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## THE ROLE OF MILITARY POWER IN INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS

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**Abstract.** Military power remains a decisive force in shaping international relations and conflict dynamics. However, the nature of conflicts in the 21st century reveals that they are not solely determined by material capabilities, cultural, ethnic, and religious factors increasingly intersect with military struggles. This article argues the complex relationship between military power and conflicts, with particular attention to the intercultural dimensions that often underlie or exacerbate violent confrontations. By drawing on theoretical approaches and historical as well as contemporary case studies, it argues that sustainable peace requires not only balanced military strategies but also the recognition and management of intercultural tensions. Military power has historically been central to the emergence and resolution of conflicts, yet many of these conflicts are deeply rooted in intercultural differences such as religion, ethnicity, and identity. This paper examines the intersection of military power and intercultural conflicts, highlighting their causes, dynamics, and implications for global security. By analyzing historical and contemporary cases, as well as theoretical approaches, it argues that the future of peace depends on both the responsible use of military power and the effective management of intercultural tensions.

Military power has long been one of the central pillars of statehood and international relations. It not only determines the security of nations but also influences the causes, dynamics, and outcomes of conflicts. While military strength may deter potential adversaries, it can also escalate tensions and trigger arms races. This article explores the relationship between military power and conflicts through historical examples, theoretical frameworks, and contemporary challenges, highlighting the implications for global peace and security.

**Key words:** military power, intercultural conflicts, cultural dimensions, international relations, global peace, global security.

**Introduction.** Military power and conflicts are deeply interconnected themes in international relations and political science. Military power and conflicts have always been central to human history, from ancient empires to modern nation-states. The traditional view emphasizes the ability of armed forces to secure sovereignty, deter aggression, and impose political will. Yet, conflicts are rarely driven by military considerations alone. Cultural differences, whether ethnic, linguistic, or religious, play a significant role in fueling violence (Banks, 2015; Huntington, 1996).

The intersection of military power and intercultural conflicts raises critical questions: Why do some cultural disputes escalate into wars? How do states employ military force to manage identity-based tensions? Can intercultural dialogue prevent armed clashes? Addressing these questions is crucial for understanding today's hybrid security landscape, where power politics and identity politics converge.

From a theoretical perspective, the study of military power has traditionally been dominated by realist approaches that prioritize material capabilities, deterrence, and the balance of power. However, contemporary conflicts demonstrate that the effectiveness of military force is closely linked to social legitimacy, cultural perception, and identity narratives within and across societies. Military interventions that ignore local cultural contexts often intensify resistance, strengthen radicalization, and undermine long-term stability. At the same time, cultural identities themselves are not static; they are shaped by historical memory, political discourse, and external pressures, including the presence of foreign military forces. In this sense, military power does not operate in a cultural vacuum but actively interacts with intercultural dynamics, reshaping identities and perceptions of "us" and "the

other.” Moreover, globalization, digital communication, and mass migration have increased the visibility of cultural differences, transforming local identity disputes into transnational security concerns. As a result, modern conflicts increasingly combine conventional military operations with symbolic, informational, and psychological dimensions. Understanding military power solely in terms of weapons, troop numbers, or technological superiority is therefore insufficient. A comprehensive analysis must integrate cultural awareness, identity politics, and communication strategies into security thinking. This integrated perspective allows scholars and policymakers to act.

**Discussion.** Military power refers to the capacity of a state or actor to mobilize armed forces, deploy advanced weaponry, and sustain war efforts. It includes not only traditional ground, air, and naval forces but also nuclear deterrence, cyber warfare, and space-based capabilities (Galtung, 1996; Waltz, 1979).

There are the following types of conflicts:

- **Inter-state conflicts:** Wars between states often rooted in power rivalry (e.g., World Wars, Russia–Ukraine, etc.).
- **Intra-state conflicts:** Civil wars and insurgencies, often involving identity groups (e.g., Syria, Sudan, etc.).
- **Hybrid conflicts:** Blending conventional, irregular, and cyber operations.

The historical examples of the conflicts as follows:

- **Cold War:** A global standoff where military superiority maintained deterrence but fueled proxy wars.
  - **Iraq and Afghanistan:** Demonstrated both the reach of U.S. military power and the difficulty of defeating asymmetric insurgencies.
  - **Russia–Ukraine:** Illustrates how military aggression reshapes security orders and revives cultural-identity conflicts.

There is one more type of conflicts called intercultural conflicts. Intercultural conflicts occur when groups from different cultural backgrounds clash due to divergent values, beliefs, or identities. Key causes include (Mearsheimer, 2001; Ting-Toomey, 1999):

- Ethnic and religious divisions (e.g., Balkans, Middle East, etc).
- Migration and integration challenges (e.g., Islamophobia in Europe).
- Globalization and identity protection (resistance to cultural homogenization).
- Historical grievances rooted in colonialism or oppression.

Types of intercultural conflicts:

- **Interpersonal:** Workplace or community-level misunderstandings.
- **Communal:** Ethnic or religious tensions within a state.
- **National:** Minority–majority conflicts escalating into civil wars.
- **International:** Cultural and civilizational clashes shaping global politics.

Military power in intercultural conflicts often becomes the tool through which intercultural disputes escalate into full-scale wars. Some patterns include:

#### 1. Ethnic wars

The Yugoslav Wars (1991–2001) were not merely geopolitical but also ethnic and religious conflicts where military power was mobilized along cultural lines (Serbs, Croats, Bosnians).

#### 2. Religious conflicts

The Sunni–Shia divide in the Middle East shows how sectarian identities intersect with military struggles, with external powers arming rival groups.

#### 3. Civil wars with cultural roots

The Rwandan Genocide (1994) stemmed from Hutu–Tutsi tensions, where cultural identities were militarized and exploited for political power.

#### 4. Global terrorism

Groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS mobilize intercultural grievances (religion, anti-Western sentiment) into asymmetric military campaigns against technologically superior states.

The theories of international relations have different standpoints concerning the role of military power in intercultural conflicts. The realism emphasizes that military power is the ultimate guarantor of security, but underestimates cultural and identity-based grievances. The liberalism argues that international institutions and dialogue can reduce both military and intercultural tensions. But the theory of constructivism stresses that conflicts are socially constructed, with cultural identities and perceptions shaping why disputes escalate (Waltz, 1979; Nye, 2011).

In recent years, the world has seen an increase in military spending and an intensification of the arms race. This tendency is particularly evident against the backdrop of intensifying strategic competition between major powers such as the United States, China and Russia. For instance, it is noted that the United States is increasing military spending and strengthening its military presence in various regions in order to maintain its global leadership.

The modern character of international relations faces the contemporary challenges as following:

- **Hybrid Warfare:** Modern conflicts combine hard power with cultural and informational dimensions, such as Russia's use of propaganda in Ukraine.
- **Migration and Security:** Refugee crises create cultural tensions within host societies, sometimes leading to militarized responses.
- **Global Polarization:** Narratives like Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" risk becoming self-fulfilling if not countered with intercultural cooperation (Huntington, 1996; Nye, 2011).
- **Technology and Culture:** Artificial intelligence, cyber warfare, and digital propaganda magnify cultural divisions while reinforcing military power.

The contemporary challenges cause some policy implications such as integrating security and culture. Recent scholarship emphasizes that the relationship between military power and intercultural conflict has become increasingly complex in the last decade. Contemporary wars rarely remain confined to physical battlefields; instead, they unfold simultaneously in informational, digital, and cultural spaces, where narratives, symbols, and collective memories play a decisive role (Kaldor, 2018; Hoffman, 2018). Studies on strategic culture demonstrate that states interpret threats and the use of force through historically shaped cultural lenses, which influence doctrine, decision-making, and public support for war (Buzan & Acharya, 2022). Moreover, non-state actors actively exploit cultural grievances through social media, transnational networks, and ideological framing, transforming localized disputes into global security concerns (Williams, 2020). The rapid diffusion of emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, autonomous weapons, and algorithmic surveillance, further reshapes how military power interacts with society (Nye, 2021). These tools enhance operational efficiency but also raise ethical dilemmas related to civilian harm, discrimination, and accountability, particularly in culturally diverse environments (UNDP, 2022). Recent research also highlights that excessive reliance on military solutions in identity-based conflicts often produces short-term control while undermining long-term legitimacy (Kaldor, 2018). Consequently, scholars increasingly advocate comprehensive security approaches that integrate defense policy with conflict prevention, inclusive governance, and intercultural dialogue (Buzan & Acharya, 2022; Williams, 2020). Empirical analyses of peace operations suggest that missions incorporating cultural mediation, local participation, and protection of minority rights achieve more durable outcomes than purely coercive interventions (UNDP, 2022). In this context, military power should be understood as one component within a broader governance framework rather than a standalone solution. Such an approach aligns with contemporary international security debates emphasizing human security, resilience, and norm-based order (Nye, 2021; Williams, 2020). Conflict management must combine military strategies with intercultural dialogue. At the same time conducting a preventive diplomacy is important – early

interventions in culturally divided societies can stop disputes from escalating militarily (Nye, 2011; Galtung, 1996). At the same time states should guide by inclusive governance provided protecting minority rights reduces the likelihood of militarized ethnic conflicts. And finally, peacebuilding should be established: Long-term stability requires reconciliation and intercultural education, not just ceasefire agreements.

**Conclusion.** In conclusion, military power remains indispensable in safeguarding sovereignty and deterring aggression. However, many modern conflicts demonstrate that cultural and identity-based grievances are the true drivers of violence. Military solutions alone cannot resolve such disputes. Sustainable peace depends on addressing both the hard power dimension of conflicts and the intercultural tensions that fuel them. The challenge for the 21st century lies in building an international order that balances defense with dialogue, deterrence with diplomacy, and strength with cultural sensitivity. Future security strategies must therefore move beyond reactive force and prioritize long-term prevention, education, and trust-building among culturally diverse societies. Integrating military planning with diplomacy, development, and intercultural communication can reduce misperceptions and limit escalation. Such an approach encourages responsible use of power, enhances legitimacy, and supports resilient peace architectures capable of adapting to global change. Ultimately, this balanced framework offers policymakers practical guidance for navigating complexity while avoiding cycles of violence and fostering cooperative international security environments worldwide sustainably.

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