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## HYBRID WARFARE AS A NEW TYPE OF ARMED CONFLICT IN THE MODERN WORLD

## WOJNA HYBRYDOWA JAKO NOWY RODZAJ KONFLIKTU ZBROJNEGO WE WSPÓŁCZESNYM ŚWIECIE

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**Abstract.** It has been over eight years since the Russian Federation illegally conquered Crimea. It was probably the apogee of the biggest noise about the "Russian hybrid war". Some authors in the literature on the subject have completely questioned this concept, while others have perceived it as a new way of waging war. In recent years, hybrid war has become a new but controversial term in academic, political book positions to suggest a kind of combination of different military and non-military means and methods. The ongoing war conflict in Ukraine has shown the important role played by well-organized propaganda. It must not be forgotten that one of the most important goals of contemporary hybrid wars is to win a battle in the enemy's mind. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to have a free media market, in which the aggressor occupies a strong position or such a level of access to modern telecommunications technologies among the population of the attacked state, which will allow for widespread familiarization with propaganda and information materials posted on social networks, websites. The aim of the article is to present the issue of hybrid warfare in the modern world.

**Keywords:** hybrid, conflict, warfare

**Abstrakt.** Minęło ponad osiem lat, odkąd Federacja Rosyjska nielegalnie podbiła Krym. Było to prawdopodobnie apogeum największego szumu o „rosyjskiej wojnie hybrydowej”. Niektórzy autorzy w literaturze przedmiotu całkowicie zakwestionowali tę koncepcję, inni postrzegali ją jako nowy sposób prowadzenia wojny. W ostatnich latach wojna hybrydowa stała się nowym, ale kontrowersyjnym terminem w akademickich, politycznych pozycjach książkowych, sugerującym rodzaj połączenia różnych środków i metod wojskowych i pozamilitarnych. Trwający konflikt wojenny w Ukrainie pokazał, jak ważną rolę odgrywa dobrze zorganizowana propaganda. Nie można zapominać, że jednym z najważniejszych celów współczesnych wojen hybrydowych jest wygranie bitwy w umyśle wroga. Chcąc to osiągnąć, niezbędny jest wolny rynek mediów, na którym agresor zajmuje silną pozycję lub taki poziom dostępu do nowoczesnych technologii telekomunikacyjnych wśród ludności atakowanego państwa, co pozwoli na szerokie zapoznanie się z propagandą oraz materiały informacyjne zamieszczane na portalach społecznościowych, stronach internetowych.

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie problematyki wojny hybrydowej we współczesnym świecie. Problem badawczy określono w formie pytania – jakie nowe elementy prowadzenia wojen są specyfiką prowadzenia współczesnych wojen hybrydowych? W celu odpowiedzi na to pytanie wykorzystano przede wszystkim krytyczną analizę literatury przedmiotu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** hybryda, konflikt, wojna

## Introduction

The term hybrid warfare does not have a consistent definition, but generally refers to deniable and secret activities, supported by the threat or use of conventional or nuclear forces, to influence the internal policies of the target countries. Some authors use this term to refer only to irregular tactics, others use a hybrid to describe a number of irregular and conventional tactics used on the same battlefield, and others use this term to describe the doctrine of a new generation war formulated by the top management of the Russian General Staff. Many authors criticize this term as a meaningless trendy slogan or catchy slogan that does not help us understand the specificity of the threat from Russia. Nevertheless, various works concerning the hybrid war and related actions seem to have in mind a similar set of actions that Russia has been pursuing in Ukraine, Georgia and other neighbouring countries, and this is likely to continue in the future.

An example of a hybrid war is the conflict in Ukraine, which broke out in March 2014. In its actions, Russia used methods characteristic of the hybrid conflict, which it was able to replace at any time, due to its military potential, with conventional measures. According to the Western media, as well as analysts from the analytical centres of the member states of the North Atlantic Pact, the annexation of Crimea and the subsequent Donbas War are a typical example of such a conflict (M. Wojnowski). The Ukrainian conflict is described as having the hallmarks of hybrid military operations. On several occasions, directly and indirectly, the Russians admitted that they had used hybrid methods during the conflict in Ukraine, which they later denied. (Wasowski, 2015, p.12).

The concept of hybrid war first appeared in the American military strategy and was used by American analysts in the military operations carried out in Afghanistan and Iraq. (A Gruszczyk, 2011, p.11). However, it gained popularity during the Israeli-Lebanese conflict that took place in 2006. It was also used in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, during which Russia demonstrated its territorial aspirations by undertaking a virtual conflict with the West. In the context of these activities, we observe the activity and multitude of information, which leads to reflections on the essence of the information war and its mechanisms.

In Polish documents, the concept of hybrid war was characterized by the Office of National Security, which defined it as “a war that combines at the same time various possible means and methods of violence, including in particular armed regular and irregular activities, operations in cyberspace and economic, psychological activities, information campaigns about the sound of propaganda, etc.” ((mini) BBN Dictionary).

The Russian monopoly on the mass media in the pro-Soviet countries became very important, which enabled the creation of a closed information space, thanks to which only a uniform, biased Russian relationship reached the public consciousness, showing Ukraine as a weak, bankrupt and deprived of prospects of geopolitical existence. Disinformation is a priority tool, the participation of Russian soldiers in military operations in Ukraine is masked by the creation of information that it was the Ukrainian troops that attacked the Russian Federation. The concentration of Russian troops transferred to Ukraine took place under the pretext of exercises in border regions.

### The essence of hybrid warfare

In the 1960s, Yevgeny Messner (Kraj, 2012, no.3, pp. 32-35.) formulated a new concept of conducting armed conflicts, which he called rebel wars. Messner's views were largely shaped by the trauma of the defeat during the Russian civil war, in which he experienced a direct fight against the enemy through irregular warfare and terror and propaganda on a massive scale. Later, during World War II, he saw intense guerrilla and anti-guerrilla warfare in the Balkan Cauldron. Messner wrote that in rebel wars, irregular operations are the basic form of struggle. The author mentioned four forms of combat: diversion, terror, guerrilla and uprising. The author used the example of Poland in World War II, where the Warsaw Uprising broke out. According to Messner, in a mutiny war, fighters are not an army, they are more of a people's movement. Forms characteristic of a mutiny war table1.

Table 1. Factors characteristic of a mutiny war

No formal declaration of war
Avoiding the official involvement of the state in a formal war
No frontline
Formal decommissioning of armed groups
Equalization of the role of armed forces with regular troops
The growing role of special forces and secret services
The decisive importance of long-term psychological and information activities
The battlefield transforms into a battle area
Increasing role in the international relations of non-recognizable states and failed states
The key role of disinformation wars
The growing role of terror
Loss of state monopoly on military operations

The main theses by E. Messner show that: in the 20th century the classical wars ended, they were replaced by rebellious conflicts (Мятеж, i.e. Mutinous War, rebel-war). In this type of conflict, psychology and propaganda are becoming increasingly important in the preparation and course of the war.

The author noted that just as there is no clear dividing line between peace and war, there is no clear dividing line between most warfare. The front line disappears, and the entire territory of the state becomes a potential battlefield. Soldiers of a new kind of war; terrorists, guerrilla groups or propagandists can operate in different parts of the country that they decide to attack. In their activities, they are much less constrained by the conventional front geometry and configuration of classic delivery lines. One of the key consequences of the fading frontline is that civilians are likely to be more involved in a real war than the ordinary armed forces of the attacked state.

Warfare is increasingly based on irregular and unconventional elements, which on average represent lower quality, lower ethical standards and lower morale. This makes warfare less professional and more unpredictable.

The complexity of warfare is increasing due to the growing number and variety of parties involved in the fighting. Conflicts no longer have a local character; instead, they increasingly attract external actors. The result is a battlefield with a mosaic of participants operating in changing configurations. In fact, this process may lead to a situation in which the political and strategic dynamics of the conflict become incomprehensible to third parties.

Messner was convinced that the Communists had perfected a new type of unconventional war that allowed them to challenge and perhaps even defeat the West, without fear of provoking a direct military confrontation.

The tactical, operational and strategic art of a rebellious war focuses on unconventional methods and instruments such as treason, terror or disinformation. The classical conventional army plays a marginal role at best. A characteristic feature of this war is the widespread use of various acts of violence, such as armed robbery, hostage-taking, kidnapping or piracy. The mutiny war is characterized by a low cost compared to traditional wars.

To sum up, Messner's work, even though it is more than half a century old, it certainly has not lost its relevance. On the contrary, many of his ideas remain at the heart of contemporary discussions on hybrid warfare.

## **The concept of armed conflict and hybrid warfare**

Armed conflict is nowadays a part of social life, it is subject to a change in the social environment in which it arises. It is therefore a dynamic process. Therefore, nowadays there is a decline in "classic" wars between states and an increase in the

number and importance of armed conflicts within the state, with the increasing involvement of various non-state actors and the progressing complexity of their conduct.

„Hybrid warfare” has become the term that dominated the current forms of armed conflict. The manner in which the annexation of Crimea was carried out by Russia and the manner in which the country became involved in the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine contributed to its popularization.

The term hybrid warfare was used in 2007 by Frank Hoffman to describe the armed conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon in 2006. (Pietras, Lublin 2014, p. 40.)

New conflicts are closely linked to globalisation processes that are evident during their lifetime. These include the presence of media that can make conflict a spectacle viewed in real time by viewers around the world.

„An important point of reference for the analysis of the essence of the hybrid warfare, with particular emphasis on the one conducted by Russia in eastern Ukraine, creates the phenomenon of asymmetric conflicts. Asymmetric conflicts have become an element of the political strategy, the premises of which formed objective changes in the international environment” (Baluk, M. Doroszko Lublin 2017, p. 22).

In descriptions of hybrid activities in Ukraine, it was often noticed that this is a military conflict, different from the classical war. The very concepts of ‚hybrid’ and ‚hybridity’ have been known for a long time and are used only in wars and not only in security sciences. The term hybrid comes from a Latin *hybrida*. It means a combination of different features, properties, elements (often unmatched or opposed to each other) in one entity (Markowski, Pawlec Lublin 2017, p. 22).

According to L. Skoneczny, in 2002 William J. Nemeth used it in his work. In those years, he analysed the Russian-Chechen conflict and described the hybridity of its activities. He also mentioned the features of hybrid warfare, including:

- unusual organization of the army,
- different from the Western way of using military forces, including the use of guerrilla actions,
- blurring of boundaries between military and civilian participants in military operations,
- difficulty in defining the enemy,
- using all available methods, means and technologies in combat operations,
- disinformation on a large scale of enemy forces,
- the use of civilian means of communication for command (Skoneczny, Warszawa 2018, p. 10.)

According to F.G. Hoffman, hybrid warfare is characterized by physical and psychological, kinetic and non-kinetic convergence of fighters and civilians, armed forces and communities, states and non-state actors, as well as the combat capabilities with which they are equipped (Pack. Warszawa 2018, p. 10.).

As M. Piotrowski notes, the definition of hybrid warfare has been included in the doctrinal documents of the largest countries, including the US National Military Strategy of 2015 (Piotrowski, *International Affairs*] 2015, No. 2, p. 21).

A hybrid war can simultaneously and intentionally synchronize many instruments of power using creativity, ambiguity, nonlinearity and cognitive elements of warfare. Hybrid wars are conducted by state or non-state entities. They aim to exploit national weaknesses in various political, military, economic, social and information areas. Hybrid warfare uses coordinated military, political, economic, civilian and information activities that extend far beyond the military sphere. It's synchronized and systematic.

Hybrid warfare is an emerging but ill-defined concept in conflict research. It refers to the use of unconventional methods in a multi-domain approach to combat. These methods are aimed at disrupting and excluding enemy activities without engaging in open warfare.

There is no agreed definition of hybrid warfare in the literature. In addition, the meaning and use of the term itself changed significantly between 2002 and 2015.

The term "hybrid warfare" was originally used to describe the growing sophistication and complexity of non-state actors on the battlefield in some places, such as Chechnya and Lebanon, and was later used in Afghanistan and Iraq. The term "hybrid" in the context of a non-state act was used to illustrate how participants such as Hezbollah – formerly considered as a quintessence of a non-state hybrid threat - used together with the features of unconventional and conventional warfare (Langer, Ustron 2018, p. 93). Although the concept is quite new, its effects and results are often on the front page of newspapers today. An example of this form of war is Russia's approach to Ukraine. It includes a combination of activities, such as disinformation, economic manipulation, the use of proxies and uprisings, diplomatic pressure and military action.

Hybrid threats are an international problem. National governments should coordinate a coherent approach among themselves to understand, detect and respond to the hybrid of war in their collective interests.

With regard to hybrid warfare, the term political warfare is commonly used to refer to power used to achieve national goals in a way that is not a physical conflict.

Such a war is being waged in the "grey zone" of the conflict, which means that operations cannot clearly exceed the threshold of the war. This may be due to the ambiguity of international law, the ambiguity of actions and attribution, or the fact that the impact of actions does not justify a response.

The concepts of "hybrid warfare" and "grey area" are probably based on long-term military strategies. What is relatively new are opponents who are exploiting gaps in information technology to achieve results. Our growing connectivity and dependence on information technology is a gap that is the target of two key threats: cyber attacks and the overthrow of our democratic institutions and social cohesion.

Both are recognised challenges to our national security. These are “hybrid threats” because they can be exploited in a broader campaign - covering political, criminal and economic activities (Pietras p. 57.) And because they are characterized by ambiguity related to the grey market, they are, well suited to achieving political goals without resorting to traditional conflict. While cyber attacks are carried out by different actors, there is an ongoing low-intensity cyber conflict between nation states. This includes attacks and counter-attacks on critical infrastructure such as energy networks reported between the US and Russia.

Many governments are particularly concerned about cyber attacks. What distinguishes them from traditional warfare is that cyber attacks are aimed not only at the military. The hybrid war approach is likely to target all elements of national power, including critical infrastructure, business systems and individuals (Kapusniak, Warszawa- Lublin 2008, p. 45.)

Misinformation and fraud are not new concepts in war, but we have already noticed a significant change in the way national states manipulate information, especially through social media.

Authoritarian governments have demonstrated the ability and intention to control information in the country. For example, information in China is controlled by the state through a censorship system commonly known as the Great Firewall of China. (Domanska, Kardas, Komentarze OSW” 2016, no. 203). There is also growing evidence that such authoritarian governments may attempt to interfere in the affairs of other nations by manipulating information. Democratic nations have a level of transparency and respect for international law that excludes their participation in disinformation campaigns. For similar reasons, they are usually not prepared to defend themselves against such campaigns.

The term “hybrid warfare” may be in vogue, and its continued use is uncertain.

Russia sees hybrid wars as the main line of future military development, not as a transitory phenomenon. The Russian military retains the theoretical space for the idea of a traditional conventional war and does not claim that all conflicts are now inherently hybrid. Instead, it argues that conventional warfare is a type of conflict that is increasingly unlikely in the 21st century due to technological change and strategic balance of power. The Kremlin further argues that Russia should shape its military and national tools so that they are optimised for hybrid warfare, not only because they are becoming more widespread, but also because they are now more practical and effective than the traditional conventional warfare. (Bialuk , Zamosc 2016, p. 76.)

Therefore, the army of the Russian Federation is adapting to improve its ability to conduct hybrid wars. The Russian army is not trying to hide its intention to conduct offensive hybrid wars. Russian military theorists write extensively and openly about the general strategies and doctrine of offensive hybrid wars and additionally discuss the development of individual hybrid means. The Kremlin’s ongoing adaptations

include actions aimed at: centralising all potential Russian decision-making bodies - civil, military, media and economic - in order to coordinate the efforts of the entire government.

## **Hybrid Wars of the Russian Federation**

The collapse of the Soviet Union gave the former Soviet republics the opportunity to shape their own foreign policy on the basis of what is commonly understood as key Western values. However, in Russia, the post-Soviet decades also provoked a lot of nostalgia. The collapse of the Soviet Union is seen not only as one of the greatest geopolitical disasters of the century, as Vladimir Putin put it but also as a huge personal drama for many Russians. The threat to Russia's internal policy was also recognised as the strengthening of economic and political ties with the West by the post-Soviet states. It has recently become apparent that three independent post-Soviet countries, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, have become targets of Russian aggression in a self-directed combat to prevent the West from entering which it considers to be part of its sphere of influence.

The solution for maintaining or tightening control in the post-Soviet space, while avoiding an open confrontation with the West, was the implementation of a "hybrid warfare", an innovative type of war involving a number of complex activities aimed at influencing the independent one in order to achieve specific political goals. The hybrid war in Russia has allowed it to effectively distance itself from the conflicts which it has helped to create or strengthen, and to justify its actions whenever necessary.

In the literature on the subject, there are many discussions about the evolution of the contemporary war. It has become possible to simultaneously apply a variety of strategies that are both conventional and unconventional in nature. After all, a characteristic feature of hybrid warfare is that it is not limited to the traditional battlefield or to the use of heavy weapons and military operations.

Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine became sovereign states after the collapse of the USSR. The fact that these countries found themselves between two geopolitical realities significantly complicated the task of an independent approach to their foreign affairs. These countries had to take balancing measures. In 2014, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine took a big step towards strengthening ties with Brussels, signing Ukraine-EU association agreements and trying to create a framework for cooperation in areas such as policy development, society and security culture. (Piskorska, Lublin 2016, p. 15.)

In Ukraine, Russia used a full spectrum of hybrid warfare techniques, which began with repeated energy disputes in 2005 and resulted in military confrontations.



Already in the early 1990s, the country started using elements of the hybrid warfare in Moldova and Georgia, namely financing and providing military assistance to separatists in the Transnistrian regions of Moldova and Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia. This led to the emergence of a permanent peacekeeping force in Transnistria, which put pressure on Moldova, and to the Russian-Georgian war in 2008. In Ukraine, Russia applied the full spectrum of hybrid warfare techniques, which began with repeated energy disputes in 2005 to military confrontations. (Piskorska, Lublin 2016, p. 16).

Apart from geographical proximity, there were some factors that made these countries susceptible to Russian hybrid attacks. These included a certain level of popular sympathy for Russia, economic and energy dependence on Russia and Russian military bases in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Crimea. Russia has made effective use of each of these factors.

The hybrid war allows the aggressor to effectively distance themselves from the conflict by presenting the intervention as an internal conflict. There is a paradox here: in Moldova and Ukraine, violent clashes resulted in the de facto loss of state sovereignty over the secession regions. Moscow was able to enter into talks about a ceasefire, playing the role of a peacekeeper, even though it caused these conflicts. Refusing to participate in the conflict is a very convenient tactic because the position of an observer who is a third party allows for greater freedom of movement while maintaining good relations with the rest of the international community.

A characteristic feature of hybrid warfare is its multidimensional character and the fact that it can take various forms in parallel. These may include media and trade channels that are used to exploit the internal and external weaknesses of the target country. (Bryc A., 2009, p. 98).

Western countries position themselves as democratic in human rights and the international legal order. So far, however, they have proved helpless in the face of Russia's readiness to appropriate these concepts in its own service. Hybrid warfare hinders defence planning. (Dępczyński, 2015, p.101). It requires a revision of military doctrines and a greater focus on non-military threats. The West must also go beyond political rhetoric and provide real help in reducing existing weaknesses in countries facing Moscow's hybrid pressure.

## **Summary**

So far, there has not been a universal definition of hybrid warfare (in the international dimension) that would be acceptable to all theoreticians and practitioners. Each definition leads to a debate as to whether the term is useful. It can be stated that hybrid warfare is a set of military and non-military activities of a non-standard,

complicated nature, its opponent is difficult to determine precisely and is variable in nature. Hybrid activities use combinations of conventional and unconventional methods. The ability to apply ambiguity to ensure that the attacker credibly denies and obscures the very fact that the attack is taking place.

Given the vastness and depth of Messner's insights, his work could be expected to occupy a more prominent place in all analyses and discussions related to the "Russian hybrid warfare". This is especially true in comparison to the noise surrounding the article (which is also very interesting) written by Russian General Gerasimov in 2013 on the tendency to blur the boundaries between states of war and peace.

The formula of the hybrid warfare in eastern Ukraine and the Gerasimov doctrine launched a discussion on the military power of Russia, the state and significance of conventional forces, the ability to project strength, the state and scope of non-military instruments that, as part of the synergy effect, may support military ones, with particular emphasis on the role of propaganda.

In any case, Messner's work should be a fundamental element of any "hybrid flavour" analysis, especially those related to Russian views on the subject. All these rules include the conflict in Ukraine, which began in Crimea in late February-March 2013 and continued later in the eastern districts of Ukraine.

The term "hybrid threats" has a questionable conceptual value. It has been joined by various definitions and is also competed with by other terms such as "non-linear war", "asymmetric conflict" and "subversiveness". In short, "hybrid threats" refer to the use of state-sponsored but not officially (which can be denied) affiliated actors who do not resort to physical violence.

The purpose of hybrid threats is to force the threat object to fulfil the strategic interests of the aggressor. There is a hidden warning against the use of force behind such threats (Kranz, 2014,p.78.)

Hybrid tricks have been used throughout history, from the Trojan horse invented by Odysseus to Trojan malware written by today's hackers. Indeed, even peacetime is "a hybrid," interrupted by assassinations, corruption, espionage, disinformation, manipulation, and economic pressure. The public debate on hybrid threats focuses on fake news, information warfare and social media manipulation. This observation is understandable: fake news is the most visible element of a hybrid campaign. However, the ways in which countries use undisclosed and unassigned assets to weaken their opponents go far beyond these elements. And disinformation is rarely an end in itself, but rather a preparatory stage for further subversive actions (Kranz, 2014,p.78.)

Extensive intelligence, conspiracy, and subversive efforts can weaken an opponent's society in a way that allows a foreign power to enter and exploit the situation.

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