



HYBRID WARFARE IN WARTIME – CONCEPT AND ACTION OPERATIONALIZATION ATTEMPT –

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Russia’s aggression against Ukraine has made the concept of hybrid warfare almost forgotten. The literature has focused on the confrontation itself, but, as a rule, hybrid threats are activated when public attention is drawn to other issues and when the public is not prepared to meet the challenge. After the invasion of Ukraine, the term hybrid warfare has dissipated into the mass of frequently used operational terms. From the range of five dimensions of this term, which entails five types of associated interpretations (Solmaz, 2022), in the war in Ukraine, the emphasis seems to be on the aspects related to the hard component. The actual military confrontation, the occupation of Ukrainian territories by Russian troops and the violent actions (including those that exceed normative and moral boundaries on the battlefield) are the elements that attract public attention to a greater extent than the soft actions with a high degree of ambiguity (Mumford, Carlucci, 2022), contributing to the synergistic effect of sharp power. Under these conditions, hybrid warfare is not necessarily a form of war that substitutes for actual confrontation, but a way in which soft actions complement or compensate for the effects obtained by hard actions. Is the invasion of Ukraine a hybrid warfare, or can we talk about hybrid warfare as running parallel to and during the war? Which of these interpretative postures allows for the deviation from the classical meaning of war, as long as the action has been defined, from the perspective of the aggressor, as a “special military operation”? In the present paper, we attempt at operationalizing the concept of hybrid warfare, which has been analysed in the dynamics of application in several recent studies, starting from the study of its effects in the war in Ukraine (Muradov, 2022; Guerrero, 2022), and that of distinguishing between the hybrid warfare and ghibridnaia voina perspectives.

Keywords: hybrid warfare; Ukraine conflict; sharp power; ambiguity; concept operationalization;



HYBRID WARFARE BEFORE THE INVASION OF UKRAINE

A debate about the viability of the term *hybrid warfare* after the invasion of Ukraine should start from its viability during the preceding operations. The ZAPAD 2021 military exercise¹, which counted more than 200,000 troops deployed in the vicinity of Ukraine, both on Russian national territory and in Belarus, was, in turn, prepared by a series of smaller-scale actions; the exercise represented, through the double stake of invasion preparation and intimidation, a form of hybrid warfare manifestation in its classical sense, as well as a framework of concept-related information actions. ZAPAD 2021 aimed, first of all, at the preparation of the invasion. However, the public opinion attention was especially focused on the informational dimension of the strategic deployment of the Russian armed forces in the west of the country, as long as the military exercise was intended to transmit important narratives and sub-narratives (Akimenko et al., 2022, p. 6), such as: Russia’s preoccupation with the status of a global great power, the consolidation of a power pole to which former Soviet bloc states that share common values are aligned (or will be aligned), the fact that the leader in the Kremlin has the qualities necessary for a commander able to regain Moscow’s sphere of influence previous to 1989 and, above all, the fact that NATO is an aggressive organization, which, through various methods of intimidation – in accordance with the actional profile described by the Gerasimov doctrine –, intends to control part of Moscow’s sphere of influence and endangers the very existence of the Russian state. These narratives and sub-narratives, disseminated in numerous classical mass media, with online platforms and with extensions in *new media*, through point-to-multipoint or point-to-point interactions, were associated with an exercise whose history comes from the period when the president of the federation was still Vladimir Putin’s predecessor, Boris Yeltsin. The 2021 military

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¹ *Zapad* is West in Russian, its initial letter becoming the symbol of the so-called special operation of the Russian Federation.



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exercise, of a much larger scale than the previous ones, was conducted in a regional climate characterized by a state of hybrid warfare in eastern Ukraine, after two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, after the end of the war in Afghanistan and the maintenance of a certain level of intensity of some conflicts in the Caucasus, in the Middle East and in Africa, as well as against the background of China’s intentions to control Taiwan, and after a series of Russian-American consultations that did not bear fruit. Unlike the previous exercises, in which the scenarios projected actions of the Russian armed forces against terrorists, ZAPAD 2021 imposed a symbolic polarization by identifying the opponents as the Polar Republic (allusion to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization), directing their offensive actions against the Central Federation (the Russian Federation) and Polesia (Belarus, as a suggestion of a wider Slavic space, including former communist countries, currently NATO member states, including Poland), with the aim of creating major confusion: *“Instead of <terrorists>, as it had been the case with previous exercises, <states> were now named as the fictional opponents of ZAPAD 2021. Thus, the so called <Polar Republic> attacked the <Central [Russian] Federation> and, jointly with its allies, proceeded to also attack the <Polesia Republic> (Belarus). When states design exercise scenarios they often create fictional <states>, but they usually respect international borders and create them within their own territory. Strangely, the <Polesia Republic> had sizable territories of the Baltic States marked as its own. Furthermore, the Russian scenario maps did not show the <Polar Republic> being active in the Baltic Sea and Kaliningrad region. Moreover, the Belarusian MoD’s briefing maps showed the occupier enter <Polesia> on land only. However, during the exercise, naval operations in the Baltic Sea and battles in Kaliningrad (part of the <Central Federation>) were numerous and more intensive compared to previous ZAPADs. The contradictions between what official maps showed and how scenarios played out on the ground suggest that the maps were produced with the intention to confuse”* (Ib., pp. 20-21).

The intention to create confusion is part of the already classicized pattern of procedures specific to hybrid warfare, with the role of manipulating the masses and antagonizing them, as the concept is defined, based on the Gerasimov doctrine, by Pavel Tsygankov (apud

Filimonov, 2019, p. 28)² or by S.G. Chekinov and S.A. Bogdanov (apud Akimenko et al., p. 5)³, but especially of creating the premises for the history mystification/falsification, an aspect on which the justification provided by Vladimir Putin for the invasion order was based. The exercise projected, through the actions associated with the concept of hybrid warfare, the framework necessary to popularize the idea of bipolar reconstruction of the world, with Russia as the central power, which would constitute a counterweight in relation to NATO, capable of designing the common framework of integration, in relation to the military doctrine of Moscow, with the system of values, with the common language, convictions and beliefs. Therefore, the discourses against the West, NATO, the EU and Ukraine during the exercise contributed to the polarization of perspectives, within the limits of maintaining a digital media favourable to their transmission and dissemination (Ib., p. 32)⁴.

IS THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION “SPECIAL MILITARY OPERATION” A HYBRID WARFARE?

Ghibridnaia voina and ideological fog in the current battlefield

The invasion of the Ukrainian territory by the Russian forces deployed in the west of the country for the ZAPAD 2021 military exercise has changed the perspective on the concept of hybrid warfare. If, from the American perspective (Hoffman, 2007), this term

² “According to [Pavel] Tsygankov, hybrid warfare also includes an application of the different techniques of social manipulation and falsification of history because hybrid war antagonizes the whole population and includes all areas of social life such as politics, economy, social development, and culture”, the perspective taken from Pavel Tsygankov, “Gibridnyye Voyny: Ponyatiya interpretatsii: real’nost” (Hybrid Wars: Definitions, interpretations and reality), in Pavel Tsygankov (ed., 2015). *Gibridnyye Voyny v khaotiziruyuschchemsya mire XXI veka (Hybrid wars in the chaotic world of the twenty-first century)*. Moscow: State University Lomonosov.

³ “Wars will be resolved by a skilful combination of military, nonmilitary, and special nonviolent measures that will be put through by a variety of forms and methods and a blend of political, economic, informational, technological, and environmental measures, primarily by taking advantage of information superiority. Information warfare in the new conditions will be the starting point of every action now called the new type of warfare, or hybrid warfare, in which broad use will be made of the mass media and, where feasible, global computer networks (blogs, various social networks, and other resources)”, v. S.G. Chekinov, S.A. Bogdanov, “Прогнозирование характера и содержания войн будущего: проблемы и суждения”, *Voennaya mysl* (10, 2015, pp. 44-45).

⁴ The digital media analysis conducted between May-September 2021 demonstrates the exponential increase in the exercise and, implicitly, narratives/sub-narratives mediatization (Akimenko et al., 2022, pp. 34-35; 44).



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entailed its understanding as a fusion of the effects of conventional and unconventional actions, the reality in the Ukrainian theatre of operations after 24 February 2022 has projected a completely different perspective. Therefore, the invasion of Ukraine – a classical military aggression, falling within the definition of war or armed conflict based on the International Law Association Report (ILA, 2008) in Rio de Janeiro, once both conditions related to a violent military phenomenon defined as such are met in this case⁵ – was presented to the public by the President of the Russian Federation as a “*special military operation*”. The intentional ambiguity in relation to the terms agreed in international protocols is included in the range of elasticity allowed by the Russian concept of hybrid warfare, namely гибридная война (*ghibridnaia voina*), and not by the American one, *hybrid warfare*. In other words, by the way the *de facto* situation has been defined, it exceeds the framework of hybrid warfare in the Western understanding, but not the one of hybrid warfare in the Russian understanding. Vladimir Putin, misleading public opinion, defined the ordered action within the limits of the concept *ghibridnaia voina*, ignoring the evidence of the international legal system. That is the reason why the concept semantics and the major differences between it and the American concept of *hybrid warfare* should be revisited and clarified.

A reference paper on the difference between the two concepts is that coordinated by researcher Ofer Fridman, from the King’s Centre for Strategic Communications (KCSC), King’s College London, together with Vitali Vladimirovici Kabernik, former director of Moscow State Institute of International Relations, respectively with British historian James C. Pearce, having more than seven-year university experience in Moscow, who managed to mirror the American concept and the one

⁵ In *Initial Report on the Meaning of Armed Conflict in International Law*, the Committee on the Use of Force of the International Law Association, a body mandated by the executive committee to provide a framework for the definition of the terms war or armed conflict and the limits of the state of war and state of peace definition, the term *war* being replaced with that of *armed conflict*, which was defined in relation to two characteristics: the existence of organized military groups and the engagement in different-scale actions: “*Looking to relevant treaties – in particular IHL treaties – rules of customary international law, general principles of international law, judicial decisions and the writings of scholars, as of the drafting of this Initial Report, the Committee has found evidence of at least two characteristics with respect to all armed conflict: 1.) The existence of organized armed groups 2.) Engaged in fighting of some intensity*” (ILA, 2008, pp.1-2).

reshaped by the Moscow military school of thought (Fridman et al., 2019). Promising to solve the acute problem of the effects of emerging technologies on the conduct of armed conflict, the concept of hybrid warfare developed by the American school was taken over and, as I have shown above, distorted by doctrinal dissimulation based on the Gerasimov doctrine, to respond not to a need to describe an upgraded reality of the battlefield, but to that of covering the Kremlin’s actional intentions. The concept allowed, after the emergence of the Gerasimov doctrine (2013), after the annexation of Crimea (2014) and the conflict in Donbas (2014), respectively after the proclamation of the Islamic Caliphate (2014), a coverage of some areas of interest in knowledge: (1) the hybridity between the military and non-military means of combat, which can lead to the achievement of political goals without implicit military confrontation; (2) the increasing role of the informational dimension of the confrontation at the hard level and (3) the understanding of the inexplicable phenomenon of the territorial and virtual expansion of the Islamic State: “*In light of these developments, three main issues have been occupying the academic and professional discourse in regard to contemporary conflicts. The first one has been the idea of increasing hybridity between different military and nonmilitary means and methods employed by political players to achieve their goals without escalating to an outright open armed confrontation. The second one has been the increasing role of the informational dimension as a virtual space, used to promote certain political goals, either domestically or internationally, or both. The third major topic has been the rise of the Islamic State with a whole set of problems and threats to international security and stability*” (Ib., p. 2).

On these coordinates, once in the American doctrine and in the NATO doctrine the emphasis was on actional hybridity, namely on the understanding of how contemporary conflicts can involve the antagonistic positioning of state and non-state entities starting from the model of hybrid warfare carried out by the Lebanese Shiite militias in the 2006 conflict with the state of Israel, the Russian doctrine developed American concepts by extending them to a meaning encompassing the entire society. The concept of hybrid warfare, translated into Russian as *ghibridnaia voina*, began to develop along



The concept of hybrid warfare, translated into Russian as ghibridnaia voina, began to develop along the lines projected by American and European studies, but expanded its scope to the level of mass warfare, designing a series of methods and structures useful in achieving the objectives of the Russian Federation to return as a major player in the geopolitical balance of power.



A feature of hybrid warfare, both in the classical sense and in the conception distorted by the Gerasimov doctrine, is that of doctrinal ambiguity and dissimulation, which has led to the nomological and ideological “fog” of the battlefield. Analysing this projection, Russian researcher Gheorghii Iurevici Filimonov drew attention to the action of hybridization and ambiguity included in the case of the hybrid warfare concept.

the lines projected by American and European studies, but expanded its scope to the level of mass warfare, designing a series of methods and structures useful in achieving the objectives of the Russian Federation to return as a major player in the geopolitical balance of power. This term provided the conceptual framework necessary to return to the Clausewitzian “fog” of the battlefield, to maintain it within the limits of the Clausewitzian concept on the basis of which the aim of absolute war and the projection of the total annihilation of the enemy could be extended. If, at present, the classical “fog” of the battlefield is not possible, given the tendency to make it transparent through the use of various technologies, the only possibility of blurring remains the ideological one, based on which the concept of *ghibridnaia voina* can cover what the transparent framework of international protocols would not allow to take place. A feature of hybrid warfare, both in the classical sense and in the conception distorted by the Gerasimov doctrine, is that of doctrinal ambiguity and dissimulation, which has led to the nomological and ideological “fog” of the battlefield. Analysing this projection, Russian researcher Gheorghii Iurevici Filimonov (2019, p. 26) drew attention to the action of hybridization and ambiguity included in the case of the hybrid warfare concept. The concept covered the unclear area of Messner’s insurrectionary warfare, based on seven subversive methods: propaganda, obstruction, sabotage, actual subversion, terror, guerrilla warfare and rebellion, and developed in the directions opened by the projections of Aleksandr Dughin and Igor Panarin, through parasite concepts in relation to similar ones developed by the American military school of thought. *Ghibridnaia voina* is a concept developed apparently in the mirror in relation to the original, *hybrid warfare*, but which, through doctrinal dissimulation, hides its true intention through the “*arson fireman*” method.

Ghibridnaia voina or absolute war

Regarding its own intentions, *ghibridnaia voina* admits the entire range of military actions included in the Clausewitzian projection of absolute war: “War is therefore an act of violence, to force the opponent to fulfil our will. (...) Violence, i.e. physical violence (because moral violence does not exist outside the concept of the state and the law), is therefore the means, and imposing our will on the enemy, is the goal”. (Clausewitz, 1982, p. 35).

The demonstration is made by Filimonov (2019, p. 30), in the study “*The Color Revolutions in the Context of Hybrid Wars*”, in relation to the argument of Russian academician Mihail Ghenadievici Deliaghin, who defines hybrid warfare in the same terms as the absolute war was defined 200 years ago by Prussian General Carl von Clausewitz: “[Hybrid war] is a struggle that seeks to destroy the adversary, to completely eliminate the independence of his governing system and bring him under your full control. Hybrid war aims to reduce the adversary country [from its status as an independent state] to a territory under your own authority”⁶.

Deliaghin’s text, whose subtitle generates ambiguity by connecting it to the wars of the past, covers exactly the framework for the application of Clausewitz’s doctrine, still in use in Moscow, with the means specific to the military actions in the Cold War period. In other words, dissimulating, *ghibridnaia voina* doctrine includes the military actions specific to the “*yesterday’s wars*”, adding to them complex information actions, to meet the goal established by the Clausewitzian paradigm more than 200 years ago, namely to destroy the enemy, to completely control it, denying its very “*raison d’etre*”. The coverage of this action with the formula used by Putin, which he has always emphasised, thus beginning a leitmotiv of the Kremlin propaganda, namely that of “*special military operation*”, makes it subsumed under the concept of *ghibridnaia voina*. The concept is one that, from Moscow’s perspective, opposes a state, the Russian Federation, to a formation that claims statehood, Ukraine, but which has no historical right to claim this quality, no right to self-determination. The justification of aggression by means specific to the classical war for the “*denazification*” of Ukraine produces ideological effects, not legal ones, because none of the aspects mentioned by Putin for starting the so-called “*special military operation*” have any legal basis. *Ghibridnaia voina* is used to justify the imperialist claims of a state that uses military force and political instruments to deny the right to existence and self-determination of another state, trying, through doctrinal dissimulation (to which I drew attention two years ago, see Lesenciuc, 2020, pp. 51-56), to justify the armed intervention.

⁶ The text was taken by Filimonov from the blog of Mihail Deliaghin, <https://delyagin.ru/>, in the article “*Novyye tekhnologii tzvetnykh revolyutsiy: Ne gotov’tes’k poz avcherashey voyne*” [New Techniques of Color Revolutions: Stop Preparing Yourself for the Yesterday’s Wars].



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In Russian military thought, unlike the American one, the concept of war covers a broad range of social-political actions, while the concept of confrontation (warfare) is associated with the military confrontation as such. The distinction is made by Kabernik, who defines the two terms, of which the former, under the conditions of knowing the distinction, could be associated with hybridity, while, in reality, both are impregnated by the hybrid character of the action, including in order to justify military operations.

Unfortunately, the Russian perspective on the concept of hybrid warfare has not been properly analysed, and this return to absolute war, this expansion of the terms applicable within the limits of *hard* power, to the armed forces, to the entire society, without proper preparation for this type of threat, has allowed for the creation of surprise by launching the so-called “*special military operation*”. In Russian military thought, unlike the American one, the concept of war covers a broad range of social-political actions, while the concept of confrontation (warfare) is associated with the military confrontation as such. The distinction is made by Kabernik (2019, pp. 43-44), who defines the two terms, of which the former, under the conditions of knowing the distinction, could be associated with hybridity, while, in reality, both are impregnated by the hybrid character of the action, including in order to justify military operations (as in the case of the events on 24 February 2022): “*Russian military thinking not only defines war as a socio-political phenomenon, but going further it discriminates between war and warfare, and this discrimination is important for a better understanding of Russian concepts. War is a state of society while warfare is viewed by Russian military scholars as activities associated with armed conflict, a practical implementation of combat principles. Hence, according to this understanding, there just cannot be a hybrid war, or a cyberwar, or any other sort of war. Instead, certain forms and modalities of warfare, including hybrid, informational or other that can be used during a war, which, in turn are viewed as a full-spectrum conflict involving armed violence as the predominant way to resolve political or other contradictions. According to the views of the Russians, military warfare is a mandatory element of any war. This in turn introduced another layer (or, more accurately, layers) for analysis. While war itself is the state of the society, different forms of warfare can be used to fight a war*” (Kabernik, p. 62).

In the same train of thought, that of doctrinal dissimulation, the confusion between the terms is exploited in Moscow both by the school of military thought and by the ideological propaganda bodies of the political power. That is why it is necessary to exemplify the way in which the concept of warfare (*voenaie deistvia*) produces confusion and maintains conceptual and doctrinal ambiguity, by the study of the same researcher: “*The understanding of <warfare> in Russian military*

tradition is generally associated with the activities carried out during military engagement. Starting from 2016, the Military University of the Russian Defence Ministry introduced a special course called Social Environment focused on practical implementation of social technologies in warfare. Rossiyskaia Gazeta called its article covering the announcement of those courses <Cadets to Be Taught the Methods of Hybrid Warfare>, which is misleading title that does not reflect the actual article content” (Ib.).

Kabernik’s study is not limited to the discrimination between the two concepts, *war* and *warfare*, which, in American terminology, have totally different meanings. It demonstrates how the Clausewitzian projection of the absolute war is due to Lenin – I insisted on the perspective related to the Russian communist leader who became a transfer vector of Clausewitz doctrine to Moscow as well as of its implicit application in the Revolution in October (1917) in the study *Gândirea militară românească sub amprenta clausewitziană/Romanian military thought under Clausewitz ideas* (Lesenciuc, 2019) –, who intuited and speculated on the fact that any form of war or violence inevitably replaces the law. From this perspective, the Russian concept of politics was defined as the continuation of war by other means, inverting the Clausewitzian perspective and imposing the different forms of manifestation of violence within the limits of the cumulative concept of *war*, associated with both politics and confrontation. Lenin’s perspective was therefore based on a way of thinking about the confrontation as the state of the entire nation, an idea that has not changed to this day. With the advent of new technologies, which meant, in fact, a new form of vulnerability (Kabernik, p. 56), the Russian school of military thought has insisted on the subversion suggested by Yevgeni Messner and developed this path along the surrogate directions of Dughin and Panarin. The attention to subversion and dissimulation can shed light on how, similarly, related concepts, such as Liang Qiao and Xiangsui Wang’s (1999) *unrestricted warfare*, can produce effects through non-military methods of warfare. Obviously, in the invasion of Ukraine, the Russian Federation deviated from the planned course. Certainly, Vladimir Putin did not expect resistance from the Ukrainians and the transformation of the confrontation, started with classical means and based on outdated operational plans, into a war of attrition.



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The Russian school of military thought, finding in the concept of *hybrid warfare* one broad enough to allow the unstructured mix of methods, techniques and tools to encompass intended subversive actions, has adapted and expanded it to the level of the entire society. The study of this school of thought, which is based on rigid Clausewitzian concepts, relatively easy to decipher in terms of doctrinal transparency and security interests, deserves special attention.

Hybrid warfare, a term contaminated by *ghibridnaia voina*

The concept of *hybrid warfare*, in its original sense, contains a form of ambiguity that can be reduced by obtaining the common denominator of the five varied forms of interpretation of the concept, as they were investigated in the study of Tarik Solmaz (2022):

“<Hybrid Warfare> as the employment of synergistic fusion of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal activities in the same battlespace.

<Hybrid Warfare> as the combined use of regular and irregular forces under a unified direction.

<Hybrid Warfare> as the use of various military and non-military means to menace an enemy.

<Hybrid Warfare> as sub-threshold activities involving any mix of violent and non-violent means.

<Hybrid Warfare> as a way of achieving political goals by using non-violent subversive activities”.

The five interpretive projections are the necessary synthesis in the absence of the concept operationalization that would eliminate the semantic and ideological “fog”. Associated rather with the confrontations between state and non-state actors, with actions of terrorist groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas, Daesh, the concept has kept viable the initial projection of Hoffman (2007) regarding the combination of conventional and unconventional means and ways of military action as well as the aspects related to the inability to discriminate violence. Over time, the concept of *hybrid warfare* has expanded its scope beyond the military domain and beyond the battlespace to include, through the emergence of the term hybrid threat, the mix of tools and means that exceed the *hard* dimension of confrontation. Hybrid warfare has hybridized semantically, allowing

political, economic, social, and symbolic aspects to be associated with military aspects. After the development of the Gerasimov doctrine, which referred to the varied range of actions on and off the battlefield, and especially after the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the conflict in Donbas, the concept has been used in official NATO documents, starting with the Wales Summit Declaration of 5 September 2014, after it had been previously debated in the *NATO Review* (1 July 2014), as well in the European Commission documents, which refer with predilection to hybrid threats. Official documents of NATO and EU member states, including Romanian ones, frequently refer to these two concepts, and the response solutions are related to early warning and threat awareness, building state and societal resilience, prevention and adequate response to crises, interagency and transnational cooperation and coordination etc. The studies have led to an extension of the concept from the *hard* level to the *soft* level. This contamination of the military term with meanings concerning the mixture of different forms of power is perhaps the most serious aspect in the attempt to clarify and operationalize the concept. The hybridization of the concepts of hybrid warfare and hybrid threats allowed for the settlement of the semantic fog, which later served as the ideological fog in the semantics of the term *ghibridnaia voina*. Under this unclear concept, a series of varied meanings began to hide, including in the Western rhetoric: “*the concept of <hybrid warfare> has continued to evolve and gain new meaning in the West’s strategic discourse*” (Solmaz, 2022), the only clarification being due to the prevalence of communication situations in which hybrid warfare has been associated with predominantly non-violent actions, but which do not exclude violence. However, hiding under an insufficiently clear term some tendencies to diversify military and non-military actions, but especially actions that are the object of international humanitarian law and those that exceed, in the murky waters of the concept, exactly these norms, has allowed for the ambiguity of the concept of hybrid warfare and the inability to use it doctrinally. The *de facto* situation was characterized by Andrew Mumford and Pascal Carlucci (2022, pp. 1-15), who, paraphrasing the famous Clausewitzian syntagm, understood hybrid warfare as the continuation of ambiguity with other means. In other words, an ambiguous term, hybrid warfare,



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characterizes an ambiguous situation, in which indefinite challenges channel the synergistic effect, in order to destroy a *status quo*. Maintaining the term in this area of ambiguity, specific to the change of political regimes and attempts to break the balance of power, does not serve it, considering its origin in the military field and its use in the doctrinal apparatuses. Therefore, the term has become contested for its lack of clarity and its inability to associate a concrete response or set of countermeasures that would enable the military to be trained for action on the battlefield. *Hybrid warfare* was born in the American school of military thought, being a concept meant to semantically cover military operations – the initial term was a *battlefield-centric concept*, noted Solmaz (2022) –, ending up to be used beyond the scope of military concepts. By extending its semantic area in the field of *soft powers*, it has served as a mask for the Russian hybrid actions, which have expanded the understanding of the concept of hybridity up to the border between legal and illegal, between moral and immoral in employing violence to achieve the desired effects. In his conclusions to the synthesis of hybrid warfare terminological development, Tarik Solmaz underlines the same impotency to operationalize the concept and the same terminological ambiguity, always useful for the state and non-state structures interested in the legal-illegal, moral-immoral mix: *“The term <hybrid warfare> has drawn remarkable attention in the West’s strategic debates over the last fifteen years, and apparently, it will continue to draw attention. Nevertheless, it is still an extremely contested concept. The definitions concerning <hybrid warfare> significantly differ from each other. Moreover, it has been used to describe a wide range of different phenomena that necessitate different countermeasures. The concept of <hybrid warfare> has been so stretched that today hybrid warfare, which was originally included in the West’s military lexicon as a battlefield-centric concept, has even been used to refer to just non-kinetic destabilization operations. Hence, alongside a poor understanding of such a concept, the ideational confusion weakens the capabilities of Western states and organizations to effectively deal with what they deem <hybrid threats>. As such, the concept of hybrid warfare seems to be suffering the same fate as <terrorism> which is another contested term in the strategic lexicon.*

Hence, eliminating such a conceptual haziness should be prioritized by Western policymakers and defense intellectuals” (Solmaz, 2022).

In other words, if, initially, in NATO member countries, the concept of hybrid warfare was associated with the meaning proposed by Frank G. Hoffman, and the concept of hybrid threat had also a military meaning, currently, the two concepts have semantically migrated to other areas of application. Practically, the first extension of the concept of hybrid threat, beyond the military area of application, is due to the concept operationalization attempt of NATO (2010), according to which hybrid threats are not purely military, but involve different levels of activity: *“Hybrid threats will have elements that are relevant to defence. Their character is not purely military but military capabilities may contribute to aspects of their prevention, resolution or consequence management. [...] Hybrid threats are comprised of, and operate across, multiple systems/subsystems (including economic/financial, legal, political, social and military/security) simultaneously and will therefore prove problematic for NATO’s response which would initially focus upon a military/security line of operation. Hybrid threats can expand and contract these lines of operation rapidly to accomplish their objectives”* (NATO, 2010, pp. 3-4).

Understanding the complex situation in Ukraine in terms of this type of threats that exceed the military dimension of the confrontation, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas have been associated with typical cases of activated hybrid threats. Hoffman’s concepts could no longer serve to define the situation in eastern Ukraine, and the complexity of the confrontation, exceeding the military dimension, has allowed the mixture of *“actors, narratives, tactics and technologies”* (Palmer, 2015, p. 1), which has served the Russian Federation to align itself with the concept of *hybrid warfare*, to metabolize it and transform it into *ghibridnaia voina*, as a form of doctrinal dissimulation and speculation about interests that find coverage in the new paradigm of military thought: *„Looking to the wider implications for European security and for NATO’s strategy in the wake of Russia’s political behavior and military performance against Ukraine, Russia’s embrace of the hybrid warfare paradigm has prompted speculation over: (i) Whether hybrid warfare represents a new transformation of warfare*



ROMANIAN
MILITARY
THINKING

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and should qualify as a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) that will set out a new strategic paradigm; and (ii) Whether Russia's new political posture and countering Russia's hybrid warfare challenge effectively amount to a revival of the Cold War and the restoration of the familiar operational patterns of the NATO-Warsaw Pact strategic competition of the 1970s and 1980s" (ib., p. 2).

Therefore, Russia proposed its own model of hybrid warfare, in which it included an important ideological dimension, through which it mixed tactics and instruments specific to the Soviet period – Palmer (p. 9) plastically describes this projection with the expression "old Soviet wine in new Russian bottles" – and managed to mix (and maintain at a necessary level of ambiguity) aspects of *hard* and *soft* power in order to maximize its own asymmetric advantages⁷.

Unfortunately, currently looking at hybrid warfare as a mixture of *hard* and *soft* powers means nothing more than a semantic contamination of the concept of *hybrid warfare* with the one that has served Russian dissimulation and speculation – *ghibridnaia voina*. On the other hand, such contamination would also mean that the war of concepts – British researcher Ofer Fridman (2019, pp. 67-84) named a chapter of his comparative study on hybrid warfare from the Russian perspective and from the NATO perspective "A War of Definitions: Hybridity in Russia and the West" – has been won by the Russian Federation. Perhaps terminological clarification can only be done by judging the current conflict in Ukraine, produced by the old Soviet tactics packaged in the new forms of the hybrid conflict in terms of association with concepts of different use in NATO member states and in Russia. Is the current invasion of Ukraine a hybrid warfare? Or is the hybrid war a part of what represents the deployment of political, economic, symbolic forces and intentions, projected at the level of Russian state propaganda on the Ukrainian territory? Starting from the origin of the term and the way it can serve following the concept operationalization in the doctrinal apparatus, the answer

⁷ Ruiz Palmer explicitly expresses the mix between power levels: "hybrid warfare bridges the divide between the hard and the soft power applications that result from the technological and information revolutions of the last three decades in ways that maximize asymmetric advantages for Russia, as well as minimize risks and costs". (2015, p. 2).

is simple: the current invasion of Ukraine is *ghibridnaia voina*, but not *hybrid warfare*. Hybrid warfare, in the Western sense, associated with a form of conflictual hybridity specific to our days, ended with the ZAPAD 2021 exercise and with the beginning of the "special military operation". Hybrid warfare is a form of limited conflict, which does not aim at the total destruction of the adversary and which entails the use of a mix of means and tools precisely in order not to keep the war within the limits of the bloody confrontation specific to the application of the Clausewitzian paradigm. *Ghibridnaia voina* is the "wolf in sheep's clothing", the absolute war camouflaged in the conceptual and ideological fog of hybridity, designed to contribute to the total destruction of the enemy, to the destruction of its *raison d'être*, historical foundations, references and identity anchors. *Ghibridnaia voina* is not a form of hybrid warfare, but one of total war, a massed war, of yesterday, wearing the illusory clothes of the war of the future.

AN ATTEMPT AT OPERATIONALIZING THE TERM "HYBRID WARFARE". INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS

Once the Russian Federation uses the loose concept of hybrid warfare to appeal to old tactics and methods of action in a new form of application, whereby "other means" in the Clausewitzian projection also cover new technologies (Guerrero, 2022, p. 2), and to impose its sphere of influence, whose legacy from the Soviet Union it claims, and even more, once it practices "hybrid warfare", to restrict the foreign policy of the former Soviet states (Muradov, 2022, pp. 168-191) and to challenge their identity and right to self-determination, means that the term "hybrid warfare" is unclear and serves Moscow in the terminological and ideological "fog". The concept operationalization entails a temporal regression, before the hybridization of *hard* and *soft* dimensions of power. In the context of 2014, the year in which the Gerasimov doctrine had already been assigned the hybrid dimension, in which Russian hybridization entailed, on the one hand, the avoidance of direct confrontation with the West (Guerrero, p. 1), and on the other hand, the provocation of the former Soviet republics in order to determine the consolidation of the old sphere of influence, the *hard-soft* distinction is quite clear.



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Soft power includes two classical dimensions, starting with Montesquieu, political power and economic power, to which is added the concept of symbolic power, suggested by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, which operates with symbolic forms and objects, respectively ideologies.

The concept of *hard power*, older than that of *soft power*, entered, starting from the last decades of the 20th century, a kind of decline in terms of its applicability as an instrument of imposition. The observation was made a long time ago, and the mention of a specialist in geopolitics and international relations such as Colin S. Gray (2011, p. 4) does nothing but reinforces a reality: “*Military force has less utility as an instrument of policy in the 21st century than it did in times past, even recent times past*”. Obviously, the *hard* dimension can be associated with coercive power as a whole, entailing more than military power and the use of military force, but it is in decline anyway. *Soft power* includes two classical dimensions, starting with Montesquieu, political power and economic power, to which is added the concept of symbolic power, suggested by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1982/2012), which operates with symbolic forms and objects, respectively ideologies. With the development of new technologies, which has led to a major change in economic terms and, through information technologies, also in terms of symbolic power, the classical division of powers has deepened through ethical and legal norms the distance between *hard* and *soft* power, diminishing the role of coercive power and expanding economic and symbolic power. But, the new technologies have been used not only in the civilian field, which is why, gradually, with the digitization of the battlefield and the large-scale use of computer technologies, a consistent *soft* dimension, an information dimension, thoroughly symbolic, has developed inside the *hard* power. Under these conditions, *hard* power has included a symbolic dimension, applicable within ethical and legal normative limits. The entire spectrum of information operations is the object of the analysis of this *soft* dimension of the *hard* component of power, an aspect that I highlighted in the study “*Rolul comunicării în Operațiunile Informaționale (INFO OPS) și în Managementul Resurselor Informaționale (MRI)/The Role of Communication in Information Operations (INFO OPS) and in Information Resource Management (IRM)*”. Understanding a complex concept like *Network Centric Warfare* means understanding the information network architecture, serving *hard* power, which is, understanding the *soft* dimension of the *hard* power.

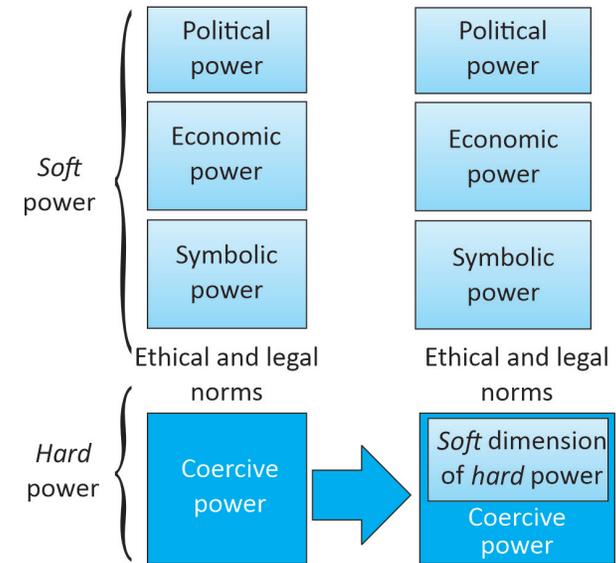


Figure 1: Hard power qualitative transformation

In relation to this distribution, the concept of operational hybrid warfare within the limits of *hard* power and capable of producing effects within these limits is that proposed by Frank G. Hoffman, who intuited in 2005 and demonstrated in 2007 the need for operational diversification of military actions to include tactics, capabilities and tools belonging to the *hard* dimension as such and the *soft* dimension of *hard* power. Along these lines, the concept of *hybrid warfare* applicable to the *hard* dimension has become an artificially extended concept to the entire range of powers, and the Russian Federation has benefited from it to hide under the conceptual umbrella of hybridity and the lack of clarity/transparency the actions belonging to the *soft* level, in which it has melted the *hard* dimension. The concept of *ghibridnaia voina* has expanded as a mixture/hybridization of powers, but the difference in application consists precisely in going beyond the ethical and legal norms established at the international level, to which the Russian Federation adhered, in order to be able to impose a hybrid warfare of a different nature, assimilable to absolute war, as it is explained by Deliaghin’s perspective. The difference between the two forms of hybrid warfare is consistent, and the response reactions of the democratic world to the Russian invasion of Ukraine



The concept of hybrid warfare applicable to the hard dimension has become an artificially extended concept to the entire range of powers, and the Russian Federation has benefited from it to hide under the conceptual umbrella of hybridity and the lack of clarity/transparency the actions belonging to the soft level, in which it has melted the hard dimension.



as a result of the application of the Russian concept of hybrid warfare, having Clausewitzian and Soviet roots, has been natural: political and economic sanctions and symbolic reaction to a high level, to be able to counteract the hybridization of the conflict.

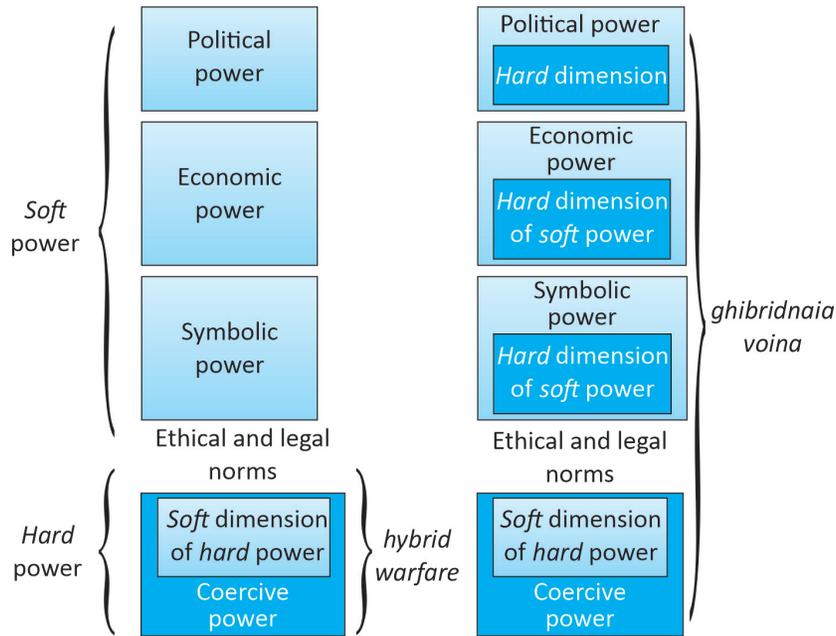


Figure 2: The two forms of hybrid confrontation

This projection has the role of highlighting the different forms of hybridity, as well as the difference between *smart* (associated with the application of the concept of *hybrid warfare* in addition to actions at the *soft* level) and *sharp* (associated with hybridity of *ghibridnaia voina* type) power, in their combination of *hard* and *soft*. In the absence of a clarification of this nature, it has been possible for studies by Russian researchers to transform the *smart/sharp* distinction suggested in 2017 by Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig, and expanded later (Walker et al., 2020, pp. 124-137) into one that serves propaganda interests, that distinguishes between “us” and “them”, even though American researchers have made explicit the notation regarding application in democratic regimes and authoritarian regimes.

The natural response to the hybrid challenges of *ghibridnaia voina* type – in our attempt to operationalize the concept of *hybrid warfare*

– is not limited to actions at the military level in relation to hybrid threats. Hybrid threats in Hoffman’s understanding (2007, p. 29) refer to the *hard* dimension of the confrontation: “Any adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal behavior in the battlespace to obtain the political objectives”. The true hybrid threats are those of hybridization beyond the ethical and moral boundaries that separate the use of force (i.e. the *hard* dimension) from the other dimensions of power. The only adequate response remains that of building the anti-*ghibridnaia voina* shield, which entails protecting society through security education and culture, through strategic communication and through societal resilience. Societal resilience is the optimal response to the hybrid mix specific to authoritarian nations, which employ conceptual dissimulation to create a form of actionable asymmetry with dramatic effects on the democratic values of the free world.

In the attempt to operationalize the concept of hybrid warfare, we have returned to the precise and applicable definitions in the military field belonging to American researcher Frank G. Hoffman. No further operationalization is required. However, it is absolutely necessary to understand the concept of *ghibridnaia voina*. The difference between *hybrid warfare* and *ghibridnaia voina* is consistent, and the preparation of the response to hybrid threats in accordance with the understanding of one’s own doctrine is insufficient. This doctrinal dissimulation and the transformation of the concept of hybrid warfare into one that covers a series of actions lacking transparency, legitimacy and ethics has been possible due to the game made by the Russian Federation, which launched the Gerasimov doctrine in order to justify its own intended actions at the level of 2013. Unfortunately, military thought has not made explicit distinctions between the classical form of hybrid confrontation and the disguised one.

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