

# The Role of Counter Terrorism in Hybrid Warfare

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*A report prepared for NATO's Centre of Excellence for Defence Against Terrorism (COE DAT)*



August 2016

Delivered in line with the stipulations outlined in Contract No. 03-16-C-011

## Executive Summary

This report defines hybrid war as a multi-causal mode of conflict that takes place in multi-threat environments in which states and non-state actors interact (both covertly and overtly) using a mixture of regular and irregular war-fighting tactics for the purposes of extending influence, interest and, in some cases, territory.

NATO's counter-terrorism mantra of being 'Aware, Capable and Engaged' for a future safe from terrorist attacks is jeopardised by the dangers posed by hybrid threats.<sup>1</sup> Counter-terrorist *awareness* will be blind-sided by the ambiguous qualities of modern hybrid threats. Counter-terrorist *capabilities* are in need of reassessment based on the fact that hybrid terror threats can emerge from state and non-state sources, testing intelligence functions, as well as the notion of effective deterrence. Counter-terrorist *engagement* with partner institutions is heightened given the mutual threat posed by the spectre of hybrid war. This is especially true of capacity-building and crisis management as a means of enhancing preparedness and resilience against hybrid threats.

Tactical acts of terrorism seen today in hybrid war has the collective capacity to have a strategic effect given the way it is being used in conjunction with other conventional modes of conflict. It therefore means that terrorism can recast the status quo – a traditional preserve of insurgencies. The implications for this on NATO counter-terrorism policy is inevitably one of increasing militarisation. But as it stands counter-terrorism has a fairly low profile in NATO policy papers on hybrid war, and hybrid war as a concept does not appear in NATO strategy on counter-terrorism. The two concepts are speaking past each other inside

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<sup>1</sup> The 'Aware, Capable and Engaged' policy is set out in NATO's Policy Guidelines on Counter-Terrorism (May 2012).

the alliance. Furthermore, counter-terrorism policy needs to be given high profile visibility in NATO's conventional defence planning given the way that the hybrid use of terrorism can be utilised by 'regular' opponents.

In light of the hybrid threat posed by the ISIL/DAESH and Russia NATO counter-terrorism planning needs to be focussed on both the threat of so-called 'jihadi' violence *inside* the borders of member states but also the state-sponsored terrorism on the alliances' 'contested zones' on the southern and eastern flanks. This requires NATO counter-terrorism policy adopting as a key priority the disruption of 'hybrid warriors' in 'contested zones'. This would necessitate NATO understanding the growing IS threat in Libya under the rubric of hybrid warfare.

NATO should continue to undertake large scale, multi-partner training exercises based on hybrid war scenarios with a high component of hypothetical terrorist activity. This should then lead to NATO counter-terrorism policies targeting groups who share an ethnic or linguistic bond with the hybrid war belligerent in order to have the greatest effect on minimising the potential for future terrorist attacks.

## Introduction

By its very nature, hybrid warfare creates difficulties in understanding the origin or meaning of a hostile action given the way in which intention and involvement are masked – especially by the sponsorship of third party terrorist attacks. When applied to a conflict setting, hybridity poses a specific set of challenges to NATO policy makers and military commanders given the unclear lines of responsibility for actions deemed threats to NATO member states. Hybrid warfare needs a sound doctrinal basis because all warfare, especially that involving terrorists and subversion, necessitates coping effectively with strategic surprise. The challenge is to understand the causes and conduct of hybrid warfare as a means of countering the increasing role played by terrorist groups in perpetrating acts of irregular or unconventional war on behalf of sponsor states. Modern warfare may be more hybrid in nature but this does not mean it is unfathomable.

It is the aim of this project to develop a report that offers several important contributions of use to members of NATO's Centre of Excellence for Defence Against Terrorism, as well as the broader NATO military community. It will offer: a working definition of hybrid warfare, trace its rise, and assess the threats and opportunities it poses for NATO counter-terrorism planning now and in the future. Collectively this will provide NATO COE-DAT with a useable research project that will be both historically informed and policy relevant with the capacity to shape NATO's counter-terrorism strategy in the coming years.

The report will constitute four main parts, each of which will contain analysis of previous and on-going real world examples of counter-terrorism issues at play in hybrid warzones:

- a. ***Developing a working definition of 'hybrid warfare' and categorising its key constituent activities (including terrorism).*** This will enable NATO planners to strengthen the doctrinal basis of their counter-terrorism response in hybrid war situations.
- b. ***Clarifying the extent to which recent and on-going episodes of hybrid warfare are a departure from previous experience.*** This brings a level of historical context to contemporary policy discussion about the role acts of terrorism have played in hybrid war scenarios. This will include examples from Russia, Syria and other warzones.
- c. ***Identifying NATO's key challenges to countering terrorism in hybrid conflicts and the opportunities arising from the application of counter-terrorism strategies.*** This offers policy-relevant recommendations to NATO COE DAT officers that could lead to new approaches to the problem.
- d. ***Developing analysis on future counter-terrorism trends in both the spread and the evolution of hybrid warfare.*** This offers a forward-looking assessment of how NATO will have to adapt its counter-terrorism approach in the future in line with identifiable patterns in the development of hybrid war-fighting.

The report will be rounded off with a summary of the recommendations that are made throughout, for the consideration of NATO planners.

It is clear that NATO member states currently face important hybrid threats, each of which involves the use of terrorism to different degrees. The first is Russian annexation activities on the eastern fringes of NATO, especially inside Ukraine. The second is the infiltration of self-styled ISIL/DAESH fighters returning to their home countries in the West from their

experiences fighting in Syria or Iraq. This report will draw on these two dominant examples to illuminate the current threat, as well as offering greater background context to the threat by utilising other instances of hybrid war's conjunction with terrorism. Although acknowledging that hybrid warfare as a concept is certainly not new, this report argues that it has now attained a level of usage never before seen amongst multiple state and non-state actors on different continents.

**PART 1: *Developing a useful definition of 'hybrid warfare' and categorise its key constituent activities (including terrorism and its related activities).***

Hybrid warfare, as a concept, transcends the mono-causal modes of conflict that have dominated recent strategic discourse, such as insurgency or piracy. Instead, it encompasses a complex set of relationships, dynamics and processes. This report defines hybrid warfare as a multi-causal mode of conflict that takes place in multi-threat environments in which states and non-state actors interact (both covertly and overtly) using a mixture of regular and irregular war-fighting tactics for the purposes of extending influence, interest and, in some cases, territory. This goal does not have to be achieved through kinetic means alone, and can indeed be conducted 'virtually' in cyber space.

Terrorism is one of the most important constitutive components that make up the challenge posed by hybrid war. When comingled with ethnic tension, political corruption and strains on resources, contemporary terrorism demonstrates an extraordinary potency that can be utilised by multiple state and non-state actors. Hybrid war belligerents can use terrorism in its traditional capacity to coerce populations through fear as a way of reducing an opponents' willingness to fight back.

The hybrid component of modern war refers to both the source of the threat (acts of conventional war that are complemented, and indeed complicated, by the use of terrorist proxies or cyber attacks) and the covert methods often utilised (that are seen as a way of maintaining the 'plausible deniability' of the perpetrator in certain instances). The strategic use of hybrid warfare in an irregular manner can manifest itself in different ways, including the use of cyber attacks, information operations, psychological operations, economic attacks and the sponsorship of a proxy terrorist attack.

In his seminal 2007 report, Frank Hoffman brought the phrase 'hybrid war' into contemporary military parlance. Noting that the US (and, by default, its allies) can 'expect to face competitors who will employ *all* forms of war and tactics, perhaps simultaneously', Hoffman posited that modern warfare could no longer be tidily separated into traditional modes of conventional or unconventional.<sup>2</sup>

This report builds on Hoffman's initial articulation of hybrid wars as conflicts that 'incorporate a full range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder... [that] can be conducted by both states and a variety of non-state actors.'<sup>3</sup>

Other takes on defining hybrid war have revolved around similar themes as Hoffman's. A NATO Defense College (NDC) conference report from May 2015 defined hybrid warfare in quite procedural terms as 'the denial of - and defection from - standard norms and principles of international relations in pursuit of narrow interests.'<sup>4</sup> A research paper produced by the NDC a month earlier produced a three-dimensional definition of hybrid war that encapsulated actor, means and territory: '[Hybrid warfare is] a form of violent conflict that simultaneously involves state and non-state actors, with the use of conventional and

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Hoffman, 'Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars', Potomac Institute for Policy Studies (Arlington, VA, 2007), p.7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

<sup>4</sup> NATO Defense College conference report, 'NATO and New Ways of Warfare: Defeating Hybrid Threats', No.03/15 (May 2015), p.1.



unconventional means of warfare that are not limited to the battlefield or a particular physical territory.’<sup>5</sup>

Despite some variations in definition of the phenomena, hybrid war poses key questions in the formulation of strategy for NATO and its partners. Strategy, as commonly understood in the West, is ‘a course of action integrating ends, ways and means to meet policy objectives’.<sup>6</sup> The need for a strategy that adequately balances ends, ways and means in a policy context requires a fundamental self-assessment of the realistic attainability of the endgame, the restriction on the number of ways it can be achieved and the availability of means. Limitations placed on any of these factors can cause a state to pursue non-conventional or irregular strategies that are hybrid in nature in order to nullify any material or power disadvantages they have in relation to adversaries. All strategy, as Lawrence Freedman has stated, is ‘fluid and flexible’.<sup>7</sup> Hybrid warfare adds uncertainty to its characteristics. It is also strategically creative. Freedman reminds us that ‘underdog strategies, in situations where the starting balance of power would predict defeat, provide the real test of creativity’.<sup>8</sup> By taking the immediate belligerency out of war, via the conduct of operations on multiple levels, and indeed the obfuscation of responsibility for what could be construed as an act of war, the recourse to hybrid warfare is strategically creative

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<sup>5</sup> NATO Defense College research paper, ‘NATO’s Hybrid Flanks: Handling Unconventional Warfare in the South and East’, No.112 (April 2015), p.3.

<sup>6</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee, ‘Towards the Next Defence and Security Review: Part One’, Seventh Report of Session 2013-14, Vol.1 (HC 197), 7 January 2014, p.3.

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.xi.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.xii.

because of the way in which it makes strategic strengths (such as surprise and deniability) out of weaknesses (such as economic constraints and a poor conventional military capacity).

Hybrid warfare needs to be fully sketched out and conceptually understood to avoid strategic confusion, which often arises when conflicts involving multiple competing actors in confusing political environments are conceived of as using traditional concepts of war.<sup>9</sup>

Hybrid warfare takes place on multiple platforms using multiple actors. Yet by being strategically designed to circumvent situations that look like, or could lead to, conventional conflict hybrid warfare will take a position of near permanence on the strategic landscape. This permanence is reinforced by the fact that hybrid war is not a “universal war-winning formula.”<sup>10</sup> It is designed to prolong belligerency, perpetually frustrate an opponent, and leverage protracted political pressure. By tackling and engaging in hybrid warfare we are both perpetually avoiding and committing to a continuous conflict – even if the prosecution and countering of hybrid warfare looks like neither war nor peace. Hybrid warfare is fought in the increasingly militarised grey area in between.

This grey area is now being dominated by what Doug Ollivant has labelled ‘hybrid warriors’, a new breed of non-state actor (possibly state-sponsored) who have replaced our traditional conception of terrorist or insurgent. They have, in Ollivant’s words, adopted significant capabilities of an industrial or post-industrial nation-state army... retaining their ties to the

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<sup>9</sup> Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground Up: Twenty-First Century Combat as Politics* (London: Hurst, 2012), p.6.

<sup>10</sup> Bettina Renz, ‘Russia and Hybrid ‘Warfare’’, *Contemporary Politics*, 2016, Online version, p.6.

population and a devotion to the 'propaganda of the deed'...'<sup>11</sup> As a result of this new reality, NATO counter-terrorism policy therefore needs to ensure that the disruption of 'hybrid warriors' in these quasi-militarised 'grey zones' is a key strategic priority given the capacity for regional destabilisation.

Professor Christopher Coker of the London School of Economics has argued that the language and methods of risk analysis are applicable to the way that modern war is understood and conducted and that war has fundamentally 'become risk management in all but name'.<sup>12</sup> Recourse to hybrid warfare is, logically, an act of risk reduction. The desire by a state to avoid solely using overt, conventional force with obvious lines of responsibility denotes a decision influenced by the appeal of waging an indirect and unconventional war in order to lever as much gain out of a pre-existing or newly manufactured conflict without having a large stake in the risks of being an outright combatant in a conventional war that is subject to normal channels of international legal scrutiny and reduces the chances of direct retaliation by the victim state and/or its allies. The risk of waging hybrid war is compacted because of the conflation of conventional and unconventional methods of war-waging. In hybrid wars, as Frank Hoffman argued, 'the irregular component of the force attempts to become operationally decisive rather than just protract the conflict.'<sup>13</sup> The implication of this places an increased emphasis on the role of counter-terrorism within the broader military strategy of NATO given the heightened strategic leverage that acts of terrorism can have in modern warfare. It may soon not be possible to tidily distinguish between acts of

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<sup>11</sup> Douglas A. Ollivant, 'They Rise of Hybrid Warriors: From Ukraine to the Middle East', [www.warontherocks.com](http://www.warontherocks.com) (9 March 2016)

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Coker, *War in an Age of Risk* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), p.viii.

<sup>13</sup> Hoffman, 'Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', p.8.

mass casualty terrorism, the conduct of irregular war and conventional conflict. The lines delineating the traditional typologies of warfare are becoming increasingly blurred. Counter-terrorism can thus no longer be seen as an isolated policy area, separate from other military or police operations. NATO counter-terrorism planning, therefore, needs to be fully integrated within the alliances' overarching military planning as an acknowledgment of the centrality of terrorism to the waging of hybrid warfare. Indeed, as Hoffman also predicted: 'The likeliest opponents on future battlefields accept no rules. Their principal approach will be to avoid predictability and seek advantage in unexpected ways and ruthless modes of attack.'<sup>14</sup> Acts of terrorism will be a key way for them to achieve this.

States often resort to perpetrating hybrid warfare because they feel the seductive strategic pull of wrapping themselves in a cloak of invisibility. Responsibility for such attacks is often vague and the actual perpetrator often remains protected by claims of plausible deniability. However, if significant legal or forensic evidence emerges linking a state to a particular attack (as happened during revelations about responsibility for the Stuxnet cyber attack on Iran's main nuclear facility in 2012<sup>15</sup>), the cloak of invisibility soon reveals itself to be the Emperor's new clothes. The waging of hybrid warfare does not guarantee perpetual deniability for the perpetrators.

The father of modern strategic thought, the Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz refers in his seminal treatise *On War* to what he calls 'the fog of war' to describe the absence of

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<sup>14</sup> Hoffman, 'Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', p.16.

<sup>15</sup> For a thorough expose of the Stuxnet plan see David Sanger, 'Obama Order Sped Up Wave of Cyberattacks Against Iran', *The New York Times*, 1 June 2012. Also see James P. Farwell and Rafal Rohozinski, 'Stuxnet and the Future of Cyber War', *Survival*, Vol.53 No.1 (2011), pp.23-40.

information a commander has across a multitude of levels, from the tactical to the grand strategic. Building an intelligence picture of an enemy's intent, force structure, weapon capabilities, etc remains a crucial part of any strategy. But hybrid warfare represents the foggiest form of war given the deliberate obfuscations that occur in hiding the identity of the perpetrator state. Not knowing exactly who the 'enemy' is presents the most fundamental of challenges to strategic formulation. To paraphrase General Sherman during the American Civil War, war waged in a hybrid manner puts the opponents on the horns of a dilemma: over-reaction looks pre-emptive and disproportionate if clear responsibility for an attack has not been established; but the lack of a response leaves a state open to death by a thousand cuts. This is the precarious tightrope that NATO policymakers must tread when determining how to respond to the use of hybrid warfare by other states. Part 3 of this report look in greater depth at these options.

***PART 2: Clarify the extent to which recent and on-going episodes of hybrid warfare and subversion are a departure from our previous experience.***

The phrase 'hybrid warfare' first received a high profile airing in the 2007 report by Frank Hoffman, as mentioned earlier. Since then, concerns about opponent states resorting to hybrid war have come to dominate security debates within NATO member states. For example, a UK House of Commons Defence Committee report in July 2014 regarding Britain's commitment to NATO noted how Russia is attempting to coerce its regional neighbours and expand its borders.<sup>16</sup> Describing the Russian annexation of Crimea as 'a "game-changer" for UK defence policy', the report called for 'a fundamental reassessment of both the prioritisation of threats in the National Security Strategy and the military capabilities required by the UK'.<sup>17</sup> This call is valid, but not solely for the reasons cited in the report. Trends denoting an increasing utilisation of hybrid warfare are not exclusively emanating from Russia. This report highlights broader, longer-term trends that point to an increasing number of states, including China and Iran, that seek to attain strategic goals in a hybrid manner across an array of strategic platforms.

War in the modern world is changing. Since the end of the Cold War inter-state war has declined globally, whilst even civil wars have become a relative rarity. But war is not

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<sup>16</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee, 'Towards the Next Defence and Security Review: Part Two - NATO', Third Report of Session 2014-15, (HC 358), 31 July 2014, p.12.

<sup>17</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee, 'Towards the Next Defence and Security Review: Part Two - NATO', Third Report of Session 2014-15, (HC 358), 31 July 2014, p.7.

becoming an obsolete element of human interaction.<sup>18</sup> Governments and militaries around the world are simply changing the way that their strategic objectives are secured. An approximate 50% reduction in major inter- and intra-state conflicts between 1990 and 2010 belies a significant shift in global attitudes to war.<sup>19</sup> A heightened perception of risk, greater restrictions on military expenditure as a result of the Global Financial Crisis, and a greater public aversion (in the West) to direct uses of force in the wake of the Iraq War has led to an accentuated appeal for national security goals and defence priorities being attained by other means. This is the era of hybrid warfare.

One of the defining characteristics of this new era is the blending of regular and irregular modes of war – the essence of modern ‘hybridity’. But it is worth considering how changes to the irregular mode of war (traditionally where acts of terrorism have resided) have impacted upon the way hybrid war has been waged. Arguably one of the most noticeable changes that has occurred (as demonstrated by some of the case studies to follow) is the blurring of the classic distinction between terrorism and insurgency. To differentiate between terrorism and insurgency, two terms often misused interchangeably, is not to merely engage in a facile semantic debate. The variances are evident in regards to both their means and ends. Such discrepancies must be addressed if groups like the ISIL/DAESH are to be adequately conceptualised. Although definitions of such phenomena are subject to perennial contestation, a broad consensus has emerged. In essence, terrorism is a primarily symbolic tool of political violence applied tactically and often indiscriminately to ensure

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<sup>18</sup> As claimed by John Mueller in his book *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

<sup>19</sup> Statistics drawn from Bruno Tertrais, ‘The Demise of Ares: The End of War as We Know It?’, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.35 No.3 (2012), p.8.

coercion through fear. An insurgency is a strategic effort to subvert, overthrow and then recast an existing status quo via a combination of political and violent means.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, not only must we distinguish terrorist from insurgent groups by their varying emphasis on tactical targeting, notably the level of discrimination in their attacks (insurgent groups have a far greater propensity for the bombing of specific targets, such as embassies or symbols of ‘occupier’ power, and for attacking mainly military and political targets as opposed to civilians) but we must also consider the difference of strategic endgames held by terrorist and insurgent groups. Although variations of both groups may hold similar ideological beliefs, the crucial discrepancy is that insurgent groups overarching aim is to seize control of the state apparatus, as contrasted to purely symbolic terrorist acts that are designed primarily to disrupt or force a change in policy by existing elites. The contrasts between terrorism and insurgency have been muddled in recent years with the rise of the debate surrounding ‘new terrorism’. Proponents of the notion of ‘new terrorism’ pointed to an emergent tendency during the 1990s for terrorist groups to undertake attacks of catastrophic violence, driven by unshakeable ideological or religious fanaticism to achieve fundamental overhauls in regional or even global governance.<sup>21</sup> Yet arguably such analysis describes characteristics of insurgent groups, particularly given the nature of their strategic objectives. Leaving aside the ‘new’ terrorism debate given the implicit presence of

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<sup>20</sup> See David Kilcullen, ‘Countering Global Insurgency’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol.28 No.4 (2005), p.603; Bob O’Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare* (Washington DC: Brassey’s, 1990), p.13; Ian Beckett, ‘The Future of Insurgency’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.16 No.1 (2005), p.24.

<sup>21</sup> For example see Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).



insurgent-related factors in the description of 'new' terrorism<sup>22</sup>, the differentiation between terrorism and insurgency therefore can be epitomised by the variances in the character, scale, and most importantly, the purpose of the violence used.<sup>23</sup> It is important to bear such distinctions in mind when analysing the use of terrorism in hybrid war today, firstly in regard to our interpretation of the threat it poses, and secondly in relation to our conceptualisation of the response to the threat. In short, the tactical acts of terrorism seen today in hybrid war have the collective capacity to have a strategic effect given the way it is being used in conjunction with other conventional modes of conflict. It therefore means that terrorism can recast the status quo – a traditional preserve of insurgencies. The implications for this on NATO counter-terrorism policy is inevitably one of increasing militarisation – and this requires recalibrating NATO's doctrinal approach and strategic vision towards hybrid threats emerging from non-state actors and the capacity of states to sponsor them. Understanding hybrid war as a modern manifestation of an indirect strategic approach is important to this.

#### *HYBRID WARFARE AS A MODERN 'INDIRECT APPROACH'*

The rise of hybrid warfare does not reinvent the wheel in strategic terms. Indeed, in many ways contemporary hybrid warfare is the latest iteration of conflict in the mode of what

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<sup>22</sup> For an insight into the debate see Peter Neumann, *Old and New Terrorism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009) and Antony Field, 'The 'New Terrorism': Revolution or Evolution?', *Political Studies Review*, Vol.7 No.2 (2009), pp.195-207.

<sup>23</sup> Ian Beckett, *Modern Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies: Guerrillas and Their Opponents Since 1750*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), p.vii; J.A. Lynn, 'Patterns of Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency', *Military Review* July/August, 2005, p.24.

Basil Liddell Hart labelled the 'indirect approach' to strategy in the mid-twentieth century. Liddell Hart based his strategic approach on an understanding that brains were a more effective strategic lever than brawn, arguing that indirect methods 'endow warfare with intelligent properties that raise it above the brute application of force'.<sup>24</sup> Scarred both mentally and physically by the First World War, and influenced by the dictums of Ancient Chinese strategist Sun Tzu, Liddell Hart came to believe that war was no longer won by decisive battles and mass offensives. For him, strategic perfection was the attainment of goals without the need for extensive kinetic war-fighting. This required focussing strategic efforts on the psychological will of the enemy, emphasising the nature of surprise. Such characteristics remain pertinent factors in understanding how states that pose key challenges to NATO's medium-term security, such as Russia and China, think and act today. To this extent, contemporary hybrid warfare is a modern manifestation of an indirect strategic approach.

The indirect approach is encapsulated in dictums from Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, including 'Subdue the enemy without fighting', and 'Avoid what is strong to strike what is weak'.<sup>25</sup> Unfairly dismissed by its critics as little more than war avoidance, the indirect approach is admittedly a strategic ideal, but it is one that is better depicted as war displacement. It creates the conditions whereby an enemy is forced to realise that their own strategic objectives are unobtainable without the need for direct or conventional use of force. As Lawrence Freedman has noted, 'the logic point[s] to deterrence'.<sup>26</sup> Hybrid warfare is therefore a form of conflict predominantly designed to deter competitor states from staking

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<sup>24</sup> Basil Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* (Revised Edition) (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p.17.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.44.

<sup>26</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.138.

significant strategic resources of their own. This is in large part based on acute calculations of political risk and a desire to maximise self-interest that is greater than the will of an adversary to aggressively respond. This in-built logic of deterrence is re-enforced by other key components of hybrid warfare, namely plausible deniability (victim states might be deterred from retaliating in a conventional way because of the unclear lines of responsibility for the initial attack).

As a form of deterrence itself, the prosecution of hybrid warfare by adversaries is arguably immune to rival forms of deterrence. Liddell Hart observed over half a century ago that 'the nuclear deterrent... does not apply and cannot be applied to the deterrence of subtler forms of aggression'.<sup>27</sup> Nuclear weapons are not enough to counter the resort to hybrid warfare by competitor states, but it may prevent the escalation of hostilities that encompass conventional modes of confrontation.

An indirect approach 'takes the line of least resistance' in the physical sense and the 'line of least expectation' in the psychological sense. It is both hybrid and attritional, ensuring that an enemy is weakened 'by pricks instead of blows'. When states perceive inferiority in their own conventional military capabilities an indirect strategy of hybrid warfare may be adopted, especially if the leaders of the state feel assured that the drain on their enemies in countering acts of hybrid warfare are greater than the prosecution of them.<sup>28</sup> The purpose of the strategy is to reduce resistance within the mindset of enemy decision-makers by exploiting the twin military components of movement and surprise. This is assured, Liddell Hart argued, through a sudden 'change of front', thus dislocating the enemy through

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<sup>27</sup> Basil Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* (Revised Edition) (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p.373.

<sup>28</sup> Basil Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* (Revised Edition) (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p.334-5.

movement in the physical sphere and dislocating the enemy commanders steadfastness in the psychological sphere due to the surprise nature of the move.<sup>29</sup> Russia and the ISIL/DAESH groups have been vociferous advocates of a modern re-working of the indirect strategic approach as manifest through their recent waging of hybrid wars.

## RUSSIA

The Russian annexation of the Crimea and occupation of the Donbass region in early 2014 'included the successful use of subversion, cyber, proxies, conventional military interventions, and military exercises to deter and coerce, all conducted under the cover of the nuclear umbrella.'<sup>30</sup> This mutual application of regular and irregular approaches to territorial expansion sparked a lively debate as to whether this marked a new beginning of the Russian use of hybrid war. The origin of this debate lies in interpretations of the so-called Gerasimov Doctrine, named after the Russian Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov, who wrote an article in the Russian Academy of Military Science's journal *Military-Industrial Courier* entitled 'The Value of Science in Prediction'. Sceptics of the notion that Russia has overtly embraced a hybrid war strategy downplay the importance of Gerasimov's article. Samuel Charap of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London has argued that the article is actually an assessment of the American way of war and not a blueprint for Russian strategy. In short, Charap argues, 'there is no such thing as a

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<sup>29</sup> Basil Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* (Revised Edition) (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p.337-9.

<sup>30</sup> Samuel Charap, 'The Ghost of Hybrid War', *Survival*, Vol.57 No.6 (2015), p.53.

Russian hybrid war with NATO that will be limited to the hybrid realm.’<sup>31</sup> However, Charap’s use of the phrase ‘hybrid realm’ does indicate a misguided interpretation of this type of conflict as a separate typology of war (such as cyber) rather than an accumulation of them (cyber, terrorism, air power, etc).

Another sceptic, Bettina Renz, has noted that the label ‘hybrid warfare’ ‘inadequately reflects the direction of Russian military modernisation and as such has led to a skewed understanding of Russian military capabilities.’<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Renz argues, ‘exaggerating the extent to which the ‘hybridity’ of Russian tactics used in Crimea determined military success... is likely to preclude the flexibility of responses needed in any potential future Russian hostility.’<sup>33</sup> In other words, what happened in Crimea was a one-off. Surprise only works once. However, the surprise about Russian actions in Crimea was not necessarily surrounding the means by which they annexed parts of Ukraine, but the speed and success with which they were able to utilise it.<sup>34</sup>

Michael Kofman and Matthew Rojansky of the Wilson Center in Washington DC have added their voice to scepticism about Russian embrace of hybrid war. Like Renz, they argue that hybrid war ‘can hardly be considered a definitive doctrine for Russia’s power projection in its neighbourhood’ because, as they see it, hybrid war is a shallow label that misinterprets Russian actions.<sup>35</sup> Simply put they state that ‘the West has incorrectly elevated Russia’s

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<sup>31</sup> Charap, ‘The Ghost of Hybrid War’, p.53.

<sup>32</sup> Renz, ‘Russia and Hybrid Warfare’, p.1.

<sup>33</sup> Renz, ‘Russia and Hybrid Warfare’, p.6.

<sup>34</sup> Nicu Popescu, ‘Hybrid Tactics: Russia and the West’, *Issue Alert* (EU Institute for Security Studies), No.46 (2015), p.2.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Kofman and Matthew Rojansky, ‘A Closer Look at Russia’s Hybrid War’, *Kennan Cable*, No.7 (2015), p.1.

particular operations in Ukraine to the level of a coherent or preconceived doctrine.<sup>36</sup>

However, as Mark Galeotti points out, 'Russia's current style of war reflects reforms dating back to 2008 [with the invasion of Georgia] and policy discussions going back much further than that.'<sup>37</sup> In addition, it is worth remembering a point made by Diego A. Ruiz Palmer in a recent NATO Defense College research paper in which he noted that it is a long-standing Russian habit to 'ascribe to foreign countries the paternity of concepts and practices developed and implemented by Russia.'<sup>38</sup> What we can observe at the present time is Russia adopting an approach that Galeotti labels 'guerrilla geopolitics' in which 'a would-be great power, aware that its ambitions outstrip its military resources, seeks to leverage the methodologies of an insurgent to maximise its capabilities.'<sup>39</sup> Such 'insurgent methodologies' arguably include the insertion of the so-called 'little green men' inside Crimea in a deliberate attempt to coerce the local population and take control of key political and communication centres. This is underlined by the non-insignia uniforms they wore, which lent them an intentionally state-less look.

NATO is clearly a source of great irritation to the Russian military and political hierarchy. The 2014 Russian Military Doctrine, which was approved by President Vladimir Putin, identified NATO – specifically the issue of alliance enlargement into eastern Europe – as a substantial

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<sup>36</sup> Kofman and Rojansky, 'A Closer Look at Russia's Hybrid War', p.3.

<sup>37</sup> Mark Galeotti, 'Hybrid, Ambiguous and Non-Linear? How New is Russia's 'New Way of War'?', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.27 No.2 (2016), p.283.

<sup>38</sup> Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, 'Back to the Future? Russia's Hybrid Warfare, Revolutions in Military Affairs, and Cold War Comparisons', NATO Defense College research paper, No.120 (2015), p.8.

<sup>39</sup> Galeotti, 'Hybrid, Ambiguous and Non-Linear?', p.283.

threat to the country.<sup>40</sup> Russian objectives to undermine NATO through the adoption of a hybrid war approach are borne out of attempts to 'weaken NATO's willingness to follow through on its own deterrent threats.'<sup>41</sup> It thus contains a significant psychological component that seeks to weaken NATO resolve and probe the limits of Article 5 invocation.

Russia's prosecution of hybrid war is driven by a desire to mutually restore Russia's perceived place in the world; maintain control of their old 'sphere of influence'; and help enhance a distinctive anti-Western 'Russian World' through the projection of their ideology via 'soft power' channels.<sup>42</sup> As Ruiz Palmer has argued, 'what sets Russia's brand of hybrid war apart from the asymmetric tactics and techniques traditionally associated with non-state actors... is its scale.'<sup>43</sup> This allows Moscow to blend hard and soft power measures to simultaneously expand control of their immediate border region whilst intimidating global rivals. This is a trait of the hybrid war approach that they share with the ISIL/DAESH.

## ISIL/DAESH

The effects of the spill-over from the 2011 Arab Spring have provoked a profound reassessment of Western interpretations of the utility of irregular forces (and thus on the use of terrorism and the waging of hybrid warfare) for a few key reasons. First, the impact of the fall (or attempted removal) of regimes like Colonel Qaddafi's in Libya or Bashar al-

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<sup>40</sup> CNA Occasional Paper, 'Russia's 'Ambiguous Warfare' and Implications for the US Marine Corps' (May 2015), p.4.

<sup>41</sup> Alexander Lanoszka, 'Russian Hybrid Warfare and Extended Deterrence in Eastern Europe', *International Affairs*, Vol.92 No.1 (2016), p.176.

<sup>42</sup> Ruiz Palmer, 'Back to the Future?', p.3.

<sup>43</sup> Ruiz Palmer, 'Back to the Future?', p.1.

Assad's in Syria brought significant political changes in the region that will have a spill-over effect on NATO countries. Second, the escalation of Syrian protests into a full-scale civil strife saw the rise of ISIL/DAESH and an effective security meltdown along the porous border with Iraq that has turned into one of the most vicious hybrid warzones in the world. Third, and most importantly, reconsideration of the use of irregular forces has come about in large part because of the contradictory demands that the prosecution of hybrid wars waged by, and indeed against, ISIL/DAESH created. Suddenly, as the political and strategic picture of the region shifted, ISIL/DAESH terrorists, along with a variety of other militias, paramilitaries, insurgents and auxiliaries all became key players in the war, thus underlining the importance of counter-terrorism to NATO's broader anti-ISIL/DAESH strategy.

Such changes to the nature of hybrid war rub up against the strategic objectives of ISIL/DAESH itself. The apocalyptic ideology of ISIL/DAESH, based on Koranic predictions, confidently asserts that the caliphate will defeat the "armies of Rome" in a grand battle.<sup>44</sup> If "Rome" is synonymous with the West at large, then the prophecy is a long way from being fulfilled, largely because ISIL/DAESH's embrace of hybrid warfare will itself inevitably avoid a grand battle in a conventional sense given the onus placed on perpetrating acts of terrorism.

Ready to exploit the new civil war in Syria was the remnants of the once powerful Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), who had crossed the border after being pushed out of their Iraqi stronghold of Anbar province in 2007. AQI changed its name to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant in 2012 to reflect their cross-border interests. Acting as a spearhead for extremist Sunni

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<sup>44</sup> Graeme Wood, 'What ISIS Really Wants', *The Atlantic*, March 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2015/02/what-isis-really-wants/384980>



resistance to the Shia forces in charge in Damascus and Baghdad, ISIL/DAESH fighters scored quick successes, rapidly gaining control of territory. So swift was their spread that they declared the foundation of a caliphate stretching across 423 miles of Iraq and Syria on 29 June 2014. ISIL/DAESH contains around 30,000 fighters, with a core of approximately 20,000 ideologically loyal full-time members. Using a combination of intimidation, terrorism, and more orthodox large-scale military assaults, ISIL/DAESH has proven capable of challenging national armies and defeating rival insurgent factions. By September 2014, ISIL/DAESH was earning approximately \$2 million per day, making it the wealthiest terrorist organization in the world.<sup>45</sup>

Since 2011 a myriad of foreign nations have been funding what *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius has labelled “a chaotic melange of fighters” inside Syria.<sup>46</sup> If the previous case study showed a clear hybrid war pattern developing in Eastern Ukraine, Syria is a particularly anarchic hybrid war involving a broad network of shifting relationships between states, terrorists and their proxies, each with different goals in mind. The incredibly swift rise of ISIL/DAESH, combined with their disregard for any other group or country, made strange bedfellows out of the resultant anti-ISIL/DAESH coalition. NATO has found itself sharing the same strategic objective as many countries in the Gulf region in the effort to quell the rise of this virulent movement and roll back the borders of this self-proclaimed Sunni caliphate. The simultaneous battle to oust Assad from power in Damascus has seen

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<sup>45</sup> Charles Lister, ‘Profiling the Islamic State’, Brookings Institute, 2014, [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling%20islamic%20state%20lister/en\\_web\\_lister.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling%20islamic%20state%20lister/en_web_lister.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> David Ignatius, ‘Foreign nations’ proxy war in Syria creates chaos’, *The Washington Post*, 2 October 2014, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/david-ignatius-foreign-nations-proxy-war-creates-syrian-chaos/2014/10/02/061fb50c-4a7a-11e4-a046-120a8a855cca\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/david-ignatius-foreign-nations-proxy-war-creates-syrian-chaos/2014/10/02/061fb50c-4a7a-11e4-a046-120a8a855cca_story.html)

Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar channel financial assistance and weapons towards their favoured rival Sunni groups in the hope it would lead to an outcome of their liking. Instead, this indirect interference was mirrored by pro-Assad Shia groups, like Hezbollah, being sponsored by Iran and Iraq. As one senior Iraqi politician noted of Tehran's proxy intervention: "The Iranian's have a PhD in this type of warfare".<sup>47</sup> Beset by a disunited opposition and by a marauding set of foreign intelligence agents, Syria has become a particularly bloody hybrid battle ground.

Even President Obama himself has acknowledged that ISIL/DAESH are a 'sort of hybrid of not just the terrorist network but one with territorial ambitions, and some of the strategy and tactics of an army.'<sup>48</sup> This is a reflection of the group's simultaneous creation of a self-styled army to seize land in Syria and Iraq via the direct use of terrorist violence which it has also sought to export abroad to Western cities. It is this combined threat of regional destabilisation and exported terrorism to Europe and America that means the threat from ISIL/DAESH is, in the words of NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General Jamie Shea, an 'integrated mess' for all NATO member states to help deal with.<sup>49</sup>

The threat of ISIL/DAESH terrorism to NATO countries comes not just from 'returning fighters' from Syria and Iraq but also from the instability being caused on NATO's southern flank in Libya. Since the fall of Muhammed Gaddafi in 2011 ISIL/DAESH has attempted to expand its territorial control over increasingly lawless parts of the country's disputed territories. Greater attention to the threat of ISIL/DAESH – those archetypal modern 'hybrid

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<sup>47</sup> Patrick Cockburn, *The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution* (London: Verso, 2015), p.159.

<sup>48</sup> President Obama on CBS *60 Minutes* September 2014, quoted in NATO Defense College research paper no.112, p.5.

<sup>49</sup> NATO's Counter-Terrorism Co-operation with Partners report on Information Day (7 October 2014), p.9.

warriors' - in Libya is important if NATO is to mitigate a growing terrorist problem just a short distance by sea from some member states.

A final word on the implications for NATO's counter-terrorism strategy towards ISIL/DAESH must go to Graeme Wood whose seminal piece 'What ISIS Wants' raises two important misconceptions that deserve to be contemplated by a wider audience. The first is a tendency to lump ISIL/DAESH and al-Qaeda together into a monolithic 'jihadist' bloc which overlooks key differences between the two groups. Counter-terrorism responses therefore need to be nuanced enough to separate the two – and perhaps even play the two off against each other. The second misconception, Wood argues, is a reluctance to acknowledge ISIL/DAESH's medieval religious premise which acts as the source of the group's worldview. Such misinterpretations have arguably led the West to seek proxies that are broadly anti-'jihadist' and/or exude discernable nationalist qualities. Western backing of the Free Syria Army (FSA) inside Syria is demonstrative of the first type of proxy, whilst the use of Kurdish *peshmerga* militiamen in northern Iraq are symptomatic of the second. Indeed, the *peshmerga* were instrumental in preventing ISIL/DAESH from taking the prize possession of the Kurdish regional capital Erbil, and have assisted in the recent operation to retake Mosul from ISIL/DAESH control. The use of such proxies is a sign that the West (including NATO powers) are trying to inflict death by a thousand cuts upon ISIL/DAESH rather than backing a major land invasion. Hybrid war approaches therefore work both ways in this particular warzone – but there is a deeper recent historical background to the use of hybrid war being waged in the Middle East in particular.

*IRAN & SYRIA*

One of the most prolific users of hybrid warfare strategies over the past few decades in the Middle East has been Iran. The creation of the so-called 'Resistance Axis' by the myriad collection of state and non-state actors in the Middle East including Iran, the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, Hezbollah from its base in Lebanon, and Hamas in the Palestinian Territories has offered up the opportunity for Tehran and Damascus to wage regional war in a hybrid manner through the use of their terrorist proxies. Iran's power projection in the region has rested on traditional (military) and non-traditional (energy-based) threats. Western attempts to box Iran in have resulted in a regional proxy war, during which Iran has sought to project its power in a hybrid way so as to avoid directly antagonising the US whilst simultaneously undermining them.<sup>50</sup> Tehran has relied on hybrid warfare methods to maintain its position as a regional power for decades. It has used limited resources and the sponsorship of proxies to try and nullify the conventional military balance in the region, which Israel controls thanks to large scale American military support. Iran's approach has been replicated by the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad through the establishment of alliances with Hezbollah and Hamas. So archetypal of hybrid warfare have Iran and Syria's actions become that a 2012 report by the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies concluded that: 'Hezbollah allows Syria and Iran to project power in ways that Israel could not directly counter... This form of power projection has allowed Syria to push Israel into a low-level war of attrition without involving Syria [directly].'<sup>51</sup>

Admittedly, Hezbollah's proximity to Damascus has waned in recent years, largely as a result of the group's growing autonomy. Regardless of this development, what is clear is that

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<sup>50</sup> Aram Nerguizian, 'US and Iranian Strategic Competition: The Proxy Cold War in the Levant, Egypt and Jordan', *Center for Strategic and International Studies Report* (2012), p.12.

<sup>51</sup> Aram Nerguizian, 'US and Iranian Strategic Competition: The Proxy Cold War in the Levant, Egypt and Jordan', *Center for Strategic and International Studies Report* (2012), p.49.

Hezbollah 'remains the most widely acknowledged hybrid force in the world' given the way in which they conjoined traditional terrorist tactics with the attainment of sophisticated missile technology and advanced electronic war-fighting capacities that could be operated in large swathes of territory they effectively controlled.<sup>52</sup>

## CHINA

China has been a conspicuous user of hybrid warfare for some time now. Beijing's national security strategy broadly revolves around the attainment of several key objectives: creating an international security environment conducive to economic growth; ensuring the stability in its border regions; neutering American power in the Asia-Pacific region in non-confrontational (arguably hybrid) ways; domestic counter-terrorism; and expanding its global political and economic influence.<sup>53</sup> In conventional military terms the US holds a significant nuclear superiority over China (approximately 5,000 warheads versus 240), and has a technologically superior air force and navy.<sup>54</sup> This imbalance is arguably a key factor that has led China to resort to more hybrid ways of achieving its national security goals. This is especially important given the double bind Beijing finds itself: the US is China's largest trading partner as well as its biggest debtor. There are thus hard economic and military reasons to avoid outright confrontation with Washington.

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<sup>52</sup> Ollivant, 'The Rise of the Hybrid Warriors'.

<sup>53</sup> Donald Gross, *The China Fallacy: How the US Can Benefit from China's Rise and Avoid Another Cold War* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p.22.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.23-4.

In the 1990s the Chinese developed a strategic principle known as ‘Tao Guang Yang Hui’, which pertains to the notion of concealing capability from outward display.<sup>55</sup> Two decades later it would appear that China has adapted this principle to include concealing not just *capability* but also *intention* and (in the cyber realm) *responsibility* from outward display. It is a maxim well suited to the prosecution of hybrid war and fits in well (albeit covertly) with the overarching Chinese grand strategic aim of ‘peaceful rise/development’ (PRD). The Chinese Communist Party is increasingly assuming that the continuation of China’s peaceful rise can be achieved increasing by hybrid means because the nation cannot afford a confrontational rise.<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps the most important glimpse of strategic thinking within the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) dates back to the publication in 1999 of a document written by two Colonels from a new generation of military officers. Entitled ‘Unrestricted Warfare’ the document advocated a fundamental rethink of how the Chinese military perceived the conduct of war in an era of rapidly evolving political, social and technological change. Although over a decade old, it is worth quoting a key passage at length because we can observe the germinal origins of contemporary Chinese ‘ambiguity’ in the field of warfare:

‘War which has undergone the changes of modern technology and the market system will be launched even more in atypical forms. In other words, whilst we are seeing a relative reduction in military violence, at the same time we definitely are seeing an increase in political, economic and technological violence... When we suddenly realise

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<sup>55</sup> Feng Zhaung, ‘Rethinking China’s Grand Strategy: Beijing’s Evolving National Interests and Strategic Ideas in the Reform Era’, *International Politics*, Vol.49 no.3 (2012), p.324.

<sup>56</sup> Barry Buzan, ‘The Logic and Contradictions of “Peaceful Rise/Development” as China’s Grand Strategy’, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, (2014), Online version.

that all these non-war actions may be the new factors constituting future warfare, we have to come up with a new name for this new form of war: Warfare which transcends all boundaries and limits, in short: unrestricted warfare. If this name becomes established... it means that all the boundaries lying between the two worlds of war and non-war, of military and non-military, will be totally destroyed, and it also means that many of the current principles of combat will be modified, and even that the rules of war may need to be re-written.<sup>57</sup>

The lasting influence of this document on PLA thinking is clear given the strong correlation between the call in 1999 to embrace the breakdown of clear barriers between war and peace and contemporary Chinese actions on the international stage. Undoubtedly a more indirect approach has been taken in regard to its attainment of national security objectives, particularly through its use of cyber attacks. 'Unrestricted Warfare' is an insightful document for us to understanding how the Chinese military has within it a new generation of leaders willing to endorse the furthering of strategic objectives in increasingly indirect and subversion ways. This lays the groundwork for a more long-term interpretation of the evolution of Chinese military thinking and the centrality of hybrid warfare to it. The PLA may have labelled it 'unrestricted warfare' but its characteristics are highly congruent with our understanding of 'hybrid warfare'. And given Beijing's embrace of its core principles some years ago, the Chinese may well be its most experienced exponents.

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<sup>57</sup> Qiao Liang and Wang Xiansui, 'Unrestricted Warfare' (Beijing: People's Liberation Army Literature and Arts Publishing House, February 1999), pp.6 & 12, available at <http://militarydispatch.com/publications/unrestrictedwarfare.pdf>

Given the accumulative threats posed by these recent and on-going advocates of hybrid war – especially the use of terrorism within it – it is now important to identify challenges to NATO and the opportunities to reshape strategy.



**PART 3: *Identify key challenges and the opportunities for NATO arising from contemporary hybrid warfare.***

Modern ‘hybrid warriors’, as Doug Ollivant labels them, pose a fundamental threat to NATO member states because they operate outside of the system of sovereign statehood that NATO countries belong and do not respect international law or the norms and rules of the international system. Furthermore, they operate in spaces outside of strong state control – grey zones – that make NATO penetration (or even monitoring) difficult. Increasing NATO’s military presence in these grey zones would require a cross-alliance willingness to engage in operations that would be politically sensitive. At the very least NATO should undertake more large-scale training exercises that are based on scenarios involving high levels of terrorist activity undertaken by hypothetical ‘hybrid warriors’. These exercises would be similar to that conducted by NATO’s Allied Command Transformation in May 2011 titled ‘Countering Hybrid Threats’.

Hybrid warfare requires an increased cross-alliance emphasis on strengthening the resilience of critical national infrastructure. A more integrated political, diplomatic, military and legal response is needed in the face of an increasingly diverse and obfuscated set of threats to the security of NATO member states.<sup>58</sup> As such, the response to hybrid warfare by other states may require intermingling different sorts of military operation including counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism, and peacekeeping. Hybrid warfare blurs the lines between hitherto distinguishable modes of conflict. For this reason the decision to push

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<sup>58</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee, ‘Towards the Next Defence and Security Review: Part One’, Seventh Report of Session 2013-14, Vol.1 (HC 197), 7 January 2014, p.22.

forward with a new 'fusion centre' within the European Union to enhance cross-institutional awareness of hybrid threats to Europe should be welcomed and serve as a springboard for greater EU-NATO co-operation on hybrid threats.<sup>59</sup>

So how can NATO mitigate the challenges posed by the outbreak of hybrid war? An important first step is observing when the outbreak of a hybrid war is coming. Alexander Lanoszka has identified four conditions whose presence makes the likelihood of hybrid war occurring increase significantly:

'first the belligerent has local escalation dominance; second, the belligerent seeks to revise the status quo; third, the belligerent has a relatively weak neighbouring state in so far as the latter lacks a robust civil society and has local ethnic or linguistic cleavages that can be exploited; and fourth, the weak neighbour has some ethnic or linguistic ties to the belligerent.'<sup>60</sup>

Lanoszka's criteria emphasises the necessity of focussing counter-terrorism measures on localised conflicts and highlights the continued blurring of lines between terrorism and insurgency given the predilection of hybrid war belligerents to change the status quo. The group most vulnerable to overtures by belligerents in hybrid war scenarios to perpetrate acts of terrorism on their behalf are what Lanoszka labels 'large stateless populations' who share an ethnic or linguistic bond with the belligerent (as was seen with the Russian-speaking population in the Crimea). NATO counter-terrorism policies need to be targeted at

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<sup>59</sup> Julian E. Barnes, 'EU Defense Ministers Back New Group Focussed on 'Hybrid Warfare'', *Wall Street Journal*, 19 April 2016. This decision comes off the back of a European External Action Service (EEAS) discussion paper of May 2015 entitled 'Countering Hybrid Threats', that affirmed European desire to increase resilience against hybrid threats.

<sup>60</sup> Lanoszka, 'Russian Hybrid Warfare and Extended Deterrence in Eastern Europe', p.176.

those groups to have the greatest effect on minimising the potential for future terrorist attacks.

The prevalence of hybrid warfare amongst adversaries on the global stage increases the importance of taking the opportunity to engage in *unambiguous* and on-going talks with states NATO suspects of waging hybrid war as a way of openly dissuading them from resorting to subversive acts. As the military actions of our adversaries become more intangible our diplomatic efforts need to become increasingly open as a means of diverting other states from the recourse to hybrid war.

The rise of hybrid warfare poses several fundamental questions for NATO planners and policymakers in the medium-term. The most pressing surrounds that of the collective security implications (NATO Article 5) of responding to an act of hybrid warfare. If an enemy acts by using an act of terrorism, and a direct line of responsibility for an attack is blurred, can a collective security clause be legitimately invoked? The 2014 NATO Summit in Wales confirmed that in the event of a cyber attack Article 5 would be triggered – but can the same be said for a terrorist attack that is tied to a state as part of a hybrid war strategy? Demonstrating the origin and intent to such an attack can prove difficult.

Challenges to the organisation posed by hybrid use of terrorist tactics are multiple. What is clear is that NATO's counter-terrorism mantra of being 'Aware, Capable and Engaged' for a

future safe from terrorist attacks is jeopardised by the dangers posed by hybrid threats.<sup>61</sup> Counter-terrorist *awareness* will be blind-sided by the ambiguous qualities of modern hybrid threats. Counter-terrorism *capabilities* are in need of reassessment based on the fact that hybrid terror threats can emerge from state and non-state sources, testing intelligence functions, as well as the notion of effective deterrence. Counter-terrorism *engagement* with partner institutions is heightened given the mutual threat posed by the spectre of hybrid war. This is especially true of capacity-building and crisis management as a means of enhancing preparedness and resilience against hybrid threats. All these challenges will inevitably remain in the future, as the next section of the report discusses.

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<sup>61</sup> The 'Aware, Capable and Engaged' policy is set out in NATO's Policy Guidelines on Counter-Terrorism (May 2012).

***PART 4: Develop analysis on future trends in both the spread and the evolution of hybrid warfare.***

Trends of future warfare will be dictated by the confluence between people, place and politics. As David Kilcullen has convincingly argued, these trends are clear: '[M]ore people than ever in history will be competing for scarcer and scarcer resources in poorly governed areas that lack adequate infrastructure, and these areas will be more and more closely connected to the global system, so that local conflict will have far wider effects'.<sup>62</sup> Kilcullen takes his analysis further by arguing that the warzones of the future will be 'crowded, complex and coastal'.<sup>63</sup> This represents what he perceives to be an 'environmental discontinuity' with recent wars (such as the predominantly rural war in Afghanistan). But, Kilcullen feels, we will see a level of 'operational continuity' in as much as future threats will continue to emanate from irregular sources in unconventional ways. This author would add to this analysis that the threats will also be manifest in an increasingly hybrid manner.

A NATO Defense College conference concluded in May 2015 that 'strategic hybrid warfare is not simply an alternative form of warfare; it is the new way of warfare'.<sup>64</sup> The conference ended with a call for a new NATO counter-hybrid warfare strategy that should be built on the principles of 'political solidarity, political agility and credible, tailored military power'.<sup>65</sup> To this must be added enhanced counter-terrorism co-operation given the centrality of

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<sup>62</sup> David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla* (London: Hurst, 2013), p.50.

<sup>63</sup> See chapter 5 in *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> NATO Defense College conference report, 'NATO and New Ways of Warfare', p.3.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

terrorism to the utility of hybrid warfare. What is clear is that counter-terrorism has a fairly low profile in NATO policy papers on hybrid war, and hybrid war as a concept does not appear in NATO strategy on counter-terrorism. The two concepts are speaking past each other inside the alliance. In the future there needs to be better integration of theory and practice if the alliance is to tackle these inter-twined threats. Counter-hybrid war strategy needs to acknowledge the core role that acts of terrorism play in modern hybrid conflicts, whilst counter-terrorism strategy needs to speak more closely to the wider strategic aims of the alliance if opponents who use terrorism as part of a wider hybrid strategy are to be defeated.

Strategic thought is the product of the conflict environment around it. As Robert Johnson, Director of the Changing Nature of Warfare programme at the University of Oxford, has reminded us, 'the most accurate assessments of war in the near future are informed by the present'.<sup>66</sup> Threats to NATO's security today are myriad in nature, complex in cause and frequently hybrid in origin. Tight civil-military relations are essential if NATO is to present an effective and unified front in the face of hybrid threats in the future, especially as terrorism by its very nature seeks to undermine the pillars of social stability. Hybrid war in the future will continue to try and weaken the social cohesion of NATO member states by using the tactic of terrorism to serve the broader strategic objective of territorial control. As such, hybrid war will continue to hold a fundamental appeal to illiberal states aiming to use the openness of liberal states against them.

In order to understand where conflict, especially hybrid ones, will occur in the future we need to return to our maps. Although our era of globalisation renders universal the

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<sup>66</sup> Robert Johnson, 'Predicting Future War', *Parameters*, Vol.44 No.1 (2014), p.67.

possibilities of cyber war or the implications of the weaponisation of space, geography offers not just impenetrable physical barriers to the conduct of war but throws up divisions between ethnic groups, boundaries that contentiously split control of natural resources, and borders that create claim and counter-claim to territory.<sup>67</sup> Geography is a prime catalyst to hybrid wars. Indeed, when taking acts of cyber war out of the equation, many acts of hybrid war take place between neighbouring countries (as currently witnessed between Russia and Ukraine). Geography tells us that there is little reason to assume this pattern with change in the near future. Even a decade ago Frank Hoffman was arguing that hybrid wars will occur in what he labelled 'contested zones'.<sup>68</sup> Therefore NATO counter-terrorism planning needs to be focussed on both the threat of so-called 'jihadi' violence *inside* the borders of member states but also the state-sponsored terrorism on the alliances' 'contested zones' on the southern and eastern flanks.

In addition to a fundamental geographical element, hybrid warfare contains an intrinsic psychological component as well. As Basil Liddell Hart said of the indirect strategic approach more generally, it is 'closely related to all problems of the influence of mind upon mind'.<sup>69</sup> Countering the application of hybrid warfare by our adversaries therefore requires investment in the ability of NATO forces to effectively carry out information warfare and influence operations in areas of strategic concern. Furthermore, policymakers and strategic planners should be prepared to expect the unexpected given its reliance on strategic surprise. Effectively countering the use of hybrid warfare by adversaries cannot rely on

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<sup>67</sup> For a broader argument relating to the connection between war and geography see Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate* (New York: Random House, 2012).

<sup>68</sup> Hoffman, 'Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', p.15.

<sup>69</sup> Basil Liddell Hart, *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* (Revised Edition) (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), p.18.

concentrating superior forces in a region. Planning must transcend notions of separate 'domestic' and 'expeditionary' theatres.

Furthermore, there are several important environmental factors that may well influence the spread of hybrid warfare in the future. The UN has estimated that by the end of the next decade nearly 50% of the world's population will be living in areas under 'high water stress'.<sup>70</sup> The capacity for inter-country conflict being propelled by disputes over access to water from rivers, dams and reservoirs is significant and recourse to subversive methods is highly probable. Water is a weapon of hybrid warfare. As water analyst at the Nobel Institute, Brahma Chellaney, has argued 'there are growing risks of unconventional water conflicts, waged with the aid of economic or riparian leverage, terrorist proxies, or other covert means'.<sup>71</sup> Approximately half of the world's land surface contains river basins that cross national borders, including in some conflict hot spots that are also experiencing heavy stress on water access such as the West Bank, Kashmir and the Tibetan Plateau. A hypothetical act of hybrid water warfare would see the re-engineering of a cross-border river flow or the terrorist destruction of a dam that could exacerbate pre-existing tensions. When water, or indeed energy resources such as oil or gas, run low or such resources are used as political tools (such as Russia's cutting of gas supply lines to Ukraine), we can see how the subversion of energy resources can be another weapon of hybrid warfare.

Another way that competition for resources can lead to a proliferation in hybrid warfare in the future is via an intensification of experiences of food insecurity across parts of the globe.

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<sup>70</sup> Cited in Brahma Chellaney, *Water, Peace and War: Confronting the Global Water Crisis* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), p.xii.

<sup>71</sup> Brahma Chellaney, *Water, Peace and War: Confronting the Global Water Crisis* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), p.xiii.



A 2013 report by the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington DC concluded that: ‘Since evidence shows that conflict leads to food insecurity, it seems likely... that continued food insecurity could well contribute to continuing or restarting conflict’.<sup>72</sup> Tensions over land valuable for the cultivation of crops or grazing of cattle can lead to competition that seeks hybrid outlets such as ‘spontaneous’ land grabs or raids on cross-border food storage facilities.

In sum, hybrid war may well be a dominant security concern for NATO now, but the threat shows no signs of abating given the potential avenues that adversaries could use in the future. NATO needs to fully embrace this challenge through on-going training exercises, doctrinal revision, and the maintenance of alliance solidarity and readiness.

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<sup>72</sup> Emmy Simmons, ‘Harvesting Peace: Food Security, Conflict and Cooperation’, *Woodrow Wilson Center Environmental Change and Security Program Report*, Vol.14 Issue 3 (2013), p.22.

## Summary of recommendations

- NATO's strategies on hybrid war and counter-terrorism need to be better integrated and reflect the inter-twined threat.
- Furthermore, military derivations of NATO counter-terrorism policy needs to be given high profile visibility in NATO's conventional defence planning given the way that the hybrid use of terrorism can be utilised by 'regular' opponents.
- NATO counter-terrorism planning needs to be focussed on both the threat of so-called 'jihadi' violence *inside* the borders of member states<sup>73</sup> but also the state-sponsored terrorism on the alliances' 'contested zones' on the southern and eastern flanks.
- NATO counter-terrorism policy needs to adopt as a key priority the disruption of 'hybrid warriors' in 'contested zones'.
- The decision to push forward with a new 'fusion centre' within the European Union to enhance cross-institutional awareness of hybrid threats should be welcomed and serve as a springboard for greater EU-NATO co-operation on hybrid threats.
- NATO should continue to undertake large scale, multi-partner training exercises based on hybrid war scenarios with a high component of hypothetical terrorist activity.
- NATO needs to understand the growing ISIL/DAESH threat in Libya under the rubric of hybrid warfare

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<sup>73</sup> If requested by the specific NATO member following the "NATO Support to Allies" CT policy key principle.

- NATO counter-terrorism policy needs to soften groups who share an ethnic or linguistic bond with the hybrid war belligerent in order to have the greatest effect on minimising the potential for future terrorist attacks.

## About the author

Dr Andrew Mumford is an Associate Professor in Politics and International Relations at the University of Nottingham, UK. Awarded his PhD from the University of Warwick in 2009, he was one of the 2012/13 Visiting Fellows at the Eccles Centre for American Studies at the British Library in London and is an Associate Editor of *Political Studies*. He has also been a Visiting Fellow at the International Centre for the Study of Terrorism (ICST) at Pennsylvania State University in the USA. He previously taught at the Universities of Sheffield and Hull before joining Nottingham 2011. His book *The Counter-Insurgency Myth: The British Experience of Irregular War* was published the same year. His book *Proxy Warfare* was published by Polity in 2013 and was described by the Dean of the US Naval Postgraduate School as “an important contribution to our understanding of war”. His new book on the US-UK ‘special relationship’ in counter-insurgency wars from Palestine to Afghanistan is due for publication with Georgetown University Press in 2017. In addition, he has published numerous journal articles and book chapters on issues pertaining to the causes, conduct and consequences of war in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including British counter-terrorism methods during the Northern Irish ‘Troubles’, negotiations with terrorists, and the future of proxy war. He has delivered keynote lectures at NATO’s Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) HQ; NATO’s Inter-allied Confederation of Reserve Officers (CIOR) annual seminar; and to officers at the Royal Air Force (RAF) College. He was a consultant to the UK Ministry of Defence’s in-house think-tank, the Development Concept and Doctrine Centre (DCDC), in the run up to the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR). He was invited to speak at the prestigious Future Forces Conference in the Netherlands where he addressed the heads of 18 European militaries about the changing nature of proxy

warfare and the implications on Western military strategy and resource provision. He currently supervises a large cohort of PhD students whose doctorates cover topics including comparative assessments of counter-insurgent behaviour, a mixed methods explanation of the proliferation of proxy warfare, and political management of the war against ISIL/DAESH. He has edited an upcoming special issue of *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* on the theme of 'How Terrorists Learn'. He can be contacted at [andrew.mumford@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.mumford@nottingham.ac.uk) or followed on Twitter @apmumford.

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