

# THE EVOLUTION OF EUROPEAN PERCEPTION OF THE TERM „HYBRID WARFARE“\*

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The emergence and use of the term „hybrid warfare“ is related to the efforts of the US military analysts to explain the changes in the physiognomy of war, as well as the practical problems of the US Armed Forces on the ground as a result of these changes. A wider debate within American (Western) military circles on the inefficiency of Western conventional power in asymmetric conflicts at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been caused by the combined use of conventional and irregular methods of warfare by the Taliban, Al Qaeda and Hezbollah. In this situation, the term „hybrid warfare“ has provided an explanation for the asymmetric concept of warfare on which Western military forces did not have an adequate response. The theory of „hybrid warfare“ was established in 2007, and its essence indicated the combined use of violent methods by non-state actors. Since the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, the perception of the concept of „hybrid warfare“ has been considerably changing and expanding. In addition to violent methods, the concept has also included non-violent methods such as economic, diplomatic, political, information methods, etc. Moreover, non-state actors were no longer in the focus of the concept, and states have become the main stakeholders of hybrid activities. Thus, the term „hybrid warfare“ comes out of narrow military considerations and gets wider political and media attention. In this paper, the authors have tried to identify and explain the reasons that led to the change of the perception of the term “hybrid war” after the Ukrainian crisis, despite the evolution of the meaning of the term, from the non-state to the state-centric concept of warfare. In order to achieve this goal, the authors have set the European perception of Russian involvement in the Ukrainian crisis in the focus of their consideration.

*Key Words: hybrid warfare, non-state approach, state-centric approach, Europe, Russian Federation, Ukrainian crisis*

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## Introduction

After the Cold War, a new security agenda has been established all over the world. At that point of time, European security was mostly discussed in the terms such as peacekeeping, counter-terrorism and, at times, counter-insurgency.<sup>1</sup> However, since 2014 Europe has faced with a new kind of security threats, characterized by the combination of a large number of different types of warfare – ranging from conventional, irregular or special military units, all the way to informational, economic and cyber means including acts of terrorism and criminal activity. These kinds of threats are most commonly known as „hybrid threats“, „hybrid warfare“ or „hybrid war“. The first mention of these terms can be found in the US military terminology from the beginning of this century. Despite this fact, the aforementioned terms have become widely known only after the emergence of the Ukrainian crisis. As a result, a series of terms containing the word „hybrid“, such as war, warfare, threats or tactics, have become an indispensable part of the mainstream vocabulary of political debates in Europe. At the same time, many scholars and analysts have become confused by the popularity of the terms, which has caused conceptual ambiguities to this day.

Nevertheless, due to the fact that Europe has faced with various forms of unconventional and non-traditional threats that can result in very serious consequences, the necessity for interrogation and explanation of this phenomenon has been created. Thus, the main research questions in this paper are what the actual meaning of the term „hybrid warfare“ is, whether it is a new type of warfare or a new term for the old concept? Furthermore, who the subject of hybrid activities is and who these activities are directed to. Consequently, the objective of this work is to analyze and explain the meaning of the term „hybrid warfare“ from the appearance of this term to the present and, crucially, its perception by European academic, political and military circles.

## Non-State Approach to Consideration of the Term „Hybrid Warfare“

The usage of the new terms, or the adaptation of the old ones, in order to describe and explain emerging security phenomena and processes, is the common practice in various terminologies in the fields of security, military, politics, science, journalism, etc. The transformation of the war that began at the end of last century has created new security reality that could not be described by the existing concepts. As a result, a new concepts have been introduced in order to explain the essence of the new security environment. One of such concepts that has also gained the greatest public attention is „hybrid warfare“. This term has emerged through the aspiration of military strategists and theorists to explain the characteristics of the new concept of war, which certainly points to the specificity of contemporary war conflicts in relation to the previous classic war ones.

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<sup>1</sup> Nicu Popescu, *Hybrid tactics: Russia and the West*, EU Institute for Security Studies, Alert No. 46, October 2015.

In addition to the classic, or the traditional, or the conventional war, in the course of history, various types of wars have been perceived - nontraditional, irregular, asymmetric wars, etc. Furthermore, many, if not most of wars, were characterized by both regular and irregular operations in order to exploit the advantages of each kind of force. Thus, a strategic synergy that increases the probability of inflicting damage on an opponent has been created. What is common for all those military activities is that they have been directed towards identification of weaknesses and vulnerability of enemies.

The „hybrid war“ has been recognized as „the newest“ kind of war, and although it has been used for some ten years, „hybrid warfare“ is not the first term used in an attempt to explain the current transformation of the nature of the war. Yet, under such semantic determination that has arisen within the circles of the US armed forces, the beginning of the use of the term is related to the middle of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It pointed to a new, largely unconventional mode of warfare, which represented a problem to the United States Armed Forces in war practice.<sup>2</sup> Initially, the meaning of the term was seen as military concept to which comparatively superior conventional Western forces did not have an adequate response.

The first known use of the term „hybrid warfare“ dates back to 1998 when Robert Walker recognized „hybrid war“ in his paper *Spec Fi: the United States Marine Corps and Special Operations* and defined it as: „Hybrid warfare' is that which lies in the interstices between special and conventional warfare. This type of warfare possesses characteristics of both the special and conventional realms, and requires an extreme amount of flexibility in order to transition operationally and tactically between the special and conventional arenas”.<sup>3</sup> Hence, Walker took over and quoted the definitions of special and conventional operations according to *Joint Pub 1-02 – Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* from 1989 and concluded that those two elements, when combined, comprise „hybrid warfare“. Walker believed that there was nothing new in the concept of hybrid operations because the combination of closely coordinated special and conventional operations has impacted on the outcomes of numerous military campaigns, for example in the American Revolution.

After 2000, gradual introduction of a new term among the US military expert circles has begun. They pointed out to the concept that describes a military operational approach that emerged in the post-Cold War period. Captain William J. Nemeth used this term to describe the Chechen insurgency that blended (hence the word 'hybrid') guerrilla warfare with modern military tactics and use of technology – from mobile telephones to the Internet.<sup>4</sup> Nemeth argued that the Chechen society was in a hybrid situation between a pre-modern and contemporary state, where the architecture of the modern society was built upon the basis of a traditional, pre-state clan (*teip*) and family ties.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, „hybrid“ represents, according to Nemeth, a war in which differences between regular and

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<sup>2</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, *Further Thoughts on Hybrid Threats*, Small Wars Journal, March 3, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Robert G. Walker, *Spec Fi: The United States Marines Corps and Special Operations*, Master's Thesis, Monterey, CA, Naval Post Graduate School, December 1998, p.4-5.

<sup>4</sup> Nicu Popescu, *Hybrid tactics: Russia and the West*, EU Institute for Security Studies, Alert No. 46, October 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Andras Racz, *Russia's in Hybrid War in Ukraine-Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist*, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Helsinki, FIIA Report 43, 2015, p.28.

irregular war have been blended, on the one hand, and that kind of structure enabled Chechens to mobilize their society for the war and provide widespread support for the fighting through family ties, on the other hand. This interference of the traditional and modern components leads to a special kind of creativity of the pre-state society in using modern technology and weapons, and this way of thinking creates surprise and tactics capable of overcoming the difference in power between two armies.

In 2002, Alan Dupont, while he was thinking about the new kind of war that the world was facing with, noticed that asymmetric wars would not only be fought by terrorists and criminals. The other armed groups, which inhabit the lower reaches of the threat spectrum, will fight hybrid forms of warfare, where modern, conventional weapons systems may be of limited use.<sup>6</sup> Although „hybrid war“ was not exclusively in the focus of his attention, and he did not make a clear distinction between „asymmetric“ and „hybrid war“, an attempt of this Australian strategist is worth of attention. It is an attempt of explanation of an irregular way of fighting between a non-state actor that is facing with more powerful state actor.

Many authors have tried to understand and explain the nature of the „hybrid war“. However, the historical milestone that illuminates the nature of this kind of war happened in 2006. The Israel-Hezbollah War of 2006 put the concept of „hybrid war“ in focus because the term „hybrid“ has been subsequently used to describe the strategy used by Hezbollah. Hezbollah, led by Hassan Nassrallah, represents a rising threat. Mixing an organized political movement with decentralized armed cells employing adaptive tactics in ungoverned zones, Hezbollah affirms an emerging trend. Highly disciplined, well-trained, distributed cells can contest modern conventional forces with an admixture of guerrilla tactics and technology in densely packed urban centers.<sup>7</sup> This case demonstrated the ability of a non-state actor to deconstruct vulnerability of not only a powerful state, but Western style militaries. This situation had a great influence on actualization of this problem and the concept of „hybrid warfare“ was discussed in more details starting with Lt Col Frank Hoffman.

Hoffman introduced this concept into everyday use within the professional circles of the US Armed Forces through numerous and still frequently cited papers. Considering *The National Defense Strategy* from 2005, Hoffman stressed: „... there are a broaden number of challenges facing the United States. These include traditional, irregular, terrorist and disruptive threats or challengers. This has created a unique planning dilemma for today's military planners, raising a choice between preparing for states with conventional capabilities or to more likely scenario of non-state actors employing asymmetric or irregular tactics.“ Emphasizing the possibility of combined use of both conventional and non-conventional tactics, he said: „...these may no longer be separate threats or modes of war ... future contingencies will more likely present unique combinational or hybrid threats that are specifically designed to target U.S. vulnerabilities. Instead of separate challenges with fundamentally different approaches (conventional, irregular or terrorists), we can expect to face competitors who will employ all forms of war and tactics, perhaps

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<sup>6</sup> Alan Dupont, *Transformation or Stagnation? Rethinking Australia's Defense*, Strategic and Defense Studies Centre, The Australian National University, Canberra, 2002, p.12.

<sup>7</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, *Lessons from Lebanon: Hezbollah and Hybrid Wars*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, E-notes, 2 August 2006.

simultaneously”.<sup>8</sup> He also said that „hybrid war“ can be conducted by both state and a variety of non-state actors. Likewise, these multi-modal activities can be conducted by separate units, or even by the same unit, but are generally operationally or tactically directed and coordinated within the main battle space to achieve synergistic effects in the physical and psychological dimension of a conflict.<sup>9</sup> Considering the reasons why the U.S. military faces this kind of threats, Hoffman pointed out to globalization, proliferation of advanced technology, violent transnational extremists, and resurgent powers.<sup>10</sup>

As we can notice, Hoffman took over and promoted this idea from the framework of the Fourth Generation of Modern War (4GW) established by William S. Lind in 1989. In this paper, Lind and a group of American officers presented an idea about different generations of modern war. According to them, the First Generation of Modern War, the war of line-and-column tactics, where battles were formal and the battlefield was orderly with a lot of engaged people, ran roughly from 1648 to 1860. The Second Generation of War was developed by the French Army during and after World War I, in which the massed firepower replaced the massed manpower. The doctrine was summed up by the French as „the artillery conquers, the infantry occupies.“ The Third Generation of War was developed by the German Army and it was based not on firepower and attrition, but on speed, surprise, and mental, as well as physical, dislocation. Based on maneuver rather than attrition, the third generation tactics were the first truly nonlinear tactics.<sup>11</sup> The characteristics such as decentralization and initiative were carried over from the Third to the Fourth Generation, and in other respects the Fourth Generation marks the most radical change since the Peace of Westphalia. In the Fourth Generation war, a state loses its monopoly on war. All over the world, state militaries find themselves fighting non-state opponents such as al-Qaeda, Hamas, Hezbollah, etc.<sup>12</sup> Instead of using hard power, the focus is on soft power in order to break the political will of an enemy. Hoffman noticed that the core of 4GW concept is that weakening of the state as an organized and governing mechanism results in the rise of non-states actors, which can challenge the legitimacy of the state.<sup>13</sup>

Hoffman gave a definition of „hybrid war“ explaining it through the threats: „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. Hybrid war can be conducted by both states and variety of non-state actors”.<sup>14</sup> Although Hoffman emphasizes that subject of hybrid activities can be both state and non-state actors, if we analyze his papers, we can notice that his attention to actors in „hybrid war“ was mostly directed to non-state actors as Taliban, al-

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<sup>8</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – The Rise of Hybrid Wars*, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, Arlington, Virginia, December 2007. p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>10</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, *Hybrid warfare and challenges*, JFQ / issue 52, 1st quarter 2009.

<sup>11</sup> William S. Lind, Keith Nightengale; John F Schmitt; Joseph W Sutton; Gary I Wilso, *The Changing Face of War, Into the Four Generation*, Marine Corps Gazette, October 1989, p. 23

<sup>12</sup> William S. Lind, *Understanding Fourth Generation of War*, Military Review, October 2004, p.13.

<sup>13</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – The Rise of Hybrid Wars*, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, Arlington, Virginia, December 2007. p.18.

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

Qaeda and, especially Hezbollah. The reason for putting an emphasis on research into non-state actors in a „hybrid war“ can be found in the failure of the conventional US military presence in asymmetric conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as their inability to stop or defend from the Al Qaeda terrorist attack “9/11”.

Thus, in the first decade of using the term „hybrid warfare“ its meaning pointed to the success of a comparatively weaker military opponent in the conflict with the technologically and numerically superior US Armed Forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thereby, at the beginning of the new millennium, the concept of „hybrid warfare“ has represented the analytical construct in identifying and considering a wider range of newly emerging changes in the battlefield that challenged the US Armed Forces at tactical and operational levels. In fact, it pointed to the increasing presence of unconventional methods of warfare applied by non-state actors to which the powerful conventional Armed Forces of the United States and its Western allies did not have an effective conventional response. At that period, the term „hybrid warfare“ was used to describe and explain the „irregular warfare“ conducted by non-state actors in a conflict where they are faced with superior conventional state power.

„Hybrid war“ has become a product of contemporary security environment. As Dupont noticed: „The state on state conflicts on 20<sup>th</sup> century are being replaced by 'hybrid wars' and asymmetric contents in which there is no clear cut distinction between soldiers and civilians and between organized violence, terror, crime and war“<sup>15</sup>. The emergence of this concept has influenced a new way of thinking in the field of military science. Therefore, as Walker said: “Hybrid warfare' presents a mode of conflict that severely challenges America's conventional military thinking.”<sup>16</sup> It targets the strategic cultural weaknesses of the American Way of battle quite effectively. Its main characteristics, convergence and combinations, occur in several modes. This form of conflict challenges long-standing American conception of fighting a war, and will continue to thwart the Western core interests and the world order. However, the rise of „hybrid warfare“ does not represent the end of traditional or conventional warfare, but it does represent a complex factor for defense planning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The increased effectiveness and lethality of non-state actors within hybrid war, and the symbiotic relationship that exists between sponsor (state or non-state) and client (non-state) is another variable that differentiates modern hybrid war from traditional forms of conflict.

When we analyze genesis of development and use of the term „hybrid warfare“ we can conclude that in Western Europe, except Great Britain, considering and using the term „hybrid warfare“ was quite different than in the United States. Western European countries were not exposed to the problems of waging a war in a non-traditional way as America was in the Middle East during the so called „unipolar moment“. Britain was a reliable ally of the United States participating in the Afghan and Iraqi wars in 2001 and 2003. Having experienced issues with a new way of waging a war, „British officers have

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<sup>15</sup> Alan Dupont, *Transformation or Stagnation? Rethinking Australia's Defense*, Strategic and Defense Studies Centre, The Australian National University, Canberra, 2002, p.2

<sup>16</sup> Robert G. Walker, Spec Fi: The U.S. Marines Corps and Special Operations, Master's Thesis, Monterey, CA, Naval Post Graduate School, December 1998. In this earlier work Walker described the Marine Expeditionary Unit as “a Hybrid Force for Hybrid Wars”, but he did not focus on wider meaning of term “hybrid war” or “hybrid warfare”.

moved ahead and begun the hard work of drawing out implications and the desired counter capabilities required to effectively operate against 'hybrid threats'. In 2007, the British have gone past American doctrine writers and already incorporated 'hybrid threats' within their construct for irregular war."<sup>17</sup> Other European countries did not take a significant part in these wars and consequently the consideration of the phenomenon „hybrid warfare“.

## European Political Adaptation of the Usage of Term „Hybrid Warfare“

The meaning and usage of the term „hybrid warfare“ have considerably shifted in the period between 1998 and 2014, and the turning point represents the Ukrainian crisis. Namely, in the first period of development of the concept „hybrid warfare“, which lasted as we mentioned earlier from 1998 until 2014, from the first use to the Ukrainian crisis, „hybrid war“ included four methods that could be applied by both state and non-state actors. As Hoffman defined, those modes of warfare are conventional capabilities, and irregular tactics that include terrorism, indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder. However, although both non-state and state are listed as actors, the primary focus was on non-state actors as actors on the battlefield in places like Chechnya, Lebanon or Afghanistan. Therefore, the first phase of evolution of the term „hybrid war“ represents mainly non-state approach to consideration of this phenomenon. Hoffman did recognize state as an actor, but he limited it to the situation in which Iraq was in 2003. „Hybrid challenges are not limited to non-state actors. States can shift their conventional units to irregular formations and adopt new tactics as Iraq's *Fedayeen* did in 2003“.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, he believed that state could be a „hybrid war“ actor only if irregular tactics were applied such as the organization of terrorist groups. Due to the events that took place in 2014, the term „hybrid war“ emerged from the framework defined by Hoffman.

In 2014 Ukrainian crisis has changed a way of thinking in the West about „hybrid warfare“, mostly in Europe. Although experts debate about the fact that „hybrid war“ began in foreign literature long before the Ukrainian crisis, this event represented a trigger that directed attention of European experts to research of the „hybrid war“ phenomenon. The term „hybrid war“ or „hybrid warfare“ rose to prominence in defense and policy circles, as well as in the media after the Russian annexation of Crimea. It was dragged out from the relative obscurity of military theory circles to become a mainstream term used to describe a myriad of seemingly different security and defense challenges to the West<sup>19</sup>. The study of this phenomenon has largely been deprived of research curiosity and criticism, which resulted in the hyper production of papers on this topic. Western observers have fallen into currently familiar parlance for describing the Russian annexation of Crimea and sub-

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<sup>17</sup> *Countering Irregular Activity within a Comprehensive Approach*, Joint Doctrine Note 2/07, United Kingdom, March 2007.

<sup>18</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, *Hybrid warfare and challenges*, JFQ / issue 52, 1st quarter 2009, p.37

<sup>19</sup> Erik Reichborn-Kjennerud, Patric Cullen, *What is Hybrid Warfare*, Policy Brief 1/2016, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2016.

sequent invasion of the Eastern Ukraine. Frequently termed Russian „hybrid war“ against Ukraine is seen as a threatening precedent, even a likely model for future conflicts on Russian periphery. In this view, the Russian campaign against the Baltic States, Kazakhstan or even Poland might employ a variety of tools ranging from conventional to irregular combat operations, sponsorship of political protests, economic coercion, and powerful information campaigns.<sup>20</sup> According to Western opinion, mostly in Europe, Russia considers the Baltic States to be part of its inherent sphere of influence. In these countries, especially in Latvia and Estonia, there was a concern that Russia would seek to use the Russian minority to gain influence in the Baltics, to use subversion to justify conventional attacks, or to use covert action to seize territory. At the heart of many analysts' and policymakers' concern is the fear that Russian actions will appear ambiguous, which may impede a response from the EU and NATO, given the need for consensus on a decision by these organizations.<sup>21</sup>

According to Kofman's and Rojansky's opinion, „hybrid war“ may become the defining label for Russian operations in Ukraine, but on closer examination it misses the point. „Hybrid war“ can hardly be considered the definitive doctrine for Russian future power projection in its neighborhood, much less a model that could be easily reproduced in the far-flung and diverse corners of the post-Soviet space. Rather than a genuine strategic concept built from the ground up by the Russians themselves, „hybrid war“ is merely a label attributed to Russian actions in Ukraine by the West, in an effort to make sense of cascading phases of the security crisis in which all sides except Russia seem to have been caught off balance. Moreover, the discourse around „hybrid war“ mistakenly enfolds Russian investment in shaping global public opinion, which may pose challenges for Russian neighbors and the West, and it has much broader, more ambiguous and often inchoate aims.<sup>22</sup> However, there are other, different opinions that point to the exclusivity of Russia in waging the „hybrid war“. They come mostly from European countries in the Russian neighborhood, that is, from its zone of immediate influence and interest. As Bettina Renz said, „in the view of many Western analysts it is the non-military tools, such as information, that are seen as the biggest threat emanating from Russia today. However, the Crimea operations have also led to concerns about the implications of Russian military modernization more broadly, as it is not yet clear to what extent improved capabilities will go hand in hand with more forceful or hostile intentions.“<sup>23</sup>

The nature of Russian involvement in the Ukrainian crisis was an incentive for such thinking in the West, especially in Europe. The world took Russian swift achievement of political objectives in Crimea without the need to fire a single shot with surprise. Non-military instruments and the use of information in particular were important factors in the achievement of Russian victory. Russian use of broadcasting tools for propaganda and psychological operations as the part of a broader information campaign caught both Ukraine and the West with surprise. That approach in Crimea appeared especially im-

<sup>20</sup> Michael Kofman, Matthew Rojansky, *A Closer look at Russia's "Hybrid War"*, Kennan Institute, Kennan Cable No7, April 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Radin, *Hybrid Warfare in the Baltics - Threats and Political Responses*. RAND Corporation, 2017, p.1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>23</sup> Bettina Renz, Hanna Smith, *Russia and Hybrid Warfare –Going Beyond The Label*, Finnish Prime Minister's Office, Government's analysis, 2016.



pressive because it stood in stark contrast to past military interventions. The Chechen wars and the war with Georgia in 2008 were criticized for excessive use of force and they were seen as poorly executed campaigns based on the lack of coordination, outdated equipment and poor strategy. Throughout much of the post-Soviet period the idea that the Russian military was outdated and stuck in the Cold-war thinking dominated the Western perceptions, so the success of the unconventional campaign in Crimea was particularly unexpected.<sup>24</sup> The explanation of Russian foreign and security policy as „hybrid warfare“ might be convenient, but the concept crucially does not explain anything about Russian actions, intentions or aims. In other words, what, specifically, would be the goals of Russian „hybrid warfare“ campaign against the Europe and West at all?

The implications of the Russian Great Power status in respect of Europe are the most complex and ambiguous, both for Russia and Europe. In fact, an important root cause for current tensions and fears of Russian „hybrid warfare“ against the West is linked to Russia's complicated relationship with Europe. The optimism of the early 1990s held that Russia would be democratized and become a part of the normative and value framework of EU enlargement. This situation has never happened and it is the most important reason why Russia has run into the biggest difficulties with its Great Power identity vis-à-vis Europe. Russia would like to be an equal member in the club of European Great Powers, but at the same time, as a Great Power, it does not want to be told what to do. Actually, Russia would like to be a Great Power that is in great relation with the European countries, but it does not want to be forced to adopt the European normative and value framework. For Russian relationship with the EU this has meant that it has no interest in the strong Europe as long as it is not accepted as a European Great Power on its own terms. Rather than isolating itself from Europe, Russia has opted to ensure its political involvement in Europe by tapping into political forces that are critical of the EU, critical of incumbent governments and are generally pursuing a populist agenda. These can be far-left forces rejecting the Western capitalism and standing for anti-Americanism or far-right parties propagating anti-liberal ideas (such as anti-immigrant sentiment) or EU critical political movements. Such „meddling“ has recently been interpreted by some observers as evidence of Russian „hybrid warfare“ campaign against the West<sup>25</sup>. Clearly, there is a sense that Russian foreign policy towards Europe has become more assertive and even aggressive, especially compared to the Medvedev years. The 'Hybrid warfare', in the eyes of some observers, seems to explain this change and a multitude of Russian actions, such as its attempts to seek influence in Europe by various information means, under one convenient umbrella. However, the explanation of Russian foreign policy to Europe as a campaign of „hybrid warfare“ tells us very little about what has actually changed or what exactly Russian intentions are.

Such political turn of Russia has not only had an impact on neighboring states, but in the whole Europe. A direct reflection of such behavior is the rethinking of the NATO and EU positions as organizations, whose members of the state felt threatened by the Russian influence.

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<sup>24</sup> Sam Jones, Ukraine: Russia's new art of war, The Financial Times, 28th August 2014, <https://www.ft.com/content/ea5e82fa-2e0c-11e4-b760-00144feabdc0>.

<sup>25</sup> *Russia accused of clandestine funding of European parties as US conducts major review of Vladimir Putin's strategy*, The Telegraph, 16<sup>th</sup> Jan 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/12103602/America-to-investigate-Russian-meddling-in-EU.html>

However, by interfering with NATO and EU, the politicization of the „hybrid warfare“ concept continued. In response to Russian „hybrid war“, NATO and EU have analyzed implications of that situation on their security and they had adopted numerous strategic documents. At first, the European NATO members were in a very delicate and challenging situation. Namely, after the Ukrainian crisis, the Baltic NATO states were intimidated because they believed that they were also in danger, but at the very same level they were afraid that NATO does not have the mandate to protect them. According to NATO Article 5 the *“(P)arties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all”*. Since the Crimean operation was not an armed attack, or any kind of traditional war, but the operationalization of a new form of warfare, the key question was to what extent NATO legal framework was ready to deal with modern warfare. NATO has decided to take on an ambitious task: to develop a set of tools to deter and defend against adversaries waging hybrid warfare. In 2014 NATO adopted the *Readiness Action Plan (RAP)* as a means of responding rapidly to new threats as they present themselves along the eastern and southern flanks. This Plan provides a coherent and comprehensive package of necessary measures to respond to the changes in the security environment on NATO borders and further afield that are of concern to the Allies. It responds to the challenges posed by Russia and their strategic implications. It also responds to the risks and threats emanating from our southern neighborhood, the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>26</sup> In December 2015 NATO adopted the *Hybrid Warfare Strategy*, in which it has been defined how they are going to fight hybrid threats. This strategy was developed in order to speed up decision-making and improve its response to the kind of unconventional warfare that Russia has used in Crimea and eastern Ukraine with a new playbook expected to lay out the Alliance’s help for members if they come under pressure from Russia or another country.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, in April 2017 several European members of NATO Allies formally agreed to establish the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki. Countering hybrid threats has become a priority for NATO as they blur the line between war and peace - combining military aggression with political, diplomatic, economic, cyber and disinformation measures. NATO counter-hybrid strategy includes strengthened coordination with the European Union, and also involves a new Intelligence Division, more training and exercises, and our work to actively counter propaganda with facts.<sup>28</sup> NATO understood what the main problem was with countering the „hybrid war“: unlike in conventional warfare, where it is possible to identify an enemy, NATO will find it difficult to agree on an intervention. Therefore, prevailing in „hybrid warfare“ presents NATO with an institutional challenge. In order to effectively counter hybrid threats, the Alliance will need to strengthen cooperation with international organizations, particularly with the EU.

Furthermore, the EU has taken steps to counter the Russian influence that is labelled by the phenomenon called „hybrid war“. As the EU concluded that its Member States have been increasingly exposed to „hybrid threats“ that comprise hostile actions designed to destabilize a region or a state, the EU also took steps in order to increase se-

<sup>26</sup> NATO’s Readiness Action Plan (RAP), October 2015, [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2015\\_12/20151130\\_1512-factsheet\\_rap\\_en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_12/20151130_1512-factsheet_rap_en.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> NATO adapts to countering the hybrid war: WSJ, 8 February 2016. <https://www.unian.info/world/1258925-nato-adapts-to-countering-hybrid-war-wsj.html>

<sup>28</sup> NATO welcomes opening of European Centre for Countering Hybrid Threats, 11 April 2017, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_143143.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_143143.htm)

curity of its members. *The European Agenda on Security*<sup>29</sup> from 2015 identifies three main priorities for the European security: terrorist and foreign terrorist fighters; serious and organized cross-border crime and cybercrime within which hybrid threats have been specifically recognized. In April 2016 the European Commission and the High Representative adopted the Joint Framework to counter hybrid threats and foster the resilience of the EU, its Member States and partner countries while increasing cooperation with NATO on countering these threats. The Joint Framework brings together the existing policies and proposes twenty-two operational Actions aimed at: raising awareness; building resilience; protecting Europeans online; preventing, responding to crisis and recovering and stepping up the cooperation between the EU and NATO, as well as other partner organizations.<sup>30</sup> Also, the EU *Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy* from June 2016 and its *Implementation Plan on Security and Defense*<sup>31</sup> from November 2016 made countering „hybrid threats“ as a priority, highlighting the need for an integrated approach to link internal resilience with the EU external actions. In order to make a contribution to strengthening the EU capacity to respond to „hybrid threats“, the European Commission proposed the European Defense Fund launched on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2017 with the proposed funding of about €600 million until 2020 and €1.5 billion annually thereafter.<sup>32</sup>

Having analyzed the abovementioned documents, we see that events in Ukraine are recognized and marked as a serious threat to the European security, and that a number of measures have to be implemented to counter „hybrid threats“. All those documents speak of working in conjunction with a variety of actors, especially NATO and EU, in order to improve resilience, security and continuity of governance in the face of hybrid threats. At the same time, the measures that result from these documents have contributed to the further politicization of the term „hybrid war“. This situation also points to another question: if the EU or NATO take more concrete steps in the „hybrid war“ will they become party to the conflict in the war with Russia? Or the politicization of the term of hybrid war can blur the boundaries enough in order to have ambiguity in place.

## State-Centric Approach to Consideration of the Term „Hybrid Warfare“

There is even greater importance of Ukrainian crisis in understanding the term „hybrid warfare“ besides considering the political background of Russian hybrid performances in Europe. It is absolutely clear that there has been evolution in understanding the term. The meaning and usage of the term itself have considerably shifted in the period

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<sup>29</sup> The European Agenda on Security, European Commission, 28 April 2015, [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/e-library/documents/basicdocuments/docs/eu\\_agenda\\_on\\_security\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/e-library/documents/basicdocuments/docs/eu_agenda_on_security_en.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Security: EU strengthens response to hybrid threats, European Commission, Press release, Brussels, 6 April 2016. [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-16-1227\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-1227_en.htm)

<sup>31</sup> Implementation Plan on Security and Defense, Council of the European Union, November 2016, [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs\\_implementation\\_plan\\_st14392.en16\\_0.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs_implementation_plan_st14392.en16_0.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Security and defense: Significant progress to enhance Europe's resilience against hybrid threats – more work ahead. European Commission-Press release, 19 July 2017, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-17-2064\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-2064_en.htm).

between 1998 and 2014. Whereas, as Hoffman noted, „the hybrid construct was deduced from looking at the enemy,” the simple fact that different studies of „hybrid warfare“ reference different wars is a source of analytical confusion itself over the meaning and content of the term „hybrid warfare“. This can be most dramatically seen in how the concept of „hybrid warfare“ has evolved in Western defense circles, away from the discussion on an allegedly novel way of warfare conducted by non-state actors, and to a similarly novel, yet distinct, form of warfare conducted by states, most notably, but not only, by Russia in the Ukraine.<sup>33</sup>

As previously stated, „hybrid warfare“ was originally used to describe non-state approach to a new form of waging a war. However, Ukrainian crisis has changed this perception. Broad and generic similarities between Russian actions in Ukraine and previous examples of non-state „hybrid warfare“, most notably the „blurring“ of traditional concepts of warfare, its unfamiliarity, the use of non-military means, and the asymmetric relationship to Western conventional war fighting, have all contributed to labelling these Russian actions as „hybrid warfare“.<sup>34</sup> State-centric approach to the „hybrid war“ concept involves full integration of the military and non-military means of state power to achieve political goals, in which the use of force or the threat of force plays a central role. States with highly centralized abilities to coordinate and synchronize their instruments of power (government, economy, media, etc.) can create synergistic force multiplying effects. Specifically, state concept allows for operations that “target and exploit the seams” in Western-style liberal democratic societies that do not have similar coordinating offices or capabilities.<sup>35</sup>

Hence, the Ukrainian crisis significantly changes and expands the definition of the concept of „hybrid warfare“ in the sense that Hoffman had previously established. Even Hoffman argues that his definition is challenging and too short to consider the content of Russian involvement in the abovementioned crisis. His definition was limited to the combination of tactics that are related to violence and the irregular way of warfare of state and non-state actors, but not with non-violent activities that, according to the western view, the Russian Federation was conducting in Ukraine. Therefore, in paper from 2014 Hoffman is fenced from the idea that Russian involvement in Ukraine represents a „hybrid war“ and he offered a Maxwell’s term „unconventional warfare“ to be used for description of the Russian activity. Hoffman concluded: „While I prefer 'hybrid threats' to describe the opponent, I think that Maxwell’s 'unconventional warfare' with an updated definition that incorporates aspects of contemporary conflict, might be adapted to capture today’s evolution. Activities traditionally included within subversion and counter-subversion can be added to the definition to make it sufficiently robust. Perhaps 'unconventional conflict' is a compromise that expands the concept beyond a narrow military vision of warfare”.<sup>36</sup> However, regardless of Hoffman’s fencing in determining the Rus-

<sup>33</sup> Erik Reichborn-Kjennerud, Patric Cullen, *What is Hybrid Warfare*, Policy Brief 1/2016, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2016.

<sup>34</sup> John Vandiver, *SACEUR: Allies must prepare for Russia 'hybrid war*, Stars and Stripes, 4th September 2014, available at: <http://www.stripes.com/news/saceur-allies-must-prepare-for-russia-hybrid-war-1.301464>

<sup>35</sup> Erik Reichborn-Kjennerud, Patric Cullen, *What is Hybrid Warfare*, Policy Brief 1/2016, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2016

<sup>36</sup> Frank G Hoffman, *On Not-So-New Warfare: Political Warfare vs Hybrid Threats*, War on the Rocks, July 28, 2014, <https://warontherocks.com/2014/07/on-not-so-new-warfare-political-warfare-vs-hybrid-threats/>

sian activities as „hybrid“ and proposing Maxwell's „unconventional warfare“ as more appropriate, the term „hybrid warfare“ has gained its primary place in the exploration of the Russian appearance in the Ukrainian crisis within Western, especially European, political, media and academic circles. The term „hybrid warfare“ comes out from narrowly professional military circles and gains wider Western political, media and academic attention. At the same time, the politicization of the use of the term is incorporated within the Western academic discussions on the mentioned issues, which lose their scientific basis. The question that arises is what circumstances influenced the politicization of this term. The answer should be sought in the American fear of an aroused challenger like Russia and China, and also a European fear, especially the eastern European countries that once were under the Soviet cap of Russian aggression. This fear triggered the politicization of the use of the term „hybrid war“ and its withdrawal from the framework established by Hoffman.

Thus, after the 2014 event, Russia has been recognized as a „hybrid war“ actor, which marks a transition and transformation from the non-state to the state approach of understanding the „hybrid warfare“. The „hybrid war“ theorists have not expected such transformation, which resulted in the fact that the concept was upgraded only after it occurred in practice. The first question that arises is why the activities of Russia are under the term „hybrid war“. Is there any similarity with previous understanding of war, or better term could not be found? The current war in Ukraine partially meets Hoffman's criteria for a hybrid war in the part related to the use of violent conventional and irregular methods. As Hoffman asserts that in 2006 conflict Hezbollah „demonstrated a number of state-like military capabilities“, like that there is a number of state-like military capabilities being used by the Russian-backed rebels. Also, there is a high level of operationally and tactically directed coordination taking place between the pro-Russian rebel forces and the Russian military. Those similarities between the Russian activity and non-state actors in the past, especially „blurring“ the difference between classic and irregular concept of war, the use of conventional and unconventional ways and means, represents the characteristics that have contributed to labelling these Russian actions as „hybrid war“.

Some observers can be confused with this conclusion, and say that guerrilla and conventional fighting, economic, cyber and information war occurred in Ukraine. Someone else can notice that the mentioned characteristics are actually the elements of „hybrid war“. The situation in Ukraine has put into the forefront not only the means that can be used, but the fact that the state is in the focus of a „hybrid war“. The introduction of the state into the core of the „hybrid war“ concept leads to new difficulties. The single critical expansion and alteration of the „hybrid warfare“ concept when applied to states is the strategically innovative use of ambiguity. Ambiguity has been usefully defined as „hostile actions that are difficult for a state to identify, attribute or publicly define as coercive uses of force”.<sup>37</sup> Clearly, in a situation that is not clear it is difficult to carry out security assessments and make the right decision on further activities.

The concept of „hybrid war“ gives the luxury of a wide range of possible choices of one or more actions like, for example, aggregated impacts in cyberspace, information space or even criminal activities involving kidnapping and killings. Such actions are usu-

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<sup>37</sup> Andrew Mumford, Jack McDonald, *Ambiguous Warfare*, Report produced for the DCDC, October 2014.

ally spread over time and give the impression that they are not connected together in any way, which creates a large degree of ambiguity.<sup>38</sup> Ambiguity is used to complicate or undermine the decision-making processes of the opponent. It is tailored to make a military response, or even a political response. In military terms, it is designed to fall below the threshold of a war and to delegitimize (or even render politically irrational) the ability to respond by military force.<sup>39</sup> As Reichborn-Kjennerud and Cullen noticed, these principles of ambiguity can be operationalized in many ways, from the tactical to the strategic way. At a strategic level, state-centric „hybrid war“ is designed to avoid „conventional war“. It targets perceived „red lines“ or thresholds of its opponents and operates below them; it finds „gray zones“ where these red lines are not articulated and exploits these undefended spaces; and it hides its military means while emphasizing non-military means to achieve its political goals. Ambiguity in the form of plausible deniability can be achieved by hiding and denying agency through the use of proxies, non-attributable forces (e.g. little green men) and attacks (e.g. cyber). It can also be achieved through the use of non-military comprehensive state power that is difficult to characterize as coercive force, thus limiting the ability to legitimize responses. At a broader level, „hybrid warfare“ is also ambiguous both because it operates outside of Western perceptions of war as a violent clash of kinetic forces, and because it blurs the distinction between war and peace and the beginning and end of hostilities.<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, the main advantage of the state involvement in a „hybrid war“ is the fact that the state can be labelled to participate in a classic war that is illegal. By doing so, it can covertly use military means and avoid condemnation, or to accuse someone else and thus avoid responsibility. Moreover, when a state uses non-military means, it prevents the opposing party from providing an adequate response, which could otherwise be used in the classic war. Thus, great influence on policy decisions in ways that complicate and slow ability to respond effectively has been made. Raising the boundaries of the state of war and peace, hybrid war introduces confusion from which the state actor benefits.

Some authors in this already confusing situation introduce a new degree of ambiguity in which the politicization of the term „hybrid“ as the core of the transformation of the „hybrid war“ from the non-state to the state, identifies the war with the „political war“. Chivvis in his paper said that „political warfare“ is similar to, but not identical to a „hybrid warfare“. Many terms are approximate synonyms for „hybrid warfare“, and each has a slightly different meaning. Sometimes „hybrid warfare“ and „political warfare“ are used synonymously. Indeed, there is a great deal of overlap in the instruments and methods required for each. Yet, there are also subtle differences. „Hybrid warfare“, for example, might aim at military, as well as political objectives. „Political warfare“ aims directly and exclusively at political systems and the broader polities in which they exist. „Hybrid warfare“ clearly includes the use of military force, and at the limit, even conventional military operations.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Miroslaw Basnik, *Russia's Hybrid War in theory and Practice*, Journal on Baltic Security Vol 2, Issue 1, 2016, p. 159.

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Mumford, Jack McDonald, *Ambiguous Warfare*, Report produced for the DCDC, October 2014

<sup>40</sup> Erik Reichborn-Kjennerud, Patric Cullen, *What is Hybrid Warfare*, Policy Brief 1/2016, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2016.

<sup>41</sup> Christopher S. Chivvis, *Hybrid war: Russian contemporary political warfare*, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 2017, p. 317.

Whether we call this type of war political, hybrid or “gray-zone conflicts” we must not ignore its essence - the state tends to achieve its major foreign policy goals. The similar resources are also used perfectly synchronized: population-centric approach, political destabilization, cyber tools, economic influence, covert action, military intelligence, or other operatives; economic sanctions, political pressure and propaganda. Such considerations lead us away from the essence of the state-centered understanding of the „hybrid war“ – the emergence of politicization of the „hybrid war“ in which Russia is the main actor. Russian action towards Ukraine was stigmatized due to the fear of not only the Russian neighboring states, but the whole world. The unpredictable nature of the Russian activity through the prism of a „hybrid war“, and the impossibility of providing an adequate response from other actors, mark the main features of the European security scene today.

## *Conclusion*

During the history, due to the development of society and technological innovations, types of wars have been changing and transforming. Therefore, we have been introduced with the concepts of the „classic war“, „irregular war“, „special war“, then the „Fourth Generation wars“, „compounding wars“. Today, the focus of the military experts and academics is on the term „hybrid wars“.

The „hybrid warfare“ is most commonly used term worldwide to explain the characteristics of the new concept of war, which certainly points to the specificity of contemporary war conflicts in relation to the previous classic war ones. At the beginning, it was originally used by the US Armed Forces to describe the growing sophistication and complexity of non-state actors on the battlefield in places like Chechnya and Lebanon, and later in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, with the political adaptation of the term, since the beginning of Ukrainian crisis, the perception of the „hybrid warfare“ concept has evolved in Western defense circles, away from the discussion on a novel way of warfare conducted by non-state actors, and to a similarly novel, yet distinct, form of warfare conducted by states, most notably by Russia in Ukraine.

The contribution to such changes in thinking about „hybrid war“ has mostly come from the European countries in Russian neighborhood that felt threatened by the novel Russian foreign policy at the beginning of the new century. Thus, neither the US nor Europe remained immune to events in Ukraine. Faced with a growing power that uses unconventional means to which they do not have an adequate response, they have become frightened by the Russian activities. As the answer to the growing threat, experts from the US and Europe have politicized the term „hybrid war“ by defining Russia as the main actor in this kind of war. The fact that supports this claim is reflected in the hyper production of papers about „hybrid war“ in which Russia is the main actor. Although the scientific and practical value of these works remains questionable, they influence the creation of the opinion of the expert and general public. Also, politicians surge who will more and more often charge Russia for leading the „hybrid war“, which makes further influence on the politicization of this phenomenon.

Some European scholars rejected this attitude, but most of them have hardly advocated such view on the Russian activities in its interest zone. The reasons for this lie in complex and ambiguous relations between Russia and Europe. Thus, the meaning and usage of the term itself in the European academic, political and military circles have considerably shifted in the period since Ukrainian crisis. Today, on the case of the use of the term „hybrid war“, we can see most clearly the fear of the West from the strong and unpredictable Russia.

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