

TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE AND INTEGRATED CAPABILITY PARADIGM: ENHANCING THE SYNERGISTIC EMPLOYMENT OF POWER INSTRUMENTS IN COUNTERING HYBRID THREATS

RUMO A UM PARADIGMA DE CAPACIDADE ABRANGENTE E INTEGRADO: POTENCIANDO O USO SINÉRGICO DE INSTRUMENTOS DE PODER NO COMBATE A AMEAÇAS HÍBRIDAS

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the limitations inherent in existing approaches to capability utilization and to propose a conceptual and practical framework for enhancing the effectiveness of responses to hybrid threats. Building upon the premise that a purely comprehensive approach is no longer adequate, the research advances the argument for a comprehensive-integrated paradigm, characterized by the systemic convergence of civilian and military capabilities, across national and international, governmental and non-governmental domains. Methodologically, the research employs an interdisciplinary analytical framework, combining theoretical inquiry with empirical insights derived from the review of specialized literature, case study analysis, and participation in inter-institutional exercises. This approach facilitates both a broad and in-depth understanding of the hybrid operational environment, as well as the dynamic interactions among relevant actors. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for a Comprehensive and Integrated Capability Strategy to ensure coherent alignment of actions, capabilities, and effects. Ultimately, it argues that transitioning from coordination to genuine integration enables the generation of cumulative and cascading effects, enhancing the effectiveness and strategic impact of responses to hybrid threats.

Keywords: Hybrid Threats. Comprehensive and Integration. Power Instruments. Civil-Military Capabilities. Countering Hybrid Warfare.

Resumo

Este estudo tem como objetivo analisar as limitações inerentes às abordagens existentes em matéria de utilização de capacidades e propor um quadro conceitual e prático para aumentar a eficácia das respostas a ameaças híbridas. Partindo da premissa de que uma abordagem puramente abrangente já não é adequada, a pesquisa defende um paradigma abrangente e integrado, caracterizado pela convergência sistêmica de capacidades civis e militares, em todos os domínios — nacionais e internacionais, governamentais e não governamentais. Metodologicamente, a pesquisa emprega um quadro analítico interdisciplinar, combinando investigação teórica com insights empíricos derivados da revisão da literatura especializada, análise de estudos de caso e participação em exercícios interinstitucionais. Essa abordagem facilita tanto uma compreensão ampla e aprofundada do ambiente operacional híbrido quanto das interações dinâmicas entre os atores relevantes. Além disso, o estudo destaca a necessidade de uma Estratégia de Capacidades Abrangente e Integrada para garantir o alinhamento coerente de ações, capacidades e efeitos. Em última análise, argumenta que a transição da coordenação para a integração genuína permite a geração de efeitos cumulativos e em cascata, aumentando a eficácia e o impacto estratégico das respostas às ameaças híbridas.

Palavras-chave: Ameaças Híbridas. Abrangência e Integração. Instrumentos de Poder. Capacidades Cívico-Militares. Combate à Guerra Híbrida.



1 INTRODUCTION

In hybrid conflicts, actors rely on a mix of tools aimed at influencing decision-making across political, diplomatic, social, military, economic, and informational domains. These actions are often difficult to identify clearly, as they tend to be ambiguous and span multiple areas at once. At the same time, the operational environment has become increasingly complex and unpredictable. The involvement of civilian actors, local populations, and cultural and psychological factors has made it necessary to strengthen civil-military integration and rethink traditional methods and tools for managing conflicts.

Moreover, as military forces are called upon to respond to a wider and more diverse range of situations, and as operational demands continue to grow in this hybrid context, there is a clear need to develop integrated and adaptable force structures capable of addressing emerging risks and threats.

2 METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research is to identify and highlight deficiencies in the process of using the capabilities of various power instruments and to define ways/methods through which the fight against hybrid threats can be made more efficient.

The starting assumption of this study is that, as security structures are increasingly called upon to respond to a wider and more diverse range of situations – and as operational demands continue to grow in a hybrid environment – a purely comprehensive approach is no longer sufficient. Instead, there is a need for a truly integrated approach that brings together all instruments of power, as well as both civilian and military capabilities.

To explore this, we used a range of theoretical and methodological tools to examine the multidimensional nature of the hybrid operational environment, alongside the evolving dynamics of the actors involved. In addition, the research relied on a variety of data collection methods, ranging from the review of specialized literature to inter-institutional didactic exercises and applications, as well as case study analyses conducted in both national and international contexts. This allowed for broad and in-depth insights.

The analysis seeks not only to clarify key features of this environment, but also to identify practical ways and tools to strengthen an integrated approach, seen as essential for countering the effects of hybrid threats. When processing the information, we focused on critically assessing sources, organizing and structuring the data around the research topic, connecting findings from different materials, and identifying cause-and-effect relationships between key variables, in line with the study's objectives.

Drawing on an interdisciplinary perspective and logical reasoning, the study aims to capture the core processes of hybrid conflict, outline their potential effects, and generate relevant conclusions to support more effective civil-military integration concepts.

3 IMPERATIVES IN COUNTERING THE EFFECTS OF HYBRID CONFLICTS

A rigorous understanding of the operational context of hybrid confrontations, as well as of the nature and manifestations of such threats, necessitates the identification of key imperatives, followed by the delineation of corresponding directions of action aimed at mitigating or eliminating associated risks. These imperatives are intrinsically linked to the evolving dynamics of the operational environment and to the diversity of means employed within contemporary hybrid strategies.

Among them, the *cognitive imperative* stands out as particularly important. It relates to the psychological and perceptual dimension of hybrid warfare and highlights the need for a thorough understanding of the operational environment within a given area of responsibility. Such understanding makes it possible to select and apply methods capable of shaping how an adversary perceives reality, ultimately influencing their decisions and behavior in ways that serve the initiator's objectives. This approach is closely linked to the concept of reflexive control - rooted in Eastern strategic thinking - which involves providing carefully designed information intended to steer an opponent toward decisions that benefit the influencing actor (Georgescu, 2016, p. 79). This type of non-linear action reflects a strategic mindset that is becoming increasingly common. It relies on the coordinated use of a wide range of, often non-military, means to obscure real intentions - whether geopolitical, military, or economic- while shaping the decision-making environment in a predictable way. The goal is to produce rapid and, at times,

disproportionate effects on the effectiveness of both military and non-military measures adopted by the adversary. In this context, the operational approach must be designed to address the cognitive dimension of hybrid threats through coherent actions carried out at multiple levels and supported by appropriately integrated capabilities. Beyond countering immediate threats, such actions should also contribute to creating favorable conditions for subsequent operational and strategic efforts.

The imperative of a comprehensive approach. Within the context of adversaries employing hybrid strategies, the imperative of a comprehensive approach entails the creation of operational opportunities not only at the tactical or domain-specific level, but also in terms of generating strategic, cumulative, and cascading effects with cross-domain implications. This requires the convergence of efforts aimed at understanding the complexity of hybrid warfare phenomena, as well as the development of mechanisms for the early identification of threats and the formulation of effective response measures. Given the inherently complex nature of hybrid threats, efforts to mitigate their effects extend beyond the remit of any single actor or institution. Consequently, an effective response necessitates a comprehensive approach, predicated on the temporal and spatial integration of all instruments of power and the coordinated engagement of all relevant actors – both at the national level and, critically, within the international arena.

The pattern imperative. This imperative emphasizes the necessity of avoiding rigid, linear, and uniform approaches to the organization, planning, and execution of actions across time and space. Grounded in a nuanced understanding of the complexity and unpredictability of the operational environment, it underscores the importance of mitigating strategic surprise through adaptive thinking, innovative conceptual frameworks, and flexible measures that transcend traditional doctrinal constraints. While conventional military regulations emphasize the establishment of standardized procedures, the evolving operational paradigm requires decision-makers to adopt a more analytical, context-sensitive, and non-dogmatic approach to planning and execution.

The analysis of these imperatives highlights the intrinsic interdependence between the cognitive dimension – associated with understanding complex adaptive systems in hybrid conflict – and the physical domain of action, as can be seen synthetically in *table no. 1*. It also reflects the interconnectedness of violent and non-violent means, military

and non-military components, as well as the coordinated efforts of instruments of power across all levels of engagement.

Table 1

Key Imperatives in Countering Hybrid Threats

Imperative	Domain of Action	Core Characteristics	Operational Implications
Cognitive Imperative	Cognitive/ Psychological	- focus on: perception management, reflexive control, influence on decision-making processes.	- requires deep understanding of the operational environment; - use of information and influence tools to shape adversary behavior.
Comprehensive-Integrated Imperative	Multi-domain (political, military, economic, informational)	- integration of all instruments of power; - generation of cumulative and cascading effects.	- necessitates coordinated and synchronized actions across all actors; - promotes unity of effort and efficiency.
Pattern (Adaptive) Imperative	Operational/ Strategic	- non-linear thinking; - avoidance of rigid and doctrinal approaches; - adaptability.	- encourages flexible planning and execution; - reduces vulnerability to surprise; - supports innovative responses.

These imperatives are of critical importance, as their thorough understanding facilitates the adoption of appropriate measures for the effective management of hybrid conflicts, particularly at the decision-making level.

4 RATIONALE FOR A COMPREHENSIVE-INTEGRATED APPROACH

The wide range of hybrid actions and conflicts calls for coordinated and well-prepared responses from both national and international institutions. It also requires military and civilian capabilities that can work together effectively in complex missions, with the goal of limiting the impact of hybrid threats.

Traditionally (classical comprehensive approach), what we refer to as a comprehensive approach begins with an overall understanding of the mission or organization as a whole. It then breaks this down to examine the role of each component within the broader system. In this sense, it tends to follow a more static and structured

logic, focusing on cause-and-effect relationships and clearly defined objectives. (NATO Standardization Office, 2018, p. I-2; United Nations, 2013, p. 3).

In my view, it is not enough to simply analyze the role of each actor – whether civilian or military, national or international, governmental or non-governmental – and what each can contribute to achieving the final objective. What is truly needed is the full and coherent integration of their efforts, bringing together the effects of all instruments of power in a *comprehensive and integrated approach* that is dynamic, complex, quantum, and adaptive.

By aligning and integrating the actions of both civilian and military actors across all domains in which hybrid conflicts unfold, and by grounding this cooperation in shared principles, mechanisms, and norms, it becomes possible to generate *indirect, cumulative, and even cascading* effects. These, in turn, can enhance mission effectiveness while reducing both the time required and the overall costs of achieving the desired outcome.

In addition, when discussing the *comprehensive integration of military and civilian instruments of power*, it is important to define more clearly what this actually entails, by clarifying the key concepts and terms it relies on. Thus, “*comprehensive*” means something “*that includes much (broad), that has a rich content*” (Dexonline, 2026), and “*to integrate*” implies “*to include (itself), to integrate (itself), to (incorporate) (itself), to harmonize (itself) into a whole*” (Dexonline, 2026).

Within this framework, a fundamental requirement is the *effective integration and synchronization* of *joint military* operations conducted across all domains, land, air, maritime, cyber, and space, with the actions of *civilian* and *military governmental* institutions, at both national and international levels. Equally important is the consideration of the roles, influences, and effects generated by non-governmental organizations and other relevant actors operating within the hybrid environment.

Furthermore, within the framework of projects and activities conducted at the institutional level – such as the integrative student exercise *CADET 2024*, as well as the practical applications carried out by participants in postgraduate programs focused on crisis management – I had the opportunity to undertake a scientific examination of various response options to hybrid threats. This was particularly relevant given the active involvement of structures and representatives from multiple governmental institutions across all activities.

The principal conclusion derived from these analyses underscores the necessity of adopting a comprehensive and integrated approach. Mere cooperation among the involved structures proves insufficient; rather, effective responses require the coordinated employment of a broad spectrum of instruments – military and non-military, governmental and non-governmental – within a unified operational framework.

Such an approach enables the development of a genuinely *comprehensive and integrated framework*, characterized by coordinated operations, coherence of effects, and the efficient employment of resources, all underpinned by shared commitments, mutual trust, and convergent strategic objectives. It entails the systemic convergence of civilian and military components, both intra- and inter-state, across the full spectrum of domains in which hybrid confrontations manifest.

From a conceptual perspective, *comprehensive integration* should be understood as a dynamic and adaptive system, analogous to a living organism. Although its constituent elements are heterogeneous in nature, their functional interdependence ensures the coherence and viability of the whole. In this sense, civilian and military actors – governmental and non-governmental, national and international – must not be perceived as merely juxtaposed components, but rather as functionally differentiated yet interrelated structures, each fulfilling a distinct and indispensable role. Their contributions – whether in terms of capabilities, resources, or generated effects – are complementary and non-substitutable within the broader operational architecture.

Ultimately, a *comprehensive and integrated* approach represents not only a conceptual paradigm but also a practical necessity for addressing complex and evolving security challenges. Its relevance extends beyond the immediate needs of communities affected by hybrid conflicts to encompass the strategic functioning of governmental systems. In this regard, effective inter-institutional and international cooperation constitutes a critical enabler for the promotion and consolidation of shared values and common interests (Rațiu, 2020, p. 90).

5 CONSIDERATIONS ON THE MECHANISMS OF A COMPREHENSIVE-INTEGRATED APPROACH - A COMPREHENSIVE AND INTEGRATED CAPABILITY STRATEGY

In the context of contemporary and future military campaigns and operations (Romanian Ministry of Defense, 2021, p. 10) – characterized by the integrated employment of all instruments of power, both military and non-military, to generate desired strategic effects – there is an increasing need for a coherent and unified perspective on the development, training, and employment of capabilities. Such a perspective must enable participation across the full spectrum of operations, including within the complex and evolving hybrid environment.

Although the strategies and methods underpinning *comprehensive integration* may vary significantly, the principal challenge for actors involved in managing hybrid conflicts lies in accurately assessing and calibrating the combined effects of different approaches throughout the confrontation. This involves not only selecting the appropriate mix of instruments and capabilities (strategic dimension), but also determining the optimal timing of their employment (temporal dimension) and the appropriate level of application (intensity dimension).

Given the inherent complexity of this approach, in my opinion, both at the level of states and at the level of an organization like NATO, it becomes necessary to develop an overarching *integrative Strategy* (integrative document), grounded in a rigorous scientific framework, capable of generating and institutionalizing new systems of norms, procedures, and standards derived from a holistic and dynamic understanding of action.

Such a proposed *Comprehensive and Integrated Capability Strategy for Hybrid Operational Environments* should address all structures involved in the security architecture, particularly in relation to hybrid threats. In this regard, the strategy should incorporate several key attributes:

- the establishment of guiding principles defining the status and role of each instrument of power;
- the delineation of the conditions and contexts in which these instruments are to be employed;

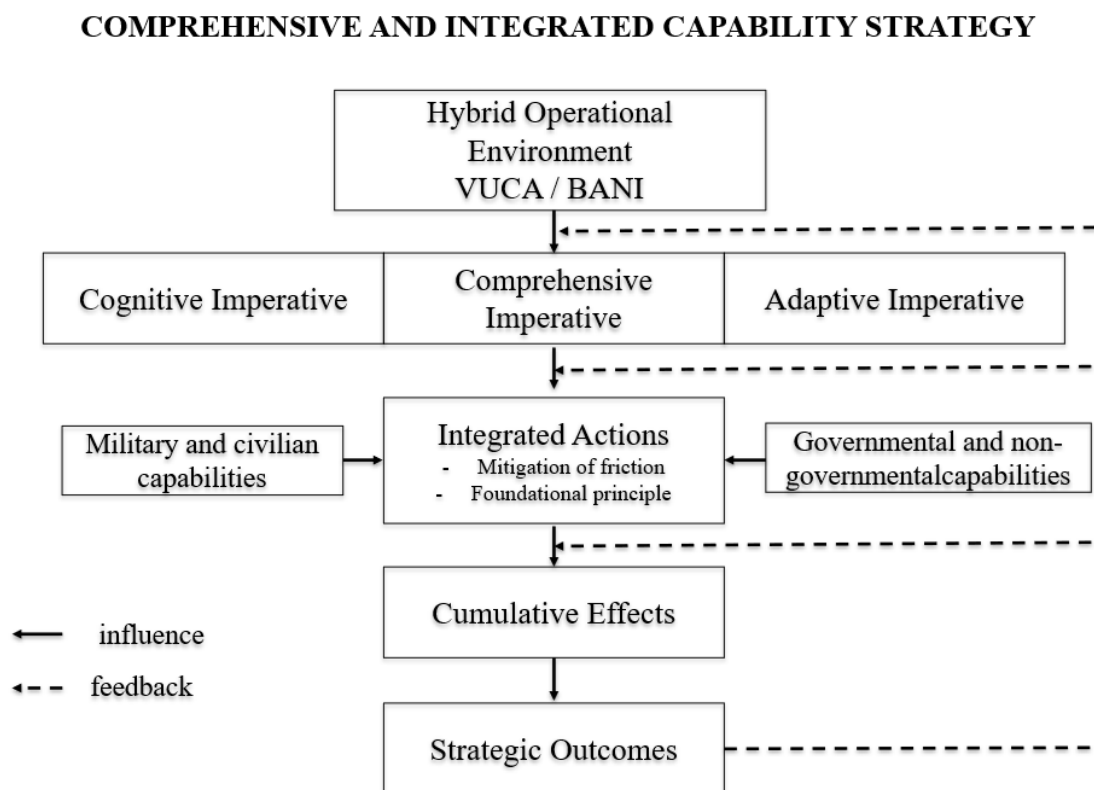
- the identification and structuring of integrated organizational frameworks required for capability management and the coordination of effects;
- the orientation and development of an integrated capability planning process;
- the regulation, within a unified conceptual framework, of capability generation, force structuring, operational planning, sequencing of capability employment, as well as command and control mechanisms;
- the direction and implementation of integrated training processes designed to prepare capabilities for coordinated action prior to the emergence of hybrid threats.

Furthermore, such a strategy provides both the foundation and the enabling framework for the development of subsequent doctrinal and operational documents. These, in turn, contribute to strengthening inter-institutional trust, facilitating the systematic exchange of lessons learned, promoting the harmonization of procedures, and supporting the organization of joint training and integrated exercises. Collectively, these elements enhance both the planning and execution of campaigns and operations, ensuring a higher level of coherence and effectiveness.

The proposed conceptual model of the *Comprehensive and Integrated Capability Strategy* reflects a systemic and dynamic perspective on the integration of instruments of power within the hybrid operational environment. At its core, the model is structured along a multi-layered architecture that captures the interaction between context, imperatives, processes, and outcomes, as can be seen in *figure no. 1*.

Figure 1

Comprehensive Integration Model



At the upper level, the hybrid operational environment, characterized by fragility, anxious, non-linear and incomprehensible (BANI), also volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), constitutes the overarching framework that shapes the behavior of actors and the conditions under which actions are conducted. This environment generates the need for adaptive and integrative responses.

The second layer is represented by three fundamental imperatives: the cognitive imperative, which emphasizes the role of perception management and influence in shaping adversarial decision-making; the comprehensive-integrated imperative, which underlines the necessity of converging all instruments of power across domains and actors; and the adaptive (pattern) imperative, which reflects the requirement for non-linear thinking and flexible operational approaches in order to reduce vulnerability to strategic surprise.

These imperatives converge within the integration layer, where civilian and military capabilities are synchronized and employed in a coherent manner. This process

enables the generation of cumulative and cascading effects across multiple domains, as illustrated in the subsequent layer of the model.

At the outcome level, the model highlights the achievement of strategic objectives and mission success as a direct result of effective integration. Importantly, the inclusion of a feedback loop underscores the dynamic nature of the system, whereby outcomes continuously influence and reshape the operational environment, thus requiring ongoing adaptation and reassessment.

Overall, the model provides a conceptual framework for understanding how the transition from coordination to full integration of instruments of power can enhance operational effectiveness in countering hybrid threats

5.1 Understanding the operational environment as an imperative of the comprehensive and integrated capability strategy

In the context of the proliferation of hybrid threats, aggressions, and operations, a fundamental question arises regarding the locus of their manifestation. The operational environment within which these phenomena unfold is characterized by a complex aggregation of interrelated components, including a diverse range of actors, multidimensional physical spaces (land, air, maritime, and space domains), intelligence structures, technological capabilities, cultural variables, risk factors, and threat vectors. The interaction and convergence of these elements generate a *volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA)* environment, thereby defining the contemporary hybrid operational context.

Beyond the VUCA characterization of the operational environment, contemporary hybrid contexts increasingly reflect the features of a *BANI* framework – *fragile, anxious, non-linear, and incomprehensible*. Fragility highlights the susceptibility of systems to rapid disruption under stress, where seemingly stable structures may collapse due to minor perturbations. Anxiety reflects the pervasive uncertainty experienced by both decision-makers and populations, driven by information overload, ambiguity, and continuous exposure to psychological influence operations. Non-linearity underscores the disproportionate relationship between causes and effects, where small actions can generate cascading and unpredictable consequences across multiple domains. Finally,

incomprehensibility denotes the growing difficulty in fully understanding the complexity of the operational environment, even with advanced analytical tools, due to the speed, volume, and opacity of interactions among actors and systems.

In this context, the transition from a VUCA to a BANI – informed perspective reinforces the necessity of adopting *adaptive, integrative, and anticipatory approaches*, capable of addressing not only uncertainty and complexity, but also systemic fragility, cognitive pressure, and the limits of traditional analytical frameworks in *hybrid conflict environments*.

Accordingly, the hybrid operational environment may be conceptualized as the overarching framework within which hybrid threats materialize, encompassing the dynamic and often covert interaction of multiple actors, means, actions, and effects that converge in a coordinated manner to achieve specific interests or strategic objectives (Rațiu, 2017, p. 265).

Within this framework, a central component of the *Comprehensive and Integrated Capability Strategy for Hybrid Operational Environments* is the identification of sources of insecurity, which can only be achieved through a rigorous and multidimensional understanding of the hybrid operational environment. Insecurity emerges as a product of the interaction among a broad spectrum of factors, thereby necessitating a comprehensive and integrated analytical approach, grounded in multicriteria and multilateral assessment methodologies.

Such analysis should encompass, without limitation, several key dimensions:

- the spectrum of actors involved, including civilian populations, cultural and ethnic groups, marginalized communities, religious structures, as well as political, economic, and social dynamics;
- the underlying causes, drivers, and contextual circumstances of the conflict, together with their implications for conflict resolution strategies;
- the historical evolution of the conflict, its geostrategic positioning, and the influence of the physical environment, including geography, climate, and infrastructure.

In this regard, one of the primary analytical instruments for understanding the hybrid operational environment is the *Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment* – JIPOE (U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2013, p. I-17). This methodology

provides a holistic analytical framework that supports decision-makers in comprehending how environmental factors influence and shape the behavior, capabilities, and intentions of relevant actors, as well as the ways in which these actors pursue their objectives and desired end states.

However, given that the civilian population increasingly represents the center of gravity in hybrid conflicts – around which actors, capabilities, actions, and effects are structured – the traditional Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) framework is no longer sufficient. Instead, there is a need for a more nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of the operational environment, incorporating detailed insights into local communities, including their social and cultural structures, value systems, behavioral patterns, and responses to both internal and external stimuli (Rațiu, 2016, p. 112).

Within such a hybrid operational context, the protection and support of the civilian population emerge as central objectives of integrated governmental action. As emphasized in operational doctrine, success in such environments is achieved not through the destruction of the adversary, but through the effective influence of the population (ISAF Headquarters, Kabul, 2009, 2-4). Consequently, a comprehensive analysis of civilian considerations constitutes a critical prerequisite for achieving sustainable and long-term outcomes.

To this end, a more refined analytical approach must incorporate the concept of the “human terrain,” encompassing the socio-cultural characteristics of the population within the operational area. This necessitates the adoption of integrative analytical tools, such as *Civil Preparation of the Battlespace*, which includes several sequential stages: defining the civil environment, analyzing the civilian operational context, developing a representative model of the human terrain, and assessing the behavioral patterns of the civilian population (Marine Corps Civil-Military Operations School, 2019, p. 23).

Enhancing awareness of the significance of the human terrain, coupled with the application of such integrative methodologies, facilitates the establishment and maintenance of effective relationships with civilian actors. This, in turn, supports improved cooperation, the harmonization of activities, the exchange of relevant information, and the integrated planning and management of campaigns and operations aimed at countering the effects of hybrid conflicts.

5.2 Approaches to mitigating friction between military and non-military instruments

Traditionally, military structures and civilian actors have operated within distinct institutional paradigms, often perceiving their roles, responsibilities, and operational cultures as fundamentally divergent. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), for instance, have historically demonstrated reluctance to engage in close proximity with military forces – even when originating from the same contributing nation or operating within the same host country – primarily due to the imperative of maintaining neutrality, impartiality, and operational security. This concern has frequently translated into a perception of risk associated with any form of visible alignment with military actors. Conversely, military leadership has often regarded civilian organizations, particularly NGOs, as lacking structural discipline, coherence in action, and operational efficiency.

However, the cumulative experience derived from recent theaters of operations has contributed to a gradual recalibration of these perceptions. Civilian actors have increasingly recognized the value of military support in areas such as force protection, logistics, medical assistance, and evacuation capabilities. Simultaneously, military and governmental structures have come to acknowledge the comparative advantages of NGOs, including their flexibility, rapid mobilization capacity, and innovative approaches to complex operational challenges. In turn, military institutions have reinforced their relevance through strategic vision, structured planning processes, and robust logistical capabilities.

Despite these developments, significant challenges persist in achieving effective coordination and synchronization between military and non-military actors. In this context, the *Comprehensive and Integrated Capability Strategy* must prioritize interagency and interinstitutional cooperation, grounded in holistic capability assessment, integrated planning processes, and coordinated implementation mechanisms. Such an approach is essential for effectively mitigating, limiting, or neutralizing the multidimensional effects generated by hybrid adversarial actions.

Furthermore, the analysis of practical experiences and conceptual frameworks aimed at enhancing comprehensive integration has led to the identification of several critical areas of divergence among participating actors. These include differences in

defining desired end states, establishing initial objectives, decision-making processes, planning methodologies, conceptual frameworks, operational principles, communication practices, intelligence-sharing mechanisms, and standardized procedures for cooperation across diverse operational scenarios.

In parallel, a set of foundational principles has been identified as essential for guiding the effective realization of comprehensive integration. These include, inter alia, a thorough understanding of the cultural context, prioritization in the employment of capabilities, unity of effort, integration of command structures, mutual awareness among actors, concentration of efforts in support of civilian populations, adaptability, continuous assessment of actions, as well as effective communication and information-sharing mechanisms. Collectively, these principles serve as normative benchmarks for structuring and operationalizing integrated approaches.

Consequently, the effective integration of actions and capabilities within a hybrid operational context requires that the commander or mission leader adopt a comprehensive and systemic perspective of the campaign or mission. This entails the identification and optimization of mechanisms for enhancing relationships among available forces – military and civilian, national and international. Additionally, it necessitates the conduct of prospective assessments of all relevant actors operating within the area of responsibility, including independent or less predictable entities, with the objective of aligning and synchronizing efforts to maximize overall operational effectiveness and strategic impact.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Military forces no longer constitute the sole or dominant guarantor of security; rather, they function as one among several instruments available to political authority. In the context of future conflicts – characterized by increasing complexity, multidimensionality, and hybridity – as well as crisis management operations, the effectiveness of action is contingent upon the adoption of a holistic and integrated approach. Such an approach *necessitates the coordinated employment of political, military, diplomatic, informational, civilian, and economic instruments, mobilized by a*

diverse range of actors, including states, governmental institutions, and non-governmental organizations.

Irrespective of the typology of actors involved in crisis dynamics – whether military structures, governmental or non-governmental organizations, or media entities – each pursues distinct objectives and interests within conflict zones or theaters of operations. These divergent agendas often translate into policies and actions that may be misaligned or even contradictory, thereby complicating the overall coherence of the response.

A defining characteristic of the traditional, or “classical”, comprehensive approach to military operations lies in its methodological sequence: it begins with a preliminary understanding of the mission – particularly its ultimate objective – and of the organization as a systemic whole, followed by a detailed examination of the roles and contributions of individual components within the broader operational architecture.

However, such an approach, while necessary, *is no longer sufficient*. It is not adequate to merely analyze the roles of the various actors – namely, the instruments of civilian and military power, operating at national and international levels, and across governmental and non-governmental domains – and their potential contributions to the achievement of strategic objectives. What is required is the full and coherent integration of the effects generated by their actions, through a genuinely comprehensive and integrated approach.

In this sense, *comprehensive integration* may be conceptualized as a process through which the capabilities of joint military forces are systematically combined with those of other national and international organizations and agencies, in order to produce coherent and mutually reinforcing effects. The outcome of such a process is the establishment of an integrated operational framework, characterized by coordinated actions conducted on the basis of shared understanding, mutual trust, and common objectives – elements that constitute a fundamental prerequisite for the effective functioning of any force.

This *comprehensive integrated* approach enables the unified convergence of all components of the civilian and military system, both within and between states, while also integrating different modes of action, effects, and networked interactions into a coherent operational construct.

Moreover, it underscores the necessity of cultivating a *culture of integration* and coordination between civilian and military instruments, aimed at ensuring functional synergy among all mechanisms and structures, irrespective of institutional interests or hierarchical subordination. Such a culture operates as a conceptual and normative framework designed to eliminate barriers – both cognitive and operational – between the two domains. Within this paradigm, civilian and military instruments evolve into coherent and interoperable capabilities, facilitated by enhanced organizational mobility and adaptability, potentially leading to a progressive convergence of their functional boundaries. This strategic orientation is essential not only at the level of execution but, more critically, at the level of conceptualization and planning.

Nevertheless, the implementation of a *comprehensive and integrated* (multilateral and inter-institutional) approach to the employment of instruments of power in hybrid warfare and crisis management continues to present significant challenges. These include the persistence of parallel planning and command structures, the shortage of experienced and authoritative specialists, the existence of divergent or even antagonistic organizational cultures, and disparities in funding mechanisms between civilian and military components. Addressing these challenges remains a central concern for analysts, theorists, and decision-makers engaged in the development of effective integrated strategies.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.