

## **DEFINING THE CONCEPT OF ‘HYBRID WARFARE’ BASED ON ANALYSIS OF RUSSIA’S AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE**

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**Abstract:** There is no generally accepted definition of ‘Hybrid Warfare.’ Often, authors use the term depending on the particular context and the issue at stake. This article reviews the variety of views on the definition of the concept of ‘hybrid warfare,’ suggests an up-to-date interpretation of the concept, and identifies key characteristics of conflicts involving this type of warfare.

It has been found that an information-psychological element forms the basis of ‘hybrid warfare’ with the aim to influence primarily public consciousness, rather than the armed forces or the State’s infrastructure. Moreover, it has been identified that the indicated threats are of ambiguous nature, and thus it is difficult to single out, detect and identify them in order to organize an appropriate response. The authors note that the concept of ‘hybrid warfare’ has originated in the realm of special forces’ operations in geopolitical terms by integrating the experience of severe confrontations threatening international security, combating terrorism and extremism of state and non-state actors.

Along with the features of ‘hybrid warfare,’ the authors elaborate on its components and types, i.e. information warfare, cyber warfare, asymmetric warfare, task force hostilities, terrorist activities, urban guerrilla warfare, signs of humanitarian war, signs of ethnic conflict, trade war, etc. It has been proved that information operations’ planning is a significant component of the interagency approach to the decision-making under conditions of a new type of war – the ‘hybrid’ war.

**Keywords:** Hybrid warfare, media, armed forces, conflict, international security, information operations.

### **Introduction**

In the modern conditions, when global problems increase the complexity of national, regional, and global security, military-political, economic and environmental conditions are constantly changing, national; religious and ethnic contradictions are becoming more acute, so that the most influential countries have already re-visited their na-

tional security strategies and began, more decisively, to pursue their agenda by using military means and methods.

As consequence in terms of security, the world is immersing in the chaos of hybrid and low intensity wars, ethnopolitical and religious conflicts. In the framework of the system of international relations, a global criticality arises – one that is able to ruin fundamentals of current security arrangements. The increase of problematic nature of globalization processes provides evidence of serious defects in international security system. Under conditions of rapid increase of problems and contradictions, chaos of globalization drifts out of control and leads to chaotization of international relations.

One of the criticality consequence, that is created in the sphere of international relations, is the emergence of conflicts of a new—hybrid—type, including those involving non-military means to pursue political and strategic objectives in the struggle against an enemy.

Obviously, the basis of such conflicts are quite motivated interests, concepts and goals of military-political forces, which cannot or do not desire to resolve differences, that exist and appear between them, without employing means of armed struggle. Types of military conflicts have been studied by a number of Ukrainian authors.<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> And although the term 'hybrid war' is not defined, unofficially it is used widely, without a clear definition. This article presents our latest research on the concept of 'hybrid war' and key related terms.

## **Review of Recent Studies and Publications**

Many research papers and expert statements are devoted to the definition of the concept of 'hybrid war' and exploration of its meaning. Frank Hoffmann, well-known American military theorist, was one of the first who claimed that a somewhat new type of threats, designated as 'hybrid threats' "... 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."<sup>5</sup> To describe this new military reality, Hoffman suggested the term 'hybrid warfare.'

Unaccredited sources consider 'hybrid war' as one of the types of warfare. From there, the Internet encyclopaedia 'Wikipedia' interprets 'hybrid warfare' as "military strategy that employs political warfare and blends conventional warfare, irregular warfare and cyberwarfare."<sup>6</sup> The term is used to characterize intricate dynamic of battlespace, that presupposes rapid adaptation and flexible response. There is one more definition, which is worth of consideration. It was suggested by the American military theorist and author of the book *The Accidental Guerilla*, David Kilcullen. According

to Kilcullen, with the combination of guerrilla tactics, civil war, insurgency, and terrorist methods, hybrid warfare is the best representation of contemporary conflicts.<sup>7</sup>

An online search provides numerous interpretations of the term ‘hybrid war.’ For instance, Lieutenant Colonel of the US Marine Corps B. Nemmet considers ‘hybrid war’ as a modern type of guerrilla war, that integrate innovative technologies and modern mobilization methods.<sup>8</sup> J. Mc Cuen, Colonel in the US Army, states that hybrid warfare is the main method of military operations in asymmetric war, which takes place on three battle areas: among population of conflict zone, local population, and international society.<sup>9</sup> The US Navy representative R. Work, quoted in Ukrainian media, explains that in a ‘hybrid war’ the enemy forces can even make use of military men, concealed among the civilian population.<sup>10</sup>

To form a cohesive point of view on possible future military conflicts, in 2009 NATO’s Allied Command Transformation presented a research report under the title “Multiple futures project – Navigating towards 2030,”<sup>11</sup> which shows perceptions and attitudes to potential developing scenario of the security environment and nature of possible military conflicts. One of the directions of developing Alliance’s capabilities elaborated in that report was “adapting to the requirements of hybrid threats.” The point of this type of threat is that a potential enemy will avoid a direct contact with NATO forces in conventional operations, involving instead irregular forces and asymmetric forms of confrontation. The ‘Hybrid enemy’ is expected to include regular and irregular forces, terrorist and crime figures, which will cooperate in ‘mixed modes.’ It is worth emphasising that the ‘hybrid enemy’ is not expected to adhere to international norms of conflict.

The same year, the author of monograph *Strategic Consequences of Hybrid Wars: The Theory of Victory*, Daniel Lasica, officer in the US Air Force, elaborated the defining characteristics of hybrid wars.<sup>12</sup> He examined the information-psychological element as the basis of hybrid warfare, while public consciousness—rather than the military forces or the infrastructure—is the primarily target of initiators of war-fighting. In addition, hybrid threats have an indistinct nature, they are hard to define and identify, as it is hard to organise for appropriate response.

Commenting on situation in Ukraine in April, 2014 the former UN and NATO Security Council Advisor, member of the upper chamber of the Parliament of The Netherlands, retired Major-General Frank van Kappen, made the following definition of the given concept: “Hybrid war is a mixture of classic warfare with the use of irregular armed formations. The state, which leads hybrid war, making a deal with non-state performers by the militants, local groups, organizations, the relationship is formally denied. These performers can do things that the state itself cannot do, because any state is obliged to follow the Geneva Convention and the Hague Convention on the

laws of war on land, the agreements with other countries. All the dirty work can be shifted on shoulders of non-state groups.”<sup>13</sup>

The diversity of authors' considerations on the definition of the concept of 'hybrid warfare' is related to certain points from their own military experience. Under such conditions, reflection of reality is possible only through in-depth study of the events taking place during the period of the Antiterrorist operation in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine and the occupation of the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, taking into account the studies of prominent political and military figures. This will allow to define the content of the concept of 'hybrid warfare' with account of the Ukrainian experience.

### **Relation to Statements in Fundamental Sources**

The defining dictionary of modern Ukrainian language interprets the meaning of the word 'hybrid' as: 1) an animal or plant organism, derived by means of hybridization; 2) admixture/cross breed (figurative meaning in a colloquial style).<sup>14</sup>

Analysing the views of U.S. military experts such as Frank Hoffman, James N. Mattis, Greg Grant,<sup>15</sup> and others,<sup>16</sup> we conclude that when applying the term 'hybrid warfare' they mean: 1) unstated secret acts of war, during which the opposing force attacks government agencies and regular forces of the enemy with the help of local rebels and separatists, who are supported with weapon and finances from abroad and from some internal institutions (oligarchs, organized criminality, nationalist and pseudo religious organizations); 2) the use of a combination of conventional, irregular and asymmetric actions along with information-psychological manipulations, political and ideological conflict. In the geopolitical context, the 'hybrid war' generalizes a new concept that is mainly used in the field of special forces' operations; it combines the experience of violent confrontations endangering the international security, and the fight against terrorism and extremism of state and non-state actors. In turn, the US Marine Corps uses the term 'hybrid' in order to reflect the potential threat of a regular and irregular armed forces. It does not consider the 'hybrid war' as a new form of warfare, but rather a synonym for 'full-spectrum conflict.' No wonder that US Department of Defense has suggested to use the term 'full spectrum operations' instead of the term 'hybrid warfare.'<sup>17</sup>

The so-called 'hybrid war' this is not a new type of warfare, but a combination of Armed forces' combat actions with irregular forces' operations. This opinion is expressed by the Ukrainian scientist V.P. Horbulin, who states that today Ukraine is in fact in a state of war, which is of the so-called 'hybrid' nature. Each particular element of the 'hybrid' war is not new and has been used in almost all the wars of the past, but the coherence and interrelation of these elements, the dynamism and flexibil-

ity of their application, as well as the increasing weight of the information factor, are unique. Moreover, the information factor often becomes an independent component and is no less important than the military component.<sup>18</sup>

The new operational doctrine of the US Army makes a reference to ‘hybrid threats’ and examines them as diverse and dynamic combination of regular forces, irregular armed formations, terrorist acts, criminal figures, or a combination of all these forces and elements, united to achieve mutual goals.<sup>19</sup>

A ‘hybrid war’ is conducted by internal forces, aimed at weakening or toppling the government, as well as by external forces. The actions of external forces involve facilitating separatists and terrorists in recruiting proponents and their training, impact on economy and social sphere, coordination of diplomatic efforts, and also conducting distinct acts of violence. For such purposes, special operations forces, reconnaissance forces, preliminary-formed separatist and terrorist groups, groups of militants and organized crime groups are involved. Their activities, disseminated with the help of the full spectrum of information and communication technologies, have also a massive information-psychological impact on the population, military and law enforcement personnel and the authorities.

The analysis of the experience of conducting ‘hybrid wars’ in Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Georgia, and now in Ukraine, shows that such a war goes beyond the traditional notions of it, it acquires a combined character, turning into a tangle of political intrigues, a fierce struggle for political and economic domination over the country, for territories, resources and financial flows. Victims of such wars are usually peaceful residents and, first of all, the most vulnerable categories of the population: the elderly, women and children. In such a conflict, it is difficult to distinguish between right and wrong, enemies from allies, ordinary peaceful citizens from terrorists, mercenaries and militants.

The aim of such type of wars becomes not only liquidation, but demoralization and aggressor’s imposition of his will to the population of the state. In fact, the classic idea of the Chinese strategist, Sun Tzu, comes to life: “...to fight and conquer in all our battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting.”<sup>20</sup>

## **Russia’s Tools used against Ukraine**

Nowadays, it is reasonable to consider the concept of ‘hybrid war’ by taking into account peculiarities of aggressive actions of Russia against Ukraine.

Firstly, attention should be paid to the sudden appearance of an army contingent—a fact kept hidden for a certain time—whose soldiers, without any identifying marks,

were well prepared to urge revolt and conduct street fighting, and who were designated in positive terms by spreading widely in mass media terms like 'green men' or the 'polite people.' Officially, none of the states recognized the deployment of its own troops (forces) to another country. Soldiers were not guided by certain international laws, rules and conventions that generally govern the conduct of war. Hence, the contingent combined a kind of a hybrid between soldiers and terrorists: hidden faces, no documents defining the real national affiliation; secret authorities of their leadership, whose orders were designed to achieve the military-political objectives of the aggressor country; armed with modern types of weapon and equipment, but lack of clarity on who is responsible for their actions.

The absence of an obvious leader of these forces (groups) prevents both the state and international community from responding, as it remains unclear who needs to negotiate with regard to the cessation of fire, resistance or exchange of prisoners. As a result, with the onset of armed clashes it is almost impossible or extremely difficult to stop them. In addition, the local population is placed into the following conditions: 1) on the territory which is under control of the aggressor, a regime of 'military emergency' and 'curfew' are immediately introduced; 2) the introduction of the principle of "who is not with us is against us," meaning that—in a condition of emergency—one who does not support the demands of the aggressor's units is automatically designated as an enemy.

Secondly, the 'hybrid war' in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea had a well-defined virtual information component. When one calls it 'propaganda,' that would be a diminution of the treacherous and poisonous nature of this information warfare. The principles of electronic cyberattacks were transformed into an uncontrolled unimpeded flow of Russian misinformation that announced a new "war with the fascists." A version of reality was created concerning derogation, persecution and intimidation of the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine, which was propagated to destabilize the situation in the state. Foreign news agencies covered these fake news as if they really provided grounds for a discussion. As a result, the falsifications, confusion and fear caused by information warfare prevented the quick reaction to the actions of the Russian Federation and weakened the resolve of those who had to do so.

Third comes the use of the Russian financial markets as an instrument for justifying its actions and preventing tangible international sanctions. The wealth of Russia's energy reserves allowed it to establish 'business relationships' with the leading countries of the world based on mutual financial gain, which also became one more powerful and hidden weapon.

In parallel to the peculiarities of conducting the 'hybrid war,' it is possible to highlight its components and varieties in the information war, which was started by the

Russian authorities against Ukraine and the world community. Ukraine needed to minimize casualties and receive support in combat actions from its population and the world community, and that shifted the emphasis of the war towards avoiding direct contact between armed forces of the parties to the conflict. The aggressor, on the other hand, carried powerful information operations aimed at influencing society with the purpose of achieving goals of the war with “someone else’s hands”; a cyber war that presupposes attacks on government, departmental and bank servers, on military command systems, etc.; asymmetric warfare with signs of a civil war; combat teams’ fighting; terrorist actions; the so-called ‘urban guerrilla’ and urban guerrilla warfare; signs of a humanitarian war (like the war in Kosovo); signs of ethnic conflict between the Crimean Tatars and the Crimean population, who ‘supported’ the annexation of Crimea; trade warfare; and an ‘emerging war’ (i.e. creating a controlled chaos to influence the policy of the country subject to aggression).

The controlled chaos which emerged in Ukraine during hybrid war has following characteristics:

- involvement of illegal military formations, mercenaries, crime figures, sabotage and reconnaissance forces, units (specialists) and military grade weapons, and power-wielding agencies to the confrontation;
- drawing civilians into a conflict via compulsory mobilization in the introduced war-time regime, voluntary or hired ‘human shields’;
- the threat of deployment of Russia’s armed forces along the state border in case Ukraine decides to use military force in what was framed by Russia as “against its own ‘civilian population’”;
- blocking attempts of the international community to deal with the conflict under the norms of international law;
- strong information-psychological impact, directed at destabilizing the situation inside the country, decrease people’s reliance on the current government system, providing support to insurgents’ actions, creation of negative image of the public authorities both in the state and on the world scene;
- greatest possible reinforcement of resistance in economic, diplomatic, information and other domains.

Taking into consideration all these characteristics in devising appropriate responses to contemporary ‘hybrid wars,’ it is necessary to understand their essence, analyse peculiarities of conducting such wars, and to elaborate a concept that can be agreed on national level.

In fact, the ‘hybrid war’ can be defined in general terms as a set of pre-prepared and operationally implemented actions of military, diplomatic, economic, and information

nature, aimed at achieving strategic goals. Its key role is to subordinate the interests of one state to another in the conditions of formal preservation of the political system of the country. The basic components of the 'hybrid war' include the traditional and non-standard threats, terrorist acts, destructive effects, new and innovative information technologies to stand against an enemy who otherwise is more powerful in military and political terms.

## Conclusion

Considering the concept 'hybrid war,' Ukrainian military experts should pay attention to special aspects of the usage of the term. Moreover, finding agreement on the concept of 'hybrid war' will allow experts to use it in the future during formulating the basic principles of formation of the national security and defence system of Ukraine, in restructuring and strengthening the Armed Forces of Ukraine and other government institutions. This in turn will provide an opportunity for deeper integration of strategic communications, public relations and information events in all aspects of Ukrainian Armed Forces' activity. Finally, the issue of executing information operations must become the main idea in every intergovernmental approach to decision making under conditions of 'hybrid war.'

## Notes

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