

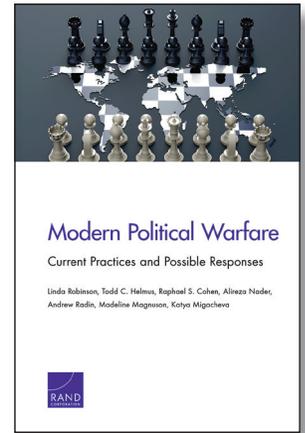


Modern Political Warfare

Current Practices and Possible Responses

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This report analyzes political warfare as it is practiced today by both state and nonstate actors, and provides detailed recommendations regarding the most effective ways that the U.S. government, along with its allies and partners, can respond to or engage in this type of conflict to achieve U.S. ends and protect U.S. interests.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is political warfare?
- How is it (or an appropriate analogous term) applied today?
- How might the U.S. government, along with its allies and partners, most effectively respond to or engage in this type of conflict to achieve its ends and protect its interests?



KEY FINDINGS

Characteristics of Modern Political Warfare

- Nonstate actors can conduct political warfare with unprecedented reach.
- Political warfare employs all the elements of national power.
- Political warfare relies heavily on unattributed forces and means.
- The information arena is an increasingly important battleground, where perceptions of success can be determinative.
- Information warfare works in various ways by amplifying, obfuscating, and, at times, persuading. Compelling evidence supplied in a timely manner is the best antidote to disinformation.
- Detecting early-stage political warfare requires a heavy investment of intelligence resources.
- Political warfare can generate unintended consequences.
- Economic leverage is increasingly the preferred tool of the strong.
- Political warfare often exploits shared ethnic or religious bonds or other internal seams.
- Political warfare extends, rather than replaces, traditional conflict and can achieve effects at lower cost.

Gaps in U.S. Information Capabilities and Practices

- Strategic-level communications are high-profile and bureaucratically risky, characteristics that militate against speed and initiative.

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- The new Global Engagement Center (GEC), established by presidential executive order and located at the Department of State, focuses on third-party validators or influencers from the bottom up, whereas Military Information Support Operations (MISO) within the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) remain more focused on government top-down communications.
- Interagency coordination and National Security Council guidance pertaining to message themes remain lacking.
- Unattributed communications may have counterproductive effects that should be anticipated and mitigated.
- Interagency coordination remains a fundamental challenge.

Effective Statecraft and Integration of Measures Short of War

- The term *political warfare* is not ideal for a variety of reasons, chief among them its association with actual warfare. It may be more useful to think of *effective statecraft and an integration of measures short of war* as necessary aspects of the U.S. arsenal.
- An integrated response to threats short of conventional war includes (1) the need for strategy, (2) the need for a whole-of-government approach to statecraft led by an appropriately enabled State Department, (3) the formulation and coordination of responses with and through other sovereign governments, allies, and partners, and (4) the improvement of military contributions to such an integrated approach.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- To improve whole-of-government synergy, U.S. military commands, including all deployed headquarters, should as a matter of course include civilian departmental representatives in order to understand, coordinate with, and support U.S. State Department and other civilian program execution.
- DoD, and special operations forces in particular, should incentivize and improve selection and training for military advisers serving at State Department headquarters, U.S. embassies, and other diplomatic posts to increase their effectiveness.
- DoD, and special operations forces, should offer military planners to the State Department as the latter builds its own cadre of planners and integrates regional and functional bureau plans, to enable State to play a lead role in responses to political warfare.
- Military commanders should develop and maintain collaborative relationships with their civilian counterparts through regular visits and frequent communications to develop common understanding of and approaches to political-military conflict.
- DoD should routinely seek to incorporate State Department regional expertise and the current insights of the U.S. country team into military plans in order to develop effective responses to political-military threats.
- The special operations community should make it a high priority to improve and implement fully resourced, innovative, and collaborative information operations. MISO requires both increased manpower and new media training.
- Military commanders and the State Department should identify critical information requirements for political warfare threats, and the intelligence community should increase collection and analysis capabilities that are dedicated to detecting incipient subversion, coercion, and other emerging threats short of conventional warfare.
- DoD and the State Department should support deployment of special operations forces in priority areas deemed vulnerable to political warfare threats as an early and persistent presence to provide assessments and develop timely and viable options for countering measures short of conventional war.