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Implications for Military Strategy

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical background and historical examples of the employment of the concept of Hybrid Warfare in Military Strategy. Thus strategy is defined as “a prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and/or multinational objectives”.² Military strategy is therefore the portion of strategy that employs the military instrument to achieve the political objectives: “That component of national or multinational strategy, presenting the manner in which military power should be developed and applied to achieve national objectives or those of a group of nations.”³ Military strategy determines the results required from the military forces and then creates the operational plans for achieving those results, including the tactics to be employed within those operations. In this context the concept of Hybrid Warfare describes a particular set of operational and tactical methods to be employed. The choice of a military strategy depends not only on the free will of the strategists determining the military objective best suited to compelling the enemy to surrender and then choosing the best method they think will achieve that desired military objective. The strategists’ options are also determined by the tools and capabilities at their disposal. These tools and capabilities are determined by the organisation and characteristics of the military force, the manpower available to it, the equipment available to it and the industrial sources of that equipment. These tools and capabilities are often not designed specifically for the particular war but were created and maintained over many years. They are determined by the culture and political organisation of the society establishing and maintaining that force.⁴ The equipment depends also on that particular society’s indigenous technological capabilities and its ability to acquire equipment from others. A final factor affecting the choice of military strategy are the cultural and political

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² *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* 2018.

³ *NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions AAP-06* 2013: 2-M-6.

⁴ NEMETH 2002.

constraints on employing its military force – what is allowed and what is not, what are the opinions of allies or other possible enemies and what is the position of the military tool in the variety of tools employed by the political leadership in conducting the conflict (diplomacy, lawfare, psychological warfare, economic warfare, cyber warfare) and the preferred intensity of violence to be employed.

Hybrid Warfare as a military strategy

As described in the second chapter of *Hybrid Warfare Reference Curriculum. Volume I*,⁵ the definition of Hybrid Warfare is constantly evolving and this requires that we first define that term for the purposes of this module. Currently, at the political level the terms Regular Warfare versus Irregular Warfare are commonly used to differentiate between the conduct of war between rival states (Regular Warfare) versus the conduct of war between a state and a non-state or between two non-states (Irregular Warfare). Also currently, at the strategic level the terms Regular Warfare versus Irregular Warfare are commonly used to differentiate between state armies employing direct military confrontation to defeat each other, destroy each other's war-making capacity or seize or retain territory in order to force a change in an adversary's government or policies (Regular Warfare) from state security forces fighting a non-state organisation in a collision of insurgency–counterinsurgency, terrorism–counterterrorism, psychological and information operations, civil–military operations and transnational criminal–policing activities (Irregular Warfare).⁶ From these common definitions stem many of the operational and tactical usages of the concept of Hybrid Warfare and its synonyms. However, as previously explained, these definitions and descriptions are limited by the current cultural, ideological and contextual viewpoint of the various users and drag the discussion of methods of warfare from one on military methodology to a political debate on the legitimacy of the specific rivals and their political goals. Historically, this is an incorrect view – both state and non-state groups have conducted both Regular Warfare and Irregular Warfare and have employed strategies that include all of the methods listed above. Past use of these terms referred to the manner of conducting military operations and the tactics employed, NOT to the identities, organisation, political

⁵ HECHT 2024: 31–49.

⁶ *Irregular Warfare (IW) Joint Operating Concept (JOC)* 2007.

goals or legitimacy of the belligerents. The use of terms such as ‘conventional’, ‘traditional’ and ‘classic’ warfare as synonyms for Regular Warfare, whereas Irregular Warfare is described as ‘unconventional’, ‘non-traditional’, or ‘new’, etc. is also problematic from a historical point of view, as these terms suggest that Regular (conventional–traditional–classic) Warfare has been the most common form of warfare throughout history whereas Irregular (unconventional–non-traditional–new) Warfare has been the exception. In fact, the opposite is true – Irregular Warfare has always been much the most common type of warfare conducted throughout history with occasional local and temporary exceptions. The regularity of Regular Warfare does not refer to it being the norm, but rather to the fairly regular (orderly) patterns of geographic deployment (formations) and temporal phases of employment, whereas Irregular Warfare refers to the forces being deployed and employed without a clearly discernible geographic and temporal pattern, i.e. irregularly (without order). Thus, the purely military terms Regular Warfare and Irregular Warfare refer not to the identity of the warring organisations, but to two distinct manners of conducting operations and tactics:

Regular warfare is most easily recognised in practice by the closely coordinated employment of large forces, concentrated in time and space, with achievements measured mostly in conquest or retention of territory and/or direct destruction of large quantities of enemy forces. Because of the temporally and spatially concentrated employment of the rival forces, the overall intensity of combat operations (the frequency of individual combat actions and strength of each of these actions) is usually medium to high.

Irregular warfare is most easily recognised in practice by the employment of autonomous small forces scattered in space, independently conducting mostly ‘hit and run’ actions scattered over time, with achievements measured mostly in the gradual collective psychological exhaustion of the enemy. Because of the temporally and spatially scattered employment of separate small forces, the overall intensity of combat operations (the frequency of individual combat actions and strength of each of these actions) is usually very low to low.

A common error in assuming the distinction between Regular Warfare and Irregular Warfare refers to two completely separate phenomena, with Hybrid Warfare being a separate third phenomenon in between. The reality is that pure Regular Warfare and pure Irregular Warfare are two ends of a continuum, along which they merge in different quantities and that Hybrid Warfare merely refers to the midpoint along this continuum – i.e. the area in which the two forms are employed in roughly equal proportions. Thus, a campaign conducted mostly

by Irregular Warfare methods might include specific acts conducted according to Regular Warfare methods, and vice versa, a campaign conducted mostly by Regular Warfare methods might include specific acts conducted according to Irregular Warfare methods. The rationale behind employing the opposite method would be its assistance to the main method employed in that operation. The concept of Hybrid Warfare describes an operation in which the two methods are merged more or less equally in one operational plan to mutually benefit from each other's unique effects.

Regular Warfare	Hybrid Warfare	Irregular Warfare
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The proportion may vary over time and in different sectors of the Theatre of Operations – campaigns may oscillate between more Regular Warfare methods, more Hybrid Warfare methods or more Irregular Warfare methods according to the deliberate decisions or constraints of the adversaries. At a particular phase of the War, one adversary may prefer a particular mix whereas the other might simultaneously prefer a different mix. Each might be able to employ the mix of their choice or might be compelled to adopt the adversary's choice because of various political, strategic or logistic reasons. A second common error is the assumption that Regular Warfare can be conducted only by state armies, whereas Irregular Warfare can be conducted only by non-state organisations. From this belief stems the erroneous concept that Hybrid Warfare is therefore the conduct of Regular Warfare by non-state organisations. This error is a result of focusing only on the legal definition of what is war and who is legally allowed to conduct war rather than focusing on the actual practice of war. It must be reiterated that state armies have and can employ Irregular Warfare and that non-state organisations have and can employ Regular Warfare. Not the type of political or military organisation defines the type of warfare, but the methods employed by whichever type of organisation, as one of the developers of the concept of Hybrid Warfare wrote: “Hybrid Wars can be conducted by both states and a variety of non-state actors. Hybrid Wars incorporate a range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder.”⁷ Furthermore, the weapon systems employed do not determine whether an operation is being

⁷ HOFFMAN 2007: 29; HOFFMAN 2009.

conducted by Regular, Hybrid or Irregular methods, though some weapon systems are used more typically in Regular Warfare whereas others are more typical to Irregular Warfare.

Criteria for conducting a Hybrid Warfare military strategy

The combination of methods is measured by four criteria:

1. Sector – the combination can be employed in the same sector or in different sectors that are operationally linked so that the actions in one directly affect the actions in the other.
2. Time – the combination can be employed simultaneously or sequentially.
3. Force – the combination can be employed by the same force, whether regular or irregular, or by separate forces acting in concert – both regular, both irregular, or one regular and one irregular.
4. Mission – Hybrid Warfare can be conducted in four basic combinations between Offensive and Defensive missions⁸ such as Offensive Regular Warfare and Offensive Irregular Warfare; Defensive Regular Warfare and Offensive Irregular Warfare; Defensive Regular Warfare and Defensive Irregular Warfare; Offensive Regular Warfare and Defensive Irregular Warfare.

Slightly preceding the development of the concept of Hybrid Warfare in the United States Marine Corps a similar concept under a different name, Compound Warfare, was developed by academic researchers in the United States Army. Part of the debate on Hybrid Warfare in the American military was an attempt to

⁸ Offensive: Forces conduct operations in territory currently physically controlled by the enemy in order to change the existing political and/or military status quo. Defensive: Forces conduct operations in territory currently physically controlled by them in order to maintain the existing status political and/or military status quo. “Physically controlled” does not mean political ownership. If a military force invades the territory of a rival political entity and conquers territory, then for military purposes that territory is now physically controlled by the invading army – its actions to retain that territory constitute defensive operations and the original political entity’s military actions to ‘liberate’ that territory constitute offensive operations. Furthermore, physical control may be absolute (there is no enemy force left in the area and the invading force is physically present in all of it), partial (there is no enemy force left in the area, but the invading force is not physically present in all of it) or in contention (enemy forces are still fighting in some of the area).

differentiate between these two concepts – were they merely different names for a similar idea or two separate phenomena? According to Hoffman, the leading proponent of the initial Hybrid Warfare concept, the two concepts differ in one central aspect: whereas Compound Warfare is defined as a combined effort by separate forces, one specialising in the conduct of Regular Warfare and the other specialising in the conduct of Irregular Warfare, Hybrid Warfare is the conduct by the same force of both Regular Warfare and Irregular Warfare.⁹ However, a Finnish officer, Petri Huovinen, who compared the writing on the two concepts as well as the concept of ‘Full Spectrum Operations’ developed by the United States army at that time, concluded that in fact Hybrid Warfare was a subset of Compound Warfare and that both were included in the concept of Full Spectrum Warfare.¹⁰ He further argued that Compound Warfare was more useful a concept at the operational level,¹¹ whereas Hybrid Warfare is better used at the tactical level. A Military Strategy based on the concept of Hybrid Warfare refers to the combining of Regular Warfare and Irregular Warfare methods in the same Operations and Battles to directly support each other in achieving the same campaign, operational or tactical objective, whether by the same unit or by different units, in the same or adjacent sectors of action, simultaneously or sequentially.

Why Hybrid Warfare?

Each form of warfare has different characteristics and therefore the strategist must choose the form most useful to him in a given operational situation. Regular Warfare is, by its nature, more intensive than Irregular Warfare – more forces are employed simultaneously in the same geographic location. Therefore, employing offensive Regular Warfare methods can achieve a more rapid and a more decisive operational result than employing offensive Irregular Warfare methods. However, they generally require the attacker to be superior in quantity or quality or both. Regular Warfare is also usually more expensive in friendly casualties and

⁹ HOFFMAN 2009.

¹⁰ HUOVINEN 2011.

¹¹ Huovinen uses the term “strategic level”, but from his description of what this entails he actually means what NATO terms the ‘operational level’: “The level at which campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted and sustained to accomplish strategic objectives within theatres or areas of operations.” *NATO Glossary of Terms and Definitions AAP-06* 2013: 2-O-3.

expenditure of resources than Irregular Warfare. Conversely, though they take longer to achieve a final operational result and that result is rarely physically decisive – enemy casualties will be few and inflicted over a long period of time, Irregular Warfare can be conducted successfully even with forces inferior in quantity and quality – whereas successfully operating against them requires at least superior quantity. Irregular Warfare does cause some physical damage to the enemy, but its main goal is a gradual psychological disruption of the enemy's will to fight and belief in his ability to win – not the number of enemy casualties is the defining issue, but the cumulative psychological effect of those casualties. Many casualties inflicted in a very short period of time are usually less detrimental to the enemy's psychological stability than a continuous stream of fewer casualties inflicted over a long period of time, because psychological pressures take time to affect people. In the first case – a heavy price has been paid, but the conflict is over – there is hope for a better future; whereas in the second case – one sees no end to the conflict and gradually loses hope. The object of Hybrid Warfare is to combine the advantages of Regular Warfare and Irregular Warfare – disrupting the enemy's psychology and organisation to facilitate his physical destruction or eviction from a particular territory. It is, however, more complicated to command and conduct efficiently and effectively. Whether fighting against a hostile force employing only Regular Warfare or against a hostile force conducting only Irregular Warfare, an adversary generally wishes to concentrate his forces in space and time to achieve a ratio of forces sufficient to defeat that hostile force. However, Regular Warfare normally occurs along the front line between the rival armies, whereas Irregular Warfare normally occurs in the rear area of an army. So, fighting against a Regular Warfare threat requires the adversary to concentrate his forces at the front, facing the hostile forces conducting those Regular Warfare operations; whereas fighting against Irregular Warfare requires him to allocate forces to his rear areas in order to protect his logistics, headquarters and operational reserve units from being raided. Thus, when fighting a hostile force simultaneously conducting both Regular Warfare and Irregular Warfare actions the adversary is compelled to divide his forces to simultaneously conduct geographically separate operations. Given that Irregular Warfare attacks are scattered spatially and temporally so that the adversary does not know in advance where and when he will be attacked, he is compelled to disperse his own forces into many small units to simultaneously and continuously defend many different sites. Thus, to successfully counter even small Irregular Warfare offensive actions requires a very large force. Therefore,

focusing on protecting his rear compels the adversary to drastically reduce the forces he allocates to conduct Regular Warfare operations at the front, thus enabling his rival to achieve numerical superiority there. Conversely, to maintain a force at the front big enough to successfully defeat the hostile force's Regular Warfare operations, the adversary must reduce the forces protecting his rear and accept the consequences of enemy Irregular Warfare operations against his logistics, headquarters and operational reserves disrupting the flow of supplies, information, orders and reinforcements required to maintain his Regular Warfare operations. These will be delayed, will arrive in fragments and will be reduced in total quantity and quality. Though the concept of Hybrid Warfare assumes a rough parity between the Regular Warfare and Irregular Warfare actions, the main effort is usually one or the other, with the opposite type employed to support it. The effect of employing Hybrid Warfare against an adversary is that it increases the variety of methods threatening that adversary and thus creates for him an operational dilemma on the best methods to counteract them and in balancing the efforts of his forces between the counter methods.

Effects of political Hybrid Warfare on military strategy

According to Clausewitz: "War is the continuation of the political intercourse with the addition of other means."¹² Thus, all conflicts can be conducted by a variety of means to achieve the desired results from negotiations (diplomacy), adversarial activities that attempt to compel and influence the adversary (lawfare, psychological Warfare) through various levels of hostile actions that do not include actual violence (economic warfare, cyber warfare – short of actually creating irreparable physical damage and human casualties) to attempt to compel the adversary through to violent military operations at various levels of intensity (very low to high) in order to defeat the enemy and dictate terms.

In this context Hybrid Warfare is the mix of non-violent methods with violent methods. The exact mix of the means chosen to be employed by the political leadership affects the objectives, resources, constraints and methods allocated to each of the means. For military strategy this determines the military objectives which the politicians and strategists estimate will compel the enemy into

¹² CLAUSEWITZ 1989: 87.

giving-in to the political demands; the extent of damage to be inflicted on the enemy (casualties, territory taken, infrastructure destroyed, etc.); restrictions on the types of damage; and the extent and intensity of the military operations employed to inflict that damage. These are calculated to assist or enhance the other non-military means employed. Thus, if the political leaders assess that they can convince the hostile population to accept their demand through a campaign focused on economic and diplomatic incentives, they are likely to reduce the emphasis on destroying enemy personnel and infrastructure – especially those the destruction of which is likely to arouse anger in the enemy population. Theoretically, the mix of non-violent and violent operations chosen can also affect the organisation of the military force. However, often that force is a given, developed over many years and the strategists must therefore either employ the existing organisation or decide many years in advance what type of military force they will need in the future and build that force from scratch or transform the existing force accordingly. However, as argued by William Nemeth – the organisation and characteristics of a military force are determined by the culture and political organisation of the society establishing and maintaining that force.¹³ Therefore, often the culture and political organisation determine also the methods in which a particular society will automatically choose to conduct warfare, regardless of theoretical debates on how a war should be conducted.

Conclusion

On the purely military level a Hybrid Warfare operation is one that combines Regular Warfare actions (essentially the employment of large forces concentrated in time and space to destroy the enemy or to capture or retain ground) with Irregular Warfare actions (essentially actions that are conducted by small separate units ‘hitting and running’ to harass the enemy rather than to destroy him or capture or retain ground). Past experience shows that both state and non-state armies and both regular armies (i.e. armies organised and manned permanently) and irregular armies (i.e. armies based on an improvised organisation manned by short-term volunteers) have employed Hybrid Warfare.

¹³ NEMETH 2002.

The hybridity was achieved by organising separate units each specialising in either Regular Warfare or Irregular Warfare or by training the same unit to conduct both. In some cases, the Hybrid Warfare operation included Regular Warfare actions in one sector while Irregular Warfare actions were simultaneously conducted in an adjacent sector, whether side-by-side or Regular Warfare at the front and Irregular Warfare behind the enemy's front. What converted them from separate actions to a single Hybrid Warfare operation was the direct effect each had on the other. In other cases, the mix was conducted sequentially in the same sector. In some cases, the Hybrid Warfare actions were all offensive or all defensive in nature, while in others an adversary conducted Regular Warfare defensively and Irregular Warfare offensively or vice versa. In some cases, both sides conducted Hybrid Warfare operations, though not in the exact same mix, in others only one side conducted Hybrid Warfare operations and the adversary responded with only Regular Warfare or only Irregular Warfare operations. In some cases, Hybrid Warfare was conducted solely at the military level, whereas in others the political level conducted Hybrid Warfare and the military strategy was either the major or the minor effort in this political strategy. Military strategy is always a tool of the political level, but when the political level is conducting Hybrid Warfare, the impact is greater, constraining the freedom of action of the military forces.

Questions

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a Hybrid Warfare strategy in various political contexts?
2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a Hybrid Warfare strategy in various military contexts?
3. What are the requirements in force structure and organisation to conduct a Hybrid Warfare strategy?
4. What are the requirements in force training to conduct a Hybrid Warfare strategy?
5. What are the considerations for choosing a particular measure of hybridity in a specific situation?

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