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# HYBRID WARFARE



*"We can thus only say that the aims a belligerent adopts, and the resources he employs, must be governed by the particular characteristics of his own position; but they will also conform to the spirit of the age and to its general character. Finally, they must always be governed by the general conclusions to be drawn from the nature of war itself."*

**Carl von Clausewitz**  
*On War*

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official position or policy of member governments, or of NATO.

**T**HROUGHOUT HISTORY, there have been numerous attempts to define and classify the phenomenon of war; a social event to be solved via a violent confrontation to which the human factor confers extreme complexity. Although practical and precise definitions are most useful, some Western defence professionals tend to use lavish terms that enjoy acceptance and popularity and to which different qualifiers are associated with the term "war". Their supporters continue to come up with the new definition of existing types of armed conflicts. One type of conflict can therefore be described in different ways, such as asymmetric war, non-linear war, war of a given generation, composite war, total war, or, in the case of the topic of this article, hybrid war.

In this text, I will argue that hybrid war does not constitute something new in history. What is new in the concept of hybrid war is the growing capacity of international actors to use all tools at their disposal to project power. This is due to the fact that it has become easier to implement global strategies in a coordinated manner, given the technological advances and shorter "distances" between our societies. Hybrid war is not different from the war on which Sun Tzu wrote his treatise 500 years B.C., or from the wars that philosophers, sociologists, political scientists, historians, strategists, soldiers, etc., have attempted to theorize throughout history.

## **The Unclear Concept of Hybrid War and How International Actors Define It Differently**

The first sign that the concept of hybrid war roams intellectual circles with imprecision is that the various definitions lack clarity, accuracy and precision. Instead, current attempts to define hybrid warfare make simple reference to attributes present in this supposedly new type of conflict. Among the existing definitions, the two definitions below are the clearest and most relevant to the topic of this article. The first definition is by John J. McCuen:

"Hybrid conflicts [therefore] are full spectrum wars with both physical and conceptual dimensions: the former, a struggle against an armed enemy and the latter, a wider struggle for control and support of the combat zone's indigenous population, the support of the home fronts of the intervening nations, and the support of the international community [...] To secure and stabilize the indigenous population, the intervening forces must immediately rebuild or restore security, essential services, local government, self-defense forces and essential elements of the economy."

*(McCuen, Hybrid Wars, Military Review, March-April 2008, p. 108)*

In her research project for the U.S. Army War College, Margaret S. Bond expressed the above definition in similar terms:

"War of the next century will comprise a kind of hybrid war, projecting all elements of national power along a continuum of activities from stability, security, and reconstruction operations, to armed combat."

*(Bond, A New Paradigm for Stability Operations in Failing States, 2007, pp. 3-4)*

The below are some words by Frank G. Hoffman (*see p. 44*) on the subject of hybrid war:

"[...] in the future, the most capable opponents may seek to combine truly disruptive capacity with traditional, irregular, or catastrophic forms of warfare [...] future conflict will be multi-modal or multi-variant rather than simple black or white with the characterization of one form of warfare [...] This construct is more frequently described as 'hybrid warfare', in which the adversary will most likely present unique combinational or hybrid threats [...] instead of separate challenges with fundamentally different approaches (conventional, irregular, or terrorist), we can expect to face competitors who will employ all forms of war and tactics, perhaps simultaneously."

*(Hoffman, Hybrid Warfare and Challenges, 2009, p. 35)*

Given the above definitions, are we really facing a new phenomenon? Or the concept of hybrid war, rather than being something novel, should simply aim to corroborate or warn that war is something infinitely complicated, with numerous appearances and variables, changing; adaptable to the context and, in short, as unpredictable as human nature.



“War is **infinitely complicated** and as **unpredictable** as human nature.”

The previous assessment would entail the obligation to follow a conflict management process with a holistic view, analysing the actors as complex systems and admitting that the phenomenon transcends military activity. War will always be a confrontation in which the intention of the adversaries will be the use of all the means at their disposal, in the most coordinated way possible, to impose their will.

**RETURNING TO THE BEGINNING**, the first appearance of the concept of hybrid war, as such, was in November 2005, at the hands of two officers of the United States Marine Corps; General James N. Mattis and Colonel Frank G. Hoffman, who wrote an article on that term in the journal *Proceedings*,<sup>1</sup> edited by the United States Naval Institute. The circumstances in

which the article was written, when the evolution of the Iraq campaign required a greater number of troops on the ground, whose firepower should be used more against an insurgent force and less against a conventional force, compelled the authors the need for a turn in American strategic thinking. The latter should not base the achievement of superiority on confrontation exclusively through constant technological advances but had to contemplate to a greater extent the influence of the human factor. This led Mattis and Hoffman to emphasize on the complexity of the “new” war, since the operations in Iraq presented them with many different threats (paramilitary forces, presence of weapons of mass destruction, terrorist groups, organized crime, failed state) that United States had not previously been faced with. Therefore, everything seems to indicate that Mattis and Hoffman, far from pursuing a term to define a completely novel phenomenon, would have as main purpose to provoke debate about the challenges that the U.S. Armed Forces would be forced to face in the near future, and influence the making of the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR)<sup>2</sup> of 2006.

Although the term hybrid war has since enjoyed great acceptance, this had yet to be reflected in the American strategic or doctrinal documents. Nevertheless, Mattis and Hoffman’s “pulling of the ears” did have the desired effect in the U.S. Department of Defense courses of

action and, specifically, in the QDRs of 2010 and 2014, as shown in the following paragraph:

“The term ‘hybrid’ has recently been used to capture the seemingly increased complexity of war, the multiplicity of actors involved, and the blurring between traditional categories of conflict. While the existence of innovative adversaries is not new, today’s hybrid approaches demand that U.S. forces prepare for a range of conflicts. These may involve state adversaries that employ protracted forms of warfare, possibly using proxy forces to coerce and intimidate, or non-state actors using operational concepts and high-end capabilities traditionally associated with states.”<sup>3</sup>

The influence of Mattis and Hoffman, however, was limited within the scope of the U.S. Department of Defense, the former, taking advantage of his position as Commander of NATO’s Allied Command Transformation, ensured that the concept was taken into account in the Atlantic Organization.

For NATO, the concept of hybrid war has been evolving towards a very broad term that, leaving aside the obsessive ambition to define a new type of war, has a very practical approach, more focused on the threats, trying to cover the contextual complexity associated with current conflicts. In this regard, I think it is appropriate to reflect Paragraph 72 of the Communiqué issued by the Alliance after the Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Warsaw in July 2016:<sup>4</sup>



**Hybrid warfare blends conventional/unconventional, regular/irregular, and information and cyber warfare.**

Photo by Frederik Ringnes, Forsvaret



## CHARACTERISTICS OF HYBRID THREATS<sup>1</sup>

- // Coordinated and synchronized,
- // Deliberately target democratic states' and institutions' economic vulnerabilities,
- // Use a wide range of means,
- // Exploit the thresholds of detection and attribution as well as the border between war and peace,
- // Aim to influence different forms of decision-making at the local (regional), state or institutional level.

<sup>1</sup> Extracted from NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, "Hybrid Threats: A Strategic Communications Perspective" [bit.ly/HybridThreats](http://bit.ly/HybridThreats)

**ABOVE:** Hybrid threats are generated from a mix of adversarial measures to influence political decision-making of the targeted nation, therefore an integrated approach across government is needed to effectively identify and address such threats. (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, Hybrid Threats: A StratCom Perspective)

"We have taken steps to ensure our ability to effectively address the challenges posed by hybrid warfare, where a broad, complex, and adaptive combination of conventional and non-conventional means, and overt and covert military, paramilitary and civilian measures, are employed in a highly integrated design by state and non-state actors to achieve their objectives. Responding to this challenge, we have adopted a strategy and actionable implementation plans on NATO's role in countering hybrid warfare.

"The primary responsibility to respond to hybrid threats or attacks rests with the targeted nation. NATO is prepared to assist an Ally at any stage of a hybrid campaign. The Alliance and Allies will be prepared to counter hybrid warfare as part of Collective Defence. The Council could decide to invoke Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. The Alliance is committed to effective cooperation and coordination with partners and relevant international organisations, in particular the EU, as agreed, in efforts to counter hybrid warfare."

Given the multifaceted nature of the threat which transcends the strictly military and, therefore, the normal scope of employment of the Alliance, there is a clear requirement to take that ultra-military (in the classic sense of the prefix) nature into account. Therefore, within this Comprehensive Approach, the primary responsibility to neutralize the threat to an attacked nation lies with the latter, and apart from the possibility of invoking Article 5, NATO relies on cooperation and coordination with related organizations endowed of

political, diplomatic, economic and legal instruments, which are essential to counteract any such threat. As a final result, we can see that within the Alliance, hybrid war runs from the Russian influence in the countries near its border, such as Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, to the expansive strategy of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (also known by its Arabic-language acronym Daesh), and other jihadist movements in the Sahel and its projection towards Europe particularly Spain, France, and Italy. As for the European Union (EU) and its attempt to define hybrid war, it is understandable that it is very difficult to build a clear and uncontested definition. In this connection, the following definition is taken from a working document of the European External Action Service:<sup>5</sup>

"Hybrid warfare can be more easily characterised than defined as a centrally designed and controlled use of various covert and overt tactics, enacted by military and/or non-military means, ranging from intelligence and cyber operations through economic pressure to the use of conventional forces. By employing hybrid tactics, the attacker seeks to undermine and destabilise an opponent by applying both coercive and subversive methods. The latter can include various forms of sabotage, disruption of communications and other services including energy supplies. The aggressor may work through or by empowering proxy insurgent groups, or disguising state-to-state aggression behind

the mantle of a 'humanitarian intervention'. Massive disinformation campaigns designed to control the narrative are an important element of a hybrid campaign. All this is done with the objective of achieving political influence, even dominance over a country in support of an overall strategy."

The EU's difficulty to achieve a clear definition of the term hybrid war has led to the organization practically renaming it "hybrid threat". This decision reflects the adoption of a practical vision on the matter, avoiding difficult and debated definitions and focusing on addressing present risks and threats. Proof of this is the quasi-total absence of the term hybrid war in each and every one of the key documents related to this matter, such as the Joint Communication of the European Commission to the European Parliament and the European Council, regarding the Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats,<sup>6</sup> the press release of the European Council on countering hybrid threats,<sup>7</sup> the Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy,<sup>8</sup> the European Defence Action Plan,<sup>9</sup> and most recently, the study developed by the Directorate General for External Policies of the Union titled "EU Defence: The White Book implementation process".<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the Western view of the matter, it is interesting to see the Russian approach. To do this, we briefly analyse the opinion of one of Russia's most important military





leaders; General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation. Gerasimov, in a speech delivered in 2013, to the Academy of Military Sciences of the Russian Federation, presented forms and methods that the armed forces put into practice during the planning and conduct of military operations. In addition, he stressed the fundamental role that science or military should play in the achievement of efficient military capabilities, through the accurate foresight of the challenges that the armed forces will face in the future. Many Western experts have used a paragraph from this speech. The translation into English is reproduced below and is used as a basis to argue that hybrid war is a new way of conducting military operations adopted by the Russian Federation:

"In the 21st Century we have seen a tendency towards blurring the lines between the states of war and peace. Wars are no longer declared, and having begun, proceed according to an unfamiliar template. The experience of military conflicts [...] confirm that a perfectly thriving state can, in a matter of months and even days, be transformed into an area of fierce armed conflict, become a victim of foreign intervention, and sink into a web of chaos, humanitarian catastrophe, and civil war. [...] The very 'rules of war' have changed. The role of non-military means of achieving political strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness."

If we analyse in a rigorous way both the context in which the 2013 speech was made and the article published in *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kurier* (VPK news)<sup>11</sup>, in February 2014, we will see that Gerasimov follows an argument not

with the aim of establishing a new strategy, but to challenge the positions and ways of thinking of the Russian military leadership, giving a heads-up and trying to trigger the development of new ideas to counter emerging risks. Additionally, Gerasimov infers, both in the speech and in the aforementioned article, the same idea that Vladimir Putin began to extend just before the elections that in 2012 would take him to the presidency of the Federation; the existence of a strategy in execution by the West consisting in implanting "controlled chaos" in zones of Russian interest.

We can see that the line of argument followed by Gerasimov is tremendously coincident with the one followed by Mattis and Hoffman in 2005 and, similarly, it was primarily oriented to redirect the policies for the transformation of the Russian Federation armed forces, not having in any case its main effort directed to define a new type of conflict or new way of making war to be implemented by the Russian Federation in the near future. Having analysed in the previous paragraphs, the ambiguous definition of the concept of hybrid war, its evolution, and its appreciation and interpretation in different and disparate ambits, we could conclude the following:

- The objective pursued by the authors when coining the concept of hybrid war was not to define a new type of conflict, but to call attention to new risks, resulting from the current context, and thereby make the structures responsible for the defence policies of their respective countries react by incorporating lines of action to counteract them.

- Submission to the public maelstrom of such an abstract and open concept as hybrid war has resulted in multiple interpretations.
- In official forums, the lack of the attributes required in its definition, namely; clarity, precision and accuracy, invokes very different interpretations and is adapted to the security circumstances of each international actor.
- There is a boom in popularity of the concept of hybrid war in some sectors, which is not shared by, for example, official instances of the main powers and alliances. The main reason is the lack of a clear definition and rigor; something which makes it impractical to use, and consequently leads to it being replaced by concepts of more clarity, lower level of ambition and, therefore, more manageable, understandable and practical.
- Finally, another aspect that definitively weakens the usefulness of the term is the cross-attribution of the term between the West and Russian strategists.

## Examples of Hybrid Warfare

### The Hybrid War of Daesh

Since its inception, Daesh has distinguished itself from other terrorist organizations by its level of ambition,<sup>12</sup> strategies, and tactics employed. It is able to adapt its forms of combat to context and capacity. This multi-dimensional way of acting corresponds perfectly with most of the definitions of hybrid war, with its main





characteristics being the combined use of conventional, unconventional, terrorist and criminal actions, mostly synchronized, and under the umbrella of a careful coverage media, orchestrated by a clear and targeted communication strategy. In this way, it is possible to act on a global scale while at the same time following a conventional type of action similar to that of other terrorist organizations, while directing it against interests classified as "Western".

There are mainly two areas of action. The first area of action, a regional or limited type, is the one where Daesh executes its operations by taking advantage of power gaps, normally in areas of conflict or post-conflict. The second area of action is global, but could be combined with the regional one or, if the previous one is affected or denied, it will become a priority. The type of operations carried out is primarily unconventional or terrorist operations that are aimed primarily at affecting the morale of the adversary, and, therefore, negatively influencing their daily lives. However, the execution of actions requires command and control structures with an enormous capacity for adaptation. Thus, acting as a "pseudo-state" would require an organization capable of carrying out functions of government, economic and finan-

cial management, social servicing, etc. This hierarchical organization of centralized control and execution coexists with another, where the execution is completely decentralized, and the structure diffused. This latter organization is the one required to carry out non-conventional, terrorist, and criminal activities globally.

A fundamental classification of Daesh as a hybrid threat is its extensive use of information, which is supported by a clear communication strategy. Within this strategy lie three different lines of action, with their respective target audiences. The first line of action is the one aimed at influencing the morale and will to fight against it. The target audience, in this case, is constituted by the international community of Western character and thought. The actions towards this audience are aimed at seeking a feeling of vulnerability through the dissemination of information related to the results of indiscriminate terrorist acts.

The second line of action is aimed at achieving acceptance and even harmony with its ideology. The international community of Arab character and thought is the target audience, to whom a message is addressed highlighting the social and governance actions put into practice in the areas of conflict, or in those areas where the sovereign state is unable to meet the population's basic needs. Finally, there is the line of action whose objective is the recruitment of followers in terrorist acts, support, or combat. The target audience is the world population susceptible to radicalization. In this case, the message is aimed at offering attractive and hopeful perspectives within the "true" religion of Islam, presenting the benefits

and transcendence of becoming a Daesh combatant in the face of apathy, nonsense and lack of expectations offered by Western life.

In conclusion, the hybrid nature of the Daesh rests on its capacity to combine different forms of action (conventional, unconventional and terrorist), supported by criminal activities, mainly as a source of financing, coordinated, directed, and controlled, efficiently, and supported by a perfectly orchestrated media campaign. From all these characteristics the only thing that is novel is the degree of synchrony and efficiency, which are only due to aspects such as accessible technological advances, the current international structure, and interdependence relations between different global social groups.

## The Conflict in Ukraine: Characteristics of the Hybrid Phenomenon

### I. Chronology of the Conflict

In 2013, in the months before Euromaidan,<sup>13</sup> the political situation in Ukraine was extremely complicated. On the one hand, there was the incumbent "Party of the Regions", representative of the Russian ethnic groups and those in favour of ties with the Russian Federation, and, on the other, the "Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform" (UDAR),<sup>14</sup> "Fatherland Party"<sup>15</sup> and "Liberty"<sup>16</sup> (Svoboda). During 2013, opposition by the parties to the policies of Viktor Yanukovich<sup>17</sup> became increasingly noticeable, despite the fact that the latter justified the austerity measures imposed as necessary to channel their future integration in the EU.

**ABOVE, FROM LEFT:** Chaos-induction is key to hybrid aggression; masked Russian soldiers, also known as "green men", photo.ua/Shutterstock; the new operational environment of cyber warfare; a woman lights a candle in front of the theatre Le Bataclan in tribute to victims of the November 13, 2015 terrorist attack in Paris. Photo by Frederic Legrand/Shutterstock. A destroyed tank is seen along a road on the territory controlled by the self-proclaimed Luhansk People's Republic near airport of Luhansk, in Luhansk region, eastern Ukraine, November 19, 2014. © REUTERS





**ABOVE:** December 1, 2013 Euromaidan riots. Thousands of people in Ukraine demonstrated against President Yanukovich's decision to abandon an EU integration pact. Photo by Kiev.Victor/Shutterstock

The situation was exacerbated by a 180-degree turnaround in President Yanukovich's strategies, which stopped the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU under the pretext of the existence of economic obstacles, which would have to be negotiated with the Russian Federation. In order to control the situation, and offer the international community an apparent normality, President Yanukovich and Vladimir Putin signed a bilateral agreement, by which the price of gas for Ukraine and Russia was lowered by one third in order to buy Ukrainian public debt to alleviate the crisis. The effect was the opposite. The protests were further aggravated in an attempt to avoid ratification of the agreement with Russia and as a reaction to the measures imposed by the government to quell the revolts. By February 2014, violent actions had spread throughout the country, with opponents of the government occupying official buildings. Despite making an attempt to negotiate in extremis with the opposition, Yanukovich was forced to leave

Kiev, being dismissed by the parliament, which then formed an interim government headed by Oleksandr Turchynov.<sup>18</sup> However, the situation was far from stable. Pro-Russian opposition denounced the illegality of the constituted government and the focus of the conflict shifted to the Crimea Peninsula, due to the ethnic Russian demographic superiority in that region. The change in the government of the country served as an excuse for pro-Russian paramilitaries<sup>19</sup> to appeal Putin's protection, implying that Ukrainian population of Russian ethnicity was threatened by Kiev.

In this climate of instability, from the Ukrainian Government and Western intelligence agencies' perspective, the appearance on scene of unidentified armed personnel, which supposedly belonged to the Russian special operations forces, was denounced. The support of these special operations forces was the reason behind the pro-Russian paramilitary forces seizing power in Crimea and the annexation to the Russian Federation signed on 18 March

2014. The United States and the EU responded to this annexation by means of economic sanctions and limited military deployments to Poland and the Baltic States. These actions had no practical outcome, as the conflict spread to the eastern region of Ukraine, instigated by the pro-Russians.

Next, the pro-Russian separatists, supported by the Russian Federation, tried to establish the same successful Crimean process in the east of the country, but which instead resulted in clashes during the summer of 2014. Among their consequences with heavy international impact was the downing by pro-Russian militias of a commercial aircraft belonging to the Malaysian Airlines. 298 passengers and crew died during this tragic event. As a result of the aforementioned incident, the sanctions against Russia were hardened and there was a perception of weakening in the Federation's support to the militias. This reduction of Russian support coupled with the military offensive of the Kiev government ended with the recovery of a large part of the territory that had been ceded to the pro-Russian paramilitaries. In September 2014, the parties reached a ceasefire agreement,<sup>20</sup> supported by the EU and the Russian Federation.

This agreement not only failed to stop the violence, but it also had an agglutinating effect of the pro-Russian separatist groups, under the denomination of the "Unified Armed Forces of Novorossiya". The ceasefire situation did not last long since the conflict was again intensified, and Russian forces crossed the border. In response to this open aggression and in an attempt to preserve territorial integrity, the government of Poroshenko<sup>21</sup> appealed for the 1994 Memorandum of Budapest<sup>22</sup> to be respected.

Thus, in a new attempt to achieve peace, the Minsk II<sup>23</sup> Agreement was signed on 12 February 2015, despite the conflict continuing until the pro-Russian separatists consolidated territory in the Debaltseve area, establishing continuity in the pro-Russian territories. These changes led to less violence and a fall in death toll. Subsequent agreements and dialogue between the belligerents have led to less violence.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, a definitive solution to the conflict has not yet been reached.



## II. The Intervention in Ukraine

The reasons for the Russian Federation's intervention in Ukraine are primarily: the Russian security strategy aspiring to expand beyond a regional power, and the instability of the government itself. Under the umbrella of the security, Russia would primarily emphasize preoccupation and reservations concerning NATO and EU pressure on its expansion towards the east (Mearsheimer, 2014). Also related to this first aspect, but more in the facet of the ambition to become a world power, is the Russian Federation's need to control the Black Sea region, which inevitably also implies the control of the Peninsula of Crimea. The Black Sea constitutes a vital access for Russia, both for economic and military aspects, since it facilitates the maritime communication lines necessary for the access of commercial routes or the projection of naval power to the Mediterranean Sea and from there to the rest of the world.<sup>25</sup> Given the Russian aspirations, it is clear that a Crimean Peninsula as part of the territory of a country belonging to the EU or NATO would constitute a situation of impermissible risk to its economy and freedom of projection.

## III. The Hybrid Aspects of the Conflict

"Hybrid" activity in Ukraine can be perceived since the moment in which this nation formalizes its intent to become an independent state, in the summer of 1991. A series of diplomatic, economic and political initiatives (pro-Western and pro-Russian) were executed by both sides of the conflict, accompanied by protest actions, civil disobedience, and subversion, to which, as the conflict escalated, others of a paramilitary and military nature were added; all of them conveniently complemented with the corresponding propaganda, information and misinformation. But among all these actions, is there anything revolutionary new? From my point of view the answer is no. As in the case of Daesh, a greater efficiency and synchrony in the actions is only the consequence of a superior command and control capacity, which would simply obey the circumstantial aspects already mentioned.

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## Principal Characteristics of the Hybrid War Phenomenon

Under the following heading, I will revisit, in specific, the main characteristics that are supposedly seen exclusively or substantively in a hybrid war.

- **Actions oriented towards enemy vulnerabilities:** This orientation towards vulnerability is determined as a fundamental characteristic of hybrid attacks in several publications. It turns out to be an absolute and indisputable principle in the planning of all military operations, past, present and future. For numerous reasons, military actions are always be directed against critical vulnerabilities, that is, those that directly influence the integrity of the adversary's centre of gravity. Would a force waste its resources trying to affect an impregnable characteristic of an adversary unless this is done with the intention of deceiving?
- **The harmonized deployment of regular and irregular forces:** There are two main forms of combat. The first type is the so-called compound warfare, where a regular force is deployed in the main effort, while an irregular force, consisting of local fighters, equipped, trained and controlled by the nation to which the regular forces belong, is engaged in smaller-scale attacks. The second way of executing military actions by using regular and irregular forces, is known as protracted warfare, a type of warfare first described by Mao Zedong in an essay published in 1938. In this type of warfare, one of the belligerents experiences an evolutionary process, where it initiates its actions from the basic state of insurgency, with very limited capabilities, and performs mainly subversive actions (mobile warfare). What differentiates this form of executing the military operations from the compound warfare is the absence of explicit support from a state actor.
- **Extensive use of information:** Influence strategies which would go far beyond the military sphere would mainly consist of the use of any mean to deprive information or disseminate it, altered or not, according to need. The objective of these actions is to influence the perception, and therefore also

the behaviour of the adversary, sowing: bewilderment, instability, dissatisfaction, demoralization, as well as undermining the cohesion of the target audiences. This causes an internal fracture and inability to perceive reality correctly, with serious consequences for the decision processes, the unity of action, and the support required in any conflict. Additionally, as an example of the adaptation of these types of strategies to the current context, where the majority of the information is managed by computer means, we find one of the ultimate ways of executing this type of actions that has lately grown in prominence: the use of cyber-attacks.

- **Employment of political, diplomatic and international legal pressure:** Under this heading we could include all those measures that, through the use of political power and diplomatic activity in different forums and international organizations, place one of the contestants, in a given conflict, in a position of superiority or, at least, with the ability to curtail the decisions of his opponent. These forms of pressure could be complemented by a twisted use of current international legislation, drafted in the light of Western thought, and whose interested interpretation or even transgression is justified for most non-state actors and for some states, in case of threat of their national interests.
- **Exercising economic and financial strategies:** These measures would be based on the ability of certain states to exert pressure on others by influencing their internal or external financial activity, causing effects that transcend the economic ones and even affect social welfare and, thereby, increase the possibilities of internal destabilization. Examples would be investments in strategic sectors, purchase of large-scale debt, restrictions on access to raw materials or energy resources, or the implementation of policies aimed at making extensive the use of a certain currency.
- **Execution of subversive, terrorist, and criminal activities:** The objective here is to achieve a degree of internal instability that again would negatively influence the management of the conflict. Propaganda, destabilizing impact of terrorism, and creating



“The term **hybrid war** simply refers to the phenomenon of war in general.”



insecurity through organized crime are ways to achieve this. These measures cause destabilization, heightening of ethnic, religious, or social tensions.

## Critical Judgement of the Characteristics of Hybrid Warfare

The following paragraph aims to sum up the unique aspects of hybrid war as a long existing type of war, not as a new concept, showing that these specific characteristics have been implemented at different degrees through the history, according to historical context. The fact that attacks have to be directed against critical vulnerabilities of the adversary, reinforces that this characteristic is one of the fundamental principles of military planning. It is neither exclusive to the hybrid war type or novel.

In relation to the use of regular and irregular forces, the supporters of the new concept claim this as exclusive to hybrid war because of the high level of synchronization achieved by these two kinds of forces. Fleeing from the most recent ones to show the presence of this aspect throughout most conflicts in the history of humanity, we could highlight; the tactics of Fabius Maximus against Hanni-

bal in the Italian Peninsula, the attempts to synchronize the actions of the Irish irregular forces and the Spanish troops during the rebellion of Hugh O'Neill against the English, the actions of the Spanish guerrilla against Napoleonic troops, in the Peninsular War, or the resurgence of French irregular forces during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870.

The degree of integration and synchronization in the cited examples is logically different. Obviously, the greater the availability of technology, the better the strategic-political level may manage and control operations, allowing it to exercise the command of tactical entities if, due to the strategic effects of such action, the situation demands it. Moreover, it is expected that this feature will improve as humanity advances technologically. Shall we say then, that a greater integration and synchronization than the current one will constitute a characteristic of another new type of war?

The use of information is another characteristic that has been present in each and every conflict in the history of mankind. The collection, distribution, propagation and manipulation of information has been essential in all the wars of history to found decisions, achieve the support of influential groups and, if necessary, create a context that induces the adversary to erroneous decision making and the loss of the support it enjoys. I would like to quote Sun Tzu, who in his work *The Art of War* explained the importance of information in military thought at that time:

"If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle. [...] All warfare is based on deception. Hence, when able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must seem inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near."

Moving on to practical examples not very distant in time, in which these type of principles related to the "management" of information were followed, we find the American War of Independence, where false messenger information was leaked to British sources, in order to provoke erroneous judgments regarding the entity of the rebel forces (Norman B. Hutcherson, *Command and Control Warfare*, 1994). In addition, propaganda was routinely used, as in

the case of information about the murder of a woman attributed to the atrocities committed by the Indians, allies of the British, in order to instigate feelings of rejection and hatred (Murray, 2012).

With a more strategic character, years later, during the Peninsular War, King Joseph Bonaparte tried to gain the initiative in the information environment. The method used was the dissemination, through gazettes and with scope throughout the Iberian Peninsula, of messages that included the atrocities and brutalities committed by the guerrillas, presenting the members of these groups as beasts at the service of the English (Hart, 2012). Years later, during the American Civil War, in a more operational sense, both the army of the Union and the Confederation were determined to alter the telegraph lines, causing the transmission of wrong or false orders or impeding its broadcast.<sup>26</sup> These same practices continued to be very common also during the First and Second World War, and in each and every one of the conflicts that have occurred up today.

## Conclusion

To conclude, I would say that the lack of concreteness of the concept of hybrid war is evident, demonstrated by the absence of a clear, exact and precise definition, since those that exist are based on a mere description of the phenomenon by enumerating some supposed exclusive characteristics, which are actually circumstantial and not at all innovative. The above offers the possibility of adapting the concept so that it is applicable to conflicts of very different types according to other classifications of proven validity, undermining its practical use. This is revealed in its limited use in strategic or security and defence policy documents. Yet, regardless of the above, it is noteworthy that its creators achieved the initial objective that led them to coining the term. The aim was no other than to provoke a change in the defence policies of their countries, redirecting them to face complex challenges, consequence of the evolution of the context of military operations. In short, the lack of concretion of the hybrid war concept, its malleable applicability and absence of exclusivity of its defining characteristics show that the term hybrid war simply refers to the phenomenon of war in general. †



## ENDNOTES:

- 1 Mattis, J and Hoffman, F. Future Warfare: The Rise of Hybrid Wars, Proceedings, num. 11th November 2005, pp. 18-19.
- 2 The Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) is a periodic review by the United States Defense Department concerning its strategy and priorities. The result are general lines of action for implementation by the department. These actions are meant confront future threats and manage risk while safeguarding national interests. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Special-Reports/QDR/>
- 3 U.S. Department of Defense, Quadrennial Defense Review Report, Washington DC, February 2010, p.8. [https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/QDR/QDR\\_as\\_of\\_29JAN10\\_1600.pdf](https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/defenseReviews/QDR/QDR_as_of_29JAN10_1600.pdf)
- 4 NATO. Warsaw Summit Communiqué. Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw 8-9 July 2016. Press Communiqué (2016) 100. 9 July 2016. [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_133169.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm)
- 5 EU. European External Action Service. Working Document EEAS (2015) 731. Food-for-thought paper "Countering Hybrid Threats". 13th May 2015. <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2015/may/eeas-csdp-hybrid-threats-8887-15.pdf>
- 6 EU. European Commission. Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats. JOIN (2016) 18 final. 6th April 2016. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016JC0018>
- 7 EU. Council. Press Communiqué. Council conclusions on countering hybrid threats. 19th April 2016. <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/04/19-fac-conclusions-hybrid-threats/>
- 8 EU. Global Strategy for the European's Union Foreign and Security Policy. Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. June 2016 [https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/regions/files/eugs\\_review\\_web.pdf](https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/sites/globalstrategy/files/regions/files/eugs_review_web.pdf)
- 9 EU. European Defence Action Plan. COM (2016) 950 final. Brussels 31st November 2016. [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/com\\_2016\\_950\\_f1\\_communication\\_from\\_commission\\_to\\_inst\\_en\\_v5\\_p1\\_869631.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/com_2016_950_f1_communication_from_commission_to_inst_en_v5_p1_869631.pdf)
- 10 EU. Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union (European Parliament). EU Defence: The White Book implementation process. 1st March 2019. <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/171abc9e-22af-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-95159511>
- 11 The Role of Non-Military Methods in the Resolution of Interstate Conflicts. Source: Valery Gerasimov, "The value of science in anticipation", VPK news, 27 February 2014. Accessed 2 July 2014, <http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>.
- 12 DAESH's level of ambition has been focused on the creation of necessary conditions for the establishment of the ideal Islamic State, destined to last and expand. Following military successes in which numerous cities and vast territories in Syria and Iraq were conquered, the organization announced on 29 July 2014 the restoration of the caliphate in the person of Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi, who made his appearance on 4 July of that year in the Great Mosque of Mosul. He proclaimed that under his guidance, the Islamic world would recover its dignity, power, and rights.
- 13 Through Euromaidan, it is known that by the end of 2013, thousands of students were initiated and centered in Maidan Nazezhnosti, Independence Plaza situated in Kiev's center. These protests were directed to reclaim the continuation of pro-European policies and the signing by the Ukrainian government of a Treaty of Association with the European Union, a definitive step towards becoming a member of the union in the near future.
- 14 The centre right "UDAR" party with nationalist views and ties to the European Popular Party approved integration into the EU.
- 15 The centre-right "Fatherland" party with nationalist views and ties to the European Popular Party approved integration into the EU.
- 16 "Liberty" was initially founded as the Nationalist-Socialist Party of Ukraine. In recent years, however, it has moderated its ideology and public manifestations, continued to attract far-right, ultra-nationalist parties, and maintaining connections with paramilitary organizations.
- 17 Member of the "Regional Party", Viktor Yanukovich, who came from the post of Governor of the Donetsk Region and twice Prime Minister, served as President of Ukraine between 25 February 2010 and 22 February 2014.
- 18 Oleksandr Turchynov, member of the "Patria" Party, was nominated interim President of Ukraine on 22 February 2014. He filled the role until his succession by Poroshenko on 7 June of that same year.
- 19 The initial request for aid is mainly attributed to Sergei Aksyonov, leader of the pro-Russian party "Russian Unity", who formed a paramilitary group initially consisting of youth militancy of his party, but later recruiting hundreds of pro-Russian Ukrainians, and renamed "Crimean Self-Defense Brigades".
- 20 The Protocol of the Trilateral Contact Group signed in Minsk on September 5, 2014, by the representatives of Ukraine, the Russian Federation and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), established a series of measures aimed at achieving cessation of hostilities, guarantee the security of the border between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, the improvement of the humanitarian situation in the zones in conflict, the deactivation of illegal military formations, the elimination of military equipment, and the implementation of measures democratic institutions for the solution of the problems related to the demands of independence. [www.osce.org/home/123257](http://www.osce.org/home/123257)
- 21 Petro Poroshenko was elected during the May 2014 elections held by the interim government in Kiev.
- 22 The Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, signed on December 5, 1994 by Ukraine, the Russian Federation, the United States and the United Kingdom, to which China and France would later join, confirms in its first point the respect of the independence, sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine, as a consequence of the adherence of the latter to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/No%20Volume/52241/Part/I-52241-080000280401fbb.pdf>.
- 23 Uppsala University, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala Data Conflict Program <https://ucdp.uu.se/?id=1&id=1>.
- 24 Sánchez Herráez, P. (2015) Crimea: A new Russian "advanced position" Analysis Paper 13/2015 (only available in Spanish language), Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE), MINISDEF.
- 25 Furlan, L. (2014) Crimea and the inheritance of the Admiral Gorshkov, Framework Document 10/2014, 2015 (only available in Spanish language), Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE), MINISDEF.
- 26 In particular, the role played then by the telegraph is perfectly compatible to the one currently played by the means of command, control and communications, military or not, supported by information technology. In both cases, they represent critical vulnerabilities. The cyber-attacks of today are the projection in our days of the attacks on the telegraph line. Old ideas adapted to new circumstances.