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CONCEPTUALIZING HYBRID WARFARE

“Therefore it is said that victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win”.

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, p. 57

ABSTRACT: *This article conceptualizes hybrid warfare as a specific style of warfare, strategic in nature and in contrast to “military-centric warfare” as its counterpart. The article builds on previous research and publications by the author and presents results in a condensed way. It suggests the following comprehensive definition of hybrid warfare: “Hybrid warfare is a specific and unorthodox style of warfare. It extends the battlespace horizontally by involving multiple domains, operates in the shadow of various interfaces thus creating ambiguity, and creatively combines the use of force with different soft-, hard- and smart-power means and methods. It tries to reach a decision primarily on non-military centres of gravity”.*

KEYWORDS: *hybrid warfare, Crimea, Russia, Ukraine, Center of Gravity, conventional war*

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EMPIRICAL MANIFESTATION: HYBRID WARFARE ON THE UKRAINIAN BATTLEFIELD¹

With the takeover of Crimea by masked Russian soldiers/fighters without national insignia in February/March 2014, and with the Kremlin initially denying its involvement, war became ‘hybrid’ in our minds. The ensuing conflict in Eastern Ukraine, with separatism supported by neighbouring countries, the establishment and security of pseudo-state people’s republics by military force, 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?

It seems helpful to start by considering what does not define hybrid warfare: outward appearances such as wearing facemasks or going without national insignia, as well as asymmetric, irregular or terrorist actions, may regularly accompany hybrid warfare, but are not in themselves sufficient indications of hybrid warfare in the narrower sense. Nevertheless, both the uniformed masked (‘green’) men without national insignia in Crimea, and the

¹ This paragraph builds on elements Schmid, J. “Hybrid warfare on the Ukrainian battlefield: developing theory based on empirical evidence”. In *Sciencdo: Journal on Baltic Security*. Tartu, August 2019; 5(1): 5–15. <https://sciencdo.com/article/10.2478/jobs-2019-0001>, Accessed on 10 November 2021. Cf. Schmid, J. “Hybride Kriegführung und das ‘Center of Gravity’ der Entscheidung.” In: *S+F, Sicherheit und Frieden. Security and Peace* 34 (2). Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2016, 114–120.

irregular pro-Russian separatist fighters in Eastern Ukraine, represent two key characteristics of hybrid warfare.

Firstly, they represent the dissolution of fixed categories of order, and 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 either from the targeted nation or the international community. It is particularly important to consider the following interfaces:

- Between war and peace: War is not declared or even necessarily fought, yet the 'conqueror' takes whatever he wants. Fast, unexpected actions of a political, military, clandestine, or propaganda-related nature leave behind a new set of circumstances ('fait accompli').
- Between friend and foe: Who is the actual adversary? Hybrid actors operate in ways that allow them to deny their actions with a certain amount of plausibility, or at least so that the actions cannot be clearly attributed to them in a timely manner ('plausible deniability'). Opposing forces are not necessarily fought, but rather sometimes disarmed and 'motivated' to join the hybrid actor's own ranks e.g. through a combination of financial incentives, threats and pressure.
- Between intrastate and interstate conflicts and therefore between domestic and external security, involving state, non-state and pseudo-state actors: The fact that in 2014 the external attacker was already in the country and allied with local actors raised the question as to whether Ukraine was defending its domestic or external security. Who were the separatists in Eastern Ukraine? Domestic or foreign? State or non-state actors? Which domestic or external security forces were able to respond appropriately or were even available for this purpose? What political and legal obstacles had been associated with a governmental response by Ukraine?

Ukraine's paralysis in winter/spring 2014 was no accident. It was primarily caused by these vulnerabilities, which were deliberately created and exploited along various interfaces. At the same time, it is evident that actions like those in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine were only possible and successful under very specific conditions that cannot readily be applied to other situations.

Secondly, the uniformed 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 modes 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 drew on irregular, subversive and propaganda-related means and methods. However, behind these separatists loomed Russia's (state) conventional military and nuclear threat scenario.

What is significant in addition is the fact that the military elements of Russia's actions visible from outside were intended, not so much to decide the conflict but to secure a decision already achieved in other fields – through subversive, clandestine, propaganda-related or political means. This demonstrates that from the very beginning, Russia was not primarily pursuing a decision on this conflict in military terms. Accordingly, the focus on a broad and flexible spectrum of non-military 'centres of gravity' for deciding the conflict and reaching

own political goals becomes the most pivotal point in explaining the hybrid form of Russia's and pro-Russian separatist actions involving Ukraine in 2014 and the following years.

Overall, these actions are marked by holistic, cross-level orchestration of different civil and military concepts, means and methods combined in an unconventional, nonlinear and scalable manner. Along with other objectives, they were and are intended to blur the line between war and peace, friend and foe, domestic and external security, and between the use of civil and military means, as well as 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 maintaining a substantial conventional and nuclear military threat scenario, which ostentatiously demonstrates its own escalation dominance through activities like extensive military exercises.

THEORY: CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF HYBRID WARFARE²

The main characteristics specific to hybrid warfare, as demonstrated for example on the Ukrainian battlefield in 2014/15, are neither wearing masks and going without national insignia, nor generally covert or irregular military actions. These characteristics are merely the symptoms or side effects that can be empirically observed from outside. After all, what renders warfare hybrid is not something we can see. While relevant in themselves, the large-scale use of disinformation and propaganda, cyberattacks or the widespread use of subversive or clandestine means to destabilize the opponent are also only partial characteristics of a hybrid grand strategy. The decisive factor is the 'hybrid' orchestration of these various 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 confrontation/war. Not only a general statement about war, but also three main characteristics and tendencies specific to the identification of the nature of hybrid warfare can be derived from these observations:

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 – namely 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 and domains (including politics, diplomacy, the economy, technology or information). In this respect, war is inherently hybrid – as is clear even in the Clausewitzian sense of 'a continuation of policy by other means'.³

² This chapter builds on and further develops Schmid, J. "The hybrid face of warfare in the 21st century". *Maanpuolustus*, #127, 8 March 2019, Helsinki (FIN). <https://www.maanpuolustus-lehti.fi/the-hybrid-face-of-warfare-in-the-21st-century/>, Accessed on 10 November 2021, as well as on Schmid, J. "Hybrid Warfare – a very short introduction". COI S&D Conception Paper. Helsinki, 2019. Cf. Schmid, J. (2017 a): "Konfliktfeld Ukraine: Hybride Schattenkriegführung und das 'Center of Gravity' der Entscheidung." In: *Krieg im 21. Jahrhundert*, hrsg. Von Ehrhart, H. 141–162. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag.

³ Cf. Clausewitz, C. von "On War". Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, 101.

However, a specific hybrid way of conducting war can be identified. It combines the tailored use of hard, soft and smart power elements with symmetric as well as asymmetric means and methods. It potentially includes all levels of vertical escalation from subversion and destabilization to the use of military force in all possible manifestations. Most importantly, it extends the battlespace horizontally by making flexible use of multiple – military as well as non-military – domains and dimensions. In order to conceptualize hybrid warfare, it is particularly important to distinguish it from its counterpart – ‘conventional’ or more precisely ‘military-centric warfare’.⁴ It is to be understood as a form of warfare that aims for an overall military decision of a confrontation primarily by military means and methods on a military battlefield. The main distinguishing feature here is the question regarding the centre of gravity on which the war is to be decided. In contrast to ‘military-centric warfare’, the centre of gravity in hybrid warfare is not primarily located in the military domain. Hybrid warfare in the narrower sense (as all war is hybrid) can be described by three key characteristics and their hybrid orchestration. In their combination they form a ‘threefold hybridity’:

Field of decision

The first key characteristic is related to the field of decision. In this regard, it can be identified that hybrid warfare **extends the battlespace horizontally** by exploiting a broad spectrum of domains and dimensions as battlefields in their own right in order to conduct and decide a confrontation. These domains range from politics, diplomacy, information, economy, technology, military and society to dimensions like culture, psychology, legitimacy and morale and many more. They potentially include all sources of power.

Despite its use of force component however, hybrid warfare tries to reach the decision of a war/confrontation as such primarily on a broad spectrum of **non-military centres of gravity**. In contrast to ‘military-centric warfare’, hybrid warfare operates with multiple, integrated, and shifting military as well as non-military centres of gravity in a flexible and dynamic manner.

In this context, the entire range of military means and methods, tactics and strategies can be employed and combined without pursuing decision of the conflict primarily in the military domain. Hence, success in hybrid warfare does not necessarily require an overall military victory.

Based on these considerations, hybrid warfare may also appear as ‘**Mosaic-Warfare**’ or ‘**Multi-Domain-Warfare**’ as it extends the battlespace horizontally and integrates different domains – as “battlefields” in their own right – with each other by multi- and cross-domain operations.

⁴ To be understood as the form of warfare with its centre of gravity primarily focused on an overall military decision of a war/conflict and with a military decision on the military battlefield being able to decide the entire war. E.g. along the lines of the Falklands War (1982), the Gulf War (1991), big portions of the Napoleonic Wars or both world wars. A bias in such thinking makes it at the same time more difficult to understand the specific logic of hybrid forms of warfare. As ‘conventional’ is a relative term the concept ‘military centric warfare’ is used to describe the counterpart of hybrid warfare more precisely. Compare: Schmid, J. “Der Archetypus hybrider Kriegführung. Hybride Kriegführung vs. militärisch zentrierte Kriegführung.” In: Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift (ÖMZ), Heft 5/2020, S. 570–579, Wien, 2020.

Conduct of operations

The second key characteristic is related to the conduct of operations. Referring to this, hybrid warfare **operates in the shadows/grey areas of various interfaces**, e.g. between war and peace, friend and foe, internal and external relations, civil and military as well as state and non-state actors and fields of responsibilities and finally in between reality/truth and fiction/propaganda.

By operating at such interfaces, hybrid warfare **blurs traditional lines of order and responsibilities** while heading for their subsequent dissolution. This is the main way of **how “hybridity”** in hybrid warfare **is created** in the first place.

The resulting **ambiguities** are intended to paralyse, limit or impede a response from the opposing side, since they make **attribution** and situational awareness difficult. At the same time, such approaches try to **cause interface challenges** for the victim or defender. As interfaces are difficult to protect, they are often not well defended and therefore constitute most critical vulnerabilities. Hence, hybrid operations are designed and tailored to expose and exploit targeted vulnerabilities in the gray zone of interfaces primarily in a non-linear or unorthodox way.

Paralysing the opponent’s decision-making process, limiting his options to respond, while avoiding confrontation with his strengths can be considered as the overarching goal of such an approach.

Based on these perspectives and the crucial role of operations in the shadow of various interfaces, hybrid warfare may also appear as ‘**Shadow-Warfare**’ or ‘**Gray Zone Warfare**’.

Employment of means and methods

The third key characteristic is related to the employment of means and methods. Concerning this matter hybrid warfare **creatively combines** and makes **parallel use** of different civil and military, regular and irregular, symmetric and asymmetric, open and covert, as well as legal and illegal instruments, means, methods, tactics, strategies, concepts and modes of warfare which otherwise prevail rather separately from each other. By exploiting **multiple attack vectors**, hybrid warfare **creates ever-new mixed hybrid forms designed and tailored to hit at vulnerable interfaces across all relevant strategic domains**.

Conventional, regular and symmetric forms and concepts are interwoven with irregular, asymmetric, nonlinear, 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 as well as covert or concealed forms and methods 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.

In short: The employment of means and methods intends to combine the tailored use of hard power with a broad spectrum of soft power elements by the creative use of smart power in order to enable operations at targeted interfaces.

The approach can be compared with the creation of a “Swiss army knife” where the knife, as a symbol for the military component is an important element, but just one element in the context of a broad variety of hard, soft, and smart power tools and instruments.

Based on this, hybrid warfare may also appear as ‘**Multi-Vector-Warfare**’ as it creatively combines soft, hard, and smart power means and methods. At the same time, it may appear

as **‘Multi-Mode Warfare’** as it combines different, regular and irregular, open and covert, symmetric and asymmetric, modes of warfare which might be seen separately from each other in a more traditional way of thinking.

Interaction

These three characteristics are closely interlinked and form a **threefold “hybridity”** of hybrid warfare in the form of a hybrid combination and interplay of different domains, interfaces and vectors. They interact closely.

The purpose of the hybrid orchestration of employed means and methods is to make operating in selected fields of action and along various vectors of action in the grey area of intersections possible in the first place. Following the basic principle of a Swiss army knife, various instruments, means and methods are precisely combined and interwoven with each other so as to enable tailored operations at those intersections considered to be relevant. The knife as a symbol of military means and methods does not necessarily take a centre stage, however. It is only one element in a spectrum of various combinations of means and methods.

Operating in the grey areas of different intersections in turn has the purpose of creating ambiguities, complicating attribution and paralysing the adversary’s decision-making process to prevent, limit, or undermine defence measures and responses. It is also intended to expose and target the adversary’s specific vulnerabilities, which are often located especially at unprotected intersections, and to shift the decision of the entire conflict to gravitational fields where one’s own strength meets the adversary’s weakness. Creating ambiguity thus becomes a means of paralysing the adversary.

The result of this is an interconnected and dynamic interaction pattern of the various fields of action in which wars and conflicts can be conducted. In contrast to ‘military-centric warfare’, the various fields are not hierarchically oriented towards a military decision of the war or conflict. Instead, the military becomes an enabling element of the general decision that is sought primarily on other (non-military) gravitational fields. Indirect, covert, nonlinear, unconventional and asymmetric actions are integral parts of hybrid strategies. These may be planned, develop gradually, or even come about by chance.

In their **hybrid orchestration**, these three characteristics form the essence of hybrid warfare in the narrower sense: They can be considered as the **‘marvellous or paradoxical trinity of hybrid warfare’**.

Comprehensive Definition of hybrid warfare

Based on these considerations the following comprehensive definitions of hybrid warfare as a specific – particularly creative and unorthodox – style of warfare and in contrast to military-centric warfare as its counterpart is suggested:

(long): Hybrid warfare is a creative act of force combining a broad spectrum of military and non-military instruments and vectors of power on an extended, multi-domain battlespace – ranging from politics, diplomacy, information, economy, technology, military and society to dimensions like culture, psychology, legitimacy and morale – while ambiguously operating in the shadow/gray zones of blurred interfaces – between war and peace, friend and foe, internal and external relations, civil and military as well as state and non-state actors and fields of responsibilities – with the ultimate goal to enable

an own decision of the confrontation primarily on non-military centres of gravity while preventing being militarily overthrown or compelled by the enemy.

(short): Hybrid warfare is a specific and unorthodox style of warfare. It extends the battlespace horizontally by involving multiple domains, operates in the shadow of various interfaces thus creating ambiguity and creatively combines the use of force with different soft-, hard- and smart-power means and methods. It tries to reach a decision primarily on non-military centres of gravity.

These conceptual considerations are to be understood as a contribution to help improve the judgement of political and military leaders, decision-makers, analysts as well as conceptual thinkers and to analyse the continuously emerging “new” empirical manifestations of hybrid warfare and their associated strategic approaches.

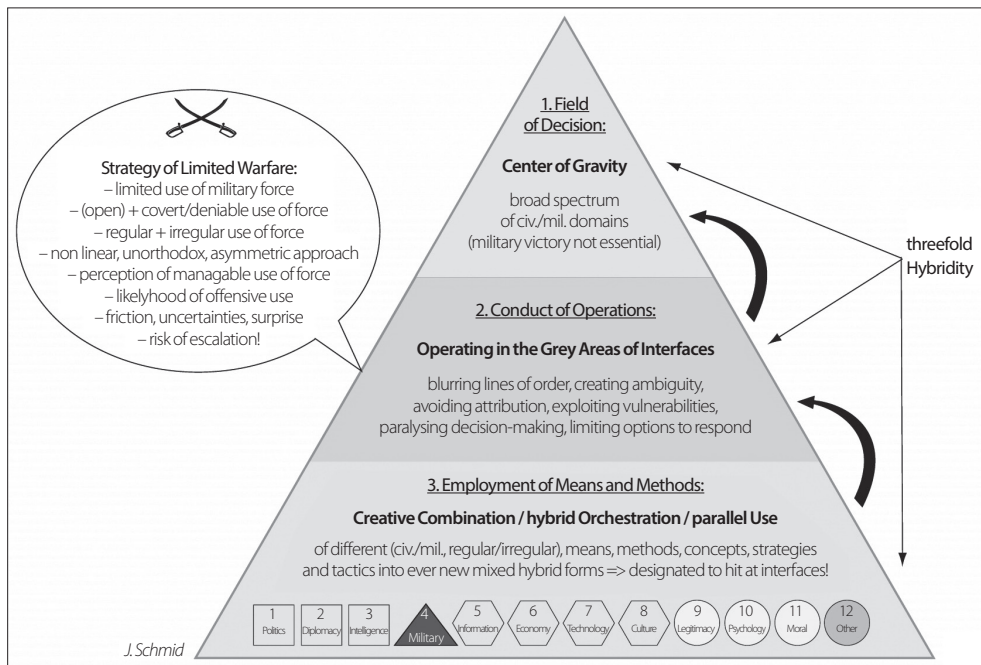


Figure 1 The “paradoxical” Trinity of Hybrid Warfare. Three key characteristics/tendencies and their hybrid interaction/orchestration⁵

(1: Politics, 2: Diplomacy, 3: Intelligence, 4: Military, 5: Information, 6: Economy, 7: Technology, 8: Culture, 9: Legitimacy, 10: Psychology, 11: Moral, 12: Other)

⁵ https://www.maapuolustus-lehti.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/190303_Paradoxical-Trinity-of-Hybrid-Warfare_J.Schmid1-2048x1448.png

THE USE OF FORCE AND THE NATURE OF CONFLICT⁶

The concept of hybrid warfare is the most comprehensive way to address hybrid challenges in a wider sense. In this understanding it represents the ‘all-inclusive package’ of ‘hybrid threats’. This particularly includes the ‘hard end’ in the escalation spectrum of ‘hybrid challenges’. While it potentially makes use of all strategic domains and sources of power – politics, diplomacy, intelligence, information, economy, finance, technology, military, society, culture, psychology, legitimacy, morale and others – hybrid warfare includes the use of force as its defining element. From terrorism, terror, sabotage and subversion, to guerrilla warfare, conventional warfare and even the nuclear domain, all possible levels of vertical escalation can be included or even combined.

Through its ‘use of force’ component, hybrid warfare constitutes the most challenging and vital scenarios in the wider spectrum of hybrid conflict. It combines the tailored use of ‘hard power’ with the deployment of a broad spectrum of ‘soft power’ elements through the creative exercise of ‘smart power’. In this connection, the use of force is not only an additional element in a hybrid threat scenario, it changes the entire nature of the conflict and turns it into war. Therefore, whatever counts for war, it counts for hybrid warfare in particular. For this reason, hybrid warfare can also be considered ‘a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means’, or as ‘an act of force to compel an enemy to do one’s own will’ (Clausewitz, *On War*, I, 1, 83, 99).

In addition, although hybrid warfare has implications for the operational and tactical level, it is primarily of a political-strategic nature. Hybrid warfare can start long before the ‘shooting war’ begins, and in an extreme case it even offers the option to win a war despite military defeat.⁷ Therefore, whatever counts for strategy – particularly ‘grand strategy’ – it counts for hybrid warfare strategy in particular. It ‘is about getting more out of a situation than the starting balance of power would suggest’. It can be perceived as ‘the art of creating power’ (L. Freedman, *Strategy*, p. xii). As a result, war and strategy do not need to be redefined to conceptualize hybrid warfare.

Furthermore, it is important to note that hybrid warfare is not a new phenomenon. It has existed throughout the entire history of war. However, while far from novel in its essence, the empirical manifestation of hybrid warfare can be surprisingly new and differ significantly from case to case. This makes identification and understanding particularly challenging. Awareness and understanding are the first preconditions for addressing this challenge.

⁶ This paragraph builds on Schmid, J. “Hybrid Warfare – a very short introduction”. COI S&D Conception Paper, Helsinki, 2019.

⁷ Cf. Schmid, J. “Hybrid Warfare in Vietnam – How to win a war despite military defeat”. In *ISPAIM – Monitor Strategic* 2–4/2020, B. Nr. 17/02.12.2020/0691, Bucuresti, 2021, 54–67. <https://ispaim.mapn.ro/app/webroot/fileslib/upload/files/Monitor%20Strategic/ms342020.pdf>, Accessed on 10 November 2021. Cf. Schmid, J. “Hybride Kriegführung in Vietnam – Strategie und das center of gravity der Entscheidung.” In: *Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik (ZFAS)*, Vol. 10, No. 3, Wiesbaden, 373–390. DOI: 10.1007/s12399-017-0659-4.

HYBRID WARFARE – A MULTIDOMAIN CHALLENGE FOR THE EU, NATO AND THEIR MEMBER STATES⁸

Hybrid warfare of the type that was demonstrated, for example, on the Ukrainian battlefield, if carried out against European countries, would pose a particular challenge for Europe and the crisis management and defence of both NATO and the EU. In an extreme case, NATO's military defence and deterrence posture could be bypassed by subversive means in a 'downward or horizontal escalation mode'. This may include possible threats from within, for example as a result of long-term subversion, infiltration, propaganda, destabilization, or internal disintegration. Such hybrid threat- and attack-vectors may combine multiple domains and dimensions including e.g. politics, diplomacy, information, media, intelligence, economy, finance, infrastructure, technology, society, culture, law, psychology, legitimacy or morale – as elements of horizontal hybrid escalation. The military domain with its "operational sub-domains" – air, land, sea, cyberspace and space – being part of them. With their security and defence policy primarily oriented towards external threats, neither NATO nor the EU would be prepared, able, or ostensibly entitled to protect their member states as well as themselves as organizations against such challenges at the blurred interfaces of war and peace, friend and foe, internal and external security as well as of civil and military fields of responsibilities on multi-domain-battlefields.

At the same time, in a world of growing insecurity and global power shifts, **dividing lines** are growing and deepening within the EU and NATO and particularly within the societies of their member states. Social and cultural tensions, radical ideologies, illegal migration, demographic transformation, eroding respect towards state authorities, organized crime and on top the insecurity created by the COVID-19 crisis situation function as **catalysts** in the convergence of various hybrid risk factors. They create additional lines of conflict, and thus provide additional starting points and leverage for hybrid action. This exposes numerous vulnerabilities on multiple domains that can be exploited by all kinds of hybrid actors – internal and external, state as well as non-state – from various directions. However, military strength provides additional opportunities to exploit hybrid methods, even without the active use of force. Military escalation potential or dominance by its mere existence would support any kind of subversive or horizontal hybrid activities on non-military domains.

In this context it has to be highlighted that keeping and preserving the **technological edge** would be of utmost importance for the EU, NATO and their member states. As their military strength and defensive posture builds to a large degree on technological superiority, losing this advantage could create a "solidarity gap" for the collective defence of Europe as it would increase the risk and "price" of transatlantic engagement. As a result, European nations could be threatened by hybrid methods of warfare with growing credibility. The same counts for their civil engagements and military operations abroad.

⁸ This paragraph builds on and further develops Schmid, J. "The hybrid face of warfare in the 21st century". *Maanpuolustus*, #127, 8 March 2019, Helsinki (FIN). <https://www.maanpuolustus-lehti.fi/the-hybrid-face-of-warfare-in-the-21st-century/>, Accessed on 10 November 2021.

However, it is worthwhile to remember that success in hybrid warfare depends on certain preconditions that do not automatically apply to any situation. For example, the Crimea scenario (2014) could not be implemented elsewhere in an offhand manner. The war in Donbas demonstrated the limitations of such an approach already back in 2014/15. In addition, Russia's large scale assault on Ukraine on 24th February 2022 shows that the hybrid design and preparation of a campaign do not necessarily guarantee overall success.

The Ukraine case (2014/15), however, illustrates another important relationship.⁹ The more closely connected and interwoven a country's relations with its adversary, and the more pronounced their mutual dependencies on multiple domains and dimensions, the more potential starting points there are for hybrid methods of warfare, which will also tend to be more successful as a consequence. For this reason, globalization, close international interaction, and interconnected societies – as positive and desirable as these developments may be – have the potential to open up additional starting points for hybrid methods of warfare. This could make hybrid warfare a particularly favoured means among former (alleged) friends (as Ukraine and Russia had been), within the framework of intrastate conflicts, and especially in inner-state and civil wars. Open, democratic societies that lack strategic vigilance are particularly vulnerable to such hybrid methods of warfare.

SUMMARY: NEED FOR COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING

Hybrid warfare is not fundamentally new. However, 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 face-masks or soldiers going without national insignia. The deciding factor is orchestrating the various concepts, means and methods within the framework of a hybrid grand strategy.

While hybrid warfare actors generally resort to creative and indirect strategies of limited warfare and a limited use of military force, it must be emphasized that hybrid warfare potentially includes all levels of escalation. Friction and uncertainty are always part of the game and the perceived manageable use of force may get out of control. Due to its focus on a broad spectrum of non-military centres of gravity, however, a military decision as such is not necessarily required for hybrid warfare actors to achieve their political goals. As happened in Donbas (2014/15) or during the Second Indochina War,¹⁰ militarily it may be sufficient for the hybrid warfare actor to prevent his opponent from deciding the war on the military battlefield, while seeking a decision himself on non-military centres of gravity. Morale and legitimacy can become strong weapons in this context.

⁹ Cf. Schmid, J. "Hybrid warfare on the Ukrainian battlefield: developing theory based on empirical evidence". In *Sciendo: Journal on Baltic Security*. Tartu, August 2019; 5(1): 5–15. <https://sciendo.com/article/10.2478/jobs-2019-0001>, Accessed on 10 November 2021.

¹⁰ Cf. Schmid, J. "Hybrid Warfare in Vietnam – How to win a war despite military defeat". In *ISPAIM – Monitor Strategic 2–4/2020*, B. Nr. 17/02.12.2020/0691, Bucuresti, 2021, 54–67. <https://ispaim.mapn.ro/app/webroot/fileslib/upload/files/Monitor%20Strategic/ms342020.pdf>, Accessed on 10 November 2021. Cf. Schmid, J. "Hybride Kriegführung in Vietnam – Strategie und das center of gravity der Entscheidung." In: *Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik (ZFAS)*, Vol. 10, No. 3, Wiesbaden, 373–390. DOI: 10.1007/s12399-017-0659-4.

In this way, the military becomes a supporting element in the ‘orchestra’ of an overall decision of the conflict, which, though drawing on the entire range of civilian and military means and methods and all possible strategic dimensions and areas, is primarily pursued in non-military fields.¹¹ 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 military-centric warfare.

With its ability to cause ambiguity by silently operating in the grey areas of interfaces, while concealing or plausibly denying an actor’s intent and role as a party to the conflict, combined with a limited use of force only as a last resort, hybrid warfare offers a huge potential for surprise and offensive actions even against militarily superior opponents (‘underdog strategy’). By following a long-term, indirect or masked ‘salami tactics’ approach or, conversely, by conducting rapid, unexpected offensive operations (‘fait accompli’), hybrid warfare actors can create new sets of circumstances that are almost impossible to be changed afterwards without undue effort. Hence, the offensive power of hybrid warfare presents the defender with a particular challenge: being taken by surprise without even recognizing that one is under hybrid attack until it is too late. Such a surprise could also be carried out indirectly, in slow motion and over a long period of time. Hybrid warfare generally favours the offensive. Hence, countering hybrid warfare successfully in the long run requires far more forces, resources, and efforts than offensive hybrid operations do.

Against this backdrop and in light of the dynamic, multifaceted nature of hybrid warfare, the crux of meeting this challenge will be to identify and understand in due time its ever-changing, multiple and often disguised appearances, as well as the pattern and strategic rationale behind it. It is impossible to respond appropriately unless the strategies and methods of a certain hybrid warfare actor are identified and understood comprehensively and early enough. Accordingly, in addition to long-term measures to build resilience, the ability to constantly perform in-depth analyses of specific war/conflict situations, related actors and strategies will become a key capability in countering and responding to hybrid methods of warfare. A comprehensive understanding of hybrid warfare and a related education of judgement, not least to prevent over-interpretation and overreaction, are decisive. For this reason, scholarship and the building of the respective analytical capabilities will play a vital role in meeting this challenge. The conceptual understanding of hybrid warfare briefly outlined in this article could serve as an analytical framework for considering and assessing this breed of warfare and related strategies in current and future situations.

“War is more than a true chameleon that slightly adapts its characteristics to the given case. As a total phenomenon its dominant tendencies always make war a paradoxical trinity – composed of primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force; of the play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam; and of its elements of subordination, as an instrument of policy, which makes it subject to reason alone”. (Clausewitz (1832), *On War*, I, 1, p. 101)

¹¹ 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.

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