



The Networkization of International Conflict: Towards a Self-Reproducing Ecosystem of Insecurity

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Abstract:

The profound transformations that international conflicts have undergone over recent decades, driven by factors such as globalisation and technological advancement, have made it increasingly difficult to explain the complexity of conflict dynamics through traditional state-centred approaches cannot be explained by relying on the traditional state-centred approach, which focuses primarily on military power and sovereignty; As a result, manifestations of insecurity have accelerated significantly through political, economic, technological and even cyber interactions involving multiple state and non-state actors.

This study analyses the transformation witnessed in contemporary international conflict by examining the relationship between the interplay of cyber insecurity, economic instability, hybrid wars and cross-border violence within interconnected security environments. The study argues that contemporary conflicts cannot be understood **simply as isolated military confrontations between states**, but have instead become, as a result of recent changes, a complex, multidimensional process arising from the interaction between various forms of instability at the local, regional and global levels.

The study adopts a multi-level analytical approach combining historical and comparative methodologies with structuralist interpretation, with the aim of examining the relationship between power dynamics, insecurity, technological transformation and cross-border interdependence within the contemporary international system.

The study concluded that understanding contemporary international conflict requires a broader analytical framework capable of capturing and understanding the specificities of current conflicts and explaining the interrelated nature of manifestations of insecurity by moving beyond traditional materialist interpretations that focus on the military dimension and state actors.

Keywords: International Conflict; Networked Insecurity; Hybrid Warfare; Cyber Insecurity; Non-State Actors; Globalization.

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Introduction

International conflict has long been considered one of the core phenomena responsible for the development of international relations and the transformation of the international system. Since the advent of the modern state the study of conflict has been inextricably linked to questions of power, sovereignty, war and international balance. Traditional thinking about the Westphalian order was that interstate wars represented the main form of conflict, while classical realist perspectives defined conflict as a natural consequence of the anarchic structure of the international system and the constant struggle of states for survival and protection of national interests (Waltz, 1979, p. 102).

However, the fundamental change in the nature of international conflict has been wrought by the major transformations that have reconfigured the international system since the end of the Cold War. Contemporary conflicts are no longer fought only in the traditional military sense between sovereign states, but increasingly develop in more complex and interlinked environments, fuelled by the

acceleration of globalisation, technological development and the growing interdependence of political, economic and security structures.

Within this context, new actors have gradually appeared alongside the state such as armed groups, private military companies, cyber actors and transnational organisations, who are increasingly involved in the production of conflict and management of insecurity within the international environment (Kaldor, 2012, p. 58). The digital transformation and the development of cyberspace have simultaneously contributed to the emergence of new forms of threats that go beyond traditional geographical boundaries, making international security increasingly interconnected with information, technology, and transnational networks (Nye, 2010, p. 3).

Besides, modern wars are not only the result of geopolitical or military rivalry. There is a growing interaction between economic instability, social fragmentation, cyber disruption, informational manipulation, environmental pressures and transnational violence in interconnected environments that give rise to more complex forms of insecurity and instability.

These transformations have shown the insufficiency of the traditional state-centric and military-centric approaches for understanding the complexity of contemporary international conflict, especially in the face of the increasing convergence of hybrid threats, technological transformation and transnational dynamics. Therefore, contemporary conflict is increasingly being understood through broader analytical approaches that can integrate political, economic, technological, informational and societal dimensions within the contemporary international system.

Statement of the problem

The transformation of the international system has had a major impact upon the nature of international conflict. Today's insecurity is increasingly played out through interrelated processes involving state and non-state actors in political, economic, technological, cyber and informational domains, rather than simply stemming from traditional interstate confrontation.

Therefore, the main research problem of this study can be reformulated as follows:

How have structural transformations within the contemporary international system contributed to the evolution of international conflict toward a networked and self-reproducing structure of interconnected insecurity ?

Hypotheses Main Hypothesis

Research Problem Contemporary international conflict no longer develops primarily through isolated interstate confrontation, but increasingly functions as a networked and self-reproducing ecosystem of interconnected insecurity operating across political, technological, economic, informational, and transnational environments.

Secondary Hypotheses

- The diffusion of power beyond the state has weakened the exclusively state-centric structure of contemporary conflict dynamics.
- Hybrid warfare, cyber insecurity, and informational manipulation have progressively blurred the distinction between war and peace.
- Globalization, technological interdependence, and multidimensional vulnerability have intensified the circulation and reproduction of insecurity across interconnected spaces.

Methodology

This study employs a multi-level analytical approach combining historical analysis, comparative analysis and structural interpretation in order to analyse the transformation of contemporary international conflict.

The research also adopts a structural analytical framework that considers the political, economic, technological, cyber, informational, and societal dimensions to better understand the complexities of contemporary insecurity dynamics.

Analytical Framework

The study employs a multi-level analytical framework based on the premise that contemporary conflict can no longer be sufficiently explained through traditional state-centric approaches based solely on military rivalry between sovereign states.

The framework employs historical, comparative and structural analysis to investigate how contemporary international conflict is increasingly developing as a networked, self-reproducing ecosystem of interconnected insecurity.

I. The Structural Transformation of International Conflict

1. From Classical Interstate Wars to Complex Conflict Dynamics

For centuries, international conflict was largely conceived as a direct military face-off between sovereign states seeking power, territorial aggrandisement or strategic influence within an anarchic international system. This traditional view of conflict was heavily influenced by the Westphalian model after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 which institutionalised the principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention in internal affairs. In this perspective, war was closely linked to the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force, and the pursuit of national interests through military means (Bull, 1977, p. 16).

Conflict was regarded by classical realist thinkers as an intrinsic characteristic of international relations. According to Thomas Hobbes, insecurity and competition were natural consequences of the absence of a higher authority to control relations between political entities. Likewise, the realist outlooks, which were later developed by scholars like Kenneth Waltz, saw international conflict as a structural product of the anarchic nature of the international system, where states were always seeking survival and security in the face of uncertainty and power competition (Waltz, 1979, p. 102).

Most major conflicts in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were largely reflective of this interstate logic. The causes of wars were normally geopolitical calculations, territorial disputes or balance-of-power considerations, and they were usually fought by regular armies on behalf of sovereign states. But the sheer destructiveness of the two World Wars gradually changed the character of international politics and the character of conflict itself.

International institutions emerged after 1945, most importantly the United Nations, that were designed to create new collective security arrangements to restrain the use of force by major powers against each other.

Even with such institutional developments, the Cold War created a new configuration of international conflict based on ideological polarisation and strategic rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. While the threat of nuclear deterrence prevented the two superpowers from directly fighting each other on a limited scale, a number of proxy wars were fought in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In this sense, the conflict was gently moving away from traditional interstate warfare to ideological competition, indirect intervention and battles for geopolitical influence.

The end of the Cold War also brought about another major change in the nature of international conflict. Far from creating a more stable international order, the post-Cold War period has unleashed civil wars, ethnic violence, transnational terrorism and asymmetrical conflicts waged by non-state actors in weak or fractured political contexts. Armed groups, militias and transnational extremist organisations gradually became key players in conflict dynamics, especially in areas of political instability and institutional fragility (Kaldor, 2012, p. 58).

Simultaneously globalisation and technological transformation accelerated the evolution of conflict beyond traditional military confrontation. Economic interdependence, digital communication networks,

cyber capabilities, and transnational flows of information have

helped create more diffuse and hybrid forms of insecurity. Today's conflicts combine more and more military operations with cyber attacks, information warfare, economic coercion and irregular violence so that the distinction between war and peace becomes more and more blurred (Münkler, 2005, p. 14).

As a result, international conflict cannot be simplified to conventional wars between sovereign states. It has evolved into a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of state and non-state actors playing out in inter-connected local, regional and global spaces. This transformation is a reflection of wider structural changes with the international system itself, whereby power, security and sovereignty are increasingly fragmented and interconnected.

2. Cold War Conflict and Bipolar Security Structures

The structure of international conflict underwent a major transformation at the end of the Second World War. The post-1945 order did not remove global instability, but it produced a new form of strategic confrontation, driven by ideological rivalry and bipolar competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. In this case, the international conflict became more and more connected with the logic of deterrence, geopolitical influence, and global balance of power (Kissinger, 1994, p. 703).

Unlike the great interstate wars of previous centuries, the Cold War was characterised by the lack of a direct military conflict between the two superpowers. The development of nuclear weapons created a situation of mutual deterrence whereby the risks of direct war were potentially catastrophic. This created conflict in the form of indirect confrontation, by using political pressure, military alliances, intelligence services and proxy wars in various parts of the world.

During this period, regions including Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America were key theatres of geopolitical rivalry. The wars in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Angola were the manifestation of the strategic battle between the capitalist and socialist blocs. While they may have frequently looked local, these battles were tied to the global rivalry that was creating the international system of the time.

The Cold War also revealed the strategic and ideological components of combat. Territorial issues or traditional military goals were no longer the exclusive source of international problems, but rival political models and ideological influence became increasingly important. Conflict, in this sense, was a manifestation of a broader contest over the structure of the international order and the distribution of global power.

Realist theories have described conflict during the Cold War as a direct consequence of the bipolar international system. Kenneth Waltz argued that bipolarity created a relatively stable balance of power, because the international system was dominated by two major actors capable of controlling escalation and maintaining strategic equilibrium (Waltz, 1979, p. 168).

Moreover, the Cold War resulted in the militarisation of international politics and the growth of strategic alliances like NATO and the Warsaw Pact, security is now increasingly associated with military capability, nuclear deterrence and ideological compatibility, thus reinforcing the perception that conflict is a permanent feature of international relations.

despite the bipolarity that imposed a stability – the Cold War also helped to globalise the dynamics of conflict. The local crises frequently escalated to international levels due to outside intervention and ideological competition. Thus it was an important transition period between traditional interstate wars and the more fragmented and transnational forms of conflict that followed the fall of the bipolar order.

3. Post-Cold War Transformations and the Rise of Complex Conflict

Contrary to all expectations, the end of the Cold War gave rise to a less stable international order, marked by an escalation of civil wars and ethnic violence, as well as cross-border terrorism and asymmetric conflicts. Among the consequences of this new international order is the emergence of a type of warfare

distinct from traditional warfare, particularly within fragile states suffering from political instability, weak institutions, and the disintegration of identity. In this regard, Edward Azar explains that the roots of these conflicts lie primarily in long-term political exclusion and social marginalization, creating what are known as protracted social conflicts. (Azar, 1990, p. 5).

On the other hand, the traditional state-centered structure of security and conflict, and the state's effectiveness, faced a major challenge during this period due to the growing influence of non-state armed groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS in the dynamics of international conflict, as the growing confrontation between states and decentralized armed networks operating through ideological and transnational structures has rendered military responses less effective. (Rogers, 2007, p. 33).

Contemporary conflicts are no longer merely wars between two or more states but now encompass other elements such as identity politics, irregular violence, organized crime, and transnational networks. All these new elements have made conflict dynamics more complex, effectively weakening political authority. (Kaldor, 2012, p. 58).

In the same vein, it can be argued that the new post-Cold War international order and its consequences through the emergence of new international issues, non-state actors, and changes in the nature of conflicts and their actors, as well as the emergence of conflicts within fragile states— all of this has directly impacted the role and authority of the state within conflicts, which has receded from being the sole actor to becoming one among many actors in contemporary conflicts, a development that has naturally.

All of this has had a direct impact on the role and authority of the state within conflicts, as it has shifted from being the sole actor to just one of many actors in contemporary conflicts.

This has naturally led to the evolution of conflicts from traditional international military conflicts into complex conflicts involving multiple actors and new issues.

4. Globalization and the Changing Nature of Conflict

Globalisation has deeply changed the nature of international conflict by raising interdependence between political, economic, technological and security systems across

national boundaries. Today's conflicts are no longer confined to a particular territory, but are increasingly played out through interconnected transnational networks that link local instability to regional and global dynamics.

Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye explain that the increasing interdependence has reduced the ability of states to act independently within the international system compared to the past, which has negatively affected the strength of states and their ability to address complex security issues relying solely on traditional military power (Keohane & Nye, 2012, p. 9) . In light of this fragility, the conflict is no longer limited to the military dimension; it increasingly encompasses economic coercion, cyber operations, information warfare, and cross-border insecurity.

Technological transformations have led to a shift in the traditional concept of military power in the contemporary international system. The concept of power has expanded further to include the flow of information, digital infrastructure, and communication networks as forms of power, through what Joseph Nye calls cyber power. (Nye, 2010, p. 3).

At the same time, globalisation has also influenced and increased the power of non-state actors by facilitating the transfer of financial resources, weapons, and ideological discourses across borders. All this interconnectedness has given armed groups and transnational networks the opportunity to operate more effectively beyond the control of states. And just as economic globalisation has contributed to the emergence of new forms of instability linked to inequality and competition for resources, many contemporary conflicts have been fuelled by what is known as the political economy of violence, especially in fragile states where armed groups exploit natural resources and weak governance structures

to prolong these conflicts. (Collier, 2007, p. 19).

globalisation and its ramifications have transformed conflict from its traditional concept into a more interconnected, hybrid, and multidimensional phenomenon shaped by interactions among various actors and cross-border political, economic, and technological pressures within the new international system.

II. Emerging Actors and the Reconfiguration of Conflict Dynamics

1. Non-State Armed Groups

The growing influence of non-state armed groups is one of the most significant shifts in contemporary conflict; While wars were traditionally fought by sovereign states and regular armies, many conflicts now involve informal armed actors operating outside traditional state structures, including terrorist organizations, ethnic militias, separatist movements, and cross-border smuggling networks.

In fact, the rise of these groups stems from several causes: the weakness of state authority, institutional fragility, economic crises, and identity-based divisions within politically unstable

regions have opened the door for these groups to establish a presence in areas where their communities face political exclusion, social marginalization, and the erosion of the legitimacy of state institutions. (Azar, 1990, p. 5).

Furthermore, the post-Cold War international environment, particularly following the events of September 11, have expanded the role of transnational armed groups in international security dynamics. Contemporary conflicts now largely involve direct confrontation between states and decentralized armed networks operating through ideological and religious structures that transcend borders, rendering the traditional state's military response less effective against these security threats. (Rogers, 2007, p. 33).

Furthermore, globalization and the digital communication systems and networks it has spawned—as well as globalization and its byproducts—have enabled these organizations to develop significant operational capabilities through digital communication systems, illicit economic networks, and cross-border financing. This has allowed them to move across borders and exploit the political environment of the Levant, with these armed groups increasingly operating within fragmented political environments shaped by identity politics, irregular violence, and financing networks, where the distinction between war, organized crime, and political violence has become increasingly blurred and intertwined. (Kaldor, 2012, p. 58).

It can be argued that international conditions—or the outcomes of the new international order—have all contributed to the growing role and power of these armed organizations or non-state actors and to the transformation of the international conflict environment in a way that makes them and changes the international conflict environment.

2. Private Military and Security Companies

The role of military and security companies represents a significant shift in the dynamics of warfare. This field, which was once the exclusive domain of the state and its military, has shifted to a security management model reliant on private-sector actors operating within the global security markets for profit.

There is no doubt that the privatization of war has led to a genuine change in the nature of contemporary conflicts, and this phenomenon has intensified and become more evident since the Cold War, particularly during the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, where companies such as Blackwater later renamed Academi and the Wagner Group have, in more recent times, been involved in military training, logistical support, intelligence activities, and even direct combat operations in various conflict zones.

P. W. Singer attributes the fact that these companies have entered the arena of international conflicts and emerged as actors in the security environment to the globalization of military services and the growing demand for flexible security capabilities outside the traditional structures of the state. (Singer, 2008, p.

45).

In many cases, these companies operate within an ambiguous legal environment, where the distinction between public authority and private force becomes difficult. This has led us to raise questions regarding accountability, sovereignty, and the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force, as well as the retreat of the state as a primary actor in conflict in favor of profit-driven military companies. This has resulted in clear structural shifts in the organization of security within the contemporary international system, where conflict has become more about profit than security.

3. International Organizations and NGOs

States, in their handling of wars and conflicts, used to focus solely on military intervention between states, but this pattern has changed, and the emphasis is now not only on stopping wars but also on building peace and preventing the recurrence of conflict.

Boutros Boutros-Ghali emphasises that international security is no longer just about the use of military force, but also includes preventing conflicts before they occur and managing them through political and humanitarian means such as mediation and peacekeeping. And this is through what he described in his book "An Agenda for Peace" as an approach or policy for governing international security. (Boutros-Ghali, 1992, p. 11).

In light of this approach, the sole objective is no longer just to end wars but to prevent their occurrence. Where the state alone cannot act within this approach, international organisations and non-governmental organisations have become key players in managing international conflicts. And it has taken on an increasing role in peacekeeping operations, humanitarian aid, mediation initiatives, and reconstruction programs between and after conflicts. Non-governmental organisations, such as humanitarian organisations, have also taken on a significant role within conflict zones.

They provide humanitarian aid such as food, medical treatment, and relief, but they also operate in very complex environments where humanitarian efforts have taken on a political and security dimension. Thus, their role is no longer solely humanitarian; they have also become key actors in international conflict management. Thomas Weiss argues that humanitarian organizations increasingly operate within complex political environments where humanitarian action, security concerns, and international governance mechanisms often overlap (Weiss, 2013, p. 27).

Today, the world has become one of multi-party conflict management, where states no longer hold the sole function due to their lack of unique capabilities. The increased participation of international organisations and non-governmental organisations is reflected in the multiple levels of global governance, where conflict management is no longer exclusive to sovereign states but has become a joint process involving multiple parties.

4. Digital Actors and Cyber Power

Technological transformations and globalisation have had a significant impact on changing and deepening the structure of international conflict, such that cyber actors, hacker networks, technology companies, and digital platforms now directly influence security dynamics alongside traditional political and military actors.

Joseph Nye believes that the expansion of cyberspace has created new fields of competition between countries, including cyber espionage, digital surveillance, information wars, and attacks targeting critical infrastructure. The concept of power in its new cyber form has become an important dimension of influential international power, due to the increasing reliance of states and non-state actors on digital systems and this type of power. (Nye, 2010, p. 3).

Cyber conflicts have blurred the lines between civilian and military objectives. Thomas Rid explains that the new concept of cyber power has changed the nature of conflicts, allowing them to occur without reaching the levels of traditional wars. But despite that, their effects touch upon strategic, political, and

economic aspects and are capable of destabilising countries and their security. (Rid, 2013, p. 9).

Therefore, given the importance of the cyber dimension and the changing and expanding concept of power to include this dimension, it has become impossible to ignore the significance of technological transformation and digital globalisation in reshaping the structure of international conflict and introducing cyber actors into the game of international disputes.

5. The Transformation of Sovereignty in a Multi-Actor Environment

The changes brought about by the post-Cold War system, such as the emergence of new international actors like international organisations, armed organisations, and military companies, in addition to the effects of globalisation and technology, have all directly impacted the state in its concept and the nature of its sovereignty.

Even the concept of sovereignty has undergone changes; sovereignty is no longer exercised exclusively through territorial control and military power, but is increasingly practiced through interconnected political, economic, technological, and informational processes at multiple levels. The concept of traditional Westphalian sovereignty, which the state historically inherited and is based on its monopoly over the legitimate use of violence, control over territory, conflict management, and security management, is gradually weakening, especially in strategic areas such as information, finance, cyberspace, and global governance.

Richard Falk asserts that the contemporary international system, or what is known as post-Westphalian, distributes power among multiple actors who operate beyond the traditional international boundaries. However, the state remains a key actor in the international system, but it no longer possesses control over the dynamics of conflict or security operations. (Falk, 2015, p. 295).

At the same time, Joseph Nye explains that the concept of power has undergone significant changes, becoming more stringent and multidimensional due to this technological transformation and the increasing importance of information and communication networks.

States no longer rely solely on military capabilities but also on other forms of power such as soft power and the ability to influence the flow of information, among others. (Nye, 2011, p. 113).

Thus, the concept of power in its broad sense is no longer entirely the domain of the state; there are many types or fields of power where the state is not the main actor. This is the reason that has led to the weakening of the state's dominance and power in international conflicts. The expansion of digital actors, multinational corporations, private security companies, international organisations, and transnational armed groups has led to the emergence of more networked forms of power within the international system, such that security management has increasingly relied on interactions between multiple actors operating simultaneously at various local, regional, and global levels.

Thus, sovereignty in the contemporary international system has become fragmented and conflicting, capable of adapting to complex transnational dynamics. Contemporary conflict no longer exclusively reflects state-centric patterns of violence; rather, it now represents a network of power formed by the interaction of governmental and non-governmental actors in an increasingly intertwined international environment.

III. Hybridization and the Expansion of Contemporary Threats

1. Hybrid Warfare and Informational Conflict

One of the primary changes in contemporary international conflict is hybrid warfare, i.e. the increased use of military and non-military instruments within the same strategic framework. Unlike traditional warfare, which is based on direct military confrontation, hybrid warfare encompasses cyber operations, propaganda, economic pressure, proxy forces and psychological warfare.

These changes reflect the changing nature of power and strategic struggle in the current international

order. States and non-state actors are increasingly aiming to damage their opponents not only militarily, but also by targeting information systems, political institutions and public opinion.

“Non-linear” conflict, in which hybrid warfare is increasingly used to destabilise enemies by military, political, economic and cyber means without resorting to direct large-scale confrontation (Galeotti, 2016, p. 7), is becoming more and more frequent.

The structure of international warfare has been fundamentally altered by digital globalisation and technological revolution. Cyber actors, hacker networks, technology businesses and digital platforms are increasingly affecting security dynamics alongside traditional political and military actors.

The growth of cyberspace has produced new realms of competition involving cyber espionage, digital monitoring, information warfare and attacks on key infrastructure. Cyber power is an important facet of international power today as states and non-state actors are increasingly dependent on digital technologies and information networks for their political, economic and security activities (Nye, 2010, p. 3).

2. Cyber Insecurity and Strategic Vulnerability

Proxy warfare has been one of the most important forms of geopolitical competition in contemporary international relations. States are increasingly seeking to achieve strategic goals through indirect intervention, local allies, armed groups and regional actors within conflict zones instead of direct military confrontation.

Local wars, like the ones in Syria and Ukraine, show how they can become broader battlefields of international competition between several third-party powers trying to extend regional influence and shift strategic balances.

Indirect intervention allows states to affect the dynamics of a conflict without the high political and military costs of direct war. Proxy strategies therefore offer more flexibility in managing geopolitical competition and projecting influence in unstable regions (Mumford, 2013, p. 11).

At the same time, the growing involvement of external actors tends often to prolong violence, to fracture political authority and to make resolution of conflict more difficult. Local struggles are increasingly connected to larger regional and international struggles over power.

Today’s proxy wars are thus a sign of the increasing internationalisation of local conflicts, and of the increasing interaction of domestic instability and international geopolitical competition in an increasingly interconnected international system.

4. Environmental and Humanitarian Insecurity

Environmental pressures have become increasingly important sources of instability in the contemporary international system. Fragile regions are experiencing an increasing convergence of political, economic and social tensions with climate change, environmental degradation, water scarcity, food insecurity and forced migration.

Environmental insecurity does not necessarily lead to violent conflict, but can increase competition for resources and increase social vulnerability in politically unstable contexts. The growth of humanitarian crises, displacement and local instability in many parts of the world is thus driven by climate-related pressures (Ide, 2018, p. 3).

Resource scarcity, notably water, agricultural land and energy supplies, has also become more and more related with greater security problems. Environmental degradation can undermine governance, heighten societal tensions and produce conditions conducive to the escalation of conflict.

And at the same time, humanitarian crises arising from war, climatic disasters and forced displacement are increasingly spilling over state borders and turning local emergencies into regional and international security issues. Current insecurity is a reflection of the growing inter-connectivity of environmental

constraints, humanitarian vulnerability and political instability in an integrated world system.

IV. Multi-Dimensional Drivers of Contemporary International Conflict

1. Economic Dimensions of Conflict

Economic factors have become a central reason in shaping the dynamics of contemporary conflicts. Unlike traditional wars, which were mostly aimed at territorial expansion or ideological disputes, modern conflicts primarily arise from economic inequality, competition for resources, and weak governance.

In unstable systems, this often results in armed groups exploiting natural resources or engaging in illicit trade networks, where these groups benefit from the state of economic instability to fund their military operations and prolong the conflict. Therefore, contemporary conflicts are often linked to economic systems that benefit from functional failure and instability rather than being due to political and military objectives.

Among the features of the new international order are the expansion and growing interdependence of the global economy, as economies around the world have become increasingly interconnected, leading to a deepening and intensification of the international dimensions of conflict; Economic dependency, financial crises, and uneven development have increasingly become factors contributing to rising social tensions, political fragility, and regional instability within the most vulnerable societies, The effects of conflicts are no longer limited to the countries experiencing them but have spread to other regions and countries through rising energy prices, disruptions in global supply chains, and food crises.

Furthermore, economic factors have paved the way for commodities such as oil, gas, rare minerals, and strategic natural resources to become key factors fueling tensions and conflicts between states. The economic dimension, through interdependence within the global economic system, has deepened and expanded the causes of international conflicts, The economic dimension has not been limited to generating causes of conflict; rather, it has itself become a tool of conflict. In many cases, states no longer resort directly to military force but instead use economic sanctions, asset freezes, and financial and banking pressures as tools of the new international conflict. (Collier, 2007, p. 19).

Globalization has facilitated the financing of and access to conflicts. In the past, wars relied primarily on state resources, but today even armed groups are able to finance their activities through smuggling, drug trafficking, and the illicit trade in minerals and natural resources

2. Identity and Cultural Fragmentation

Identity-related tensions are as important as other factors that drive international conflicts. This religious, ethnic and cultural factor has become a very important factor in igniting or deepening conflicts, especially in fragile and unstable countries, where issues of exclusion, marginalisation and weak state legitimacy emerge.

Ethnic, religious, cultural and sectarian divisions are important factors in increasing violence in these fragile environments, which in turn lead to major conflicts. In many modern international conflicts they are explained not only on the basis of geopolitical, political and economic factors, but also identity-related and social dependency conflicts. The identity dimension is often used in conflict settings; it is not only cause but also a tool or a means to escalate conflicts in favour of certain political actors by mobilising ethnic or religious narratives to increase support, legitimise violence or deepen social polarisation.

Samuel Huntington suggested that modern day tensions are often in the form of clashes of civilisations and cultural and religious differences. This can sometimes make conflicts appear to be between different cultures or religions. (Huntington, 1996, p. 28).

Identity is not only a cause or means to ignite and deepen conflicts. It could be one of the reasons that lead to unresolved conflicts, making it very difficult to solve these disputes especially when there is a history of injustice, colonisation or other factors. In modern conflicts, identity has become a determinant, sometimes more dangerous than military or economic factors, because it influences belonging and the

feeling of existence within society, and controlling its consequences is very difficult (Mamdani, 2001, p. 7).

3. Environmental Pressures and Security Instability

The dynamics of international security and war are increasingly affected by environmental pressures. Environmental challenges such as climate change, environmental degradation, water scarcity, food insecurity and population displacement combine to affect or cause long term conflicts.

Environmental change does not directly cause war, but it can exacerbate competition for finite resources between states or inside a state. This may exacerbate the volatility of fragile areas, either regional or social (Ide, 2018, p. 3).

These climate-related factors thereby worsen humanitarian crises, migrant flows and local insecurity. These issues do not directly lead to war but they do raise the probability of tensions and conflict particularly in unstable governments. The environment does not create war, but it does intensify conditions and heighten the risk of conflict when states are weak or unstable.

4. Technological Transformation and Conflict Evolution

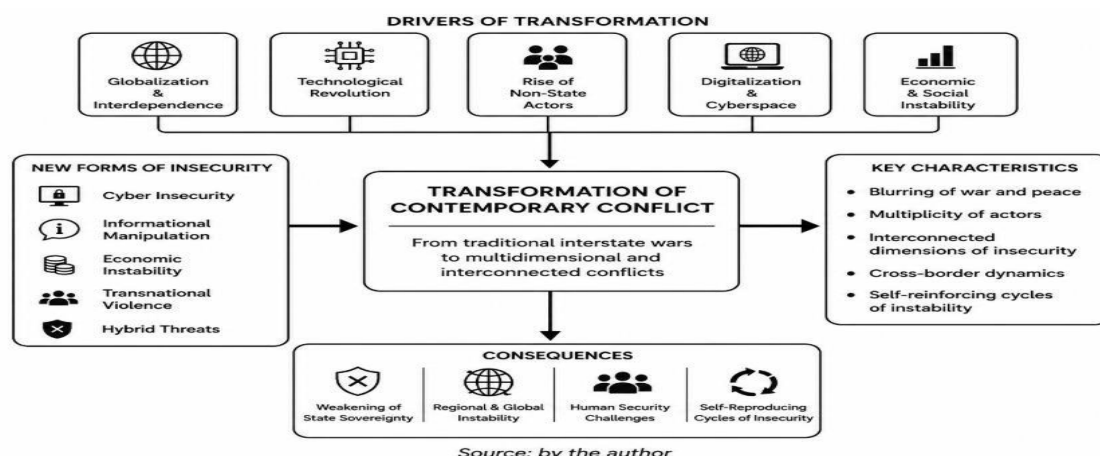
The technological shift has deeply changed the structure and evolution of modern conflict.

The international system has been altered by improvements in digital communication, artificial intelligence, cyber capabilities, surveillance systems and information technology, in terms of the organization of aggression and the exercise of power.

While traditional military involvement continues to occur, today's conflicts are increasingly defined by cyber operations, digital propaganda, information manipulation and technology competitiveness. The growth of digital infrastructure has created new vulnerabilities that can undermine political institutions, economic systems and national security organisations.

Technology has also altered the strategic value of information in conflict contexts. Control of communication networks, digital platforms and information flows is an increasing source of power in modern international relations (Nye, 2011, p. 113).

At the same time, rapid technological development has speeded up the diffusion of power away from traditional state structures. Technological capabilities of non-state actors, cyber networks and transnational organisations are increasingly able to influence the conflict dynamics and security processes at different levels of the international system.



V. The Autonomous Ecosystem of Contemporary Insecurity

1. Beyond the Fragmentation of Contemporary Conflict

The modern international conflict is developing in interlinked political, technological, economic and informational contexts that can no longer be conceived in the conventional linear conceptions of war and

security. The expansion of the international system has steadily erased the boundaries between domestic and external dangers, between the military and civilian spheres, and between direct and indirect confrontations.

In this setting, insecurity is no longer generated only through conventional military aggression between sovereign nations, but through the convergence of many vulnerabilities working simultaneously across several levels of the international system. Cyber attacks, economic instability, political fragmentation, informational manipulation, environmental stresses and transnational violence increasingly interact in the same conflict situations, producing forms of insecurity that are fundamentally interrelated rather than separate.

Such more complicated processes are suggestive of wider developments connected with globalisation and interdependence. As this interconnection increases, there is a growing likelihood that local crises may have regional and worldwide impacts that can alter the broader security situation (Keohane & Nye, 2012, p. 9). Thus, modern conflict is more a

matter of continual processes of interaction between many forms of instability, rather than discrete clashes.

At the same time, the spread of authority beyond the state has multiplied the actors participating in the production of insecurity. States are increasingly operating alongside armed groups, cyber actors, digital platforms, private military businesses and transnational networks (Falk, 2015, p. 295) in fragmented security situations where authority itself is dispersed and fragile.

Such a transformation suggests that contemporary insecurity can no longer be understood as a succession of isolated crises to be tackled individually through traditional security mechanisms. Contemporary conflict is instead increasingly imagined as a dynamic environment where different forms of instability interact, circulate and reinforce each other across interconnected political and technological spaces.

In this vein, contemporary international conflict is increasingly like an autonomous ecosystem of insecurity, in which violence, vulnerability, technological disruption, political fragmentation and informational instability interact in mutually reinforcing dynamics, rather than discrete security events.

2. The Self-Reproduction of Insecurity

One of the most significant innovations in modern international warfare is the propensity of insecurity to replicate itself in a chain of instability. Traditional conflicts were normally confined in area, time and players. Contemporary insecurity, on the contrary, is more and more generated through self-reinforcing processes in which one type of instability creates the conditions for the formation of another.

From this point of view crises are no longer isolated. Political fragility might speed up economic deterioration; economic decay could intensify social division; social fragmentation could facilitate radicalism, digital manipulation or international violence. The current sense of insecurity is less a sequence of crises than a process in which a variety of kinds of instability interact and reinforce each other.

This transformation is a structural change in the organization of conflict itself. Instability is circulating more and more through interconnected political, technological, economic and informational environments and not simply within traditional territorial boundaries.

Contemporary conflict is thus played out in cumulative interactions that can reproduce insecurity without direct military engagement.

Globalisation exacerbates this process by accelerating the transmission of financial crises, cyber threats, political disruption, disinformation and transnational violence across interconnected networks. Local instability in highly interdependent environments can have regional and international consequences that can create wider systemic vulnerability (Keohane & Nye, 2012, p. 9).

At the same time, the multiplication of actors in contemporary conflict contributes to the persistence of insecurity. In fragmented security environments where instability itself becomes a factor for strategic exploitation, there is increasing interaction between states, armed groups, cyber actors, digital platforms, private military companies, and transnational networks.

This development indicates that modern conflict is increasingly conducted through mechanisms of self-reproduction whereby insecurity generates new forms of insecurity on multiple levels simultaneously. Violence, technological vulnerability, informational manipulation, economic fragility and political fragmentation are no longer isolated crises, but interconnected processes that feed each other continuously within a globally networked system.

In this sense, the modern international system is increasingly creating conditions in which instability is structurally embedded in the operations of interrelated political and security environments, rather than constituting a transient disruption that can be fully managed through conventional security mechanisms.

3. The Circulation of Conflict Across Interconnected Spaces

One of the defining aspects of contemporary international conflict is that instability no longer stays inside a single geographical, political or strategic zone. Instead, the new modes of insecurity are arising as conflict more and more occurs in interconnected spaces where local crises, technology vulnerabilities, economic pressures and transnational dangers are in perpetual interaction.

In this view, the development of modern conflict does not take place in isolated encounters among unique individuals or in certain geographies. Instead, instability proliferates across interconnected networks in the political, cyber, informational, economic, and social sectors that can move the impacts of crisis outside of their original contexts.

This circulation of conflict is symptomatic of the increasing interdependence of the contemporary international system. Political instability may cause economic disruption, economic disruption may cause social fragmentation, while social polarisation may lead to radicalisation, digital manipulation or transnational violence. Contemporary insecurity is not a series of discrete crises but rather a dynamic process in which different modes of instability are constantly interacting and reinforcing one another.

This process has been further accelerated by the spread of digital communication systems that allow information, ideological narratives, cyber threats, and political influence to flow quickly across borders and societies. In high connectivity contexts, regional and global consequences increasingly take the form of local instability with the potential to change the broader security dynamics (Keohane & Nye, 2012, p 9).

The proliferation of actors operating simultaneously in different levels of insecurity supports the spread of conflict. States, cyber actors, armed groups, private military companies, digital platforms and transnational organisations are increasingly active in the

same fractured security spaces, resulting in overlapping and multidimensional forms of instability.

Territorially fixed or functionally separated approaches no longer suffice to understand contemporary conflict. Increasingly, conflict becomes a circulating process of interconnected insecurity that runs through several domains and keeps reproducing new vulnerabilities in the international system.

This transformation means that the current international system is not only experiencing crises, but is increasingly operating on the basis of the permanent circulation of instability itself in interlinked political, technological, economic and informational environments.

4. Toward a Dynamic Interpretation of Contemporary Conflict

Political fragility, technological disruption, cyber insecurity, economic instability, informational manipulation and transnational violence are all interactive and progressive in nature, suggesting that contemporary conflict cannot be understood in fragmented analytical categories that separate military,

political, economic or social dimensions of insecurity. What is instead increasingly appearing is a structurally interconnected environment where instability works through continuous processes of interaction, circulation and reproduction at the same time and at multiple levels.

In this context, contemporary conflict is not simply about simultaneous parallel crises.

Instead, the different facets of insecurity increasingly merge into a broader systemic dynamic in which each vulnerability contributes to magnifying and reshaping the others. Political fragmentation might increase economic fragility. Economic fragility might increase social polarisation. Informational manipulation and cyber disruption might increase institutional instability and enable new forms of violence. Conflict thus becomes less and less a series of discrete events and more and more a web of interlinked instability that is perpetually adaptive.

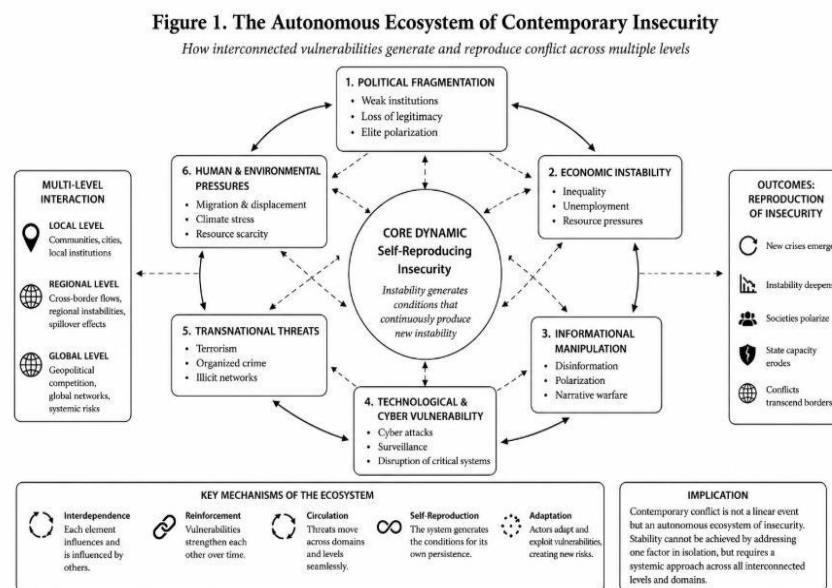
This transformation is important because insecurity is not simply imposed externally on the international system any more; it is increasingly reinforced from within the very interdependent structures through which globalisation, digitalisation and transnational interaction are taking shape. These same interconnected networks that are used to communicate, exchange economic value, integrate technologies and connect the world at large, also create the conditions for the rapid circulation of instability across political and security environments.

This evolution also points to a contemporary international system that operates more through overlapping layers of vulnerability than stable balances of power. Traditional security mechanisms were primarily designed to contain territorially identifiable threats emerging from distinctly identifiable actors. But today, insecurity is increasingly produced through decentralised, fluid processes, in which the distinctions between state and non-state

actors, civilian and military spaces, war and peace, domestic and international instability are blurred.

Thus, the complexity of contemporary conflict is not solely linked to the multiplication of threats, but to the structural interconnectedness that connects them in the same global environment. Contemporary insecurity is therefore becoming more and more like a dynamic and self-adaptive ecosystem where crises circulate, interact, mutate and reproduce new forms of instability across interconnected political, technological, informational, economic and social spaces.

In this sense the contemporary international system is increasingly less an order periodically disturbed by crises and increasingly more a permanent circulating mechanism of interconnected insecurity, in which instability itself is inscribed in the functioning of global interaction networks.



Source: diagram given by the author

Conclusion

- Traditional state-centric, military-centered approaches can no longer understand current international conflict.
- Structural transformations in recent decades have drastically altered the nature of conflict and insecurity, driven by globalisation, technological change and transnational interdependence.
- Non-state actors, cyber threats, informational warfare, proxy conflicts and hybrid forms of violence have contributed to a more fragmented security environment.
- Modern insecurity increasingly manifests itself through interlinked political, economic, technological, informational and environmental processes at multiple levels running in parallel.
- Modern conflict is no longer a series of isolated crises, but a continuous process in which different forms of instability interact, circulate and reinforce each other.
- The current international system is increasingly operated by overlapping layers of vulnerability, rather than stable and territorially contained balances of power.
- Conflict thus emerges less as a temporary disruption of the international order than a dynamic ecosystem of related insecurity that can reproduce itself across local, regional and global spaces.
- Instability has penetrated cyber, economic, informational, political and social domains, erasing the line between internal and external security, war and peace, and civilian and military domains.
- Contemporary conflict is increasingly a manifestation of the emergence of a networked and self-adaptive structure of insecurity embedded in the functioning of globalisation and digital interdependence themselves.

Therefore, a more flexible and multidimensional analytical approach is necessary to understand contemporary international conflict. This approach should encompass the interaction of state and non-state actors, technological transformation, informational circulation, and structural vulnerability in an interconnected international system.

Recommendations

- Developing multidimensional analytical methodologies to cover all the facets of insecurity (military, cyber, economic, informational, environmental and sociological) under one security umbrella.
- Enhancing international cooperation on cyber security, digital governance and regulation of transnational technical dangers.
- Enhance early warning and strategic surveillance systems to detect interconnected weaknesses before they turn into broad-based catastrophes.
- Responding to conflict with military force alone, rather than tackling the underlying factors that generate instability – such as political fragility, economic disparity, social division and weak institutions.
- Advocating integrated security policies (political, technological, economic, humanitarian and informational aspects of conflict management).
- Improved cooperation among nations, international organisations, NGOs, cyber professionals and regional actors in multi-level security governance systems.
- Development of international legal and institutional frameworks for the control of cyber warfare, digital manipulation and the strategic use of information technologies in modern conflicts.
- Support strategies to reduce the vulnerability of key infrastructures to cyber assaults, technological

disruption and international instability.

- Advancing multidisciplinary research on the interaction of artificial intelligence, digital change, globalisation and future dynamics of conflict.
- Reconsidering old notions of security in the light of rising interconnection between local instability and global insecurity in today's international system.

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