



Modern Political Warfare: Current Practices and Possible Responses

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Abstract:	This study, Modern Political Warfare: Current Practices and Possible Responses, examines political warfare as practiced today by both state and nonstate actors, including Russia, Iran, and the Islamic State. The study recommends revisions in U.S. military and nonmilitary approaches and capabilities to better address threats short of conventional warfare. The findings and recommendations should be of interest to the U.S. military, the U.S. State Department, and those in the executive and legislative branches charged with national security policy responsibilities. Allied and wider public audiences may also find this study of interest.

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Book Review

Title : **Modern Political Warfare: Current Practices and Possible Responses**
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Modern Political Warfare: Current Practices and Possible Responses

“Political Warfare” was first defined by US Diplomat George Kennan in 1948 as “the logical application of Clausewitz’s doctrine in time of peace” in a memorandum produced for the State Department. It includes the use of all national powers: diplomatic, economic, military, and informational (DEMI), some of which may have greater or lesser relevance depending on the context. Regular activities between nations do not fall within political warfare’s remit. Trade between nations may ebb and flow; information may cross borders or diplomatic ties may go up and down for a variety of reasons. And yet, political warfare involves *deliberate* policy choices to undermine a rival or achieve other political objectives. Despite all dimensions are potential tools for political warfare, it places emphasis on the non-military dimensions which constitute less obvious forms of conflict that may catch policymakers unaware, especially those conflicts where covert methods are applied to sow conflict, weaken, destabilize, disrupt, and, in some cases, create more dramatic consequences, as seen in Russia’s rapid annexation of the Crimea. This book is a timely intervention in such a period where information warfare, propaganda, proxy wars and non-military means are widely discussed as the main instruments of modern warfare.

RAND’s this book, essentially a report written for U.S. Army, is an extensive study with its in-depth case studies, expert interviews and clear recommendations alongside of theoretical aspects on political warfare. It opens with U.S historical experiences to point to the fact that political warfare is as old and “American” as the United States itself. Origins of U.S. political warfare is traced back to even before U.S. independence, when the United States encouraged French Canadians to revolt against the British Crown. While it had always remained important for U.S., during the Cold War, political warfare came into its own as a tool of American statecraft, not just as a component of conventional war but as a separate domain in its own right. The report exemplifies variety of political, cultural, informational, and economic measures employed by U.S. during the Cold War, from the broadcasts of Voice of America to the economic assistance to create left-wing political parties in Europe; or to the overthrowing of pro-Soviet Union political leaders in Middle East or Latin America. Then, the dramatic wane of U.S. interest in political warfare is indicated after the Cold War ended. This introduction to the report is meaningful as U.S. has nowadays been frequently criticized for its inability to use non-military means.

The case studies of Russia, Iran and ISIL provide substantial knowledge about the current practices of U.S. adversaries. Authors analyse Russia’s “new generation warfare” concept, which emphasizes non-military elements’ increasing role in warfare, by tracing origins from Soviet policies to the current domestic trends. Russia’s practices in Ukraine, Estonia and Europe are presented in detail, most of which can be found in various sources. What is striking is that Russian non-military state power is depicted in a five-category schema of geographic concentric circles, which provides a holistic look on Russian structure. More

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3 interestingly, authors conclude that Russia's political warfare is essentially a response to the
4 West rather than directing crises from start to finish. Another state actor, Iran, who places
5 political warfare to the centre of its strategy to defeat U.S. influence in the Middle East, is
6 also examined in detail. Authors provide scarcely-found information about Iran's economic
7 and informational activities in the region besides its well-known asymmetric military
8 capabilities such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guards and Lebanese Hezbollah. It is noted
9 that Iran's political warfare strategy has been largely successful in Iraq, but it is unclear in
10 Syria, and less likely to be successful if Syria manages to reengage with the global economy. In
11 the final case study, ISIL's capabilities are presented with a particular focus on its innovative
12 use of social media and internet. They found ISIL's multilingual decentralized propaganda
13 system astonishingly sophisticated for a non-state actor. Authors denote that it could be a
14 model even for U.S. Government. Building on these case studies, authors come up with ten
15 key principles exclusive to political warfare, which is indeed a novel contribution to the
16 literature.
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21 The report concludes with some concrete recommendations built around the main idea of
22 improving "whole government approach" and proposes some organizational changes in the
23 statecraft. One interesting but insightful recommendation is to give the State Department a
24 coordinating role within the government whereas I would expect White House to assume
25 this role. In any case, I find these recommendations extremely important, because it is
26 crucial to work on organizational changes to improve rapid decision-making capabilities of
27 democracies at a time when authoritarian regimes have greater leverage in employing
28 political warfare.
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31 In addition to case studies, authors used excerpts from interviews that they carried out with
32 40 experts and practitioners both in U.S. and other countries. One can easily get the
33 impression of meticulous work done either in case studies or interviews, and in their skilful
34 combination with the main theme. Supporting every sub-element of political warfare with
35 real-life examples, this study deserves to be a reference book for those interested in
36 political warfare in action. However, this success paradoxically helps it contribute to the
37 fallacy of labelling every conflict with a new term. Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in
38 2014, "political warfare" is the third term that has been coined by U.S. to identify the same
39 activities of Russia, China, Iran or ISIL, following the labels of "hybrid warfare" and "gray-
40 zone warfare". I would propose a more cautious approach to any adjective preceding
41 warfare. "Effective statecraft", as already discussed by authors would be a better fit for the
42 content of this study, though not as sensational as "political warfare".
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