

RUSSIAN AMBITIONS AND HYBRID MODES OF WARFARE

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Abstract. The security policy of the Russian Federation has long involved elements of threat to neighbouring countries and forcing the hand of its political partners. In the last decade, Russia has used hybrid modes of warfare to instigate conflicts and instability in its neighbouring countries, while remaining below a certain threshold of violence, allowing it to dodge retaliatory consequences. The authors of the article indicate that the objective of the use of hybrid modes of warfare in Ukraine consists in blurring motives and actors in order to obfuscate a decisive and efficient response. This article argues further that these tactics, if used against a member of the Atlantic Alliance, would effectively allow such an attack to remain below the Article 5 applicability threshold, thereby making it difficult for alliance members to reach consensus on the characterisation of the attack. Even though the member states of NATO and the EU have not been direct targets of Russian actions, former republics of the Soviet Union can be considered to be in the danger zone, based on Russian political statements and its hybrid activities in these countries.

Keywords: *International security, Russian Federation, hybrid warfare, new generation warfare, NATO, Baltic states*

1. Introduction

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict which started in 2013 does not leave much room for doubt about Russia's regional ambitions in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). By seeking out low-intensity conflicts to gain control over neighbouring countries it is clearly testing the sensitivity of NATO tripwires and the robustness of the international security framework. Recent events in Ukraine and Georgia have also revealed the potential weaknesses of the current deterrence models against hybrid aggression. We have seen Russia carry out, without any overt fear of retaliation, hybrid aggressions against its neighbours which were planned and executed with great sophistication, initiative, agility and decisiveness. Indeed, Russia has avoided any moral hesitation. What is more, in the international arena, a political consensus exists that Russia has initiated a wave of hybrid warfare which is reflected on all possible levels and is constantly expanding in scope. Thus, considering

all this, it could also be concluded that Russia is consistently testing the credibility of the current international security framework and the principle of deterrence by seeking out low-intensity options to destabilize its neighbouring countries. Even though the member states of NATO and EU have not been direct targets of Russian actions, former republics of the Soviet Union can be considered to be in the danger zone, based on Russian political statements and its ongoing hybrid activities in these countries.

In this context the importance of the *hybrid warfare* concept and its components have been broadly discussed in relation to the bloodless annexation of Crimea and the ongoing war in Ukraine¹. It has caught the imagination of academic² and military theoreticians³ and is a broadly discussed topic in articles, academic discussions, and media. The popularity and importance of the term *hybrid* has been growing and according to Michael Kofman:

*In two short years, the word has mutated from describing how Moscow was fighting its war in Ukraine to incorporating all the various elements of Russian influence and national power. The term continues to evolve, spawning iterations like 'multi-vector hybrid warfare' in Europe. Hybrid warfare has become the Frankenstein of the field of Russia military analysis; it has taken on a life of its own and there is no obvious way to contain it.*⁴

Though Kofman's description is dramatic, the growing use of the term *hybrid* is noticeable. Hybridity is often used in the context of the ongoing modernization of the Russian armed forces and claimed to be an integral part of Russia's new capabilities⁵. It describes the Russian approach as not only about developing muscles by increasing quantity and quality of military

¹ **Kofman, M.** 2016. Russian Hybrid Warfare and Other Dark Arts. – War on the Rocks, 11 March 2016. <<https://warontherocks.com/2016/03/russian-hybrid-warfare-and-other-dark-arts/>> (accessed: 12 December 2017). [**Kofman** 2016] See also **Popescu, N.** 2015. Hybrid tactics: Russia and the West. European Union Institute for Security Studies, Alert Issue 46, October. [**Popescu** 2015]

² **Galeotti, M.** 2016. Moscow's Mercenaries in Syria. – War on the Rocks, 5 April 2016. [**Galeotti** 2016] See also: **McDermott, R.** 2016a. Does Russia Have a Gerasimov Doctrine? – Parameters, Vol. 46 (1), Carlisle Barracks Spring.

³ **Hoffman, F.** 2009. Hybrid Warfare and Challenges. – The Joint Forces Quarterly, Issue 52. National Defense University Press, Washington, 1st quarter. [**Hoffman** 2009]

⁴ **Kofman** 2016, *op. cit.*

⁵ **Miller, J.** 2016. Putin's Attack Helicopters and Mercenaries Are Winning the War for Assad. – Foreign Policy, 30 March 2016. <<http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/30/putins-attack-helicopters-and-mercenaries-are-winning-the-war-for-assad/>> (accessed: 16 December 2017). [**Miller** 2016]

equipment, but about using methods other than military assets to challenge, distract and threaten NATO and EU members⁶. These methods include fake information campaigns⁷, cyberattacks to manipulate election results, threatening of regional energy security in Central and Eastern Europe, support for European radical and conservative parties, manipulation of oil and gas prices and other political and economic measures.

Essentially, the main benefit for a state in using hybrid modes of warfare is to pursue its political goals in a manner which enables avoiding the costs of retaliation from the target. The strength and attractiveness of hybridity lies in its asymmetrical nature and in the opportunity to remain below the legal threshold at which the target state would be grounded and compelled to respond militarily. Blurring responsibilities, actors and objectives makes it possible to obfuscate the response and, in Alliance configurations, potentially complicate the process of building consensus as to what constitutes an “armed attack”, which is the prerequisite for initiating the bulwark of NATO’s deterrence, Article 5.

Current and upcoming conflicts are different from World War II and Cold War type concepts aiming to use conventional power exploiting tenets of mass and concentration of forces. The last decades have demonstrated that Russia is ready to use all available conventional and nonconventional tools in a well-coordinated and sequenced way to achieve its political goals. Russia examined lessons from Iraq, Libya and wars in Chechnya and Georgia to initiate “hybrid” type warfare in Ukraine and succeeded in surprising the West⁸. It has been used to underline the political objective to restore Russia’s role as a global player, and to create a buffer of instability and influence within its “near abroad”.

The current study uses the qualitative research method based on narrative analysis when addressing Russian and NATO discourses, combined with

⁶ Popescu 2015.

⁷ Veebel, V. 2015. Russian Propaganda, Disinformation and Estonia’s Experience. – Foreign Policy Research Institute, E-Note, October 2015.

⁸ Слипченко, В. И. 2014. Войны нового поколения: дистанционные бесконтактные. Moscow: OLMA Press; Бочарников, И. В.; Лемешев, С. В.; Люткине, Г. В. 2013. Современные концепции войн и практика военного строительства. Moscow: Научно-исследовательский центр проблем национальной безопасности, Chapter 2 and 3; Grätz, J. 2014. Russia’s Military Reform: Progress and Hurdles. – CSS Analyses in Security Policy, No. 152, April 2014, Zurich; Микрюков, В. 2014. Теории войны. Военным следует оперативно адаптировать классические наработки к современным условиям. – Независимая газета, 23 May 2014. <http://nvo.ng.ru/concepts/2014-05-23/1_theory.html> (accessed: 03 March 2018).

the case study method for investigating Russian non-military assets used in modern warfare and NATO's responses to them.

Accordingly, by covering the theoretical background of hybrid warfare, the current study analyses the Russian understanding of the hybrid warfare concept and its possible effects on the implementation and credibility of the existing NATO deterrence model, seeking to answer the following question:

Would hybrid modes of warfare, if used against a member(s) of the Atlantic Alliance, allow such an attack to effectively remain below the Article 5 applicability threshold, thereby making it difficult for members of the alliance to reach a consensus on the characterisation of the attack?

2. Why Hybrid Warfare? Threat Perceptions in Russia

Theorizing hybrid warfare is a daunting endeavour. The definition of the term suffers from its normative implications. Hybrid warfare is a term primarily used as a denunciation than a level-headed analysis of current experiences of warfare. The multiplicity of modes of warfare in a single tactical, operational or strategic theatre is not a new reality of warfare. Nations using a variety of tools to achieve desired political and military aims is an age-old practice in international relations. Frank Hoffman recognizes that wars have always been more complex than a mere struggle between competing armed forces. However, contemporary hybrid wars can differ in nature due to the degree of coordination of the various modes of warfare. Hoffman acknowledges that

hybrid threats incorporate a full range of modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts that include indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder. These multi-modal activities can be conducted by separate units, or even by the same unit, but are generally operationally and tactically directed and coordinated within the main battlespace to achieve synergistic effects in the physical and psychological dimensions of conflict.⁹

Hoffman highlights that hybridity is not only linked to non-state actors. For him, the challenge and danger lies in the utilization of hybrid warfare by state actors. It makes any conflict more damaging as military actions would be preceded by non-military actions attacking the vital infrastructure and

⁹ Hoffman 2009, p. 36.

functions of a state. This logic is clearly illustrated by current security challenges posed by non-military actors in Southern Europe. It has compelled all governmental and military organizations to become more adaptive and it has required complex, whole-of-government approaches (WGA) toward security as “*the political, security, economic and social spheres are interdependent: failure in one risks failure in all others*”¹⁰.

The conclusions drawn by Russian political and military leadership in the recent decade were based on the assumption that Western countries use various non-military methods to influence regimes and political situations in targeted countries. Russia perceives that it is facing an arc of threats in its neighbourhood orchestrated by the West engaged in a renewed Cold War type strategy of containment. Regime changes or colour revolutions, whereby externally sponsored internal oppositions overthrow standing governments, are seen as the main threats in Moscow. Interestingly enough, Russian security circles routinely denounce the West’s use of hybrid warfare in the form of promoting and supporting colour revolutions in Russia’s near abroad.

“Hybrid warfare” therefore may not be a term that accurately portrays the Russian understanding of contemporary conflict and this might in turn weaken the threat assessment from the West. In fact, Russians use the term “non-linear war”.¹¹ The term started to gain popularity when General Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, presented his conceptions of future warfare.¹² Gerasimov’s speech at the Russian military academy in 2013 has often been abused by commentators as presenting a “Gerasimov doctrine”. However, the objective was not to outline a cohesive doctrine of action, instead the aim was to present an understanding of contemporary warfare for which Russian armed forces should be better prepared. The threat assessment therefore was that wars were no longer declared and that the very distinction between states of war and peace

¹⁰ **OECD 2006 Whole of Government Approaches to Fragile States**. Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, p. 7. <<https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/37826256.pdf>>.

¹¹ **Kaldor, M.; Chinkin, C.** 2017. *International Law and New Wars*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 5. [**Kaldor, Chinkin** 2017]

¹² About the concepts of the General Valery Gerasimov see: **Герасимов, В.** 2013. *Ценность Науки в Предвидении. Новые вызовы требуют переосмыслить формы и способы ведения боевых действий.* – *Военно-промышленный курьер*, No. 8 (476), 27 February 2013, Moscow. <<http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>> (accessed: 12 December 2016) [**Герасимов** 2013], and also: **Thomas, T.** 2016. *Thinking Like A Russian Officer: Basic Factors And Contemporary Thinking On The Nature of War*. Fort Leavenworth: The Foreign Military Studies Office (FMSO), April 2016, pp. 16–19.

was no longer relevant. Most interestingly, he explained how “*a perfectly thriving state can, in a matter of months and even days... sink into a web of chaos, humanitarian catastrophe and civil war.*”¹³ Furthermore, Gerasimov explained in an infamous article in the Military-Industrial Kurier that “*frontal engagement of large formations of force... are becoming a thing of the past*”, effectively replaced by “*the use of special forces, exploitation of internal opposition*” and “*informational actions, devices and means*”.¹⁴ He thus recognized that state (and non-state) actors could pursue political gains using skilful combinations of deniable and overt actions. Gerasimov recognizes that “*the role of non-military means for reaching political and military goals has increased, which has in some cases significantly exceeded the power of armed forces*”¹⁵. The outcome of that assessment is visualized in a graph presenting the utilization of both conventional and non-conventional means in a sequence of follow-on phases of an operation. It is related to Gerasimov’s perception of threats faced by Russia, as revealed in a keynote speech at the Academy of Military Sciences in February 2016:

*Russia faces a broad range of multi-vector threats, especially linked to the use of soft power: political, diplomatic, economic, informational, cybernetic, psychological and other non-military means ... the main result of Russian military science should be practical, leading the way in formulating new ideas and thinking on these issues*¹⁶.

The role of non-military measures is significantly highlighted throughout all six phases as presented in Figure 1.

Despite Gerasimov’s suggestion that the ratio of non-military and military measures should stand at 4:1, from 2013 to 2016 the share of military spending in the Russian federal budget grew rapidly and in a non-proportional way. However, as implemented in 2017 and planned for 2018, Russian military spending is dropping back to the spending level of 2012–2013 to get closer to the original balance suggested by Gerasimov.

¹³ Quoted in: **Kaldor, Chinkin** 2017, p. 6.

¹⁴ **Kaldor, Chinkin** 2017, p. 6.

¹⁵ **Герасимов** 2013, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Read in detail in: **McDermott, R.** 2016b. Gerasimov Calls for New Strategy to Counter Color Revolution. – Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 13, Issue 46, 8 March 2016.

<<https://jamestown.org/program/gerasimov-calls-for-new-strategy-to-counter-color-revolution/#.VuFxSfkrLRY>> (accessed: 6 January 2017). [**McDermott** 2016b]

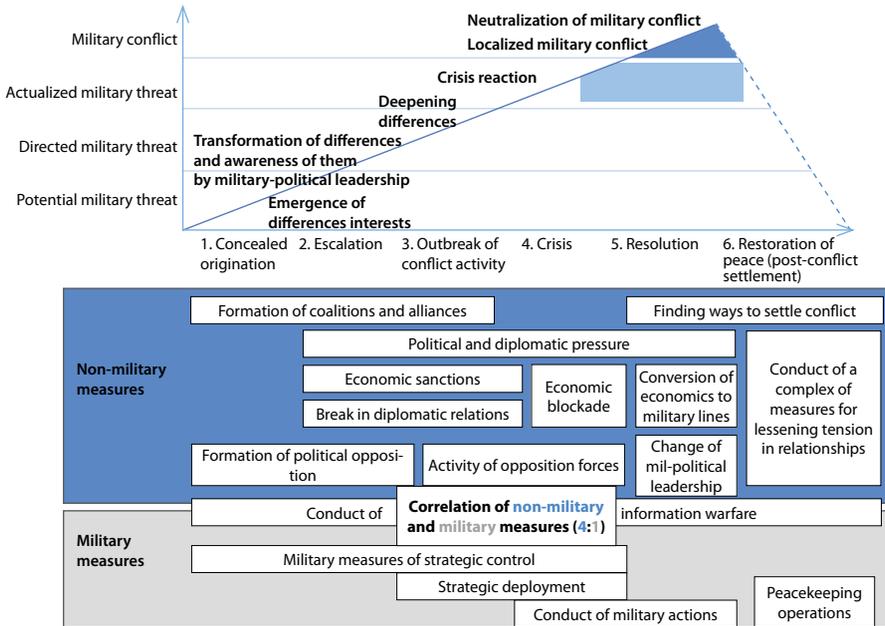


Figure 1. The Role of Non-Military Methods in the Resolution of Interstate Conflicts¹⁷

Gerasimov considers Russia to be under hybrid attack by the West whose economic measures are supported by political pressure and propaganda confrontations and cyber incidents. External support for Russian opposition and building broader coalitions including the enlargement of NATO and the EU are also seen as hostile behaviour. Roger McDermott states in his assessment of Gerasimov’s latest speech that

Gerasimov confirms the non-existence of a Russian hybrid doctrine, or approach to warfare per se. Rather, according to his public remarks, Gerasimov sees the need to respond to the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which he claims are forming such capabilities¹⁸.

¹⁷ Source: **Selhorst, A. J. C.** 2016. Russia’s Perception Warfare: The Development of Gerasimov’s doctrine in Estonia and Georgia and it’s Application in Ukraine. - Militaire Spectator, 2016 No 4. <<https://www.militairespectator.nl/thema/strategie-operaties/artikel/russias-perception-warfare>>. Figure translated and created by Dr. G. Scott Gorman, School of Advanced Military Studies.

¹⁸ **McDermott** 2016b, *op. cit.*

The same point of view is claimed by Nicu Popescu from the European Union Institute for Security Studies stating that

The term itself is a Western description of Russian military practice, rather than a conceptual innovation originating in Russia” and “the West is carrying out its own hybrid operation against Russia in the shape of smear campaigns and the imposition of economic and financial sanctions¹⁹.

According to Kofman, General Gerasimov was talking “*about how the West shapes the battlefield prior to intervention, not suggesting that Russia must do the same*”²⁰.

Russia’s threat assessment should be contextualised within a grander tradition of complex warfare. Michael Kofman²¹ links this complex approach with George F. Kennan’s memo on political warfare as

the employment of all the means at a nation’s command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives. [...] They range from such overt actions as political alliances, economic measures, and ‘white’ propaganda to such covert operations as support of ‘friendly’ foreign elements, ‘black’ psychological warfare and even encouragement of underground resistance in hostile states.²²

The developments in the Russian so-called near abroad caused Anthony Cordesman to link the national military transformation to national capacities with defence potential. Cordesman sees the two merging:

Russian military officers now tied the term ‘Colour Revolution’ to the crisis in Ukraine and to what they saw as a new US and European approach to warfare that focuses on creating destabilizing revolutions in other states as a means of serving their security interests at low cost and with minimal casualties. It was seen as posing a potential threat to Russia in the near abroad.²³

¹⁹ Popescu 2015, p. 1.

²⁰ Kofman 2016, *op. cit.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² The memo is available at: **George F. Kennan on Organizing Political Warfare**, 30 April 1948. History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, Wilson Centre. <<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114320.pdf?v=941dc9ee5c6e51333ea9ebb9bc9104e8c>> (accessed: 4 January 2017).

²³ **Cordesman, A.** 2014. Russia and the “Color Revolution”. – Center for Strategic and International Studies, 28 May 2014. <<https://www.csis.org/analysis/russia-and-%E2%80%9Ccolor-revolution%E2%80%9D>> (accessed: 20 December 2016).

The threat assessment from the Russian side posits that those supposed attempts at initiating revolutions comprise a set of overt and covert operations, unified under a synergistic purpose and supported by proper funding and qualified staffing as well as strategic patience. The state of readiness to face such a threat was highlighted in February 2016 by General Gerasimov during the annual meeting of the Academy of Military Sciences where he “called on leading military theorists and specialists as well as the defense industry and the government to jointly develop a ‘soft power’ strategy to counter the potential threat from ‘colour revolutions’”²⁴. He mentioned the need to develop a toolkit of soft measures supported by conventional hard power both as an external deterrent and a means to enforce law and order domestically.

However, here lies the paradox: while Russia’s national military doctrine²⁵ and national security strategy²⁶ both indicate clearly that the external threats to its security are of a hybrid nature and that an attack has most evidently already started, the reaction in 2010–2017 has been rather surprising as funding priorities are either of a military nature or for offensive hybrid assets.

3. Challenges and Progress for NATO in the Face of Hybrid Warfare

The complexity of “Hybrid Warfare” has been recognized by NATO in the report “Multiple Futures Project. Navigating Towards 2030”²⁷ released by the Allied Command Transformation back in 2009. Accordingly, already in 2009 a hybrid approach to warfare was expected to be used not only in former Soviet Union republics but also against NATO member states.

²⁴ McDermott 2016b, *op. cit.*

²⁵ **Putin, V., The President of Russian Federation.** Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation. <<http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf>> (accessed: 5 April 2018).

²⁶ **Putin, V., The President of Russian Federation.** National Security Strategy of Russian Federation. <<http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/18iXkR8XLAtxeiIX7JK3XXy6Y0As-HD5v.pdf>> (accessed: 5 April 2018).

²⁷ **NATO 2009.** Multiple Futures Project: Navigating Towards 2030 - Final Report; Allied Command Transformation.

<<http://www.act.nato.int/nato-multiple-futures-project-documents>>.

Those approaches being

*both interconnected and unpredictable, combining traditional warfare with irregular warfare, terrorism, and organised crime. Psychologically, adversaries will use the instantaneous connectivity of an increasingly effective mass media to reshape or summarily reject the liberal values, ideas, and free markets that characterise the Alliance.*²⁸

To achieve the ultimate aim, the enemy will use all opportunities within the engagement space to influence the economies and politics of NATO members, to weaken their unity and disrupt social cohesion, shape the information domain, and to unconditionally exploit all vulnerabilities. If the adversary happens to be a state, the variety of possible tools is incredibly vast and in the worst-case scenario could even include the use or the threat of using a weapon of mass destruction. NATO's report concludes that "[the] risks and threats to the Alliance's territories, populations and forces will be hybrid in nature: an interconnected, unpredictable mix of traditional warfare, irregular warfare, terrorism and organised crime"²⁹.

The recommendations outlined in the NATO report highlight the necessity to "develop a culture where leaders and capabilities are well suited for irregular warfare or the hybrid threat, while simultaneously maintaining NATO's conventional and nuclear competency"³⁰. There are few nations strong enough to challenge NATO members. The risk for the potential aggressor lies in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty; however, the dubious and deniable nature of hybrid modes of warfare would cause difficulty in activating it. Although largely considered as the Atlantic Alliance's main deterrence commitment to collective defence, the wording of Article 5 preserves a state's autonomy to characterize the nature of its support. It is also important to mention that the nature of hybridity has called for the need to integrate European nations more closely as the bulk of the threat is not military. All the prerequisites of an aggression could be non-military in nature and that requires all European actors to cooperate closely. Ultimately, cooperation with the European Union will be one of the key facilitators to counter weaknesses and threats in non-military domains.

²⁸ NATO 2009, p. 7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

Hybrid warfare and related threats were also discussed during the 2014 NATO Summit in Wales,

We will ensure that NATO is able to effectively address the specific challenges posed by hybrid warfare threats, where a wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures are employed in a highly integrated design. It is essential that the Alliance possesses the necessary tools and procedures required to deter and respond effectively to hybrid warfare threats, and the capabilities to reinforce national forces. This will also include enhancing strategic communications, developing exercise scenarios in light of hybrid threats, and strengthening coordination between NATO and other organisations, in line with relevant decisions taken, with a view to improving information sharing, political consultations, and staff-to-staff coordination. We welcome the establishment of the NATO-accredited Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Latvia as a meaningful contribution to NATO's efforts in this area. We have tasked the work on hybrid warfare to be reviewed alongside the implementation of the Readiness Action Plan.³¹

Thus, not only has NATO acknowledged the threats of hybrid modes of warfare, but it has taken measures to prepare itself to respond to them. Pointing out the NATO-accredited Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Latvia, as well as a plan to review the Readiness Action Plan, shows efforts in substantiating the understanding on “hybrid threats”. Hybrid warfare is also highlighted in the most recent Joint Operating Environment document prepared by the U.S. Department of Defense:

A number of revisionist states will employ a range of coercive activities to advance their national interests through combinations of direct and indirect approaches designed to slow, misdirect, and blunt successful responses by targeted states. These hybrid stratagems will be designed to spread confusion and chaos while simultaneously avoiding attribution and potentially retribution.³²

In that context Russia is mentioned as a country which will try to promote its national interests in its near abroad region along with an attempt to regain its

³¹ **NATO 2014 Wales Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales.** 5 September 2014, para 13.

<http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm> (accessed: 20 December 2016).

³² **Joint Operating Environment JOE 2035.** Washington, D.C.: Joint Force Development, J7, 14 July 2016, p. 6. <http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/concepts/joe_2035_july16.pdf?ver=2017-12-28-162059-917>.

status as a global superpower. The document also highlights that the advantage of U.S. armed forces in the conventional war domain causes potential adversaries to look for alternatives to military tools by “*development of asymmetric, unconventional, irregular, and hybrid approaches*”³³. The threats are treated in a broader spectrum, also geographically, as the U.S. is directly involved in many regions. The challenge is to ensure that the particular centre of gravity of a “hybrid war” is properly recognized and engaged respectively.

NATO’s 2015 Annual Report defines the hybrid nature of security challenges as achieved by “*combining military and non-military means of inflicting damage or creating instability*”³⁴. Hybridity was recognized as a phenomenon that has existed before and not a novel one. However, its scale, speed and intensity require new ways to prepare, to face, to analyse, to deter and finally to defend against such evolving threats. It requires consolidation of all available resources to ensure that “*a wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures are used to disrupt, confuse, damage or coerce – Allies agreed to develop a strategy on NATO’s role in countering hybrid warfare*”³⁵. In the case of NATO, a consolidated strategy is of critical importance based on the consensus of all member nations as it allows for the development of proper tools to face the threats.

In addition, the report also highlights the importance of non-military asset readiness as the military sector heavily relies on civilian assets in transportation, manpower, satellite communication and host nation support³⁶. It is obvious that without such capabilities and support, operations cannot be conducted within a protracted conflict and their sustainment will not be reliable. The report also mentions aggressive behaviour represented by the military activities near NATO’s borders and it recognizes that an unpredictable country is challenging the security in Europe³⁷. NATO is the main military arm of the Euro–Atlantic community but close cooperation with the European Union as a strategic partner must be maintained and enhanced to fully utilize the political, economic and civilian instruments of power.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³⁴ **NATO 2015 The Secretary General’s Annual Report** 2015. Brussels: NATO Public Diplomacy Division 2016, p. 10. <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_127529.htm>. [NATO 2015 The Secretary General’s Annual Report 2015]

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10, 18, 56,

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg elaborated on this topic in greater depth during a seminar on NATO's Transformation in May 2015. He recognized "hybrid warfare" as "*the dark reflection of our comprehensive approach. We use a combination of military and non-military means to stabilize countries. Others use it to destabilize them*", admitting that "*hybrid warfare is nothing new. It is as old as the Trojan horse. What is different is that the scale is bigger; the speed and intensity is higher; and that it takes place right at our borders.*"³⁸ Stoltenberg highlighted that it is important to understand the nature of such a threat to deter it and to defend against as the enemy is using a variety of tools to exploit any weaknesses. The soft tools could be

*a prelude to a more serious attack; because behind every hybrid strategy, there are conventional forces, increasing the pressure and ready to exploit any opening. We need to demonstrate that we can and will act promptly whenever and wherever necessary.*³⁹

When asked about the role of soft power and hard power represented by NATO, the Secretary General recognized the importance of both, underlining that

*We need classical conventional forces. Hybrid is about reduced warning time. It's about deception. It's about a mixture of military and non-military means. So therefore we have to be able to react quickly and swiftly. And so when we are increasing the readiness and the preparedness of our forces, well that is also an answer to the hybrid threat. When we are doing more to increase our capacity when it comes to intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, then it's also an answer to hybrid threats... So to increase the capability, the readiness of our conventional forces is also part of the answer to hybrid.*⁴⁰

NATO's Warsaw Summit in July 2016 also recognized the possibility of "hybrid attacks" among security challenges from both state and non-state actors. In that context "resilience and ability to respond quickly and

³⁸ NATO 2015 Keynote Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the opening of the NATO Transformation Seminar, 19 May 2015. – NATO Website. <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_118435.htm> (accessed: 6 January 2017). [Keynote Speech 2015]

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

effectively to cyberattacks, including in hybrid contexts”⁴¹ created and officially recognized an important domain of security. The “hybrid warfare” threat was defined as one where

*broad, complex, and adaptive combination of conventional and non-conventional means, and overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures, are employed in a highly integrated design by state and non-state actors to achieve their objectives*⁴².

To achieve success,

*the primary responsibility to respond to hybrid threats or attacks rests with the targeted nation. NATO is prepared to assist an Ally at any stage of a hybrid campaign. The Alliance and Allies will be prepared to counter hybrid warfare as part of collective defence. The Council **could decide** to invoke Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. The Alliance is committed to effective cooperation and coordination with partners and relevant international organisations, in particular the EU, as agreed, in efforts to counter hybrid warfare.*⁴³

The challenge is how to define the boundaries between a conventional attack and attacks of a hybrid nature that would allow the implementation of Article 5. It is connected to the risk of leaving targeted countries alone during a critical period when they are under attack by “green men”⁴⁴.

The essence of “hybridity” is based on the need to utilize all possible tools suitable for successful engagement of an opponent. The utilization of available tools is linked to the type of political system. Decision-making and freedom to use military and non-military means is easier in the case of authoritarian systems. It is an advantage over democratic nations as non-military options can be exploited based on the decisions of a single authority or the ruling elites in an expedient manner, disregarding popular opinion. Armed forces and law enforcement troops can be employed even faster, leaving the opponent no reaction time to respond to the threat.

⁴¹ **NATO 2016 Warsaw Summit Communiqué Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council.** Warsaw, 8–9 July 2016, para 71.

<http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm> (accessed: 27 December 2016). [**Warsaw Summit Communiqué 2016**]

⁴² *Ibid.*, para 72.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ **Männik, E.** 2014. Sõjalise kriisi anatoomia Ukrainas (The Anatomy of Military Crisis in Ukraine). – *Diplomaatia*, Nr. 130/131, June/July 2014. <<https://www.diplomaatia.ee/artikkel/sojalise-kriisi-anatoomia-ukrainas/>> (accessed: 14 October 2018).

4. Russian Non-Military Assets for Modern Warfare

Russian authorities are using hybrid modes of warfare skilfully, focusing on the comprehensive use of political and military domains supported by constant uncertainty regarding military intentions, development and responsibilities. It is partially achieved by destabilizing the security situation in the region, by questioning NATO and EU enlargement to the East, and by challenging NATO and exposing its weaknesses and limited capabilities. Nevertheless, nuclear capabilities are one of the major deterrence factors to discourage NATO and the EU from implementing decisive initiatives or countermeasures.

Routine military exercises and large-scale mobilizations, like the one in August 2016⁴⁵, shortly after NATO's Warsaw Summit, keep the Alliance guessing and distracted about Russia's political aims. The unexpected verification of the readiness of Russian armed forces can be seen as a demonstration with regard to the outcome of the NATO Summit and the alliance's decision to deploy battalion size units to Eastern Europe. NATO's other decisions, rotational presence and a program of exercises in the Baltic States were part of a dynamic reassertion of the alliance's military solidarity in the face of an escalating threat perception⁴⁶.

The Russian snap check exercises aimed to prove that deployment of NATO's multinational battalions constitutes only a minor combat power compared to the readiness of Russian armed forces to mobilize military and non-military capabilities in a short time and to conduct large-scale operations. For example, the armed forces readiness verification in August 2016 had units from three military districts (Central, Western, and Southern MDs), the Northern Fleet, Aerospace Forces, and Airborne Troops. It was a precondition for the strategic level command-staff exercise of the Southern Military District codenamed "Caucasus 2016" with some 12,500 troops supported by aviation and heavy equipment. It was followed up in October 2016 by a large-scale exercise of Russian civil defence involving some 40 million people nationwide.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ **Внезапная проверка объявлена в трех военных округах, Северном флоте, ВКС и ВДВ.** 2016.– Tass News Agency, 25 August 2016.

<<http://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/3565111>> (accessed: 14 December 2016).

Putin orders snap checks in Russian armed forces August 25-31. – Tass News Agency, 25 August 2016. <<http://tass.com/defense/895849>> (accessed: 14 December 2016). [**Putin orders snap checks 2016**]

⁴⁶ **Warsaw Summit Communiqué** 2016, para 78.

⁴⁷ **Putin orders snap checks 2016.**

The exercise “Zapad 2017”, conducted in September 2017, demonstrated the continuity of the tradition of large-scale manoeuvres accompanied with nuclear scenarios, as similar methods and scenarios were used during “Zapad 2009” and “Vostok 2010” exercises. Russia’s newly established National Defense Control Center (NDCC)⁴⁸ allows the Kremlin to implement an integrated approach to mobilisation and conflict that finds no equivalent in Western democracies. Russia continues the modernization of armed forces toward a modern battlefield and it must be treated very seriously as a huge effort has gone into presenting new capabilities and readiness to act decisively in a limited timeframe. Rapid deployment is supported by a very short chain of command and decision-making cycle. It allows for a well-coordinated utilization of all available national assets. This threat of rapidity and the danger of reaching a status of *fait accompli* refers to a situation whereby a land grab would happen so fast that reaction times would be obliterated and the restoration of the *status quo ante* too costly to foresee.

It is worth noting that the NDCC has the same staffing and structure in peace as in war time. It is able to utilize all national non-military and military capabilities at a 4:1 ratio and to facilitate a joint multi-institutional comprehensive approach and “*if implemented as planned – should greatly improve Russia’s speed of reaction and information exchange, assisting in honing its coordinated capabilities for hostile action still further*”⁴⁹. The changes to the military’s command and control structure were emphasised by the creation of four military districts and completed by the creation of the Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command in 2014⁵⁰ and the adjustment to the force structure. The initial focus on the creation of independent and more powerful brigades subordinate to military districts was revised,

⁴⁸ Also known as National Defense Management Center (Russian: Национальный центр управления обороной Российской Федерации) is the supreme command and control center of the Russian Ministry of Defense and the Russian Armed Forces.

Vladimir Putin’s massive, triple-decker war room revealed. – Washington Post, 21 November 2015. <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/11/21/vladimir-putins-massive-triple-decker-war-room-revealed/>> (accessed: 03 March 2018).

⁴⁹ **Giles, K.** 2016. Russia’s ‘New’ Tools for Confronting the West Continuity and Innovation in Moscow’s Exercise of Power. London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs Chatham House, March 2016, pp. 26–27.

⁵⁰ **Pettersen, T.** 2012. Russia to reorganize military forces in the Arctic. – The Barents Observer, 17 February 2012. <<http://barentsobserver.com/en/security/2014/02/russia-reorganize-military-forces-arctic-17-02/>>, and **Keck, Z.** 2014. Russia to Establish Arctic Military Command. – The Diplomat, 21 January 2014. <<http://thediplomat.com/2014/02/russia-to-establish-arctic-military-command/>> (accessed: 03 March 2018).

for example the recreation of 1st Guards Tank Army in the West Military District, reorganization of the 20th Army and the decision to create three new divisions based on existing combat, combat support and combat service support units⁵¹. The formulation of the National Guard in April 2016 supports that trend and facilitates the use of non-military assets to cover security of critical political, military and economic infrastructure and to enhance the readiness to contribute to territorial defence in case of an attempt to endanger the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation.

Operations in Syria have been using both combat units and private military companies (PMC). The latter are still not legal in Russia but they are recruiting its citizens and are managed by Russian leadership. According to Miller, as early as 2013, Russian mercenaries from the “Slavonic Corps” were fighting the Islamic State in Syria. Its successor, PMC Wagner “*has been fighting major battles in both Ukraine and Syria – including battles of Palmyra*” with some 900 mercenaries. It is worth mentioning that technically in legal terms, they are not mercenaries, but armed civilians still benefitting from their international civilian protection.⁵² Russian propaganda tends to prefer the term “volunteers”, stressing the higher patriotic and non-financial motivation of those groups. In addition to small arms, they also used heavy equipment and were coordinating artillery fire and airstrikes. Compared to other nations, PMC organizations linked with Russia are well-armed and utilize a variety of heavy weapons systems. Sky News released a report and video claiming that Russian mercenaries or volunteers were deployed to Syria and according to military analyst Pavel Felgenhauer “*the deployment of military contractors is consistent with the Russian take on ‘hybrid-war’*”⁵³. According to Mark Galeotti:

*The Donbas has been a testing ground for new state-controlled but notionally private initiatives, ranging from the Vostok Battalion, deployed in 2014, to a variety of other groups drawn from Cossacks, veterans, and adventurers, largely mustered by the FSB — or more usually, military intelligence, the GRU*⁵⁴.

⁵¹ Read in: **Carik, J.; Sivinskij, A.** 2016. Беларусь в контексте противостояния Россия–НАТО. Центр стратегических и внешнеполитических исследований (Center for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies). Minsk, pp. 5–9.

⁵² **Miller** 2016. See also: **Они сражались за Пальмиру.** – Fontanka, 29 March 2016. <<http://www.fontanka.ru/2016/03/28/171/>> (accessed: 16 December 2016).

⁵³ **Sparks, J.** 2016. Revealed: Russia’s ‘Secret Syria Mercenaries’. – Sky News, 10 August 2016. <<http://news.sky.com/story/revealed-russias-secret-syria-mercenaries-10529248>> (accessed: 16 December 2017).

⁵⁴ **Galeotti** 2016. – FSB – The Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation.

The PMCs, if legalized, could be continuously and effectively used within the framework of hybrid warfare, while avoiding the involvement of regular units of armed forces.

5. Conclusions

*“Hence to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting”*⁵⁵. This quote by Sun Tzu reflects parts of the current strategic thinking in Russian military and political leadership. The old Cold War mentality has waned and Russia no longer has the capabilities to conduct such large-scale operations, conquering vast territories. Frank Hoffman recognizes current warfare as *“a tailored mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal behaviour in the same time and battlespace to obtain [a group’s] political objectives”*⁵⁶. Hoffman’s definition is up-to-date. It is understood and implemented by Russian leadership. Therefore, NATO and the EU are being challenged by non-military tactics meant to weaken them, to destroy their internal cohesion, and to deepen internal divisions. The challenge is that the perception of the hybrid approach to warfare is understood differently among nations. It has direct consequences in government defence strategies and armed forces investments. It can be visible in a variety of political parties’ perception of threats, the different priorities in economic development, lacking unification e.g. within energy security and deals related to the transfer of gas and oil.

The advancing technologies and global market economy support the evolution of warfare by adding a variety of options to be exploited, some much stronger than in the past. The combination of a continuous build-up of armed forces and the creation of a National Guard ensures that the direct external and internal threat for Russia is reduced. Furthermore, it ensures close control of the internal situation, keeps opposition under control, manages the terrorist threat and thwarts any “colour revolution” attempts. It is partially linked to the recognition of power in popular movements capable of toppling governments. The latter has been under heightened attention in Russia due to the centennial of the October Revolution in 2017. In parallel, the development

⁵⁵ **Sun Tzu**. The Art of War. Part III. Attack by Stratagem. Translated by Lionel Giles. <<http://classics.mit.edu/Tzu/artwar.html>> (accessed: 27 December 2017).

⁵⁶ **Hoffman** 2009, *op. cit.*

of military and law enforcement capabilities is a facilitator for using other instruments of power supported by skilfully utilizing information and cyber domains. The hybrid approach is visualized and explained in the Gerasimov doctrine and the capabilities are available. The challenge is how long those capabilities can be preserved due to economic reasons. In the short term it is viable until 2020 or 2022, but in the long term the Russian economic situation must be improved to avoid the implosion of the current system.

The answer from Western nations must be decisive and it must include all possible tools to put constant pressure on Russia. It must be conducted in a concerted manner by all members of the European and Euro-Atlantic communities as any sign of a lack of cohesion or hesitation will be exploited against them. The hybrid threat requires a comprehensive answer by consolidating all available resources within each single nation and within security organizations. To face them NATO has agreed to “*a hybrid strategy to cope with the fast-moving challenges posed through a range of military and non-military means*”⁵⁷. It is necessary to remember that complex challenges must be countered with a complex and coordinated approach to counter propaganda, information campaigns, cyberattacks and other soft non-military options that deny Western nations the ability to react. As described in Atlantic Council’s 2016 report on Russian hybrid warfare against the West, in that domain Russia is already successful:

*Concerted effort to establish networks of political influence has reached into Europe’s core. Be it “Putinverstehern”, “useful idiots”, agents of influence, or Trojan Horses, the aim is the same: to cultivate a network of organizations and individuals that support Russian economic and geopolitical interests, denounce the EU and European integration, propagate a narrative of Western decline, and vote against EU policies on Russia (most notably sanctions) – thus legitimising the Kremlin’s military interventionism in Ukraine and Syria, weakening transatlantic institutions, and undermining liberal democratic values.*⁵⁸

The report on “the Kremlin’s Trojan horses” offers a comprehensive examination of how the Kremlin tries to influence politics in three major European

⁵⁷ **The Secretary General’s Annual Report** 2015, p. 10.

⁵⁸ **Polyakova, A.** 2016. Introduction The Kremlin’s Toolkit Of Influence In Europe. – The Kremlin’s Trojan Horses. Russian Influence in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Ed. by Polyakova, A.; Laruelle, M.; Meister, S.; Barnett, N. Washington, D.C.: The Atlantic Council, DINU Patriciu Eurasia Center, p. 3. <<http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/kremlin-trojan-horses>>. [Polyakova 2016] <<http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/kremlin-trojan-horses>>.

countries – France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. To deny further influence:

*European policy makers can and should take common action to expose, limit, and counter Russia's attempt to use economic leverage and seemingly benign civil society activities to manipulate policy and discourse in open societies*⁵⁹.

The report offers the following recommendations to France, Germany and the UK: to expose Russia's network of Trojan horses by shining a light on opaque connections, to limit Russia's influence through government actions, and to reinvest in European values and democratic institutions. Next to non-military means, the conventional capabilities must be preserved and developed further, as military weakness could be exploited by further territorial requirements recognizing that Europe is focused only on minor actions, such as deployment of limited forces to Eastern Europe, believing it serves as sufficient deterrence. The scale of Russian "snap exercises", nuclear scenarios and the continuous modernization of armed forces are something to be taken very seriously and require investing in capabilities to face an unexpected attempt to further change national borders.⁶⁰ Solid analysis must be done to face the risk that "*the actual future capability will surely differ from whatever it is that NATO and the EU are currently planning to counter*"⁶¹, endangering the preparedness to face the opponent on the future battlefield.

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⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶⁰ Polyakova 2016, op. cit.

⁶¹ McDermott 2016a, p. 105.

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