Rathmell believes that intelligence's 'grand narrative' is over after the cold war, while according to Lahneman, good intelligence is becoming hard with the end of Soviet focal point. Michael Herman is of the view that governments seeking assumptions about future and uncertainties, rely on the intelligence. According to Scott Breckinridge and Herman, intelligence is historically organized for information-gathering, a complicated task now as in the opinion of Shay Hershkovitz, threat is mainly linked with the civilian world. Jennifer Sims believes that intelligence is to provide decision-advantage to the policy makers. While commenting on intelligence's present challenges, Jeffrey Cooper identify continued reliance on analytic tools and methodologies of cold war era, which may not be adequate now.

Discussing about the impact of technology on intelligence, Bruce Berkowitz and Allan Goodman suggest that the ease of access to various information sources with the availability of thousands of cable services channels and content on Internet has brought new challenges to the intelligence. Sims is of the view that technology results in the evolution of information processing empires, while for Berkowitz and Goodman, information revolution' may be the single most significant issue, affecting the contemporary intelligence organizations. Literature on intelligence reforms also highlights the emerging threats in the cognitive domain, and how this aspect is evolving into significant challenge. Adamsky Dmitry underlines Russian strategic philosophy of exercising reflexive control, primarily in the cognitive domain. Alyson Bailes suggests that the threats are consciously and actively created, while Shay Hershkovitz emphasizes how covert campaigns are employed to affect public's consciousness, both home and abroad. Jennifer Sims highlights the rising concerns with competitors' relative knowledge as well as informational resources, and labels these as the major disruptors of the modern world. Patrick Taillon underlines the significance of establishing the traceability of information, a rising challenge for the intelligence in the contemporary world.

## **Research Methodology**

The paper relies on qualitative methodology to explore evolutionary transformation in modern warfare, especially after the cold war, and how it has influenced the security environment of the contemporary world. It examines the role of national security intelligence in the emerging combat environments and the challenges of adaptability, when evolving threats are hard to anticipate. The research seeks to draw parallels between evolving warfare and intelligence functions, which somehow seem to lack compatibility with the impending modes of threats, especially in the developing world. The paper utilizes previously

undertaken research on warfare and intelligence along with relevant books, dissertations, research papers, and other pertinent sources. The reliance on the previous research is based on the premise as well as limitation that intelligence is among the least discussed subjects in most of the world other than the US and UK.

## **Evolution of Warfare: From Conventional to Unconventional**

### **Revolution in Military Affairs**

Warfare is often categorized in various form: regular or conventional, involving traditional militaries; irregular or unconventional, where one of the belligerents relies upon non-standing army for activities in the domains of insurgency or terrorism; high-intensity which is often linked with conventional mode, and low-intensity that usually reflects irregular wars.<sup>10</sup> Compared to any earlier period of recorded history, war fighting has relatively evolved quickly during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, apparently due to rapid technological progression. Contemporary warfare is morphing as well as diversifying into broader and perhaps innovative methodologies; from 'hybrid, compound, mosaic, unrestricted, three-block, to surrogate, vicarious, postmodern and chaoplexic' forms.<sup>11</sup> The incessant evolution of warfare has added newest complexities in the security domain, where frequent reappraisal of strategic threat landscape has become inevitable.

There has been an evolution of conflicts from traditionally regarded 'conventional deployments and engagements,' usually in an overt form to more covert military actions, which are labeled as being 'vicarious warfare.'<sup>12</sup> Covert warfare has always been an essential ingredient of conflicts and employed judiciously for complementing the major activity. In the conventional realm, clandestine operations mainly implied the kinetic efforts with an asymmetric orientation against the targets in the adversary's mainland or a neutral territory. Despite the growing proclivity towards non-traditional warfare at present, the employment of secret operations persist, but with an obvious evolution in the methodology. Consequently, the covert support of subversive groups, political parties, or

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<sup>10</sup> Iulian Chifu and Greg Simons, *Rethinking Warfare in the 21st Century: The Influence and Effects of the Politics, Information and Communication Mix*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 342.

<sup>11</sup> Gruszczak and Kaempf, *Future of Warfare*, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Chifu and Simons, *Rethinking Warfare*, 10.

pliant media organizations is undertaken in the contested places, besides customary paramilitary actions or assassinations.<sup>13</sup>

Christopher Coker envisages 'irony' being the most striking feature of warfare after cold war where: distinguishing between peace and conflict has become hard; winning may not be the key objective compared to containing the battle; anticipating the evolving nature of war is becoming challenging; and finally, the winning side can still feel worse off compared to the loser of the battle.<sup>14</sup> While essentially, the mode of modern day conflicts are generally similar, different terminologies have been in use to catalogue various types of irregular, asymmetric and unconventional warfare. Americans term the space laying somewhere in-between war and peace as the 'Gray Zone;' for the Russians, it is 'New Generation Warfare;' Israelis call it a 'Campaign between the Wars;' whereas Chinese label it as the 'Three Warfare strategy.'<sup>15</sup> The argument over the changing modes, methodologies and nature of warfare, continued after the assertions of Coker in his work 'Post-modern War,' published in 1998.

## **Evolution of Asymmetry & Unconventionality in the Warfare**

The debate on the evolution of warfare has introduced several new concepts, and terminologies to describe the evolving dynamics of warfare in the contemporary world. A skepticism has, however, been identified that persistently believes in the primacy of physical over virtual dimension, interstate conflict over sub-threshold clash, and preeminence of states over non-traditional actors.<sup>16</sup> According to some analysts, Russians are the exponents of 'hybrid warfare,' seeking military objectives by a fusion of conventional war-fighting with unconventional, and asymmetric instruments such as insurgency, propaganda, political maneuvering as well as crucially, cyberwarfare.<sup>17</sup> This contention has some kind of veracity, when the contemporary modes of warfare that are essentially non-conventional, are compared with past Russian military lexicon. All types of conflicts below the threshold of an open war, and

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<sup>13</sup> Thomas Rid, "A Revolution in Intelligence," in *The New Makers of Modern Strategy: From the Ancient World to the Digital Age*, ed. Hal Brands (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2023), 1092.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Coker, "Post-modern War," *The RUSI Journal* 143, no. 3 (June 1998): 7-8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071849808446260>.

<sup>15</sup> Sean McFate, *The New Rules of War: Victory in the Age of Durable Disorder*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2019), 53.

<sup>16</sup> Lucas Kello, *The Virtual Weapon and International Order*, (London: Yale University Press, 2017), 3.

<sup>17</sup> Chris McNab, *A History of War: From Ancient Warfare to the Global Conflicts of the 21st Century*, (London: Arcturus Publishing, 2022), 242.

categorized as hybrid, unconventional, grey zone, asymmetric or irregular warfare etcetera, are actually inspired from the concepts of a Russian Colonel Yevgeny Messner.

In 1960s-70s, Colonel Messner indicated towards a process that blurred the boundaries separating regular and irregular military domains, paramilitary and stateless military formations, or rebellion and informal armed social groups.<sup>18</sup> Conceptually, this strategy was in line with the Soviet patronized armed movements, which were actively involved in violent actions all over the world during cold war. Classified as 'rebel wars,' the basic mode of combat was in the form of irregular actions and according to Messner, included features such as diversion, terror, partisanship, and insurrection.<sup>19</sup> Presumably, all unconventional, asymmetric, irregular, grey zone or hybrid war activities of contemporary world, seem to have drawn some inspiration from the concept of rebel wars. The features of present day conflicts such as obfuscating war and peace, non-attribution or irregularity were previously divulged upon by Messner.

Kello highlighted the ambiguous nature of present-day conflicts by introducing the terminology of 'state of unpeace,' a concept that distinguishes the new range of antagonistic actions, somewhere in between the binary conceptions of war and peace.<sup>20</sup> State of 'unpeace' also primarily reflects the contentions of Messner's 'rebel war,' where war may not be declared, but peace also continues to be elusive. One of the most recently introduced concepts has termed contemporary warfare as 'nonwar wars,' where the shrewd enemies often leverage the enduring 'space between peace and war' to cause ravaging effect.<sup>21</sup> Yet another contention suggests disregarding the overt/ clandestine dichotomy for identifying 'a maneuver space' in a zone of ambiguity between overt and covert domains, which is exploited for evading 'detection, attribution and response,' and termed as 'liminal warfare' space - a Latin word for 'threshold.'<sup>22</sup>

While Messner's concept of rebel wars had been introduced several years prior to the culmination of cold war, its practical manifestation can be traced in the present day modes of conflicts. For

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<sup>18</sup> Leszek Sykulski, "Old Methods in the New Framework: Strategy of Grey Zones in Hybrid Warfare," *Strategies XXI-National Defense College* 1, no. 72 (June 2021), 164, <https://doi.org/10.53477/2668-5094-21-11>.

<sup>19</sup> Sykulski, 164-165.

<sup>20</sup> Kello, *The Virtual Weapon*, 17.

<sup>21</sup> McFate, *New Rules of War*, 53.

<sup>22</sup> David Kilcullen, "The Evolution of Unconventional Warfare," *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies* 2, no. 1 (May 2019): 68, <https://doi.org/10.31374/sjms.35>.

many scholars, Russian strategy in Ukraine, and the events linked with 'Arab Spring or color revolutions,' reflect the features of rebel wars, albeit augmented by information era technologies.<sup>23</sup> For some, in post-cold war conflicts, political leaders exploit identity issues in decomposing states; violence is often decentralized with the involvement of non-state actors while regular forces target excluded group; and there is a predominant influence of a globalized war economy, orchestrated by the corrupt elites.<sup>24</sup> Chinese perspective also contemplates that presently, there is no domain which contemporary warfare cannot use.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Debate over 'Hybrid' and 'Grey Zone' Battles**

Contrary to what is commonly perceived, the unconventional warfare termed as 'hybrid' or 'grey zone battles,' is not a phenomenon exclusively linked with post-cold war security paradigm. These concepts, especially 'grey zones' have genesis in the theory of rebel wars, which is further enriched with modern technologies besides the experience of several asymmetric conflicts, during last three decades.<sup>26</sup> While these apparently low cost, and low risk combat modes are deemed preferable by every actor, however the great powers, especially the US has been ardently seeking to exploit this option. American scholars view it as least risky for the US military, financially manageable, valuable for accumulating immediate political capital, helpful in reducing public scrutiny, and likely to be politically expedient.<sup>27</sup>

The core methodologies of grey zone conflicts in the non-kinetic domain include activities such as psychological, informational and influence operations, sabotage and deceptive actions, recruitment of organized criminal gangs, and economic measures.<sup>28</sup> The kinetic mode involve actions such as clandestine operations comprising of conventional espionage, employment of Special Forces and extensive patronage of separatist, terrorists, radical political as well as religious movements.<sup>29</sup> It is being increasingly perceived that baring eruption of odd traditional clash like the Russo-Ukrainian war, which largely falls in the conventional realm, clearly distinguishable battlefields are rare in the present world. Consequently, 'grey' is turning into 'black,' since hostilities and violence taking place in the grey zone has nearly substituted conventional

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<sup>23</sup> Sykulski, "Old Methods," 165.

<sup>24</sup> Hirst, *War and Power*, 83.

<sup>25</sup> Liang Qiao, and Xiangsui Wang, *Unrestricted warfare: China's Master Plan to Destroy America*, (New York: NewsMax Media, Inc., 2002), 189.

<sup>26</sup> Sykulski, "Old Methods," 169.

<sup>27</sup> Chifu and Simons, *Rethinking Warfare*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Sykulski, "Old Methods," 163.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

warfare.<sup>30</sup> It concedes states' pursuit of political objectives without the employment of traditional military force, while relying on the hybrid and political warfare.<sup>31</sup>

The grey zone contests of modern era are no more limited to the involvement of the states alone, rather, like many other domains of human life, non-state actors have also started permeating this sphere. Kapusta is of the view that this type of warfare involves "competitive interactions among and within state and non-state.... and characterized by ambiguity about the nature of the conflict, opacity of the parties involved, or uncertainty about the relevant policy and legal frameworks."<sup>32</sup> Generally, engagement in the asymmetric conflicts is attributed to non-state actors or weaker states that are threatened with the prospects of confronting the superior adversaries. However, in present day world, a state whether powerful or weak, may initially prefer to operate in the grey zone conflicts, to evade involvement in the overt warfare.<sup>33</sup>

Notwithstanding present day mantra of growing interdependence, interconnectivity or globalization, prospects of violent clashes and rivalries continue to threaten the world. There are unlimited possibilities of conflicts, ranging from interstate wars, combat against global terrorist networks, and the wars engendered by ecological issues as well as economic disorder, and inequality.<sup>34</sup> The drivers of these conflicts that may incite violence in various modes, are employed by influential actors for shaping the global strategic environments. Consequently, present geopolitical conflicts reflect endeavors of restructuring the global system through the grey-zone conflicts, where military operations can be protracted but rarely cross the threshold of war, may not always rely on violence, and are often 'characterized by an ambiguous point of victory.'<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Sarah Bressan and Mari-Liis Sulg, "Welcome to the Grey Zone: Future War and Peace," *New Perspectives* 28, no. 3 (September 2020): 1, <https://doi.org/>

<sup>31</sup> Bressan and Mari-Liis, "Welcome to Grey Zone," 1.

<sup>32</sup> Philip Kapusta, "The Gray Zone," *Special Warfare*, vol. 28, no. 4 (October–December 2015): 20, <https://www.soc.mil/SWCS/SWmag/archive/SW2804/GrayZone.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> Geraint Hughes, "War in the Grey Zone: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Implications," *Survival* 62, no. 3 (June–July 2020): 133, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2020.1763618>.

<sup>34</sup> Mark Lacy, "Predicting the Future of War in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Future War Studies?" in *Routledge handbook of the future of warfare*, eds. Artur Gruszczak and Sebastian Kaempf, (London: Routledge, 2024), 23.

<sup>35</sup> David Carment and Dani Belo, *War's Future: The Risks and Rewards of Grey-Zone Conflict and Hybrid Warfare*, Policy paper (Calgary: Canadian Global Affairs Institute, October 2018), 2, <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/>.

## Security Paradigm in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The contemporary global arena is reminiscent of a Post-Westphalian order, where the precedence of exclusive governance system over a territorial entity continues to prevail. Despite growing role of the international institutions, supranational agencies and interconnectivity, threat perception of the territorial states has not changed. Although, wherever war has once been deemed beneficial, ethical and a glorious act, or reckoned to be crucial or inevitable, it is now being increasingly regarded as intolerably costly, reckless, futile, and debasing.<sup>36</sup> However, no one has ruled out the prospects of future conflict - an inevitable constant of human sphere. Moreover, security has been a contested subject for being largely shaped by respective social constructs, thus carrying different connotations for various geographic entities. Consequently, while insecurity visibly transcends socioeconomic and geographic barriers, its sources may differ for the territories of developing world compared to the industrialized Western nations.<sup>37</sup>

Essentially, the security challenges of the contemporary world are multi-faceted, mainly unconventional, and mostly directed at the human capital of a nation for widespread objectives. Limiting the scope of security to conventional domain alone, is no more a consensual interpretation of the concept and thus, being questioned by many scholars. It is now inevitable to have the capacity of dealing threats, such as transnational drug trafficking, terrorist activities, resource scarcities, economic espionage, trans-border pollution, health issues, environmental changes, and cyber security challenges.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, "defining national security merely in military terms conveys a profoundly false image of reality [and] causes states to concentrate on military threats and to ignore other and perhaps more harmful dangers."<sup>39</sup> This contention essentially reflects the widely developing understanding of the concept in the contemporary arena, where all-out military conflict are least preferred.

Another significant and most impactful dimension of contemporary warfare is the diminishing influence of state over violence as the sole actor. Presently, insurgents, terrorists, transnational criminal gangs, and other anti-state groups increasingly rely on the option of "asymmetrical warfare."<sup>40</sup> It entails identifying state's vulnerabilities; evading military and targeting civilians; operating in small independent

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<sup>36</sup> Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> Dan Caldwell, and Robert Williams, *Seeking Security in an Insecure World*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 3.

<sup>38</sup> Caldwell and Williams, 6.

<sup>39</sup> Richard H. Ullman, "Redefining Security," *International Security* 8, no. 1 (Summer 1983): 129, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2538489>.

<sup>40</sup> Krahnemann, *New Threats*, 202.

groups; and avoiding government controlled areas by occupying safe havens.<sup>41</sup> Hence, warfare is no more the prerogative of the states alone, as the emergence of several non-state actors has somewhat challenged this long established monopoly. These actors have the tendency towards weaponisation, capacity of exploiting states' vulnerabilities, and inclination for serving as proxies, to profit from the state-driven outsourcing of conflicts.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the role of non-state military actors in the evolution of contemporary warfare and transforming conventional mode of conflict in to an un-conventional dimension is highly significant.

It may be inferred that prior to the contemporary global arena, security of a geographical entity largely implied countering of the threats emanating from the malign intentions of other states. With the evolution of security paradigm thereafter, focus has shifted towards challenges that are generally transpiring in the form of non-conventional challenges. According to one view, the principle security concerns of fragile or weaker states are predominantly "internal in character" and apparently are reflective of "the early stages of state making."<sup>43</sup> This contention reveals a significant shift in the conventional lexicon of conflict, since greater emphasis on internal dimension apparently suggests changing modes of warfare. Notwithstanding the rising concerns over unconventional threats, especially those 'internal in character'; national security intelligence would continue to look outward for the sponsors, instigators, perpetrators and abettors of these security challenges.

## **National Security Intelligence: Necessity and Challenges of Transformation**

### **Intelligence and the Evolving Dynamics of Warfare**

Intelligence is regarded as a publically inaccessible domain for being a covert activity, and can be classified among the least debated subjects in most parts of the developing world. The lack of debate on the functioning, anomalies and challenges of national security intelligence may be forestalling the prospects of innovative thinking, transformation and alignment with the emerging realities. Lahneman is of the view that revolution is a recurring phenomenon in every dimension of human endeavor- hence, the intelligence enterprise cannot not be immune to this

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<sup>41</sup> Krahmann, 202.

<sup>42</sup> Gruszczak and Kaempf, *Future of Warfare*, 3

<sup>43</sup> Mohammed Ayoob, "Defining Security: A Subaltern Realist Perspective," in *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases*, eds. Keith Krause and Michael C. Williams (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 121.

trend.<sup>44</sup> Question now arises does intelligence require to change for keeping pace with the evolution of warfare? If intelligence needs to change, shall this be revolutionary transformation or the evolutionary one? Taking on the first part of the question, a straightforward response would be that it is inevitable for an intelligence organization to keep itself evolving, according to the dictates of threat matrix. However, careful deliberations may be much needed when the type of this change in the intelligence crafts i.e. revolutionary or evolutionary, is to be considered.

While warfare continue to be in the process of evolution since the end of cold war, there has not been corresponding focus towards reforming the national security intelligence. This tendency may be little hard to explain as in almost every other domain of security, a due cognizance for reforms can be found. Intelligence has largely continued its functions in traditional mode, despite growing reliance on technological progress, ease of access to information and modern surveillance means. In the hindsight, most of the intelligence functions being clandestine, avoid not only public scrutiny but even the inquest from the officials of other security domains as well. This apparent functional isolation of intelligence operations may somehow inculcate a propensity of status quo among the intelligence officials. Another aspect significantly influencing the intelligence organizations is their leverage of securitizing any dimension of intelligence crafts, for evading accountability or the oversight. Whereas intelligence operations are usually covert in nature and not as perceptible as most of other security activities, yet activating some transparency mechanism is unavoidable for overcoming functional inertia.

Almost all the ambits of statecraft involve anticipating the future, and then planning the viable courses of action to evade getting surprised or unprepared – national security domain being no exception. The governments contemplating future assumptions about the impending scenarios and uncertainties, have to rely on the intelligence agencies for prior information.<sup>45</sup> Hence, the input by the intelligence agencies, has always been deemed vital by the policy makers at each level, and about every domain of human life for sound decision making. Getting to know the unknowns or little known for planning and executing better, appears to be an obsessive as well as inevitable attribute of successful decision makers. Historically also, the intelligence requirements during ancient times sought information about the economic potential of the territory, the vitality of its inhabitants, and their military capacity for the policy

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<sup>44</sup> William J. Lahnenman, *Keeping US Intelligence Effective: the Need for a Revolution in Intelligence Affairs*, vol. 13, (Toronto: Scarecrow Press, 2011), xviii.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Herman, *Intelligence Services in the Information Age* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 11.

judgments.<sup>46</sup> However, with the evolution of warfare, and rising ambiguities between the environments of war and peace, forecasting the prospective security challenges has become much more demanding.

## **Emerging Dimensions of Unconventional Security Challenges and Intelligence**

The transformation in the dynamics of post-cold era operational intelligence is, presumably, symbolized with a declining focus in the absence of well-defined threat, and complexity as well as upsurge of new challenges. Contrary to the past, identification of enemy and ability of distinguishing peace from war, is becoming immensely challenging. Rathmell is of the view that intelligence's 'grand narrative' is over after the cold war, and the intelligence communities now are likely to come across multiple, overlapping as well as often contradictory narratives.<sup>47</sup> The US intelligence officials also inferred after cold war that the provision of good intelligence in the absence of a new focal point, in place of Soviet threat, would be far more demanding.<sup>48</sup> Thus, in the present world, where the proliferation of many unconventional threats to the national security are being perceived, a realignment of intelligence operations is essential.

Evolution of contemporary warfare has introduced several new dimensions of security threats that are complicated, intriguing and hard to comprehend at the initial stages. Hence, present national security challenges stem from the influences of global civil societies, financial sway of transnational corporations, or evolving social trends, which are not confined to any specific jurisdiction, but actually proliferate in the wider world.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, intelligence communities are also confronted with the internal socio-economic vulnerabilities, besides traditional threats that are very much exploitable by the anti-state elements. With human factor gaining precedence in post-cold war national security debates among the advanced nations, the homeland, or internal intelligence setups in the developing states also face challenges of realigning with this factor. Likewise, the impact of climate changes, and ensuing demographic concerns is enormous on national security, and negligence in these domains would cede the initiative to hostile forces for propaganda. While

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<sup>46</sup> Scott Breckinridge, *The CIA and the US Intelligence System*, (New York: Routledge, 2019), 4.

<sup>47</sup> Andrew Rathmell, "Towards Postmodern Intelligence," *Intelligence and National Security* 17, no. 3 (2002): 97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/>

<sup>48</sup> Lahneman, *Keeping US Intelligence Effective*, 5.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Dover and Michael Goodman, *Spinning Intelligence: Why Intelligence Needs the Media, Why the Media Needs Intelligence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 8.

many of these security dimensions existed in the past as well, however, their fallout now is far more damaging, and much broader.

In the contemporary world, sound intelligence may be factual but yet incomplete with residual uncertainties; nonetheless, intelligence has to provide decision-advantage despite uncertainty and lack of ultimate truths.<sup>50</sup> Ambiguities and uncertainties of present day security paradigm are certain to hamper good intelligence, however, this elusiveness can be reduced with sound and well-deliberated information collection plan. Thus, intelligence's core responsibility is reckoned to be information-gathering and exploitation - aspects like all source analysis, are regarded among smaller components, whereas covert action deemed even smaller.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, information gathering or 'acquisition,' has always been recognized as the foundation of intelligence operations, and even the multitude of information in these days did not reduce its significance. This continued preeminence of acquisition becomes even more vital during unconventional warfare, with increasing demands of reporting anti-state activities of various non-state targets and different foreign entities.

### **Technology: Rise of Compatibility Challenges for Intelligence**

The unprecedented progression in the technological domain has radically transformed the modes of warfare, compelling the states to review their traditional national security paradigms. Besides every other human sphere, the conventional perception of the national security is also eroding fast, with the emergence of previously inconceivable dimensions of threat. Technology has enabled apparently benign elements the capacity to challenge the state, and encroach upon the previously inaccessible domains including security. The use of propaganda for demoralizing the adversary, and generating specific narratives for perception management in some form, has traditionally been an important facet of warfare. However, in the contemporary era of exceptional informational, and technological progression, employment of various means for influence operations has added yet another intricate challenge to the national security. The era of technology has led to the evolution of worldwide information processing empires; a phenomenon not new, but with far greater transnational power and influence.<sup>52</sup> Given the present day ease of connectivity facilitating influence campaigns, intelligence organizations are confronted with the challenges of maintaining credibility.

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<sup>50</sup> Jennifer E. Sims, *Decision Advantage: Intelligence in International Politics from the Spanish Armada to Cyberwar*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 534.

<sup>51</sup> Herman, *Intelligence Services*, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Sims, *Decision Advantage*, 540.

Intelligence forecasting is predominantly a work of analysts, who predict the future events on the basis of an assessment of the acquired information, which is developed through a well-articulated mechanism. However, the analytical process continues to be dominated by the conventional mindset even when the modes of warfare, the instruments of conflict and the nature of threats have moved well beyond the traditional dynamics. Intelligence forecasts generally lack objectivity due to continued dependence on analytic tools, methodologies as well as procedures, more suited to the fixated, and hierarchical security challenges of the Cold War era.<sup>53</sup> The vital impact of technology on intelligence can be ascertained from the response of many policy makers, who at times assume the role of analysts, when provided with the information.<sup>54</sup> This propensity coupled with over-reliance on overt sources, may be undermining the intelligence reports, which has to be the most reliable mechanism of obtaining tangible security perspectives.

With the progression of technology, and consequent outreach of the masses to countless information sources, there is an apparent transformation in the conflict modes as well. The warfighting is gradually drifting away from physical to cognitive domain, making perception management and influence operations vital, both at home and abroad. Cognitive ascendancy over the enemy promises immense dividends, compared to the potential costs of traditional warfare, resulting in the growing reliance on well-conceived information campaigns. Many in the developing countries find it hard to accept that the perception management is no more limited to state's narrative, and instead the masses are more receptive towards negative, but superiorly constructed tale. In this era of media conglomerates, masses have thousands of cable services channels, content on Internet and variety of sources, to look for the information.<sup>55</sup> Hence, intelligence's continuous propensity of reliance on orthodox modes of perception management, is highly unlikely to yield desired results. Intelligence agencies can no more evade media challenges, and may have to develop some integral capacity of viable mass communication mechanisms.

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<sup>53</sup> Jeffrey R. Cooper, *Curing Analytic Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis* (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence, December 2005), 23.

<sup>54</sup> Bruce D. Berkowitz and Allan E. Goodman, *Best Truth: Intelligence in the Information Age*, (New Haven, USA: Yale University Press, 2000), 23.

<sup>55</sup> Berkowitz and Goodman, 21.

## **Influence Campaigns: Intelligence Challenges in the Cognitive Domain**

Notwithstanding some of the ongoing conflicts in the contemporary arena, belligerents prefer non-kinetic means for compliance, while avoiding engagements in conventional warfare. National security intelligence organizations, are thus required to keep an eye on all such activities that may not fall in the realm of traditional warfare, but can still be threatening. Growing concerns with the devastating costs of wars, are leading towards conflict strategies that seek compliance of the adversary without resorting to violent means. There is rising focus on influence operations, wherein a shrewdly selected information is constructed for promoting a manipulative interpretation, called reflexive control. The terminology of reflexive control has primarily been introduced in the post-cold war era, and often linked with the Russian influence activities. According to Russian strategic philosophy, reflexive control:

“...forces the adversary to act according to a false picture of reality in a predictable way, favorable to the initiator of the informational strike, and seemingly independent and benign to the target. The end result is a desired strategic behavior.”<sup>56</sup>

Threats, especially those in the conventional domain are the problems, which are ‘consciously and actively created by one security actor ... for another.’<sup>57</sup> The contemporary security dynamics are evolving in the form of a dilemma for intelligence, as these may not be well pronounced but continue to simmer in various forms, and tend to explode without any forewarning. Evolution in the warfare categorizes present challenges among the initiatives that have enormous capacity of influencing popular opinion, and threatening the strategic outlook. Contemporary use of cyber means for the manipulation of the public opinion, essentially reflects the unveiling of influence operations for favorably shaping the battlefield environments. This dimension is rightfully classified among the major disruptors of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and as influential contender for public allegiances as was the sway of transnational religions once.<sup>58</sup>

While influencing the adversary decision makers has always been a vital component of strategic planning, the ease of communications has,

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<sup>56</sup> Adamsky Dmitry, “Cross-Domain Coercion: The Current Russian Art of Strategy,” *Proliferation Papers*, No. 54 (November 2015), 7. <https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/pp54adamsky.pdf>.

<sup>57</sup> Alyson J. K Bailes, ‘Introduction: A World of Risk,’ in Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, ed., *SIPRI Yearbook 2007: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>58</sup> Sims, *Decision Advantage*, 540.

now, transformed it into a far more enviable option. With the evolution of warfare, influence campaigns may have a gradual, but essentially a devastating impact on almost every facet of the national security. These covert campaigns looking to affect targeted public's consciousness, aim at influencing public discourse; promoting favorable narratives; inciting confusion, chaos, as well as mistrust; and undermining the fundamental social contract of the target state.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, it is imperative for the intelligence agencies, not only to anticipate the damaging impact of these influence campaigns on the national security, but undertake a timely response to mitigate such challenges. This is, nevertheless, a challenging task because, 'Information Revolution' may be the single most significant issue affecting today's intelligence, since no other aspect of contemporary human life is changing as rapidly as the information world.<sup>60</sup>

### **Transformation of Intelligence: A Perspective**

Intelligence operations generally follow a well laid down methodological process, which is termed as the intelligence cycle. This commonly known process structuralizes various phases of intelligence activity, usually including direction from policy makers, acquisition or collection, processing including steps such as collation, evaluation and analysis, and finally, the dissemination. Intelligence transformation has to be an evolutionary process, relying on a gradual change for developing compatibility with the evolving warfare instead of some radical measures. The evolutionary change is also obligatory for ensuring steady adaption by the rank and files of the intelligence organization. This intelligence transformation has to primary take place in the attitudes, which implies developing the cognitive amity for dealing with the constantly mutating challenges. For this purpose, there may not be any need of redesigning the intelligence cycle but instead, rendering greater emphasis on analytical phase would be coherent with the objective of necessary transformation. Moreover, contrary to the established mechanisms, employment of analysts at each phase of the intelligence cycle beyond the 'processing' part may be far more rewarding.

Ostensibly, the consistently evolving modes of warfare that resulted in enhanced ambiguities and uncertainties, have necessitated greater focus on analysis phase of the intelligence cycle. It does not, in any way, suggest that analysis process has ever been a neglected domain, since many debates over various methodologies are extensively covered in the literature on intelligence. One of these widely cited debates has taken

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<sup>59</sup> Shay Hershkovitz, *The Future of National Intelligence: How Emerging Technologies Reshape Intelligence Communities*, (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), 22.

<sup>60</sup> Berkowitz and Goodman, *Best Truth*, 2.

place during the formative days of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) between Sherman Kent and Willmore Kendall, the two renowned American scholars on intelligence. Notwithstanding the divergent views of both the scholars on analytical methodologies, the significance of analysis in the intelligence cycle had been amply highlighted in the debate.<sup>61</sup> With unconventional modes of warfare assuming definite preference in the contemporary strategic environments, value of analysis increases manifold to avoid intelligence failures. It would, therefore, be prudent to suggest that evolution of warfare has placed 'Analysis' or 'Processing' of abundantly available information in present era at the zenith of intelligence cycle.

Intelligence organizations may not essentially require any drastic restructuring, since few tweaks in functional methodologies through adequate capacity building, can set-forth the transformation process. The capacity building of the rank and file can be achieved with the conceptual or academic uplift in relevant disciplines, while at the same time, increasing reliance on subject matter experts. With national security challenges proliferating every sphere of human life, ranging from conventional military to political, economic, legal, environmental and social domains, the customary intelligence strategies may not suffice. This multidimensionality of national security threats requires intelligence to expand its traditional focus to 'unknown-known' and 'unknown-unknown,' the two commonly used lexicons for indicating 'uncertainties'. Moreover, as the contemporary digitalized world has led to an information revolution, 'sense-making' emerges as the most vital facet of intelligence tradecrafts. Consequently, the quest for reducing prevailing ambiguities would entail greater focus on the intelligence of 'abstracts' rather than 'concretes,' thus increasing the reliance of intelligence agencies on the analysts for sense-making.

## Conclusion

The evolving dynamics of future warfare with externally inspired digital incursions in the national security domain, have emerged as a serious challenge for the entire world. The evolving threats are so real that even some of the most developed intelligence organization are concerned, and wary of potential risks linked with the online foreign interferences. These disruptive interventions can decrease trust of people in the democratic process, critically polarize social discourse, disrupt international alliances, instigate trust deficit on the leadership, emasculate state's institutions; and eventually promote economic, geopolitical, as well

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<sup>61</sup> Jack Davis, "The Kent-Kendall Debate of 1949," *Studies in Intelligence* 35, no. 2 (1992): 91-103, <https://nara-media-001.s3.amazonaws.com/arcmedia/dc-metro/rg-263/>

as ideological interests of the foreign interferers.<sup>62</sup> All these activities are aimed at influencing the unsuspecting audiences by propagating specific tales, propaganda themes, as well as credulous arguments. Hence, the core challenge for intelligence setups appears to be the capability of establishing the traceability of information.<sup>63</sup> The capacity building of the intelligence officials and enhancing their understanding of evolving global dynamics, now seems inevitable necessity. Contemplation of modern day national security threats entails superior intellect of the intelligence officials, which may be possible when they are trained and groomed to look beyond fixated mindset.

The conventional intelligence, today, is therefore faced with a moment of truth - the evolving challenges, especially with the introduction of unconventional modes of warfare, necessitate changes in the traditional approach. Intelligence setups at present are predominantly, conventionally trained for identifying different trails, detecting potential threats, and providing forewarning to the decision makers for articulating counter strategies. Notwithstanding rising necessity, the intelligence community has largely been unable to construct a new framework, for aligning itself with the emerging threats that are complicated, and highly intricate. Despite the cognizance regarding the disturbing effects of impending non-conventional security threats at every policy tier, the response capacity of intelligence organizations continue to be far from desired levels. Consequently, the dilemma of the intelligence planners is not only the transition in the frequency or nature of potential threats, but rather the complexion of the threat dynamics that have also undergone fundamental changes.<sup>64</sup> Intelligence planners may need to look beyond the conventional military threats, and explore domains, especially in the unconventional realm, which might not have been fully perceived earlier.

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<sup>62</sup> Communications Security Establishment, "Cyber Threats to Canada's Democratic Process," June, 7, 2017, 13, <https://www.cyber.gc.ca/en/guidance/cyber-threats-canadas-democratic-process>.

<sup>63</sup> Patrick Taillon, From Veracity to Traceability. A New Canadian Legal Framework for Deliberative Referenda," in *Misinformation in Referenda*, ed. Baume S, V. Boillet, and V. Martenet (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 17.

<sup>64</sup> Berkowitz and Goodman, *Best Truth*, 8.

