

HYBRID WAR AS A MODERN INSTRUMENT OF MILITARY ART

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Abstract: *The security environment in recent years has been characterized by a range of asymmetric threats that bring to military analysts’ attention strategic issues that are a lot more sensitive and controversial than they used to be. The distinction between conventional and unconventional, symmetrical and asymmetric has become harder and harder to define, whereas asymmetric threats have become diverse due to the state-of-the-art technologies.*

Today’s conflicts no longer focus on the physical defeat of the enemy, namely the physical combat. Nowadays, the war focuses on the human psyche, acts of terrorism accomplished through sophisticated, subtle and destructive methods. The hybrid war belongs to one of these tactics. It is an instrument of the military art, an implementation of procedures and knowledge acquired by the performer. The authors aim to approach some of the characteristics of the hybrid war, starting from its definition and manifestations.

Keywords: *military art, irregular war, capabilities, strategy, hybrid war, NATO, vulnerabilities*

1. INTRODUCTION

Ancient, modern, conventional, or hybrid, the war is complex, diverse and unpredictable. The specialized literature defines it as a social and historical phenomenon, which often represents the most virulent forms of the quintessence of political relations between militarily structured human groups, whose purpose is varied and sometimes inconsequential, of economic, political, religious or territorial nature [1].

Beyond any definition, throughout our existence on earth, the war has been a crude mixture of threats and coercive instruments with a political background, a challenge to the world security.

Similarly, hybrid war that we is a matter that we are invoking more and more often today, seems to be a new art of waging war, a new form of manifestation of a military conflict. A somewhat new concept, but perhaps only its name is new, if we think of the meaning of the adjective **hybrid**: “*made up of disparate elements, lacking harmony*” [2, 3].

The war has always been a destructive, annihilating, disastrous phenomenon in relation with people, holding major implications on the present time, but most often on the future. It is, in its strictest sense, “*a violent action (...), not only a political decision, but a real political instrument, a continuation of political relations, one of their achievements through other methods*” [4].

In the 21st century, within an armed confrontation, the military art has passed from the usage of existing means, as the Prussian theoretician Clausewitz had foreseen, to the real implementation of theory or data related to methods, processes and principles of military actions. The new physiognomies of the conflicts have shown that the armies based on the Prussian model are no longer effective.

Consequently, there was need for a paradigmatic reform of the armed forces structure, understood as a general term, for these forces to adapt to the evolution of the security environment. All these metamorphoses take place in a harmonious, creative, well-established manner that leads to the achievement of the desideratum.

The progress of science and technology over the past thirty years has also changed the functions of the military field, where, in addition to military science, military art – its strongest component – had to rediscover and to redefine itself quite quickly to resist and face new types of violence. The hybrid war, this latest physiognomy of a confrontation, not only military, but also psychological or even social, has its principles, most of them unbeatable and unpredictable: information supremacy, through which any action of a third party can be annihilated, accomplished by surprise; technological predominance; conflicting symmetry (politics, strategies, doctrines similar to conflicting parties); dissymmetry, asymmetry.

In the light of all these considerations, we believe that particular attention must be paid to the risks to which a hybrid war may expose us. These hazards may be of military nature (mass destruction weapons, massive arming) or non-military (precarious states, ethnic and religious disputes, complexity of the environment, corruption or illegal immigration).

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HYBRID WAR

Once with the forced and quite sudden annexation of the Crimea by Russia, in 2014, the Western strategic perception, in particular, adopted the concept of hybrid war. The term, so far, has not been given a clear definition, yet, a series of analysts in the field oscillate between a conventional war and an irregular war, or between a symmetrical one and a non-symmetrical one.

Should, at the operational level, the feature of such a battle consist of complex and varied maneuvers, focusing on the concentration and deployment of combatant forces, at the tactical level, the hybrid war is a conglomerate of conventional instruments and equipment adjusted to modern and current technological contexts. This mixture, perceived as a *hybrid*, proved to be efficient in Ukraine, namely for the benefit of Russia, whereas in Iraq and in Afghanistan, it was useful for the ISIS terrorist group. In other words, the hybrid war is Russia's strategy in Crimea, respectively, the resounding campaign of the Islamic state in the Middle East.

Chronologically, the phrase – hybrid war – appeared in 2005. Two US officers were the ones who spoke about this new form of an armed conflict [5] in an article describing the increasingly virulent and violent ethnic conflicts, initiated by radical terrorists. Considered a fourth-generation war, hybrid war is different from the classical, conventional armed confrontation. It is a hybrid of conventional and unconventional methods, tactics and capabilities, violent actions and unlimited terror. If the World War I was focused on the use of numerous masses of people (first generation war), the invention of the armored vehicles and aircraft changed decisively the fate of an armed conflict in the years of the World War II, (second generation), whereas the technological power of the post-war years generated new mutations at the level of war concepts and military confrontations (third generation).

Thus, nowadays war, the hybrid war, is one of the information era [6]; it is set up in a context of virulent insecurity. A *continuous warfare*, whose manifestations have changed in time and space, accentuating and speculating relationships “*between individuals, communities (states, alliances, religious, ethnic, professional entities, etc.), between individuals and communities, to impose one’s interests at various levels: power, influence, territories and resources (human, material and financial)*” [7].

The concept of hybrid war, as we have previously mentioned, is not fully defined. There are, however, several approaches to this phenomenon, issued by security bodies or by political-military analysts. Thus, according to the NATO, hybrid threats “*are represented by those adversaries who have the capabilities to use both conventional and unconventional means simultaneously to achieve their goals*” [8].

In the work “*Conflict in the 21st Century. The Rise of Hybrid Wars*”, the definition of hybrid warfare focuses on the adaptability of opponents – non-state actors – to armed clashes, by using military capabilities and methods (use of force) and non-military ones (irregular tactics, terrorist actions) to achieve success [9].

Another definition of the US military explains the hybrid war as being “*a combination of symmetrical and asymmetrical armed conflicts, where the intervention forces carry out traditional military operations against enemy military forces and targets, while acting simultaneously and decisively for gaining control of the indigenous population in the theater of military operations, through stability operations*” [10]. In addition to this perspective, a researcher at the Center for International Strategic Studies, Nathan Freier, describes the hybrid war as a confrontation involving four threats: *traditionalism, asymmetry, catastrophic terrorism and disruptive terrorism*, due to the use of technology in relation with military superiority [11].

From the set of more or less exhaustive definitions of this phenomenon, named hybrid war, there results that, in a confrontation of this type, success can be achieved in a direct, palpable, visible manner, most often at the cost of loss of life. Targets are populated areas, subway stations, stadiums. An international community that unfortunately can only witness actions but it and cannot react. This piece of truth makes us conclude that, in the hybrid war, on the one hand, it is military weaknesses that are being “*exploited*”, while on the other hand, there are non-military (societal) vulnerabilities that the aggressor feels and targets: ethnic and religious tensions, inefficient and corrupt institutions, economic or energy dependence, etc. Thus, starting from these weaknesses, a hybrid war will involve various actions, ranging from terrorism to media propaganda, through irregular military actions very rarely if ever assumed.

The main characteristic of the hybrid war is coding. We have no war declarations; we do not have diplomatic talks. Everything happens at an amazingly rapid pace, which sometimes may appear even illogical! Codes and symbols seem to make up the background of war. Unlike other forms of war, the hybrid war emphasizes the economic environment of a state, supported by propaganda that includes religious messages: Orthodoxy against Catholicism, Islam opposing Christianity, and Islam versus Hinduism. Hybridity is a strategy that uses this combination of means against a state: conventional forces, governments destabilizing, Special Forces, intelligence agents, cyber, criminal, paramilitary, and terrorist activities. The goal is an offensive and a global one against a state, an institution or an organization.



3. NATO: A SECURITY CHALLENGE

In July 2006, Israel experienced a hybrid war. The Hezbollah Movement then demonstrated the power of its capabilities by implementing its own technologies: anti-tank missiles, drones, all of which were amplified by a well-managed propaganda and the tactical skills of those who organized the action.

The conflicts of the twenty-first century have led to profound transformations of the conventional war concepts. The post- cold war unipolar order has led the US and its allies to prefigure and adopt a different approach to the reality of armed confrontations from the psychological, legal and, most importantly, strategic point of view. The hybrid war is silent, hidden and insidious. It uses conventional military forces combined with a series of unconventional tactics and, as a central point, cyber elements. This is, at a quick glance, a possible difference between a symmetrical, linear conflict, in which everything is planned, and the asymmetric, nonlinear conflict, in which we witness a simultaneous use of military and non-military tactics. We are talking about accomplished actions, such as the annexation of the Crimea by Russia, an action unrecognized by the US and the EU Member States, but it is a reality that we now witness and whose consequences we experience. It was a “*silent*” annexation, without the use of weapons, only through the support of paramilitary groups and detachments of Russian and indigenous activists led by Russia.

What is NATO doing? How does it react in case it does?

We infer or we expect answers to these questions. NATO is a political-military organization, as we know. It needs to adapt to all changes in the security environment, especially in situations of global uncertainty.

Some answers appeared in the summer of 2014, when, at the Newport Summit, the Alliance announced a new security action plan with regard to the situation in Ukraine – a “very high” readiness joint task force in Eastern Europe, a “lance peak” to include 3-5,000 troops available within 48 hours [12]. The NATO Secretary General of that time, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, asserted that “we have to give a clear message to any potential aggressor: the attack against any of the allies will face the reaction of the whole Alliance.” [13]

Should an answer be found, it will consist of the states’ resilience against dishonest propaganda, and against subtle attacks to their lives.

4. CONCLUSIONS

From the Trojan horse to the virtual space nowadays, the world has witnessed numerous phases of the hybrid war. The difference is that those stages were never referred to as hybrid. However, they were marked by hidden, cunning, and ultimately violent threats. Weapons or one-to-one combat are no longer sufficient to conquer a state. The fight does no longer occur on land; it has moved at psychological level and it involves conquering people’s minds, feelings and attitudes.

Hybrid war is never declared. Real weapons are replaced by nonmilitary instruments. As a member country of the NATO and the EU, Romania needs to be aware of its exposure to the most diverse attacks, from public opinion manipulation to cyber attacks. We are part of the NATO, but we are also part of this unconventional war.

What is the hybrid war? A non-linear battle of the 21st century. The actions in Ukraine awakened the Europeans. Perhaps it is time for NATO and the EU to take advantage of this situation. A coordinated defense planning could generate benefits, not competition.

The best strategy to oppose hybrid war is to prevent it. Through an effective and objective coordination between the two world organizations, most of the hybrid actions could be countered. Thus, peace and security would be assured in the Euro-Atlantic area.

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