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To cite this article: Gjorgji Veljovski, Nenad Taneski & Metodija Dojchinovski (2017): The danger of “hybrid warfare” from a sophisticated adversary: the Russian “hybridity” in the Ukrainian conflict, *Defense & Security Analysis*, DOI: [10.1080/14751798.2017.1377883](https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2017.1377883)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2017.1377883>



Published online: 15 Oct 2017.



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# The danger of “hybrid warfare” from a sophisticated adversary: the Russian “hybridity” in the Ukrainian conflict

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## ABSTRACT

The term “hybrid warfare” is a new one that the West began to use to explain its failure to cope with asymmetric threats. Focusing on the war on global terrorism, the West temporarily withdrew its attention from traditional adversaries, such as Russia, which has used this gap and has audaciously returned to the stage as a global actor. Until the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 and inflaming the Ukrainian crisis, most Western authors attributed “hybrid threats” mostly to non-state actors. But the Ukrainian scenario showed the true face of “hybridity” in the modern battlefield when practised by a powerful state actor. Russian “hybrid warfare” in Ukraine has already been seen as a combination of conventional and unconventional methods, that have been complemented with other instruments of national power – diplomatic, economic and information. The purpose of this article is, through an analysis of the Ukrainian scenario, to demonstrate that although the term “hybrid” is new, the concept itself is old and is a continuation of already seen doctrine from the Cold War era. Although “hybrid threats” can come both from state and non-state actors, the Russian interference in Ukraine is proof that they are especially dangerous for the West if, or when, they are initiated from a traditional, sophisticated adversary that has the capacity to use all forms of warfare.

## KEYWORDS

“Hybrid approach”; “hybrid warfare”; asymmetry; Ukrainian conflict; Russia; the West

## Introduction

Based on the experiences of the last two decades, the West identified that “hybrid threats” in the future would come mostly from the non-state actors, often associated with terrorist groups and organisations that combine regular and irregular warfare, cyber-crime and other asymmetric methods.

The intervention and interference of Russia in the Ukrainian conflict (from 2014 to present) triggered a debate about the dangers of “hybrid warfare” when it is initiated by a powerful, traditional opponent. The new concern is based on the fact that the unlimited use of means and methods available to a powerful state actor, such as Russia, can produce

a much greater synergy with the potential to make future wars “dirty” again and returning the world to a new Cold War.

Although the nature of war in the future will not change, the methods of warfare certainly will.<sup>1</sup> Today’s trend of “hybrid warfare” shares similar characteristics with the proxy wars fought during the Cold War in third world countries under the control of the great powers. However, because of many factors such as: globalisation; technology; the internet; terrorism; and the changing role of international community, today’s wars seem more complex and difficult to contain.

Analysis of the structure and nature of the hybrid concept of warfare, reveals that it is obvious that neither is a new nor unique threat with which NATO or the West cannot cope. This article offers a critical approach when explaining the term “hybrid war” as a continuation of an already seen doctrine that combines conventional and unconventional warfare. The specific aim is to demonstrate that although most of the existing literature on “hybrid warfare” includes the threat from both state and non-state actors, it is more dangerous when initiated by a strong state actor. Because more capabilities equal a greater potential, strong state actors, such as Russia, possess greater capabilities when combining different methods of warfare.

Using the example of the Ukrainian scenario in 2014, in which Russia demonstrated a hybrid approach, this article offers a breakdown of the structure of hybrid warfare using the method of analysing: its centre of gravity; critical capabilities; critical vulnerabilities; and critical requirements. It is an example of a greater efficiency when combining a wide range of state capabilities with the capabilities of a non-state actor, as seen in Eastern Ukraine.

This method unveils the intention of Russian hybridity that makes it possible to predict and propose actions and policies to counter them. Because the hybridity touches many fields in the societies affected by conflict, this analysis is an appropriate method to understand the dangers of “hybrid warfare” in the future. Beside its purely military element, it also shows the effects of other aspects of war.

### **“Hybrid” threat, war and warfare – new words, old concepts**

Although the concept of “hybrid war” had emerged earlier,<sup>2</sup> the term “hybrid warfare” became adopted as a new trend amongst military professionals to describe future warfare since the combined actions of Hezbollah in 2006.<sup>3</sup> In the US military, a “hybrid threat” was defined as “diverse and dynamic combinations of conventional, irregular, terrorist and criminal capabilities.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, as it became a trend,<sup>5</sup> Fleming describes the term “hybrid threat” as

an adversary, state or non-state that adaptively and rapidly incorporates diverse and dynamic combinations of conventional, irregular, terrorist and criminal capabilities, as well as non-military means, simultaneously across the spectrum of conflict as a unified force to obtain its objectives.<sup>6</sup>

According to the European Parliamentary Research Service in reference to the latest conflicts in Ukraine, Iraq and Syria, examples of “hybrid threats” include, but are not limited to, terrorism, cyber security, organised crime, maritime disputes, space, resource scarcity and covert operations.<sup>7</sup> In addition to these, NATO has also identified as

“hybrid threats” low intensity and asymmetric conflict scenarios such as: piracy; demographic challenges; retrenchment from globalisation; and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. All these are “posed by adversaries, with the ability to simultaneously employ conventional and non-conventional means adaptively in pursuit of their objectives.”<sup>8</sup>

Today, many politicians and military professionals use words like “irregular” and “unconventional war” or “asymmetric and hybrid threats” in a misguided context, as being an anomaly to the “normal” way of warfare. However, these have always existed throughout history and it is self-evident that these are not anomalies, but ordinary behaviour in war under different circumstances. As Gray discussed, war in any shape no matter how is categorised is simply a war.<sup>9</sup> In general, war, by definition, is regular, irregular or a combination of both. It seems that the term “hybrid” was introduced as a novelty to impress (or scare) politicians to trigger particular responses. Giving importance to the “hybrid threat” as something new suggests that the militaries should reorganise and reequip to respond to such “new” challenges. Such categorisation may mislead to the belief that it is a new way of war, when instead it is not offering anything that does not already exist in the military doctrine.<sup>10</sup>

The term “hybrid war” became popular after the annexation of Crimea, when the Western media and military experts tried to explain how the turn of events in Ukraine caught the Ukrainian government, NATO and EU off guard.<sup>11</sup> The coordination and synchronisation of the actions between the Russian military and pro-Russian separatists, were met with timely supported media coverage and diplomatic effort, but were too good to be ad hoc. Thus, the immediate response of the Maiden events explained by NATO was an example of a well-planned Russian hybrid war.<sup>12</sup>

There are already on-going studies and discussions of what measures are necessary in a defence strategy to build resilience against adversaries who are capable of waging “hybrid warfare.” At the NATO summit in Warsaw in July 2016, the Alliance confirmed that it adopted a strategy, “to assist an ally at any stage of a hybrid campaign” with the possibility of invoking Article 5 of the Washington Treaty.<sup>13</sup> Because of the Russians’ aggressive actions towards Ukraine, NATO made strong efforts “to enhance Ukraine’s resilience against a wide array of threats, including hybrid threats.”<sup>14</sup>

As the term “hybrid war” became synonymous with the latest Russian strategy, many western authors started to track its roots. In analysing such type of warfare, it turns out that there is a strategy pattern already seen during the Cold war. By externally provoking internal conflicts in a targeted state, the initiating side disrupts and destabilises in order to achieve its strategic goals.<sup>15</sup> Such shaping of geopolitical and economic interests through sabotaging regional security is not a new concept; today’s hybrid war, therefore, could be explained as a mere continuation of great powers’ proxy wars.

“Hybrid war” is also not exclusively a Western concept. During the Chinese war of independence, Mao Tse Tung successfully combined conventional and unconventional tactics, deploying both symmetrical and asymmetrical approaches on the opponent.<sup>16</sup> This came naturally as the Peoples’ Army at first had used purely guerrilla tactics and then grew in numbers and gained strength sufficient to launch conventional strikes. The “hybrid approach” is thus desirable if it can be afforded. While complex, at the same time it is favourable, because it adds conventional military power to the irregular tactics and techniques. The “hybrid approach” could be the future concept of warfare,

because it offers a high degree of adaptability by mixing all possible available means: military and non-military; conventional and unconventional; and all possible ways in accordance with the opponent's strengths and vulnerabilities.

The pattern of "hybrid warfare" is not different from many scenarios in which one of the great powers has manipulated internal socioeconomic problems, ethno-religious conflicts or other sensitive disputes in a country. Almost every multiethnic, multireligious or a developing country has some vulnerabilities that, if challenged from the outside, could trigger a chain of events towards destabilisation. It has been used over and over again to disintegrate countries, change regimes or turn a regional policy in favour of the initiating side. This often looks like a conspiracy theory, but it is a logical strategic reality that some countries have so many unsolved problems and open questions that, if designated as a target, it will be relatively easy for the initiating side to guide the process towards destabilisation.

Although the term "hybrid war" became associated with the non-state actors, it is also clear that states can successfully wage "hybrid war" at all levels.<sup>17</sup> Because states already have conventional capabilities, it is easier for them to integrate irregular tactics and unconventional means than *vice versa*. The great powers practised "hybrid warfare" throughout the twentieth century and the concept will dominate the conflicts of the future with not less intensity.<sup>18</sup> However, the novelty is that in contemporary and future conflicts, modern, more advanced, armament and weapons systems are easily accessible to the irregular forces and the non-state actors.<sup>19</sup> In addition, cyber capabilities are also easily accessible and are more and more used against powerful states and militaries. Probably that is the main difference between twentieth- and twenty-first-century hybrid warfare: during the first period, shaping public opinion using psychological operation and propaganda was predominantly a state's luxury, while today, there is no monopoly on manipulation and propaganda.

Mostly because of the unconventional and the asymmetric part of the hybrid equation, it is considered that the side that uses hybrid methods, practises so-called unrestricted war, disregarding lawful and moral limitations established in modern warfare.<sup>20</sup> This means that no matter if the "hybrid approach" is used by a non-state actor or a state, it might be perceived as unethical. The opposite view is that in every war, each opponent has a natural right to use whatever means necessary to achieve a favourable position and better odds for winning.<sup>21</sup>

Because anyone that uses a "hybrid approach," either state or non-state actor, must drive their actions towards a desired end state, suggests that it is possible to predict potential hybrid threats.<sup>22</sup> As an example, if we observe a potential complicated state, through analysis of its structural vulnerabilities it should be obvious what are the potential targets to weaken the system from within. It could be interethnic relations, religious strife, bankruptcy, poverty, unemployment, etc. Today's communications and international laws facilitate connectivity so that the intentions of a state in the international arena are both almost impossible to conceal and relatively easy to predict.

### **Russian version of hybrid warfare in Ukraine**

As demonstrated in the Ukrainian scenario, deception and information management became an important part of the Russian hybrid warfare. To achieve this, the Russians

revoked the old Soviet unconventional doctrine as part of their information operations labelled as “reflexive control.”<sup>23</sup> This concept in the West was known as psychological operations; however, the Russian version goes beyond it. They project a set of information with the intention to deliberately guide the opponent into making the desired moves that will be either bad for him, or, even if the moves are correct, to be too late and thus useless. The flow of a large quantity of uncertain or fake information tends to disrupt the decision-making process of the opponent in a way that he either cannot distinguish what is true or false or he takes too much time to take a timely decision. The concept of “reflexive control” allows the initiator to control the decision-making process of the opponent by being one step in front of him. By overwhelming him with options, the “controller” makes the opponent respond slowly and, obviously, predicts his move and in many cases guides it towards a desired goal.

In the Ukrainian scenario, Russia used a “hybrid approach” as a weapon of choice among others because it is easier to break national resistance through providing “cumulative physical and moral effects produced by defeating or neutralising a series of physical or moral centres of gravity in multiple campaigns at various levels of wars.”<sup>24</sup> To delay understanding what is happening, as an important tool in their “hybrid approach” the Russians integrated the element of “reflexive control.”<sup>25</sup> The result was the smooth annexation of Crimea, at the same time indirectly encouraging the pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine to rebel against the Ukrainian government. Although hybridity is a combination of many other efforts, Kasapoglu suggests that “without having a good understanding of reflexive control operations, one cannot fully grasp Moscow’s *modus operandi*.”<sup>26</sup>

The Russia’s intervention in Crimea followed the same pattern from the Soviet era: the action of the unmarked soldiers in 2014 who seized the main facilities in the Crimea was very similar to the initial seizing of key infrastructure in Afghanistan in 1979, conducted by Soviet troops in Afghan uniforms.<sup>27</sup> The Russian annexation of Crimea was done overnight, unexpectedly. It was, however, very well organised and not to be dismissed as not thoroughly planned. The annexation started with unmarked soldiers, often in the media labelled as “little green men,” blocking military and police facilities, setting up barricades and checkpoints all over Crimea.<sup>28</sup> Ukraine lost 12.8% of its territory as a result of the Russian sponsored “hybrid war.”<sup>29</sup> Even though the Russian media said that what happened in Ukraine was a non-linear approach, the pro-Russian separatists did not fight as if it were a normal insurgency: they were well-equipped rebels with Russian provided weapons.

After the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, the “hybrid approach” in warfare has become a synonym for the West as the challenge that needs special attention.<sup>30</sup> Irregular warfare is already known to the west, but what makes the Ukrainian scenario different is the effective combination of old unconventional tactics with cyber-electronic warfare, drones, radio jamming and use of sophisticated armament and equipment.<sup>31</sup> This is the main difference from Afghanistan, where the insurgents did not possess the latest technology in contrast with the Eastern Ukraine separatists.

Russian “hybrid warfare” against Ukraine is also manifested through “economic sanctions, secret intelligence operations, international propaganda campaigns, purposeful cyber attacks, diplomatic interventions, and political pressure.”<sup>32</sup> Other forms of Russian “hybridity” include:

arming foreign insurgents while denying such support; employing inflammatory propaganda; fostering civil unrest amongst foreign minority communities; cutting off energy supplies; making provocative over-flights and harassment of air, land and sea traffic of many neighbouring countries, including NATO allies; intimidation and covert operations; cyber attacks; financial manipulation; kidnapping and illegal border crossings; snap military exercises and deployments near borders; and casual threats of nuclear weapons.<sup>33</sup>

The war in the Eastern Ukraine could be perceived as a Cold War style proxy war between the West and Russia and once more proof that it is very difficult to defeat insurgents. It is therefore always a better option if one chooses such strategy to achieve victory in the long run. In January 2013, the Russian General Valery Gerasimov, announced that in future wars the Russian military would apply a “new kind of war fought with non-military methods to achieve political and strategic goals.”<sup>34</sup> The Western media quickly labelled these actions as “hybrid,” although the combination of measures taken was not new to the West. As general Gerasimov pointed out, such a kind of war would have to combine all military, intelligence and information effort to achieve the end state and avoid large-scale conventional means.<sup>35</sup>

The Russians chose the “hybrid approach” as their future way of war based on the bitter experience from the wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya. After retreating from Afghanistan, the Russian military failed again in the First Chechen War, facing both conventional and guerrilla tactics at the same time.<sup>36</sup> The only way Russia managed to pacify Chechnya in the Second War was through a mixture of military and diplomatic effort. Thus, the Russians understood the convenience of the non-linear warfare from the position of a victim and decided to integrate it with their conventional strength in a new military doctrine. The product was a “hybrid approach” in possible future wars in their neighbourhood, which has enough ethnic Russians who can be used as insurgents to support Russian interests.

A “hybrid approach” is easier in an environment similar to Ukraine: ethnic and religious diversity; social and economic challenges; identity crisis; ambiguous policies; and a lack of a clear vision for the political end state. The Russian deception tactic was so efficient that even in the West some were convinced that the “little green men” were Crimean locals, not Russian soldiers.<sup>37</sup> The “hybrid approach” offers options for the side that initiates the action. As the Ukrainian scenario demonstrates, it might be a prelude to aggression or military intervention. It is a combination of several techniques such as: fake operations; denial and deception; concealment of the end state; bluffing in the international arena about the policy development; hiding intentions; influencing public opinion through the media; and creating ambiguity and uncertainty. The Russian goal in Ukraine with such hybrid methods was to exploit the domestic weakness created by the Ukrainian crisis.<sup>38</sup>

### **Unveiling hybrid war with CG-CC-CV-CR analysis**

One of the latest methodologies to understand wars and conflicts is to identify: centres of gravity; critical capabilities; critical requirements; and critical vulnerabilities (CG-CC-CV-CR). According to Joe Strange and Richard Iron (p. 18), this methodology is applicable in any war, and could be used in explaining the hidden agenda in “hybrid wars.”<sup>39</sup> The reason why this particular methodology is part of the military operational art and valid when analysing “hybrid warfare” is because it accurately unravels the structure of the conflict. It

starts with a holistic approach with all aspects included and pinpoints the specific parts of the problem.

The methodology of the analysis of centre of gravity allows answers which are: the ultimate goals of the opponent; what is being attacked; what are his concerns and his focus; and how he weakens his opponent's centre of gravity as a source of strength. The Russians evoked the element of "reflexive control" as part of their "hybrid warfare" to disguise their end state whilst at the same time providing many options with multiple possible outcomes.<sup>40</sup> This method helped to identify what exactly was the purpose of the "hybrid approach," or what was the opponent attacking directly and indirectly.

Since Carl von Clausewitz defined the centre of gravity as something "if struck, it will most certainly lead to decisive victory," it became an important tool in warfare and did not lose its relevance in contemporary military doctrines.<sup>41</sup> The centre of gravity is a source of physical or moral strength that is decisive in winning or losing in war.<sup>42</sup> It is "the hub of all power, on which all depends."<sup>43</sup> Whereas a clear identification of the centres of gravity is crucial, it is important to understand that it is not constrained only as a purely military objective, but also as part of more complex political, diplomatic, and economic relations in contemporary society. This means that it is often attacked by other, non-violent ways and means, and therefore relevant for the understanding and practice of "hybrid warfare." Leaders and populations are considered as centres of gravity at the strategic level; at the operational and tactical levels, they are usually various combat forces who provide actual physical strength.<sup>44</sup>

Critical capabilities are possible actions and effects that make the centre of gravity relevant and important, or what the centre of gravity can do that is of particular concern. In the concept of "hybrid warfare," it is valuable to recognise those capabilities because it helps identifying the mechanisms with which to counter the opponent's actions or, with reverse engineering, discover the true strength of the centre of gravity.<sup>45</sup>

Critical requirements are certain conditions, methods and resources necessary for the centre of gravity to provide the critical capabilities.<sup>46</sup> There are some requirements that cannot be predicted and controlled; but those that can are important to be detected and attacked to weaken or destroy the centre of gravity. As there are many requirements in war, the advantage of the "hybrid concept" is that it can be attacked simultaneously through a combination of ways and means.

Critical vulnerabilities in war are identified as the weakest link in the opponents' defence system.<sup>47</sup> This is arguably the most interesting part of the equation through the scope of "hybrid war." The idea of "hybridity" is to exploit opponents' vulnerabilities with minimum risk, the use of military force and cost. In multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies with social and political challenges, there is much vulnerability from which to choose.

In modern warfare, the centre of gravity cannot be destroyed directly, even with the use of conventional force. It has to be weakened and attacked from many directions – thus the usefulness of the "hybrid" concept. By exploiting vulnerabilities and their destruction, the opponents' critical requirements are compromised.<sup>48</sup> The nullifying of the requirements will disrupt the critical capabilities that will slowly make the centre of gravity irrelevant and be defeated. The opponent that initiates "hybrid war" on the victim will have to defeat the victim's centre of gravity by following three methods: directly making it irrelevant; stripping it of the support that makes it effective; or defeating it by attacking its vulnerabilities.<sup>49</sup>



This is evident from the Ukrainian scenario, where Russia used different means and methods and pursuing “hybrid warfare” to destroy the Ukrainian centre of gravity.

## Analysis

### *Key events in the Ukrainian crisis*

The Ukrainian crisis began in late November 2013 when over 100,000 people with pro-European sentiments started demonstrations in Kiev against the government over EU agreement delays.<sup>50</sup> Their number grew to 800,000 protestors and on 1 December 2013 people occupied Kiev City Hall and Independence Square.<sup>51</sup> This chain of events triggered Russian concern over pro-European Ukrainians.

The first attempt to project Russian national interest of keeping Ukraine out of the EU and NATO came on 17 December 2013, when the then Russian President, Vladimir Putin, offered to buy 15 billion dollars of Ukrainian debt, plus lowering the price of gas.<sup>52</sup> This was a clear sign that Russia was not willing to let Ukraine go, and giving full support to the pro-Russian Ukrainian President Yanukovich.

Between 16 January 2014 and 16 February 2014, the Ukrainian government acted ambiguously and with confusion, with a great division in the Parliament as clashes with the police started to cause casualties. When it seemed that the demonstrations were over, under suspicious circumstances, clashes erupted again on 18 February. Within two days at least 88 people were killed in Kiev. On 22 February, the Russian-backed Ukrainian President Yanukovich was removed by the Parliament, a clear signal to Russia that Ukraine had chosen a pro-European future.

Usually, for every conflict there has to be one trigger moment or event. One opinion why the Russians needed to react with force was when the Ukrainian Parliament voted to ban the Russian language as a second official language in Ukraine. Although the vote was later overturned, it was enough to anger the Russian-speaking population in Eastern Ukraine and gave Russia an excuse to launch military operations in Crimea.

On 27 February 2014, pro-Russian armed men seized key buildings in Simferopol, Crimea, followed by the so-called “little green men,” unidentified and unmarked. They seized the Crimean main airports, which marked the introduction of the Crimean annexation. On 1 March, the Russian Parliament officially approved Putin’s policy to react with force in Crimea. The Ukrainian government was taken by surprise and failed to react with military forces stationed at the Crimea. On 16 March, Crimea voted for secession on a referendum and two days later Crimea became part of the Russian Federation. This happened so fast that it was likely to have been a spontaneous act, though such an operation must have been pre-planned.

On 7 April 2014, protestors in the Eastern Ukraine cities of Donetsk, Luhansk and Kharkiv also called for a referendum. On 15 April, the acting Ukrainian President voted for anti-terrorist operations in Eastern Ukraine. This was also used by the Russian media and propaganda to rally support for their kindred Russians. Once the clashes had started, pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk organised a referendum and declared independence.

Another event was successfully used by Russia to approve support for kindred Russians in Ukraine. On 2 May, 42 people were killed in riots in Odessa, most of whom were

pro-Russian activists trapped in a burning building. The images of the incident sparked anti-Ukrainian sentiment in Russia and, furthermore, gave Putin another excuse to give support to pro-Russian separatists.

In order to officially back off from Ukrainian matters militarily, the Russian Parliament on 25 June cancelled Putin's authorisation for the use of military force in Ukraine. On 5 July, the separatists abandoned the city of Slavyansk, after a calculated and well-advised decision that they could not hold their positions and moved to defend Donetsk decisively. On 17 July, pro-Russian separatists shot down flight MH17, demonstrating that they somehow possessed a sophisticated air defence system.

On 26 August, Ukrainians captured Russian paratroopers and later exchanged them for Ukrainian soldiers, proving that Russians were operating in Ukrainian territory.<sup>53</sup> On 22 August, a huge Russian supply convoy brought humanitarian aid to the separatists in Luhansk, without either Ukrainian government control or its permission. The convoy was theatrically paraded from its starting point in Russia, approaching slowly towards Ukraine over a period of several days. The eyes of the world were focused on the convoy, without anything being done as it violated Ukrainian sovereignty.

On 5 September, a truce was signed in Minsk, between Ukraine and the pro-Russian rebels, *de facto* recognising them as a side in a conflict. After this, on 24 September, NATO reported that Russian troops were withdrawing from Eastern Ukraine and, later, on 24 October, Putin withdrew troops from the border. The Russian retreat was obviously due to the truce signed, suggesting mission accomplished. However, in the following November, NATO again reported that Russian equipment and forces had entered Eastern Ukraine. The proof for arming the rebels came on 22 January 2015, when Ukrainian troops were overrun at Donetsk airport and on 23 January, the separatist leader announced an offensive. This meant that the separatists already had the capacity for conventional war. On February 2015 in Minsk, an agreement was made to withdraw all heavy equipment from the frontline.<sup>54</sup>

### **Identifying CG-CC-CR-CV**

From the recorded events, facts and figures, using CG-CC-CR-CV methodology, the Ukrainian conflict has been analysed in order to identify how the Russian "hybridity" worked in this scenario. [Table 1](#) shows the Russian centre of gravity. [Table 2](#) shows the Ukrainian centre of gravity.

Based on this analysis, the Russians used a wide range of policies and actions across the spectrum of warfare to attack the Ukrainian centre of gravity whilst at the same time protect their own. The list is probably longer as "hybrid" threats are also covert and concealed, thus left to interpretations and speculation.

Furthermore, [Table 3](#) demonstrates the most obvious and fact-based ways and means that the Russians used to meet their ends in the Ukrainian conflict.

The Russian centre of gravity in Eastern Ukraine is the pro-Russian separatist movement. The Russians needed the separatists to project Russian power and national interests in Ukraine. Russians would protect their centre of gravity whilst the Ukrainian government would try to destroy it. The physical existence of the separatists and their full strength to resist the Ukrainian forces is extremely important to Russia.

**Table 1.** Russian centre of gravity analysis.

<p><b>CG</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine</li> </ul> <p><b>CR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heavy weapon systems from Russia (air defence, artillery)</li> <li>• Logistics from Russia</li> <li>• Russian special forces, advisers and “volunteers”</li> <li>• Support from the population in Eastern Ukraine</li> <li>• Support from the population in Russia</li> <li>• Effective governing</li> <li>• Providing civil services, rule of law, normal way of life</li> <li>• Ability to sustain for a long time</li> <li>• Provide energy for population and critical infrastructure</li> <li>• Connect energy infrastructure with Russia</li> </ul>	<p><b>CC</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deny Ukrainian government control of Eastern Ukraine</li> <li>• Pursue independence and secession from Ukraine</li> <li>• Connect with Russia via referendum like Crimea</li> </ul> <p><b>CV</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If Russia stops supporting (politically, morally, militarily, logistically)</li> <li>• If population stop supporting separatists</li> <li>• If NATO supported Ukrainian government decides to act in full strength</li> </ul>
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The most critical capability that the pro-Russian separatists provide to serve Russian national interests is to deny the Ukrainian government control of Eastern Ukraine. In most similar cases of insurgencies seeking secession, time is on the side of the separatists. The second capability is for the separatists to have enough strength to pursue independence and secession from Ukraine. Although the west will never accept this as a legitimate action, it is possible that Eastern Ukrainian separatists might attempt to connect with Russia via a referendum, similar to that held in the Crimea.

To stay relevant, the separatists’ centre of gravity needed several critical requirements. The first requirement was military aid from Russia including obtaining heavy weapons systems and supplying them with an anti-aircraft defence to counter the strong Ukrainian Air Force. Logistics from Russia was the second critical requirement. According to counter-insurgency theory, specific geographical conditions cannot favour both sides equally.<sup>55</sup> The fact that Ukraine shares a border with Russia favours the separatists in Eastern Ukraine because they can easily get supplies and reinforcements when needed. The requirement for training specialists and advisers is always important for a successful insurgency. The Russian government admitted that there were Russian volunteers who fought on the side of the separatists.

Another critical requirement is to gain political and moral support from the local population and, moreover, from the Russians themselves. In order to be relevant, the separatists must demonstrate an ability to govern. For this to be feasible, it would need financial support from Russia. To preserve the support of the local population, the separatist government must provide the necessary civil services, rule of law and normal way of life. Insurgent wars are wars of attrition and thus the requirement is to maintain control

**Table 2.** Ukrainian centre of gravity analysis.

<p><b>CG</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ukrainian government</li> <li>• Ukrainian security forces</li> </ul> <p><b>CR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support from NATO, EU and wider International community</li> <li>• Support from Ukrainian population</li> <li>• Support from population in disputed territories</li> <li>• Provide civil services and relevancy in the disputed territories</li> </ul>	<p><b>CC</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wage full-scale military operation to reclaim Eastern Ukraine</li> <li>• Establish control and end secessionist attempts of separatists</li> </ul> <p><b>CV</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Losing popular support to reclaim territory</li> <li>• Not able to provide civil services in Eastern Ukraine</li> <li>• If international community recognises sovereignty of disputed territories</li> <li>• If NATO and EU back off and suggest reconciliation with Russia by allowing secession</li> </ul>
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**Table 3.** Russia's ways and means in Ukraine conflict.

Ways to attack the Ukrainian centre of gravity and protect its own	Policies and actions
<b>Economics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attempt to buy Ukrainian loyalty before the escalation in Kiev</li> <li>• After pro-Russian president Yanukovich was removed, Russia attempt to blackmail Ukraine with gas supplies</li> </ul>
<b>Political</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Russia offered open support to Ukraine if the country stays pro-Russian</li> <li>• After removal of president Yanukovich and the obvious pro-European path was chosen by the Ukrainian government, Russia provoked historical sentiments from the Second World War especially the pre-war status of Crimea</li> <li>• Russia vows right to protect national interests and kindred Russian speaking population in the former soviet republic.</li> <li>• Russian parliament supports Putin and authorises him to use any means necessary to protect Russian interests in Ukraine, including military means</li> </ul>
<b>Military conventional</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conventional seizure of Crimea</li> <li>• Deploying military forces on the border with Ukraine, show of force in the Black Sea against western (US) presence</li> <li>• Arming rebels with sophisticated and heavy equipment</li> </ul>
<b>Military unconventional</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infiltration of Special Forces, advisors and "volunteers" to support pro-Russian separatists</li> </ul>
<b>Information</b> (Psychological, electronic and, cyber warfare, deception operations, media and propaganda)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shaping public opinion in Russia</li> <li>• Using attacks on the Russian language, Russian people, reminding of the Crimean legacy of the Second World War and Nazi crimes, using Odessa-like incident to spark animosity.</li> <li>• Projecting Russian power internationally, claiming right to defend national interests and influence in the regional matters</li> <li>• Supporting pro-Russian separatists with intelligence</li> </ul>

over a long period. In order to secure a critical infrastructure and provide energy for the population, the separatists would eventually have to connect to the Russian energy infrastructure.

Critical vulnerabilities for the Russians are, if they do not provide sufficient support for the separatists politically, morally, militarily, and logistically, mostly because of pressure from the international community. This would impact on the next vulnerable point: without the necessary help from Russia, the separatists might lose the support of the population in Eastern Ukraine. The final vulnerability is the possibility that a NATO-supported Ukrainian government decided to act in full strength to defend its own territory. In such case, it is open to question whether or not Russia would risk a full-scale war against Ukraine.

The Ukrainians have two equally important centres of gravity. The first is if the legitimate government was determined to defend Ukraine within its current borders; and the second is the Ukrainian security forces, who have the actual power to provide the necessary action. NATO is determined to support both centres of gravity. The critical capability of both is maintaining the potential to wage a full-scale military operation to reclaim Eastern Ukraine, establish control and end the secessionist attempts of the separatists. Russians are aware of this capability and of NATO's determination to back the Ukrainian government and support the Ukrainian security forces with training, equipment and weapons if needed.

To stay valid as a centre of gravity, the critical requirement of the Ukrainian government is constantly to seek support from NATO, the European Union and the wider

international community. No less important is the requirement to maintain the will of the people to preserve Eastern Ukraine. If the government decides to defeat the separatists using force, the support of the Ukrainian population is another critical requirement. Nevertheless, another important requirement in similar scenarios is that of seeking the support of the population in the disputed territories. Not all of the population in Eastern Ukraine are willing to break away from Ukraine. The Ukrainian government must demonstrate the will to provide civil services and policy relevance in the disputed territories. This requirement overlaps with that of the Russians, because both sides are fighting for the hearts and minds of the local population. Whoever fails to connect with the population could lose their support.

The most critical vulnerability for the Ukrainian government is if they were to lose popular support in the attempt to reclaim the lost territory. The Ukrainian population might lose interest and reconcile with Russia to avoid further bloodshed. Time has always favoured the insurgents. Not being able to provide civil services in Eastern Ukraine for a long time also means losing connection with the local population. Another identified vulnerability is if the international community, NATO and the EU were to settle with Russia for a regional peace by allowing secession.

The Russian “hybrid war” in Ukraine is evident through the many different ways with which to attack the Ukrainian centre of gravity whilst protecting its own. From the beginning of the crisis, they deployed a wide range of policies and actions to achieve their end state which, though concealed, was obvious. The Russian government doubtless will seek opportunities in former Soviet territories that are populated by ethnic Russians to project influence and possibly reclaim territories that they consider lost. Economically, the Russian government literally attempted to buy the Ukrainians loyalty before the protests in Kiev. When the pro-Russian Ukrainian President Yanukovich was removed due to pro-European demonstrations in Kiev, the Russian government tried to force Ukrainian obedience by threatening to withhold the gas supplies.

Politically, the Russians offered open support to Ukraine if the country stayed pro-Russian. When this attempt failed and President Yanukovich was removed from office, it was clear to the Russians that the Ukrainian government had chosen the pro-European path. The evidence of the “reflexive control” is the Russian provocation of historical sentiments from the Second World War, and disputing the pre-war status of Crimea. Because the Ukrainians chose to distance themselves from Russia, Moscow vowed that they would protect national interests and their kindred Russian-speaking population in Ukraine. In a very short period of time, the Russian Parliament decided to support President Putin and authorised him to use any means necessary, including military, to protect Russian interests in Ukraine.

The military approach was “hybrid” from the beginning of the crisis, using both conventional and unconventional ways and means. The Russians seized Crimea by naked force, using conventional military units. To support their claim, they deployed land forces on the border with Ukraine, backed up with their naval assets in the Black Sea, and deployed a show of force against any possible western presence near the Crimean Peninsular. Beside arming the separatists with sophisticated heavy equipment, the unconventional element is seen with the infiltration of Russian Special Forces and the presence of advisors and “volunteers” to support pro-Russian separatists.

Using the core ideas behind the concept of “hybrid war,” the Russians managed to combine their older doctrine with the new ways to influence populations and engage in misdirection, misinformation and propaganda. The information operations were simultaneously conducted towards shaping public opinion in Russia, Ukraine and the wider international community. They were especially focused on sending these messages to pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine. The Russians closely followed Ukrainian decision-making and reacted very quickly. They shaped an anti-Ukrainian posture by using the attacks on the Russian language and threats to Russian people, reminding them of the Crimean legacy of the Second World War and Nazi crimes. After the incident in Odessa, the Russian media heavily exploited the killing of ethnic Russians to spark animosity in Eastern Ukraine. Through well formulated strategic communication, the Russians projected their power internationally by claiming the right to defend their national interests and exercise influence in regional matters.

## Conclusion

Since the results of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had not achieved their expectations, western politicians and military leaders tried to blame the failure of the western way of war on an unexpected combination of different methods and means by their opponents. That is why the “hybrid” threats were originally identified within an asymmetrical concept that became popular to label terrorist organisations and groups, such as non-state actors, that waged an unrestricted and immoral war.

This view gained a new dimension during the Ukrainian crisis, with the actions that Russia had taken to influence policies and events in Ukraine. Since then, the characteristics of “hybridity” and “hybrid warfare” have become a synonym for a danger that can come from states as well as non-state actors. Many believe that the latest Russian policy is to assert itself again as a great power and is aimed towards former Soviet spheres of interest that will destabilise international security.<sup>56</sup> In order to achieve this, the Russian government reintroduced an old fashion doctrine from the Soviet era based on a combination of psychological and information operations, covert and concealed military and diplomatic actions that had been very effective in the past.

So far, the Russian “hybrid warfare” has proved successful in Ukraine. “Hybridity” offers more clandestine and covert ways to achieve the end state. The international community is clearly against Russian interference in Ukraine, so the use of conventional assets would risk provoking a more decisive response. They chose the “hybrid approach” to avoid a full scale conventional war with Ukraine and, possibly, NATO. Since the Ukrainian crisis, this concept has become a synonym for the Russian efforts to return on the world stage as a global actor.

Knowing the nature of the “hybrid warfare,” it should be relatively easy to understand and recognise the threat. The problem is when the practitioner of the “hybrid warfare” is a country such as Russia – one conventionally strong enough to be challenged or sanctioned by the international community. Any weaker country could not achieve what Russia did in Ukraine. This means that a truly “hybrid warfare” is possible only in a Russian-like framework. Smaller countries or non-state actors could not apply such a combination of political, military, economic, and diplomatic effort without being stopped immediately. Thus, “hybrid warfare” whilst intended to use low intensity tools, takes great power to support it.

This article demonstrates the usefulness of the method of analysis of the centre of gravity and the elements through which one can attack and destroy the opponent (through tackling critical capabilities, vulnerabilities and requirements) and as a potential tool for understanding “hybrid warfare” in a particular scenario. This method allows a more detailed study of the structure of the conflict in which one or more actors apply the “hybrid” concept of warfare in order to foresee a wide range of defensive measures in any future hybrid scenario. In future conflicts, non-state actors can be expected to continue to threaten international security. However, the Ukraine scenario demonstrates that it will be even more dangerous when they are initiated by powerful state actors with a richer arsenal of available ways and means.

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.