



Beyond War: How Chips and Maritime Straits Checkmate the West

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The 20th-century conception of war is dead. For decades, we identified armed conflict with the clanking of tank tracks, the roar of fighter jets, and the rigidity of geographical borders. Today, that paradigm is replaced by a fluid and pervasive reality: **hybrid warfare**. The clash unfolds in the gray areas of international law, moving along an asymmetric *continuum* where the boundaries between peacetime and wartime have dissolved, redefining the spectrum of relations between states into three dynamic phases: **Competition, Crisis, and Conflict**.

In this new scenario, military power is no longer measured solely by the number of bayonets but by the ability to secure one's logistical chain. When national security depends on microscopic components or geographical bottlenecks, the entire defense apparatus of a superpower can find itself at a dead end. It is the **economic-military impasse** that the West, and particularly the United States, faces today.

1. The Spectrum of Interstate Relations: The Hybrid Doctrine

Sub-threshold warfare does not seek the immediate physical destruction of the enemy but aims to erode its internal resilience, paralyze its decision-making processes, and exploit its structural dependencies. The conceptual architecture of the hybrid threat develops through three strategic stages:

A. Competition (The Race for Semiconductors)

It is the state of permanent friction in which global powers struggle for technological and industrial leadership. It is not about the free market but a true economic "martial art." The United States, through the approval of massive internal subsidy plans (*Chips and Science Act*), is desperately trying to bring back the production of advanced semiconductors. Taiwan and the "Asian tigers" have demonstrated that control of microchips equates to control of 21st-century power projection: without next-generation chips, command and control systems based on Artificial Intelligence, electronic scanning radars, and missile guidance systems simply cannot be built.

B. Crisis (The "Weaponization" of Resources)

When competition intensifies, civilian tools are converted into weapons (*weaponization*). It is the phase of asymmetric coercion. A hostile actor does not declare war but attacks the internal stability of the adversary through cyberattacks on critical infrastructures, disinformation campaigns to fracture social consensus, or by blocking the export of essential raw materials, such as rare earths and lithium, indispensable for the technological and military transition of the West.

C. Conflict (Multidomain Friction)

The opening of kinetic hostilities does not erase the hybrid dimension but amplifies it. The launch of missiles and the deployment of drones on the field are immediately accompanied by total financial sanctions, exclusion from international banking circuits (SWIFT), and technological embargoes. A modern conflict is not won only on the front line but on the ability of factories and research laboratories to sustain the war effort in the face of economic isolation.

2. The Strait of Hormuz and the Asphyxiation of Communication Lines

The geopolitical case of the **Strait of Hormuz** perfectly describes the transition between the state of Crisis and sub-threshold Conflict. Hormuz represents one of the vital arteries of the global economy, a bottleneck (*chokepoint*) through which about one-fifth of the world's oil consumption passes.

For a regional power like Iran, the ability to threaten or block transit in the strait does not require a blue-water fleet capable of competing with the *US Navy*. It is sufficient to use low-cost naval mines, fast boats for swarm attacks, and unidirectional attack drones (UAV/FPV). The closure or significant slowdown of traffic at Hormuz instantly translates into a global economic shock: soaring energy costs, blockage of insurance chains, and supply paralysis. It is the essence of hybrid warfare: a localized and low-intensity military action that generates a disruptive effect at the global macroeconomic level.



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3. The Economic-Military Impasse of the United States

This scenario highlights the paradox and impasse in which the United States and, by extension, the entire Atlantic Alliance find themselves. Washington possesses the most advanced and expensive conventional military instrument on the planet (nuclear aircraft carriers, fifth-generation fighters, dedicated satellite constellations). However, this military giant stands on economic and industrial clay feet.

- **The offshoring trap:** For thirty years, the West has offshored manufacturing and advanced material processing to Asia (and often to China itself), chasing the dogma of cost efficiency. The result? Today, the U.S. defense industrial base struggles to sustain the production rates of standard munitions and complex weapon systems due to the lack of basic components and critical raw materials.
- **The vulnerability of "Just in Time":** Modern military logistics have borrowed the *just in time* model from large civilian companies, minimizing stocks and warehouses. In a context of hybrid warfare and disruption of maritime communication lines (such as Hormuz or the Red Sea), this absence of strategic reserves becomes an immediate critical vulnerability.
- **The cost of asymmetry:** The United States spends millions of dollars to produce a single air defense interceptor missile, then used to shoot down modified commercial drones worth a few thousand dollars. This economic disproportion in the long run generates unsustainable financial attrition for Western budgets.

Impact Map of Hybrid Conflict

Attack Domain	Sub-Threshold Tool	Strategic Effect on the West
Technological	Semiconductor export block / Rare Earths	Paralysis of Defense production and advanced weapon systems.
Maritime	Asymmetric threat at Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb	Energy shock, inflation increase, logistical disruption.
Cognitive / Cyber	Disinformation and ransomware attacks	Political destabilization and blockage of critical civilian infrastructures.

Conclusions: Resilience as the New Pillar of Defense

The American impasse demonstrates that tactical technological superiority is utterly useless if not supported by total **industrial sovereignty and energy security**. In the new era of geoeconomics and hybrid warfare, a nation's wealth and productive capacity are no longer mere indicators of economic well-being.

A country's ability to defend itself is measured by the solidity of its scientific research, the diversification of its supplies, and the resilience of its industrial fabric. If it is not understood that

the front line of national defense is now deployed within microchip factories, artificial intelligence laboratories, and the protection of global maritime corridors, the conventional military instrument will remain a formidable machine but incapable of moving.