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## A New Concept for Waging War

Trying to define hybrid warfare has been likened by one academic, to an attempt to “capture the complexity of 21st-century warfare, which involves a multiplicity of actors, blurs the traditional distinctions between types of armed conflict, and even between war and peace”.<sup>2</sup> Even as a shorthand description, one feels that there is much more to say and recent geopolitical events in Europe would tend to reinforce the point that precision, in terms of the definition of hybrid warfare might be a Holy Grail of war studies. Perhaps a more profitable route, as some commentators have suggested, is that instead of seeking precise definitions, one might be better served by considering the typical contours of major conflict and to ascertain where one can detect continuity or change.<sup>3</sup> Accounts and definitions of hybrid conflict might also benefit from asking pertinent questions as to what would hybrid – in terms of warfare – actually mean. For those familiar with only a single form of land warfare, they would see hybrid in the use of maritime power for example. Others might see the use of air power as a new dimension of warfare when it arrived but these are big picture frames of reference and one might suspect that conflict today does not reflect this significant pivot in the deployment of force.<sup>4</sup>

### Hybrid Warfare as a concept

When Frank Hoffman deliberately or inadvertently set a descriptive benchmark for new and evolving forms of conflict in a 2007 article, he defined hybrid warfare as “different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder, conducted by both sides and a variety of non-state actors”.<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly, this holistic description seemed to capture the

<sup>1</sup> Centre for the Study of New Security Challenges.

<sup>2</sup> WITHER 2020: 7–9.

<sup>3</sup> FRIDMAN 2022; STRACHAN 2013.

<sup>4</sup> STRACHAN 2013.

<sup>5</sup> HOFFMAN 2007: 14.

essence of what was happening in the world at that time in terms of violent and sub-violent threats to peace and stability. Hoffman's explanation correctly brought to the fore some important abstract considerations and concepts such as the challenge to traditional perceptions of conflict, of the loss by the state of the monopoly of violence, of the wider attraction for aggressive parties to use proxy actors to further their aims or to disguise their intentions and the importance of coordination of effort, which relies on this variety of forms and actors. Less emphasis was placed on discussions suggesting whether most, if not all of the above, had been absent or in proximity to conflict.<sup>6</sup> Hoffman was not advocating that traditional forms of conflict would be abandoned – especially by states – but that the utilisation of other forms of pressure could equally deliver results and advantage in conflict. Of course Hoffman was aware and time has demonstrated that many of these new forms of conflict have been accentuated or added to by the onward march of technological development.<sup>7</sup> For example, cyber warfare in 2007 is not what it seems to have evolved into today. The actual deployment of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) and the potential for further associated weaponry, including advanced drone systems on the battlefield have come of age today – not in terms of concepts for use perhaps but in terms of scale, lethality and quantity. Weaponry displaying significant upgrades in speed, payload or AI-infused connectivity and control, are significantly impacting the battlefield or counterterrorist operations but certainly not to the extent that we cannot recognise the context of the traditional utility of force. Where does conflict or battlefield technology improvement end and hybrid warfare begin?<sup>8</sup> This is a legitimate question and one, which is given insufficient attention. Many commentators on hybrid warfare seek to build upon Hoffman's early definitional foray but actually, whether they agree or disagree with the specifics of the definition, is less important than a recognition, that complexity as a factor is critical. One is not only witnessing complexity in a technological sense but complexity as a factor in relation to decision-making. Blending these components together in order to develop a coherent policy, strategy and range of operational and

<sup>6</sup> Arguably this was not the intent of the author.

<sup>7</sup> Even a cursory glance at reputable military technology journals – for example produced by Jane's Publishers – such as Jane's Defence Weekly allows the student to keep abreast of military technology and its use.

<sup>8</sup> Military technologists will say that no explicit pivot is applicable to all contexts and conflicts which of course hampers the search for a complete definition of hybrid.

tactical options, does tend to reinforce the concept of hybrid.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps, therefore, it might be appropriate at this juncture to pursue the main lines of Hoffman's descriptions of the factors that underpin the need for new definitions of conflict, before returning to an assessment of whether hybrid is more important as a cliché for describing conflict in our times or if it does accurately reflect a significant shift in how mankind has evolved its conflict resolution, especially those based on violent action.

### **Key aspects of Hybrid Warfare**

Essential to any definition of hybrid warfare is to undertake a tentative review of what might be the main features of this perceived novel description of contemporary conflict. It is also undeniable that any such review must regularly be audited, if nothing else, in order to keep abreast of actual developments in the field so to speak. Indeed, as Europe comes to terms with significant conflict on its own doorstep in Ukraine, it is not unreasonable to use the policies, operations and tactics unfolding daily to reflect on how we frame our definition, its efficacy and use as a descriptor for those analysing the conflict and in extremis, to assess whether it is sufficiently novel for the general public to perceive a difference in forms of conflict.<sup>10</sup> It is quite often overlooked that Hoffman and others never suggested that hybrid warfare would eliminate the need for conventional military operations. Some commentators have admittedly suggested that certain forms of military applications such as tank deployment for example might be nullified by certain enhancements in anti-tank technology. Perhaps they have a point. However, by any measure of analysis, conventional military operations still predominate in modern conflict but that the way that conventional operations are planned and executed might reflect more a shift in combat risk assessment, particularly in relation to the integration of new and emerging technologies as a force multiplier.<sup>11</sup> Yet it would be churlish to ignore the effect that new forms

<sup>9</sup> WITHER 2016: 73–87.

<sup>10</sup> A typical example is the early Ukraine conflict analysis by Professor Michael Clark, Fellow of King's College London, on the UK's Sky News which early on framed elements of the conflict as hybrid but the term seems less used, perhaps the novelty factor has been lessened by more traditional images of war.

<sup>11</sup> PAYNE 2021.

of weaponry are having and might have on the conduct of future conventional operations, such as in a state to state struggle currently in Ukraine or in a state's response to asymmetrical engagements. So long as a technology can continue to drive weapon enhancements or create new forms of weapon, then it is unlikely that they would not be a feature of military planning, procurement and deployment. Of course an aspect of hybrid warfare as outlined by Hoffman and others and which impacts on this conventional underpinning is the involvement of irregular forces as a support to conventional operations. Is this a novel feature of conflict today? Not really as the integration of irregular forces and operations into more traditional forms of engagement has a well-established pedigree and by definition only supports the hybrid warfare concept because of our understanding of the abstract concept of hybrid as opposed to any novelty in utilisation.<sup>12</sup> For the foreseeable future, traditional norms of the utilisation of force will remain the bedrock of any concept or definition of warfare. The introduction of new forms of military hardware will undoubtedly impact on how such conventional force is used. New and emergent battlefield weapons, ranging from enhanced anti-tank weaponry or artillery counter battery assets will blend with enhanced C4 and communications-based networked situational awareness to make new weaponry faster, more accurate, have a loitering capacity or simply become more kinetic.<sup>13</sup> As mentioned above, many commentators emphasise the non-state actor dimension of hybrid warfare. Of course being non-state is no determinant of conflict generating capability, structure or intent. Groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon clearly demonstrate the potential that such irregular groups have to influence local conditions on the ground during a conflict.<sup>14</sup> Key to understanding this integration, however, is perhaps the issue of purpose and less capability. For any state actor, having such an association can often disguise a state's true intent and offer plausible deniability when an operation is undertaken to advance one's true goals and objectives. Political deniability in the context of global relations is exceedingly important and this ability to blur the facts of responsibility and generate doubt in an opponent, especially one seeking international support, is invaluable. Such considerations of fake news or deniability of responsibility has

<sup>12</sup> The Russian Wagner Group has been operating in support of Russian operations for many years in places such as the Middle East and Africa.

<sup>13</sup> FRANTZMAN 2021.

<sup>14</sup> HOFFMAN 2007.

been reinforced by technology and especially social media but it nevertheless complicates the issue of attribution.<sup>15</sup> Does this new form of activity justify or contribute to the definition of Hybrid Warfare? History would suggest otherwise. Propaganda has often been used to disseminate false information, whether to weaken an opponent's resolve, or influence their policies, strategies and operations and of course, to generate deceit and surprise.<sup>16</sup> Commentators of hybrid warfare and serious students of conflict studies would all agree, however, on the increasing relevance and importance of cyber operations as a fast-moving and potentially very destructive form of conflict and they would be right. Right up to a point. As we can see for ourselves in relation to Ukraine, cyber operations might not have as decisive an influence in conflict as first supposed. Would that be a fair assessment however? One of the attractive attributes of cyber capability is an ability to act anonymously and with deniability. Cyber capabilities can enhance surveillance of an opponent's secure data, damaging the networked operations of an opponent's vital national critical network infrastructure or collapse daily societal support functions within a designated area of operations.<sup>17</sup> Yet having the potential capability – sophisticated cyber powers in the global order are increasing – is not quite the same as using it successfully. Having a cyber capability can infer hostile intent but equally it can reflect a form of deterrence. Much more has to be considered also as to the effect of a coordinated cyber and real world operational posture, which is far more than a short-term, one-off strike. Where one might argue that it is novel is strangely enough the question of the legal and regulatory framework regarding cyber conflict. What cyber action would constitute an act of war? What cyber actions might trigger an asymmetrical response and where does the law lie there? Where sits *Jus ad bellum* or *Jus in bello*?<sup>18</sup> Answers to such questions are far from satisfactory but does hint at traditional definitions, rightly or wrongly, being under threat from revisionist concepts.

<sup>15</sup> Already, the conflict in Ukraine is raising numerous incidences of fake news and deepfake videos as part of the conflict narrative and propaganda war.

<sup>16</sup> GALEOTTI 2022.

<sup>17</sup> UK National Cyber Strategy 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Such questions have been a staple diet of international symposia and debate for well over a decade.

### **Associated activities**

A defining feature of the debate surrounding the definition of hybrid warfare is the extent to which commentators seize on a range of activities which can influence conflict and as such, seen as tools of warfare. This list of actions seems to fluctuate depending on one's particular perspectives on conflict and its conduct. This regular shift in emphasis of what might constitute supporting conflict – related measures, require some thoughtful consideration. Sir Henry Wotton, a seventeenth century English diplomat once defined an ambassador as more or less “an honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country”.<sup>19</sup> Was it ever thus? Modern diplomacy has many functions within the confines of supporting state policy and one must assume that elements of it can be aimed at furthering national aims and objectives in a period of tension or conflict. What else could be expected of one's diplomats abroad? Of course it is to be hoped that the quality of your diplomacy might persuade others of the righteousness of your policies and convert others to see the world as you do. More synthetic and duplicitous perhaps could be the use of diplomacy to eschew truth and generate falsehood. The repetition of a narrative at variance with your opponent's perspective or stated position on an issue fosters dubiety at best and deception at worst. The question remains, however, does the use of diplomacy actually signify hybrid warfare or is this simply the best use of whatever means you have at achieving some form of influence over the behaviour of others, particularly influential neutral parties.<sup>20</sup> One of course might speculate as to other forms of behaviour, certainly not diplomacy per se but rather the utilisation of diplomatic staff and facilities and indeed international diplomatic legal norms to support other forms of engagement. Embassies have often been abused as protected sites for the placement of non-diplomatic officials, the creation of false documentation and even the smuggling of weapons. There are numerous ways that state actors with malicious intent can abuse diplomatic protocol just as much as diplomats can abuse the truth in the service of government policy.<sup>21</sup> Before leaving this ‘associated measure’, one should not overlook the nexus between diplomacy and intelligence collection. It is hardly possible to imagine a situation whereby

<sup>19</sup> BRIND 1999.

<sup>20</sup> RICHARDSON 1994.

<sup>21</sup> An interesting example might be found in the series of recent UN Security Council debates on aspects of the conflict in Ukraine.

diplomacy does not reflect the need to learn more of the intentions and capabilities of friends and foe alike. Can this spill over into a more aggressive measure to acquire knowledge or to influence or suborn others? Most definitely yes! In essence, diplomacy and statecraft is frequently a handmaiden of a state's military actions. That this should be so seems historically and functionally obvious.<sup>22</sup> One could legitimately argue over the definition of terrorism as much as hybrid warfare. Throw irregular warfare into the mix and an overarching definition becomes ever more elusive. Some experts have argued cogently that terrorism or aspects of it can quite easily be integrated into a wide spectrum form of warfare. Terrorism in particular has the capability of engaging and tying down significant numbers of opposing combatants, either Army or Police, thus deflecting them from more traditional or essential purposes. Terrorism can be target-specific or target-indiscriminate depending on the objectives. Terrorism can deny space or mobility within a specific boundary.<sup>23</sup> Integrating such potential, however, is not so straightforward – assuming a perfect identification and harmonisation of interests cannot be taken for granted and it is not inconceivable that operational cohesion might be jeopardised through conflicting priorities. Certainly there is much to ponder regarding how a state can best exploit terrorist actions or a campaign of irregular warfare in a particular target state of interest, especially if it is a neighbouring state and one has an ability to influence the level and direction of terrorism or irregular warfare. The potential for disguised or deniable action would be considerably heightened.<sup>24</sup> The coordination of terrorist or irregular warfare activities with more traditional forms of conventional warfare is not new. The important feature to observe, however, is less the activity and more the coordination. It is the level of coordination that might push opportunism into actual policy. Interfering in another country's affairs through policies of disinformation and the manipulation of electoral practices has become a frequent talking point of late. That it exists seems hardly in doubt, especially if one examines the formal government reports regarding interference in the elections in the last USA elections or even the Brexit referendum in the UK. Such subversion reminds one of the general atmosphere during the Cold War, where both blocs regularly attempted to influence or interfere in

<sup>22</sup> OMAND–PHYTHIAN 2018.

<sup>23</sup> JASPER–MORELAND 2014.

<sup>24</sup> This is particularly so regarding North Korean and Iranian use of military assets as commercial entities in relation to WMD proliferation activities.

the affairs of the other, mostly without great success. So-called ‘Active Measures’ is hardly new.<sup>25</sup> Today, it is exceptionally difficult to appreciate how effective such interference could be. Those commentators who regularly point to the internet and social media platforms as tools for online manipulation do so from a point of view that sees the message as the main problem. Others see technology as the primary concern, in so far as it facilitates manipulation and structured messaging in a way that precludes viable alternative messaging. Part of this concern is well understood by those whose area of expertise is psychological warfare and who regularly exploit the vulnerabilities of internet governance or media freedoms in general.<sup>26</sup> Yet to better appreciate the nature of the activity under consideration, one must acknowledge that there are wider factors at play and that have more to do with changes and movement in the individual’s perspective on issues such as data harvesting, information management, online commerce and privacy than simply being discerning about the likes and dislikes of a particular message.<sup>27</sup> That interference in the internal affairs of another state goes on is not in question. That it happens through the exploitation of new communications technology can be a concern but perhaps a greater concern is the fear of such behaviour leading to more sophisticated monitoring and surveillance and ultimately control of the internet in your opponent’s state. The war in Ukraine has highlighted once more the use of economic sanctions, as a suitable tool for seeking to inflict damage or pain on an adversary or as a way to modify behaviour. It can be an attractive policy option, as it certainly does not envisage the use of traditional kinetic force.<sup>28</sup> That said, economic warfare generally or targeted sanctions specifically are not morally or ethically neutral. They are, as a tool of coercion, designed to inflict pain and suffering on the intended target – it is the level of pain and suffering that is often associated with economic warfare that generates dispute. As to their efficacy, the jury is possibly ‘out’ on that. Targeted or ‘smart sanctions’ against the likes of Iran or North Korea under the auspices of the United Nations in order to modify their behaviour as regards nuclear weapons development has failed to meet expectations. The EU and the G7 sanctions on Russia as a result of the action in Ukraine have also

<sup>25</sup> RID 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Hearing before the Select Committee on Intelligence of the U.S. Senate on Policy Response to the Russian Interference in the 2016 U.S. Elections.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> It also introduces an element of deniability.



clearly failed in their intention of modifying Russian behaviour.<sup>29</sup> Of course modifying vital interests of an adversary is one thing. Denying routine access to general or specific economic or financial markets is another and it is difficult to conceive that such sanctions do not raise the threshold of disruption to strategic supplies or essential commodities. More often or not, economic sanctions can result in the suffering of too many innocent parties in the targeted state and even within the state of the instigator of the sanctions – the so called ‘blowback effect’ can hit one’s own people and economic interests.<sup>30</sup> Such results inevitably lead to speculation as to whether so-called ‘smart sanctions’, the spearhead of economic warfare, are really as sharp as people anticipated or that the terminology simply disguises a blunt weapon. Additionally, is the judicious use of economic actions, alongside other forms of military or paramilitary action, really a new form of warfare? Few commentators today are likely to agree.<sup>31</sup>

### **Definition or distraction**

Away from the contentious issue of seeking to define what is a hybrid war lies a rich field of study on why seek to define it in the first place. Furthermore, as even this brief review above hopefully demonstrates, even those activities, which arguably represent the constitutive parts of hybrid warfare, are themselves subject to dubiety. Why should this be the case? Part of the problem of defining hybrid warfare lies in part with society’s penchant for simplifying complex concepts as if this process can and does make the issue more transparent or manageable in terms of understanding. In terms of hybrid warfare, this is certainly not the case. In part, slick definitions have also been a feature of military studies discourse. Not that long ago we had concepts such as Network Centric Warfare, Deep Strike, Deep Battle and Asymmetrical Warfare as semaphores for a certain discourse on the utility and utilisation of force. Such concepts engendered significant and contentious debate as military strategists posited their opinions on the significance of these military policy applications, often supported by

<sup>29</sup> At the last count, the EU has initiated 9 sets of sanctions – incremental actions but also reflects that influencing Russia’s behaviour through economic sanction is not easy.

<sup>30</sup> The EU debates on energy supplies and the cost of energy is typical of the blowback in this arena.

<sup>31</sup> MULDER 2022.

operational analysis based on real applications of force or larger scale conflict. The lessons learnt culture is alive and well in military circles and each and every global conflict of any import is studied and analysed to identify potential force multipliers.<sup>32</sup> However, as European militaries in particular shifted focus from the Cold War to small scale regional conflicts, much of it in support of state building or peace-keeping policies, it was understandable that traditional forms of warfare would adapt or in some cases, go out of business, even if only temporarily. Yet the need for definition remained; under the rubric of expeditionary warfare, it was becoming apparent that less traditional forms of operation were required, if not as the primary form but at least an important element of it. However, as the complexity of a globalised world took root, the requirements of military application did not wither on the vine but rather became a stop-gap sticking plaster against which it sought to maintain peace and security against a raft of diverse and often novel threats, risks and challenges.<sup>33</sup> Under such conditions, it was inevitable that the study of modern forms of conflict would generate new but non-specific concepts that were difficult to pin down and describe. The term hybrid warfare was merely one effort at packaging the complexity in a form that might have supported concentrated analysis and crucially, thinking on dealing with some of the new abstract issues within the hybrid definition.

### **Hybrid conflict concepts**

A primary consideration regarding Hybrid Warfare is the issue of complexity. How does one go about planning and controlling a strategic engagement with the component parts equally complex and requiring a no small amount of finesse in terms of direction and leadership? Obviously decentralisation is essential but the trend today is to encourage political leadership to have intimate control of military or military-political applications. Whether we like it or not, it is not unusual to have civilian commanders-in-chief both observe and in effect make decisions on tactical actions that have strategic impact, whether this is regarding the killing of a high value terrorist target or the decision to use force against an

<sup>32</sup> This is the whole point in establishing and maintaining military educational institutions.

<sup>33</sup> These conflicts ranged from Iraq and Afghanistan to Sierra Leone and Mali.

adversary state target on foreign soil.<sup>34</sup> There is every reason to believe that such blurring of command and control function is likely to become a permanent feature of how modern democratic states wage war. The devolution of control and responsibility for military action in a hostile environment – a traditional feature of the chain of command system most of us are familiar with – might be modified in the future to better integrate or embed civilian authority, including legal authorities, with the option to overrule military authority when they see fit.<sup>35</sup> Further emphasis in this aspect of conflict does seem to suggest that in a way, a form of hybrid command and control will evolve in such a way as to give some meaning and additional substance to those arguments, which clearly recognise the hybrid nature of warfare.<sup>36</sup> At the other end of the spectrum of warfare evolution is the notion of ceding various forms of authority – in other words, command and control – to machines or at least machine intelligence. It is nigh on impossible to ignore the military application of artificial intelligence (AI). Such applications include not only more versatile and faster missile technology such as hypersonic platforms, surveillance systems, maritime domain robotic controlled vessels or stealth torpedoes and of course the phenomenally successful drones. Enthusiasts of military AI salivate over the potential regarding some nanotechnologies and smart materials as a vital component of the combat soldier of the future.<sup>37</sup> Impressive as these examples are, however, the main concern seems to lie in ceding authority to certain types of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems, especially those, which adopting loitering functions, can determine what target to engage and when, absent the human in the decision-making loop. Technical experts will argue that this independence is not complete but as the debates at the UN on banning such weapons has revealed, the ability to cede a kill authority is a technical application away, a mere ‘weapon of math destruction’ as one writer described a range of capabilities generated by algorithms.<sup>38</sup> Inherent in this direction of military development is a more realistic component or contribution to hybrid warfare. The time is coming when the battlefield might be populated by a novel form of man and

<sup>34</sup> President Obama and Hilary Clinton observed U.S. forces undertake the attack on Bin Laden in his Pakistani compound.

<sup>35</sup> The embedding of legal officers at unit level in the Israeli Army is a case in point.

<sup>36</sup> There are interesting parallels to the Soviet military’s use of political officers.

<sup>37</sup> WEISSMANN et al. 2021.

<sup>38</sup> O’NEIL 2016.

machine cooperation, the augmentation of the man and aided by ever-sophisticated applications of AI-inspired weaponry.<sup>39</sup> Another complexity and abstract consideration governing the early thinking on the ‘why’ of hybrid warfare was the subject of the exploitation of information or data as we might prefer to describe it today. This was an abstract consideration as the traditional forms of information warfare were being impacted by exciting and imaginative technical applications, not only in terms of communications and the forms of communication but also more interestingly on the exploitative potential related to data as a concept. The problem for military strategists was not that information warfare was divorced from strategic planning but rather what was this more indeterminate product – data – and how might it be exploited? Like many a new technology, the early military association with the internet would be superseded by cutting-edge technology start-up companies that easily surpassed the military in its application and exploitation of data, albeit for commercial advantage.<sup>40</sup> Today, this situation concerning data exploitation is hard-wired throughout society and the number of self-empowered actors has proliferated. So too has their products and capabilities to such an extent that states often rely on their technical applications to augment their own capabilities. Additionally, in response to the profit motive, these data empowered entities have both offered and are implementing levels of networked data applications throughout our societies, certainly generating significant energy saving application for the individual and society but inadvertently creating levels of networked vulnerabilities that can, if targeted in a conflict, leave flourishing societies defenceless and exposed to malicious influence from destruction to blackmail.<sup>41</sup> Incorporating critical network infrastructure into national defence is not new. We have already spoken of cyber vulnerabilities. What is novel is the level of integration and connectivity encouraged by system network functionality and the fact that it was never constructed with security in mind. We actively undertake the protection of nuclear sites for example but do we invest similar amounts on protecting the ‘Cloud’ and its associated power supplies?<sup>42</sup> A sad but worrying feature of conflict since Frank Hoffman coined his hybrid warfare phrase has been the

<sup>39</sup> FRANTZMAN 2021.

<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, U.S. DARPA still continues to fund commercial companies in this sector.

<sup>41</sup> This explains much of the activism of groups such as those opposed to the deployment of lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems.

<sup>42</sup> KISSINGER et al. 2021.

willingness on the part of state and non-state actors to develop weapons of mass destruction, primarily chemical. However, there is a growing suspicion that several states might be exploiting developments in life sciences, particularly through the enhancements afforded by artificial intelligence. As the recent global pandemic has highlighted, our societies are exceedingly vulnerable to the ravages of certain viruses and bio-security has become a matter of some urgency and concern in security circles. The protection of hazardous materials and the processes and research that goes with them is a challenge and for the time being, there is an inadequate global structure to manage such concerns.<sup>43</sup> It would be inconceivable that states would not be taking note of such developments in the bio-security domain and equally inconceivable that non-state actors would fail to see the potential applications, certainly as a possible method for mass destruction but equally to acquire leverage in any form of ransom action. Here then is a form of activity that could augment traditional forms of military action, particularly if the agent is manageable and containable. Some will argue and at times successfully that biological warfare is an unstable application of force and as such, difficult to adequately control and direct. However, life scientists will counter this and point to the phenomenal power of AI-inspired techniques that can empower the developer and make precision strikes possible and even desirable in some contexts.<sup>44</sup> Hoffman and his successors were alive to such possibilities but again the devil is in the detail. Under what circumstances would a biological warfare component of a wider strategic military application fit in to such a concept? Perhaps the answer might lie in the timing of such an action. Using a managed biological warfare action well in advance of a more traditional use of force – especially when the target society has been weakened or seriously depleted by their bio-response or simply because they lack resilience – might tip the balance in the eventual application of conventional arms. Under such a scenario, the term hybrid might have some merit.<sup>45</sup> Finally, attention can be drawn to a few other aspects of deliberate state behaviour, which might constitute an asymmetrical tactic in support of wider military or coercive behaviour against individual adversaries or groups of adversaries. Here, one might consider

<sup>43</sup> KISSINGER et al. 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Advocates of AI-enabled weapons frequently cite the fact that AI weapons are devoid of emotions and not subject to the stresses and strains of conflict and how this might negatively influence a soldier on the battlefield.

<sup>45</sup> HOFFMAN 2007.

the use of the displacement and movement of large numbers of refugees or migrants, the deliberate withholding or controlling of water sources and denying food supplies to stimulate serious hunger and perhaps famine. Europe has recently been subjected to state-sponsored manipulation of refugees by Belarus in order to modify the policies of the EU. Such behaviour, including the deliberate deception of migrants and refugees with a promise of safe entry to the EU, deliberately flouts international norms of behaviour and puts the refugees and migrants at terrible risk. The Belarusian authorities used such a coordinated move to deliberately seek to punish its neighbours for imposing EU-inspired sanctions against Belarus and the fact that it failed and resulted in a climb down by Minsk has not lessened the lessons to be drawn from such policies.<sup>46</sup> Similar examples abound with regard to clashes over water rights – which generally occurs in parts of the world where sufficient supplies of natural water, is at a premium. It is worth pointing out however that such manipulation can be either short-term or, if part of a longer strategy of attrition, a long-lasting affair and likely to have a significant environmental impact for many years after. The current Russian blockade on Ukrainian grain supplies is very similar to the above and must be measured as a short-term measure. The move is seen as an attempt to both ensure the short-term lifting of international economic sanctions against Moscow and equally to damage Ukrainian economic standing in the wider international community and influence the international perspective of the conflict. Indeed, should there be sufficient economic and social dislocation as a result of the denial of access to food supplies, some countries might witness the beginnings of new migration flows away from impoverished and hungry states to the richer northern and predominantly EU states.<sup>47</sup> The above actions can easily be seen as useful components of hybrid warfare but it is worth noting that it is not the type of action that would generate immediate strategic gain. It is difficult to predict let alone control such phenomena once unleashed and such a degree of unpredictability – unless that be the ultimate objective – is fraught with potential complications that might not work to the advantage of those who would initiate such actions.

<sup>46</sup> RUDNIK 2021.

<sup>47</sup> An often overlooked fact in this dispute is that Russia is keen to have its fertiliser transferred without sanctions.

## Conclusion

Clausewitz once noted that “every age has its own kind of war, its own limiting conditions, and its own peculiar preconceptions”.<sup>48</sup> It is difficult to disagree with such an assessment. Commentators differ as to what hybrid warfare actually is, although there is a degree of consensus on the fact that numerous forms of military and supporting activity can have a bearing on the conduct of modern warfare. These activities, however, tend to reinforce the application of new concepts based on the potential inherent in new technologies for example or new forms of strategic thinking regarding the exploitation of the globalised networking of societies, in essence a recognition of the ‘dual-use’ function of much of society’s basic systems and infrastructure and methods of interacting. A simple recent blockage of ships transiting the Suez Canal and the delays and shortages of both consumer and essential goods it generated, can be replicated in wartime as the Russians have demonstrated in the Black Sea. Hybrid warfare has never been – indeed it would have been difficult to justify – a totally novel form of warfare but is rather a reflection of how one might engage in conflict between interconnected parties in a more connected and technically globalised environment. That parties to a hybrid conflict might choose to use both dedicated and dual-use assets in an imaginative way can easily be placed alongside the realities of asymmetrical engagement, including kinetic, and the interest of non-state parties, who are not invested in the full panoply of state interest. Yet it would be futile to deny that something seems to have changed regarding warfare. For many communities, it represents a backward step in international politics, an environment, which such subscribers to this view, suggest is becoming less violent. That might be so but the facts on the ground deny wishful thinking and point to modes of conflict, which, through emerging technologies, are affording opportunities to use force and other forms of pressure, in creating an interconnectivity of a full spectrum of forms of violent persuasion and action. It is worth speculating, however, as to where a truly hybrid warfare concept might arise if what we are managing is not it? The total militarisation and integration of space operations could very well justify such a label. Total war in the cyber realm could be another. Perhaps a future robot war or a machine–human integration could change the face of battle. Think the unexpected. Perhaps the only thing that is certain is that conflict stimulates analysis and emulation and time will lend itself to the evolution of even

<sup>48</sup> CLAUSEWITZ 1993: 727.

newer forms of conducting war. For the purist and traditionalist, such evolution might be unwelcome but at the end of the day, Clausewitz will still recognise the principles of war at work.

## Questions

1. Explain the reasons why you think that Frank Hoffman coined the phrase hybrid warfare in his 2007 article and state if you agree or disagree with his thinking.
2. What features of modern conflict do you think best contribute to an understanding of hybrid warfare and indicate how this is evidenced in the current Russia–Ukraine war?
3. Hybrid warfare: continuity or change? Discuss.
4. Which future developments in modern conflict might reinforce the notion that war is truly hybrid and how might this impact European security?
5. How should military training establishments in the EU recalibrate their thinking and methods in the light of the current war in Ukraine, as a typical example of modern hybrid conflict?

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