

CICERO FOUNDATION GREAT DEBATE PAPER

No. 17/05

*July 2017*

---

# THE DANGER OF “RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE”

**DR. OFER FRIDMAN**

*King's Centre for Strategic Communications*

*Department of War Studies*

*King's College, London*

Cicero Foundation Great Debate Paper No. 17/05

© Ofer Fridman, 2017

All rights reserved

The Cicero Foundation is an independent pro-Atlantic and pro-EU think tank.

Founded in Maastricht in 1992 at the signing of the Maastricht Treaty.

[www.cicerofoundation.org](http://www.cicerofoundation.org)

The views expressed in Cicero Foundation Great Debate Papers do not necessarily express the opinion of the Cicero Foundation, but they are considered interesting and thought-provoking enough to be published. Permission to make digital or hard copies of any information contained in these web publications is granted for personal use, without fee and without formal request. Full citation and copyright notice must appear on the first page. Copies may not be made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage.

# THE DANGER OF “RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE”

Ofer Fridman

## INTRODUCTION

During the last decade, Hybrid Warfare has become a much-evoked, yet controversial, term in the academic, military and political discourses. This paper argues that from a military tactical-operational concept intended to describe the evolving reality of the battlefield in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the idea of ‘Russian Hybrid War’ has become a panacea to the identity crisis that the West (especially NATO, as its military alliance) has experienced since the end of the Cold War. This paper aims to trace the development of the contemporary definition of the so-called ‘Russian Hybrid Warfare’ focusing on several important aspects that have been shaping the conceptual understanding of this term and its political usage.

First, the paper focuses on the conceptual development of the theory of hybrid warfare, as it was originally conceptualised in the US military. Secondly, it traces the reconceptualization process that occurred to the idea of hybrid warfare in the West after the beginning of the Ukrainian Crisis in 2014, trying to explain the popularity of the term ‘Russian Hybrid Warfare’ in the Western discourse, despite its conceptual ambiguity and impracticability. Finally, the paper points to an unhelpful politicisation of Russian actions in the Western political and military discourses and its role in the relations between Russia and the West.

## THE RISE OF ‘HYBRID WARFARE’

The popularisation of the term ‘Hybrid Warfare’ can be attributed to American military theorist Frank Hoffman, who, in his famous *Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, made an attempt to conceptualise the evolution of the battlefield environment that transcends the commonly accepted linear division between regular and irregular types of warfare.<sup>1</sup> Analysing different theoretical concepts of warfare produced in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and

---

<sup>1</sup> Hoffman, Frank, *Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Rise of Hybrid Warfare*, (Arlington: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007).

projecting them onto the Israeli experience with Hezbollah in Lebanon in 2006, Hoffman argued that:

“The blurring of modes of war, the blurring who fights, and what technologies are brought to bear, produces a wide range of variety and complexity that we call Hybrid Warfare.”<sup>2</sup>

As a result of this analysis, Hoffman articulated his theory of hybrid warfare, stating that:

“[Hybrid War] incorporates 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>3</sup>

Following Hoffman’s conceptualisation, the theory of hybrid warfare had become very popular within American military circles attracting many followers, as well as opponents. On the one hand, the group of the authors, who adopted hybrid warfare as a prism of analysis, included Steven Williamson, Margaret Bond, Daniel Lasica, Timothy McCulloh, Richard Jonson and many others.<sup>4</sup> On the other, Hoffman’s ideas also attracted much criticism. For example, Williamson Murray argued that:

“Despite the surprise that the events in Lebanon elicited in the American defence community, the historical record suggests that hybrid warfare in one form or another may well be the norm for human conflict, rather than exception.”<sup>5</sup>

Dan Cox, with several co-authors, claimed that:

“The concept of hybrid threats (or hybrid warfare), as defined by its main proponents, is indeed unclear, incomplete, and often unhelpful. [As] by arguing

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> Williamson, Steven, *From Fourth Generation Warfare to Hybrid War*, (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 2009); Bond, Margaret, *Hybrid War: A New Paradigm for Stability Operations in Failing States*, (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 2007); Lasica, Daniel, *Strategic Implications of Hybrid War: A Theory of Victory*, (Fort Leavenworth: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2009); McCulloh, Timothy and Richard Johnson, *Hybrid Warfare*, (MacDill Air Force Base: The Joint Special Operations University Press, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Murray, Williamson, ‘Conclusions: What the Past suggests’, in Murray and Mansoor, (eds), *Hybrid Warfare*, p. 290.

that individual units (or even separate but aligned units) can somehow simultaneously (or easily and quickly) switch back and forth between conventional, irregular, and criminal activities elevates the enemy to mystical status.”<sup>6</sup>

And Robert Mihara stated that:

“[Hybrid] threat-based approach makes eminent sense in prioritizing initiatives for developing operational doctrine or in campaign planning, but it makes far less sense when promulgating a strategic plan for an Army institution that is posturing itself for the long term.”<sup>7</sup>

While there is no doubt that Hoffman’s conceptualisation suffered from certain ambiguity, in the defence of the novelty of his idea, it might be argued that the differences in the equipment, weapons, training and skills between contemporary regular and irregular forces are significantly bigger than they used to be in the past, and therefore their mix creates a truly new tactical-operational environment. Moreover, his concept has never pretended to have strategic nature, since his purpose, as Hoffman put it by himself, has always been to “educate ourselves about how to better prepare for that messy grey phenomenon and avoid the Groznys, Mogadishus and Bint-Jbeils of our future.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, hybrid warfare, in its original interpretation, was a tactical-operational concept intended to improve the performance of the military units on the complex battlefield environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## THE RISE OF ‘RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE’

Either as a result of the described criticism of the ‘a-strategic’ nature of Hoffman’s theory, or as a part of the natural development of any voguish concept, the theory of hybrid

---

<sup>6</sup> Cox, Dan, Brusolino, Thomas and Alex Ryan, ‘Why Hybrid Warfare is Tactics Not Strategy: A Rejoinder to “Future Threats and Strategic Thinking”’, *Infinity Journal*, Volume 2, Issue 2, Spring 2012, pp. 25-26.

<sup>7</sup> Mihara, Robert, ‘Beyond Future Threats: A Business Alternative to Threat-based Strategic Planning’, *Infinity Journal*, Volume 2, Issue 3, Summer 2012, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Hoffman, Frank, ‘Hybrid vs. Compound Wars’, *Armed Forces Journal*, October 2009, p. 2.

warfare was reconceptualised, encompassing additional dimensions that were lacking in the original concept. The first comprehensive attempt to reconceptualise hybrid warfare was done by NATO in 2010 in its *Bi-Strategic Command Capstone Concept*, which stated that:

“Hybrid threats are those posed by adversaries, with the ability to simultaneously employ conventional and non-conventional means adaptively in pursuit of their objectives ... Hybrid threats are comprised of, and operate across, multiple systems/subsystems (including economic/financial, legal, political, social and military/security) simultaneously.”<sup>9</sup>

While this definition of hybridity was significantly broader than the original one and it encompassed “a wide variety of existing adverse circumstances and actions, such as terrorism, migration, piracy, corruption, ethnic conflict, and so forth” allowing NATO to face “the adaptive and systematic use of such means singularly and in combination by adversaries in pursuit of long-term political objectives;”<sup>10</sup> the concept did not flourish. Despite the initial enthusiasm and the productive debate, due to an absence of political willingness among NATO’s members to invest resources in developing capabilities required to meet hybrid threats, in 2012 NATO decided to halt its work on hybrid warfare.<sup>11</sup>

This situation cardinally changed in 2014, after the beginning of the Ukrainian Crisis. The Russian reaction in Crimea and eastern Ukraine surprised the Western community, in general, and NATO, in particular. In January 2014, Heidi Reisinger, from the NATO Defence College, assessed that:

“Many years of continual reform, underfunding, and the devastating effects of demographic trends have led the Russian armed forces to a situation where

---

<sup>9</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, *BI-SC Input to a NEW Capstone Concept for the Military Contribution to Countering Hybrid Threats*, Brussels, 2010, pp. 2-3.

<sup>10</sup> Aaronson, Michael, et al., ‘NATO Countering the Hybrid Threat’, *Prism*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 2011, p. 115.

<sup>11</sup> Bachmann, Sascha-Dominik and Håkan Gunneriusson, ‘Hybrid Wars: The 21st-Century’s New Threats to Global Peace and Security’, *Scientia Militaria, South African Journal of Military Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 1, 2015, p. 79.

even senior military personnel raises doubts about the ability to provide national defence without tactical nuclear weapons...”<sup>12</sup>

Then, just 10 months later, Reisinger’s assessment entirely changed, as, according to her, Russian actions “have been effective and sometimes surprising mix of military and non-military, conventional and irregular components, and can include all kinds of instruments such as cyber and information operations.”<sup>13</sup>

In the past several years, many researchers have outlined the fact that since the beginning of the Ukrainian Crisis in 2014 the analyses and commentaries on the concept of hybrid warfare, in the context of the Russian reaction to the crisis, have increased exponentially.<sup>14</sup> While in analysing the vast amount of literature produced on the topic it is easy to identify works from Scandinavian<sup>15</sup> and Baltic states,<sup>16</sup> the UK,<sup>17</sup> the US<sup>18</sup> and other Western

---

<sup>12</sup> Reisinger, Heidi, ‘Does Russia Matter? Purely Political Relations Are Not Enough in Operational Times’, *NDC Conference Report*, NATO Defence College, Rome, 31 January 2014, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Reisinger, Heidi and Aleksandr Golts, ‘Russian Hybrid Warfare: Waging War below the Radar of Traditional Collective Defence’, *Research Paper*, No. 105, NATO Defence College, Rome, November 2014, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> For example: Wither, James, ‘Making Sense of Hybrid Warfare’, *Connections: The Quarterly Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2016, pp. 73-87; Monaghan, Andrew, ‘The ‘War’ in Russia’s ‘Hybrid Warfare’’, *Parameters*, Vol. 45, No. 4, Winter 2015-16, pp. 65-74; Renz, Bettina, ‘Russia and ‘Hybrid Warfare’’, *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 2016, pp. 283-300.

<sup>15</sup> For example: Rácz, András, ‘Russia’s Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy’s Ability to Resist’, *FIFA Report*, No. 43, June 2015; Finnish Defence Research Agency (FDRA), ‘On the Concept of Hybrid Warfare’, *Research Bulletin*, No. 1, 2015; Cederberg, Aapo and Pasi Eronen, ‘How Can Societies Be Defended against Hybrid Threats?’, *Strategic Security Analysis*, No. 9, September 2015.

<sup>16</sup> For example: Hunter, Eve and Piret Penik, ‘The Challenges of Hybrid Warfare’, *International Centre for Defence and Security*, Tallinn, April 2015; Maigre, Merle, ‘Nothing New in Hybrid Warfare: The Estonian Experience and Recommendations for NATO’, *Policy Brief*, German Marshall Fund of the United States, February 2015; Berzins, Janis, ‘Russia’s New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defense’, *Policy Paper*, No. 2, National Defence Academy of Latvia, Centre for Security and Strategic Research, April 2014.

<sup>17</sup> For example: ‘Editor’s Introduction: Complex Crises Call for Adaptable and Durable Capabilities’, *The Military Balance*, Vol. 115, No. 1, 2015; Charap, Samuel, ‘The Ghost of Hybrid War’, *Survival*, Vol. 57, No. 6, December 2015–January 2016, pp. 51-58.

<sup>18</sup> For example: Kofman, Michael and Matthew Rojansky, ‘A Closer Look at Russia’s “Hybrid War”’, *Kennan Cable*, No. 7, April 2015; Neville, Seth, ‘Russia and Hybrid Warfare: Identifying Critical Elements in Successful

countries, it seems right to argue that the institution leading the discourse in this period was NATO. In addition to a vast amount of research produced by NATO experts on the topic of 'Russian Hybrid Warfare',<sup>19</sup> NATO also organised several high-profile conferences on the topic, such as 'NATO's Response to Hybrid Threat' that was organised by the NATO Defence College in April 2015 and was described as "its largest-ever academic conference;"<sup>20</sup> or 'Countering Hybrid Threats: Lessons Learned from Ukraine', the NATO Advance Research Workshop that took place in Bucharest on 28-29 September 2015.<sup>21</sup>

While the idea of 'Russian Hybrid Warfare' was spreading like a bushfire across NATO, there were several scholars, who questioned the relevance of the concept to the Russian case. For example, discussing the application of the theory on Russian actions in Ukraine, Bettina Renz and Hanna Smith argued that:

"'Hybrid warfare' does not adequately reflect the content and direction of Russian military modernization ... [it] understates Russian ambitions and overestimates Russian capabilities at the same time. "Hybrid warfare" oversimplifies Russian international politics/foreign policy, which is more complex than the label implies ... [and it] tells us nothing about Russian goals or intentions and mistakenly implies that Russian foreign policy is driven by a global 'grand strategy'".<sup>22</sup>

---

Applications of Hybrid Tactics', (Monterey: Naval Postgraduate School, 2015); Bartkowski, Maciej, 'Nonviolent Civilian Defense to Counter Russian Hybrid Warfare', The Johns Hopkins University Center for Advanced Governmental Studies, March 2015.

<sup>19</sup> 'Research Publications', NATO Defence College, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/research/research.php?icode=0>, [accessed: 5 July 2017].

<sup>20</sup> Lasconjarias, Guillaume and Jeffrey Larsen, (eds), *NATO's Response to Hybrid Threats*, (Rome: NATO Defence College, 2015), p. XXVII.

<sup>21</sup> Iancu, Niculae, et. al, (eds), *Countering Hybrid Threats: Lessons Learned from Ukraine*, (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> Renz, Bettina and Hanna Smith, (eds), 'After 'Hybrid Warfare', What Next? – Understanding and Responding to Contemporary Russia', Publications of the Government's analysis, assessment and research activities 44/2016, Helsinki, 2016, pp. 8-9.



Dima Adamsky claimed that:

“When exploring the theory and practice of Russian operational art, terminology matters ... Applying the Western conceptual HW [Hybrid Warfare] framework to explain Russian operational art, without examining Russian references to this term, isolating it from Russian ideational context, and without contrasting it with what Russians think about themselves and others, may lead to misperceptions.”<sup>23</sup>

And Michael Kofman stated that:

“Today’s conversation on Russia’s use of hybrid warfare has become a discourse on something more arcane, resembling black magic. Generalisations about “Russian hybrid warfare” are not only unhelpful, but are becoming a cliché.”<sup>24</sup>

On the one hand, these works, based on in-depth theoretical and historical analysis, were the early warnings of conceptual dissonance between the theory of hybrid warfare and its application on the Kremlin’s actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. On the other, they were only a drop in the ocean of an overwhelming discourse in favour of the idea that Russia has been waging a hybrid war.

#### ‘RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE’ AND THE WEST’S IDENTITY CRISIS

The Kremlin’s reaction to the Ukrainian Crisis not only took the West by surprise, it also created a conceptual puzzle to Western military affairs experts. In other words, the Western community was surprised not only by what the Russians did in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, but also by how they did it, as their actions did not fit any of the Western conceptual boxes regarding contemporary conflicts. Since history teaches that people tend to fear an unknown that they struggle to understand or explain, especially when it comes

---

<sup>23</sup> Adamsky, Dima, ‘Cross-Domain Coercion: The Current Russian Art of Strategy’, *Proliferation Papers*, No. 54, November 2015, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> Kofman, Michael, ‘Russian Hybrid Warfare and Other Dark Arts’, *War on the Rocks*, 11 March 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/03/russian-hybrid-warfare-and-other-dark-arts/>, [accessed: 5 July 2017].

accompanied with the 'historical baggage' the West carries against Russia, it is not surprising that the Western quest to solve the conceptual puzzle of Russian actions has been quickly politicised, promoting different agendas of groups that shaped and directed this same discourse.

While it is possible to point to several major actors that have been politicising the idea of 'Russian Hybrid Warfare', it seems right to argue that NATO in general, and its eastern members in particular, played one of the most crucial roles in this process. Analysing NATO's political discourse after the end of the Cold War, Andreas Behnke argued that:

"The continued existence and relevance of NATO is to a significant extent contingent upon the Alliance's capacity to construct and maintain a cultural space called 'the West' which provides its member-states with a common identity and purpose."<sup>25</sup>

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact removed NATO's main adversary creating an anxious debate on the very purpose of the Alliance and its future. Though NATO's involvement in Afghanistan wound up the Alliance's purposefulness, it did not solve the problem of its inherent identity as the defender of the West and its values. Since the so-called Global War on Terror was not about particular values or norms that NATO was established to defend, but about a universal sense of stability and resilience, it seems that the Alliance's participation in this struggle only increased its identity crisis, rather than solved it.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the economic crisis that struck Western economies at the end of the 2000s even enhanced the sense of insecurity among NATO's leadership, as a research conducted by the RAND Corporation in 2012 claimed:

"Financial and economic constraints are redefining NATO's ability to provide security in the coming decade. NATO faces more than a simple, short-term budget squeeze: It is confronted with a secular trend that will have a serious

---

<sup>25</sup> Behnke, Andreas, *NATO's Security Discourse after the Cold War*, (London: Routledge, 2013), p.3.

<sup>26</sup> Rynning, Sten, *NATO in Afghanistan: The Liberal Disconnect*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), Behnke, *NATO's Security Discourse*, Chapter 10.

impact on NATO Europe's ability to deploy and sustain power over long distances."<sup>27</sup>

In this context of prolonged identity crisis and increasing economic austerity, the rhetoric revival of the Russian threat has appeared very convenient to NATO's leadership. Conceptualising and politicising Russian actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine as a new hybrid threat that endangers 'the West' by compromising its democratic values has served NATO in three major ways. The first was a revival of the concept of 'Hybrid Warfare' itself that forced NATO's member-states to commit previously denied resources. For example, one of the results of this revival was the establishment of the NATO Strategic Communication Centre of Excellence in Riga, as the *Wales Summit Declaration* stated:

"We will ensure that NATO is able to effectively address the specific challenges posed by hybrid warfare threats [and therefore] we welcome the establishment of the NATO-accredited Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Latvia as a meaningful contribution to NATO's efforts in this area."<sup>28</sup>

The second reason why the idea of Russian 'Hybrid Warfare' was so rapidly politicised by NATO is the fact that it perfectly suited the Alliance's inherent identity as the main defender of Western values. The narrative of the Kremlin's comeback as a threat to these values has been the panacea to NATO's 25-years-old crisis of identity, as Michael Kofman put it:

"Individually, Western countries are knowledgeable about the extent of Russian political influence in their respective nations; but collectively the West has chosen to speak in narratives, and paint a caricature of how Moscow uses its instruments of national power. That is understandable as a part of an effort to motivate NATO, raise alliance awareness, and reassure vulnerable members."<sup>29</sup>

This leads to the third reason of this politicisation – NATO's eastern members, which have been the most vocal voices in this process of redefining Russian actions, as a new threat

---

<sup>27</sup> Larrabee, Stephen, *NATO and the Challenges of Austerity*, (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2012), p. 95.

<sup>28</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, *Wales Summit Declaration: Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales from 4 to 5 September 2014*, 5 September, 2014, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Kofman, 'Russian Hybrid Warfare and Other Dark Arts'.

posed to the security and integrity of the whole Western world. On the one hand, due to the genuine traditional historical fear from their powerful eastern neighbour, political and military experts from these countries tried to attract attention and get protection from their more powerful allies in the West. On the other, by politicising 'Russian Hybrid Warfare' as the main threat to Western values, it seems that these countries have been trying to get access to financial and military support, thus improving not only their traditional military power, but also enforcing their political legitimacy. For example, Estonia and Latvia, containing large Russian speaking minorities, have been concerned with the threat of the Kremlin's propaganda long before the beginning of the Ukrainian Crisis, traditionally describing the potential Russian subversion of their own current political establishment as a "coup attack".<sup>30</sup>

In other words, as Lithuanian president, Dalia Grybauskaitė, put it, NATO is an "insurance policy" that "does not mean you will get sick, but it is better to have it",<sup>31</sup> and therefore it should protect from any irredentist actions Moscow may implement, directly or indirectly. While the ability of NATO to protect its Baltic members in the event of Russian conventional offence is doubtful,<sup>32</sup> the narrative of NATO's eastern flank's vulnerability to overt or covert Russian actions has been serving the purposes of both the Alliance, as a whole, and its eastern members. On the one hand, NATO used this narrative to establish the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) as an answer to the new challenges "that arise, particularly at the periphery of NATO's territory", thus enhancing the political and economic commitment among its members "to act together and decisively to defend freedom and our shared values of individual liberty, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law".<sup>33</sup> On the other, from the perspective of the Baltic states, a permanent presence of NATO forces on

---

<sup>30</sup> Männik, Erik, 'Small States: Invited to NATO—Able to Contribute?', *Defense & Security Analysis*, Vol. 20, No.1, 2004, p. 29; See also: Szulda, Robert and Marek Madej, (eds), *Newcomers No More?: Contemporary NATO and the Future of Enlargement from the Perspective of "Post-Cold War" Members*, (Warsaw: International Relations Research Institute, 2015).

<sup>31</sup> Grybauskaitė, Dalia, quoted in Adomaitis, Nerijus, 'Lithuania Awaits NATO "Insurance Plan" on Russia', *Reuters*, 11 March 2010, <http://in.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-46841820100311>, [accessed: 5 July 2017].

<sup>32</sup> Shlapak, David and Michael Johnson, 'Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: War-gaming the Defence of the Baltics', *Report*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, *Wales Summit Declaration*, pp. 1-2.

this territory offers an evidence of the promised “insurance”, thus enforcing the current political establishments in the eyes of their own populations. Whether VJTF is able to prevent, or even deter, Russian non-military activities in these states, such as information and cyber operations, is a completely different story.

#### ‘RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE’ – AN UNHELPFUL CONCEPTUALISATION

Before starting the analysis of the usefulness of conceptualisation of Russian actions as hybrid warfare, it is important to emphasise that an integral part of the debate (at least in academic and professional communities) was a genuine attempt to understand the complex combination of military and non-military means and methods employed by the Kremlin in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. And it will be difficult to disagree with Mark Galeotti, who claims that “it would be naïve to consider today’s Russia as a purely peaceable, defensive power.”<sup>34</sup> While it seems right to assume that the Kremlin neither seeks an open military confrontation with the West, nor believes that NATO presents a military threat,<sup>35</sup> it seems also reasonable to assume that Russia does employ a set of certain means and methods, in an attempt to “neutralise potential military risks and military threats through political, diplomatic and other non-military means.”<sup>36</sup> The main question, however, is to what degree the concept of hybrid war helps us to understand Russian actions?

The analysis of the discourse on hybrid warfare since its beginning in the mid-2000s and until today shows that, in fact, the relation between the original ‘Hybrid Warfare’ and the ‘Russian Hybrid Warfare’ is very ambiguous, if not to say accidental. While the former was a theory of warfare intended to describe the changing nature of contemporary conflicts, focusing on tactical and operational levels, the latter adopted the broadest possible

---

<sup>34</sup> Galeotti, Mark, *Hybrid War or Gibrinaya Voina? – Getting Russia’ Non-Linear Military Challenge Right*, (Prague: Mayak Intelligence, 2016), p. 25.

<sup>35</sup> Russian military doctrine does not define NATO is a military threat. Instead, it defines “bringing the military infrastructure of NATO member countries near the borders of the Russian Federation” as a “military risk” that “can lead to a military threat under certain conditions.” See Presidential Decree, *The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, Moscow, 25 December 2014, (Russian).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

definition of hybridity in international relations, defining it as “a complex blend of means that includes the orchestration of diplomacy, political interaction, humanitarian aid, social pressures, economic development, savvy use of the media, and military force.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, there are two different interpretations of hybrid warfare that dominate Western contemporary academic and professional discourses: the original definition of hybrid warfare that implies a combination of conventional and irregular means and methods on the battlefield; and the so-called ‘Russian Hybrid Warfare’ that includes any possible combination of hostile activities (military and non-military).

On the one hand, this all-inclusiveness of ‘Russian Hybrid Warfare’ easily explains why the term ‘hybrid war’ has been so quickly and successfully politicised, as it allows bringing any hostile action under the same conceptual umbrella, creating a continuity of a unified political message and allowing different internal political players to close the ranks against an external threat. On the other, it is important to emphasise the “dangerous misuse of the word ‘war’,”<sup>38</sup> when describing something that does not involve armed confrontations.

An extension of the phenomenon of war on any possible combination of political confrontation is a dangerous exercise, which might be useful for political reasons, but it is also very confusing for the military. Any military organisation, by its very definition, builds and prepares itself to win wars, i.e., to compel the enemy through an act of force, and, therefore, conceptualisations of non-military confrontations as wars perplex the military leadership, simply because most of the required actions and counter-actions do not fall under military responsibility. For example, this is why NATO has been trying to counter-measure ‘Russian Hybrid Warfare’ in the Baltic States and in eastern Europe (which is anything but conventional military actions) by deploying conventional forces into these states (VJTF) - because as a military alliance, it can employ only military means and methods, even when facing a non-military challenge by its nature. In other words, while Russian actions are indeed ‘hybrid’ (in a broadest and most ambiguous sense of this word), they hardly fall under the definition of ‘war’, and any attempt to call them as such is a very

---

<sup>37</sup> Joint Irregular Warfare Center, *Irregular Adversaries and Hybrid Threats, An Assessment-2011*, Norfolk, 2011, p. 24.

<sup>38</sup> Samuel Charap, ‘The Ghost of Hybrid War’, *Survival*, Vol. 57(6), 2015/16, p. 52.

dangerous and irresponsible politicisation of a very serious and highly undesirable phenomenon.

#### CONCLUSIONS: 'RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE' – REINVENTING THE COLD WAR?

There is a very thin line between the perception of the reality and the reality itself, and since language is the only way to describe them both, it also serves as a way to cross this line. Without falling into Foucauldian patterns of interpretation, it is difficult to escape the fact that certain political players have been benefiting from the ongoing discourse of hostility. On the one hand, NATO member-states constantly repeat their claims that they do not want a repetition of the Cold War scenario. On the other, it seems that they talk themselves into it, as in analysing their language used to describe the reality (or the perceptions thereof), it is difficult not to notice that a new title ('Hybrid War') does not really change its nature. Without a doubt, today's confrontations are very different from what the world experienced during the Cold War; but then, the Second World War was very different from the First one: the weapons were more destructive, the tactics were more sophisticated and the outcomes were more devastating. And, yet, the nature of the First World War and the Second were very similar, as they both were total wars fought, by more or less, the same parties.

Before politicising 'war' between Russia and the West, it is important to remember that the previous attempt to call not-exactly-war a war, led to the Cold War, which was not only a nuclear stand-off with the U.S.S.R., but also a period in Western history that was enormously expensive, both financially and politically, and extremely destabilising for the rest of the world.<sup>39</sup> In its relations with Russia, the West has to understand that the world needs a wind of change, but not the one that the Scorpions sang about, as it created an unhelpful euphoria in the West and even less helpful taste of humiliation in Russia. The world needs a wind of change that brings forth mutual respect and understanding, ability to

---

<sup>39</sup> Charap, Samuel and Jeremy Shapiro, 'Consequences of a New Cold War', *Survival*, Vol. 57, No. 2, 2015, pp. 37-46.

take responsibility for previous mistakes and readiness to compromise. Only such a wind would eliminate the need for a future Scorpions to sing again in several decades.

\* \* \* \* \*

**This paper is based on the forthcoming book: Fridman, Ofer, *Russian 'Hybrid Warfare': Resurgence and Politicisation*, (London: H C Hurst & Co, 2017).**

Dr Ofer Fridman  
King's Centre for Strategic Communications  
Department of War Studies  
King's College London  
[ofer.fridman@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:ofer.fridman@kcl.ac.uk)

---

## **The Cicero Foundation**

**Independent Pro-EU and Pro-Atlantic Think Tank Founded in 1992**

Hondertmarck 45D  
6211 MB MAASTRICHT  
The Netherlands  
Tel. +31 43 32 60 828  
Tel. +33 1 41 29 09 30  
Fax: +33 1 41 29 09 31

Email: [info@cicerofoundation.org](mailto:info@cicerofoundation.org)

Website: [www.cicerofoundation.org](http://www.cicerofoundation.org)

Registration No. Chamber of Commerce Maastricht 41078444