

COORDINATION BETWEEN THE MILITARY INSTRUMENT AND DIPLOMACY IN MODERN WARFARE: IMPLICATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY STRATEGIC COMPETITION FOR THE ADAPTATION OF THE ARMED FORCES

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ABSTRACT

Shifts in the international security environment have redefined the way states employ the instruments of national power to achieve strategic objectives. Contemporary conflicts demonstrate that success no longer depends exclusively on military superiority, but on the coherent integration of military, diplomatic, economic, informational and legal instruments. In this context, the synergy between the military instrument and diplomacy becomes an essential factor of strategic effectiveness. The article analyses the mechanisms through which this interaction influences the outcomes of contemporary conflicts and highlights the implications for the adaptation of the armed forces. The research employs a qualitative methodology, based on a comparative analysis of the conflicts in Kosovo, Afghanistan and the Gaza Strip, complemented by an examination of NATO and European Union doctrinal documents. The results show that operational success does not guarantee the achievement of political objectives, and the effectiveness of diplomatic efforts is conditioned by the existence of credible military capability. Based on these findings, the article proposes the conceptual model Integrated Military–Diplomatic Synergy Framework (IMDSF), which explains the interdependence between the military and the diplomatic instrument and provides an analytical framework for adapting the armed forces to the requirements of contemporary strategic competition.

KEYWORDS:

military-diplomatic synergy; military instrument; diplomacy; strategic competition; armed forces adaptation

Submission Received: 15 July 2026; Revised: 03 August 2026; Accepted: 06 August 2026; Published: September 2026

1. Introduction

The invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, Sino-American strategic competition (between the United States and the People’s Republic of China), the proliferation of violent non-state actors and the development of emerging technologies have radically altered the paradigms regarding the use of force in international relations. At present, armed conflicts unfold simultaneously across the military,

DOI: 10.2478/raft-2026-0024

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diplomatic, informational, economic, legal and cyber domains, and strategic success depends on coordinating these dimensions in a coherent and adaptive manner.

This development confirms the continued relevance of the observation made by Clausewitz (1832/1976) in his seminal work “Vom Kriege” (On War) according to which war represents the continuation of politics by other means, showing that armed violence is not an end. War is merely an instrument employed by political leaders when diplomacy fails, to impose its own will.

Clausewitz’s thinking captures the nature of conflicts through several key ideas:

- **The intended purpose:** Politics sets the objective (what the state seeks to obtain), while war becomes merely the method of reaching that goal.
- **Continuity or coherence:** When peaceful negotiations no longer yield results, governments resort to violent means. This means that war and politics are closely linked.
- **The relationship of subordination:** The military must always answer political leaders, not the other way around.

Nevertheless, in the 21st century, the relationship between politics and war can no longer be reduced to the link between political decision-making and the use of armed forces. Contemporary diplomacy does not function merely as an instrument for preventing or ending conflicts, but directly influences operational planning, coalition building, international legitimacy, access to resources and the political support required for the conduct of military operations.

At the same time, military power is no longer assessed exclusively through its material dimension. The credibility of military capabilities influences the effectiveness of diplomatic negotiations, the deterrence of adversaries and the strengthening of alliances. In this sense, diplomacy and the military instrument operate in a relationship of strategic interdependence, in which each mutually amplifies the other’s effectiveness.

In professional literature, this relationship is analyzed through concepts such as *Comprehensive Approach*, *Whole-of-Government*, *Integrated Deterrence*, *Smart Power* or *Multi-Domain Operations* (Nye, 2011; Freedman, 2013). Nevertheless, there is relatively little research proposing an integrative model of the synergy between the military and the diplomatic instrument and analyzing its implications for the institutional transformation of the armed forces.

Addressing this gap in the specialized literature, the present research seeks to provide a documented answer to the question:

To what extent does the symbiosis between the diplomatic and the military instrument influence the strategic effectiveness of contemporary operations, and what institutional transformations does this situation impose on the armed forces of NATO member states?

The following objectives aim to provide a consolidated answer to this question, with the research setting out to:

- analyze the conceptual relationship between diplomacy and the military instrument in the specialized literature;
- examine the way in which NATO and the European Union conceptualize the integration of the instruments of power;
- compare three representative conflicts to identify the patterns of interaction between military action and diplomacy;
- formulate a conceptual model regarding diplomatic–military synergy and a set of implications for the adaptation of the armed forces.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The article employs a structured qualitative analysis of an exploratory and explanatory nature, relying on the comparative analysis of case studies and on documentary analysis. The choice of this approach is justified by the complexity of the phenomenon under analysis and by the need to capture, in depth and in detail, the relationships between politico-military variables that cannot be measured exclusively through statistical methods.

Comparative analysis enables the identification of commonalities and differences between conflicts with distinct characteristics, favoring the formulation of conclusions with a high degree of transferability.

2.2. Research Questions

The research is structured around the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between the military instrument and the diplomatic instrument in contemporary warfare?
2. How is this relationship conceptualized in NATO and European Union doctrine?
3. What strategic lessons emerge from comparing the conflicts in Kosovo, Afghanistan and the Gaza Strip?
4. What are the implications for the adaptation of the armed forces of NATO member states?

2.3. Research Hypotheses

H1. The effectiveness of contemporary military operations is directly influenced by the level of integration of the diplomatic instrument.

H2. Military-diplomatic synergy represents a multiplier of strategic effectiveness, contributing to international legitimacy, alliance cohesion and the sustainability of political outcomes.

H3. The adaptation of the armed forces must include the development of institutional capabilities dedicated to politico-military cooperation and interinstitutional integration.

2.4. Methods and Sources

The research combines documentary analysis of NATO and EU doctrines, comparative analysis of case studies, content analysis of academic literature, and the corroborated use of multiple sources for the validation of conclusions.

The main body of sources include NATO doctrinal documents, European Union documents, UN resolutions, fundamental academic works and articles from indexed specialized journals.

2.5. Justification of the Case Studies

Kosovo, Afghanistan and the Gaza Strip were selected because they represent three distinct types of conflict, in which the relationship between diplomacy and the military instrument manifested itself differently:

- Kosovo – a multinational military intervention with a coercive and humanitarian purpose;
- Afghanistan – a long-term stabilization and institutional reconstruction operation;

- the Gaza Strip – an asymmetric conflict between a state and a non-state actor, characterized by intense diplomatic and informational competition.

Comparing these cases enables the identification of robust patterns regarding the role of politico-military synergy in achieving strategic outcomes.

2.6. Limitations of the Research

The analysis focuses on the politico-military dimension and does not seek a detailed assessment of the tactical or technical-operational aspects of each conflict. Likewise, the article does not aim to issue normative judgements on the actors involved, but to comparatively examine the relationship between diplomacy and the use of the military instrument from the perspective of strategic studies.

3. The Conceptualized Theoretical Framework of the Proposed Topic

3.1. The Evolution of the Relationship between War, Politics and Diplomacy

The relationship between war, politics and diplomacy constitutes one of the foundations of strategic studies, its evolution reflecting the transformations of the international security environment and of the way in which states exercise their power. While classical approaches regarded the use of armed forces as the main instrument for achieving political objectives, contemporary literature highlights the complementary character of the instruments of national power and the need to integrate them into a coherent strategy (Freedman, 2013).

The point of reference of modern strategic thought remains the theory formulated by Carl von Clausewitz, according to which war represents “*the continuation of politics by other means*” (Clausewitz, 1976). From this perspective, the use of force does not constitute an end, but an instrument subordinated to political decision-making. Although conceived in the context of the interstate wars of the 19th century, Clausewitzian theory retains significant explanatory value, because it highlights the instrumental character of military action and its dependence on political objectives. Nevertheless, the complexity of contemporary conflicts requires extending this perspective by including dimensions such as diplomacy, informational influence and economic competition.

An important contribution to this conceptual evolution belongs to Basil Liddell Hart, who argues that strategic success depends on the application of an “indirect strategy”, based on combining military means with political and diplomatic pressure (Liddell Hart, 1967). In this approach, victory is not determined exclusively by the destruction of the adversary’s military capacity, but by influencing its political will through the coordinated use of all available instruments.

The changes that occurred after the end of the Cold War significantly expanded the concept of power. Joseph Nye (1990; 2004) demonstrates that international influence is not based solely on military coercion (*Hard Power*), but also on the capacity for attraction and persuasion (*Soft Power*), subsequently proposing the concept of *Smart Power*, which involves the integrated use of military and non-military resources. This approach highlights the fact that diplomacy does not represent merely an alternative to the use of force, but a complementary instrument, capable of amplifying the strategic effects of military action and of contributing to its international legitimacy.

In the same direction, Colin S. Gray (2010) defines strategy as the process of harmonizing all the instruments of national power with a view to achieving political

objectives. According to him, the effectiveness of military operations is conditioned by the coherence of political decision-making, by diplomatic support and by the capacity of state institutions to act in an integrated manner. Lawrence Freedman (2013) develops this perspective, arguing that contemporary strategy seeks to influence the adversary's behavior by combining military, diplomatic, economic and informational instruments in a continuous process of strategic competition.

The conceptual evolution highlights the transition from an approach centered on the use of armed force to one oriented towards the integration of the instruments of national power. Consequently, strategic success can no longer be explained through the isolated performance of the military instrument or of diplomacy, but through the state's capacity to coordinate these instruments within a unitary strategic architecture. This paradigm shift constitutes the foundation of the analysis developed in the present article and justifies the need for a conceptual framework that explains the mechanisms of military-diplomatic synergy, embodied in the Integrated Military-Diplomatic Synergy Framework (IMDSF) model.

3.2. The Integration of the Instruments of National Power

The transformations of the security environment have led to the extension of the concept of power beyond the exclusively military dimension, requiring an integrated approach to the instruments available to the state. The specialized literature highlights that strategic effectiveness is conditioned by the capacity of state actors to coordinate the diplomatic, informational, military, economic, financial and legal instruments with a view to achieving political objectives (Gray, 2010; Freedman, 2013).

A significant contribution to this evolution belongs to Joseph Nye (1990, 2004), who redefines the concept of power through the distinction between *Hard Power* and *Soft Power*. While *Hard Power* involves the use of military and economic coercion to influence the behavior of other actors, *Soft Power* relies on the attractiveness of values, culture and political legitimacy. Subsequently, Nye (2011) introduces the concept of *Smart Power*, arguing that strategic effectiveness results from the appropriate combination of coercive and persuasive instruments, depending on the nature of the threat and the operational context.

At the doctrinal level, this logic was transposed into the **DIME** (*Diplomatic, Informational, Military, Economic*) model, used in American strategic planning for the integration of the main instruments of national power (Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS], 2020). The evolution of the operational environment led to the extension of the model towards **DIMEFIL**, through the inclusion of the financial (*Financial*), informational (*Information*), intelligence (*Intelligence*) and legal (*Law Enforcement*) dimensions, reflecting the multidimensional character of contemporary strategic competition (U.S. Army War College, 2022).

Although these models offer a useful framework for understanding the state's resources of power, they present an important conceptual limitation. Both DIME and DIMEFIL classify the instruments of national power, yet they explain to only a limited extent the mechanisms through which the interaction between them generates strategic effects. In particular, the relationship between the military instrument and diplomacy is treated predominantly in a functional manner, without highlighting the processes of coordination, synchronization and mutual influence that condition the transformation of operational success into sustainable political outcomes (Gray, 2010; Freedman, 2013).

This limitation becomes evident in contemporary conflicts, where the use of military force is accompanied by diplomatic negotiations, economic sanctions, information operations and legal actions conducted simultaneously. Under these conditions, the performance of each instrument cannot be assessed independently, but in relation to the state's capacity to generate integrated strategic effects. Consequently, the integration of the instruments of national power must be understood not merely as a process of institutional coordination, but as a mechanism for creating strategic synergy. This perspective constitutes the starting point for the analysis of the way in which NATO and European Union doctrine operationalizes the cooperation between the military and the diplomatic instrument.

3.3. Military-Diplomatic Synergy in NATO and European Union Doctrine

The transformations of the security environment have prompted international organizations to develop conceptual frameworks capable of integrating the instruments of national and collective power in the management of complex threats. Unlike the **DIME** and **DIMEFIL** models, used predominantly in American doctrine and strategic planning for the classification and coordination of the instruments of national power (Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS], 2020), NATO and the European Union have adopted concepts oriented towards the institutional integration and politico-military coordination of the actors involved in conflict prevention and management.

Within NATO, the concept of the **Comprehensive Approach** represents the foundation of the cooperation between military instruments and political, diplomatic, economic and civilian actors. Enshrined in the *Lisbon Summit Declaration* and subsequently consolidated through the *Strategic Concept 2022*, it starts from the premise that military operations cannot generate sustainable strategic outcomes in the absence of effective coordination with international organizations, national authorities and civilian actors (NATO, 2010; 2022). From this perspective, success is defined by the capacity to synchronize the use of force with the processes of political negotiation, institutional reconstruction and strategic communication.

The evolution of strategic competition has also led to the emergence of the concept of **Integrated Deterrence**, initially developed in the doctrine of the United States Department of Defense and subsequently reflected in the adaptation of NATO's deterrence and defense posture. The concept promotes the coordinated use of conventional and nuclear military capabilities, of diplomacy, economic sanctions, informational instruments and cooperation with allies to influence the behavior of adversaries (U.S. Department of Defense, 2022; NATO, 2022). Thus, deterrence is no longer conceived exclusively as an expression of military superiority, but as the result of the integration of all the relevant instruments of power.

A similar evolution can be found in the **Multi-Domain Operations (MDO)** concept, developed within the American doctrinal environment and compatible with NATO's transformation process. It seeks to synchronize the actions conducted in the land, air, maritime, cyber and space domains, in parallel with the use of diplomatic and informational instruments, to achieve convergent strategic effects (U.S. Army, 2022). In this approach, military operations are integrated into a broader political effort, oriented towards maintaining the strategic advantage in great-power competition.

At the level of the European Union, the **Strategic Compass for Security and Defense** develop a similar approach by promoting the coordination between foreign policy, security and defense instruments, societal resilience and international partnerships (Council of the European Union, 2022). Unlike NATO, the emphasis is placed on integrated crisis management, on the strengthening of civilian and military

capabilities and on the complementary use of diplomatic, economic and legal instruments. In this sense, the European Union favors a *Whole-of-Government* and *Whole-of-Society* approach, in which strategic effectiveness results from institutional cooperation and from the coordinated mobilization of the available resources.

The comparative analysis highlights that, although NATO and the European Union use different terminologies, both promote the same strategic logic: the integration of the military instrument into a broader ensemble of political, diplomatic and economic instruments. Nevertheless, these concepts remain oriented predominantly towards institutional and operational coordination, without explicitly explaining the mechanisms through which the interdependence between the military instrument and diplomacy generates strategic effects. This conceptual limitation justifies the development of an analytical framework dedicated to military–diplomatic synergy, grounded in the **Integrated Military-Diplomatic Synergy Framework (IMDSF)** model.

3.4. The Literature Gap and the Foundation of the Integrated Military-Diplomatic Synergy Framework (IMDSF)

An analysis of the specialized literature highlights a consensus regarding the need to integrate the instruments of national power in the management of contemporary strategic competition. Both the fundamental works in the field of strategic studies (Freedman, 2013; Gray, 2010) and the doctrinal documents produced by NATO and the European Union promote the coordination of military, diplomatic, economic and informational instruments as a prerequisite of strategic effectiveness (Council of the European Union, 2022; NATO, 2022). Nevertheless, most approaches remain predominantly normative or institutional, focusing on the principles of cooperation and less on the mechanisms through which the interaction between the military instrument and diplomacy produces integrated strategic effects.

The literature devoted to strategy explains the role of politics in guiding the use of force and the importance of coordinating the instruments of power, yet it treats the relationship between the military and the diplomatic dimension in a predominantly functional manner. Established models, such as *DIME* or *DIMEFIL*, catalogue the instruments of state power and facilitate the strategic planning process, without proposing criteria for assessing the level of integration between them and the impact of this integration on the outcomes of conflicts. Similarly, concepts such as the *Comprehensive Approach*, *Whole-of-Government* or *Integrated Deterrence* offer directions for institutional action, but do not develop an analytical model that explains the causal relationships between politico-military coordination and strategic effectiveness (JCS, 2020; NATO, 2022).

This limitation becomes evident in contemporary conflicts, where the strategic outcome is simultaneously influenced by military operations, diplomatic negotiation, strategic communication, economic sanctions and international legitimacy. The experiences of Kosovo, Afghanistan and the Gaza Strip demonstrate that military superiority can generate significant operational advantages, yet these do not automatically translate into sustainable political outcomes in the absence of a coherent diplomatic effort and of an effective mechanism of interinstitutional coordination. Conversely, diplomacy considerably reduces its capacity for influence when it is not supported by a credible military capability and by a strategic posture capable of lending credibility to the negotiation process (Freedman, 2013; Gray, 2010).

Starting from this conceptual gap, the present article proposes the **Integrated Military-Diplomatic Synergy Framework (IMDSF)**, an analytical model intended to

explain the mechanisms through which the integration of the military and the diplomatic instrument influence the achievement of strategic objectives. Unlike existing models, the IMDSF neither classifies the instruments of power nor describes exclusively the institutional architecture of cooperation; instead, it analyses the processes of interdependence between them and the effects generated throughout the entire cycle of the conflict.

The model is structured across four interdependent levels. **The strategic level** pursues the definition of politico-strategic objectives, the building of international legitimacy and the synchronization of political decision-making with military planning. **The operational level** targets the integration of military planning with diplomatic efforts and the coordination of the actions of national and international actors. **The tactical level** analyses the way in which cooperation between military and civilian structures contributes to achieving operational effects and to maintaining political support. **The post-conflict level** assesses the transformation of military advantages into sustainable political outcomes through diplomacy, institutional reconstruction and the strengthening of governance.

From a methodological point of view, the IMDSF provides a comparative analysis framework that enables the assessment of the degree of military-diplomatic integration in conflicts with different characteristics and the identification of the relationship between the level of synergy and strategic effectiveness. This model constitutes the main element of originality of the research and underpins the comparative analysis of the case studies regarding Kosovo, Afghanistan and the Gaza Strip, presented in the following chapter. Consequently, the contribution of the article lies not merely in synthesizing the existing literature, but in developing a conceptual tool that facilitates the assessment of the adaptation of the armed forces to the demands of contemporary strategic competition.

The architecture of the model, its interdependent levels and the synergy relationship between the military and the diplomatic instrument are synthetically illustrated in Figure no. 1.



Figure no. 1: The Integrated Military-Diplomatic Synergy Framework (IMDSF)
(Source: Author's own conception)

4. Comparative Analysis of Military-Diplomatic Synergy in Contemporary Conflicts

4.1. Selection Criteria and the Methodology of the Comparative Analysis

The validation of the **Integrated Military-Diplomatic Synergy Framework (IMDSF)** model relies on a comparative analysis of case studies, a method widely used in strategic studies research for identifying causal relationships between politico-military variables and for formulating conclusions of both theoretical and practical relevance (George & Bennett, 2005; Gerring, 2017). The choice of this approach enables an examination of the way in which the level of integration between the military instrument and diplomacy influences the achievement of strategic outcomes in different operational contexts.

The case studies were selected through purposive sampling (*purposive sampling*), so as to cover distinct conflict typologies and different forms of employing the instruments of power. Kosovo illustrates a multinational military intervention conducted under the pressure of intense diplomatic activity and concluded through a political-institutional agreement. Afghanistan represents an example of a complex counterinsurgency and stabilization operation, in which military superiority was not sufficient for achieving long-term political objectives. The Gaza Strip reflects an asymmetric conflict characterized by the interdependence between military action, informational competition and international diplomatic pressure.

The comparative analysis uses a common evaluation matrix, built on the basis of the IMDSF model, which includes five dimensions: (1) the politico-strategic objectives pursued; (2) the use of the military instrument; (3) the role of the diplomatic instrument in supporting or constraining military action; (4) the level of military–diplomatic synergy; and (5) the strategic outcomes achieved. Applying the same criteria to all three cases enables comparability of the results and the identification of recurring patterns regarding the relationship between politico-military coordination and strategic effectiveness.

The data analyzed are derived from NATO and European Union doctrinal documents, resolutions of the United Nations Security Council, official reports, as well as from the key academic literature concerning the conflicts under analysis. The triangulation of these sources seeks to increase the validity of the conclusions and to reduce the risk of interpretations dependent on a single category of sources (Yin, 2018). This approach enables the assessment of the applicability of the IMDSF model and the substantiation of the recommendations regarding the adaptation of the armed forces to the demands of contemporary strategic competition.

4.2. Case Study: Kosovo – Military-Diplomatic Synergy within a Multinational Intervention

The NATO intervention in Kosovo (1999) represents a relevant case study for the analysis of the relationship between the military instrument and diplomacy, since the success of the operation was not determined exclusively by the air campaign, but by the interdependence between military pressure, diplomatic negotiations and international legitimacy. The politico-strategic objective of the Alliance consisted in ending the violence against the Albanian population of Kosovo and securing the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces, while at the same time avoiding the extension of the conflict into the Western Balkans (NATO, 1999).

From the perspective of the **Integrated Military-Diplomatic Synergy Framework (IMDSF)** model, the *Operation Allied Force* campaign demonstrates that

the use of the military instrument was strategically effective only insofar as it was correlated with a continuous diplomatic process. The air strikes created the pressure needed to alter the strategic calculus of the Belgrade leadership, yet the cessation of hostilities was made possible through the negotiations conducted under the aegis of the international community and embodied in the Kumanovo Military-Technical Agreement and in the adoption of Resolution 1244 of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC, 1999).

The level of military-diplomatic synergy can be assessed as high. The military instrument provided credibility and coercive capacity, while diplomacy ensured the legal and political framework necessary for transforming the operational advantage into a strategic outcome. At the same time, the cooperation between NATO, the United Nations and the other international actors facilitated the deployment of the KFOR mission and the initiation of the post-conflict stabilization process, demonstrating that military success represents only one stage in the achievement of politico-strategic objectives (Clark, 2001).

Nevertheless, the Kosovo case also highlights the limits of military-diplomatic synergy. The absence of explicit authorization from the UN Security Council generated debates regarding the legal legitimacy of the intervention, and the political status of the province remained contested for a long period (Freedman, 2000). Consequently, the analysis confirms the hypothesis according to which strategic effectiveness results from the integration of the military instrument and diplomacy, yet this integration must also be supported by an adequate level of international legitimacy and by institutional mechanisms capable of consolidating post-conflict outcomes.

4.3. Case Study: Afghanistan – The Limits of Military-Diplomatic Synergy in a Stabilization Operation

The conflict in Afghanistan (2001-2021) illustrates the complexity of transforming military success into sustainable politico-strategic outcomes and highlights the limits of the cooperation between the military and the diplomatic instrument in stabilization operations. After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the intervention led by the United States and subsequently by NATO pursued the neutralization of the Al-Qaeda organization, the removal of the Taliban regime and support for the establishment of Afghan institutions capable of ensuring the security and governance of the state (NATO, 2021).

From the perspective of the **Integrated Military-Diplomatic Synergy Framework (IMDSF)** model, military operations achieved significant results in the initial stage of the conflict, through the dismantling of terrorist networks and the rapid removal of the Taliban regime. Subsequently, however, the strategic objectives went beyond the strictly military dimension, being conditioned by the consolidation of state institutions, economic development and the growth of the legitimacy of the Afghan authorities. In this stage, the effectiveness of military operations became dependent on coordination with the diplomatic and civilian instruments, as well as on the cooperation between national actors and the international organizations involved in the reconstruction process (Johnson & Leslie, 2008).

The analysis reveals a moderate level of military-diplomatic synergy. Although NATO, the United Nations and the participating states developed mechanisms of politico-military coordination, the differences in strategic objectives, institutional fragmentation and the limited capacity of the Afghan authorities diminished the

effectiveness of the integrated effort. In addition, the negotiations conducted in the final stage of the conflict evolved at a different pace from military operations, which reduced strategic coherence and affected the sustainability of the results achieved (SIGAR, 2021).

The withdrawal of international forces and the return of the Taliban to power in 2021 demonstrate that military superiority and operational performance are not sufficient for achieving political objectives in the absence of an effective integration between military action, diplomacy and institutional consolidation. The Afghanistan case thus confirms that military-diplomatic synergy must be maintained throughout the entire cycle of the conflict, including in the stabilization and post-conflict phase. From the perspective of the IMDSF model, the essential strategic lesson is that the lack of continuity and coherence between the military and the diplomatic dimension reduces the capacity of states and alliances to transform operational advantages into sustainable political outcomes.

4.4. Case Study: The Gaza Strip – Military-Diplomatic Synergy in Contemporary Asymmetric Conflict

The conflict in the Gaza Strip represents one of the most relevant examples of contemporary strategic competition, in which the use of the military instrument is inseparable from the diplomatic, informational and legal dimension. After the attacks launched by Hamas against Israel on 7 October 2023, the declared strategic objectives of the Israeli authorities aimed at neutralizing Hamas's military capabilities, freeing the hostages and eliminating the threat to national security (IDF, 2023). In parallel, the conflict generated an unprecedented diplomatic mobilization, involving the United Nations, the United States, the European Union and regional actors, such as Egypt and Qatar, with a view to limiting escalation and facilitating the negotiations regarding a ceasefire and the exchange of hostages (United Nations, 2024).

From the perspective of the **Integrated Military-Diplomatic Synergy Framework (IMDSF)** model, the Gaza case highlights a high level of interdependence between military action and diplomacy, but a limited synchronization between the two instruments. Military operations pursued the degradation of Hamas's military infrastructure and operational capacity, yet their effects were permanently influenced by international diplomatic pressure, by concerns regarding international humanitarian law and by the evolution of the negotiations regarding humanitarian access and the release of captive persons (ICJ, 2024; United Nations, 2024).

Compared with Kosovo and Afghanistan, diplomacy did not have merely the role of supporting or legitimizing the use of force but became an active factor in shaping the pace and intensity of military operations. The resolutions and debates within the United Nations, the mediation efforts of regional actors and the pressure exerted by international partners influenced the decisions regarding humanitarian pauses, the access of international organizations and the prospects of a temporary agreement on the cessation of hostilities. At the same time, informational competition and strategic communication had a significant impact on the international legitimacy of military actions and on global public perception.

The analysis highlights that strategic effectiveness cannot be assessed exclusively through the operational results achieved on the battlefield. In the case of the Gaza Strip, military advantages are conditioned by the capacity of the actors involved to transform tactical success into sustainable political outcomes through diplomatic and institutional mechanisms. From the perspective of the IMDSF model,

the conflict confirms that, in modern warfare, the synergy between the military instrument and diplomacy represents a dynamic process, simultaneously influenced by international legitimacy, strategic communication and legal constraints. These characteristics differentiate contemporary asymmetric conflicts from classical military interventions and highlight the need for integrated mechanisms of politico-military planning and coordination.

4.5. Comparative Analysis of the Case Studies

The comparative analysis of the conflicts in Kosovo, Afghanistan and the Gaza Strip highlights that the level of integration between the military and the diplomatic instrument directly influences the capacity of the actors involved to transform operational results into sustainable strategic effects. Although the three conflicts differ in the nature of the actors, the politico-strategic objectives and the geopolitical context, they confirm the fact that the effectiveness of the use of force is conditioned by the existence of coherent and continuous politico-military coordination (Freedman, 2013; Gray, 2010).

In the case of Kosovo, military-diplomatic synergy was characterized by a high level of coordination between the military pressure exerted by NATO and the diplomatic efforts conducted within international organizations. This complementarity facilitated the cessation of hostilities and the establishment of an international stabilization framework, demonstrating that operational success can be converted into political outcomes when military action is supported by diplomatic and institutional mechanisms (NATO, 1999; UNSC, 1999).

Afghanistan illustrates a different situation, in which initial military superiority was not sufficient for consolidating long-term strategic objectives. The lack of constant coordination between military operations, the processes of institutional reconstruction and political negotiations reduced the effectiveness of the international effort and highlighted the vulnerabilities of an insufficiently integrated approach (SIGAR, 2021).

In the Gaza Strip, the interdependence between military action and diplomacy is even more pronounced, yet the dynamic character of the conflict, international diplomatic pressure and the informational dimension permanently influence the decision-making process. This case demonstrates that, in contemporary asymmetric conflicts, strategic outcomes depend not only on operational performance, but also on the capacity of the actors to maintain international legitimacy and to synchronize military action with diplomatic objectives (United Nations, 2024).

The comparison of the three case studies confirms the existence of a direct relationship between the level of military-diplomatic synergy and strategic effectiveness. The higher and the better coordinated the integration between the two instruments throughout the entire cycle of the conflict, the greater the probability of transforming military advantages into sustainable political outcomes. These findings provide empirical support for the validation of the **Integrated Military-Diplomatic Synergy Framework (IMDSF)** model and constitute the basis for testing the hypotheses formulated within the research.

4.6. Validation of the Research Hypotheses

The comparative analysis of the case studies provides empirical support for the validation of the hypotheses formulated within the research and confirms the usefulness of the **Integrated Military-Diplomatic Synergy Framework (IMDSF)** model in assessing the relationship between the military instrument and diplomacy.

Hypothesis H1, according to which the effectiveness of contemporary military operations is influenced by the level of integration with the diplomatic instrument, is confirmed. In the case of Kosovo, the coordination between NATO's air campaign and the politico-diplomatic negotiations facilitated the achievement of the strategic objectives and the establishment of an international stabilization framework (NATO, 1999; United Nations Security Council [UNSC], 1999). In Afghanistan, although military superiority was evident in the initial phase of the intervention, the lack of sustainable synchronization between military operations, institutional reconstruction and the political process limited the consolidation of strategic outcomes (SIGAR, 2021). In the Gaza Strip, the effectiveness of military action is permanently influenced by the evolution of diplomatic negotiations, by international pressure and by legal constraints, which confirms the interdependence of the two instruments (United Nations, 2024).

Hypothesis H2, according to which military-diplomatic synergy represents a multiplier of strategic effectiveness, is likewise validated. In all three cases, political outcomes depended on the capacity of the actors to integrate the use of force with diplomatic efforts and with the mechanisms of international legitimation. The differences between the conflicts do not invalidate this relationship but demonstrate that the level and form of synergy vary according to the characteristics of the strategic environment and the typology of the conflict (Freedman, 2013; Gray, 2010).

Hypothesis H3, which asserts the need to develop institutional capabilities dedicated to politico-military cooperation and interinstitutional integration, is confirmed through comparative analysis. The lessons drawn from Kosovo, Afghanistan and the Gaza Strip highlight that the adaptation of the armed forces cannot be limited to the modernization of military capabilities, but must include permanent mechanisms of integrated planning, interinstitutional coordination and cooperation with diplomatic and civilian actors. This conclusion is consistent with the doctrinal guidelines promoted by NATO and the European Union regarding the comprehensive approach to security (Council of the European Union, 2022; NATO, 2022).

The results obtained confirm, overall, the research hypotheses and demonstrate that strategic effectiveness is determined not only by the performance of the military instrument or of diplomacy analyzed separately, but by the degree of functional integration between them. Consequently, the IMDSF model provides an adequate analytical framework for explaining the mechanisms of this interdependence and for substantiating the process of adapting the armed forces in the context of contemporary strategic competition.

4.7. Application of the Integrated Military-Diplomatic Synergy Framework (IMDSF)

The results of the comparative analysis demonstrate the applicability of the **Integrated Military-Diplomatic Synergy Framework (IMDSF)** model as an instrument for assessing the relationship between the military instrument and diplomacy in contemporary conflicts. Unlike established models, such as DIME or DIMEFIL, which catalogue the main instruments of national power, the IMDSF highlights the mechanisms through which the coordination between the military and the diplomatic dimension influences strategic effectiveness throughout the entire cycle of the conflict (Gray, 2010; Freedman, 2013).

Applying the model to the three case studies reveals the existence of a direct relationship between the level of military-diplomatic synergy and the capacity of the actors to transform operational advantages into sustainable political outcomes. In Kosovo, the high level of politico-military coordination favored the integration of military

action with diplomatic negotiations and international stabilization mechanisms. In Afghanistan, the diminishing coherence between the military dimension, institutional reconstruction and the diplomatic process limited the sustainability of strategic outcomes, while in the Gaza Strip the dynamics of military operations are permanently influenced by diplomatic negotiations, legal constraints and informational competition. These differences confirm the fact that strategic effectiveness depends not only on the performance of each instrument, but on their level of functional integration.

From an analytical perspective, the IMDSF model enables the assessment of conflicts across four interdependent levels: **strategic**, through the analysis of the coherence between political objectives and the use of force; **operational**, through the assessment of the coordination between military planning and diplomatic action; **tactical**, through the examination of the cooperation between military and civilian actors in the theatre of operations; and **post-conflict**, through the appraisal of the capacity to transform military success into sustainable political and institutional outcomes. This approach facilitates the identification of the points of vulnerability of the decision-making process and provides a common framework for the comparative analysis of conflicts with different characteristics.

Consequently, the IMDSF represents not only a conceptual model, but also an instrument of strategic analysis applicable to the processes of planning, evaluation and institutional adaptation. In line with the approaches promoted by NATO and the European Union regarding the integration of the instruments of power, the model complements the existing literature by explaining the mechanisms of interdependence between the military instrument and diplomacy and provides an analytical basis for formulating the recommendations regarding the adaptation of the armed forces to the demands of contemporary strategic competition (Council of the European Union, 2022; NATO, 2022).

4.8. Implications for the Adaptation of the Armed Forces in the Context of Contemporary Strategic Competition

The results of the research highlight that the adaptation of the armed forces can no longer be based exclusively on the development of military capabilities but must include the consolidation of the mechanisms of integration with the diplomatic, informational and civilian instruments. In the context of contemporary strategic competition, operational effectiveness is conditioned by the capacity of military structures to act within an interinstitutional and multinational framework, in which strategic planning and the decision-making process are coordinated with political and foreign policy objectives (NATO, 2022).

The analysis of the case studies demonstrates that the armed forces must develop institutional capabilities dedicated to politico-military cooperation, including permanent structures for coordination with civilian authorities, competences in the field of strategic communication and expertise regarding international law and crisis management. At the same time, the training process must integrate complex scenarios, specific to multi-domain conflicts, in which operational success depends on the synchronization of military actions with diplomatic initiatives and with the activity of international organizations (Council of the European Union, 2022).

From this perspective, the **Integrated Military-Diplomatic Synergy Framework (IMDSF)** model provides a useful instrument for assessing the level of military-diplomatic integration and for substantiating the process of institutional transformation. The adaptation of the armed forces must therefore be oriented not only towards

increasing operational performance, but also towards developing the capacity to generate strategic effects through the coordinated use of all the instruments of state power.

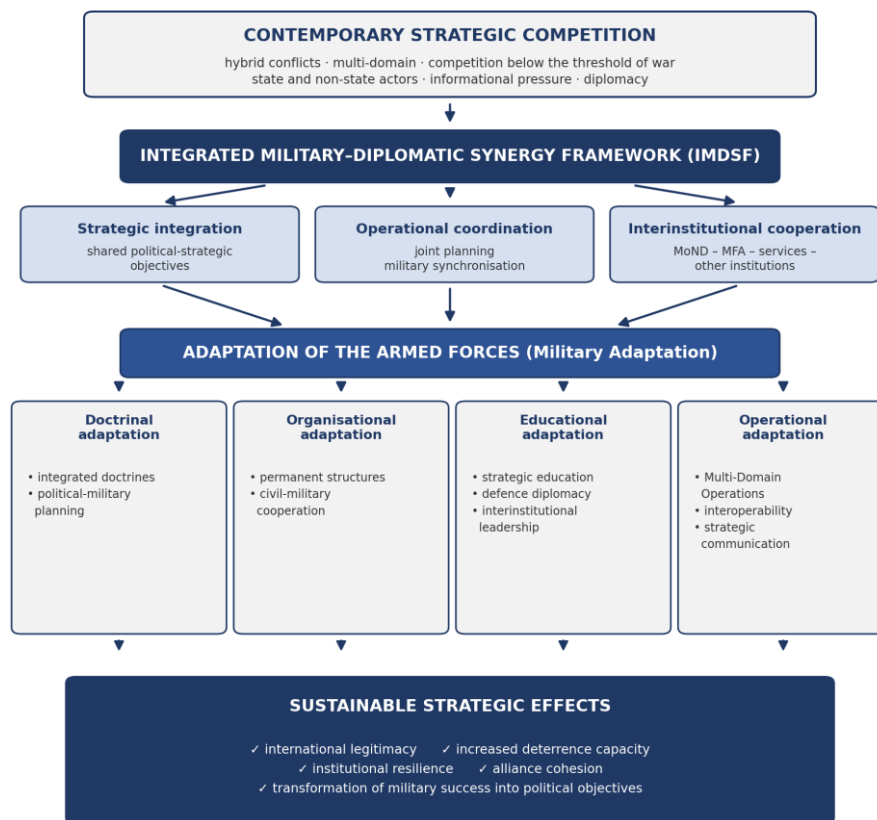


Figure no. 2: The model of the adaptation of the armed forces in the context of contemporary strategic competition
(Source: Author's own conception)

5. Conclusions

The transformation of the international security environment and the extension of strategic competition into the military, diplomatic, informational and economic domains have fundamentally changed the conditions under which states pursue their security objectives. The analysis carried out confirms that contemporary warfare can no longer be understood exclusively through the lens of the use of armed force but must be approached as a complex process of integrating the instruments of national power. In this context, the relationship between the military instrument and diplomacy becomes an essential determinant of strategic effectiveness.

The research has demonstrated that operational success does not automatically guarantee the achievement of political objectives. The case studies regarding Kosovo, Afghanistan and the Gaza Strip highlight that strategic outcomes depend on the capacity of the actors to synchronize the use of force with diplomatic action, to maintain international legitimacy and to integrate the military dimension into the processes of stabilization and reconstruction. Although each conflict presents its own particularities, the comparative analysis identified a common pattern: a reduction in the level of military-diplomatic coordination diminishes the probability of transforming operational advantages into sustainable political outcomes.

By validating the hypotheses formulated, the research confirms the existence of a direct relationship between the degree of military-diplomatic integration and strategic effectiveness. At the same time, the results support the need to develop institutional capabilities dedicated to politico-military cooperation, capable of facilitating the coordination between the military and diplomatic authorities and the other state institutions involved in the management of crises and conflicts.

The main original contribution of the article consists in the development and application of the **Integrated Military-Diplomatic Synergy Framework (IMDSF)** model. Unlike established models, which describe the instruments of national power or the principles of interinstitutional cooperation, the IMDSF explains the mechanisms through which the interaction between the military instrument and diplomacy influences strategic outcomes throughout the entire cycle of the conflict. The application of the model in the comparative analysis demonstrated its usefulness both as an instrument for interpreting contemporary conflicts and as conceptual support for the adaptation of the armed forces.

From a practical perspective, the research highlights that the adaptation of the armed forces must go beyond the modernization of combat capabilities and must include the development of permanent mechanisms of politico-military planning, the consolidation of interinstitutional cooperation, the integration of strategic communication and the preparation of personnel for operating in multi-domain and multinational environments. These directions are compatible with the doctrinal guidelines promoted by NATO and the European Union regarding the integrated approach to security and the consolidation of strategic resilience.

The research also presents certain limitations. The analysis focused on three representative case studies and on the military-diplomatic dimension, without examining in detail the influence of the economic, informational and cyber instruments on strategic outcomes. Likewise, the IMDSF model was validated through a qualitative approach, which opens the possibility of future research oriented towards the development of indicators and criteria for the quantitative assessment of the level of military-diplomatic integration.

Looking ahead, future research could extend the application of the IMDSF model to conflicts such as Ukraine, the South China Sea or the Indo-Pacific region, as well as to the analysis of strategic competition conducted below the threshold of armed conflict. At the same time, the integration of the informational, cyber and economic dimensions into an extended conceptual framework could contribute to the development of a comprehensive model for assessing the synergy of the instruments of state power in the strategic environment of the 21st century.

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