

Interview: Sascha Dov Bachmann

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This interview was conducted by the Remote Control project.

In this interview, Dr. Bachmann discusses hybrid warfare, its use in Ukraine and Crimea by Russia, and whether NATO is adequately prepared to formulate effective responses to this method of warfare.

Q. What is ‘hybrid warfare’?

Hybrid warfare as a warfare concept is not new among those practising the art of war. However, contemporary events lead us to argue that today’s hybrid warfare “has the potential to transform the strategic calculations of potential belligerents [because it has become] increasingly sophisticated and deadly”.

Hybrid war is a concept that has emerged shortly after the end of the Cold War and sums up the complexities of modern warfare, which go beyond

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conventional military tactics, often involving cyberwarfare, propaganda and a fluid, non-state adversary.

The concept of hybrid warfare has been discussed by (mostly US) military writers since the beginning of the 21st century and its recognition as a theory in formal military doctrinal thinking is still not settled. Hybrid warfare may use elements from four existing methods and categories of full spectrum warfare, namely:

- conventional warfare;
- irregular warfare (such as terrorism and counter-insurgency);
- related asymmetric warfare (unconventional warfare such as partisan warfare);
- and compound warfare (where irregular forces are used simultaneously against an opponent while being employed by state actors to augment their otherwise conventional warfare approach).

Hybrid warfare builds on existing doctrinal elements and adds the following: evolving war-fighting capacities in the fifth dimension such as “cyber-warfare”; and activities in the so-called information sphere.

Q. Who were the first actors to utilize hybrid warfare and why?

According to Hoffman’s seminal work “Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars”, it was Hezbollah in its 2006 war with the IDF. Here, a non-state actor (NSA) did utilise war fighting capabilities normally not used by non-state actors such as blending conventional warfighting on the ground and activities in the information sphere. Other examples are Islamic State/Daesh which show a blend of capabilities which blur the line of traditional warfighting: such as the use of suicide bombers, improvised explosive devices, and the use of ‘ground

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troops' in a conventional manoeuvre context augmented by strong propaganda/information sphere activities.

Why: because these capabilities are available. Hezbollah (and IS) had and has a substantial potential of rockets/military hardware and is aptly using the possibilities available through social media in the information sphere unknown before. Both non-state actors are also utilising the opportunities of informing public opinion in the West thanks to a growing Muslim population in the West who have cultural and lingual access/connection to these conflicts/the nature of the conflict.

Q. Is hybrid warfare something that states have used?

Russia has used hybrid warfare.

How:

In a Keynote speech at the opening of the NATO Transformation Seminar on 25 March 2015, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [remarked](#):

“ “Russia has used proxy soldiers, unmarked Special Forces, intimidation and propaganda, all to lay a thick fog of confusion; to obscure its true purpose in Ukraine; and to attempt deniability. So NATO must be ready to deal with every aspect of this new reality from wherever it comes. And that means we must look closely at how we prepare for; deter; and if necessary defend against hybrid warfare.” ”

Michael Kofman and Matthew Rojansky described Russia's 2010 Military Doctrine of modern warfare:

“ “..... as entailing “the integrated utilization of military force and forces and resources of a non-military character,” and, “the prior implementation of measures of information warfare in order to achieve political objectives without the utilization of military force and, subsequently, in the interest of shaping a favourable response from the world community to the utilization of military force.” ”

The employment of hybrid methods has been evident from Russia’s activities in Crimea and the Donbas region of Ukraine, with its deployment of “little green men”, namely, soldiers wearing unmarked uniforms that make direct state attribution difficult. According to Mark Galeotti, Professor of Global Affairs at New York University’s Center for Global Affairs:

“ “The conflict in Ukraine has demonstrated that Moscow, in a bid to square its regional ambitions with its sharply limited resources, has assiduously and effectively developed a new style of ‘guerrilla geopolitics’ which leverages its capacity for misdirection, bluff, intelligence operations, and targeted violence to maximise its opportunities.” ”

While there may be limitations to the way in which these methods were used in Ukraine, the use of non-attributable military personnel provides expert assistance to an enemy and, even if not directly engaged in hostile acts, provides advice and assistance to those who carry out such acts. Nevertheless, the seriousness of the threat posed by such forces should not be underestimated. General Breedlove, currently Commander, US EUCOM and the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), is reported as saying,

“ “if Russia does what it did in Crimea to a NATO state, it would be considered an act of war against the alliance.” ”

In Ukraine, Russia employed a hybrid strategy by combining irregular warfare and cyber warfare to achieve its strategic objectives. Reuben F Johnson, writing in IHS Jane's Defence Weekly, on 26 February 2015, considered that "Russia's hybrid war in Ukraine 'is working'." They had combined a [substantial ground force](#) of 14,400 Russian troops supported by tanks and armoured fighting vehicles, backing up the 29,300 illegally armed formations of separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Q. Does hybrid warfare hold military advantages for states over conventional warfare?

Russia is winning the hybrid war in Ukraine: it has successfully annexed Crimea, and effectively turned Ukraine into a state on the brink of wider failure. In the process, Russia has successfully divided Western countries on how to respond to this act of aggression. Russia also successfully reactivated its Cold War disinformation mechanisms, successfully blurring reality and fiction for global observers. Russia has uncovered the West's inability to find a common policy to respond to the unfolding events in Ukraine.

Q. How does hybrid warfare relate to international law? Is this way of waging war covered in current international legal paradigms?

Generally speaking, hybrid warfare does not change the international legal paradigms such as [Article 2\(4\), 51 UN Charter](#) and in the context of NATO, [Article V of the NATO Treaty](#). Whether any form of hybrid attack, alone or cumulatively, amounts to a use of force and, if so, reaches the threshold of an "armed attack" to justify a military response under Article 51 – and what form that response would take – are very difficult questions to answer. They are situation/fact specific. Moreover, attribution may be problematic. In addition,

hybrid warfare – with its possible elements of cyber, terrorism, asymmetric warfare etc. – might not reach the threshold of such an attack and hence allow affected states to ‘deny’ the existence of such warfare in order to continue with their diplomatic relations, trade etc with the ‘aggressor’ state. Such behaviour might undermine existing alliances and weaken international comity.

Q. How prepared, or perhaps unprepared, are NATO for formulating effective responses to hybrid warfare?

NATO is in my opinion well prepared to formulate effective responses given its substantial work undertaken in the context of hybrid threats.

NATO *recognized* as early as 2010 hybrid threats were a new security risk and designed a new NATO Bi-Strategic Command Capstone Concept, describing hybrid threats as emanating from an adversary who combines both conventional and unconventional – military methods to achieve its goals.

In the two years following 2010, NATO drew up a specific threat catalogue, which identifies security-specific risks beyond conventional warfare threats: nuclear proliferation, terrorism, cybercrime and cyber-war, organized crime and its role in drugs, arms and human trafficking, migration, ethnic and religious conflicts, population conflicts due to resource scarcity and globalization.

NATO recognized that these may amount to a concrete threat to the alliance or that it could be authorized by the United Nations, because of their capacity, to intervene. Recognizing this, NATO worked on a related global approach (Comprehensive Approach) in order to counter these risks. This approach envisaged involving state and non-state actors in a comprehensive defence strategy that combines political, diplomatic, economic, military technical and scientific initiatives. Despite intensive work on this approach as part of a

“Countering Hybrid Threats” experiment in 2011, the NATO project work in 2012 had to stop due to lack of support from their members. (From our submission to the [UK DC](#))

Given this existing framework/ capstone on how to respond to hybrid threats and the inter-related nature of hybrid threats and warfare, I would like to argue with some confidence that NATO has the capability to formulate an effective doctrinal approach, notwithstanding the initial discontinuation of the work on the hybrid threat concept.

Q. Do you think that hybrid warfare will be the main method of waging war in the future and how do you see the use of this form of warfare evolving?

Hybrid warfare with its various forms such as cyber-attacks, the use and abuse of the information sphere, the use of a holistic mix of conventional and irregular warfare, the exploitation of country specific vulnerabilities, law fare etc, is here to stay due to its obvious benefits to the using power/state/actor: deniability and the possibility of staying under the threshold of an armed attack which would in a likeliness trigger a military/kinetic response. I am convinced that the elements of hybrid warfare will evolve further and will eventually be used by state and non-state actors alike. Whether the overall term “hybrid warfare” for such multi-modal forms of warfare/threats is to stay we will see. Hybrid war’s impact on international law and comity is significant and it will question some of our established doctrines/concepts.

Sascha Dov Bachmann, Assessor Jur, LL.M (Stel) LL.D (UJ), is an Associate Professor in International Law (Bournemouth University, UK), Extraordinary Associate Professor in War Studies (Swedish Defence University, Sweden) and Guest Speaker at NATO School. Outside academics, he served in various

capacities as Lieutenant Colonel (German Army Reserve) taking part in peacekeeping missions in operational and advisory capacities. Sascha acted as NATO's Rule of Law Subject Matter Expert (SME) in NATO's Hybrid Threat Experiment of 2011 and in related workshops at NATO and national level. He would like to thank Brigadier (Rtd) Anthony Paphiti, former ALS officer, for his insightful comments and discussions.

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