



On the concept of hybrid warfare

The term "hybrid warfare" was brought to public notice after Russia had seemingly effortlessly occupied the Crimean Peninsula of Ukraine during the spring of 2014. For the researchers and those interested in warfare the term is neither new nor does it describe any mind-boggling changes in the ways wars are being waged. Despite the experiences and researches from previous operations, western countries were surprised by the actions of the Russians. Neither the West nor Ukraine were prepared for the hybrid warfare.

This research bulletin of the Finnish Defence Research Agency's Concepts and Doctrine Division discusses the concept of hybrid warfare as seen from the US point of view. We will also provide a review of Russian warfare-related texts where "hybrid warfare" is somewhat illuminated, even though the concept is not widely used in official context in Russia.

Concept of hybrid warfare in the USA

The concept of hybrid warfare has been a subject of articles and research for several years in the US. During the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan it was deemed that the observed enemy activities required a different kind of approach for using armed forces.¹

In the US, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) examined in 2010 (1) whether the Department of Defense (DOD) has defined hybrid warfare and how hybrid warfare differs from other types of warfare and (2) the extent to which the DOD is considering the implications of hybrid warfare in its strategic planning documents.²

The GOA audit concluded that hybrid warfare is not an official term although it appeared in some planning documents of the DOD and its sub-organisations³. According to GOA, officials from the majority of the DOD organizations they visited agreed that **hybrid warfare encompasses all elements of warfare across the spectrum**. Therefore, to define hybrid warfare risks omitting key and unforeseen elements⁴.

Furthermore, the audit stated that the DOD has not formally defined hybrid warfare at this time and does not plan to do so because the DOD does not consider it a **new form of warfare**. Those interviewed in the audit had expressed that the term "hybrid" is more relevant to describe the increasing complexity of conflict that will require a highly adaptable and resilient response from U.S. forces rather than a new form of warfare.⁵

GAO analyzed the documentation of the DOD, the services and academic publications and came to conclusion that hybrid warfare blends conventional⁶ and irregular⁷ warfare approaches across the full spectrum of conflict.

While studying unofficial definitions GAO found, among others, the following examples:⁸

- *Hybrid warfare* – State or non-state activity that employs multiple modes of warfare: conventional capabilities, irregular tactics, and criminal disorder.
- *Hybrid threat* – An adversary that simultaneously and adaptively uses a combination of 1) political, military, economic, social and information means and 2) conventional, irregular, terrorism and disruptive/criminal conflict methods

Figure 1 depicts GAO's approach to hybrid warfare⁹:

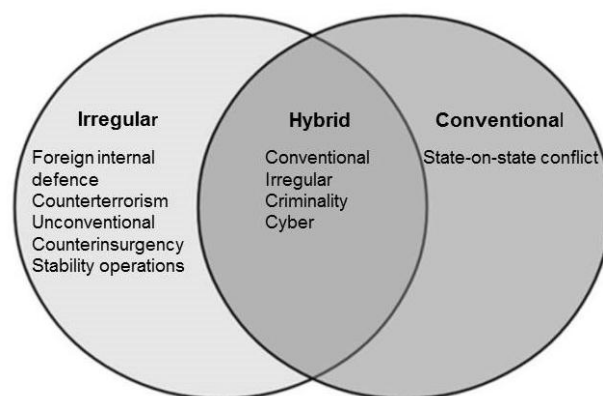


Figure 1. The hybrid warfare concept according to GAO.

In the Ukraine case, the Russian information activities utilized spreading of disinformation and distortion of facts by structuring alternative narratives and realities in cyber space. This was efficient especially among the Russian audience, which has no alternative information channels.¹⁰

Former US ambassador to Nato, Kurt Volker, has discussed Russian hybrid warfare and western chances for countermeasures in Ukraine in an interview with the Nato Review Magazine. According to Volker, Russia has been extremely successful in information warfare. Russia is going to use its special operation forces, intelligence capabilities, economic and energy-related oppression, cyber attacks, and threat of conventional arms to achieve its goals. To counter these, stronger measures are needed, says Volker¹¹.

To define it briefly, hybrid warfare can be seen as a combination of information warfare and mainly irregular warfare methods to achieve strategic goals¹². The borderline between war and peace is getting blurred.

¹ Mattis 2005; Huovinen 2011.

² GAO 2010.

³ Ibid, 2.

⁴ Ibid, 11.

⁵ Ibid, 15.

⁶ Conventional warfare is defined as a form of warfare between states that employs direct military confrontation to defeat an adversary's armed forces, destroy an adversary's war-making capacity, or seize or retain territory in order to force a change in an adversary's government or policies.

⁷ Irregular warfare is defined as a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s).

Irregular warfare favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capacities, in order to erode an adversary's power, influence, and will.

⁸ GAO 2010, 18.

⁹ Ibid, 16. – It should be noted that information environment was no yet emphasized in GAO's picture, even though it has been mentioned in the texts.

¹⁰ Šešelgytė 2014.

¹¹ Nato 2014. – "What creates de-escalation is a strong response that causes Russia to think twice about going any further, stabilises a tense situation and then allows it to de-escalate."

¹² Brown 2011, 20.



Hybrid warfare in Russian thinking

Official statements and military publications of the Ministry of Defence of Russia have not so far widely discussed the concept of hybrid warfare (гибридная война). The Russian Wikipedia article on hybrid warfare was published as late as in spring of 2014¹³. The Russian idea of war is still based on Marxist-Leninist interpretation of von Clausewitz's classic definition, which defines war as the continuation of politics by other, namely violent, means¹⁴. This principle has prevailed in Russia, only with a brief intermission during Gorbachev's perestroika¹⁵.

Today's Russian dictionaries and military manuals have preserved Lenin's definition of war almost word by word. According to these definitions war is a social and political phenomenon related to radical changes in relations between states and peoples. War means a transfer from non-military and non-violent methods to weapons and violence in order to achieve political and economic goals. According to dictionary definitions, armed force is the principal tool for warfare.¹⁶

A textbook published in 2009 by The Russian Presidential Academy *Военная политика Российской Федерации в условиях глобализации: учебное пособие (The Military Policy of the Russian Federation in the Conditions of Globalization)* states that increased interdependency has led to a situation where armed force, traditionally regarded as the main guarantee for state sovereignty, is nowadays just one method for crisis management¹⁷.

It has been suggested that the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, General of the Army Valery Gerasimov had described Russian hybrid warfare as early as in the winter of 2013 and he had even anticipated the methods used by Russians in Ukraine¹⁸.

The latter statement is probably somewhat exaggerated. The main topic of an article based on the speech Gerasimov gave in January 2013 in Academy of Military Science is the general transition of applied methods of war which requires preparedness from Russia. The highlights describing changes in warfare are, among others:

1. "Rules of war" have changed significantly, use of non-military means to achieve political and strategic goals has increased in such a manner that it has exceeded the use of weapons in some cases.
2. Methods used in struggles are political, economic, information-related, humanitarian, and other non-military means which are used by utilizing the population's potential for protest.
3. Goals will be achieved by using clandestine military operations, information confrontation, and special operations.
4. Visible military force is used in the form of peace-keeping and crisis management operations.
5. In addition to conventional ones, irregular methods are used as well.
6. The following trends will be enhanced in military operations: Formation of mobile task forces, common intelligence and information space, opportunities offered by new communication-and-control, and supporting equipment.

¹³ Пинчук, see also Wikipedia-ru. – Article added to Wikipedia on 26.4.2014.

¹⁴ von Clausewitz 1998, 27–28.

¹⁵ Jalonen 1990, 72–73, 76–81, 87.

¹⁶ SVE, part 2, 305, see also Рогозин 2004,

¹⁷ Лутовинов 2009, 23.

¹⁸ Goble 2014, see also Tikka 2014.

7. Military operations will become faster, more dynamic and active and they will be more effective.

8. There are no operative and tactical pauses between operations' active phases.

9. Communication and control equipment will bring the leadership and troops closer to each other.

10. Confrontations of large numbers of strategic and operative formations in frontline battles are history.

11. Contactless, long-distance impact without engaging the adversary will be the most important method for achieving goals in operations and battles.

12. Targets will be destroyed throughout the whole depth of adversary's area.

13. The differences between strategic, operative and tactical level will become blurred, as well as the difference between offensive and defensive actions.

14. Precision-guided weapons will be used widely.

15. Weapons based on new physical principles and autonomous actions will be commissioned to active duty.

According to Gerasimov, asymmetric operations are used widely. These are used to balance adversary's superiority in armed battle. These methods include special operations, use of internal opposition throughout the adversary's area as a permanent front and influencing with information.¹⁹ The illustration in the article discussing Gerasimov's speech gives an idea how Russians see the increase in importance of non-military actions (Figure 2) and changes in methods of warfare (Figure 3)

The Russian military doctrine of 2010 and especially its updated version of late 2014 describe how the methods of warfare have expanded and how the impact will be directed throughout the depth of the whole area in the beginning of section *special features of modern military conflict*²⁰.

According to a textbook of The Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA) there are some interests which are universally secured with armed forces. These include areas with resources, traffic routes, and junctions. Instead of straight-forward occupation and use of force, it is recommended to use indirect approaches and efforts to subdue the adversary to cooperation either by coercing or by letting the adversary to guide itself towards desired direction. When selecting armed options, the strategy is to avoid own losses and to take into account the interdependency of the fighting parties, and the vulnerability of the infrastructure. Success requires swift action and precise impact. Armament, equipment, usability and competence of the troops must support this; therefore a shift from mass armies towards professional armies is taking place.²¹

The change in the methods of warfare has not yet had influence on exercises and preparations of the Russian armed forces, at least in a visible manner. The main focus is still in the traditional show of military force and the preparedness to use it in joint military operations.

¹⁹ Герасимов 2013.

²⁰ Military Doctrine 2014, 15 § a, в, see also Military Doctrine 2010, 12 § a, в, – "Integrated use of Armed Forces and political, economic, information and other non-military activities together with exploitation of population's protest mentality and the use of special operation forces." and "Influencing the adversary throughout the entire depth of its territory and concurrently in global information space, air space, in space and on land and on sea".

²¹ Лутовинов 2009, 24–25.

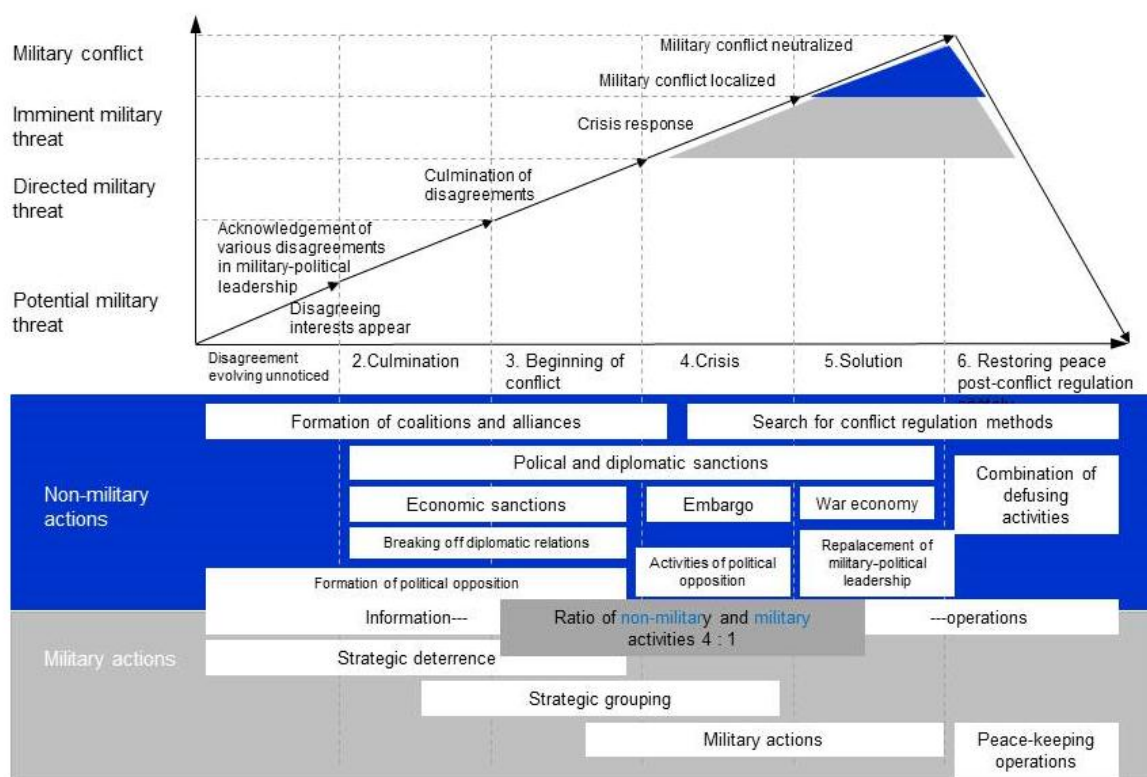


Figure 2. Non-military methods in escalation of international conflicts. Source: Gerasimov 2013.

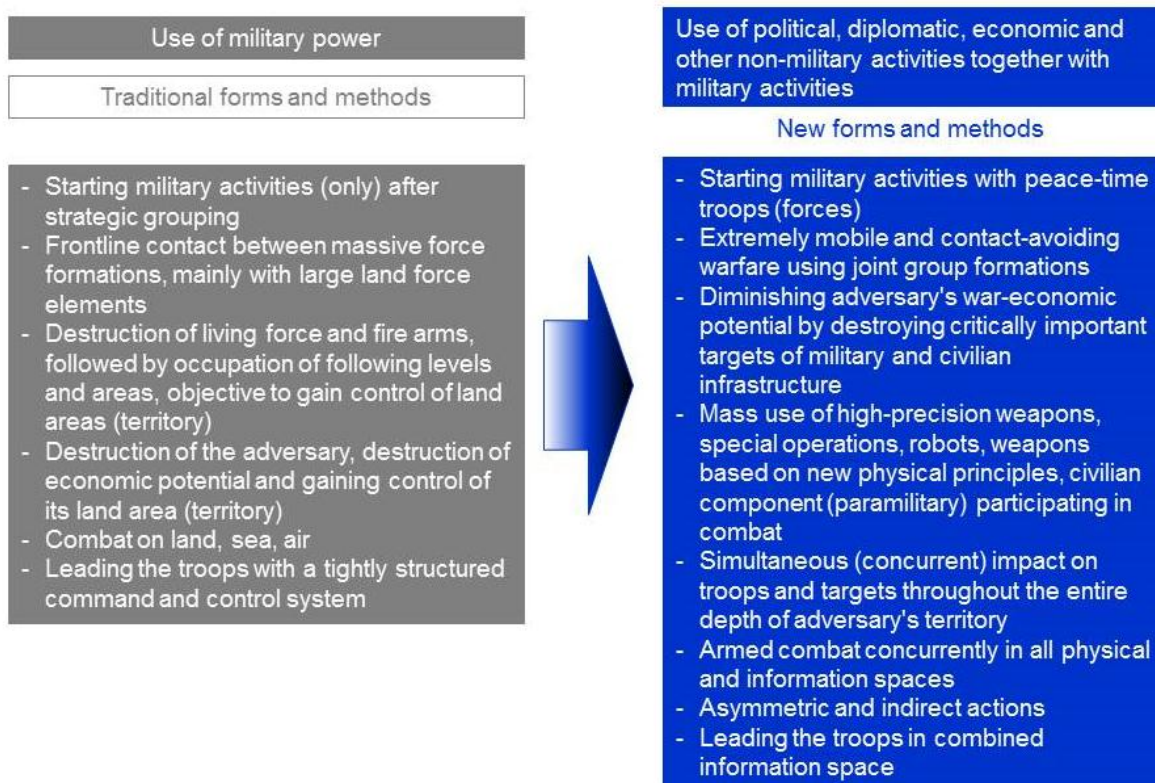


Figure 3. Evolution of armed conflicts. Source: Gerasimov 2013.



The background for Gerasimov's speech and articles on the progress of Russian art of war is in long-term research of military science, which started in the beginning of last decade and has mainly focused on post-cold-war military operations conducted by the US and Nato. In Russian context, the transitional trend in warfare is seen as a general global phenomenon, not as much as a Russian action plan for the future. Most of the military capabilities presented in Gerasimov's list are still in process of being adapted by the Russian Armed Forces.

Hybrid warfare in the Crimean Peninsula

In Russia, the Crimean occupation operation and Russia's military actions in East Ukraine have not yet been discussed in military publications of the Ministry of Defence. The strict and cautious editorial policy with preliminary selection of the article contents being published yearly is naturally based on the fact that these actions are not even officially acknowledged. Retired officers have published some estimations regarding the Crimean operation.

Colonel (ret) Viktor Murakhovsky agrees with President Vladimir Putin's estimation on Crimean events in his article *Crimean operation – a visible proof of the new quality standards of Russian Armed Forces*. President Putin's analysis is that the Crimean events displayed new qualitative possibilities and high moral standards of the personnel.²²

According to Murakhovsky the Russian political leadership made the decision to commence the Crimean operation in a situation that had evolved. The operation was planned and executed in real time. The order of battle of the troops and equipment directed to the operation was not formed in the same way as in conventional warfare. Compared to the time and space, the mobilization of formations was scattered and no field-deployed command echelons were used to lead the force. Operation's vanguard consisted of detachments of special operations force brigade, reconnaissance elements of airborne and marine troops, air-lift, and navy. These took hold of the key locations, conducted reconnaissance and secured the entry for the main body of forces. The operation was supported by electronic warfare and both operational and tactical military deception.²³

While analyzing the situation and the given mission, the Russian military experts had to, in addition to the potential of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, take into account the likelihood of Ukraine's Right Sector militia entering Crimea. Deployed Russian soldiers were given strict rules for respectful treatment on the Ukrainian soldiers and national symbols. According to Murakhovsky, the Ukrainian soldiers estimated the situation correctly and refrained from using weapons.²⁴

Ukrainians' submission to Russians' "polite" actions during the occupation of Crimea corresponds to the method recommended by Lutovinov where the adversary's will to resist is eliminated either by coercing or by persuading him to self-motivated cooperation or giving up resistance.

Adjacent activities on information and cyber space as well as in legislation and politics supported the Crimean operation and were willingly accepted by the majority of the population in Crimea

and Russia. In practice, Russians were implementing the concept of *Full Spectrum Operations* developed in the West.²⁵

According to Murakhovsky, Russia was able to break the coherent information front of the media and state actors in leading western countries and a blatant cognitive dissonance erupted between actuality and government officials' perception of the situation.²⁶

Discussion

Hybrid warfare with its wide spectrum of methods can be utilized most efficiently by a state where strategic decision making is centralized under one uniform, possibly totalitarian, leadership and which itself does not have any self-imposed restrictions to use force.

Most prone to the effects of hybrid warfare are especially collapsed or nearly-collapsed states in which the populations are divided into conflicting factions due to ethnic, economic or religious grounds. In addition to this, states constrained by either announced or unannounced restrictions regarding decision-making in security policy must be aware that a determined and ruthless actor may be able to influence their free selection of security options. If critical actors in a state's safety and security sector do not share a common situational awareness and understanding, an aggressor will be able to paralyze their decision-making with deception and rapid changes in influencing methods. Self-imposed constraints in security-political decision making will give the aggressor a chance to reach military, political or economic goals without using force.

Countering the wide spectrum of methods offered by hybrid warfare requires common understanding on how to protect decision-making and functions critical for society's comprehensive security among state leadership, authorities and business life. This goal is ideally achieved by sharing a common situational awareness, developing strategies and procedures, and exercising.

The concept of hybrid warfare does not rule out any previous methods for achieving military, political or economic goals. Even though the list of methods is getting longer, this does not render the use of military force obsolete.

Authors

Lt Col (GS), PhD, Military Science, Petteri Lalu – Chief Scientist, Finnish Defence Research Agency, Doctrine and Concepts Division.

Cdr (GS) Juha Puistola – Research Manager, Finnish Defence Research Agency, Doctrine and Concepts Division.

Translation from a Finnish original – MA Antti Hujala, Finnish Defence Research Agency, Doctrine and Concepts Division.

²² Мураховский 2014.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, see also FM-3.0, C1, chapter 3.

²⁶ Мураховский 2014.



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²⁷ The January 2015 article in *Krasnaja Zvezda*, a magazine of the Russian Armed Forces, covers a meeting of the Western Military District commanders. The agenda of the meeting focused on commanding the troops in hybrid- and network- centric warfare. The HQ of the Western Military District defined hybrid warfare as "a military strategy combining conventional and partisan warfare (Russian *малая война, small war*) and cyber attacks directed towards technical structures of a state and its citizens."