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## The Strategy of Indirect Approach in the U.S. Foreign Policy

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### ABSTRACT

The essence of the strategy of indirect approach (SIA), the definition of which was introduced into the scientific discourse in the mid-20th century by the English historian B.G. Liddell Hart, is that the main consideration in it was given not to the military force factors, as it had been previously in history, but to alternative options for subduing a hostile state. Nowadays, according to many American scientists and experts, SIA should be used primarily in the preparation of war, and therefore it has switched from the purely military sphere to other areas of state activity – economy, culture, ideology, etc. Nowadays, one of the types of the SIA of the United States is the so-called proxy war, in which military actions of the allied state are the final stage of gradual inclusion of another country into the zone of American influence through alternative methods.

**Keywords:** strategy of indirect approach; war; the United States; economy; foreign policy

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From the historical point of view, the concept of “strategy” (from Greek — the art of the commander) implies the management of the actions of the armed forces of the state during the war [1]. But with the development of social relations, this definition no longer reflected the real situation in world politics. Therefore, the famous German (Prussian general) military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, defining strategy as the use of combat operations to achieve the goal of war, at the same time pointed out that it “borders on politics and statesmanship or, rather... becomes both” [2]. This trend has arisen because the outcome of geopolitical conflicts has become more dependent on non-military factors — economic, social, ideological, etc. Based on this thesis, American scientific and analytical publications have now begun to operate with the concept of “irregular warfare, which aims to change the political regime of a hostile state through indirect

methods”.<sup>1</sup> It is no secret that such actions pursue mainly economic goals. For example, control over the production and export of oil in the Persian Gulf, as well as its sale for dollars, allows the United States to ensure the leading role of its currency in the global financial system [3]. Thus, the statement of the fact that geopolitical tensions are now spreading to economic relations, voiced in the Global Risks Report of the World Economic Forum 2022,<sup>2</sup> is quite consistent with the current situation.

Consequently, indirect actions became the main policy of the United States and its NATO allies not only in the military sphere, but also in other areas of state activity. In this regard, it should be noted that in Anglo-Saxon geopolitical concepts, unlike the continental

<sup>1</sup> Unconventional warfare (United States Department of Defense doctrine). URL: <https://military-history.fandom.com/> (accessed on 20.04.2023).

<sup>2</sup> The Global Risks Report 2022. 17th Edition. INSIGHT REPORT. URL: <https://www3.weforum.org/docs.pdf> (accessed on 11.03.2022).

European ones, the indirect approach was largely based on the experience of conquest and exploitation of colonies. Thus, the main geopolitical goal of Great Britain was the conquest of the natives by the hands of the natives themselves [4]. In general, the strategy of indirect approach reflects the essence of the Anglo-Saxon strategy, which the French historian F. Braudel saw in the fact that the dominance of Great Britain was achieved through trade, deception and “cunning” [5]. If we continue developing his thought, we can state that the main methods of the Anglo-Saxon strategy of indirect approach — deception and bribery — were the traditional and most effective weapons of the British Empire: “One of the main duties of British residents ... was to bribe and corrupt ministers and other officials” [4].

Such methods in international activities were subsequently actively used by the United States to open foreign markets for American goods — the so-called “open door policy” [6]. Its justification was the doctrine of “sea power” of the American Admiral A. Machen, in which the establishment of control over the world trade routes was declared the main task of US foreign policy. According to the famous American political scientist J. Friedman, the relevance of this strategy remains to this day, because “the fundamental threat to American national security can only come from the sea” [7]. As early as 1926, W.B. Howe, president of the U.S. Navy League, expressed the opinion that a sound economic policy of his country must ensure a continuous flow of imported goods from outside, “vital to the American people” [8], and accordingly, indirect action along with the Navy must guarantee the achievement of this goal. It should be emphasised that its main difference from traditional military strategy — is the wide use in geopolitical confrontation not only of economic, financial, diplomatic, but also psychological means, which gradually come

to the fore in confronting hostile states or their coalitions.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the main thing in the strategy of indirect approach, according to B.G. Liddell Hart, is that “victory or defeat depends mainly on the opponent’s morale and only indirectly — on the blows against him” [1]. Many scholars and experts note that the ideas of the English historian are largely based on the writings of the famous Chinese thinker Sun Tzu (6th century BC) [9]. “To fight a hundred times and win a hundred times — is not the best of the best; the best of the best — is to conquer another’s army without fighting. Therefore, the best war — is to defeat the enemy’s designs; the next place — is to defeat his alliances; the next place — is to defeat his armies” [10].

This statement, as modern American scholars emphasise, captures the essence of the indirect approach, as it points to the importance of pre-planning in war, which in the future makes it possible to “disarm the enemy without incurring the costs of battle (e.g., money and lives)” [11]. Thus, the peculiarity of the practical use of the concept of indirect approaches in conflicts between states is to ensure that victory is maximised before hostilities begin.

The principles of indirect action became imperatives of US foreign policy after World War II. Sun Tzu’s work, as well as the Chinese treatise on thirty-six stratagems,<sup>4</sup> were carefully studied by the famous American intelligence officer A. Dulles during his tenure as consul in Shanghai (1945–1946). He believed that the Chinese thinker gave profound recommendations on the organisation of “counterintelligence,

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that in recent decades considerable attention has been paid to economic psychology, which is engaged in interdisciplinary research on the relationship between psychology and economics. It studies the psychological bases of economic behaviour of individuals and the impact of economic processes on their psychology.

<sup>4</sup> Thirty-six stratagems. Chinese secrets of success. Moscow: White Alves; 2000.

psychological warfare, deception, security, falsification" [12]. The principles of CIA special operations, including in the economic sphere, became largely based on Sun Tzu's stratagem: "To go forward where one is not expected; to attack where one has not prepared" [10].

According to the American researcher J. Schwartz, indirect actions are most effective at the major strategic level of warfare (Grand Strategy, as defined by B. G. Liddell Hart), which establishes a state's political goals in war and determines what military and non-military means (financial, commercial, diplomatic, and ethical) will be used to achieve them [11]. But this idea is not new. In a review of General A. A. Svechin's book "Strategy" (1927), the Soviet military theorist A. E. Snesev pointed out that strategy should be continuous, and its goals can be achieved by non-military means — agitation, destruction of the enemy rear and economy, etc.

Based on such approaches to the development of strategy of indirect approach and its application in geopolitical confrontation, the concept of "soft power" was created in the United States — a term that was first applied by Harvard University Professor J. Nye, understanding it as language, culture, and political leadership [13]. Currently, its continuation is the theory of "network-centric warfare", the basics of which are outlined in the article by Vice Admiral A. Sebrovski and Professor J. Garstka. It states that the organising principle of such a war "originates in the dynamics of growth and competition that have emerged in the modern economy..., and the means of warfare are increasingly becoming a commodity" [14].

Thus, the fact that modern warfare for the US — is mainly an economic and financial operation, only technologically different from the wars of the past, is rather straightforwardly fixed. Since its main component is information technology, in the military sphere this allows

for a shift to accelerated decision-making in combat operations, which at present are theoretically only an addition to the strategy of indirect approach.

Its further development was based on the law of system change in the long term from insignificant influences ("butterfly wing flapping effect") discovered in 1961 by mathematician E. Lawrence. On its basis, the theory of "chaos management" as applied to large social and state formations emerged, the author of which is the American diplomat S. Mann. He put the main emphasis on the rejection of stability in international relations, which he regarded as an "illusory end in itself". In his opinion, the creation of instability allows the application of strategies that promote US interests [15].

In general, the theory of controlled chaos "is based on reforming mass consciousness, worldview and spiritual sphere by subjecting individuals to modern means of manipulation". It is a "global psychological operation" that destroys "the culture of solidarity" and replaces it with "the cult of money and social Darwinist stereotypes regarding the role of the individual in society." Thereby reducing "the ability of the masses to resist through self-organisation" [16].

Based on such perceptions, Western expert and academic circles have increasingly started to operate with the concepts of "invisible power" and even "invisible geopolitics". As Serbian scientist and UN expert J. Kurbalija reasonably emphasises "in this increasingly interdependent world, politicians and diplomats will have to pay more attention to invisible geopolitics. Facebook friendships, Twitter exchanges, the level of Internet traffic, the flow of remittances — all this can be no less important than, for example, military alliances and other indicators of traditional geopolitics" [17].

The creation of such concepts and theories in the United States and other

Western countries has led to a definitive shift in strategy from the military sphere to the governmental sphere, where military considerations often play a far from central role. They can only be prioritised with the approval of the government, as only the government can decide whether it is “worth the gamble”. It logically follows that the preparation for war to achieve a bloodless victory over a hostile state does not provide for any time and space limitations. At the same time, the military component is only one component of the Grand Strategy, which, in order to weaken the enemy’s will to resist, “must take into account and use the full force and power of financial, diplomatic, commercial and, last but not least, ideological pressure” [1].

These ideas formed the basis of the theory of the so-called colour revolution, created in 1972 by American professor J. Sharp. It centred on the organisation of subversive actions in a potentially hostile state through a large number of “small-scale non-violent” acts of civil disobedience, which should result in the destruction of the existing system of power and political regime change.<sup>5</sup> More broadly, this strategy is referred to in the U.S. as the vacuum strategy, which suggests that instead of “open frontal confrontations and large-scale battles”, the enemy should be dealt in a way of “small pinpricks, like mosquito bites”. Although they are capable of inflicting damage, the object of attack itself remains invisible to the enemy, forcing him to disperse his forces and means and thus lose initiative and “judgement” [18].

At present, from the point of view of American analysts, ideological factors are largely determined by intensive information and psychological influence, the purpose of which is to change the mass consciousness

of the population of this or that country in the direction necessary for the USA.<sup>6</sup> This approach was formulated after World War II by General W. Donovan, head of the Office of Strategic Services (from 1942 to 1946), who pointed out that the task of propaganda at the initial stage of confrontation is “to prepare the population of the territory chosen for invasion... Then the fifth column comes into action, followed by sabotage units or commandos, and finally, the invasion divisions” [19]. It is assumed that in this way the U.S. and its allies will be spared the costs of conflict, while achieving the weakening of their adversaries regardless of their military strength. In order to achieve this effect, according to the Italian professor G. E. Valori, it is necessary to use disinformation on a large scale, which “increases aggressiveness” and, consequently, “weakens thinking abilities”. Hence “the geostrategic effect of these operations: when the whole country is gradually filled with this type of communication, everyone, including the ruling class, will be affected by it”. As a consequence, when its representatives start making decisions, “they will in any case operate with pseudo-concepts, automatic reactions, platitudes, misperceptions and old stereotypes”.

As Valory stresses, the ability to influence the population “in a stable, effective, and comprehensive way has already reached its peak..., and the one who succeeds in manipulating the enemy remains the winner”, while the object of influence always loses, and perhaps he “does not even realise it”. This is facilitated by the fact that the most advanced

<sup>5</sup> Sharp Theory of Nonviolence Struggle and Color Revolutions. URL: <https://softpanorama.org.shtml> (accessed on 30.05.2023).

<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, it usually results in the destruction of the hostile state and the enslavement of the population, although formally the institutions of the former statehood may remain in place. A “fictitious reality” therefore emerges, which is that “today’s slavery is characterised by the fact that it is illegal, and as a result it is more hidden than in the past. Nevertheless, it is believed that there are more slaves today than at any time in history.” URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/03/13/> (accessed on 30.05.2023).



information-psychological technologies have become “individual”, i.e., they are quickly adapted to each individual citizen. This makes it possible to create the effect of “invisible manipulation and regulation”, primarily in the global information environment. For example, according to Valory, bots generated more than 50% of all global internet traffic in 2017 alone [20].

It is clear that only the United States can fully apply this kind of technology used by Western countries in geopolitical confrontation with their rivals and adversaries. Their prolonged dominance in the world economy allowed the American expert on irregular warfare P.W. Taylor to introduce the concept of “globalisation of strategy”, since now “every state relies to a greater or lesser extent on foreign resources”. Consequently, he states, an assessment of the situation must include relevant regional and global “points of contact so that these links can be utilised in planning military operations”.

Taylor goes on to point out that the indirect approach requires reliable intelligence about the adversary in order to determine where the adversary is least resistant. Since this approach involves influencing the governance structure of a society “alien to our own,” the intelligence collected and analysed must include political, military, economic, social, information, and infrastructure variables. It is also necessary for planners to conduct a comprehensive self-assessment of their capabilities to avoid miscalculations in planning operations.

It is also important, according to Taylor, to make every effort “for a coordinated Western alliance led by the United States to degrade the capabilities of the adversary” through coercive diplomacy,<sup>7</sup> economic pressure,

information operations and military threats. “Criminal sanctions could be used, if not to capture the targeted leaders, at least to prevent them from travelling abroad.” Subsequently, covert operations involving “undermining a hostile government’s ability to respond to threats and crises” and information operations using criminal elements, media, NGOs, corporations, and other influencers are possible [21].

At the same time, US experts point out that in the context of globalisation, the expansion of Internet connectivity has made the critical infrastructure of each nation state — water, electricity, communications, etc. — “more vulnerable”, making it possible to inflict damage on an adversary without using military forces. In addition, a country that dominates strategic industries and supply chains can gradually “impose its geopolitical will and undermine the position of its rivals without direct military intervention.” These actions, according to Singaporean expert K. Ramakrishna, are a classic example of a long-term indirect strategy [22].

Such actions, in Taylor’s view, could form the basis of a new theory of unconventional warfare that would allow for a more rational use of available resources and reduce dependence on the political decisions of a country’s leadership. Since the theoretical underpinnings of the strategy of indirect approach, in his assessment, have not yet been developed in the United States, this approach could serve as the basis for a consolidated theory of indirect action, — ranging from covert action to security co-operation with allies in multinational operations. Taylor emphasises that the United States must, first, plan and assess the situation at the local and regional levels; second, expand its presence in strategically important regions; third, ensure the loyalty of local authorities; and fourth, facilitate allied actions while guaranteeing the durability of the results achieved [21].

<sup>7</sup> In 2006, former U.S. Secretary of State K. Rice coined the term “transformational diplomacy,” which she interpreted as “working with multiple partners around the world to build and sustain democratic states. Meanwhile, in fact, it is a diplomacy of influence and coercion.”

At the same time, the American military analyst C. Livieratos believes that the first priority should be to “invest in the opportunities created for non-violent influence and stop the excessive use of force to solve the many problems of irregular warfare”. In his view, it should also be taken into account that the line between direct and indirect approaches is unclear and blurred [23].

Indeed, from the point of view of Taylor and other American scientists and experts, there is currently no unified theory of strategy of indirect approach, and therefore “it is open to different interpretations” [11]. As a consequence, there is a clear understanding in US analytical and academic circles of the limitations of the strategy of indirect approach, especially in terms of forecasting [24], and many Western researchers are aware that it is impossible to fully determine the consequences of its application. In the context of globalisation, it will be quite difficult to implement indirect actions, especially in the information and economic spheres, because of the possible “boomerang effect”. Thus, according to British scientists, “the more purposefully a strategic goal is pursued, the more likely it is that such an action will ultimately undermine the initial success” [25]. B.G. Liddell Hart therefore pointed to the need for flexibility in using the strategy of indirect approach, which involves “activities in case of success, failure or partial success, which is most often the case in war” [1].

Based on this thesis, it should be noted that the existence of various approaches to the formation of the strategy of indirect approach, despite their shortcomings, allows Washington to correct its mistakes quite quickly, sometimes radically adjusting its strategy and thus providing the necessary flexibility in its implementation. This approach was particularly evident in the practical application of the strategy of indirect approach.

As noted above, previously little-connected non-military factors and means have formed the basis for the United States’ use of indirect action since World War II. Nevertheless, the use of direct military violence remains a critical component of Washington’s foreign policy.<sup>8</sup> Thus, in 2022, the Congressional Research Service estimated that the U.S. Army has participated in 251 military operations around the world since the 18th century,<sup>9</sup> and independent experts count 392 such cases [26]. In a much-quoted speech of the American General S. Butler in the U.S. Congress in 1935, he said literally the following: “I spent 33 years and 4 months in the military service and for most of that time I was a high-class bully working for Big Business, Wall Street and the bankers. In short, I am a racketeer, a gangster of capitalism.” [27].

In an article by American journalist T. L. Friedman, printed in the influential American newspaper “New York Times” in 1999, it was openly proclaimed that “the invisible hand of the market never acts without an invisible fist”, which is called “the army, navy, air force of the United States” [28]. But given the fact that at present the world order based on the dominance of one power is experiencing a quite obvious crisis, “the United States faces a changed geopolitical situation and a new set of economic problems” [29].

It should be remembered that in the modern period, the United States’ use of the strategy of indirect approach takes place in the context of globalisation, which until recently was often considered a purely economic phenomenon. But its negative consequences have led to a systemic crisis in world politics

<sup>8</sup> To achieve its goals, the United States, as a maritime power, often uses so-called carrier diplomacy. Earlier in the 19th century it was called “gunboat diplomacy”.

<sup>9</sup> Instances of Use of United States Armed Forces Abroad, 1798–2022. URL: <https://crsreports.congress.gov> (accessed on 25.04.2023).

and a sharp increase in global instability. Therefore, British expert and businessman C. Devonshire-Ellis believes that the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict means a struggle both for the preservation of the existing model of globalisation and against it, which leads to increased confrontation between the West and the East.<sup>10</sup>

Under these conditions, the United States is seeking to accelerate the transition to the sixth technological mode, based on nano- and biotechnology, artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, etc., in order to maintain its global advantage and weaken its competitors and rivals as much as possible. For this purpose, the United States enacted the “Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act” of 2017. Therefore, Taylor believes that as part of indirect action, economic sanctions measures can also be used to influence high-ranking officials of hostile states, “who can then later be contacted by intelligence agents” [21].

The growing role of supranational structures, which are mainly controlled by the United States, contributes to the implementation of the American strategy of indirect approach. Their task is to weaken the sovereignty of national states and, if necessary, to dismember them. Thus, before the Second World War there were about 50 states in the world, and now (together with unrecognised states) — there are more than 250. To reduce their sovereignty, the United States, using its monopoly position in the world financial system, purposefully created financial crises in unfriendly, from their point of view, states — in Argentina (1982, 2001), Mexico (1992), Russia (1998) and others. In 1972, Washington developed a doctrine of financial sabotage (“shock doctrine”), i.e., a certain algorithm of actions to destroy the political, social, and

economic order of a country. The US first implemented it in Chile after the CIA-led military coup in September 1973. [30].

Such actions since 1953 were justified by the thesis of US President D. Eisenhower — “strengthening allies and winning the friendship of non-aligned governments”. This “friendship” was quite often achieved through the planning and implementation of coups d’état. The US has now admitted that this kind of indirect CIA action was “sometimes questionable” because it involved “bribes, subversion and even assassination attempts”, but was nevertheless authorised by the US leadership [31].

In addition to financial sabotage, colour revolution technologies have been effectively implemented by US intelligence agencies in a number of countries: East Germany, Hungary, Romania (1989), Georgia (1995), Serbia (2000), Ukraine (2004, 2014), Kyrgyzstan (2005, 2010). Often these attempts were unsuccessful: China, Georgia (1989), Mongolia and Armenia (2008), Moldavia (2009), Belarus (2006, 2020) and Russia. But these failures are considered temporary by the theorists and technologists of colour revolutions. This view is largely due to the successful use of the strategy of indirect action against the Soviet Union, which was one of the main factors that led to its collapse and the creation of a monopolistic system of world order led by the United States.

Currently, the US National Security Strategy of 12 October 2022 (Strategy 2022) states unequivocally that “around the world, the need for American leadership is greater than ever” and states that “rules-based order must remain the foundation of global peace and prosperity”. Thus, it is assumed that “rules” established by the U.S. in its own self-interest completely supersede the established system of international law. It is therefore not by chance that the term “failed state” has emerged and spread in the American expert community to describe those countries that,

<sup>10</sup> Op-Ed Commentary by Chris Devonshire. URL: <https://www.asiabriefing.com/news/2022/02/2022> (accessed on 12.04.2023).

for a variety of reasons, are unable to maintain their independent existence. The introduction of this concept has caused mixed reactions in the world — for many it is clear that its use is often just a pretext for direct military intervention.

According to the Strategy 2022, securing United States leadership in the world requires three areas of national action: investing in key sources and instruments of American power and influence; building an effective coalition of allies to enhance collective influence in shaping the global strategic environment and addressing common challenges; modernising and strengthening the military to ensure that it is equipped for an era of strategic competition with major powers, “while maintaining the ability to suppress the terrorist threat to the homeland”.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, military force, from Washington’s point of view, is by no means an anachronism inherent in past historical eras; it can be used at any time to achieve certain political goals if the strategy of indirect approach proves ineffective. Therefore, Strategy 2022 states that the U.S. military is — “the most powerful fighting force the world has ever known” and the U.S. will not hesitate to use it “when necessary” to defend its national interests. However, the document caveats that they should be used as a “last resort” and that non-military tools should be used before then.

Thus, this document traces a clear interconnection of direct and indirect approaches to the realisation of the main geopolitical goal of the US — to maintain its dominance in the international arena. Based on this imperative, earlier, in 2008, US Secretary of Defence R. Gates warned: “Never ignore the psychological, cultural, political and human dimensions of war, which are of

inevitably tragic, unproductive and uncertain character” [32]. But in practical terms, a fundamental contradiction has emerged in the US foreign policy, which, according to the assessment of American Admiral E. Olson, is that direct military-power influence has become paramount [23]. Therefore, the US military expenditures are constantly increasing, although, according to the American economist J. Galbraith, it is not due to political necessity. This approach, according to him, is dictated by the interests of large corporations, which allows them to influence the state policy [33]. And this is despite the fact that the direct use of the army and navy in geopolitical confrontation often resulted in tangible defeats for the United States, as, for example, in its largest armed conflict in Vietnam (1965–1975). Therefore, indirect action subsequently began to prevail in the so-called non-contact warfare. Operations such as “Decisive Force” in Yugoslavia (1999), “Desert Storm” (1991) and “Shock and Awe” (2003) in Iraq were based mainly on the strategy of indirect approach, which became dominant, “pushing aside the military-force factor, which was to achieve the defeat of the enemy by creating a numerical superiority in forces and means” [34]. These actions by the Western alliance initiated a long period of instability on Iraqi territory and in the Near and Middle East region as a whole [35].

The US operation against Iraq in 2003, which mainly involved non-military components of the strategy of indirect approach, is particularly indicative in this respect, as it was prepared over several years and involved the processing of public opinion at home and abroad. As soon as the military operation was launched, massive radio propaganda and disinformation of the Iraqi command, as well as the distribution of leaflets calling for an end to the resistance, were organised. Particular attention was paid to the targeted destruction of civilian

<sup>11</sup> NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/> (accessed on 30.04.2023).



communications, which, according to American analysts, is an example of a successful information and psychological operation by the American military leadership during this war [36]. In addition, one of the main tools of the US strategy of indirect approach in Iraq was the bribery of Republican Guard generals who ordered their subordinates to stop resistance. At the same time, bribes were given to high-ranking Iraqi military officers before the start of hostilities [37]. Together, these factors allowed the US and its allies to achieve victory with minimal losses, although the Iraqi army was superior to the coalition forces in many respects. In this operation, the United States made extensive use of information and remote (non-contact) influence in combination with other methods and means as part of the indirect approach.

Based on this experience, American experts concluded that information superiority is the main condition for victory in modern local conflicts. At the same time, “information, in its broad sense as deception of the enemy, achieving surprise, application of military cunning, intimidation of the enemy by demonstration of force, has moved to a new technological level” [34]. In their opinion, the means of information influence in modern geopolitical conflicts are now so developed that they are capable of solving strategic tasks, in particular, disorganisation of military and state administration. At the same time, their effectiveness is achieved by the fact that they are used, as a rule, in combination with other forces and means [38], as they have certain disadvantages. Thus, Professor M. Vego of the US Naval War College publicly stated: “The concept of warfare in a unified information environment is increasingly turning into a new religion — a set of beliefs that cannot be seriously challenged. Its flaws or vulnerabilities are not publicly discussed, and they are reluctantly accepted” [39].

Therefore, while generally oriented towards the use of indirect action, the United States is simultaneously improving methods and tools of military force influence on the enemy. In particular, military personnel with knowledge of foreign languages and cultures and the ability to create combat units out of the local population are involved in tactical operations. As Livieratos rightly notes, “this is no longer conventional force, but an unconventional technique for destabilising foreign governments and regimes” [23].

Such U. S. actions are based on the understanding that the indirect approach is not always successful in military operations and in preparation for them [11]. Thus, Washington’s attempts (from 2013 to 2018) to accuse the Syrian leadership of using chemical weapons were unsuccessful due to Russia’s principled position on this issue. This is also convincingly proved by the situation with Iran — the US military threats to Iran were never implemented, as well as repeated attempts to organise a colour revolution in this country failed. That is why US Defence Secretary O. Lloyd, during his visit to Israel in March 2023, had to declare that diplomacy — is “the best way to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons”.<sup>12</sup>

In a broader context, growing dissatisfaction with U.S. policy around the world, including among its allies, has led U.S. experts to recognise the ineffectiveness of its influence on the populations of many countries. In Livieratos’ assessment, this leads the U.S. military to overly focus on coercive capabilities and neglect non-violent measures such as, for example, information-psychological operations. But as the United States are facing increasingly complex challenges from great power rivals (here meaning Russia and China) as well as

<sup>12</sup> Readout of Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III’s Meeting in Israel With Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. URL: <https://www.defense.gov/> (accessed on 30.04.2023).

continuing threats from non-state actors (terrorism), “it needs to use more non-violent influence techniques and stop the excessive use of force to address armed conflict” [23].

In this regard, it should be noted that Washington’s costs in modern conflicts often exceed the benefits it planned to obtain, which clearly contradicts the “golden rule” of strategy formulated as far back as ancient Rome.<sup>13</sup> For example, the French historian E. Todd noted that the situation in Ukraine has existential significance for the United States, which risks losing control over global finance: “America is fragile, and the resistance of the Russian economy is pushing the US imperial system towards the abyss”.<sup>14</sup>

In the future, Livieratos warns, proxy military conflicts (proxy wars) and competition in the so-called “grey zone”<sup>15</sup> with almost equal opponents will not allow the US to win a quick victory. He points out that states such as China and Russia have already adapted their strategies to the new reality to capitalise on capabilities that “the US military has side-lined over the past thirty years”. In his view, fierce U.S. competition with these states will require a rethinking of approaches because Washington “never learnt how to effectively influence populations” [23].

It should be noted that these judgements of the American analyst are in line with the American Strategy 2022, in which China and Russia are indirectly referred to as “hostile forces” that are “increasingly close

to each other”. This approach confirms the permanence of Washington’s geopolitical goals, as Admiral A. Mahan argued back in the late 19th century that the United States should unite not only with Great Britain, but also with Germany and Japan to contain Russia on the arc of Eurasia — from Europe through the Middle East to China and Northeast Asia [40]. Therefore, the deepening military co-operation between Moscow and Beijing is currently of particular concern in Washington [41]. In general, it has, as follows from surveys of world public opinion, led to the fact that countries that have a favourable attitude towards Russia almost always have a positive attitude towards China, and vice versa [42].

American experts also note that the development of military philosophy in the United States, which is concerned with understanding the situation in the enemy country and using its weaknesses to achieve victory over it, does not affect China [23]. At the same time, the confrontation between Washington and Beijing, according to J. Friedman, is gradually shifting towards the economy, which is “much more important for the Chinese than the military balance” [43]. But such trends, as stated in *The Economist*, occur at a time “when America’s weight and influence in the global economy are on the decline”, which, in turn, requires a revision of previous geopolitical theories.<sup>16</sup>

The existing contradictions in scientific approaches to the formation of an effective strategy of indirect approach towards the competitors and adversaries of the United States are largely a reflection of the growing domestic political and economic instability in the United States itself. Therefore, Livieratos argues that the idea of direct and indirect approaches should have been “abandoned altogether”, although he believes they are still

<sup>13</sup> The «Golden Rule» of strategy for Roman Emperor Octavian Augustus was that he never started a battle or war unless he was certain that he would gain more in victory than he would lose in defeat.

<sup>14</sup> Emmanuel Todd: «La Troisième Guerre mondiale a commencé». URL: <https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/monde-20230112> (accessed on 29.04.2023).

<sup>15</sup> American military analysts understand the “grey zone” as a geographical space with indistinct borders, in which there is no universally recognised legal regime, and the activities of all political actors balance on the edge of war and peace. URL: <https://info.publicintelligence.net/USSOCOM-GrayZones.pdf> / (accessed on 11.07.2023).

<sup>16</sup> The new geopolitical epoch. URL: <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2022/12/26/> (accessed on 27.05.2023).

useful in conventional war planning, but their “simplistic separation limits creativity”.

His thesis shows that the US and its allies will continue to do everything possible to maintain their dominance in the world, using, among other geopolitical tools, a strategy of indirect action to do so.

In conclusion, it should be noted that its prolonged use as the most important instrument of US foreign policy was a natural consequence of its orientation towards economic and financial dominance in the world. At present, in order to maintain this dominance, a complex of political, economic, informational-psychological, military and forceful methods and means of influence on potentially unfriendly states are used. At the same time, the central component of the

modern strategy of indirect actions of the United States has become the processing of world public opinion in a favourable direction on the basis of information technologies. At the same time, it should be emphasised that a unified theory of strategy of indirect approach has not been developed so far in the United States, as well as in the West in general. This is largely responsible for the desire of the United States to dictate its will everywhere and anywhere, which introduced and still introduces elements of “strategic adventurism” into the foreign policy of this country. At the same time, the existence of different approaches to the formation of a strategy of indirect approach allows Washington to find and correct its mistakes quite quickly and, if necessary, radically change the strategy.

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