Getting a Grip on the So-Called "Hybrid Warfare"

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The outlook on international security within the Western security community, and particularly in Europe, has changed dramatically during the post-Cold War era.[1] At the same time, the West has gone out-of-area, developed an expeditionary military mind-set and fought several wars of choice against third-rate military adversaries in the name of "military crisis management," "counterinsurgency warfare," and the "War on Terror."

During the past 25 years, the shared Western understandings on international security have gone through a process of foundational change. Western notions of international security and military affairs have gone through a paradigm change. At the core of this change has been the belief that we have been able to overcome the Cold War era zero-sum logic to international security and adversarial relations with other great powers of the day—namely Russia and China. The West has moved away or gradually grown out from containing and deterring state-based military threats towards ever broadening notions of international security. The "new" post-Cold War-era Western security perspective included the stability of the globalizing international system and human security as perspectives through which to analyse security threats and appropriate responses to these threats.[2]

Now that Russia has used very traditional great-power tools in Ukraine since 2013, and also in Syria since 2015, many Western states have found themselves in need of a "new" framework—any framework—to cope with this return of the past

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in contemporary international politics. After all, most European states could not conceptualize military threats in Europe only three years ago. Similarly, the United States has pulled out its troops from Europe with the conviction that state-based military threats in Europe are unimaginable. Thus, during the last 25 years, most Western states have focused on committing military troops to multinational expeditionary operations with scant direct connections to Western states' survival or national security interests. After Crimea, advocating hybrid warfare has been a way to (re)securitize the traditional great-power perspective on international security—an approach that Western states had desecuritized since the end of the Cold War as the West was redefining international security on its own terms.[3]

The hybrid warfare thesis is represented by the idea that Russia has invented a new approach to statecraft and military affairs after the war in Georgia. It reflects more than anything the collective Western surprise that the very traditional actions of Russia have caused. This article argues that the hybrid warfare thesis has catered to the Western need to explain and understand Russia's actions in Ukraine as the post-Cold War-era Western conceptualisations of international security have proved to be laid on shaky foundations. Great-power rivalries, spheres-of-influence thinking, propaganda, coercion, the use of proxies, spying, and the use of military force by great powers did not become extinct with the demise of the Cold War even though many Western analysts and statesmen thought they had. Recent actions of Russia have revealed this flaw in the Western approach to post-Cold War-era international security.

The emergence and development of the hybrid warfare thesis has been politically useful—highlighting the changing nature and shortcomings of the post-Cold War-era Western perspective on international security. The analytical utility of the hybrid warfare thesis is more limited. Many of the supposedly new elements of the so-called hybrid warfare and the myriad of associated and supposedly new forms of warfare are in fact normal practices of statecraft rather than novel expressions of war. Many Western strategic analysts and statesmen have problems in dealing with these traditional tools of statecraft due to the development of Western perspective on international security during the post-Cold War era. More than anything, the rise of the hybrid warfare thesis is a collective Western attempt to domesticate the traditional threat that Russia poses today.

This article first probes the effects that the international watershed event—the end of the Cold War —had for Western states. Next, the way that Western states have redefined their perspective to international security during the past 25 years will be examined. The notion of strategic discourses is introduced as a tool to characterize the Western change away from Cold War-era deterrence and territorial defence towards ever widening notions of new threats and new require-

ments for the development of military capabilities. Finally, the emergence of the hybrid warfare thesis is examined in the wake of increased Russian assertiveness, particularly in and against Ukraine. This is done against the background of the redefined post-Cold War-era Western outlook to international security that had matured for more than two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The End of the Cold War as a Root Cause

The end of the Cold War in the late 1980s and early 1990s was a truly significant conceptual watershed event in world politics. It was a process that was celebrated all around the world, and particularly in the West, which was the "winner" of the decades-long bipolar power struggle. It was also highly celebrated within the former Soviet bloc—ranging from ex-Soviet Republics to former members of the Warsaw Pact—all of whom had been suddenly and unexpectedly freed from the shackles of oppressive Soviet rule.

At the same time, the end of the Cold War was a highly problematic process in international politics. The antagonistic bipolar logic that had prevailed within the world system for decades was gone in a matter of months or years. The logic according to which most states had executed security and defence policy for decades, and the *raison d'être* of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), was suddenly gone, and nothing even resembling a different or an alternative logic of international politics emerged. Simply put, statesmen all around the world knew that the end of the Cold War was a positive outcome in international affairs, but none of them knew what was to follow in its suit.

From a Western perspective, the demise of the Soviet Union removed the familiar, taken-for-granted and all-pervasive existential threat that for two generations had guided state policy in practically all spheres of societal life. In an instant, Western states were left without any significant national security threat. Statesmen all around the Western world—and elsewhere—were confronted with the question: what threatens us and how do we counter that threat? As the 1991 NATO Strategic Concept noted, former enemies were turning into partners to be engaged:

> Since 1989, profound political changes have taken place in Central and Eastern Europe which have radically improved the security environment in which the North Atlantic Alliance seeks to achieve its objectives. The USSR's former satellites have fully recovered their sovereignty. The Soviet Union and its Republics are undergoing radical change. The three Baltic Republics have regained their independence. Soviet forces have left Hungary and Czechoslovakia and are due to complete their withdrawal from Poland and Germany by 1994. All the coun-

tries that were formerly adversaries of NATO have dismantled the Warsaw Pact and rejected ideological hostility to the West. They have, in varying degrees, embraced and begun to implement policies aimed at achieving pluralistic democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and a market economy. The political division of Europe that was the source of the military confrontation of the Cold War period has thus been overcome.[4]

The sudden desecuritization of East-West relations opened space for new interpretations of the basic logic of international politics and state security. In fact, the end of the Cold War forced states to redefine their approach to security and matters of defence. After all, states were spending millions of dollars every day on national security with tools and policies that were inherited from the past era— the era of superpower confrontation, ideological hostility, militarised state-focused security outlook, and constant fear of war breaking out. As this era was widely accepted to be over, a new logic of international security needed to be devised— quickly. Thus, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the demise of the existential threat that it had posed set a daunting task for Western statesmen. They needed to define the new rules of the post-Cold War-era international system, as well as national and alliance-wide perspectives on international security. In addition, statesmen were challenged by the rapidly evolving international events to execute these new policies, and this was no easy task. After all, this meant foundational changes in the state security apparatuses throughout the Western world—and beyond.

Western governments changed their policies on national security during the 1990s, but without a new grand plan—or a shared collective vision—about the nature of the emerging international security system and the required national steps needed in this new and emerging environment. The old system was celebrated to be over, but the new systemic logic was described in vague and even contradictory terms. Nobody really knew, then, what kind of actors or issues would constitute tangible security threats during the next year or the next decade. Attempts to come to terms with the emerging international systemic security logic started to accumulate: "A New World Order,"[5] "End of History,"[6] "The Clash of Civilizations,"[7] a time for "an Agenda for Peace,"[8] the era of "New Wars,"[9] "humanitarian interventions"[10] and so on. None of these—or any other—novel depictions of international security rose to the level of coherence that the bipolar superpower confrontation had enjoyed.

If there was one concrete step that was executed in all Western states at the end of the Cold War —and more broadly within the world system—it was the cutting of military expenditures and a reduction of military manpower in many armed forces. World military expenditures declined year after year (in constant

US dollars) between 1989–1998.[11] Even if statesmen were not sure what were the cornerstones of the post-Cold War security and defence policy, they knew that the level of military preparedness and capability that was left over from the Cold War era was on a too high level. As months and years passed, calls became louder and louder to cash in the so-called peace dividend. Old adversaries needed to be assured that the West would not take advantage of its victory in the Cold War. This led to public framing of a less conflictual world order where military threats were on a significantly lower level than before. Cooperation was emphasised at the expense of bloc politics and adversarial relationships.

The policy of engagement became the practical tool with which ex-Eastern Bloc states were tamed and brought closer to—and in many cases into—the West.[12] The idea was to engage former adversaries in a process that aimed at the spread of democracy, free market economies, accentuation of human rights, and other liberal-democratic values. At the same time, the traditional state-based military perspective to security was downplayed. The enlargement of the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization are prime examples of this policy of engagement in practical terms. Similarly, the many cooperative initiatives towards Russia were attempts to build a partnership, which could eventually lead to a less adversarial world in which great-power rivalries were a thing of the past.

Redefining the Rules of International Security on Western Standards

It was already noted that there has not been a coherent publicly promulgated Western vision of the post-Cold War-era international security system. Rather, the Western winners of the Cold War have redefined these rules in an incremental fashion by responding to different emerging security issues in world politics. From the 1991 Persian Gulf War to interventions in Somalia (1993) and Haiti (1994), from humanitarian missions in Rwanda and Burundi (1994) to air bombings on humanitarian grounds in Bosnia (1995) and Kosovo (1999), Western states were setting new standards for the use of military force to provide security in the post-Cold War era. This process of redefinition did not start afresh, but incrementally and slowly outgrew the preexisting Cold War-era rules of the international security game. Thus, Western states were redefining international security on their own terms—but not under the conditions of their own choosing. In the incremental process of redefining perspectives on international security, Western states' powers were curtailed by the preexisting (Cold War-era) conceptualisations of security and the reactive mode that Western states were operating from —re-

sponding to different crises and shocks that emerged in different parts of the world.

During the last 20 some years, we have witnessed the emergence and development of a new Western framework on international security, which will be examined next through the prism of strategic discourses. The post-Cold War-era Western strategic discourses are understood to represent changes within the shared Western understanding on the systemic logic of international security and how, where, and when to use military force. In other words, shared understandings concerning international security and the use of military force are formed or "negotiated" within various—interrelated and in many cases contradictory—discourses. The cumulative effect of these discourses adds up to an implicit Western security strategy, which has never been the product of conscious strategy formulation or has not been explicitly accepted as such by Western states. As it happens, the West has ended up with a new and evolving security outlook—instead of being in the driver's seat with deliberate and successful strategy articulation.[13]

The most coherent shared Western notion of the nature of the post-Cold War international system has been based on *globalisation* and its effects on international security. After the winding down of the superpower confrontation, globalization has progressed based on technological development—particularly in the field of information technologies—and political decisions. As the void in threat perceptions caused by the demise of the Soviet Union craved to be filled, the discourse on globalization provided one solution on how to reframe the international security logic and associated threats to international security.

As the globalization discourse puts it, we are all in this interconnected world together, and many of the threats to security are common threats to us all. Thus, a cooperative positive-sum security approach has been proposed to tackle threats to the smooth functioning of the globalizing international system. Within the discourse on globalization, threats to international security have been framed in the form of instability and unpredictability related to the day-to-day workings of the interdependent and increasingly interconnected world. Also, free access to the so-called global commons has been accentuated within the Western globalization discourse.[14]

Based in this positive-sum approach to global security, another Western strategic discourse has fomented and sedimented. This is the view that the nature of conflicts and wars is dramatically changing with the end of the Cold War. Instead of the superpower confrontation and the threat of state-based war, the proponents of new wars, ethnic conflicts and low-intensity conflicts have argued that warfare is moving inside the state, and that novel forms and actors of warfare are changing

the international security dynamics.[15] Even though the number of intrastate conflicts has significantly decreased since 1991, and the shift from interstate wars to intrastate wars already occurred directly after World War II, many policymakers and analysts have been ready to accept the war below the state level-argument[16]. As such, it has fitted nicely into the globalization narrative as chaotic, and messy new wars indeed seem to jeopardize the smooth running of the delicate interconnected world order in which traditional state-level war has become almost extinct.

The discourse on new wars and other intrastate conflicts has benefitted from the widening of the concept of security that started simultaneously with the decreasing threat of a massive war in Europe *à la* Cold War. New sectors and referent objects of security have been included in the post-Cold War—and postmodern—Western security concept.[17] In addition to the traditional state security approach, the systemic level (the entire globalizing world order) and the individual or human level (human security) have been included in the referent objects of security in a process that started in the early 1990s. With Somalia, Haiti, Rwanda, Bosnia, East Timor, Kosovo and the like, large-scale humanitarian suffering was gradually securitized and militarized within the Western security community that was desperately searching for new foundations for national and international security.

Related to the widening of the security concept, another Western strategic discourse surfaced and strengthened from the early 1990s to the present due to the increased possibilities of 24/7 live media coverage and exponentially improved methods of communication during the last 20 years. The birth of social media and the ability to be online all the time further increased people's awareness of incidents all around the world. Broadcast television, radio, newspapers, millions of internet pages, and social media services produce unprecedented exposure to world events that was unimaginable a generation ago.[18] Massively increased public awareness of large-scale humanitarian suffering and crises all around the world since the early 1990s coincided with the loss of strategic foundations within the West and elsewhere.

Thus, when the West was having its post-Cold War "*was nun*—moment," a door was opened for formulating and promulgating an approach to ease humanitarian suffering in out-of-area crises where large populations were involved. This happened despite the fact that the number of armed conflicts started to decline in the early 1990s.[19] The emergence of the Western tradition of military crisis management was facilitated by the urgent need to formulate a rationale for the continued existence of many Western (European) armed forces—although at a lower level of manpower and expenditures. Also, the rapid expansion of the European humanitarian military agenda was enabled by the need to redefine the *raison d'être*

of NATO. As it has been argued, during the 1990s NATO faced the choice between going out of area or going out of business.[20] The maturation of the Western crisis management tradition in only five years (1991–1996) that become apparent from NATO documents is indicative of the speed and direction of the post-Cold War Western strategic *problematique* of no existential military threats.

In the 1991 Strategic Concept of NATO, it is noted that:

> The Alliance is purely defensive in purpose: none of its weapons will ever be used except in self-defence.[21]

Also, in 1996 the new crisis management role of NATO was presented in a different fashion:

> The new NATO has become an integral part of the emerging, broadly based, cooperative European security structure. . . .We have. . . reconfigured our forces to make them better able to carry out the new missions of crisis management, while preserving the capability for collective defence.[22]

The fourth strategic discourse that has heavily influenced the way Western states have conceptualised international security, and particularly how they have developed and used their armed forces, matured during the 1990s and early 2000s. It was launched within the US defence establishment after the 1991 Gulf War—as lessons learned from the first big war of the new era. The strategic discourse based on the *Revolution in Military Affairs* (RMA) promised a fundamental change in military capability and how military forces would fight in the future. Networked systems and forces, digitalization, satellite communications, precision strike capabilities, and other high-tech applications were accepted in the United States as a new "silver bullet" that would offer a sound logic according to which the American military would develop in a world that posed no existential threats or even a peer-competitor.[23]

In a world with unprecedented accumulation of power on one actor—the United States that seemed to enjoy the benefits of the "unipolar moment"[24]—and where threats to American or Western security were not military in nature, the RMA-discourse provided a strategic imperative for military transformation. Should the old state-based threat and the associated military logic someday return—the reasoning went—the transformed RMA-forces would be able to cope with any potential adversary, whether that be China, Russia, or any other actor.

The RMA thesis fit nicely within the immediate post-Cold War trend of cutting or "streamlining" Western armed forces to cash in the peace dividend and to create a nonadversarial security environment, particularly in Europe *vis-à-vis*

Russia. Although high-tech militaries are very expensive, the military transformation that RMA offered with an exponential increase of capability meant that all-volunteer professional military forces could axe hundreds of thousands of Soldiers from their ranks and close hundreds of military bases and facilities in the United States and Europe.

Also, the shift from preparing to wage big war in Europe towards small, short and less demanding multinational out-of-area operations facilitated the strengthening of the RMA proponents' arguments. Small, capable, high-tech forces in instant readiness with good force protection seemed to be, during the 1990s and the following decade, what was in high demand. And consequently, as the United States—and also European states—started to field these new RMA capabilities with related transformed organisations and operational concepts, a "push" to use these new forces in operations was created. Particularly, for the small European states, all-professional forces would have become a problem if they were not used. As has been argued, small states face a "use it or lose it" dilemma with professional military forces. It is difficult for small states to maintain professional militaries for the mere prestige they bring.[25]

When terrorists struck in the United States in 2001, the overall shared Western approach to international security and the use of military force had already undergone a significant change. State-based military threats, territorial defence, and deterrence gave way to a comprehensive approach to security and an expeditionary military mindset. As the NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow explained in January 2016, NATO's deterrence policy should be strengthened, hinting even to the reassessment of the role of nuclear capabilities within this policy:

> the security environment has changed, and so strengthening and modernizing NATO's deterrence posture for the 21st century is, in my view, the most important challenge we must meet between now and Warsaw. . . . In the years since the fall of the Berlin Wall, defense spending fell and armies shrank throughout Europe. We therefore cannot replicate the deterrence posture that existed during the Cold War, even if we wanted to. The forces and the budgets necessary to maintain them are simply not there. . . . We need to be strong, we need to be clear, and we need to deter. . . *And, if necessary, we will make adjustments to our broader deterrence posture across the full spectrum of Alliance capabilities.*[26]

Building on the above mentioned changes, and stemming from a superpower mentality of military affairs—exacerbated by the traumatic and historic large-scale attacks on continental US—the George W. Bush administration responded to the threat of terrorism with a highly military approach. The post-9/11 "Global War on Terror" (GWOT) was not, however, only about defeating terrorists with

military and other means. The GWOT was as much about redefining the rules on the use of military force within the international system by the United States as it was about killing the perpetrators and supporters of the 9/11 attacks.

The focus of the post-9/11 Bush administration was to use military forces, if needed, unilaterally, preventively, and anywhere in the globe where it was deemed necessary. The international norms inherited from the Cold War—state sovereignty and nonintervention—had already lost some of their charm before 9/11, at least within the Western security community. But after the launch of the GWOT, the only military superpower of the world declared—and confirmed this declaration with deeds—that the era of defensive outlook to military matters was over. As President Bush framed it:

> On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country. … Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated. … Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.[27]

"The Twenty Years' Crisis"

During the 20-plus years of the post-Cold War era, the shared Western understandings of international security and the use of military force in the international system underwent a gradually emerging cumulative change. In retrospect, it is easy to see how this changing Western perspective on international security and the use of military force has made a fundamental break with the traditional notions of national security in a hostile international system characterized by state-based military threats. Thus, with the passing of time during two decades, the incrementally advancing process of redefining Western security perspectives and associated military actions on a "case-by-case basis" has produced a new outlook on security and the use of large-scale military violence that is in many ways very different from the classical notions of strategy, great-power politics and alliance theory. As Marcin Zaborowski, the head of the Warsaw Office for the Center for European Policy Analysis, has argued:

> in 1999, the alliance was embarking on its first-ever intervention in Kosovo. Ever since, NATO has thrown itself into redefining its role to expand beyond collective defense and embrace collective security. In reality, that meant that the role of defending NATO territory started to be seen as somehow archaic, and the new alliance was expected to expand its tasks to out-of-area operations aimed first

and foremost at peacekeeping and peace-enforcing. Deterrence and territorial defense became uncomfortable terms in NATO headquarters associated with old-fashioned Cold-War thinking."[28]

In practical terms, the Western security community has, under the lead of the United States, outgrown and departed from the notions of large-scale state-based military threats, great-power politics and associated political manoeuvring, and the defence of territory (national territory and alliance territory) as the real and primary mission of the armed forces. In addition, the significance of concepts such as containment, deterrence, and defence have eroded as Western perspective on military affairs and security have evolved into the direction of cooperative engagement and security cooperation, management of crises, as well as expeditionary operations and warfare. Frank Hoffman, a distinguished research fellow at the National Defense University, described this well in 2009:

> The 2005 National Defense Strategy was noteworthy for its expanded understanding of modern threats. Instead of the historical emphasis on conventional state-based threats, the strategy defined a broadening range of challenges including traditional, irregular, terrorist, and disruptive threats. The strategy outlined the relative probability of these threats and acknowledged America's increased vulnerability to less conventional methods of conflict. The strategy even noted that the Department of Defense was "over invested" in the traditional mode of warfare and needed to shift resources and attention to other challengers.[29]

As the brief analysis of the several post-Cold War-era Western strategic discourses revealed, the transformation and expansion of the security perspective, and the activation of the military tool in the strategic toolbox of the Western states since early 1990s has not been linear or preplanned. Within the realm of international politics, states —represented by statesmen and/or small security political elites—make history, but under the preexisting conditions that limit, favour, and guide policies towards certain directions rather than others. Past actions limit the window of opportunity today. With the sudden and surprising annexation of Crimea and the start of the crisis in Eastern Ukraine, Russia brought this fact of international politics to the fore—interpreted in the West through the prism of hybrid warfare.

The Emergence of the Hybrid War Thesis

Hybrid war and hybrid warfare represent the latest manifestation of the Western need to (re)conceptualise and (re)define the post-Cold War international security logic and associated rules according to which states use military force—

and other elements of statecraft—in the international system. Hybrid warfare can also be conceptualised as the latest Western strategic discourse, which is supposed to explain away the international security problems that Western states have faced during the last several years, and which have been left unexplained by the other Western strategic discourses on globalization, new wars, the RMA, expeditionary military (crisis management) operations, and the GWOT.

In a way, hybrid warfare has become the latest Western strategic buzzword, which is facilitating a deeper understanding of the apparently new elements of the chaotic and unpredictable contemporary international security arena. From this perspective, hybrid warfare is assisting in explaining away the surprise that Russia's traditional great-power policies and actions in Ukraine since early 2014 (and in Syria since autumn 2015) have caused amongst Western statesmen and strategic analysts.

Gen Philip Breedlove, the commander of the United States European Command and Supreme Allied Commander Europe, noted in January 2016 that for 20 years, US military decisions were guided by the effort to make Russia a partner. In General Breedlove's words, the West has "hugged the bear"—that is, Russia—for 20 years, but after Georgia (2008), Crimea (2014), Donbass (2014-) and Syria (2015-), this has to change.[30] Looking back some 20 years, the efforts to redefine rules of the international security game on Western standards have now become contested by Russia.

Within the Western strategic community, the hybrid warfare thesis has been advocated to depict the new reality of contemporary warfare. The concept itself is not a totally new one. It has matured over several years, focusing first on the mixing of regular and irregular forces and tactics with terrorism and revolutionary technologies to negate the military superiority of the West in general—and the United States in particular. It is noteworthy that this maturation of the hybrid warfare thesis took place in an era when the West was overtly preoccupied with asymmetric conflicts or irregular forms of warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq. It was during these years—more than a decade—that many believed that the "old" state-based big wars were a thing of the past and that the future will be marked with wars similar to those that the United States and its NATO allies witnessed in Iraq and Afghanistan.[31] These wars showcased the deficiency of the high-tech RMA thesis and the ineffectiveness of the global-level militarized GWOT as a new security approach. As Mattis and Hoffman have argued,

> [t]he kinds of war we will face in the future cannot be won by focusing on technology; they will be won by preparing our people for what General Charles Krulak, the former Marine commandant, used to call the Three Block War. … We are extending the concept a bit, and beginning to talk about adding a new

dimension. … The Four Block War adds a new but very relevant dimension to situations like the counterinsurgency in Iraq.[32]

The so-called "green men" became the symbol of the Western discourse on hybrid warfare in early 2014, when Russia invaded the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine. As the hybrid warfare narrative goes, these unidentified green men without insignias—which in fact consisted of hundreds of armed uniformed soldiers—were the reason Russia was so successful in taking Crimea. This narrative overlooks the fact that the government in Kiev—and people around the Crimean peninsula—were very well informed that these so-called green men were not Ukrainian military troops. So, even if these armed Russian special operations forces soldiers were not carrying insignias, there was plenty of evidence that they were not part of the forces that were loyal to the government of Ukraine.

Thus, the decision not to stop or counterattack these invading forces—which were clearly soldiers of organized armed forces —was not based on the notion that Ukrainian authorities did not know that Crimea was being invaded. Inaction was based on the decision by the government of Ukraine not to attack these invading forces, because (1) Ukraine had no credible functioning armed forces, which could have beaten the Russian soldiers without the whole military operation turning into a bloodshed and slaughter of the Ukrainian military, and (2) the culture of corruption had degraded the fighting capability and morale of Ukraine's armed forces, so that Russian military could take the garrisons around Crimea without any real fighting.[33]

The hybrid warfare narrative suggests that the use of nonconventional "green men" and the associated obfuscation of the Ukrainian situational awareness was the reason that the takeover of Crimea was so successful. This narrative turns a blind eye to the fact that Ukraine had no real usable military capability that had any chance of success against a regional great power—namely Russia. Moreover, Russia had more than 10,000 soldiers stationed within its military bases in Crimea when the "green men" suddenly appeared on the scene. At the same time, another 150,000 Russian military troops were in close proximity of Ukraine on military exercises.[34] Thus, whereas some Western statesmen and strategic analysts may for a while have been confused by the true origins of the so-called "green men," Ukrainian authorities knew that they should have been capable of mustering military operations against these invading forces, but they did not have the required military force, which could have done the trick.

Even if the proponents of the hybrid warfare narrative could agree with the analysis above, they would point out that as Western states' situational awareness of what was going on in the Crimea was obfuscated, they lost their possibility of acting against Russia's invasion in a timely fashion. This line of reasoning bypasses

the fact that the Western states did not have the capabilities or the willingness to commit any military force against Russia's invasion in support of Ukraine.[35] The fact is that there was almost nothing that Western states could have done to halt the Russian invasion of Crimea even if they wanted to, and they did not.

The second aspect of the Western narrative on hybrid warfare waged by Russia accentuates the strategic use of nonmilitary tools. By definition, the true essence of war is related—but not limited—to the use of large-scale high-quality violence, that is, military force. Nonetheless, to analyse war without a political context and the diverse spheres of human interactions that are connected to the military sphere resonates well within the post-Cold War Western tendency to see warfare from a simplistic, mechanistic and technocratic perspective. This Western strategic myopia has evolved from the RMA thesis and the associated possibilities of waging war (operations) with a high reliance on force protection in the many wars of choice that the West has undertaken during the last two decades.[36] The technocratic Western understanding of war—looking at pursuing politically defined goals with the use of large-scale violence through the prism of high-tech capabilities and force-protection possibilities—has been challenged in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya where superior Western military capability has not translated into politically defined goals during the last 15 years.

The technocratic high-tech Western focus on war has thus matured in the past two decades. The emergence of the concept "comprehensive approach" testifies to the problems that Western states have confronted since they have gone out-of-area with the RMA approach on the use of military force. As the Alliance Joint Doctrine (2010) notes:

> From a military perspective, a comprehensive approach is founded on not only a shared situational understanding, but also recognition that sometimes non-military actors may support the military and conversely on other occasions the military's role will be supporting those actors. . . The importance of including from the outset those elements – diplomatic, civil, and economic – that are to be enabled by military success must not be underestimated. Failure to do so will at best lose the strategic initiative; at worst, it will result in strategic failure. This is the basic premise of a comprehensive approach, which NATO applies to its operations.[37]

Thus, NATO member-states have jointly agreed upon the notion that purely military solutions to political problems are rarely possible. Strategic goals should be pursued with a mix of political, economic, cultural and in some cases also military means. This has been the essence of statecraft for centuries—or even millennia. Military analysts and strategic thinkers have understood war from a broad perspective for at least 2,500 years—since the days of Sun Tzu (or Sunzi).

War has never been a "pure" military matter that is executed by military forces only. The formulation of the Comprehensive Approach within the European Union reflects the same understanding:

> The EU's Comprehensive Approach (CA) envisages the concerted use of the wide array of policies, tools and instruments at the disposal of the EU, spanning the diplomatic, security, defence, financial, trade, development cooperation and humanitarian aid fields.[38]

The above-mentioned definitions of the Comprehensive Approach both within the EU and NATO reflect the fact that for years Western strategic thinkers and statesmen have been painfully aware that military operations in and by themselves are not enough to produce favourable international security outcomes. Nor are purely military operations enough for the attainment on national interests in most cases. Based on the analytical similarities between the concepts of hybrid warfare and the Comprehensive Approach, it could be argued that the Comprehensive Approach has in fact been a Western hybrid warfare technique for example in Afghanistan, where military momentum and rising troop levels have not guaranteed "victory." And as the Secretary General of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, has argued:

> … how to deal with hybrid warfare? Hybrid is the dark reflection of our comprehensive approach. We use a combination of military and non-military means to stabilize countries. Others use it to destabilize them.[39]

The third argument in favour of the hybrid warfare thesis has revolved around Russia's information warfare and its use of government controlled media houses and internet trolls (or troll armies) to change public perceptions of Russia's actions in Ukraine. This strategic level information warfare—partly using internet trolls and partly other modern means to lie and to distort and modify the truth—has supposedly improved Russia's possibilities at reaching its goals in Ukraine and more broadly within the international system. Through the "weaponization of information," Russia has arguably successfully obfuscated what was going on in Crimea in March 2014 and what is currently happening in eastern Ukraine.

What the proponents of this information warfare argument often seem to neglect, however, is the fact that since the invasion of Crimea in early 2014, Russia has become a pariah state targeted with political and economic sanctions. Its proxy war in Eastern Ukraine has not gone unnoticed and the associated narrative about its noninvolvement does not resonate among Western strategic decision makers. Statesmen do not make decisions with information collected from internet discussion forums or from adversaries' officials' public statements. It is extremely difficult—with even the best of narratives —to create a long-standing

"alternative reality" or shared understanding, which departs from preexisting conceptualisations and shared understandings, and which is contradictory to the "facts on the ground."

It is true that today anyone can get his or her message out in some form—whether it is through conventional media sources or social media. However, it is a different thing to say that it would be easy to change preexisting narratives or to create new ones. Narratives influence how people conceptualize reality. Moreover, narratives constitute identities. Narratives are not only stories that can be made up by anyone. They are deep-seated cultural constructs through which people infer meaning about the social world. Thus, narratives are resistant to change. Changing narratives implies changes to the way people see the world and how they identify themselves. Narratives have a strong bias on status quo over change.[40]

When it comes to the use—or nonuse—of information, Russia was successful in its annexation of Crimea on the basis that it did not a priori reveal its intentions or methods for executing the land-grab. Russia thus departed from the post-Cold War Western method of publicly arguing in favour of and "selling" an upcoming military operation. However, it should be noted that even with this successful obfuscation of the situational awareness of Ukraine's government and Western states for some hours or maybe even days, the possibilities of Ukraine's armed forces to resist the Russian invasion were practically nonexistent. The difference in military capability between Russia and Ukraine was —and still is —so staggering.

The fourth aspect of the hybrid warfare thesis revolves around another strategic hype concept, that of cyber warfare. For many years—at least since the 2007 Estonian Bronze Warrior episode—cyber threats and cyber warfare have been proposed to fundamentally change the nature of warfare. Resonating with the logic of the RMA discourse in the 1990s and during the next decade, cyber warfare advocates and cyber threat prophets have moved to securitize the cyberspace. Waging war in cyberspace offered a way to conceptualize new vulnerabilities in Western societies and new asymmetric means of warfare that could threaten us, despite the fact that none of these cyber warfare elements had ever materialized on the "battlefield."

So far, the things that we have witnessed have been related to denial of service attacks, infiltration of social media and e-mail accounts as well as other similar low-yield small-level incidents. Most of the reported cyber "warfare'" episodes have been criminal acts directed against individuals or enterprises. Concerning real cyber war incidents—with tangible national security effects—Libicki has argued based on his analysis on the war in Ukraine that one of the surprising features has been the lack of cyber war almost completely.

> For the last twenty years, with the advent of serious thinking about "cyber war," most analysts—and even the more skeptical thinkers—have been convinced that all future kinetic wars between modern countries would have a clear cyber component. However, the current Russo-Ukrainian conflict is challenging this widely held notion. . . . The most notable thing about the war in Ukraine, however, is the near-complete absence of any perceptible cyber war.[41]

The absence of cyber warfare in the hard core of security and defence issues so far does not mean that cyber threats are irrelevant to states at the strategic level. Needless to say, our ever increasing dependence and reliance on networked information and services make managing the cyber domain critical. Thus, it is noteworthy that so far the threats and possibilities of cyber warfare have been inflated and are closer to science-fiction than real life.

Hybrid Warfare is Warfare—Plain and Simple

In the immediate aftermath of the end of the Cold War, Russia was not able to challenge or influence the Western process of redefining the post-Cold War era international security architecture and the new rules of the international security game. Thus, during the last 25 years, many Western statesmen and security analysts have become accustomed to the situation where no one (not even Russia or China) disrupts the principles of Western security and defence policy. At the same time, the very concept of war has undergone a gradually emerging change. Instead of "war proper," we have witnessed numerous "campaigns," "crisis management operations," "humanitarian missions in the spirit of R2P," and other instances of the "use of military force."[42]

Russia has brought back a traditional great-power outlook to the use of military force—war —and the associated concepts of spheres of influence, near-abroad, zero-sum game, and multipolarity. Western analysts and statesmen have had difficulties in recognising and dealing with these traditional notions and actions with the analytical tools at their disposal. Managing common threats in a globalising world with multinational expeditionary operations is an altogether different approach than great-power rivalries, deterrence (with conventional and nuclear weapons) and spheres of influence in pursuit of the national interest.

Russia is not acting or arguing according to the globalization-based positive-sum approach to relations between states. Its approach towards Ukraine and the West has been based on status, prestige and influence. The Western narrative on hybrid warfare has thus served the purpose of formulating a "new" framework or a language, which makes Russia's strategic behaviour understandable and intelligible —from a Western point of view—and which is able to explain the strategic

surprise that Russia's approach and actions have caused within the Western security community.

As András Rácz, an EU foreign and security policy expert, has argued, the tipping point of the hybrid warfare discourse coincided with NATO adopting the expression during the summer of 2014. Since then, NATO has had an important role in reproducing the hybrid warfare discourse. It has been within the institutional contours of NATO that the birth and strengthening of the hybrid warfare thesis has been facilitated.[43]

In a way, the discourse on hybrid warfare is bringing back or highlighting some of the vocabulary of the traditional and narrow conception of security, which Russia has advocated. Russia's actions and associated political rhetoric accentuate great-power privileges, state-level security, and state-based military threats. This is an approach that has been repudiated since the early 1990s in Western strategic discourse and public narratives on the logic of the globalizing international security system and the rationales for using military force within this system. During the last 25 years, Western militaries have engaged former adversaries, brought stability to the globalizing world order, done good on several continents and managed crises "out there." In addition to being just a way to confront the emerging post-Cold War era security environment, deemphasising or forgetting state-based "war proper" has been a politically motivated and expedient way to redefine the post-Cold War era international security architecture on Western standards.

Hybrid warfare can be conceptualised as a bridge between the post-Cold War-era Western approach to international security with active use of military force within the international system and the more traditional great-power approach to international relations, which we have witnessed in Ukraine. This bridge facilitates the "resurrection" of state-based military threats within the Western strategic calculus, but in a way that is consistent with the broad array of thoughts on international security, which have matured and sedimented during the post-Cold War era.

Hybrid warfare thus represents the (re)securitization of the traditional great-power logic within shared Western understandings of international security—after 25 years of desecuritization of the very same logic, which has formed the essence of the post-Cold War-era security and defence policy up to the beginning of the crisis over Ukraine.[44]

To conclude, hybrid warfare is a politically useful concept. Crying "hybrid warfare," easily gets one's security-related argument heard. Furthermore, within the Western strategic community the discourse on hybrid warfare has become so abused that through this concept many actors find it easy to forward their academic or political position. But when one tries to operationalize hybrid warfare

on the military strategic, operational or tactical levels, one quickly realizes that the very broad and unanalytical concept has less to offer—either to academic practitioners or practice-oriented national security professionals. Going below the political or grand strategic level, one needs to break up the grand concept of hybrid warfare into "smaller" and more precise concepts that are very familiar from previous decades and centuries: coercion, extortion, bribery, lying, proxy wars, psychological manipulation, propaganda, and others that have been the essence of statecraft over several millennia.

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