

Russian Practices

Opinions on defining the term “hybrid war” are not uniform. To a large extent, they have an empirical basis, hence the diversity of definitions. The authors use a semantic approach to define the term. The term “hybrid war” itself is composed of two words such as war and hybrid. Dominant in relation to this phrase is the noun “war”, the adjective “hybrid” determines what type of war it is. In the English language, according to the Dictionary of Military Terms, the word *war* “means an armed conflict between nations”,² or “may also mean conflict between social groups within the state, world war, civil war, guerrilla war, atomic war, thirty-year war, Trojan war”, etc. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica³ *war* is defined as “wars, battles, and other domestic or international conflicts, whether armed or diplomatic, are often the outcome of a dispute over natural resources or a struggle for power, influence, and wealth. Major conflicts between nations, peoples, and political groups can end up shifting the cultural and political geography of the world and can also effect change, whether international or not, in societal values and the balance of power”. In defining the term *war*, the definition of Carl von Clausewitz, a Prussian general, an important military strategist, theoretician and historian, professor of the military academy, representative of the Prussian–German military school is generally accepted, who in his work *On War* defined war as “an act of violence to force an adversary to submit to our will”.⁴ Violence (we stress physical violence) is the dominant theme of this concept, and represents a means to achieve the goal by defeating or disarming the enemy. As Clausewitz further states in his work, war between nations always starts from a certain political situation and is always triggered by a certain political motive. It is not just a political act, but a real instrument of politics, “war as a continuation of political relations and their implementation

¹ Armed Forces Academy of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik.

² U.S. Department of Defense 2010.

³ Encyclopedia Britannica s. a.

⁴ BRÜHL 2016.

by other means”.⁵ Therefore, even in case of a hybrid war, it must be based on the analysis of the current political context and the motives of the actors who are waging this kind of warfare against sovereign states. The word “hybrid” is a word of Greek origin and means crossbreed or mixed race, or bastard. The adjective hybrid is derived from it, meaning crossed, mixed. In the English language, the word “hybrid” means “something that is created by mixing two very different things”.⁶ From the above said and their semantic context, the authors conclude that a “hybrid war is an act of violence, carried out with significantly different means or methods, with the aim of forcing the adversary to submit to our wills or, as a continuation of policy by significantly different means, while carrying out the policy openly and covertly, through various activities of state and non-state actors, military and non-military means, conventional and asymmetric forms of waging war, even without its declaration”. NATO defines hybrid warfare as: “The use of military and non-military as well as covert and overt means (including disinformation, cyber-attacks, economic pressure, deployment of irregular armed groups and use of regular forces) to blur the lines between war and peace, sow doubt in the minds of target population, and destabilize and undermine societies.”⁷

Gray zone conflict

The gray zone is an operating environment in which aggressors use ambiguity and leverage non-attribution to achieve strategic objectives while limiting counteractions by other nation states. Inside the gray zone, aggressors use hybrid tactics to achieve their strategic objectives. While hybrid threats have historically been associated with irregular and conventional warfare, their use in the gray zone leads to a dichotomy between two types of hybrid threats that can mainly be attributed to the need for ambiguity and non-attribution in the gray zone. The two types of hybrid threats are “open-warfare hybrid threats” and “gray-zone hybrid threats”. A case in point is Russia’s military actions in eastern Ukraine, part of what the Kremlin calls its “New Generation Warfare”.⁸

⁵ BRÜHL 2016.

⁶ U.S. Department of Defense 2022.

⁷ NATO 2023.

⁸ CHAMBERS 2016.

Aleksandr A. Bartosh defines the gray zone as a wide area of action (operational environment), which we can perceive as the battlefield of a hybrid war, which covers the territory of one or more states against which a campaign of hybrid war is conducted.⁹ In the European Union, only two member states have a defined gray zone in their strategic documents – Hungary and Romania. In the Hungarian security strategy, the issue of the gray zone is characterised concretely and extensively as asymmetric and hybrid ways of waging war, where emerging or resurgent states or non-state actors use a wide range of military or non-military means to advance their interests, often in a covert form are gaining more and more weight. This way of waging war blurs the otherwise clearly defined boundaries between peace and war, leading to transitional situation below the threshold of armed conflict – gray zone that do not meet the definition of war and are difficult to assess. The lack of an adequate defence capacity cannot only make it difficult for the target of the attack to react quickly and decisively or to prepare preventive measures, but it can even make it completely impossible.¹⁰ Russia considers the Venezuelan presidential crisis, the ongoing Libyan conflict, the Syrian civil war and the crisis in Belarus (the crisis in Belarus is mainly a crisis of the regime, when President Lukashenko, instead of dialogue with his own people, relied on violence and repression, thereby depriving himself of legitimacy) as examples of hybrid warfare.¹¹ The Russian military actively focuses on preparing for future conflicts and on enhancing the capabilities it considers essential for victory in hybrid warfare. Russian strategic thinking identifies “hybrid wars” as the main line of future military development, not as a temporary phenomenon. The Russian military maintains theoretical space for the idea of traditional conventional warfare and does not argue that all conflicts are now “hybrid” in nature. Instead, it argues that conventional war is an inherited type of conflict that is increasingly unlikely in the 21st century due to technological change and strategic power. The Kremlin further argues that Russia should shape its military and national security tools for hybrid warfare not only because it is becoming more common, but also because it is now more practical, economical and effective than traditional conventional warfare.¹² The Kremlin rejects the differences between different types of conflicts and synthesises these types of

⁹ BARTOSH 2021.

¹⁰ The Government of Hungary 2020.

¹¹ CLARK 2020: 11.

¹² CLARK 2020: 12.

conflicts within a unified concept of hybrid war. He rejects the conflict in the gray zone as well and considers it part of a hybrid war. Russia's hybrid warfare framework specifically includes the use of conventional military operations. Russia rejects the Western division into proxy operations and disinformation on the one hand and conventional conflict on the other. The Russian concept of hybrid warfare is incompatible with the idea of fighting in a "Grey zone", which is related to a relatively clear line where conflict means "war", but below which there is an ambivalent state of "war" or competition.¹³ After the aggressor has made a strategic decision to use hybrid aggression, its preparation begins and takes place in peacetime. The nation or state against which it will be used is mostly without indications of any conflict. The preparation mainly includes intelligence activities to find out the weak and vulnerable places of the enemy for the later correct choice and use of components and elements of hybrid warfare. If we accept that the beginning of hybrid aggression begins in peace and that the purpose of hybrid aggression is not total war, then it mainly takes place in the beginning of the already mentioned gray zone. It is precisely in conflicts that take place within the gray zone that it is not possible to talk about peace, but the situation of the strategic environment does not even show formal signs of war, rather it seems to be a series leading to the escalation of the conflict. An aggressor who has decided to use a hybrid form of war minimises the space and scope of his operations to a place (within the axis of the conflict spectrum) where he is covered by sufficient ambiguity that he is a participant in the conflict, so that he can avoid bearing the consequences as an aggressor. All this without the open use of its own conventional armed forces. The result is a mixed and unclear management of operations and combat activity. It is precisely this feature that characterises contemporary modern conflicts and wars.

From the Russian perspective, the entire "Grey zone" is potentially part of a hybrid war, which additionally involves the use of military forces above the upper threshold of the "Grey zone", which the West and China would consider a conventional war.¹⁴ Therefore, the West must fundamentally reorient its strategic thinking about Russia. It assumes that the Kremlin is currently fighting a hybrid war against the West and is using the experience gained from the battle in preparing for the next war. Thus, the West must avoid imposing its own conceptual boundaries on the developing Russian theory, which expressly rejects

¹³ CLARK 2020: 12.

¹⁴ CLARK 2020.

it. It must recognise the key differences between hybrid warfare and “Grey zone” conflict and incorporate conventional military operations into the perception of hybrid warfare. Only then can the Western community propose an appropriate approach to combat the real threat posed by Russia.¹⁵

Different approaches

Hybrid war is a coherently defined term for a typology of war as a set of means for conducting state policy for Russian military thinking and has an explicit and concrete meaning. The Russian military defines “hybrid war” as a strategic-level effort to shape the governance and geostrategic orientation of a target state in which all actions, up to and including the use of conventional military forces in regional conflicts, are subordinate to an information campaign¹⁶ and considers (as we have already mentioned above) the Venezuelan presidential crisis, the ongoing Libyan conflict, the Syrian civil war and the current crisis in Belarus as examples of hybrid war. The confusion of the term in the English language led to its complete rejection or to the proposal of its own definition.¹⁷ The discussion in the Western community points out that the term hybrid war is generally and primarily used in connection with the means of war, while for the Kremlin it refers to a category of war. The West will not understand Russian security policy, let alone Russian military policy, without a clear understanding of the Russian concept of hybrid warfare. The Western debate on the nature of the Russian military threat often divides the issue of hybrid warfare into two parts. One part is the threat of conventional war against NATO, but this kind of threat is unlikely, moreover, it is economically disadvantageous. The second consists of information aimed at subversive Russian actions or the deployment of “green men” as the maximum limit of kinetic operations. Such a divided concept does not describe the Russian view of “hybrid war”, since it includes only conventional manoeuvre warfare and activities that American theorists associate with the term “Grey zone”.¹⁸ Although several studies report that the Kremlin uses “hybrid means” in every conventional war, it is quite the opposite,

¹⁵ CLARK 2020.

¹⁶ CLARK 2020: 11.

¹⁷ KLIJN–YÜKSEL 2019.

¹⁸ DALTON et al. 2019.

the Kremlin conducts conventional military operations in the space that the West considers “competitive”.¹⁹ This misunderstood conception of the Russian threat leads Western policymakers to focus on the components of the Russian military threat separately, despite the fact that they are actually part of a cohesive whole.²⁰ A strategy of confronting Russia based on answers to incomplete parts of a set of problems is doomed to failure. Limiting the concept of hybrid warfare to activities below the threshold of conventional conflict leads Western analysis of the Kremlin to focus too much on the conventional threat posed by the Russian military to NATO armies. The false dichotomy of dividing hybrid and conventional means leads the West to conclude that conventional forces will be used and that it is necessary to adapt to the conventional use of conventional forces. Therefore, Western analysis does not pay enough attention to the capabilities and intentions of conventional units of the Russian armed forces to conduct hybrid operations directly and not only through subversive actors or other elements of the Russian state. Studies conducted have attempted to examine the relationship between hybrid efforts and conventional forces, how NATO conventional forces can counter a Russian hybrid effort led by Russian proxy forces such as in Ukraine. The goal of hybrid warfare is often to succeed without the involvement of conventional troops. Such studies do not address how NATO should respond in such an event and fail to adequately consider how to identify and respond to Russian conventional forces engaged in hybrid warfare. These studies informed NATO on the interaction between kinetic conflicts and the information space and limited the problem in ways that missed the mark.²¹ The 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy (NDS) asserts that Russia is disrupting the military balance of the “Competitive Military Advantage” of the U.S. and recommends upgrading the capabilities of the conventional military.²² This recommendation is not bad, but it is insufficient. It does not eliminate Russian

¹⁹ The competition space, also known as the competition continuum, is a framework the United States increasingly employs to reject the artificial distinction between armed conflict and peace without significant military competition that the United States has traditionally followed. Discussions of the competition space reject a dichotomy between war and peace, and instead describe ongoing international competition conducted through a mixture of cooperation, competition below armed conflict and armed conflict. See Joint Chiefs of Staff 2019.

²⁰ MUELLER III 2019.

²¹ Asymmetric Warfare Group 2016.

²² U.S. Department of Defense 2018.

efforts to circumvent and directly challenge NATO's capabilities. One of the results of the studies is the finding that Russia's conventional threats are overestimated and hybrid warfare threats are underestimated, including an excessive focus on nuclear power or strategic deterrence.²³ Keeping NATO conventional forces in Eastern Europe is necessary and important to deter any potential Russian conventional threat. Russia could certainly use conventional forces against its western neighbours if the U.S. and its allies did not maintain adequately equipped and trained forces to help those allies defend themselves. In addition, these conventional forces can serve as a basis for directly attacking Russian hybrid operations.²⁴ The assumption that maintaining conventional NATO forces on the alliance's eastern border will prevent Russian hybrid operations seems unrealistic. Russian theory and doctrine increasingly assume that Russia cannot or should not engage in conflict against a conventional NATO force, but that it can achieve its goals – including against NATO states – through a hybrid effort that nevertheless includes elements of conventional warfare.²⁵ The NDS prioritises averting a major conventional conflict between the great powers. Russia is also trying to avoid a major conventional war between the great powers, so it is using a hybrid way of waging war that would achieve its goals. The NDS thus creates a hidden risk that Russia can achieve its political goals through hybrid warfare, to the great detriment of the U.S. and its allies, even if the U.S. formally achieves the goal of deterring war between the great powers. Russia has no intention of waging a conventional superpower war. If the U.S. focuses on deterrence to prevent Moscow from achieving its objectives below the threshold of conventional war, then the U.S. may suffer a strategic defeat even if its defence strategy technically succeeds.²⁶ Studies of the Russian military threat to Europe are necessary but insufficient because they do not capture the global scope of the Kremlin's use of conventional assets as part of hybrid warfare.²⁷ Several valuable case studies of Russian hybrid warfare focus exclusively on conflicts in the former Soviet Union, neglecting the Kremlin's global goals and the concept of

²³ ROSE 2018.

²⁴ CONNABLE et al. 2020.

²⁵ SOKOLSKY 2017.

²⁶ SOKOLSKY 2017.

²⁷ SOKOLSKY 2017.

hybrid warfare.²⁸ Russia represents a major conventional military threat to the West. Russia has also posed a huge challenge to the U.S. and its international efforts to fight the Islamic State in Syria because of the limited conventional military force it has incorporated into its hybrid warfare. The concept of Russian hybrid warfare thus allows Moscow to pose military challenges to the U.S. and its allies in areas beyond conventional military forces. Western decision-makers and military personnel must study Putin's Russia with a full understanding of Russian intentions and not just Russian capabilities. Intelligence analysis of Russian military capabilities without analysis of Russian intentions is valuable but often misleading.²⁹ Western analyses of Russian military learning and development can often correctly identify Russian capabilities and weaknesses, but fail to predict how Russia will use its increasingly modernised forces in ways consistent with the Kremlin's intent and view of hybrid warfare.³⁰ Discussion of Russia's experience gained in Syria and Ukraine is often strictly focused only on how Russia will apply this experience in the fight against conventional NATO forces, rather than understanding that this experience is part of Russia's theory of hybrid warfare.³¹ Western decision-makers must change their conceptual understanding of Russian hybrid warfare from a term that identifies a set of means to a definition of a type of war. Several analysts in the Western community have accurately assessed the Kremlin's changing means of achieving its goals, most of which fall below the level of conventional warfare.³² Several major studies have highlighted the key lines of the Kremlin's hybrid warfare efforts and proposed recommendations for countering them. The existing literature on Russian hybrid warfare is inconsistent with the Russian understanding of the term and uses "asset pool" rather than "type of war". This is not to say that the U.S. and its allies should not continue to develop their own frameworks, but the U.S. cannot eliminate important Russian terms due to faulty Western definitions. The U.S. and its allies must understand the Kremlin's concept of hybrid warfare and successfully counter the means involved in those wars – otherwise the West risks winning one battle but losing a war it does not know it is fighting. The thinking required to confront Russian hybrid warfare in current and future

²⁸ CONNABLE et al. 2020.

²⁹ Defense Intelligence Agency 2017.

³⁰ BLANK 2019.

³¹ MAJUMDAR 2018.

³² CONNABLE et al. 2020.

conflicts is critical. Western studies have analysed the key attributes of the Russian military threat but have so far failed to synthesise them with the views of the Russian military. The West cannot successfully counter the Russian threat without a holistic understanding of the Russian military.³³

The Russian approach

This section analyses the Russian military debate on hybrid warfare and Russia's assessment of the future of warfare from the perspective of the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation. The analysis of the Russian perspective on hybrid warfare is of great importance for further research on the topic, not only because of the great military power of the Russian Federation (RUS), but also because of its Russian–Georgian conflict in 2008 and later in the sudden annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in the spring 2014. Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the RUS and First Deputy Minister of Defence – Army General Valery Vasilievich Gerasimov is considered the founder of the Russian concept of hybrid warfare. According to Gerasimov “hybrid war is a war of a new generation, in which traditional military methods and procedures are replaced by hybrid ones, that is, a wide range of political, economic, informational, international, humanitarian and other tools”. General Gerasimov goes on to say that “in the 21st century, a tendency begins to prevail, when the boundaries between war and peace are blurred. Wars are not declared, and if they are started, they do not follow the usual pattern. Experiences from conflict connected with the so-called “colour revolutions” in North Africa and the Middle East point to the fact that a prosperous state can become in a few months, or even days, an arena of military struggle, a victim of foreign intervention, and reach a state of humanitarian disaster, chaos, and civil war”.³⁴ “In none of the countries” continues the general, “where the so-called Arab Spring is not an officially declared war, but the social, economic, and political consequences for individual states and societies are comparable to the consequences of a real war. Weapons are no longer needed to achieve political and strategic goals, there are more effective tools. To achieve the set goals, it is often more appropriate to use political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military measures, including the protest potential

³³ CONNABLE et al. 2020.

³⁴ GERASIMOV 2016.

of the target country's population". As an example, Gerasimov cites the use of humanitarian organisations or private security companies. According to him, examples are operations in Syria, Ukraine, or Libya, where hired private military companies worked closely with armed opposition units, or Greenpeace's activities in the Arctic. The Chief of General Staff and the Russian Government are convinced that the West finances both the opposition and other organisations in Ukraine and Russia. "All this is supplemented by cover military action of an information nature or special forces. The open use of force under the pretext of "peacekeeping and crisis management" only happens at the end of the conflict to "achieve the ultimate goals". In this context, Gerasimov goes on to ask: "Of course, it would be easiest to say that the events of the Arab Spring were not a war, and therefore we soldiers should not investigate them. But maybe it is quite the opposite, aren't these events a typical war of the 21st century?" And at the same time he adds: "The very rules of war have changed. The role of non-military methods of achieving political and strategic goals has increased, and in many cases their effectiveness exceeds the power of weapons. Military forces are often used under the guise of peacekeeping operations to achieve reconciliation between hostile parties." Frontal battles of large groups of soldiers at the strategic and operational level are gradually receding into the background, the general states. Influence on the adversary at a distance gradually becomes the main strategy to achieve the objectives of the operation. Its objects are destroyed throughout the depth of its territory. The distinctions between strategic and tactical levels and defensive operations are being blurred. Very accurate weapons are widely used. Weapons operating based on a new physical principle and robotic systems are built as part of the armament. Symmetric military activity is widely used, which makes it possible to level the superiority of the adversary in armed combat. At the same time, members of the special forces and forces of internal opposition are used to create a permanent front on the entire territory of the hostile state. Information influence is also used, the forms and methods of which are constantly being improved. Current events are reflected in the military doctrines of various countries. General Gerasimov presented the view (mentioned above) that the enemy can be defeated by a combination of political, economic, technological, informational and ecological operations. His statement is in line with the vision of war, which does not take place on the physical battlefield, but, as the Russian theorist states, it takes place in the so-called psychological sphere. According to him, future wars will not be fought in the classic way, on the battlefield, but mainly in people's minds. This is also why Russia

currently places great emphasis on the field of information and psychological operations. Information and psychological operations will no longer play the role of only supporting auxiliary activities, as before, because a well-prepared and conducted information and psychological war can, according to this concept, in many cases replace traditional ways of conducting war without the need to deploy many military units and equipment. In recent conflicts, according to General Gerasimov, new methods and ways of conducting military operations have appeared, the development, improvement and application of which will continue and will bring fundamental changes in the character of future armed conflicts. The biggest changes between traditional and non-traditional military methods (ways) are shown in Figure 1. As part of clarifying the Russian view of hybrid war, respectively new generation wars, it is also necessary to mention the work of Colonel Sergey G. Chekinov and Lieutenant General Sergey A. Bogdanov. The importance of their work mainly lies in the fact that, although they emphasise the use of the most modern military and non-military technologies, the war of the new generation should take place primarily in the psychological and informational dimension. The enemy's public institutions will be drawn into the war in a subversive way, while these conflicts, in which asymmetric procedures are to be largely used to undermine the enemy's superiority, should be preceded by intensive intelligence and reconnaissance activities. Chekinov and Bogdanov divided the course of war of the new generation into the following phases:³⁵

1. Non-military asymmetric warfare including informational, psychological, ideological and economic measures as part of a plan to create favourable political, economic and military conditions for the next phases of the war.
2. Special operations aimed at deceiving political and military officials through coordinated measures along diplomatic channels, mass regulations and directives.
3. Intimidating, lying and bringing government and military officials to force them abandon their official duties.
4. Destabilising propaganda, which is supposed to increase the dissatisfaction of the population, which will be intensified by the arrival of militant groups and the escalation of subversive activities.
5. Establishment of non-fly zones over the country to be attacked, declaration of blockade and extensive use of private military companies in close cooperation with armed opposition forces.

³⁵ CHEKINOV–BOGDANOV 2017.

6. Initiation of military actions, which were preceded by extensive reconnaissance and diversionary activity, i.e. all types, forms and methods of operations, including special forces operations, space operations, radio and electronic operations, diplomatic intelligence, intelligence and industrial espionage.
7. Operations conducted through targeted information, electronic warfare, air and space operation, continuous aerial intimidation in conjunction with the use of high-precision weapon systems (long-range artillery) and weapons based on new technology (including microwaves, radiation, non-lethal biological weapons).
8. Liquidation of the remaining places of resistance and destruction of the remnants of enemy groups through special operations conducted by reconnaissance units, which search for enemy units and report their coordinates to rocket and artillery units; fire using advanced weapons, focused on destroying opposing units; deploying airborne units to surround the last points of resistance; and terrain clearance operations through ground units.

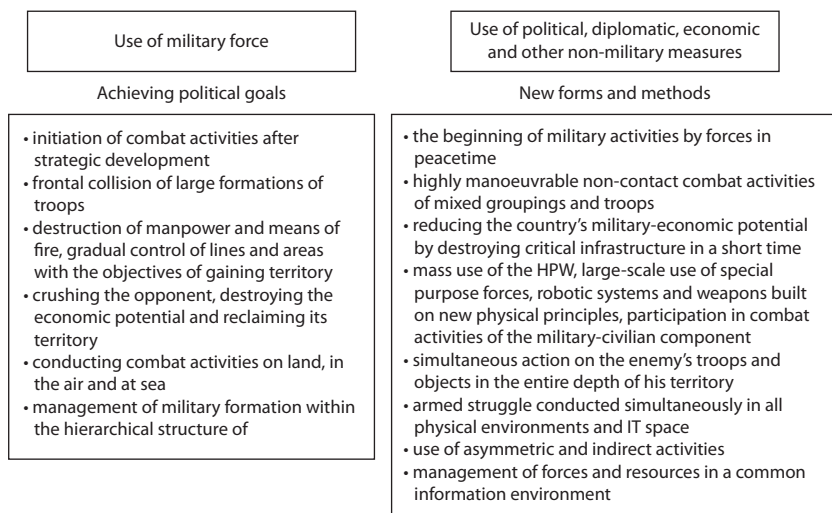


Figure 1: Changes in armed struggle

Source: www.vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf

It follows from the above that the Russian view of conducting modern warfare is based on a theory where the main battlefield is the mind and the main idea of General Gerasimov is the fact that the difference between peace and war is being blurred, and we are now in the stage of permanent war. The public debate is a very good indicator of overall Russian military thinking, including what is hidden from public view. In Russia, the new National Security Strategy (NSS) of the Russian Federation (RUS) was published on 2 July 2021. It is the basic document of Russia's security policy, which defines the national interests and strategic priorities of the RUS, as well as the goals and tasks of the country's security policy. The document states that the strategy is based on inseparable relations and interdependence of the national security of the RUS and the socio-economic development of the country. Among other things, the document talks about the legitimacy of adopting symmetric and asymmetric measures to eliminate hostile actions that would threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Russia. According to the strategy of the U.S. and its allies, they are actively attacking traditional Russian spiritual, moral, cultural and historical values. Foreign non-profit non-governmental, religious, extremist and terrorist organisations are also taking the same steps. The document lists nine strategic national priorities. These are the protection of people, defence, state and public security, information security, economic security, scientific and technological development, environmental security, protection of traditional values, strategic stability. The strategy also sets goals in the country's economic stability, which should eliminate the effects of the adopted sanctions against the Russian Federation. The document replaces the previous security strategy from 2015.³⁶ It is likely that the Russian Ministry of Defence (MoD) is having both internal and public discussions about hybrid warfare and the future of warfare as such. Much of Russia's discussion of hybrid warfare is conducted in public military journals. The Russian military almost certainly additionally discusses the details of hybrid warfare in secret forums and conducts assessments of the lessons learned about ongoing hybrid wars, such as the Ukraine campaign. However, unclassified publications in Russian reach a larger military audience than classified documents and influence the thinking of more Russian officers. Theories and priorities of the development of the MoD are published in recognised magazines, where senior officers outline the main priority of the Russian Armed Forces, including the

³⁶ Russian Federation Presidential Decree 2021.

conduct of hybrid warfare.³⁷ Open discussion of hybrid warfare and the future of warfare benefits the quality of Russia's educational process. Authorship is easier in unclassified publications than in classified ones, which are likely to be limited to select groups of officers and planners. Inputs to the open discussion include contributions from officers with experience in waging war in Syria, which the Kremlin views as a hybrid war. Military academics discuss the future of the conflict in military journals, further discuss how they will synchronise their information campaigns, military veterans and military educators provide historical context for the conduct of the operation, among other things. Public discussion is an iterative process that allows authors to share experiences and learn from each other.³⁸ Unclassified Russian military discourse occurs in two types of sources such as military doctrine and Kremlin-run intelligence servers. Russia mainly uses military magazines as a forum for discussing past operations and planning future doctrines. Typical Objectives of Russian Hybrid Warfare, as practised today, can have at least three objectives:³⁹

1. *Capturing territory without resorting to overt or conventional military force.* This was the objective of Russia's successful annexation of Crimea in 2014, the move that launched the debate over Russian "hybrid strategies". The annexation of Crimea relied heavily on the now infamous "little green men" primarily Russian special forces operating through a newly created Russian special operations command. The use of these elite troops, in conjunction with an information warfare campaign and the deployment of loyal Russian proxies, created circumstances that laid the groundwork for a bloodless conventional takeover of Crimea. Russia used some similar tactics ahead of its 2008 invasion of Georgia. The resulting "frozen conflicts" in Ukraine and Georgia have hampered these countries' efforts towards integration with Western Europe. In a much-referenced 2013 article on modern warfare, Russian Chief of the General Staff General Valery Gerasimov argued that non-military means are used four times more often in modern conflicts than conventional military measures.
2. *Creating a pretext for overt, conventional military action.* Russia's annexation of Crimea generated concerns that the Kremlin might seek to use a hybrid strategy to create a pretext for military action elsewhere, such

³⁷ Security Council of the Russian Federation 2016.

³⁸ *Military Thought*. A Russian Journal of Military Theory and Strategy.

³⁹ CHIRVIS 2017.

as in the Baltic states. Russia might seek to foment discord between the minority Russian population in a country like Estonia, creating a narrative that portrays the Estonian Government as repressive and then exploiting this narrative to justify a Russian military intervention on behalf of the Russian minority. Such an operation would likely be accompanied by cyber operations aimed at inflaming tensions or complicating national and NATO responses. It would almost certainly be accompanied by efforts to influence broader European and world opinion in ways that favoured Russia's intervention. On the ground, it would involve the use of Russian secret agents and proxies.

3. *Using hybrid measures to influence the politics and policies of countries in the West and elsewhere.* This objective is currently the most pressing challenge for Western governments, including the United States. Here, the Kremlin does not seek to use hybrid strategies as a substitute for military action or as a precursor for war. Instead, it seeks to ensure that political outcomes in targeted countries serve Russia's national interests. Most vulnerable are countries with weak legal and anticorruption measures or where key domestic groups share Russia's interests or worldview. However, even strong countries, such as the United States and Germany, are far from immune.

Moscow has many mechanisms and levers for hybrid war. These are primarily the following:⁴⁰

1. *Information operations.* Russia has become notably more effective in its use of strategic communications to shape political narratives in many countries. Outlets such as *Russia Today* and *Sputnik News* are among the most well-known vectors for this strategy, but Russia also uses targeted television programming; funds European think tanks to promote its views; and employs large numbers of Internet trolls, bots and fake news farms. The objective of these information operations is primarily to muddy the waters and cast doubt upon objective truths and to shape the political discussion in ways that will benefit the Kremlin.
2. *Cyber.* The Kremlin now has access to a growing cadre of cyber warriors that allows it to hack into Western information systems to collect valuable

⁴⁰ CHIVVIS 2017.

information. The information is then used to influence elections and other political outcomes outside Russia's borders.

3. *Proxies.* Russia also uses a range of proxies to further its interests. Proxies are often groups that have broad sympathy with Russia's objectives. One of the Kremlin's typical proxies is the Night Wolves, a biker club and ultranationalist, anti-American gang, whose leader is a friend of President Putin. The exact role of the Night Wolves is uncertain, although it can be used to intimidate populations and may facilitate a range of hybrid activities behind the scenes. Russia also seeks to exploit European protest movements. For example, it backed anti-European Union (EU) groups in a 2016 referendum on trade with Ukraine in the Netherlands. It is also suspected of supporting the anti-shale gas and other protest movements in Bulgaria that have complicated Bulgaria's efforts to reduce its dependence on Russian energy sources.
4. *Economic influence.* Russia uses both direct and indirect economic influence to affect European politics. Moscow used energy as a tool of foreign policy when it shut off the natural gas supplies to Ukraine in the dead of the winter in 2006 and 2009 in an overt effort to coerce Ukraine into agreement on the price of its gas. The indirect influence Moscow has built in Europe, however, may be even more important. Taking advantage of the vast network of natural gas pipelines built in Soviet times, the Russian state-owned gas giant Gazprom and its subsidiaries wield influence over the politics and economics of many European countries. Russia has also offered large-scale investment to build energy pipelines and other infrastructure in countries that are dependent on Russian energy supplies as a means of growing its influence – often through murky backroom deals.
5. *Clandestine measures.* Russia also could use traditional espionage as part of its hybrid methods, bribing, extorting and otherwise attempting to influence vulnerable political figures to further its interests. As part of its broader military modernisation program, Russia has invested in strengthening its special operations forces. These forces have a variety of roles, but one of their most dramatic tasks has been to infiltrate other countries and lead hybrid warfare efforts there. Russian military intelligence, for example, is believed to have instigated a 2016 plot to overthrow the pro-NATO government of Montenegro. Russian Special Forces were crucial in seizing Crimea and supporting separatists in the Donbass, and they are likely operating in several NATO-allied countries.

6. *Political influence.* Of course, Russian leaders also use traditional diplomacy to support their preferred political parties and candidates, offering high-level visits in Moscow and otherwise attempting to champion their claims, while deriding the positions of political leaders more critical of Moscow. Behind these levers lies the implicit threat of Russian conventional and, in the extreme, nuclear force. A discussion of Russia's full military capabilities is unwarranted in this testimony, but it is important to recognise that these higher-end military capabilities are the backdrop against which hybrid warfare is carried out.

Definitions and perceptions

The Russian Army is evaluating war in increasingly unusual, rapid and varied ways in terms of the tools used and the people involved. Russian analysts believe that the West is waging an ongoing hybrid war against Russia. The Kremlin also believes that the likelihood of a conventional war against Russia is declining, and this motivates Russia to engage in other types of conflict, namely hybrid wars, to best prepare for a future war. The Russian Armed Forces define hybrid war as a war in which all efforts, including military operations, are subordinated to an information campaign.⁴¹ The Kremlin does not see hybrid war as a model for all future conflicts. The operational approach within the broader conventional war perceives Russia as a set of means to achieve state policy goals. The Kremlin considers hybrid warfare a state activity, including the use of conventional military force. Russian analysts aim to gain the ability to determine the long-term strategic orientation of the state with the use of hybrid warfare. In Russia's view, victorious states or coalitions in hybrid wars successfully assert their worldview, values, interests, including the allocation of resources to fulfil the state's goal. The winning states or coalitions then gain power and, from the Russian point of view, have the right to determine the future of the country.⁴² Researcher of the Academy of Sciences of Russia Kiselev claims that the goal of hybrid art is to divide states and change their governments to achieve their goal (it was the goal of the Arab spring).⁴³ The Russian army uses a political goal as the primary

⁴¹ CHEKINOV–BOGDANOV 2017.

⁴² BARTOSH 2018.

⁴³ KISELEV 2015.

prerequisite for action, while the broader goal is a hybrid war. With its help, they gain control over the worldview and orientation of the state, which is an information goal that requires the use of an information campaign centre.⁴⁴ Russian analysts believe that hybrid wars represent protracted conflicts as the aggressor uses a combination of “crush and starve” to undermine the will of the adversary by targeting both its resource and political base.⁴⁵ A large set of works by Western authors discusses hybrid means and uses various concepts such as “gray zone conflict”, “hybrid warfare”, “hostile measures” and more. The Russian military uses several vague terms to describe hybrid assets, loosely defined as any action beyond traditional kinetic operations. Examples include “hybrid conflict”, “asymmetric operations”, “information warfare”, “non-military combat” and “unconventional warfare”.⁴⁶ The Russian military identifies a broad set of assets that are currently being discussed as the characteristic tools of hybrid warfare. The Russian Armed Forces use the range of conflict objectives to define the boundary between hybrid warfare and international competition. The Kremlin holds the institutional worldview that the West has been waging a hybrid war against Russia since the end of the Cold War. He further claims that his civilised duty is to fight against the West’s attempts to dominate the world. The Kremlin also believes it must adapt to the current situation to win this battle. This worldview deeply shapes Russian military development and assessment of future war. The Kremlin notes that many different conflicts are part of this Western hybrid war against Russia. Russian military thinkers argue that the U.S. is trying to maintain its status and is using NATO to consolidate its dominance and limit Russia.⁴⁷ Since 1991, Russian analysts have assessed globalisation as a concerted effort by the West to dominate the world.⁴⁸ Russian analysts argue that the hybrid war between the U.S. and Russia resembles the Cold War because of its intention to shape the “basic moral core of humanity”.⁴⁹ This is claimed by the leaders of the Russian armed forces, and this opinion is not marginal. In March 2019, Gerasimov said that the U.S. and its allies are developing offensive capabilities, including a “global strike” in several domains, to remove

⁴⁴ BARTOSH 2018.

⁴⁵ KISELEV 2015.

⁴⁶ GERASIMOV 2016.

⁴⁷ BARTOSH 2018.

⁴⁸ CHEKINOV–BOGDANOV 2017.

⁴⁹ BARTOSH 2018.

unwanted governments, undermine the concept of sovereignty, change legally elected governments such as in Belarus, Iraq, Libya, Ukraine and Venezuela.⁵⁰ Russian military thinkers assess all these Western actions as an element of a hybrid war against Russia, with Kiselev claiming that “the theory of hybrid war was developed in the bowels of the Pentagon”.⁵¹ They also say the U.S. is adapting to the rising costs of conventional operations by developing hybrid warfare. From the Russian perspective, Western hybrid wars are a change from the previous U.S. model of “invasion to restore democracy”.⁵² Dvornikov, in July 2018 stated that the 1991 Persian Gulf War was the last conventional Western war, and the West now achieves its political goals by forcing the enemy to submit to its will by using other methods. The goal of this Western hybrid war, conducted by using a mix of state forces with international legal coverage and non-governmental organisations, is the creation of an obedient government in the given territory.⁵³ Russian analysts report that NATO previously “picked a victim” and forced other nations to join a large-scale military operation in Yugoslavia and Iraq in order to eliminate unwanted governments and thus achieve its goals.⁵⁴ Gerasimov stated in March 2016 that “the falsification of events and the use of mass media activities can be compared to the results of the large-scale use of troops and forces”.⁵⁵ Gerasimov cites “Inciting Nationalism in Ukraine” and the results of the Arab Spring as examples of Western hybrid warfare. Western governments can now achieve regime change through hybrid warfare primarily using information warfare rather than conventional force.⁵⁶ Prominent hybrid war theorist Bartosh further claims that the West is fine-tuning this model in ongoing operations in Latin America, the Middle East and the Balkans. Other Russian authors specifically cite NATO interventions in Libya, the former Yugoslavia and the Syrian war as key examples of western hybrid warfare.⁵⁷ The Kremlin sees the Western hybrid war against Assad in Syria as part of a wider, ongoing Western hybrid war against Russia, with the dual purpose of pressuring Russia and allowing the West to further develop and refine

⁵⁰ GERASIMOV 2019.

⁵¹ KISELEV 2015.

⁵² KISELEV 2015.

⁵³ DVORNIKOV 2018.

⁵⁴ KISELEV 2017.

⁵⁵ GERASIMOV 2016.

⁵⁶ GERASIMOV 2016.

⁵⁷ BARTOSH 2018.

its approaches to hybrid warfare.⁵⁸ This Russian concept, according to which the West is already waging a hybrid war against Russia, forms the basis of the assessment of the future war. The need to reassess the future war is based on “the West’s quest for world domination”, and it will include activities that would not be considered war according to traditional definitions.⁵⁹ If the Russian army does not adapt to the growing importance of hybrid warfare, the Kremlin will lose the civilisation struggle for survival. The Russian narrative about the U.S. and its involvement in global conflicts certainly serves the Kremlin’s propaganda interests and often mischaracterises U.S. intent and capabilities. But this story really shapes Russian military thinking and planning. Deeply paranoid and frankly hyperbolic, the worldview ignores superpower conflicts, sidesteps other actors, including China, and presents a truly distorted picture of events in the U.S. Readers may legitimately question whether this worldview is intentional for Russian information operations or propaganda. The Kremlin could intend to use this rhetoric to shape Russian public opinion against the U.S., or to obscure Russian discussions about how to conduct its own hybrid wars while describing any offensive actions by the West.⁶⁰ The worldview that the West is applying a hybrid war against Russia permeates official Russian military planning and discussions. The discussion about the Western hybrid war against Russia is not limited to propaganda outlets like *Russia Today* and *Sputnik News*. Arguments and analyses that shape this worldview are published in *Military Thought*, the most respected discussion forum of the Russian Armed Forces. The highest officers of the Russian army argue for this worldview in public speeches in which they clarify the priorities of the armed forces. The researchers mentioned above are recognised military academics and heads of major military research institutions, not fringe analysts or junior officers. In addition, Russian military analysts are openly discussing how to conduct offensive hybrid wars. The Russian Army does not hide its intention to use hybrid means offensively. Russia’s conception of continued hybrid warfare against the West shapes strategic priorities and assessments of the future of warfare. Indeed, the Kremlin believes it is on the defensive against a Western hybrid war and is shaping its preparations for a future war based on this assessment.⁶¹ Norwegian scientists

⁵⁸ BARTOSH 2018.

⁵⁹ CHEKINOV–BOGDANOV 2017.

⁶⁰ CHEKINOV–BOGDANOV 2017.

⁶¹ CHEKINOV–BOGDANOV 2017.

within the Countering Hybrid Warfare project⁶² characterise hybrid warfare as the involvement of state and non-state actors, the use of various means, while the actors' activities may differ. All actors exhibit the capability to synchronise various instruments of power against specific vulnerabilities (weak spots) to create linear and non-linear effects. Hybrid warfare is described as the synchronised use of multiple instruments of power tailored to specific vulnerabilities across a full spectrum of societal functions to achieve synergistic effects. They came to the view that hybrid warfare is asymmetric and uses multiple instruments of power along horizontal and vertical axes. This distinguishes hybrid warfare from an attrition-based approach to warfare, where one force matches the strength of the other, either qualitatively or quantitatively, to degrade the adversary's capabilities. A hybrid warfare actor can synchronise its military, political, economic, civil, information (MPECI) instrument of power to escalate a series of specific effects-producing activities vertically and horizontally. It also shows how a hybrid warfare actor can either vertically escalate by increasing the intensity of one or more instruments of power, and/or horizontally "escalate" through synchronising multiple instruments of power to create effects greater than through vertical escalation alone. The key is to understand that the various instruments of power are used in multiple dimensions and at multiple levels simultaneously and in a synchronised fashion. This type of thinking allows hybrid warfare actors to use the various MPECI means at their disposal to create Synchronized Attack Packages (SAPs) that are specifically tailored to the perceived vulnerabilities of a target system. The instruments of power used will depend on the capabilities of the hybrid warfare actor and the perceived vulnerabilities of its opponent, as well as the political goals of the hybrid warfare actor and its planned ways to achieve those goals. As with all conflicts and wars, the nature of hybrid warfare depends on the context. Ilmari Kähkö⁶³ in the article *The Evolution of Hybrid Warfare: Implications for Strategy and the Military Profession* (2021) emphasises that hybrid warfare and gray zone conflict suggest that success in modern warfare depends on the coordination and combination of military and non-military means. This is not a new argument and has been

⁶² CULLEN – REICHBORN-KJENNERUD 2017.

⁶³ Ilmari Kähkö, PhD is Associate Professor of war studies in the Department of Security, Strategy, and Leadership at the Swedish Defence University.

debated since at least the so-called three block war⁶⁴ in the late 1990s. Neglecting to analyse our own experiences in places like Afghanistan and equating Russian action and hybrid war have contributed to a poor understanding of Russia and how we can combine various means and ways to achieve our desired political ends. Associating hybrid war with Russia alone also reflects the absence of a major rethinking of war and warfare in general even though the Afghanistan War alone illustrates how we struggle to wage this kind of war ourselves. It is equally difficult to see any major organisational reforms these new insights have heralded, for instance the need to coordinate and combine military and non-military means. Considering that armed forces do not possess most of the non-military means emphasised by notions of hybrid warfare, it is unsurprising that the use of force and military technology have remained top priorities even in Russia.⁶⁵ As its title suggested, even Gerasimov's speech focused on carrying out combat operations and soon turned to high-tech capabilities, including artificial intelligence and robots. Military professionals around the world still assume the centrality of traditional military operations and above all the use of violence in war. This kind of narrow military strategy does not correspond with the emphasis in contemporary conflicts that has shifted from use of force in war to use of nonviolent means below the threshold of war. The evolution of hybrid war indicates that the current emphasis lies in a grand strategy that applies all available means an actor possesses, not in narrow military strategy that focuses on mere violence.

Means used

Wars no longer appear according to typical (classical) templates but change significantly. Russian analysts and senior military officials consider the course of conflicts such as the flower revolutions of the Arab Spring, Ukraine and

⁶⁴ The Three Block War is a concept described by U.S. Marine General Charles Krulak in the late 1990s to illustrate the complex spectrum of challenges likely to be faced by Marines on the modern battlefield. In Krulak's example, Marines may be required to conduct full-scale military action, peacekeeping operations and humanitarian aid within the space of three contiguous city blocks. The thrust of the concept is that modern militaries must be trained to operate in all three conditions simultaneously, and that to do so, leadership training at the lowest levels needs to be high.

⁶⁵ RENZ 2016.

conflicts in the Middle East as examples of hybrid warfare, during which, as experience shows, quite happy countries can turn into an arena of bitter military struggle in a few months or days, or become victims of foreign intervention, plunge into the abyss of chaos, humanitarian disaster and civil war. We already mentioned in the third part of the article that General Gerasimov considers just such wars to be typical wars of the 21st century. According to him, the role of the non-military to achieve political and strategic goals has increased, which in many cases greatly exceed the power of weapons in their effectiveness. On the other hand, Western countries consider it important to investigate the Chechen War (William J. Nemeth), Israel's war against Palestine (Frank Hoffman), the civil war in Syria, the annexation of Crimea, etc. Hybrid War is not a new type of war, but a form of war that has been present since the beginning of written history. The combination of regular and irregular military forces, along with other measures aimed at destabilising the opponent is not new. However, in relation to hybrid struggle in the past, it is a key dimension today to achieve domination in the information field. In the analysed examples of hybrid warfare (Croatia, Ukraine), the importance of achieving information dominance is visible. The use of propaganda psychological struggle in combination with intelligence operations and other types of coercion is aimed at destabilising society and facilitating external intervention aimed at obtaining control of it. A very important means and a characteristic symptom of hybrid warfare is the use of the protest potential of the population (dominant in the conflict of the Arab Spring, Syria, Ukraine). Violence in any form has an important position in the definition of hybrid war. Different means for the guide of hybrid warfare can be considered e.g. classical (symmetrical) and asymmetrical warfare, regular and non-regular armed groups (unmarked, unidentified, insurgents), political, economic and diplomatic missions, propaganda dissemination in various types of media that disrupt the basic principles of democracy, especially through social networks, cyber and activities of organised criminal groups, etc. The important thing is that these activities are carried out synergistically in time and space and with the sole goal: to defeat the opponent, or to impose our will. Schematically, the means of hybrid warfare are shown in Figure 2.

As part of the research at the Armed Forces Academy General Milan Rastislav Štefánik, Slovakia, the team led by Vojtech Jurčák worked on the project "Identifying the Symptoms of Hybrid Warfare". Within research, we analysed the course of hybrid war in Croatia, Ukraine, Georgia, Libya, Israeli–Palestine conflict and Islamic state, and identified the means used to conduct hybrid warfare in

individual conflicts. We analysed the course of the hybrid warfare and concluded that the most common means of guiding a hybrid warfare are:⁶⁶

- political means, focused primarily against the foundation of a democratic state and membership in the Regional or Security Alliance
- information means, represent the spread in the media, social networks, etc.
- cyber means, nowadays an increasingly important area in terms of security and defence policy, as evidenced by the decision of the NATO Summit in Warsaw in 2016, where the Alliance defined cyberspace as the fifth dimension of combat activities
- propagandist means, directed against central state administration bodies, the NATO and the EU membership, constitutional officials and constitutional authorities

In addition to these means, the ways of the protest potential of the population are also used in which the credibility of the constitutional and management bodies of the country is undermined and their decisions are questioned.



Figure 2: Possible means of guiding a hybrid war

Source: Compiled by the authors

⁶⁶ JURČÁK et al. 2017.

This group also includes asymmetrical means to cause fear in the population by using terrorist attacks, destabilising the security situation, manifestations of extremism, criminal groups, etc.

If we want to operate preventively in relation to hybrid wars, it is necessary to reduce the vulnerability of the areas where these funds are used to wage hybrid wars, which means analysing their weaknesses and then increasing their resilience or restoring the disrupted areas of politically, socially and economically weaker countries. Moscow uses a wide array of subversive tools, many of which are non-military, to support Russian national interests. Moscow is trying to use hybrid warfare to achieve several specific political objectives: to divide and weaken the NATO; subvert pro-Western governments; create excuse for war; attach the area and ensure access to European markets under its own conditions. Experts use the term “hybrid war” in different ways. Currently, several related expressions are used, including “gray zone strategies”, “competition without conflict”, “active measures” and “new generation war”. Despite the subtle differences, all these terms point to one direction: Russia uses several instruments of power with an emphasis on non-military instruments to promote their national interests outside their borders – often to the detriment of the U.S. and the interests of their allies. Russian use of hybrid strategies has increased significantly in recent years. This growth is a key dimension of the overall increase in Russian military capabilities and the antagonistic attitude of the Kremlin towards the West. Of course, Russian sources for hybrid warfare are not infinite, and Russia faces many of the same difficulties as any other country that has to coordinate its multifaceted foreign policy. Its hybrid tactics will also not be effective everywhere. Nevertheless, the U.S. and their allies need a clear understanding of the threat and strategy to effectively face Russian hybrid strategies before the U.S. critical interests are damaged in Europe and elsewhere.

Conclusion

The aim of the article was to analyse the approach of the Russian Federation to hybrid threats, what they consider important, how representatives of the Russian Army perceive this term and its characteristics, what is their goal and how they applied theoretical conclusions and ideas in practice. It is possible to state that General Gerasimov can be considered the creator of the concept of hybrid war, who researched and characterised it based on the conflict of the Arab Spring,

wars in the Middle East, etc., also known as the Gerasimov Doctrine, which is the basis of conventional and unconventional means in hybrid warfare, or also called “new war” or “permanent war”. There is also disagreement concerning the notion of gray zone. From the Russian point of view, the entire gray zone is part of a hybrid warfare, which additionally involves the use of military forces above its upper limit. The U.S. debate on hybrid warfare focused heavily on unconventional means of conflict. Russian theorists insist that all conflict is now hybrid in nature. Therefore, the Russian Army is adapting its capabilities to hybrid warfare and does not hide its intention to conduct offensive hybrid warfare, in which political, military, economic, civil and environmental means are used. The challenges posed by Russia’s hybrid war and preparations for future wars are not insurmountable. The Western community must fully understand Russian threats and successfully confront the Kremlin. Russia is shaping military and non-military instruments of state power to combat hybrid threats.⁶⁷ The Russian military defines hybrid warfare as an effort at the strategic level to shape, direct and geostrategically orient a target state in which all means received, including the use of conventional military forces in regional conflicts, are subject to an information campaign. Russia sees the Venezuelan presidential crisis, the Libyan conflict, the Syrian civil war and the crisis in Belarus and Ukraine as examples of hybrid warfare. The Russian military is actively focusing on preparing for future conflicts and increasing the capabilities it deems necessary to win the hybrid war. In relation to hybrid warfare, there are also critical comments. Hugo Klijn and Engin Yüksel,⁶⁸ reflect on the word “hybrid” and consider it a buzzword, which is appropriate because it aims to describe something that is impressive, hardly Russian, and hardly new. After General Gerasimov’s article was published, the Russian way of waging hybrid warfare emerged, which was a combination of traditional tools and tactics and preparing for unconventional warfare. The annexation of Crimea was the result of social and political changes in Ukraine and within it a favourable situation for Russia to acquire (legal presence of Russian forces in Sevastopol, majority population, dismal quality of the Ukrainian armed forces) and maintain the availability of the Russian naval forces to warm seas, that was a unique circumstance not “easily reproducible” in another country. Nevertheless, whatever Russia has undertaken since this episode, which otherwise might have been labelled as ‘integrated’, ‘non-linear’,

⁶⁷ JURČÁK et al. 2017.

⁶⁸ KLIJN–YÜKSEL 2019.

‘cross-domain’, ‘informational’ or even ‘public diplomacy’ activities, has been grouped under ‘hybrid’ methods of conflict or, indeed, warfare. Meanwhile, strong evidence that Russian outlets have been actively engaged in influencing, not deciding, election or referenda outcomes in a number of Western countries has boosted the prominence of the ‘hybrid’ category headings, and tilted interpretation towards disinformation efforts – purportedly serving as precursors to other forms of conflict that are “conveniently categorized as being under the threshold of war”. Various authors have, patiently but fruitlessly, debunked the notion of a Russian hybrid warfare doctrine or the newness of some of its apparent components. Rather, it appears the West has attempted to cast a mirror image of its own concepts onto Russian military thinking. By doing so, the West has framed a distracting threat perception that may keep it from addressing the right issues.⁶⁹ Both in his now famous 2013 article and in a more recent, March 2019 strategy speech at the Academy of Military Sciences, Gerasimov pointed to the increased role of non-military methods by Western states to achieve strategic objectives. Indeed, according to Russian military thinkers “gibridnaya voyna” is about (Western) attempts to erode the socio-cultural cohesion of the adversary’s population, ultimately leading to the replacement of an unfriendly regime by a colour revolution, with minimum (if any) military intervention. It is important to note that in his 2019 speech Gerasimov concluded that the decisive role in conflict is still played by military force.⁷⁰

Questions

1. What is the view of the Western community on hybrid war in relation to Russia?
2. How Russian theorists define the theory of hybrid warfare?
3. What is Russia’s view of future conflicts in the world?
4. What measures should the international community take to effectively eliminate hybrid threats?

⁶⁹ KLIJN–YÜKSEL 2019.

⁷⁰ KLIJN–YÜKSEL 2019.

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