

Hybrid Warfare: A New Phenomenon in Europe's Security Environment



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Research and presentation paper by Jagello 2000
in cooperation with Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno
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Introduction

At least since 2014, Europe has been facing a new kind of hybrid security threats which combines a 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 threats are no less relevant for the Czech Republic.

Developing an effective response to these threats means not only to present long-term solutions, but it will also require a comprehensive approach of all security forces, next to military and intelligence also police and customs services. In the Czech Republic we still lack a clear definition of hybrid threats as well as a professional discussion of relevant actors dealing with the readiness of security forces (of the Czech Republic) and their ability to adequately respond to these threats. Therefore Jagello 2000 Association, jointly with the Faculty of Social Studies of Masaryk University (FSS MU) in Brno and in cooperation with the European Commission Representation in the Czech Republic, implemented a research and presentation project from May to September 2015, resulting in the current paper on the topic of hybrid warfare.

The first part of the project was a special seminar held in July 2015 at the FSS MU in Brno, involving leading Czech experts on these issues. This seminar resulted in a draft version of the paper with definitions of hybrid threats and best practices for dealing with them.

The second phase of the project was a workshop for representatives of the security forces of the Czech Republic that focused on the practical readiness. The draft version of the paper was introduced to the professional public - the auditorium included representatives of the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior, Police, National Security Agency, Customs Administration and academia. The event took place on Friday, September 18, 2015 as part of expert programs associated with the NATO Days in Ostrava. NATO Days in Ostrava are regarded the biggest security show in Europe and is organized by the Jagello 2000 Association in cooperation with all components of the integrated rescue system.

The result of these discussions is presented in the following paper which takes into account inputs and suggestions from the entire course of the project. The authors of the text are Zdeněk Kříž, Zinaida Shevchuk and Peter Števkov from Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic.

1. Hybrid warfare as a concept

The war in Clausewitz's concept is seen as a continuation of the policy of the state by violent means, which are used to force the opponent to execute our will. The primary role in this concept is played by the use of armed violence in its symmetrical or asymmetrical form. To this end all the resources of society are used as later elaborated in the concept of total war. Although hybrid warfare serves the same purpose, namely the achievement of political goals, which can be very diverse, it differs from war in Clausewitz's concept (further referred to as 'classic war') in many different characteristics.

Expert debate about hybrid warfare began in foreign literature long before the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In our opinion, this debate's weakness consists in the fact that the available definitions do not set explicit demarcation criteria for distinguishing between classical and hybrid warfare. If we want to differentiate between hybrid warfare and classic war, the main demarcation criterion, in our judgment is the use of the means that are primarily used to achieve the objectives of war. In hybrid warfare, it is important that non-military means of subversive nature play the leading role. Ideally, an attacking state need not make explicit use of military force. The aim of the attacker is to control the minds of the political leadership and the population of the attacked state through propaganda (psychological operations), deceptive campaigns and intimidation by terror. If military force is used, it is used in secret. Use of demarcation criteria, prioritising non-military tools of subversion and conducting secret warfare, these aspects clearly distinguish hybrid warfare from other types of war.

1.1. Working definition of hybrid warfare

Hybrid warfare is an armed conflict conducted by a combination of non-military and military means and aiming with their synergistic effect to compel the enemy to take such steps that he would not do of his own accord. At least one side of the conflict is the state. The main role in achieving the objectives of war is played by non-military means such as psychological operations and propaganda, economic sanctions, embargoes, criminal activities, terrorist activities, and other subversive activities of a similar nature. The attacker's military operations are conducted in secret by irregular forces combining symmetric and asymmetric methods of combat operations against the whole society and, in particular, against its political structures, state authorities and local government, the state economy, the morale of the population and against the armed forces.

2. Use of elements of hybrid warfare against Georgia and Ukraine

2.1. Georgia 2008

The Russia-Georgia armed conflict in the summer of 2008 broke out at the time of the Beijing Olympics and aroused deep concern in the international community. According to some experts, it was the first armed confrontation between the East and the West after the end of the Cold War. The main aim of Russia was to retain its influence through military operations, to recognise the independence of the regions concerned, and to maintain a significant military presence in those territories. Last but not least, Russia 'buried' the chances of Georgia to achieve NATO membership in the near future, which Georgia has sought since 2002. **In this case, it was not a hybrid warfare within the meaning of the above-proposed definition. It was a war according to the classical definition, in which Russia openly intervened with military force and used some elements of hybrid warfare to prepare and support the conduct of combat operations.** The policy goals of the operation were primarily achieved by military force whereas elements of hybrid warfare (economic sanctions and embargoes, information war, war in cyberspace) played more of a supporting role.

Both sides of the armed conflict waged an intensive information war, making it difficult to separate facts from intentionally disseminated disinformation. This information war was dominated by three main themes:

1. Georgia and especially President Saakashvili were aggressors.
2. Russia was forced to intervene to defend its citizens and to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe (defensive purpose);
3. The West has no legitimate reason for criticizing Russia because Russia simply does what the West did in Kosovo in 1999.

Parallel to the information war against Georgia, cyber war also took place. A total of 38 Georgian websites were attacked, including the website of the Georgian president, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Bank, Parliament, and Supreme Court. These attacks were centrally managed and coordinated.

It is difficult to evaluate the performance of the Russian armed forces, as it is still not entirely clear whether it was a pre-planned and carefully prepared military operation, or whether it was on both sides an unexpected war, for which neither of the conflicting parties were prepared. However, the rapidity of the deployment of Russian military forces in the mountainous terrain, the early opening of a second

front in Abkhazia, Russian espionage activities in the region, military provocations on the eve of war, the downing of a Georgian unmanned aircraft and, last but not least, the Russian military exercises in the region ('Caucasus 2008') demonstrate the readiness of Russia to escalate the conflict. The conflict nevertheless revealed many Russian shortcomings, particularly weaknesses in the coordination of ground, naval and air forces. According to available sources, an important role in military operations was played by airborne units and special forces. The reforms announced by the Russian president immediately after the war reflect the intention to improve Russia's ability to effectively lead the campaign by employing modern technologies and operating procedures.

2.2. Ukraine 2014–2015

Russia used and is still using against Ukraine a wide range of military (asymmetric and symmetric), economic, propagandistic, diplomatic and perhaps even cyber means of combat.

The activity of Russian diplomacy, of course, cannot be summed in a text of this scope and purpose, but in brief, we can say that Russia is seeking to weaken Kiev at forums of international organisations, in particular by promoting the federalisation of Ukraine. Concerning the economic means, Moscow manipulates the price of imported Russian natural gas and adopts restrictive non-tariff measures on Ukrainian food products. For the Ukrainian economy, the most severe sanction is a ban on the use of Russian air space by Ukrainian airlines.

Russia uses the so-called 'new propaganda' that does not seek to persuade the recipient, but to obfuscate what is truth and what the recipient can trust. To enlist support for the war in the Russian population it uses a broad variety of media channels, particularly state television, which in its coverage of Ukraine can significantly influence the local public opinion. These include Russia Today, Voice of Russia, Sputnik, press agency ITAR-TASS and the agency RIA Novosti. It is also worth mentioning that multiple sources have confirmed the existence of an army of trolls paid by the government. These are Internet bloggers and debaters who post views preferred by the Russian government to domestic and foreign websites.

Concerning the cyberspace area, several attacks against the Ukrainian government websites and systems have been recorded (e.g. the Ukrainian electoral counting electronic system, the Ukrainian transport network, and attacks on websites of volunteer battalions). However, it is not possible to determine with certainty whether it has been the work of the Russian forces. It is also necessary to emphasise

that all cyber-attacks are only the tip of the iceberg. The extent of Russian cyber-attacks using malware or spyware can never be determined with certainty unless Russia discloses this information voluntarily (or if it is leaked).

In the military dimension, Russia and the separatists are able to deploy a wide spectrum of units in the conflict. According to the US Department of Defense, in November 2014 Russia had 7,000 regular troops in Ukraine (excluding the Crimea). To this day, it is alleged that more than 40,000 Russian troops have been rotated in Ukraine. Russia and Russian organisations actively support the separatists (with logistics, material and personnel), who are a combination of the local population, Russian citizens and, occasionally, citizens of many other countries. Without extensive logistical support from the outside, it is impossible for the separatists to conduct combat operations to the extent that we see in eastern Ukraine. Russia is the only country in the region that has the capacity and motivation.

If we apply the working definition in the introduction, then we can speak of hybrid warfare in particular to describe the Russian occupation of the Crimea and Russian operations until the summer of 2014. Evaluation of the conflict since the summer of 2014 is not so clear-cut. Since summer 2014, it is quite obvious that regular Russian troops operate in eastern Ukraine and if necessary (e.g. imminent defeat of the separatists) even entire organic military units can be used. Denying this direct participation of the Russian military belongs to the hybrid warfare tools. **On the other hand, the direct military intervention of Russia suggests that hybrid warfare has reached its limits.**

3. Is this a new approach?

The bedrock of the hybrid warfare concept is that of subversion, which comprises four main stages:

1. demoralisation of the target society,
2. destabilisation of the target society,
3. precipitation of a crisis in the target society,
4. seizing control of the target society by internal forces acting in concert with the attacker.

This is an old Soviet (Marxist-Leninist) concept, applied towards the West by the USSR throughout its existence. Attacks on the adversary's political authorities, propaganda, fomenting unrest, creating 'people's republics', these are well-known components under the cloak of the new hybrid warfare. Modern

information technologies allow multiplication of the effect that brings a new quality and dangerous nature of this phenomenon.

4. Potential of hybrid warfare

Hybrid warfare in the media space is considered extremely dangerous. The proponents of this view usually refer to the Russian general Gerasimov, who claims that hybrid war can disrupt even a well-governed and prosperous state. This optimism (or pessimism, depending on one's perspective) is difficult to sustain in the light of the current empirical evidence. In a security analysis of this phenomenon, it is important neither to underestimate nor to overestimate its possibilities.

The main problem for the defender is to identify the moment when he is the target of a hybrid attack. **Therefore, defence against hybrid warfare depends in the first line on intelligence services and in the second line on an authentic civil society.** To wage a hybrid war aiming to achieve political goals, a number of specific necessary – however not sufficient – conditions must be met. Only their right configuration generates a suitable battlefield for hybrid warfare.

Empirical evidence to date indicates that these are at least the following necessary but not sufficient conditions in isolation:

1. the attacked country has been mismanaged in the long term and it does not fulfil its basic functions,
2. its population is divided along several dividing lines,
3. the potential attacker holds a certain attraction for a part of the attacked-country population and can therefore use soft-power instruments,
4. the attacked country borders the attacker and is unable to effectively control its borders,
5. the attacked country has no dependable allies, and
6. the attacker has a certain degree of credibility in the international community, which allows him to influence the international community with his version of events.

Even in the case of Ukraine, which is in the post-communist milieu the prototype of a poorly governed state, managed like a company that lays golden eggs for oligarchs, the hybrid warfare succeeded only in the first stage in the Crimea. However, **by the second stage**, when Russia, encouraged by its success in the Crimea, tried to split Ukraine along the Odessa–Kharkov line, **this concept fatally failed** and the defeat of Russian irregular forces fighting in secret until then

in the east of Ukraine had to be prevented by an open intervention of Russian regular forces in the summer 2014. This intervention continues till today, producing negative political, economic and military consequences Russia.

If we think about further potential of hybrid warfare used against the West and the countries close to it, we must take into account that **Russia has lost the element of surprise**. Potential targets of this type of warfare, which in our region means primarily the Baltic States and indirectly NATO, would now be less shocked than in 2014. This is relevant also to the other countries of the West. Whether this conclusion applies to Belarus and the Central Asian countries is a question, however. Some steps taken by Belarus indicate that Lukashenko is aware of these risks.

Hybrid warfare has to be carefully analysed and preparations have to be made for waging it. The Central European countries should devote particular attention to Russia. **A fight against an opponent that wages a hybrid war is the task for the entire society and must be conducted in all areas**. Last but not least, the society must be prepared to make hybrid counterattacks in the area of information war and in cyberspace against the attacker. However, in our opinion, a **much more dangerous form of Russian aggression against members of NATO would be a repeat of the Georgian scenario, especially if it is supported by nuclear threats from Russia**.

5. Proposed measures for improving the ability of states to face hybrid warfare

- Strengthen the state's ability to fulfil its basic functions and hence the loyalty of citizens to the state.
- Carry out intelligence and analytical activities in order to detect enemy preparations for a hybrid warfare, and, particularly, the launch of hybrid attacks using subversion.
- Continually single out countries that might resort to hybrid warfare and focus attention on them already in peacetime. Continuously draw up plans of countermeasures of both defensive and offensive nature against these countries in all areas relevant to hybrid warfare.
- Systematically prevent the infiltration of political leadership of the state carried out by agents of influence of a potential hybrid attacker.
- Acquaint the public in a suitable form with influence networks which a potential

hybrid attacker constructs in the attacked-to-be country as well as with their modus operandi.

- Strengthen social cohesion of the country. By the active state policy do not allow the creation of variously defined socially excluded areas (e.g. based on ethnicity, religion or social status), which a potential attacker could rely on and which he could exploit in his campaign.
- Develop and build political relations with other potential targets of hybrid aggression. Exchange experience both on appropriate multilateral platforms (NATO and EU) as well as bilaterally.
- In the area of foreign policy, strive to address the threats associated with hybrid warfare in international organisations for collective defence of which the state is a member.
- Reduce to a minimum the necessary level of diplomatic, economic, military and cultural relations with countries that have been evaluated as potential hybrid attackers.
- Develop an adequate form of homeland defence consciousness and educational activities among the population concerning hybrid warfare and ways to face it. Systematically develop cooperation in this area with an authentic civil society.
- Enhance flexibility and the ability of independent action at all levels of state, local government and the armed forces.
- Develop a wide range of capabilities needed for hybrid warfare, particularly intelligence capabilities, including the abilities to operate in cyberspace and to use information operations.
- Build military capabilities to be usable at all types of expeditionary operations and in defending territory.
- Strengthen the ability of the police to act against irregular and hostile unidentified armed formations fighting incognito at the very moment they attempt to paralyse the authority of state and local government.
- Create legislative conditions to ensure that police forces could be rapidly reinforced on the national territory by the military in their fight against unidentified armed formations at a time when the state has not formally been declared a war.
- Pursue scientific study of the issue of hybrid warfare using the approaches of all relevant scientific disciplines.

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Working definition of hybrid warfare

Hybrid warfare is an armed conflict conducted by a combination of non-military and military means and aiming with their synergistic effect to compel the enemy to take such steps that he would not do of his own accord. At least one side of the conflict is the state. The main role in achieving the objectives of war is played by non-military means such as psychological operations and propaganda, economic sanctions, embargoes, criminal activities, terrorist activities, and other subversive activities of a similar nature. The attacker's military operations are conducted in secret by irregular forces combining symmetric and asymmetric methods of combat operations against the whole society and, in particular, against its political structures, state authorities and local government, the state economy, the morale of the population and against the armed forces.