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## *Cognitive warfare as a strategic vanguard: a dialectical perspective on strategic thinking*

### **Abstract**

This article exposes the capacity to develop an integral understanding of reality through the dialectical materialism approach to knowledge. To this end, a critique is made from a dialectical perspective of modern forms of scientific knowledge, which tend towards a fragmented approach to knowledge, making it difficult to adapt to the current geostrategic context. At the same time, it is shown how cognitive warfare has taken a central role in national security strategies, presenting itself as a superior phase of strategic thinking in itself. In this vein, it points out how cognitive warfare, in its strategic form, extends beyond the military sphere, permeating various social and political spheres, integrating the nexus between warfare as the continuation of politics by other means and providing conscious state direction. Through this approach, the article examines the strategic approaches of China, Russia and the United States, concluding that the first two are in a position of strategic advantage due to the holistic vision provided by their approach to knowledge.

### **Keywords**

Dialectical materialism, strategic thinking, cognitive warfare, gnoseology and national security.

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## I The method of dialectical materialism and the approach to knowledge

In this first section of the article, we will make an exposition on the method of dialectical materialism from the critical approaches to knowing and knowledge, which, later on, dialectical materialism makes transcend towards thought as an active way to understand and alter reality in a conscious way and in close relation to the material conditions that shape reality. For this, we will make use of various works of authors who developed and develop the method of dialectical materialism, from Marx and Engels. In addition, the approach of western gnoseology as a form of theorization of knowledge and its limitations will be exposed through the dialectical perspective.

Initially, we will begin with the approach of the dialectical method and the centrality of knowledge as an element that occupies the genesis of the development of the method. Later, through the definitions of Marx's *Grundrisse*, we will enter into the development of the abstract and the concrete as key elements in the process of the development of dialectical praxis. For this purpose, we will expose Marx's approaches, as well as those of other authors such as Lenin or Ilienkov, among others.

Knowledge and ways of knowing have been a repeated element throughout the historical development of human thought. In this sense, the development of history has presented different ways of knowing reality in relation to the different social formations, which are inseparable from the particular way of thinking of each era.

More recently, science has been configured as an empirical and systematic method capable of explaining the phenomena of the material-natural world, external to human mediation, with the aim of understanding them in order to be able to mediate with it. We must recognize that, although each of the aforementioned approaches uses different methods (means), they all have something in common (ends), namely: to approach reality.

Therefore, the centrality of human action as a transforming force of reality has been an element of constant study, in which historically can observe the various factors and reasons that have been attributed to the changes that have determined historical development. However, our position is that the reasons historically attributed to the movement of history have been dominated by insufficient approximations, that is to say, approximations that have diagnosed reality in an external and fragmented manner, causing the positions generated by modern sciences, particularly in Western development, to be limited.

This situation –scaled to the spheres of power of the states and within the framework of the rise of multipolarity in the international system– proposes a situation of asymmetry in the approach and development of knowledge of the western states in the face of rising states with diverse approaches to knowledge, dominated by completely opposite theories or philosophies of knowledge, some of which, such as dialectical materialism, present more integral or holistic approaches, which dissolve, to a greater extent, the inherent friction generated by the fragmentation of reality in

modern sciences, allowing for greater flexibility and increased responsiveness in an international environment immersed in the systemic contradictions generated by the mode of production.

### *1.1 Criticism of idealism and development of dialectical thought*

The proposal of dialectical materialism encompasses diverse forms, such as the critique of scientific theory, and approaches the development of reality in a dynamic and constantly evolving manner. This means that, under the premise of the objective bases of knowledge provided by the method of dialectical materialism, we would arrive at the most general forms of our social metabolism and, therefore, of the specificity of historical social compositions. It would be, therefore, in Ilienkov's words, a "science of the general forms and laws of all development, common to thought and "being"; that is, a social-historical and natural development, and not of the "specifically subjective" forms and laws of thought" (Ilienkov, 2022).

From Engels' point of view in relation to dialectics, we find a strong criticism of the origin of the method of dialectical materialism, specifically against German idealism and Hegel. The latter was respected by Marx and Engels as the first philosopher who raised the possibility of demonstrating internal laws immanent to the development of reality. However, from dialectical materialism the final result of the Hegelian work is criticized because of the limitations of knowledge and the conceptions of the time in which they are produced (Engels, 2006).

However, the centrality of the critique of Hegel and its impossibility in the resolution of the problem posed about the laws immanent to the movement of the real is found in its initial approach to how we know and how knowledge is acquired. Hegelian idealism is the fundamental limitation, from the point of view of dialectical materialism, for the deepening and solution of the issue raised in relation to the internal laws of the real, because, as an idealist, Hegel understood that ideas were not more or less precise abstractions of reality, but rather an inversion of the terms of materialism, where ideas precede the world they represent (Engels, 2006), generating, therefore, an irreconcilable fracture in the way of acquiring knowledge.

This inversion generates the exteriority of the relationship between thought and material reality, where knowledge becomes a projection of abstract concepts that, not being a direct reflection of reality, cannot capture the contradictions and determinations inherent to reality itself (Carrera, 2013).

From the perspective of dialectical materialism, this separation between idea and reality constitutes an unbreakable wall for the comprehension of the totality of the real and its approximation, since ideas would arise prior to material and social dynamics, generating a dissociation of the process of knowledge from the objective conditions that give rise to it. In this sense, idealistic knowledge remains trapped in an abstract and idealistic sphere, incapable of reconciling itself with the internal contradictions of the real.

Therefore, knowledge from idealism reveals itself incapable of capturing the movement and development of the real in a dynamic way, remaining in an abstraction divorced from material praxis and showing itself, consequently, sterile for an effective and, when the time comes, transforming understanding of reality.

Engels' approach reveals that dialectics makes it possible to establish a strategic relationship with reality, seeing it as a constantly changing process. This not only helps to identify the general laws that explain this movement, but also provides the conscious subject with the ability to observe and understand objective reality in relation to specific forms of subjective reality. However, as Ezekiel (2013) points out, the dialectical method underscores the impossibility of achieving completely objective knowledge, although it does allow us to determine that the social relations of production shape the ideas that explain reality.

This final point, which suggests that ideas are a refraction of our social mode of production, is crucial to understanding the centrality of dialectical thinking. Ideas and social relations of production refract as they interact with different material conditions and historical contexts, which means that an idea or phenomenon does not manifest itself in the same way in different situations; its form and effects change according to the specific material conditions in which they are encountered.

As Marx puts it, our generic essence, what defines us as a species and distinguishes us from animals, is our ability to transform our activity into an object of will and consciousness, at the same time that such will aims to make the medium a means to itself (Carrera, 2017):

“The animal is immediately linked to its vital activity. It does not differ from it. It is *it*. Man makes his activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has a conscious vital activity. It is not a determination with which he immediately coincides. Conscious vital activity immediately differentiates man from animal vital activity. Precisely for this reason he is a generic being. Or he is only a conscious being, is say, his own life is, for him, object, precisely because he is a generic being. For this reason alone his activity is free activity” (Marx, 2010: 112-113).

In an article for the *Bolchevik* magazine in 1925, Lenin summarizes dialectics under the principles of “unfolding of unity” and “knowledge of its contradictory parts”. He further points out that “the condition for knowing the processes of the world in their self-movement, in their spontaneous development, in their real life, is to know them as a unity of opposites.” Lenin goes on to explain the way of understanding history, which can be divided into two, namely: “development in the sense of decrease and increase, as repetition, and development in the sense of the unity of opposites” (Lenin, 1925, p.). Under this conception we see that, in the first conception is hidden the reason why reality happens, its precursor, while in the second conception we can understand the reasons why this self-movement takes place (Lenin, 1925).

Under this conception, we can understand the approach under the dialectical method carried out by Marx in *Capital*, where he began with the simplest unit of society mediated by the capitalist mode of production: the commodity. Marx would

start from what is called, within dialectical materialism, the abstract. The term abstract, within this tradition, does not refer simply to a vague or unspecific form of idea, but a form of simplification of a complex phenomenon, in a certain way, a sort of generalization of the general aspects of a phenomenon.

Therefore, we understand that it is that in its simplest form, in its ordinary appearance that we can perceive sensorially and that is found as “appearance” insofar as certain characteristics are abstracted that configure its existence and limit key aspects for analysis. In contrast, the concrete would refer to the totality of reality, understood as a complex of elements, as the synthesis of multiple determinations (Marx, 1857-1858). Therefore, the concrete would encompass all the mediations that make a phenomenon what it is on the basis of the synthesis of its determinations.

In dialectical materialism, the concrete is an essential concept because it is the means through which the determinations that make the abstract what it is are discovered. In other words, the concrete is understood as the search for the material reasons that configure reality. This perspective poses a third way as opposed to traditional scientific approaches, which are usually based on the representation of reality through the definition of concepts and theoretical categorization (Carrera, 2013). To understand this distinction, it is useful to resort to the classification of the types of knowledge established by Carrera (2013), who distinguishes between “intuition, that is, immediate non-rational knowledge, and rational conception, that is, the representation that starts from concepts and relates them following a constructive necessity, a logic” (Carrera, 2013, p.).

In contrast to these two ways of knowledge, dialectical materialism, especially in Marx’s work, introduces a third way whose aim is to transcend mere representation. Marx points out that:

“The concrete is concrete because it is the synthesis of multiple determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in thought as a process of synthesis, as a result, not as a starting point, although it is the true starting point, and, consequently, also the starting point of intuition and of representation [*Vorstellung*]. On the first path, full representation volatilizes into abstract determination; on the second, abstract determinations lead to the reproduction of the concrete by the path of thought” (Marx, 1858: II).

This approach clearly reveals the limitations inherent in the method of representation. Representation, as applied here, consists of taking manifestations presented immediately, either through sensory perception or through analysis in a historical context, and assuming that these manifestations are intrinsic and constant. This process culminates in the representation of the manifestations “as if they were subject to relations of necessity that respond to the very constructive logic of the representation” (Carrera, 2013). However, this approach does not penetrate into the exteriority of the represented elements, which means that it does not allow thought to understand the underlying determinations that make possible that which is to be known.

Instead of remaining with representation, Marx introduces an alternative method of dealing with the concrete: reproduction. This method implies that reproducing the concrete through thought means that the process is determined by the real concrete, so that nothing beyond the real object can exist, “it cannot count on any constructive necessity that marks a starting point for it” (Carrera, 2013). In other words, the concrete cannot originate in ideas that are mere representations or concepts; knowledge must begin with the real object reflected in our consciousness, which initiates the process of knowledge, and not the other way around.

The dialectical method used in Marx’s *Capital* clearly exemplifies how the process of moving from the abstract to the concrete is employed to unravel the underlying relationships behind the abstract appearance of the elements that make up reality. Marx describes this process as follows:

“The economists of the seventeenth century, for example, always begin with the living whole, the population, the nation, the state, various states, etc.; but they always end by discovering, through analysis, a certain number of determining abstract general relations, such as the division of labor, money, value, etc. Once these elements were more or less fixed and abstracted, economic systems began to emerge which rose from the simple-labor, division of labor, necessity, exchange value to the state, exchange between nations, and the world market. The latter is manifestly the correct scientific method” (Marx, 1858).

This method, which starts from the abstract and advances towards the concrete, is essential to avoid the attribution of *a priori* knowledge to the elements of knowledge and to avoid the naturalization of characteristics in a first moment, which would lead to their crystallization as immovable concepts. In his analysis, Marx starts from the abstract, that is, from what manifests itself immediately and, therefore, in its appearance, but which in that manifestation does not immediately reveal its determinations, that is, the concrete.

## 1.2 *Criticism of modern science from dialectical materialism*

The importance of the dialectical method presented here lies in the development of the capacity to know, which is central to military and strategic issues, since the positions taken by the actors in the international system are ultimately determined on the basis of their understanding of reality, their theory of knowledge. From our point of view, the more developed the model of knowledge, i.e. the capacity to know, the greater the possibility of mediating with reality and being able to anticipate it. For this, it is necessary to differentiate knowledge from thought.

To begin with, we want to make a historical approach to knowledge, to later apply the difference posed by dialectical materialism between knowledge and thought that exposes the fundamental differences to enter into the analysis of strategic thinking and cognitive warfare in its different forms.

In the development of the problems of scientific knowledge we find a central theme, which is of interest to us in this article, due to its dominance since the emancipation of the natural sciences from theology by means of Copernicus' *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (Engels, 1873-1886). Despite this split, the resulting product was the search for the domination of matter, of the natural environment for the "human spirit" (Engels, 1873-1886).

Under this process, there was a refinement of the different disciplines within the framework of the natural sciences throughout the eighteenth century, which developed a peculiar joint conception of reality, namely: the immutability of nature, pointing out to us that the split between theology and the natural sciences was not immediately completed (Engels, 1873-1886).

Although the scientific method has reached a predominant position as a tool that allows the construction of knowledge, we must recognize that it is a method highly conditioned by *a priori*gnoseological assumptions, which influence from the beginning the identification of the problems to be solved, as well as the hypotheses to be proposed for this purpose. These hypotheses not only inherently contain the *a priori* assumptions that structure our knowledge, but also determine the direction and limit the perspective from which the research itself is approached.

In addition, the process of the scientific method continues with the collection and evaluation of evidence for the validation or refutation of the hypotheses initially proposed, which later culminates in generalization through theories, principles and laws. However, as Lenin (1973) points out in his critique of empiriocentrism, this approach tends to absolutize immediate experience and sensory perception, which leads to an epistemological reductionism that disregards the complexity of objective reality.

In the same vein, Lenin argues that the approach of empiriocentrism runs the risk of blurring the dialectical relationship between matter and consciousness, turning them into an externality, by giving priority to individual experience and sensations over the material structures that underlie and determine such experiences. This is why, in its attempt to eliminate and avoid metaphysical assumptions, empiriocentrism ends up falling into a form of idealism that detaches human perceptions from the objective conditions that produce them (Lenin, 1973).

### 1.3 *From knowledge to thought: dialectical logic*

As we have seen, dialectical materialism does not consist in itself in a set of general statements drawn from the method, but rather it is the logic behind the scientific worldview. A sort of recognition of the material forms that make up conscious life. In contrast to science, which is configured as a method of constriction of the real under general laws and principles in separate spheres of knowledge, dialectical materialism is proposed as a rational regulator of the natural material –this is the basis of objective knowledge– that provides the capacity for analysis of the general

forms of social metabolism, providing a greater increase of knowledge about the real than other approaches to knowledge. In this sense, dialectical materialism presents a key differentiation between knowledge and thought, a key differentiation with regard to strategic thinking from the dialectical point of view and which explains its limitations and potentialities. At the same time, we understand that strategic thinking is dominated by non-dialectical approaches, more related to idealism (Lenin *et al.* 2022).

Before exposing dialectical logic, it is necessary to distinguish it from formal logic. The latter focuses on the internal coherence of thoughts, validating arguments independently of the material content (Ilienkov, 2022). This abstraction, which makes it possible to apply operations universally, leads to a disconnection with concrete reality.

In contrast, dialectical logic overcomes the limits of content abstraction by integrating the contradictions and movement inherent in reality itself (Ilienkov, 2022). Unlike formal logic, which acts as a corrective guide to maintain coherence of thought in a static way, dialectical logic is the active and dynamic assimilation of the inherent elements of reality such as motion and contradiction.

It is especially in the contradiction where dialectical logic stands as such, since, for this approach, contradictions are not errors or problems to be solved, but are the engine of development of reality (Ilienkov, 2022) that, through the understanding and management of these, allows dialectical thinking to be not only a form of knowledge, but a tool for the active intervention of reality.

It is in this sense that logic, understood in its dialectical form, becomes the science of thought insofar as, in Ilienkov's words:

“(…) is not only a general scheme of subjective activity, which creatively transforms nature, but also, simultaneously, a general scheme of change of any natural and social-historical material, in which this activity is executed and by objective needs it is always bound” (Ilienkov, 2022: 23).

According to Ilienkov, the logic he proposes is not a sort of formal tool or set of abstract rules, but becomes a science of thought because of its capacity to organize knowledge itself and its own active articulation, that is, its connection with the real contradictions and dynamics that shape the world.

In this sense, we identify a central element for dialectical logic, that is, the transition from knowledge to thought. This transition is not a simple change of state or an automated process, but a process in itself. Where knowledge, understood as the accumulation of data and events, must be reorganized and reinterpreted by dialectical logic to become thought, taking the form of a dynamic process. During reinterpretation, the laws of the dialectical method are followed, allowing thought to identify and mediate the contradictions inherent in reality (Ilienkov, 2022).

From this approach we can see the relevance of the dialectical approach to strategic thinking, which deals with rational direction, mediating with reality and giving it the required shape for the desired interests. However, we must not forget that both

the objectives and the means used to reach them are originated by our approach to knowledge and our worldview of reality.

It is here that dialectical materialism presents a methodology that allows for the understanding of the underlying processes and structures of reality. This approach not only explains phenomena in their present state, as we have explained throughout the article, but allows us to examine their historical becoming and potential change thanks to the incorporation of the movement of the real in its analysis, not leaving it as an external agent or collateral effect.

Therefore, the need to revise the approaches to knowledge and current gnoseology is evident.

## 2 The need for a dialectical perspective in strategic thinking

It is crucial to recognize that the complexity of the operating environment, motivated by the current state of transition from a unipolar to a multipolar order, where the countries with the greatest weight are the United States (USA from now on), China and, to a lesser extent, Russia, necessarily requires a revolution in strategic thinking. As has been pointed out, the increase in global conflicts poses a situation in which the contradictions inherent in the production model are transforming international relations and, in particular, war as a means of achieving political objectives of a strategic nature (Checa, 2023).

In this paper we will take the approach of the framework proposed by Merino *et al.*, (2022) of Hybrid and Fragmented World Warfare. In this line, war has taken a hybrid form, where an integrated mixture of elements of conventional, unconventional or irregular warfare can be observed (Merino *et al.*, 2022). This hybridization in methods has led to a scenario in which the Western differentiation between war and peace has been blurred, weakening the decision-making and response structure of Western countries, governed by the rules-based international order initiated after World War II and crystallized after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Checa, 2023). In turn, the rise in power of other powers, especially China and Russia, is generating frictions at all levels of state power globally. This contradiction between the unipolar order in a dynamic of loss of dominance and the emergence of multipolar forces is leading to an unrestricted confrontation, which encompasses all the fronts disputable by states (Merino *et al.*, 2022). This is why the strategic performance of states takes on a central role in this context given the complexity of the current operating environment.

The increase in complexity is motivated by “the advance of the current industrial revolution, which generates conditions for deepening interconnection, interdependence and the density and intensity of social relations of production” (Merino *et al.*, 2022). At the same time, we observe that complexity is represented in the opening of the multiple fields where war is developed for the achievement of the political objectives of each power. Thus, we can see how the doctrinal development of armies or Western *think tanks* enters into a dynamic of development and refinement of

types of warfare, namely: economic, cyber, legal, information and cognitive (Merino *et al.*, 2022). This last type is the one we pick up in the article given the predominant position it has in the current context, in which it is presented as a necessity inherent to the current forms of the composition of international security and the approaches established in the concepts of 5th generation warfare (Merino *et al.*, 2022).

Thus, we can observe that the contradictions in the international system are motivated by the strategies of countries such as China and Russia, which have strategic approaches largely influenced by dialectical materialism. In fact, both countries share in their strategies the asymmetric exploitation of the contradictions inherent in the current international order with the aim of obtaining advantages in the framework of strategic competition against the unipolar order. This advantage does not reside in the military sphere but extends to and interconnects with other spheres simultaneously (Checa, 2023).

In this line, our approach to cognitive warfare differs from the Western one and is closer to the holistic approaches of China and Russia, since, for these countries, cognitive warfare is not only a domain of the military realm, but takes the form of a strategic thinking deeply influenced by dialectical materialism, as part of its background related to the approach to knowledge.

Strategic thinking from a dialectical perspective stands as the ability to interpret reality in its fullness, with its movement and internal contradictions. In the case of Engels, his approach to military affairs was centered on the relationship between economics and military technique, the latter determined both in means and objectives by the former. In the same way, Clausewitz tried to develop a “philosophical elaboration of the art of war” based on the search for individualized general principles, that is, abstracted from the context in which they have been given and, therefore, turning them into universal laws explaining the nature of war (Lenin *et al.*, 2023). Here we can see Engels’ dialectical approach confronted with Clausewitz’ idealistic approach.

Clausewitz, however, confined the analysis of the nature of war to military history, which was the main source for the extraction of universal laws. This difference makes it necessary to accept the following idea of Mehring: “if one wants to recognize the superiority of historical (dialectical) materialism also in this field (the military) one must confront the exposition of Engels (in the *Antidübring*) with Clausewitz’s compendium of military history: *Of War*” (Lenin *et al.*, 2023). This sentence explains the necessity of the analysis of the concrete sphere, such as the military, at the same time that there must be an awareness of the approach to knowledge that shapes the research methodology.

In this way, the atomized and fragmented sphere of the study of reality takes direction and context. This is why Engels’ military studies evidenced the nexus between war and economy as a logical consequence, in dialectical terms, of Clausewitz’s central thesis on the relationship between war and politics (Lenin *et al.*, 2023). This form of integral and dialectical understanding is the condition of possibility for the articulation of a strategic thinking that not only addresses war in its traditional

dimension, isolated from the dynamic and contradictory relations of reality, but also overcomes the separation of war as a particular technical sphere, as is military science, while extending war as a means to other spheres governed by dialectics.

This is why the dialectical conception allows us to analyze the evolution of the historical forms of the sphere of military science in motion, recognizing cognitive warfare as a higher stage of strategic thinking. Cognitive warfare is configured as an evolution of traditional strategies in response to the need posed by the inevitable complexification and interconnection of the different spheres of reality, motivated by the development of the capitalist production model and its inalienable process of accumulation and expansion, currently at a global level.

Similarly, the dialectical perspective is not only limited to the explanation of the emergence of cognitive warfare, but takes it as a tool capable of mediating in a conscious and directed, therefore strategic, way with reality. Moreover, it becomes a tool to mediate with the fragmentation of reality caused by the predominantly scientific approach to knowledge. Therefore, cognitive warfare stands as the strategic vanguard of current strategic thinking due to its reflective and practical capabilities, a question we will address in the following section.

### *2.1 Cognitive warfare as strategic vanguard*

As we have previously stated, the conception of thought as a tool for the transformation of reality, that is, for the mediation of the human with the natural material, is presented as a fundamental element of military science and, more specifically, with the foundational principles of strategic thinking. This ability to identify and study the conditions material in a given historical moment or situation generates the condition of possibility to raise an adaptation and strategic planning as in cognitive warfare.

In this section we will analyze how the three great powers of the international system today –the USA, China and Russia– have developed national security strategies influenced by the complexity posed by the conditions of the current geostrategic scenario, in which a holistic understanding of security (also of war as a means) is required, given the degree of interconnection at all levels (commercial, transportation, monetary, political, cultural, etc.). We will examine the three perspectives with the aim of showing how China and Russia as powers with an approach to knowledge closer to dialectical materialism have greater flexibility and adaptation of their strategies, as opposed to the US approach and its inherent limitations.

#### *2.1.1 China's holistic national security and strategic cognition*

In the case of China, we find the development of the holistic national security concept (总体国家安全). This concept has developed over the years, eventually becoming one of the core elements guiding China on its path to becoming a great

power and ultimately a socialist-oriented state. As early as 2017, the 19th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP from now on) declared the full inclusion in the party's constitution of the holistic approach to national security (Yuan, 2021). Thus, the perceived threat to Chinese interests has increased for the CCP (Drinhausen and Legarda, 2022), which understood that the current composition of the correlation of forces in international relations required new measures that were capable of protecting and promoting the path to a security system that would secure the path of Chinese development (Yuan, 2021).

In 2020, there is a new development that crystallizes the importance of the new concept of national security, with the Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee being the space in which the decision is made to equate security and development, integrating the principle of "global development and security" in the XIV Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) (Yuan, 2021). For issues related to global security, he has put forward a proposal known as the Global Security Initiative (GSI) in 2022, which follows the line of the Global Development Initiative (GDI) of 2021 (Drinhausen and Legarda, 2022). Here we can see the need to intersect security and development, both internally and externally in a dialectical approach.

China's approach is centered on linking the country's development with security, while security is seen as an indispensable element for ensuring development. China sees this relationship as both internal and external at the same time, so that national security cannot be confined solely to the internal sphere of the State; rather, it is obliged to develop a theoretical-practical platform that allows, in a single movement, to ensure internal and external development, as well as internal and external security, issues that from the Chinese perspective are indivisible. Therefore, the lack or imbalance of any of the elements could lead to the aggravation of the contradictions immanent to them, thus eliminating the possibility of completing the path marked out by the state powers.

The aforementioned theoretical-practical platform is given by the framework of the holistic national security concept; however, it is in its cognitive warfare approach that it is endowed with both capabilities. In this sense, the transposition of the Western concept of cognitive warfare to the Chinese approach becomes the "Three Warfare" "*Sanzhan*" (三战) strategy. The fundamental objective lies in influencing public perception, maintaining the support of one's own population, eroding support in the opponent's population, and exerting influence on third parties (Cheng, 2012). While it is true that the origin of this strategy belongs to the military sphere, we can observe that it is expanding its use to spheres associated with the civilian, this being the key element for the flexible articulation of the strategic cognition of the Chinese state.

Therefore, strategic cognition is established as an essential means to articulate objectives within the framework of holistic national security. At the same time, it functions as a guide for reflecting on one's own actions, enabling an awareness of the fundamental elements of reality, which is crucial for a deep analysis and a solid intellectual construction. This approach exposes the dialectical character of Chinese strategic thinking, making it the actor in the international system closest to the knowledge approach of dialectical materialism.

### *2.1.2 Reflexive control of Russia*

In the case of the Russian approach, we find that Reflexive Control (RC from now on) is presented as a strategy framed within Russian military thought. Its origins can be traced back to the Soviet Union, where we find that it is a strategy shaped by systems theory (cybernetics) and dialectical materialism (Martinez, 2020).

In the framework of military thinking we see that the CR is a sort of dynamic game theory in which the actions of the adversary can be parameterized, as if it were a system, in such a way that a twin model of the way of thinking and acting can be generated (Vasara, 2020). The modeling of the thinking and action system, which is summarized in command and control (C2), aims to create a framework for the experimentation of actions with strategic and reflective objectives.

In a certain sense, the aim is to insert actions that generate responses in the adversary that are beneficial to the controller, so it would be a matter of constantly parameterizing and modeling the rival actions with the objective of perfecting the model to obtain better and better results in the actions. These actions are related to the Soviet active measures, since they are the way to provoke reactions in the adversary in order to collect enough information for the creation and improvement of the system/model.

In the case of the RC, the dominance of cybernetics imbricated with dialectical materialism for its instrumentalization in the military sphere is evident, as we have mentioned above. However, we can observe that the RC presents itself as a platform for strategic action, given the capabilities of systems theory in relation to the modeling of the adversary's behavior, since it can be extrapolated beyond the battlefield.

Thus, we find that the RC becomes the main tool for the configuration of Russian national security, in that it can encompass surfaces related to the concept of holistic security, as in the Chinese case. Moreover, it can be observed that the current central element of the RC for the articulation of its system is cognitive warfare (Czech, 2023), insofar as it draws on the development of sciences such as neuroscience or neurotechnology to influence decision-making and the very shaping of the strategic influence operations it puts forward.

## *2.2 All elements of the U.S. National Power and Strategic Deterrence approach to Defense*

This section dedicated to the USA, separated from the Chinese and Russian approaches, is motivated by the fact that we consider that the American approach is a paradigmatic case of the approaches to knowledge criticized from the perspective of dialectical materialism developed throughout the initial phases of this article.

From our point of view, the US faces the contradictions of its own empiricist approach to knowledge, generating the separation between fields of knowledge and fragmenting reality understood as a whole into irreconcilable spheres. This results

in the inability to assume an articulated holistic strategic position as in the cases of China and Russia. In addition, the state configuration of liberal democracies generates contradictions and limitations in the use of strategies such as cognitive warfare (Checa, 2022).

Given this situation, the U.S. is not impervious to the current geostrategic situation and is developing response strategies in response to the increased security footprint, which has extended into spheres that have traditionally been separated from the military sphere.

To analyze the U.S. position in this regard, we find that one of the most relevant *think tanks* in the U.S. defense sphere, the RAND Corporation, has developed the concept of integrated deterrence.

Integrated deterrence was introduced in the 2022 U.S. National Security Strategy and is framed by the commission on the Congressional National Defense Strategy called “All Elements of the National Power-Based Approach to Defense.” The focus of the concept centers on the articulated combination of multiple U.S. deterrence capabilities, namely traditional (land, maritime, and air) and emerging (cyber and space) military domains, along with the tools of what Joseph Nye called soft power (political, diplomatic, and economic). The goal of this concept is to increase deterrence capabilities against adversaries such as China and Russia (Mazarr and Ke, 2024).

The concept proposal focuses on three core elements such as deniability, resilience and cost imposition. This requires addressing challenges within the Department of Defense and other parts of the U.S. administration such as full integration, understanding and communication and stability and adaptation (Mazarr and Ke, 2024).

While the concept has been developed in depth as a framework for articulating U.S. power capabilities in the face of an international environment characterized by intensified competition and increased security challenges, it can be inferred — although not explicitly mentioned in the article— that cognitive warfare is a central element in the operationalization of the integrated deterrence approach. For the U.S. perspective of cognitive warfare, this is presented as a tool focused on manipulating perceptions and influencing the adversary (Naidon *et al.*, 2022). It is this form of reduction to the military sphere and, in particular, to the sphere of fusion between information and psychological operations (Naidon *et al.*, 2022) as a kind of higher stage of the same. However, we believe that it is here that the limitations of the American and Western approach, dominated by the empiriocentrism of the modern sciences, manifest themselves.

From our point of view, the limitations of empiricism as a theory of knowledge lie in its ability to determine the concreteness of perceptions (sensible emotions) as abstract elements. It is not able to understand that even the simplest sensible impression is obtained by the individual as a sensation mediated by a whole social relation established within the social metabolism. Therefore, the cognitive realm, from the point of view of dialectical materialism, must focus on the mediation of the

social relation in individuals, groups and/or states, rather than on the manipulation and subversion of the perceptions and cognitive capacities of the targets.

This approach makes it necessary to incorporate it into the concept of integrated deterrence as a tool capable of articulating it effectively, at the same time as it must serve as a tool for analyzing and determining the current concrete historical form and the social metabolism developed in it. A way of understanding all the edges of the environment in order to be able to act strategically on it.

### 3 Conclusions

Finally, dialectical materialism as a way of approaching knowledge allows for a holistic and articulated vision of strategic thinking, conferring significant advantages in an international context of contradiction and interdependence. In this sense, the instrumentalization of cognitive warfare as a strategic platform and its application in national security is shown as the path for the integration and articulation of the state capabilities, while giving conscious direction to actions within the current context.

On the other hand, Western difficulties in adapting to the complexity of the current international reality are evident, to the detriment of the adaptation of China and Russia, which, under an approach of dialectical heritage and practice, manage to integrate in their strategic frameworks political, social and economic dimensions of modern warfare.

This situation highlights the importance of comprehensive and rationally coordinated approaches to face the current geopolitical challenges, where the strategic organization must overcome its current state and integrate all spheres.

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