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Hybrid Warfare

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Introduction

Contemporary international relations are carrying a wide range of challenges that have led to the necessity to redefine existing national and international strategies grounded predominantly on conventional state-based threats. Recognising vulnerability to non-conventional challenges, contemporary strategies are increasingly acknowledging the importance of the changing character of warfare. Namely, not only have the non-conventional threats become increasingly perilous, but the overlapping of different classes of threats have dramatically increased the complexity of existing challenges. This leads to a conclusion that future conflicts are very likely to be multidimensional, with blurring and combined forms of combat characterised by expanding dynamics and growing destructiveness, frequently called hybrid.

Due to the fact that it includes a wide range of fairly unconsolidated categories, the term itself had received a significant amount of criticism related to an alleged lack of conceptual clarity. Still, while the mainstream transatlantic security policy elites largely operate in traditional terms and only modestly use the contemporary framework of strategic thinking, the challenges and increasingly assertive opponents are following a different path.

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In practical terms, unlike the case of traditional conventional military incursion, hybrid warfare (HW) encloses a wide range of belligerent activities like economic pressure of various types, subversive IT operations, sabotages in the field of critical infrastructure, undercover intelligence operations, informational and legal warfare, terrorist and criminal actions, as well as many others. Its main characteristics is actually the extension of the combat zone beyond the exclusively military domain and an increasingly complex combination of military and non-military methods. Also, the vagueness of hybrid threats makes them even harder to detect and increasingly lethal, due to the fact that they complicate the decision-making procedure of the opponents and expose their vulnerabilities.

Furthermore, hybrid actors are capable of integrating high-tech systems into their frameworks of operation and use it beyond mainstream standards, what makes them effectively superior to the existing operational systems of the transatlantic security community.

While non-state actors find it relatively easy to acquire military and non-military capabilities in an increasingly interconnected world, states with capabilities to govern their power tools in a highly centralistic way can actually generate synergic and magnifying effects. Asymmetrically, liberal democracies with fairly complicated bottom-up decision-making procedures are finding it increasingly difficult to respond to this challenge.

Definition and characteristics

Throughout history, unconventional tactics

and means usually brought advantage or victory in war, therefore irregular components are nothing new in warfare. One can say that every era had its own war style that reflected its challenges, lifestyle and degree of development. Today we are living in a highly digitalized and connected world that is also fast and carrying a variety of complex and new challenges to which contemporary warfare needs to give an answer.

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There is a debate in academic and military circles about contemporary warfare, its definition and name. There are terms such as compound war or unrestricted warfare that tried to define the complexity of modern warfare, but the most unifying term turned out to be HW. Although there is no universal definition of the term, the most accepted one is by Frank Hoffman who argues that HW blurs modes of war and the perception of who fights and what technologies are brought to bear, producing a wide range of variety and complexity.

Hoffman successfully targeted three main characteristics of HW that distinguishes it from other irregular types of warfare and describe modern wars: diversification of warfare actors, usage of modern technology and convergence of all means for military purpose.

In HW, the state loses its monopoly over the war and non-state actors equally participate in it using both military and non-military tools in particular. Non-state actors have grown capabilities and capacities to confront any state actor and be an independent player in the war. The state increasingly uses unconventional and non-military means and often sponsors non-state actors financially, with weapons or additional force, therefore creating a hybrid army.

Furthermore, in his definition of HW, Hoffman argues that all elements of hybrid warfare can be conducted by separate units which are generally, operationally and tactically directed and coordinated within the main battlespace to achieve synergic effects. Therefore, the lines are blurred between organization, command and control structure. It is often uncertain who is leading the organisation and to which level the state is included.

Modern technology has advanced contemporary warfare and maximised efficiency, where actors have various high-tech lethal systems and devices at their disposal, usable for cyber-attacks and available to terrorist groups. Because of internet and IT technologies, cyber and information warfare are the most important dimensions of HW. Information warfare, including espionage, placement of disinformation, use of telecommunications for propaganda and possibilities of social networks became of growing importance for achieving military and political goals. Also, the complexity of cyberspace enables anonymity for the actors and leaves only speculations about the responsibility and involvement of the state.

Furthermore, individuals can easily take part in the war due to internet, digitalization and its interconnectivity.

The complexity of HW lies in the convergence of all available methods and modes including conventional and unconventional capabilities, tactics, weapons and formations, modern technology, terrorist and criminal acts. The fact that even states are not reluctant to use unconventional methods reveals the Machiavellian nature of HW where the end justifies its means. Also, instead of a classical 'military against military' conflict, all power capabilities are used against the vulnerability of the opponent. Such tactics of targeting and attacking an opponent's vulnerability in an unconventional way, using all available means, enables the diversification of actors and an inferior army or a group to overcome much stronger military power.

HW comes as a reflection of the hybrid threats and modernity, bringing along more lethal wars. We are facing a fusion of war forms, a convergence of regular and irregular components at all levels, with unclear boundaries between actors.

Examples of HW in contemporary international relations

The debate about HW arose after the **Russian** annexation of Crimea and its actions in Eastern Ukraine which has been broadly taken as a show-case of the phenomenon. Information warfare in a form of network intrusion, taking over and controlling of the information environment and infrastructure preceded the annexation of Crimea. Russian soldiers

removed the national and ranking signs from uniforms ('little green men') and took over the TV and radio stations and mobile phone operators. The most popular social network in Ukraine, VKontakte, has been overtaken and blocked, furthermore, the website of the Russian opposition leaders was intruded and the e-mails and phone calls of Ukrainian government and western diplomats were intercepted.

Synergy and coordination of Russian military means with intelligence, modern technology and cyberspace operations significantly increased the effectiveness of Russian actions. Russia strategically targeted points of action and with HW methods acted in an ambiguous way leaving the international community, and NATO in particular, little room for manoeuvre. Also, Russia exploited the possibilities of cyberspace that lacks binding regulations and operates in the grey zone, where the West has difficulties to react properly.

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Wars in Georgia and especially in Chechnya were lessons learned for Russia. In Chechnya, it confronted a seemingly untrained and amateur opponent that in the end proved to be highly organised and capable of successfully implementing modern technology in warfare, creating historical background for Russian

contemporary military doctrine.

Furthermore, Russian HW should be perceived in context of USA's unreachable military capabilities and spending, where in order to maintain relevance, unconventional and creative tactics are necessary. The term HW, which is usually used in the West, is often rejected in Russia, however, even Russian highest military personnel, such as the Chief of the General Staff, admitted that the development of contemporary warfare is going in a somewhat hybrid direction, with increased importance of non-military and non-standard means, converged with asymmetrical actions and modern technology.

Usage of HW is also increasingly relevant in **China's** attempts to acquire control over the geostrategically vital South China Sea. Similar to Russia's 'little green men', it uses 'little blue men' to uphold and amplify the dominance over some islands with disputed territorial status. So, apart from China's navy and coast-guard, a so-called maritime militia has rapidly developed over the course of the last decade, taking an increasingly important role in implementing the country's strategy in the Southeast Asian archipelago. The curiosity is that it is comprised of thousands of civilian fishermen boats that are regularly used to rebound US navy vessels and those of neighbouring states with competing territorial assertions. In this manner, China is successfully widening its control in the South China Sea (reclaimed approximately 13 km² in total) with relatively assertive actions that are, however, still below the threshold of open military conflict and are not up to the level of criteria for military engagement of neighbouring countries and other interested parties. These tactics have

ensured ambiguity and deniability, which enabled China to maintain regional stability which actually generates significant economic profit for the country and consequentially strengthens its strategic position.

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The 'fishermens's fleet' has expanded tenfold during the last few years, improving its overall as well as fire-power capabilities and has been assisting in a few hundreds of 'law enforcement' operations in that period. Its significance for China's regional policy is visible from the fact that the maritime militia not only receives military training and equipment from the navy, but that its personnel obtains the same amount of compensation for physical disability caused during the service as other state administration employees.

The USA had its own HW moments, especially in its war against ISIL, where, besides the use of conventional military power, it also supported Iraqi government troops, various opposition forces in Syria and Kurdish Peshmerga forces.

Furthermore, one can note the fact that, actually, proxy wars and information warfare is nothing new to the US' pragmatic approach to various challenges in the international arena throughout the decades. There are numerous examples from 20th century political developments in Latin America where the US

used different methods for facilitating direct influence over the structure and function of the political systems. There are also different examples of the usage of media for political purposes during the Cold War, when even the profit-driven Hollywood film industry was not entirely cleansed from direct influence of the US state administration. Furthermore, energy-related interests in the Middle East kept US decision makers active in attempts to influence or sometimes even topple political regimes in that part of the world. A contemporary example of HW usage in American foreign policy is the UUV (underwater unmanned vehicle) captured by the Chinese Navy in the waters of the South China Sea. When it comes to direct conflict, the US uses its advantage – conventional military force, where it has no measurable opponent – but once the sphere of interest is targeted there is no hesitation for usage of intelligence and irregular methods for detecting vulnerability of the opponent and reaching its political and military goals.

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In the 2006 **Israel – Hezbollah war**, the state of Israel was seriously challenged by a non-state group – Hezbollah – in an unconventional and unexpected way, commencing the theory of HW. Besides conventional armament supplied by Iran, Hezbollah used guerrilla tactics, irregular forces, terrorism, crime and information warfare within a highly coordinated but multiple structure. Very similar HW characteristics can be found in **ISIL's** actions and tactics in Syria and Iraq, where military operations were converged with terrorism, guerrilla and technology. ISIL used the advantage of the terrain, especially the desert and urban areas, and its shape-shifting ability to demilitarize and transform from a strategic armed organization to a civil citizen groups.

Mainstream interpretations of the last two mentioned examples, before Russian actions in Ukraine, could mislead to the conclusion that HW is exclusively related to irregular actors and represents only a security challenge, rather than the future form of war. But after the 2014 events, HW is accepted as a contemporary form of warfare where lines between war and peace are blurred with ambiguity and deniability and neither is related only to non-state actors and war time in the conventional sense.

Conclusion

Although irregular methods in warfare are not a novelty, HW with its specific characteristics is becoming a synonym for contemporary wars. HW is a product of the modern, digitalized and interconnected world that changed our life and values and brought many new security challenges that are also hybrid and interconnected in nature.

HW developed as a converged war with the overlapping of military and non-military means, conventional and unconventional methods. We have come to the point where even states don't hesitate to use all means available for reaching their goals, successfully avoiding international law, peace conventions and declarations due to the ambiguity and blurred lines between war and peace. HW enabled actors to conduct war without declaring it and therefore creates a false picture of security and stability, while assertive actions are being undertaken.

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HW is not only a security challenge that needs to be handled, but a future form of war and Russian, Chinese and US actions prove it. There is no doubt that while still being relevant, hard, conventional power is not the core of modern warfare, but, most certainly, creative strategies, modern technology and unconventional methods have a growing importance in the contemporary security context. The crucial characteristic of HW is modern technology used in unexpected and new ways, as well as the cyber dimension of war. Cyber space made HW more complex by opening another battlefield – virtual, intangible and capable of doing serious damage. With its fast development and its endless possibilities for inflicting harm it

prevents immediate response, leaving the victim only to fix the damage already done.

Described examples prove that HW evolved from small and proxy wars to an adopted contemporary form of war used by the biggest powers. China's moves in the South China Sea, events in Ukraine and the US' attitude towards use of intelligence and modern high-tech devices have shown that a redefinition of war and an acceptance of new game rules is evident.

In that light, this is where developed capacities of intelligence sharing and other forms of

cooperative approach to security come to the fore. Highly sophisticated challenges can obviously be countered only with highly sophisticated methods in a cooperative manner in the contemporary international environment where even the strongest global power cannot respond individually.

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