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Hybrid warfare on the Ukrainian battlefield: developing theory based on empirical evidence

Abstract: With the takeover of Crimea by masked Russian soldiers/fighters without national insignia in February/ March 2014, with the Kremlin at first denying its involvement, war became 'hybrid' in our minds. The follow-on conflict in Eastern Ukraine, with separatism supported by neighbouring countries and the armed establishment and military securing of pseudo-state people's republics, including recourse to pro-Russian fighters 'on holiday', has reinforced the impression of a hybrid form of warfare, raising the question: what is hybrid warfare? This article argues that the specific nature of hybrid warfare is essentially a strategic matter characterised by three key tendencies and their orchestration within a hybrid 'grand strategy': 1. Focusing the decision of the war/conflict, as such, primarily on a broad spectrum of non-military centres of gravity in a flexible and dynamic manner. 2. Operating in the shadow of various interfaces against specific vulnerabilities of the opponent, thus challenging traditional lines of order and responsibilities, creating ambiguity and paralysing the decision-making process of the opponent. 3. Creative combination and parallel use of different civilian and military means and methods, categories and forms of warfare and fighting, thus creating 'new' mixed, hybrid forms.[1] At the same time, there is a growing sense that hybrid forms of warfare will shape the face of war in the 21st century.[2] They seem to offer unpretentious political success by smart recourse to limited, deniable and supposedly manageable use of force. The assumption that the risk of military escalation and political damage could be kept within limits may at the same time increase the likelihood of the offensive use of hybrid forms of warfare. For this reason, it is high time to improve our common and comprehensive understanding of hybrid forms of warfare as a precondition for common and comprehensive action in defence and response.

Keywords: War; Hybrid Warfare; Ukrainian Battlefield.

1 Two paradigm shifts

The year 2014 marked a *paradigm shift in security policy* in and for Europe *in two ways*. *Firstly,* the use of military power to enforce political interests, including those of state actors, returned directly to the 'Old Continent'.[3] The Ukrainian theatre of conflict/war[4] has brought it to the external borders and therefore into the immediate neighbourhood of the

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1 For the original version of this article, see Johann Schmid: Hybride Kriegführung und das 'Center of Gravity' der Entscheidung. In: *S+F, Sicherheit und Frieden – Security and Peace*, 34 (2). Baden-Baden: Nomos. 2016, ISSN 0175-274X, pp. 114–120.
2 Compare, e.g. Schmid, Johann (2019), 'The hybrid face of warfare in the 21st century'. *Maanpuolustus*, #127, 8 March 2019, Helsinki (Finland).
3 The Balkan Wars of the 1990s are sometimes still considered 'accidents of history'. The public soon forgot about the 2008 Russo–Georgian War.
4 On the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, see, for instance, Christian Wipperfürth: *Die Ukraine im westlich-russischen Spannungsfeld. Die Krise, der Krieg und die Aussichten (WIFIS-Aktuell)*, vol. 51, Verlag Barbara Budrich, Berlin 2015. Compare also: Racz, Andras: *Russia´s Hybrid War in Ukraine. Breaking the Enemy`s Ability to Resist*. FIIA Report 43, The Finish Institute of International Affairs.

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European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Both organisations, and especially their member countries at the eastern periphery, are alarmed.

Yet, dismay over war and conflicts is not in itself the only factor causing this paradigm shift. At the southern periphery of Europe, in the Arabic–Islamic arc of crisis from the Middle East to North Africa, war and conflict have been the rule rather than the exception for decades. These conflicts had – and still have – effects on Europe. What is truly causing the paradigms to shift for Europe is the fact that the assumption of a 'post-national era' and an 'end of the history of war' – at least within Europe – has had to be dismissed as utopian. For this reason, it is a paradigm shift that also relates to perceptions in that political realities have put an end to long-cherished, idealistic wishful thinking.

At the same time, the paradigms have shifted because, from the very beginning of the conflict in and around Ukraine and with Russia, EU/NATO–Europe – even if it did not take direct military action – found itself in the role of an active party to the conflict, as illustrated, for instance, by the EU's association and sanctions policies. This means that, unlike most conflict situations at the southern periphery of Europe, the conflict in and around Ukraine is not one in which EU/NATO–Europe can either become involved from a distance or stay out of it, depending on its current interests or humanitarian motives. The EU, for instance, was part of the overall course of events from the very beginning. Individual member states in exposed geostrategic positions saw, and still see, a threat to their vital security interests. As a result, the nature of this type of challenge is fundamentally different from the nature of conflicts in other parts of the world in which the EU or NATO has been engaged since >2 decades.

The second, no less-relevant part of the paradigm shift, is a result of the specific manifestation of this challenge and threat. The conflict in and around Ukraine and with Russia, with multiple overlapping and intertwined lines of conflict[5] is one of the main factors in this shift. With the occupation of Crimea by masked Russian soldiers/fighters without national insignia in February/March 2014, with the Kremlin at first denying its involvement, war became 'hybrid' in our minds – at first in academic discourse and, then, also in the media and within political debate.

The further development in Eastern Ukraine (Donbass), with separatism supported by neighbouring countries and by the armed establishment and military securing of pseudo-state people's republics (Donetsk, Luhansk), including recourse to Russian fighters 'on holiday', has reinforced this impression of a hybrid form of warfare. Once the discussion of hybrid warfare had gained momentum in autumn 2014 – i.e. considerably after the initial events – the Syrian Civil War, which had been going on since 2011, and the actions of the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq and Syria were retroactively interpreted as 'hybrid'.

This occasionally gave the impression that hybrid warfare was a new phenomenon that had also had a lasting effect on the character of war and would therefore pose a fundamentally new security challenge. The old debate on (supposed) 'new wars' experienced a kind of 'hybrid' revival. In contrast, however, lines of argument developed stating that – historically – hybrid warfare is by no means 'new'. The Trojan horse and references to Russian Spetsnaz forces that already existed during the Cold War or to Hezbollah's actions in the 2006 Lebanon War[6] serve as evidence that the phenomenon has existed throughout the history of warfare.

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5 The relevant lines of conflict here are those within Ukraine regarding the organisation of the domestic power structure in connection with the question of whether to maintain or reshape the sociopolitical system. The 'fight for Maidan' symbolises this part of the conflict. These internal lines of conflict are overshadowed by the international fight for spheres of interest and influence, as well as over competing integration models, i.e. a fight over Ukraine. At the heart of the conflict is whether Ukraine should orient itself towards and integrate itself into the East or the West. The EU/NATO and Russia/the Eurasian Economic Union represent the two opposite poles. Some parts of these lines of conflict complement and reinforce each other. Others cut across each other. They are accompanied by attempts to reinterpret the conflict for declaratory or propaganda purposes in order to move it to a field that offers the party in question greater chances of success. See also Ehrhart, Hans-Georg (2016): Unkonventioneller und hybrider Krieg in der Ukraine: Zum Formenwandel des Krieges als Herausforderung für Politik und Wissenschaft. In: *Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik (ZFAS)*, vol. 9(2), pp. 223–241.

6 See, for instance Frank G. Hoffman: *Hybrid Warfare and Challenges*. In: *Joint Forces Quarterly,* 52(2009): 1, pp. 34–39. Hezbollah's hybrid actions in the 2006 Lebanon War were particularly characterised by a combination of irregular and regular methods of warfare and combat. These methods were sometimes applied across various levels, all the way to the tactical area. The result was a somewhat paradoxical situation: the actual conventional actor – the Israeli Defense Forces – was primarily prepared for counterinsurgency, which is why the conventional methods of fighting and combat capability of Hezbollah, supposedly an irregular actor, came as such a surprise. In addition to its traditional focus on irregular methods of warfare, Hezbollah had also acquired remarkable capabilities in infantry combat, combat from and around fortified positions, long-range antitank operations, and leadership and organisation. By merging irregular and regular forms of warfare and combat from the operational/strategic level down to the tactical level, it developed into a hybrid military force.

Nevertheless, the kind of hybrid actions Russia and the pro-Russian separatists have demonstrated in Ukraine presents a particular challenge for Europe and, in this connection, for crisis management and defence by both NATO and the EU. Though it may seem unlikely from today's perspective, in an extreme case, NATO's military defence capability could be bypassed by hybrid means in a downward escalation mode, using subversion, infiltration and disintegration. Neither NATO nor the EU would be able to take countermeasures against domestic or non-military destabilisation of individual member countries because their security and defence policy have primarily been oriented towards external out-of-area threats. Moreover, if a 'hybrid challenger' commands military escalation potential comparable to Russia's, this, by its pure existence, would support any hybrid activities.

Against this backdrop, we have to ask: What is hybrid warfare?[7] What is specific about this phenomenon? Drawing on the war and conflict-related events involving Russia in and around Ukraine, this article examines the actions of the main actors involved with regard to hybrid elements and, thereby, derive points of reference for a generalisable characterisation of hybrid warfare on this basis.

2 The phenomenon of hybrid warfare

It seems helpful to start by considering what does not define[8] hybrid warfare: outward appearances such as wearing masks or going without national insignia, as well as asymmetric, irregular or terrorist actions, may often accompany hybrid warfare, but these are not in themselves sufficient indications of hybrid warfare in the narrower sense. Nevertheless, both the uniformed masked ('little green') men without national insignia in Crimea and the irregular pro-Russian separatist fighters in Eastern Ukraine represent *two key characteristics of hybrid warfare* in the narrower sense.

Firstly, they represent the dissolution of fixed categories of order, as well as hybrid actors' tendency to deliberately operate at the various interfaces of traditional areas of responsibility, thereby creating vulnerabilities while systematically attacking them. The resulting ambiguity prevents, paralyses or impedes a fast, unified response from either the adversary or the international community. It is particularly important to consider the following interfaces:

a. *Between war and peace:* War is not declared or even necessarily fought, yet the 'conqueror' takes whatever he/she wants. Fast, unexpected actions of a political, military, clandestine or propaganda-related nature leave behind a new set of circumstances ('*fait accompli*').

b. *Between friend and foe*: Who is the actual adversary? Hybrid actors operate such that they can deny their actions with a certain amount of plausibility or at least such that the actions cannot be clearly attributed to them ('plausible deniability') in due time. Opposing forces are not necessarily fought but, rather, sometimes disarmed and 'motivated' to join the hybrid actor's own ranks through a combination of financial incentives, threat and pressure.

c. *Between intrastate and interstate conflicts and, therefore, between domestic and external security, involving state, non-state and pseudo-state actors:* The fact that the external attacker is already in the country and allied with local actors raises the question as to whether Ukraine is defending its domestic or external security. Who are the separatists in Eastern Ukraine? Domestic or foreign? State or non-state actors? Which domestic or external security forces can respond appropriately or are even available for this purpose? What political and legal obstacles are associated with a governmental response by Ukraine?

Ukraine's paralysis in winter/spring 2014 was no accident. It was primarily caused by these vulnerabilities that were deliberately created and exploited along various interfaces. At the same time, it is evident that Russia's actions in

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7 The term 'hybrid warfare' will be used henceforth instead of 'hybrid war' because only the way in which it is waged determines whether a war can be called 'hybrid' or 'non-hybrid' in a narrower sense. At the same time, hybrid warfare is often conducted in a non-linear or asymmetric manner. This means it is possible that, in some configurations, not all parties involved in a conflict will pursue a specifically hybrid approach to warfare. In other words, a hybrid actor can encounter an actor with a more conventional approach such that the war cannot necessarily be considered 'hybrid' on the whole or in every regard.

8 The distinction between nature and appearances will be essential in this regard. The ways in which something is manifested – especially, when it is as alive as war is, with not only physical, but also spiritual, moral, psychological and social factors playing a key role – are generally highly changeable, multifaceted and varied. For this very reason, they must not be equated with the main characteristics of the matter in question, i.e. the features that define what it is at heart and in its nature. Otherwise, we would have to proclaim 'new wars' or a paradigm shift after every new event that changes the manifestation of war.

Crimea and Eastern Ukraine were only possible under very specific conditions that cannot readily be applied to other situations.

Secondly, the uniformed (Russian) masked men without national insignia in Crimea and the pro-Russian separatist fighters in Eastern Ukraine constitute the creative combination and interrelation of different categories, means and forms of warfare. This is both the second key characteristic of hybrid warfare and an illustration of the range of creative ways in which 'hybrid actions' can take shape. In this regard, it is important to consider aspects such as the combination and interrelation of irregular and conventional forms and concepts: the pseudo-state separatists in Eastern Ukraine primarily draw on irregular, subversive and propaganda-related means and methods. However, Russia's conventional state military (and nuclear) threat potential looms behind these separatists.

3 'Hybrid shadow warfare' in and around Ukraine

Against this backdrop, we might ask whether irregular, covert military actions and a party to the conflict concealing its own role can be considered the main characteristics of hybrid warfare in the narrower sense, and, if not, what these main characteristics would be.

What is significant is the fact that the military elements of Russia's actions visible from outside were and are intended less to decide the conflict than to secure a decision already achieved in other fields – through subversive, clandestine, propaganda-related or political means. This clearly demonstrates that, from the very beginning, Russia was not primarily pursuing a decision of this conflict in military terms. Accordingly, the focus on a non-military 'centre of gravity' for deciding the conflict becomes the most pivotal point in explaining the hybrid type of pro-Russian separatist actions involving Ukraine.

Nevertheless, military actions played an important role. On the one hand, they enabled Russia to avert potential military countermeasures by Ukraine in advance – because they would have had no chance of succeeding – and actively counter them in individual cases. On the other hand, the military component gave the necessary weight to activities in the decisive non-military fields. In keeping with the basic principle of the 'diathetic'[9], which Herodotus (according to T.E. Lawrence) once used to describe the Persian King Cyrus' preparation for his military campaigns, the Russian military became primarily a supporting, yet also necessary, element of enforcing an outcome that had already been prepared, and in some cases achieved, in other fields.

There are three reasons why it was important for Russia to conceal or disguise its own military actions. *Firstly,* in order to use military means (with as little bloodshed as possible) to create irreversible facts before the opposing side was even able to accurately assess the overall situation (i.e. the occurrence of an attack and clear identification of the political adversary and its intentions) and thereafter organise an appropriate defence, including military measures, on this basis. *Secondly,* in order to use the resulting ambiguity and ability to plausibly deny its own involvement to a certain extent to avoid unnecessarily fostering the resistance of Ukraine and its population, as well as the international community, and therefore to prevent, paralyse or limit a fast, unified response. *Thirdly,* in order to enjoy the political advantages of indirect operation via non-state 'proxies' – the separatists – without having to commit itself to the political line of fire, thereby keeping the political costs at a minimum.

Considering these overall circumstances and the orchestration of different civilian and military means and methods oriented towards a primarily political, non-military 'centre of gravity' for deciding the conflict, Russia's and the pro-Russian separatists' actions involving Ukraine can be referred to as hybrid warfare in the narrower sense. At the same time, the primarily covert or concealed nature of the actions also justifies the use of the term 'shadow warfare'.

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9 Cf. Lawrence T.E.: *Die sieben Säulen der Weisheit. Lawrence von Arabien.* List Verlag, Munich, 1994, p. 217 ff.

4 Specific conditions: a 'home match' in Crimea

In order to avoid the impression that its 'principles of success' could be applied arbitrarily to other situations, it is important to state that Russia's actions in Crimea took place under very specific conditions. The specific feature of the situation was that Russia was operating almost literally on 'home soil'.

Two-thirds of the population of Crimea were and are Russian, and an even larger portion of them are pro-Russia. Because of the naval base in Sevastopol, Russian armed forces were already there and only needed the appropriate reinforcements. Crimea's island-like geography alone would have been enough to make it easy to seal off and isolate the area of operations. At the same time, the Ukrainian security forces did not have a particularly deep-seated loyalty to their own country. Russia's subversive infiltration of and clandestine influence on the Ukrainian security forces seems to have been well underway even before its operations started. Accordingly, the Ukrainian side lacked the will and unity to put up serious resistance on site. A large part of the Ukrainian security forces in Crimea defected to the Russian side, presumably due to a combination of propaganda, pressure and financial incentives. For Russia, it was a 'home match' in the truest sense.

In this context, Russia had access to a wide variety of starting points for non-military actions and – while still drawing on military means – ways of deciding the conflict outside the purely military realm. As a result, it was neither necessary nor particularly logical for Russia to shift the conflict's 'centre of gravity' to the military field any more than it had to, let alone to make that its primary focus. In philosophical terms, as the Prussian general and military philosopher Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831) put it, war never starts until defence takes place[10] and is therefore more a matter for the defender than the attacker because the 'conqueror' is always peace loving (as Napoleon Bonaparte also always claimed about himself) and, we could add, would prefer to achieve conquest without fighting. In this view, war would have been more an issue for Ukraine than for Russia.[11]

These very specific conditions for Russia's annexation of Crimea also demonstrate the limited extent to which this type of action can be applied to other situations. The existing conditions in Crimea, which Russia knew how to make use of, do not automatically exist elsewhere. Nor can they simply be created artificially from outside. In any case, wearing masks or going without national insignia is not enough to guarantee success. What was possible in Crimea in terms of annexation without a fight reached its limits even in Donbass, and what was still possible in Donbass would scarcely be possible with regard to the Baltic States, let alone countries such as Finland or Poland, even if we overlooked the Baltic States' or Poland's NATO membership. Nevertheless, Russian minorities, particularly those in exposed geostrategic regions precisely like those in the Baltic States or Moldova, may offer potential starting points for exerting influence through propaganda or subversive means.[12]

5 Specific conditions: establishing pseudo-state structures in Donbass

The subsequent actions by pro-Russian separatist forces in Eastern Ukraine also adhered to a hybrid 'grand strategy', with various – at times, changing – centres of gravity for decisions. The primary objective was the subversive establishment of pseudo-state political structures in Donbass, supported by intelligence activities and propaganda. The main focus was not on military aspects. Unlike in the actions in Crimea, Russia initially did not even deploy very many of its own military units. Armed 'separatists' – whoever they were and are (of course, a vital framework of Russian forces could be assumed) – primarily acted and are acting as proxies providing military protection for the central pseudo-state subversive activities. The initial success of the 'separatists' was somehow astonishing. With a relatively small number of forces, they soon seized 'political control' over large parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, which originally had a population of around 4 million people.

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10 Cf. Clausewitz: *Vom Kriege* VI, 7, p. 644 ff.
11 Cf. Clausewitz: *Vom Kriege* VI, 5, p. 634.
12 With regard to several member states of the European Union, however, other minorities or groups of population, particularly those influenced by Salafism/radical Islamism, may represent an even more serious element of potential hybrid challenges.

Yet, once again, this initial success can largely be attributed to the specific conditions of the situation. The general pro-Russian views of large parts of the population in Donbass, their broad rejection of Kiev's policies and the domestic political factors that prevented the Ukrainian security forces from taking action at this time were key factors.

At the same time, the limits of this type of action became clear in that the separatists failed to mobilise large parts of the population for active military defence of Donbass. In May 2014, the leader of the separatists and, for a time, the 'minister of defence' of the separatist 'Donetsk People's Republic', the Russian colonel and suspected intelligence officer Igor Girkin (also known as 'Strelkov'), even felt compelled to complain about this matter publicly in a video message on YouTube, (presumably) directed at Moscow.

Where are the young guys? [...] I never would've thought that not even a thousand men in the entire region are ready to risk their lives [...] They're just waiting for the army from Russia that can do everything for them.[13]

6 Using the military to prevent a military decision of the war/conflict

In summer 2014, Ukraine put increased military pressure on the separatists and went on the offensive with the 'anti-terrorist operation' (ATO) led by its Ministry of Internal Affairs. Since then, Russia has been preventing Ukraine from achieving a military decision of the conflict through long-term Russian military support for the separatist forces in Donbass and isolated cases of direct, albeit temporary, intervention with its own units.[14] Twice – in summer 2014 and in February 2015 ('Debaltseve pocket') – Russian intervention with conventional forces has prevented a military decision in Ukraine's favour, even if this intervention has been covert and temporary.

Russia itself did not and does not seem to be pursuing a military decision of the war/conflict. In other words, Russia does not see the military domain as the primary 'centre of gravity' for active operations in these areas. Nevertheless, the fact that Russia is preventing Ukraine from achieving a military decision of the conflict opens up opportunities for the separatists and, indirectly, for Russia itself, to exert influence at the political level. This can be seen as the heart of the pro-Russian separatist model of hybrid warfare with regard to Ukraine.

7 Gerasimov and the Russian version of non-linear/hybrid warfare

The type of actions that Russia has taken against Ukraine is not coincidental. It follows a pattern that General Valery Vasilyevich Gerasimov, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, already set out in a speech in front of Russian officers in February 2013.[15] This speech, which was later published in a Russian language military specialist journal as a signed article, provides a succinct and important insight into current Russian attitudes regarding questions on war, armed conflict as well as military and non-military activities in this context. Gerasimov's article can be considered a key document for understanding the type of Russian action in the conflict in and around Ukraine and, therefore, for understanding the Russian type of non-linear or hybrid warfare.

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13 Cf. http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/ostukraine-separatistenfuehrer-strelkow-beklagt-kampfmoral-a-970290-druck.html.

14 In a similar manner, the Russian presence in Armenia prevented Nagorno-Karabakh from being recaptured by Azerbaijan's strengthened military, and the Russian intervention in the 5-day war against Georgia prevented a military decision in Georgia's favour against the separatist forces in South Ossetia.

15 The article was published in the '*Military-Industrial Courier*' (VPK), a Russian-language military specialist journal, on 27 February 2013: Cf.: Gerasimov, Valery Vasilyevich: '*Military-Industrial Courier*' (VPK), 27 February 2013. The journalist Robert Coalson created a rough translation of the article in English and initially published it on his Facebook page on 21 June 2014 and later in the *Huffington Post*. Cf.: https://www.facebook.com/notes/robert-coalson/russian-military-doctrine-article-by-general-valery-gerasimov/10152184862563597. http://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf. Gerasimov updated his views on 2 March 2019, again speaking at the Academy of Military Science. He highlighted the need to prepare to fight different types of battles while using military and non-military means. In particular, he emphasised the need for achieving technical, technological and organisational supremacy over any potential adversary. Compare: Pavel Felgenhauer. A New Version of the´Gerasimov Doctrine´? *Eurasia Daily Monitor,* vol. 16 (32). 7 March 2019. https://jamestown.org/program/a-new-version-of-the-gerasimov-doctrine/.

7.1 War in the 21st century

Gerasimov's article begins with a look at the lessons of the 'Arab Spring'. The fact that a functioning state could be plunged into chaos and civil war and fall victim to external intervention within days serves as a kind of introductory epiphany for Gerasimov. From there, he moves to the changing ways in which war and warfare manifest themselves. In this process, he identifies increasingly blurred lines between war and peace. In his view, wars are no longer officially declared in the 21st century. He writes that the importance of non-military (political, economic, information technology (IT)-based, etc.) means of achieving political and strategic objectives has grown. These means are then methodically coordinated with the protest potential of parts of the population and primarily 'military means of a concealed character'. According to Gerasimov, they are accompanied by information campaigns, the use of special-operations forces and even the open use of armed forces, for instance, under the guise of peacekeeping. As he sees it, head-on collisions between large sets of military forces at the operational or strategic level are increasingly a thing of the past. Instead, he defines the focus as asymmetric action in order to neutralise the adversary's advantages and open up a permanent operational front (including domestic opposition forces and information campaigns) throughout the entire depth of the enemy 'area'. He writes that this is the kind of war for which the armed forces should also be prepared, even though people only have a very superficial understanding of its asymmetric nature.

7.2 The importance of military science

Accordingly, the second section of Gerasimov's article emphasises the growing importance of military science, whose task is to develop a comprehensive theory of asymmetric forms and means of warfare. In this process, he calls for it to start with Russia's own experiences (partisan activities, fighting against irregular formations in Afghanistan and the Caucasus) yet also to incorporate the latest technological developments (drones, robotics, automation and air defence). He adds that information space opens up particularly great opportunities for taking asymmetric action to influence state structures and populations but also makes it necessary to take measures to protect the country's own 'objects'. In his view, the operations in Georgia clearly illustrated the lack of a unified approach to the employment of armed forces outside Russian territory. At the same time, as Gerasimov writes, events such as attacks on embassies (Libya), taking hostages (Algeria) or piracy demonstrate how important it is to develop a system of armed defence of a country's own interests outside its national borders. He highlights that this system requires simplification of procedures for crossing borders and using the airspace and territorial waters of other countries, as well as cooperation with the governmental authorities of the relevant countries, all of which requires academic preparation.

7.3 Controlling territory

In the third section of his article, Gerasimov addresses the importance of controlling territory in modern conflicts, underscoring the growing relevance of a country's ability to defend its own population, as well as its infrastructure and communication links, against activities by not only special-operations forces but also terrorist forces. He sees the answer in the establishment of territorial defence that involves all governmental law enforcement agencies, and he calls for the research facilities of the relevant ministries to come up with appropriate, well-founded proposals.

7.4 Unconventional approaches

Finally, Gerasimov discusses the special role and significance of military science in the development of new ideas and unconventional approaches, assigning it a deciding role in developing an understanding of the specific, unique logic of each concrete war/conflict situation. In particular, he writes that military science can help in identifying the specific vulnerabilities of an adversary regardless of its strength, as well as helping to develop the means and methods to defeat it on this basis.

7.5 A comprehensive approach

Gerasimov's article is not doctrine, and certainly not military doctrine. Rather, it essentially represents the Russian version of a 'comprehensive approach' oriented towards whole-of-government efforts focussing in an asymmetric and unconventional manner on the specific vulnerabilities of the opposing side. Scientific findings play a major role in this approach. The modular, situation-specific and sometimes deniable use of political, clandestine, IT-based, economic and military measures is part of this non-linear/civil–military comprehensive approach. Although Gerasimov does not use the term 'hybrid', his article clearly illustrates the Russian understanding of hybrid warfare (hybrid campaigns) in the narrower sense. Within this context, scientific findings play a key role both in developing an understanding of concrete conflict situations and in identifying specific vulnerabilities of potential adversaries and developing concepts for defeating opposing actors.

7.6 Theory and practice

Many aspects of Gerasimov's remarks – e.g. the covert nature of military action in combination with broad use of non-military means, and both drawing on and fostering a population's existing potential for unrest to protect Russia's interests even outside its territory – are reflected in Russia's actions involving Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, as well as in Russia itself, in the form of disinformation and propaganda. Theory and practice are very close together.

8 Ukraine: torn between hybrid and military warfare modes

Yet, not only Russia, but the Ukrainian side also has used a hybrid strategy to respond to the Russian separatist actions. Political propaganda, embargoes and disrupting the power supply (Crimea, separatist territories), as well as police and intelligence operations, have been some of Ukraine's chosen tools. The 'centre of gravity' of Ukraine's actions is now located in the areas of media and political diplomacy with the primary objective of delegitimising the opposing side and gaining as much international support and as many allies for its own cause as possible. In this way, Ukraine is pursuing a fundamental principle of success in war and has been relatively successful with this course.

In theory, attempting to decide the outcome of the war/conflict primarily in the military field is out of the question for Ukraine because of Russia's military escalation dominance. The same also applies to external actors such as the EU. Yet, because, for Ukraine, this conflict is about its existential interests of territorial integrity and national sovereignty – there is good reason to call it a belated war to found the state – it still made attempts of this kind, either out of desperation or with an agenda. In summer 2014, during its ATO, Ukraine managed to regain more than half of the territory controlled or claimed by separatists at that time, a considerable partial success. A military outcome and recapture of the entire Donbass region seemed likely as long as the fight was solely against separatist forces.

However, Russia's military intervention, though limited in duration and scope, put an abrupt end to this impression, underscoring both the fundamental military superiority of Russian forces and Russia's willingness to employ them if the separatists should face too much military pressure from Ukraine or even risk military defeat. Extensive Russian military exercises, some of them in close proximity to Ukraine, were intended to underscore this very fact rather than to prepare for a large-scale invasion of all of Ukraine.

This pattern from summer 2014 was repeated in January/February 2015, and the centre of gravity of the conflict shifted temporarily back to the military area due to the Ukrainian ATO forces' attempt to regain control over Ukraine's border with Russia in order to sever the separatist territories' connection to Russia. The defeat of the Ukrainian forces in the combat action in the 'Debaltseve pocket' is a reflection of the fact that Ukraine was and is not capable of deciding the conflict in its favour primarily by military means. For that reason, Ukraine will most likely continue the conflict in hybrid form, primarily focusing on non-military domains.

9 Developing a theory: hybrid grand strategy and the three key characteristics of hybrid warfare

Russia`s and the pro-Russian separatist's hybrid actions involving Ukraine are marked by holistic, cross-level orchestration of different civilian and military concepts, means and methods combined in an unconventional, non-linear and scalable manner. Along with other objectives, they were – and are – intended to blur the line between war and peace, friend and foe, and domestic and external security, as well as between the use of civilian and military means and between state and non-state actors. These operations target the vulnerable interfaces of traditional categories of order and areas of responsibility. Fast political, clandestine, military and other actions create a new set of circumstances (Crimea) and put the actors taking them in a grey area – at least for a certain amount of time – while paralysing or impeding possible responses. In the background, Russia was – and is – maintaining a substantial conventional and nuclear military threat scenario, which ostentatiously demonstrates its own escalation dominance through activities such as extensive military exercises.

The main characteristics specific to hybrid warfare of the pro-Russian separatist kind involving Ukraine are neither manifested in the wearing of masks and going without national insignia nor in generally covert or irregular military action. These characteristics are merely the symptoms or side effects that can be observed from outside. After all, what makes warfare hybrid is not something we can see. While relevant in themselves, large-scale use of disinformation and propaganda, creating ambiguity and the widespread use of subversive or clandestine means to destabilise Ukraine are also only partial characteristics of a hybrid grand strategy. The deciding factors are the 'hybrid' orchestration of these elements in an overall strategic approach and their dynamic and flexible orientation towards a broad spectrum of primarily non-military 'centres of gravity' for deciding the conflict. Not only a general statement about war, but also three main characteristics for specifically identifying hybrid warfare can be derived from these observations:

9.1 General statement

In principle, every war exhibits hybrid dimensions and elements, on the one hand to the extent that it proceeds from a political rationale or motive – i.e. one that exists independently of the war itself – and, on the other, because war is, as a rule, not conducted in purely military terms, but rather in many other fields (including politics, diplomacy, the economy, technology or propaganda). In this respect, war is inherently hybrid – as is clear even in the Clausewitzian sense of 'a continuation of politics by other means'.[16]

9.2 Three main characteristics of hybrid warfare

However, a specific hybrid form of warfare can also be identified. Three main features and tendencies characterise this *hybrid warfare in the narrower sense.*

Firstly, it involves focussing the decision of the war/conflict, as such, primarily on a broad spectrum of non-military centres of gravity, thereby making use of multiple and shifting centres of gravity in a flexible and dynamic manner. In this context, the entire range of military forms, means and methods for conducting a conflict are used and combined without pursuing decision of the conflict primarily in the military domain or primarily with military means and methods. Regardless of how high the intensity of combat is, the 'centre of gravity' is seen in other, primarily non-military fields, such as morale, legitimacy or political will. In the context of hybrid warfare, combat action in itself does not primarily serve to decide the outcome of a war/conflict – in contrast with ('conventional') military-centric warfare.[17] Instead, it is oriented towards supporting the decision of the war/conflict in other – i.e. non-military –

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16 Cf. Clausewitz: Vom Kriege I, 1, (24), p. 210 ff.

17 This is to be understood as the form of warfare whose centre of gravity is primarily focussed on a military decision of a war/conflict, along the lines of the Napoleonic Wars or both World Wars. A bias in thinking makes it, at the same time, more difficult to understand the specific logic of hybrid forms of warfare.

fields. In this way, the military becomes a supporting element in the 'orchestra' of overall decision of the conflict, which, though drawing on the entire range of civilian and military means and methods as well as all possible strategic dimensions and areas, is primarily pursued in non-military fields.[18] Flexibly focussing the decision of a war/conflict on a broad spectrum of non-military centres of gravity is therefore the first and most fundamental characteristic of 'hybrid warfare' in the narrower sense and the one that distinguishes it from what can be called '(conventional) military-centric warfare'.

Secondly, it involves deliberate operation in the grey area of various interfaces against specific vulnerabilities of the adversary and the subsequent dissolution of fixed categories of order. Blurring the lines between categories – such as war and peace, friend and foe, intrastate and interstate conflicts, domestic and external security, state and non-state actors, as well as civilian and military approaches – creates interface problems and exposes specific vulnerabilities. Despite its indirect, covert or concealed strategic approach, the hybrid actor's operations, which are generally asymmetric, systematically target the specific vulnerabilities in the grey area of various interfaces. The resulting ambiguities paralyse, limit or impede a response from the opposing side. At the same time, this approach is intended to prevent the actor's own weaknesses from being exposed.

Thirdly, it involves the creative combination and parallel use of different civilian and military categories, forms, means and methods of warfare and fighting, thereby creating 'new' mixed, hybrid forms. Conventional, regular and symmetric forms and concepts are interwoven with irregular, asymmetric, non-linear or unorthodox categories to form a strategic hybrid amalgam. In some cases, this process takes place across different levels within an area of operations and may involve state, non-state or pseudo-state actors. Both open forms and methods as well as covert or concealed ones come into play. The 'new' hybrid forms that result are generally difficult to clearly identify or understand in terms of their patterns, rationales and logic. This fact favours the element of surprise, while making defence, response and the development of appropriate counterstrategies more difficult.

9.3 Implications

These circumstances mean two things.

Firstly, that hybrid warfare is characterised by a creative, flexible and generally limited use of military means.[19] Due to its focus on a broad spectrum of non-military centres of gravity, it does not necessarily require a military decision of the war/conflict. Accordingly, the use of military means usually adheres to strategies of limited warfare.

Secondly, even though hybrid warfare is not fundamentally new, the variety of its manifestations that can be creatively designed through hybrid orchestration is. This means that hybrid warfare does not present a fundamentally 'new challenge', nor can the phenomenon be tied to specific outward appearances such as wearing masks or going without national insignia. The deciding factor is orchestrating the various concepts, means and methods within the framework of a *hybrid grand strategy.*

Against this backdrop and considering the dynamic, multifaceted nature of the phenomenon of hybrid warfare, the crux of meeting this challenge will be promptly identifying and understanding its ever-changing patterns and strategic rationale. It is impossible to respond appropriately unless the strategies and methods of hybrid warfare are promptly identified and understood. Accordingly, not only long-term measures to build resilience, but also the ability to quickly perform an in-depth analysis of war, conflict and strategy will become a key capability in countering and responding to hybrid methods of warfare. In this context, scholarship will play a vital role in meeting this challenge. By determining its three main characteristics and their hybrid orchestration, this article provides a general characterisation of hybrid warfare, which could serve as an analytical framework for considering and assessing current as well as future war and conflict situations.

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18 Conversely, this does not, however, mean that each case in which the military has a supportive role and is employed in other fields is already a case of hybrid warfare.
19 However, as friction and uncertainty are part of wars' nature, the 'limited use of force' approach may escalate and get out of control. Compare, e.g. Schmid, Johann (2019), 'The hybrid face of warfare in the 21st century'. *Maanpuolustus*, #127, 8 March 2019, Helsinki (Finland).

A fundamental inspiration why particularly defence- and peace-oriented nations should care about war (and therefore also about hybrid warfare) has already been provided by Carl von Clausewitz 200 years ago:

> ***War serves the purpose of the defense more than that of the aggressor.*** *It is only aggression that calls for defense, and war along with it.* ***The aggressor is always peace-loving; he would prefer to take over our country unopposed.*** *To prevent his doing so, one must be willing to make war and be* ***prepared*** *for it. In other words, it is just the weak, or that side which must defend itself, which should be always armed in order not to be taken by surprise; so it is willed by the art of war. (Clausewitz, On War, VI, 5, p. 444)*