

Moving Beyond a Capabilities-Based Understanding of Hybrid Threat

A Monograph

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Abstract

Moving Beyond a Capabilities-Based Understanding of Hybrid Threat, by CW3 Timothy M. Zilliox, US Army, 37 pages.

Use of the term hybrid threat to describe potential future adversaries has become increasingly more common in the lexicon of the US military over the last decade. The concept of hybrid threat is complex and allows actors in a conflict to employ a wide array of means beyond just conventional military forces. It includes not only the combination of conventional forces and unconventional, or irregular, forces and tactics, but leverages other non-military factors to achieve strategic ends. The US military, however, views the concept of hybrid threat from a capabilities-based perspective, as evidenced by the way it explains hybrid threat in its writings, from the 2015 National Military Strategy to US Army training circulars. This perspective is problematic, as it shapes our understanding in too narrow of a manner and fails to account for the contextual and strategic underpinnings that underlie any hybrid threat. A holistic understanding of hybrid threat is necessary, one that focuses on the cognitive foundation of historical perspective, culture and values that create hybrid military activity. If we are to understand hybrid warfare, we must view it as a strategic concept which develops from the aggregation of beliefs, values, norms and behaviors of the entity that employs it. In other words, it requires us to move past doctrinal descriptors and universal models, towards a theory of hybrid warfare that understands it as a cognitive construct that enables and structures hybrid strategy and operations.

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Acronyms

CETO	Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities
CTC	Combat Training Center
DATE	Decisive Action Training Center
FM	Field Manual
IDF	Israeli Defense Forces
ISAF	International Security and Assistance Force
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
MCO	Major Combat Operations
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OE	Operational Environment
TRADOC	Training and Doctrine Command

Introduction

Use of the term hybrid threat to describe potential future adversaries has become increasingly more common in the lexicon of the US military over the last decade. The term is codified in army doctrine, and training strategies are employed to combat hybrid threats. Military historian and retired US Marine Corps officer Dr. Frank Hoffman notes that the effort to define and describe hybrid threat began in the US nearly fifteen years ago at the Marine Corps' Warfighting Lab,¹ but the term emerged more commonly in US military dialogue after the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War in Lebanon.

The concept of hybrid threat is complex and allows actors in a conflict to employ a wide array of means beyond just conventional military forces. It includes not only the combination of conventional forces and unconventional, or irregular, forces and tactics, but leverages other non-military factors to achieve strategic ends. Those additional non-military factors include, but are not limited to, politics, economics, culture, values, identity, and history. The definition of hybrid warfare that appears in the 2015 National Military strategy notes "there exists an area of conflict where actors blend techniques, capabilities, and resources to achieve their objectives."² It illustrates how the Joint Chiefs of Staff view hybrid threat and indicates that the US military views hybrid threats from a capabilities-based perspective. The statement frames hybrid threat in terms of tangible resources and capabilities. This perspective permeates the US Army's doctrine and training strategies on hybrid threat. However, this conceptualization is problematic, as it shapes our understanding of hybrid threat in a way that is too narrow and fails to account for the contextual and strategic underpinnings that manifest in any hybrid threat. In other words, a holistic view of what constitutes a hybrid threat is necessary for the Army to adequately prepare

¹ Francis Hoffman, "The Evolution of Hybrid Warfare and Key Challenges," *Statement Before the House Armed Services Committee*, March 22, 2017, accessed October 17, 2017, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=800752>.

² US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2015* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 4.

to address hybrid threats in the future. A holistic view understands both the physical and the cognitive, and finds advantage in exploiting the operational paradigm, cognitive gaps, and values of one's rival that structure his functions.

This monograph proposes a theory of hybrid warfare that acknowledges and apprehends the complexity of a hybrid threat and includes the cognitive foundation that produces a hybrid actor; cognitive underpinnings that include historical perspective, culture, and values. It will move past the capabilities-based descriptions that currently exist in US Army doctrine to provide a deeper understanding and holistic view of the nature of hybrid threats. To do that, it is necessary to begin with the current understanding of hybrid threat in US military doctrine. Next, three case studies are presented to demonstrate the complexity that underlies contemporary hybrid threats, with an emphasis on the cognitive hybrid strategy in the examples. One particularly useful example is the Israeli-Hezbollah War in 2006. While some scholars note examples of hybrid threats from hundreds of years ago, the Israeli-Hezbollah War provides a more useful starting point here, since much of the concern about hybrid warfare and discourse in the US military began with this conflict.³ The second example used will be the Russian use of hybrid warfare in Ukraine. Much of the current discourse on hybrid threat within the US military focuses on Russian actions in Georgia in 2008 and in the Ukraine since 2014. The third case study will focus on the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Al Qaeda, highlighting the compilation of unique characteristics posed by these groups, such as the incorporation of terrorist acts and the exploitation of international law. The monograph then proposes a new way of understanding hybrid threat based on the problems identified with our current understanding and addresses the limitations in the way we currently think about hybrid warfare. It will conclude with the implications of a new way of understanding hybrid threat; implications for US military doctrine, planning and future training.

³ Williamson Murray and Peter Mansoor, eds., *Hybrid Warfare* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Combining Forms of Warfare

Major William Nemeth was one of the first in the US military to use the term hybrid warfare in his thesis for the Naval Postgraduate School in 2002. In studying the Chechen War from 1994-1996, Major Nemeth referred to “the flexible, half regular, half irregular warfare that relied on conventional arms, methods of terrorism and organized crime, and irregular warfare” as hybrid.⁴ He argued that the Chechens successfully deployed systematic and focused fusion of elements of Western and Soviet military doctrines, with decentralized operational guerilla tactics and the use of modern communications technology to coordinate their efforts.⁵

Nathan Frier, a senior associate in the International Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington D.C., posed a definition of hybrid warfare in 2005, which also appeared in the 2005 National Defense Strategy. He introduced a ‘quad chart’ which he used to examine what he termed the “hybrid norm.”⁶ His quad chart included four traits: traditional, irregular, catastrophic terrorism, and disruptive. According to Frier, a hybrid actor would have to deploy a combination of two or more of these traits, allowing them to negate a traditional military superiority, to be considered “hybrid.”⁷ The most useful contribution Frier’s work contributed was that it clarified the distinction between irregular warfare and hybrid, a distinction that was blurred at the time as many practitioners simply used the terms interchangeably. His chart showed that irregular warfare may be a component of hybrid warfare, but it was not the sole component.

⁴ W.J. Nemeth, “Future War and Chechnya: A Case for Hybrid Warfare” (Thesis, US Naval Postgraduate School, 2002), 39.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, *The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America 2005* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2005).

⁷ Nathan Frier. “Strategic Competition and Resistance in the 21st Century: Irregular, Catastrophic, Traditional, and Hybrid Challenges in Context,” Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, May 2007, 46, accessed September 24, 2017, <http://www.dtic.mil/docs/citations/ADA468246>.

However, the term hybrid threat became a commonly used term after the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War, and attempts to explain the complexity of twenty-first century warfare, which involves a multiplicity of actors and blurs the traditional distinctions between types of armed conflict and peace. Dr. Frank Hoffman, who at the time was a Research Fellow at the Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities (CETO) at the US Marine Corps Combat Development Command, posed one of the earliest accepted definitions of hybrid warfare which emerged after the Israeli-Hezbollah War. Hoffman wrote that hybrid wars “incorporate a range of different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder.”⁸ The use of the term hybrid warfare became popular in the defense community, but some critics argued that it was not a new concept, but just a new term for complex, asymmetrical capabilities that had existed for centuries. One critic, Dr. Damien Van Puyvelde, an Assistant Professor of Security Studies at the University of Texas at El Paso, wrote “warfare, whether it be ancient or modern, hybrid or not, is always complex and can hardly be subsumed into a single adjective.”⁹ It is noteworthy that Hoffman’s early definition focuses on capabilities and tactics. It treats the term hybrid warfare as a descriptor, not as a concept or an idea, and in doing so fails to capture the strategic nature of hybrid warfare.

Since 2007, many different definitions of hybrid warfare have appeared, and many are based on Hoffman’s work. However, Hoffman’s conceptualization is not the only one. It is important to note that understanding the nature of hybrid warfare is complicated, in part, by the varying definitions that exist. Retired US Army Colonel John McCuen wrote that hybrid wars were “a combination of symmetric and asymmetric war in which intervening forces conduct

⁸ Frank Hoffman, “Conflict of the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars,” Potomac Institute for Research Studies, Arlington, VA, 2007, 14.

⁹ Damien Van Puyvelde, “Hybrid war – does it even exist?” *NATO Review*, May 7, 2015, accessed October 8, 2017, <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2015/also-in-2015/hybrid-modern-future-warfare-russia-ukraine/en/index.htm>.

traditional military operations against enemy military forces and targets while they must simultaneously – and more decisively – attempt to achieve control of the combat zone’s indigenous populations by securing and stabilizing them.”¹⁰ McCuen’s description acknowledges the combined involvement of symmetric and asymmetric capabilities as Hoffman’s did, however McCuen emphasized winning control of the people within the contested space. McCuen wrote that hybrid war is “a wider struggle for control and support of the combat zone’s indigenous population, the support of the home fronts of the intervening nations, and the support of the international community,” highlighting the importance he places on winning the psychological battle, not just the physical fight.¹¹

More recently, hybrid warfare appeared in the US’ 2015 National Military Strategy. It states that the US is expected to become involved in “hybrid conflicts comprised of overlapping state and non-state violence . . . where actors blend techniques, capabilities, and resources to achieve their objective.”¹² State and non-state actors may work towards shared objectives and employ a wide range of weapons.¹³ The use of hybrid conflicts by aggressor states “serve to increase ambiguity, complicate decision-making, and slow the coordination of effective responses.”¹⁴ As in many of the definitions since Hoffman’s in 2007, there is a focus on regular and irregular forces combining to complete the same objectives, noting the use of advanced capabilities by the irregular forces.

Some argue that the concept of hybrid warfare is an entirely Western construct, influenced by the experiences of the Israelis in their 2006 war with Hezbollah, and by the historical experiences of the US and European allies in Afghanistan and Iraq. For example,

¹⁰ John McCuen, “Hybrid Wars,” *Military Review* 88, no. 2 (March 2008): 108.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² US Joint Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2015*, 4.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Dmitry Adamsky, and Associate Professor at the Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy, and Strategy at the Interdisciplinary Center at Herzliya, Israel, argues that American, European, and Israeli combat operations in the Middle East form the conceptual base and intellectual inspirations for creating the hybrid warfare concept.¹⁵ He writes “military hybridity as a simultaneous employment of conventional, sub-conventional, and possibly non-conventional warfare for the sake of political objectives, or as the blurring of political and jihadi identities of the actors.”¹⁶ The reference to Islam in the definition indicates the author’s assertion that recent military conflicts in the Middle East have an influence on Western notions of hybrid warfare.

Some Russian military leaders reject the hybrid warfare label pinned on them by many Western military analysts and eschew the concept of hybrid warfare as entirely Western. However, analysis reveals that Russian New Generation Warfare, their doctrine under Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov, maintains many similarities to Western definitions of hybrid warfare. Gerasimov, in an article he published in VPK in February 2013, outlined his perspective on future operations, stating that future conflicts would emphasize “the broad use of political, economic, information, humanitarian and other non-military measures, taken along with the use of the population’s protest potential.”¹⁷

In 2015, the International Institute for Strategic Studies forwarded a refined definition of hybrid warfare as,

The use of military and nonmilitary tools in an integrated campaign designed to achieve surprise, seize the initiative and gain psychological as well as physical advantages utilizing diplomatic means; sophisticated and rapid information, electronic and cyber

¹⁵ Dmitry Adamsky, “Cross-Domain Coercion,” *Proliferation Papers* no. 54 (November 2015): 22, accessed October 8, 2017, <http://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/pp54adamsky.pdf>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Valery Gerasimov, “The Value of Science Is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations,” trans. Robert Coalson, *Military-Industrial Kurier*, February 27, 2013, accessed October 8, 2017, <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2015/10/complex-academic-writing/412255/>.

operations; covert and occasionally overt military and intelligence action; and economic pressure.¹⁸

Although this new definition included the concept of gaining a psychological advantage and inclusion of economic pressure, there is still a focus on capabilities and tactics to achieve objectives. What is important about the psychological advantage created in hybrid warfare is its ability to generate constantly unique strategies that create surprise. Critics of this definition also argue that obtaining a psychological advantage and the use of economic pressure are not new, nor unique, to hybrid warfare.

Counting Lego Pieces

After the Vietnam War, and in the midst of the Cold War, the US Army shifted its doctrinal focus back to conventional state-on-state operations. From AirLand Battle, published in 1986, to Full Spectrum Operations, published in 2001, Army doctrine gave little attention to unconventional forms of warfare.¹⁹ In 2006, after several years conducting counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Army published FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*. Army training centers adopted counterinsurgency-focused scenarios, and the Army focused on preparing soldiers for the counterinsurgency campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In 2010 the Army's Training and Doctrine (TRADOC) G2 published TC 7-100, *Hybrid Threat*. The TRADOC G2 maintains a Threats Integration Section whose mission includes the study, design, and documentation of Operational Environment (OE) conditions to support US

¹⁸ The Military Balance, "Complex Crises Call for Adaptable and Durable Capabilities," 115, no. 1 (2015): 5.

¹⁹ US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1986), 9; AirLand Battle doctrine describes the Army's approach to generating and applying combat power at the operational and tactical levels, and recognizes the three-dimensional nature of warfare. US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), 3-1; Full Spectrum Operations combines offensive, defensive, and stability or civil support operations simultaneously as part of interdependent joint forces to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative to achieve decisive results.

Army and joint training and leader development programs.²⁰ This mission includes describing hybrid threats for the US Army. The training circular described how the Army conceptualized hybrid threats, hybrid threat tactics, and implications for training. It defined a hybrid threat as “the diverse and dynamic combination of regular forces, irregular forces, and/or criminal elements all unified to achieve mutually benefitting effects.”²¹ It goes on to state “the emergence of hybrid threats heralds a dangerous development in the capabilities of what was labeled a ‘guerilla’ or ‘irregular’ force in past conflicts.”²² A more detailed description of the nature of hybrid threats is offered in the first chapter. It notes,

Hybrid threats are innovative, adaptive, globally connected, networked, and embedded in the clutter of local populations. They can possess a wide range of old, adapted and advanced technologies – including the possibility of weapons of mass destruction. They can operate conventionally and unconventionally, employing adaptive and asymmetric combinations of traditional, irregular, and criminal tactics and using traditional military capabilities in old and new ways.²³

In describing how hybrid threats operate, TC 7-100 notes “hybrid threats will use an ever-changing variety of conventional and unconventional organizations, equipment, and tactics to create multiple dilemmas.”²⁴ Though more evolved than Hoffman’s original description, this description still treats hybrid threat as though it is a box of Lego pieces which one can combine to build a new model. It still fails to acknowledge the cognitive underpinnings and strategic calculus that compel an actor to employ hybrid warfare.

²⁰ US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), “Threat Tactics Course” (PowerPoint Presentation, US Army TRADOC G2, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2017), accessed October 28, 2017, <https://wss.apan.org/s/TRADOCTraining/.../Threat%20Tactics%20Course.aspx>.

²¹ US Department of the Army, Training Circular (TC) 7-100, *Hybrid Threat* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), v.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 1-1.

²⁴ Ibid., 1-2.

The manual devotes a chapter to address how hybrid threats accomplish their objectives in its chapter entitled Hybrid Threat Strategy. It notes:

Strategic operations apply all four instruments of power, in varying combinations depending on the conditions. In most cases, the diplomatic-political, informational, and economic means dominate. During strategic operations, military and/or paramilitary means are most often used to complement those other instruments of power to achieve hybrid threat goals.²⁵

The chapter goes on to describe in more detail how a hybrid threat mixes instruments of power during conflict. Again, the description offered here focuses on capabilities, as if they are tangible things like Lego pieces. It describes the means and ways a hybrid threat achieves its goals, like *how* one assembles Lego pieces to build something. However, it never describes the conceptual or contextual foundation of a hybrid threat strategy. A foundation is the base or groundwork of something. The contextual foundation of a hybrid threat strategy is the situation that gives rise to conflict, the values ascribed to the actors, how the actors see themselves and their adversary, the way the actors view time and space, and how the actors leverage and exploit these factors. These form the foundations of strategy actors employ in conflict.

It is also notable that the manual approaches hybrid threat from a highly conventional perspective. For example, when describing how to defeat hybrid threats, the manual states:

Major combat operations (MCO) employ all available combat power (directly and indirectly) to destroy an opponent's military capability, thereby decisively altering the military conditions within the operational environment. MCO usually involve intensive combat between the uniformed armed forces of nation-states. Hybrid threats may have the capacity to engage in MCO . . . each separate actor and action of a hybrid threat can be defeated if isolated and the proper countermeasure is applied.²⁶

This depiction focuses on defeating a hybrid threat from a conventional perspective and ignores the underlying reasons why an adversary chooses a hybrid strategy. Those underlying reasons are deeper than simply adopting a tactic to defeat a stronger adversary. They involve the weaker

²⁵ US Army, TC 7-100 (2010), 3-2.

²⁶ Ibid., 1-7.

adversaries culture, values, identity, and the context in which the conflict is taking place. These factors all shape and define the hybrid threat's strategy and cannot be addressed using conventional military actions alone; a point which is overlooked given the manual's conventional perspective.

In December 2011, the TRADOC G2 published its Decisive Action Training Environment (DATE) Manual 2.0. The manual is a fictional composite model that represents the conditions that exist within the complex real-world environment. The manual depicts five countries and portrays a full range of potential threat capabilities, used to drive training for Army units both at Combat Training Centers (CTC) and at home station.²⁷ The Army's CTCs began using DATE scenarios in 2012. The manual was updated, and version 3.0 was published in July 2017. The DATE manual mentions that future threats will be hybrid, but says very little else about the nature of hybrid threats. It is meant to be complimentary to *TC 7-100, Hybrid Threats*. However, in its description of the threat, it fails to address the threat's cognitive underpinnings.

It is noteworthy that the Army uses the term *hybrid threat* throughout its doctrine, and does not use the term *hybrid warfare*. While the distinction may seem trivial, it may explain why Army doctrine describes hybrid threat in terms of capabilities, and fails to explain the conceptual nature underlying hybrid threats. In the field of psychology and linguistics, linguistic relativity holds that the semantics of a language can affect the way in which its speakers perceive and conceptualize the world, and in the extreme, completely shape thought, a position known as determinism.²⁸ Linguistic determinism encompasses a range of views in which our thinking, or our worldview, is seen as being determined or shaped by language; it is a two-way process in that the kind of language we use is also influenced by the way we see the world. Language patterns

²⁷ TRADOC, "Threat Tactics Course."

²⁸ Phillip Wolff and Kevin Holmes, "Linguistic Relativity," *John Wiley & Sons, LTD*. 2 (May/June 2011): 253, accessed October 28, 2017, <http://wires.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WiresArticle/articles.html?doi=10.1002%2Fwics.104>.

our experience and the subject is constructed through discourse.²⁹ Some psychologists strongly assert that the language we use affects the way we think. Dr. Antonio Benitez, a professor of Developmental Biology at the University of Seville, argues that language acts as a filter, enhancer, or framer of perception and thought. He further explains that language does not limit our ability to perceive the world, but it does focus our perception, attention and thought on specific aspects of the world.³⁰

Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines hybrid as something heterogeneous in origin or composition. In other words, something that consists of dissimilar or diverse ingredients.³¹ It combines things that do not normally go together. They become something created for a unique purpose and become inseparable. Merriam-Webster defines a threat as an expression of intention to inflict injury or damage or one that threatens.³² Warfare, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is a struggle between competing entities.³³ Given these definitions, it is evident that use of the term hybrid in the context of Army doctrine to describe the future threat is appropriate. Furthermore, given that Army doctrine describes the means and ways future adversaries will compensate for the US Army's advantages seems appropriate given the definitions of hybrid and threat. However, the definition of warfare implies it is about the actual conflict between entities. The term hybrid warfare implies the subject is in the very nature of the conflict between entities.

²⁹ *Oxford Reference*, "Linguistic Determination," accessed October 28, 2017, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100107512>.

³⁰ Antonio Benitez, "How the Language We Speak Affects the Way We Think," *Psychology Today*, (February 2, 2017): 1, accessed October 28, 2017, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-biolinguistic-turn/201702/how-the-language-we-speak-affects-the-way-we-think>.

³¹ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, "Hybrid," accessed October 28, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com>.

³² *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, "Threat," accessed October 28, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com>.

³³ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, "Warfare," accessed October 28, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com>.

Merriam-Webster defines nature as the inherent character of something.³⁴ Therefore, it is possible that the vocabulary used in Army doctrine and in Soldiers' discourse about the concept of hybrid limits the ability to understand hybrid threats or hybrid warfare in a more holistic manner.

It is important to highlight what is meant by holistic. A good definition for holistic, as used here, is the idea that the whole is more than merely the sum of its parts.³⁵ In other words, when all the pieces are assembled together, the product is something new, with unique properties. The new "whole" cannot be understood simply by counting the pieces that went into its construction, it must be viewed as its own unique system, built for its own unique purpose. Hybrid warfare, then, is more than just the sum of the capabilities, resources, or tactics that it encompasses. It is something different, which emerges for a unique purpose.

Several recent conflicts serve as good examples to show how hybrid threat is more than just the application of unconventional, non-traditional, or blended tactics and capabilities. The examples presented here will show that the actors employed hybrid warfare as a matter of strategic choice and leveraged beliefs, values, norms and behaviors to their advantage. A good starting point is the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War, which provided a significant impetus to the discourse about hybrid threat in US military.

Exploiting Israeli Values

The 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah War, also called the July War, began on July 12, 2006 when Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) invaded Lebanon after Hezbollah kidnapped two IDF service members to precipitate a prisoner swap for Hezbollah members held by Israel. Israeli forces bombarded Hezbollah targets in Lebanon for weeks, and Hezbollah launched close to 4,000

³⁴ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, "Nature," accessed October 28, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com>.

³⁵ *Dictionary.com*, "Holistic," accessed February 18, 2018, <https://www.dictionary.com>.

rockets into Israel.³⁶ Despite heavy bombardment from the air, Israel was unable to stop Hezbollah's daily rocket attacks into Israel. On August 9, Israeli ground forces entered Lebanon. Military operations ended on August 14 with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1701. The conflict induced a heavy toll on the IDF, Hezbollah, and civilians in both Israel and Lebanon. In the end, however, both sides crafted narratives declaring victory. Hezbollah killed 116 Israeli soldiers and forty-three civilians, and was still firing rockets on northern Israeli settlements after the ceasefire began.³⁷ The number of Hezbollah members killed is not clear, as the group maintains tight control over what information it releases publicly, including its casualty figures. The purpose of this case study, however, is not to determine the victor, but rather to highlight Hezbollah's ability craft itself into a unique hybrid entity; utilize a combination of conventional and unconventional tactics; and employ a hybrid strategy which exploited culture, identity, and information to create multiple dilemmas that hindered the IDF's ability to destroy the organization. In fact, Patrick Porter, a Professor of Strategic Studies at the University of Exeter, asserts that as a result of Hezbollah's survival, the war politically strengthened it, leaving its power and stature unbroken in Lebanon.³⁸

Hezbollah, or "Party of God," is both a political movement and a Shia social organization in Lebanon, funded by Iran, with a military arm it calls "Islamic Resistance." The group emerged from Israel's 18-year occupation of Lebanon from 1982 to 2000 and was intended to bring the Iranian Shia revolution to Lebanon. It serves a good example of a modern hybrid threat; part welfare provider and part warfighting outfit. It also demonstrates that the relationship between

³⁶ Penny Mellies, " Hamas and Hezbollah: A Comparison of Tactics," in *Back to Basics: A Study of the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead*, edited by Scott Farquhar (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2009), 72.

³⁷ Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 173.

³⁸ Ibid.

military effectiveness and political values is not straightforward.³⁹ It possesses sophisticated weapons usually associated with state-controlled militaries yet hides among the civilian population. It possesses territory and can take and hold urban terrain. It combines colorful rhetoric with cutting edge military technology and expertise to operate as an agile force, organized in a decentralized network structure.⁴⁰ Hezbollah's use of violence is deliberate, and aligns with carefully calibrated strategies.⁴¹

After the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, Hezbollah began transforming its military wing from a purely guerilla force to a new model. This new model was based on Hezbollah's presumption that Israel no longer had a tolerance for prolonged war and high casualties. Hezbollah Secretary-General Hasan Nasrallah stated in a victory speech after the IDF withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 that "Israeli society is as weak as a spider web." He was convinced that Israel's biggest weakness was "Israeli society itself."⁴² Matt Matthews, a historian at the US Army's Combat Studies Institute, notes that Secretary Nasrallah believed Israeli post-war society was brittle and would not endure wars anymore, and that under pressure it would succumb to Arab aggression.⁴³ Secretary Nasrallah identified aspects of Israeli society that he believed were weaknesses, and exploited them for strategic purposes.

Hezbollah assessed that any future Israeli offensive action would rely heavily on air and artillery bombardment, limiting the commitment of ground forces to mitigate casualties. Therefore, it needed the offensive capability to penetrate well into Israel's border and mitigate

³⁹ Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes*, 178.

⁴⁰ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 45.

⁴¹ Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes*, 178.

⁴² Matt Matthews, "Hard Lessons Learned: A Comparison of the 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War and Operation Cast Lead – A Historical Overview," in *Back to Basics: A Study of the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead*, edited by Scott Farquhar (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2009), 14.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 15.

against the IDF's massive precision firepower. This drove Hezbollah to form several rocket artillery units. To undermine the IDF's ability to target and destroy Hezbollah's rockets with air strikes or artillery, they emplaced the launchers inside hilltop villages and towns. Hezbollah assessed that the IDF would not conduct air or artillery strikes in populated villages for fear of causing civilian casualties. And if the IDF did target those villages, Hezbollah would accuse the IDF of targeting civilians and capitalize on the opportunity to sway both international support and support among the Lebanese populace. Hezbollah once again exploited the Israeli's value system for their own tactical advantage.

However, in order to ensure maximum protection of its rocket forces, Hezbollah also mixed more conventional military tactics with its exploitative unconventional tactics. In order to protect its rocket forces from an IDF ground incursion, Hezbollah surrounded its rocket sites with underground tunnels and bunkers, explosive-ridden areas, and anti-tank units. The Hezbollah forces manning these defenses were armed with conventional anti-tank missiles and trained to conduct anti-tank ambushes in Iran and Syria. Mines and improvised explosives devices (IED) were emplaced in defensive belts to disrupt IDF mechanized forces, allowing Hezbollah to mass indirect fire on halted IDF convoys. These obstacles were intended to delay IDF ground forces and inflict as many casualties as possible, further capitalizing on Hezbollah's assessment that Israeli society would be intolerant of high casualties.⁴⁴

Hezbollah aggressively uses social assistance programs to exploit the concept of identity, portraying itself as an agent of Lebanese nationalism and an example of Shia Islamic political and military power to inspire other Shia populations like the Bahrainis, Saudis, Iraqis, and Yemenis. This allows Hezbollah to garner not only the support of the local Lebanese populace, but also generates a significant amount of financial support from Shia donors outside Lebanon. Hezbollah

⁴⁴ Amir Kulik, "Hezbollah vs. the IDF: The Operational Dimension," *Strategic Assessment*, 9, no. 3 (November 2006): 3, accessed October 27, 2017, <http://tau.ac.il/jcss/sa/v9n3p7Kulick.html>.

runs its own television station, *al-Manar*, which it uses for propaganda purposes and cultivation of the identity it seeks. A key strategy of Hezbollah's information operations campaign is exploitation of civilian casualties. This theme depicts Israel as indiscriminate and heavy-handed, responsible for the deaths of Muslim civilians. It further portrays Hezbollah as the protector of Muslim civilians. In many Muslim countries, a significant percentage of people who emphatically reject the beliefs and tactics of terrorist groups nevertheless are receptive to the claim that Israel is conducting a war on Islam.⁴⁵ This civilian-victim message cleverly exploits identity politics to leverage the mistrust many Muslims have for Israeli motives.

The Israeli military possesses formidable capabilities in the region, thus is easily portrayed as heavy-handed in their use of force. Matthews uses the analogy of the biblical story of David and Goliath, noting that Hezbollah portrays Israel as Goliath, making it easy to portray itself as David.⁴⁶ In the story, David uses Goliath's strengths against him, hitting him in the head with a rock to defeat him. Hezbollah successfully exploits global communications and the civilian-victim theme into a powerful political tool, which forces Israel to self-impose limits on its use of force. Matthews frames the dilemma this creates for Israel like this: "In order to deter, the IDF has to appear and operate like a Goliath. Yet, every time it appears and operates like a Goliath, it instantly loses media points."⁴⁷ Secretary Nasrallah played on the David versus Goliath image in the aftermath of Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon at the conclusion of the 2006 war, announcing a "divine victory" over Israel by a few thousand dedicated youths, blessed by God, holding back the strongest Army in the Middle East.⁴⁸ Hezbollah employed a narrative that

⁴⁵ Mellies, " Hamas and Hezbollah: A Comparison of Tactics," 106.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 107.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 114.

exploited regional and world opinion to shape perception of both Hezbollah and Israel. It used the concept of narrative to its own strategic advantage.

Image can be a powerful tool when employed in the strategic context. Hezbollah is very careful to cultivate its image as a protector of the Muslim faith, even though they are Shia and rose from the export of the Iranian Revolution. One of its primary strategic narratives is resistance to Israeli and Western onslaught, portraying its members as true defenders of Arab society and the Muslim faith sacrificing themselves for the greater good. Unlike democratic Israel, Hezbollah is not subject to “the harsh audit of a free press and a competitive political process.”⁴⁹ Therefore, it exploits instruments of intimidation within Lebanon to manipulate the foreign press and silence criticism.

As noted, Hezbollah emerged from the 2006 conflict with Israel in a better position politically than when it had started. This is attributable to the fact that Secretary Nasrallah set a realistic goal from the beginning, even stating that mere survival would be victory, and framed the conflict using the narrative of Hezbollah as the vanguard of a Lebanese national resistance, who withstood Israel’s coercion.⁵⁰ Annihilation of an adversary is a poor strategy in a hybrid war context, as the complete destruction of a hybrid adversary is nearly impossible; it will almost always survive in some form to fight again. Therefore, the result will usually be a stalemate (or at least a temporary advantage); victory is a matter of perception, left to be exploited by the belligerents involved. Hezbollah proved adept at exploiting its stalemate with the IDF as a victory using the David versus Goliath theme. This shows how hybrid warfare is a learning contest, and the belligerent who understands and exploits its adversary’s values and behaviors quickest possesses an advantage. It also highlights the strategic value of hybrid warfare and underscores the importance of understanding the strategic nature of hybrid threat. Hybrid warfare understands

⁴⁹ Mellies, “ Hamas and Hezbollah: A Comparison of Tactics,” 114.

⁵⁰ Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes*, 174.

that conflict is not fought towards an end-state, but that it creates the conditions for the next confrontation.

Hezbollah also sought to exploit time as a weapon against Israel. The Muslim concept of time relative to war takes a more long-term approach than the Western conceptualization, hence Hezbollah views their struggle with Israel as a long-term effort. Hezbollah believed a victory over Israel was preordained and required patience and a prolonged commitment. Noting Hezbollah's assessment that Israel was averse to a long commitment resulting in significant casualties, time was on Hezbollah's side. They understood Israel's aversion to attrition to the point of unwillingness to suffer casualties, and designed their strategy and operational approach to prolong the conflict and outlast the IDF. Hezbollah's strategy was to attack into Israel using its arsenal of rockets to weaken Israeli resolve while defending against Israeli attacks from well-prepared positions in southern Lebanon to delay the IDF, prolonging the conflict to support strategic narratives and sway world opinion.

Hezbollah also understood the value of operational shielding. Hezbollah fighters utilized the tactic of "hugging" or hiding amongst civilians designed to force IDF soldiers to abstain from attacking due to fears of causing civilian casualties and collateral damage. Hezbollah fighters often wore civilian dress and blended in with the civilian populace, and often used residential structures for firing positions, storage facilities, and hiding sites. Videos emerged showing Hezbollah fighters placing rocket launchers next to residential buildings and hiding them in residential garages. These tactics were part of a larger strategy designed to exploit Israeli values. They also assisted Hezbollah's propaganda campaign. When the IDF did cause civilian casualties or collateral damage, Hezbollah quickly capitalized by showing images of the casualties or damage on its media outlets. This all played into Hezbollah's larger strategy of weakening Israeli resolve and international support for Israel.

According to Patrick Porter, the IDF erred in its initial assessments of how Hezbollah would fight. The Israelis entered the conflict with plenty of combat experience, both on the

conventional side fighting its Arab neighbors, and fighting groups in its occupied territories who employed a variety of unconventional tactics. However, as Porter notes, the differences were dramatic between combating Palestinian irregulars in the West Bank and Lebanon's Hezbollah.⁵¹ He notes that Hezbollah developed its style of warfare from forces that were both more localized and more globalized than the so-called "Arab" context. Hezbollah's form of warfare evolved not from peculiarly Lebanese traditions, but from improvisation, internal debate, and external patronage from Iran, who are not Arabs, but Persians.⁵² Therefore, it is erroneous to assume that an "Arab" way of war exists. This logic fails to adequately understand the role of culture, the role of change in a community, and the influence of both external and internal forces. Porter asserts that if Hezbollah has a culture, it is one of self-reinvention.⁵³ Hezbollah's way of war was not rooted in semi-permanent Lebanese or Shia traditions, but rather has repeatedly changed since Israel's occupation of Lebanon began in 1982. Their capabilities and resources have improved dramatically since then, in part from the support of external benefactors like Iran and Syria. An Israeli soldier who fought in Lebanon for sixteen years remarked about Hezbollah's transformation, noting "it is like the difference between men who have guns and an army."⁵⁴

To be fair though, the portrayal of the IDF as an entity that failed to learn from its experience and adapt is not entirely accurate. Israeli Army Brigadier General Gal Hirsch, the Commander of the Galilee Division, undertook a deliberate transformation of his division in preparation for the 2006 conflict with Hezbollah. He understood the unique context of a conflict against Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon and developed tailored operational solutions. He notes that his solutions were "context related, with uniquely adapted operational formations for

⁵¹ Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes*, 188.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Jonathan Finer, "Israeli Soldiers Find a Tenacious Foe in Hezbollah," *Washington Post*, August 8, 2006, 1.

particular geographic areas.” He explains that operational learning is dynamic and requires constant change, noting that “when strategy does not change, operations and tactics have limited capabilities.”⁵⁵ This case study highlights how hybrid warfare is a learning contest which exploits values, culture, and narrative. These factors formed the foundation of Hezbollah’s hybrid strategy, which was unique and contextually-based. Brigadier General Hirsch understood this as well and transformed his unit to fit the unique operational context he faced.

Reflexive Control and the Use of Manipulation

In 2014 Russia made several military incursions into Ukrainian territory, taking control of strategic positions and infrastructure within the Ukrainian territory of Crimea and in Eastern Ukraine. Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula after a referendum in which Russia claims Crimeans voted to join the Russian Federation. Eastern Ukraine is still gripped in armed conflict between Ukrainian Government Forces and those backed by Russia. Russia successfully blended conventional military tactics and capabilities with non-military means and ways to successfully annex the Crimean Peninsula and control key areas of Eastern Ukraine, highlighting the distinct aspects that challenge our current definitions and understanding of hybrid threat.

As Russian actions in Crimea are discussed here, it is important to bear in mind that many of the actions taken by Russia were possible because of distinct characteristics that exist in Crimea. In other words, Russia’s actions in Crimea do not represent a generic model of hybrid warfare that are applicable in other situations. In fact, critics of many Western definitions of hybrid threat often note that the current depictions fail to understand that conditions that are unique to each conflict. The successful pursuit of Russian objectives in Crimea were aided by a largely pro-Russian civilian population, the presence of Russian military installations on the

⁵⁵ Gal Hirsch, *Defensive Shield* (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2016), 204.

Crimean Peninsula, a weakened Ukrainian political leadership, a weak Ukrainian military, and a near lack of reaction from the international community.

Russia's swift achievement of its political objectives, the annexation of Crimea, took many by surprise. The extensive manipulation of information was an important factor in Russia's victory. Some military writers in the west concluded from this that with the hybrid warfare approach Russia employed, it had developed a new way of war.⁵⁶ As Nicu Popescu of the European Institute for Security Studies notes, Russia executed a strategy which exploited favorable circumstances using a range of military means to achieve specific political objectives; it is not that Russia has found a new universal war-winning approach.⁵⁷

When analyzing Russia's employment of non-military means in Crimea, it is important to understand the context in which it occurred, particularly as it relates to the use of information and attempts to influence opinion. Antulio Echevarria, a Senior Fellow in the Foreign Policy Research Institute's Program on National Security, in an article about coercive practices, noted that the use of information and communication make one vulnerable to mirror-imaging, that is projecting one's own values and ways of thinking onto one's adversary.⁵⁸ Such projections often produce faulty assumptions about what one's adversaries hold dear and how they will behave. Russian strategic narratives found a receptive audience in Crimea, and to a lesser extent in Eastern Ukraine, largely because of large ethnic Russian populations in those regions. The Russians portrayed the Maidan protestors as fascists, asserting that Russia was the protector of ethnic Russians in Ukraine. Clearly this narrative was successful in large part because of the pro-

⁵⁶ Bettina Renz, "Russian Military Capabilities After 20 Years of Reform," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 56, no. 3 (2014): 61.

⁵⁷ Nicu Popescu, "Hybrid Warfare: Neither New nor Only Russian," Alert 4, European Institute for Security Studies, 2015, 2, accessed November 1, 2017, http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Alert_4_hybrid_warfare.pdf.

⁵⁸ Antulio Echevarria, "How We Should Think About Gray Zone Wars," *Infinity Journal* 5, no. 1 (2015): 16.

Russian disposition among many in the target population, and would not produce the same results in different contexts where pro-Russian sentiment was less certain.

Crimea was an autonomous republic in the Republic of Ukraine but had a population that was 60 percent ethnic Russian. This is due in not only to Crimea's history as a once-Russian territory, but also to deliberate Russian efforts to shape the environment. Crimea was not only important to Russia for historical reasons, but for strategic ones as well. The Russian Black Sea naval base, located on the Crimean Peninsula, provided access for the Russian Fleet to the Black and the Mediterranean Seas. The Black Sea Fleet base affected the ethnic and social structure of the Crimean Peninsula. Russian citizens who were called into mandatory military service who served in the Crimean Peninsula often stayed in Crimea when their service was over.⁵⁹ Sevastapol, the capital of Crimea, was also home to the Black Sea Branch of Moscow University, where former officers of Russian Special Services worked as teachers, and graduates often stayed to work in the mass media operating in Crimea or in state institutions of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Crimea was also home to a wide circle of political and non-governmental organizations supported and financed by Russia.⁶⁰ Russia also adopted a policy of granting Russian citizenship to people in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.

Russia exploited these conditions to foment unrest amongst the populace directed at the Ukrainian government as early as 1992.⁶¹ In 2006, the President of Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko, stated that the Russian Black Sea Naval Base in Crimea was a base of activity of Russian special services on the Crimean Peninsula. Their task was not only to conduct counterintelligence in seeking to protect the Sevastapol military base, but also the collection of information about the

⁵⁹ Charles Bartles and Roger McDermott, "Russia Military Operations in Crimea," *Problems of Post-Communism* 61, no. 6 (2014): 46.

⁶⁰ L. Roslycky, "Russian Smart Power in Crimea: Sowing Seeds of Thrust," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 11 (2011): 303.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

military, political, economic, and social situation in Crimea, and the instigation of pro-Russian and separatist attitudes through pro-Russian public organizations and mass media.⁶² Possessing a military base on the peninsula provided Russia a distinct advantage once it decided to escalate its campaign to annex Crimea. In early 2014, over 150,000 Russian troops poured into Crimea through the Black Sea Naval Base under the guise of conducting a military exercise. Russia's political objective was to demonstrate its resolve to defend its interests in Ukraine by military means and dissuade any external forces from possible intervention.⁶³

In late February 2014, Russian Special Forces and members of the Russian Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff started to instigate and organize pro-Russian rallies directed against Ukrainian authorities. Russia exploited the favorable demographic situation on the peninsula. Russia also capitalized on opportunity when Ukrainian authorities decided to abolish the status of Russian as an official language, using the issue to further foment discontent among Crimea's pro-Russian population.⁶⁴ The Russian narrative asserted that overthrown Ukrainian President Yanukovich had been overthrown illegally, and that Russian speakers in Crimea were facing a threat.⁶⁵

About a week after the protests began, Russian Special Forces units, disguised as civilians and operating amongst the pro-Russian civilian population and in conjunction with irregular and criminal groups, seized strategic objectives: the Parliament of Crimea and the Council of Ministers building, the Simferopol international airport and the Belbek airport, the television station, Ukrainian air defense installations, and blocked Ukrainian military units

⁶² Roslycky, "Russian Smart Power in Crimea: Sowing Seeds of Thrust," 303.

⁶³ Johan Norberg, "The Use of Russia's Military in the Crimean Crisis," The Carnegie Endowment, accessed November 1, 2017, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/03/13/use-of-russia-s-military-in-crimean-crisis>.

⁶⁴ S. Cimbala, "Sun Tzu and Salami Tactics: Vladimir Putin and Military Persuasion in Ukraine," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 27, no. 3 (2014): 371.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

deployed in Crimea.⁶⁶ They also cut off lines of communication, disrupted radio and internet connections, and established checkpoints on major roads leading to the Crimean Peninsula.⁶⁷ These actions effectively cut off the Crimean Peninsula from the rest of Ukraine.

Shortly after, uniformed Russian servicemen, however bearing no unit insignia, began securing key sites on the Crimean Peninsula; many of the same sites that Russian plain-clothed special forces troops and Russian-supported criminal groups had seized. These uniformed troops began helping local civilians, taking pictures with women and children, and generally behaving politely and establishing good relations with the civilian populace.⁶⁸ Merriam-Webster defines meaning as the end, purpose or significance of something.⁶⁹ The purpose, or significance of Russia's actions was to shape perceptions and expectations. In other words, the meaning of these actions is an important part of Russia's hybrid strategy. Russia denied involvement in the initial chaos surrounding the protests and seizure of key sites and portrayed its uniformed troops as peace-keepers who brought stability to a region gripped with chaos, there to protect Russian speaking people of the region.

Recall both Hoffman's definition of hybrid threat and the US Army's definition in doctrine include the element of criminal threats. US Army doctrine does not elaborate on the use of criminal threats, nor how it will manifest itself. Hoffman, in his more detailed explanation of the element of criminal threats, explained that criminal activities are intended to cause disorder and chaos within the zone of military actions.⁷⁰ However, in Crimea, the actions of non-regular

⁶⁶ Emmanuel Karagianis, "The Russian Interventions in South Ossetia and Crimea Compared: Military Performance, Legitimacy, and Goals," *Contemporary Security Policy* 35, no. 3 (2015): 408.

⁶⁷ Bartles and McDermott, "Russia Military Operations in Crimea," 63.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, "Meaning," accessed October 28, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com>.

⁷⁰ Francis Hoffman, *Conflicts in the XXI Century: The Rise of Hybrid Warfare* (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007), 29.

formations and criminal elements were closely integrated with the actions of Russian Special Forces troops and intelligence officials. Russian military authorities controlled the activities of these entities, and employed them to attack strategic objectives, not to inflict chaos.⁷¹

Russia also controlled a host of non-regular formations in Crimea that have been referred to in public discourse as Crimean self-defense forces. These groups consisted of a conglomeration of private security contractors, criminals, and gangs assembled and controlled by Russian military authorities. These groups were employed in conjunction with Russian Special Forces to seize the Crimean Parliament, airports, and other strategic objectives in Crimea. Some of the groups were employed to promote fear. They conducted kidnappings and tortured pro-Ukrainian activists, established illegal checkpoints, and disrupted the work of journalists.⁷²

An important component of the Russian campaigns in both Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, which has gotten a great deal of attention among those who study Russia, has been the application of *reflexive control*. Reflexive control is a uniquely Russian concept based on *maskirovka*, an old Soviet notion in which one conveys to an opponent specifically prepared information to incline him to voluntarily make the predetermined decision desired by the initiator of the action.⁷³ The goal of reflexive control is to ‘control’ the ‘reflex’ of the opponent by creating a certain model of behavior in the system it seeks to control.⁷⁴ The most fundamental way to do this is to locate the weak link in the system and exploit it through moral arguments, psychological tactics, or appeals

⁷¹ *Janes Intelligence Review*, “The Rising Influence of Russian Special Forces” (2014): 4, accessed November 2, 2017, http://www.janes360.com/images/assets/299/46299/The_rising_influence_of_Russian_special_forces.pdf.

⁷² András Rácz, “Russia’s Hybrid Warfare in Ukraine: Breaking Enemy’s Ability to Resist,” Report 43, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, June 2015, 41, accessed November 2, 2017, http://www.fia.fi/en/publication/514/russia_s_hybrid_war_in_ukraine/.

⁷³ Timothy Thomas, “Russia’s Reflexive Control Theory and the Military,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 17 (2004): 237.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

to specific leaders' character.⁷⁵ As Russian Colonel S. A. Komov, a leader in contemporary Russian military theory noted, the basic elements of reflexive control include distraction, overload, paralysis, exhaustion, deception, division, pacification, deterrence, provocation, suggestion, and pressure, all with the intent of manipulation.⁷⁶ Reflexive control dictates that Russia choose actions most advantageous to its overall objectives by shaping its adversary's perceptions of the situation. Colonel Komov wrote that "when employing the theory of reflexive control, you paint a picture of the world, that, if successful your opponent accepts...this false picture compels your opponent to act in your favor."⁷⁷ In other words, Russia exploited an adversary's beliefs and values, and manipulated perceptions, just as Hezbollah did in the earlier example.

In Ukraine, Russia successfully used this technique to prevent the US and its European allies from intervening with military force, allowing Russia to continue its efforts to disrupt and influence Ukraine through both military and non-military means. Russia exploited pre-existing dispositions among its adversaries and persuaded leaders in the West to do what they already wanted to do in the first place, namely to remain on the sidelines as Russia dismantled Ukraine.⁷⁸ The key elements of Russia's reflexive control techniques in Ukraine have been denial and deception operations to obfuscate the presence of Russian forces in Ukraine using soldiers wearing uniforms bearing no insignia; concealing Russian goals and objectives in the conflict; fomenting uprisings and violent activity then portraying Russian troops as the providers of security and stability; and exploiting the large ethnic Russian population and the presence of

⁷⁵ Thomas, "Russia's Reflexive Control Theory and the Military," 238.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 248.

⁷⁷ Mark Mateski, "Russia, Reflexive Control, and the Subtle Art of Red Teaming," *Red Team Journal* (October 13, 2013), accessed November 2, 2017, <https://redteamjournal.com/2016/10/reflexive-control/>.

⁷⁸ Maria Snegovaya, "Putin's Information Warfare in Ukraine," Russia Report 1, Institute for the Study of War, Washington DC, September 2015, 2.

Russian military facilities in Crimea to portray Russia as an interested power rather than a party to the conflict. This approach has achieved positive results for Russia, allowing it to sideline the West and gain time to build and expand its own military involvement in Ukraine. It even managed to sow discord within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as members were unable to agree on how to respond.⁷⁹ Russia's actions in Ukraine, like Hezbollah's actions in Lebanon, were a unique arrangement of actions which formed the foundation of a contextually-based strategy.

As noted earlier, hybrid warfare contains an element of learning and understanding each situation in its own unique context. The socio-cultural conditions in Crimea differ markedly from those in Eastern Ukraine. Russian authorities understood this. In Crimea, Russia exploited the unique conditions to rapidly achieve their strategic objectives. In Eastern Ukraine, Russia has taken a much different approach. Andrew Monaghan, a Visiting Fellow at the Changing Character of War Program at Pembroke College in Oxford, notes that categorizing Russian actions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine together under the umbrella term of 'hybrid warfare' draws a veil over the more conventional aspects of the war in Eastern Ukraine.⁸⁰ While Russia employed non-military means of power, the campaign in Eastern Ukraine relied more on conventional military force. The battles at Debaltsevo and Donbass airport involved Russian Special Forces and paramilitary forces under Russian control, and featured combat using armor, artillery, multiple-launch rocket systems, unmanned aerial systems, and electronic warfare. During these battles, massed artillery strikes were used to considerable lethal effect against Ukrainian military forces.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Snegovaya, "Putin's Information Warfare in Ukraine," 2.

⁸⁰ Andrew Monaghan, "Putin's Way of War: The 'War' in Russia's 'Hybrid Warfare,'" *Parameters* 45, no. 4 (Winter 2015-2016): 65.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

Much of the Western analysis, though, grouped Russian actions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine together, attributing them to a new Russian way of hybrid warfare. As Bettina Renz and Hanna Smith of the University of Helsinki note, Russian-language academic and media coverage write about hybrid warfare in reference to Western discussions of warfare. They further note that after the Crimean annexation, Western military analysts often attributed the Russian approach to the writings of Russian Chief of the General Staff Valeri Gerasimov in 2013. This attribution is flawed, according to Renz and Smith, because it is selective and hindsight-based. What Gerasimov stated, they note, is the increasing importance of non-military tools in conflicts, including political, economic, informational and humanitarian.⁸²

As many of the definitions of hybrid warfare note, a mix of both military and non-military means is a common component. The exploitation of information and socio-cultural conditions were an important component of the Russian approach in Crimea, perhaps more important than the application of military force. However, as Renz and Smith note, Crimea was not “won” with non-military means alone. Russia’s exploitative efforts were backed by Russian Special Forces and auxiliary fighters and the implicit threat of overwhelming Russian military force. Charles Bartles notes labeling Russian use of information to influence political processes in other countries as ‘hybrid warfare’ is partially the result of attempts by some Western analysts to create a model of Russian ‘hybrid warfare’ reverse-engineered from the approach pursued in Crimea. He points out that as Russian use of information preceded the use of limited military force in Crimea, some inferred that Russian information campaigns or attempts to influence public opinion elsewhere represented the first phase of Russian ‘hybrid warfare’ campaigns.⁸³ It is fallacious to conclude that Russian actions in Crimea, coupled with a cursory understanding of

⁸² Bettina Renz and Hanna Smith, “Russia and Hybrid Warfare – Going Beyond the Label,” *The Aleksanteri Papers*, January 2016, 7, accessed October 15, 2017, <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/download/file/fid/4920>.

⁸³ Charles Bartles, “Getting Gerasimov Right,” *Military Review* (January-February 2016): 34.

Gerasimov's writings, represented a Russian model of hybrid warfare that could be applied universally in other theaters.

Just as Hezbollah did in Lebanon, Russia understood the importance of exploiting values for strategic purposes. Russia leveraged cultural ties to foment discontent and undermine its Ukrainian adversary. Russia also understood how to capitalize on behavior to achieve its strategic ends. It not only employed reflexive control to influence its adversaries in Ukraine, but also knew how to keep the level of conflict below a threshold that would provoke a NATO military response. As noted earlier, hybrid warfare is a learning contest, and dangerous violent extremist organizations like the Islamic State and Al Qaeda learn from these conflicts as well.

Violent Extremists Learn Too

In 2014 the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) overtook large swaths of terrain in Northern Iraq and Syria, defeating Iraqi military units in large-scale combat operations, capturing a tremendous amount of conventional military equipment in the process. This marked a significant point in the evolution of Al Qaeda in Iraq then ISIS, from an insurgent group fighting in Iraq against the US occupation and the newly formed Iraqi Government in the early 2000s, to a transnational group using hybrid warfare to establish an Islamic caliphate. Although Iraqi Security Forces, with the help of the United States and other coalition partners, has retaken much of the territory seized by ISIS in 2014, ISIS has demonstrated an acute ability to modify its composition and tactics, blend modes of warfare, and exploit information in both the regional and international arenas to survive.

The blending of conventional and unconventional tactics and equipment that ISIS employed clearly fits within earlier definitions of hybrid threat, such as Hoffman's. ISIS blended its military actions aimed at securing terrain with terror attacks targeting civilians in Iraq, Syria, and abroad. It has committed acts that have drawn international condemnation such as the mass murdering of civilians, looting and pillaging, and the destruction of cultural icons. Scott Jasper

and Scott Moreland, both faculty members at the Naval Postgraduate School, in an article about ISIS as a hybrid threat, expanded upon Hoffman's earlier definition of hybrid threat, adding the concepts of terrorism and disregard for international law. They note that hybrid threats may utilize terror campaigns to proliferate hate and strike fear against cultures, identities, and beliefs that oppose their own. They further note that hybrid threats often cynically view international laws as a constraint upon their adversaries that can be exploited.⁸⁴ In other words, they exploit their adversary's value systems, and adherence to international laws and norms, just as Hezbollah exploited the Israeli's values.

In its assault to seize Mosul in June 2014, ISIS forces numbered between 500 and 800 fighters, and traveled in 150 vehicles in conventional formations. Their formations blended civilian vehicles and captured military vehicles. In subsequent assaults in Baiji and Tikrit, ISIS deployed over 60 tactical military vehicles.⁸⁵ In May 2015, in its quest to seize Ramadi, ISIS changed its tactics and employed less conventional means, using 27 vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices mounted on the chassis of stolen armored vehicles to destroy Iraqi Army positions.⁸⁶ ISIS again displayed its ability to employ conventional military tactics six months later in defending Ramadi against the Iraqi Army's bid to re-take the city, constructing elaborate defenses which included the use of snipers to cover obstacles, and the incorporation of machine-gun and mortar fire to hold terrain.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Scott Jasper and Scott Moreland, "ISIS: An Adaptive Hybrid Threat in Transition," *Small Wars Journal* (October 29, 2016): 2, accessed November 10, 2017, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/isis-an-adaptive-hybrid-threat-in-transition>.

⁸⁵ Jessica Lewis, "The Terrorist Army Marching on Baghdad," *Wall Street Journal*, June 13, 2014, 1, accessed November 10, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/jessica-lewis-the-terrorist-army-marching-on-baghdad-1402614950>.

⁸⁶ Margaret Coker, "How Islamic State's Win in Ramadi Reveals New Weapons, Tactical Sophistication and Prowess," *Wall Street Journal*, May 25, 2015, 1, accessed November 10, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/islamic-states-gains-reveal-new-prowess-on-battlefield-1432592298>.

⁸⁷ Michael R. Gordon, "Iraqi Forces Prepare Next U.S.-Backed Attack on ISIS, With Mosul on the Horizon," *The New York Times*, November 30, 2015, 1.

The exploitation of fear was a significant component of ISIS' strategy. As ISIS seized towns in Syria and Iraq in 2014 they used cruel acts of terrorism to subdue local populations, destroyed Shiite holy sites, and executed those who resisted. They supported this with a propaganda campaign showing beheadings of Westerners in an effort to exploit fear and deter Western intervention.⁸⁸ In late 2015, as ISIS lost much of the territory it seized to the US-backed Iraqi Army's offensive in northern Iraq, it turned to exporting terror attacks abroad in an attempt to deter Western nations from backing the Iraqi Army and interfering in Iraq and Syria. ISIS-sponsored attacks include the November 2015 attacks in Paris, the March 2016 attack at the Brussels airport, the June 2016 attack at an Orlando nightclub in the US, the July 2016 vehicle attack in Nice, France, and the March 2017 vehicle attack outside Westminster Palace in the United Kingdom. ISIS media outlets exploit radical Islamic sentiments among followers abroad, encouraging individuals to attack targets Western countries in so-called "lone-wolf attacks," for which ISIS takes credit to further its campaign of fear and intimidation to deter Western interference in Iraq and Syria. Some of the attacks noted here fall into this category.

ISIS used the internet and other media to distribute propaganda showing its ruthless tactics, mass executions, and gory punishments to incite fear as it seized large swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria in 2014. In 2015, ISIS exploited the internet by hacking the Twitter and YouTube feeds at US Central Command to publish lists of generals and addresses along with propaganda videos.⁸⁹ However, in 2015, as it ceded territory back to the Iraqi Army in Northern Iraq, ISIS' media wing utilized a different tactic, one that had been used successfully by Hezbollah over a decade earlier. ISIS produced nearly 900 pieces of Arab-language propaganda,

⁸⁸ Rukmini Callimachi, "Obama Calls Islamic State's Killing of Peter Kassig Pure Evil," *The New York Times*, November 16, 2014, 1, accessed November 10, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/17/world/middleeast/peter-kassig-isis-video-execution.html>.

⁸⁹ David Alexander and Jim Finkle, "Apparent Islamic State Backers Hack U.S. Military Twitter Feed," *Reuters*, January 12, 2015, 1, accessed November 10, 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-cybersecurity-centcom-hack/apparent-islamic-state-backers-hack-u-s-military-twitter-feed-idUSKBN0KL1UZ20150112>.

most focused on quality-of-life issues such as food, utilities, and schools in an attempt to portray a utopian view of life under their caliphate.⁹⁰ ISIS propaganda focused not only on the portrayal of what it meant to be a “good Muslim,” as Hezbollah did in Israel nearly a decade earlier, but also capitalized on the “David and Goliath” theme by portraying the US and its coalition partners as Goliath.

As Jasper and Moreland note, the disregard for international law has been a hallmark of ISIS’ strategy. In fact, more than merely displaying their own disregard for international law, ISIS attempts to exploit its adversary’s values and regard for international norms and statutes. Again, it is important to understand this contextually. What Western law prescribes is often different than what Islamic Law prescribes. And even ISIS’ interpretation of Islamic law is not consistent with how many Muslims choose to observe Islamic law. ISIS placed civilians within its convoy of 500 vehicles to deter coalition airstrikes as it fled the city of Manbij in northern Syria in August 2016.⁹¹ ISIS has also exploited the refugee crisis created by its campaign across Syria and Iraq. ISIS has moved operatives across Europe, posing as refugees. The attackers responsible for the 2015 attack in Paris posed as Syrian refugees, moving through Turkey into Greece in a boat filled with dozens of legitimate Syrian refugees. They were traveling with other ISIS operatives who intended to commit a separate attack, but were discovered and arrested at a refugee center in Salzburg, Austria with fake Syrian passports.⁹²

⁹⁰ Margaret Coker and Alexis Flynn, “In a Shift, Islamic State Tries to Show it Can Govern,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 14, 2015, 1, accessed November 10, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/in-a-shift-islamic-state-tries-to-show-it-can-govern-1444779561>.

⁹¹ Mazin Sidahmed, “ISIS Appears to Use Civilians as Human Shields to Flee Syrian Town,” *The Guardian*, August 19, 2016, 1, accessed November 10, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/19/isis-civilians-syria-manbij-human-shield>.

⁹² Scott Bronstein, “ISIS Planned for More Operatives, Targets During Paris Attacks,” *CNN Investigations*, September 5, 2016, accessed November 10, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/05/politics/isis-suspects-terrorism-europe-documents/index.html>.

Patrick Porter states that fear of losing in conflict makes adaptation vital. He notes that states and polities study, spy and copy from one another, adapt desirable features of others' militaries, seek advisors, and adopt doctrines or other military styles. Military organizations derive from the culture of their parent societies, but they are also part of a worldwide profession of state-based militaries that borrow from each other.⁹³ Although not a state entity, Al Qaeda exhibits many of the characteristics in Porter's description noted here.

Globalization has lent itself not just to the transfer of military thought on strategy but has also contributed to the proliferation and exploitation of criminal activity to support hybrid wars. In 2014, ISIS took in over \$2 billion, much of it from selling oil from seized oil fields on the black market.⁹⁴ Kidnapping and extortion also contribute significantly to ISIS' war chest. Additionally, in Afghanistan, even after over a decade of war and eradication efforts by the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF), the Taliban still earn about \$400 million annually from the production, cultivation, and exportation of opium.⁹⁵ Porter also points out that the global market helps shape *jihad*. He notes that insurgent groups who are brought together through a world bazaar established to facilitate criminal transactions also functions as a medium to transfer ideas on the means for conducting attacks, what he calls "knowledge traffic."⁹⁶

What these examples all show is that hybrid threats are unique and contextually oriented strategies. They are also exploitative. Understanding hybrid threat is not accomplished by counting Lego pieces or examining models built from Lego pieces. We must understand that

⁹³ Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes*, 32.

⁹⁴ Jose Paliery, "Inside the \$2 Billion ISIS War Machine," *CNN Money*, December 11, 2015, accessed November 10, 2017, <http://money.cnn.com/2015/12/06/news/isis-funding/index.html>.

⁹⁵ Hashim Wahdatyar, "How Opium Fuels the Taliban's War Machine," *The Diplomat*, October 28, 2016, accessed November 10, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/10/how-opium-fuels-the-talibans-war-machine-in-afghanistan/>.

⁹⁶ Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes*, 64.

hybrid threat is a strategy, and though some hybrid threats may share common building blocks, each contains its own unique logic with its own system of reasoning applicable to its context.

Toward a Holistic Understanding of Hybrid Strategy

Hashim Wahdatyar, of ACCION International in Washington DC, wrote that one needs to “be cautious in simply defining a hybrid adversary as any that engages in multiple forms of warfare because this can include just about every type of organization from criminal gangs to the German Wehrmacht.”⁹⁷ History is replete with examples of armed conflicts in which one or more of the belligerents employed a variety of capabilities to achieve their goals. It seems only natural that a force would use any and every means available to it to achieve victory. As US military analysts studied recent conflicts in the early twenty-first century and developed a model of future threats the US military would confront, they developed a theory of hybrid threat. However, the problem with models is that their focus is on sameness. In other words, they seek to create a representation that applies universally, which fails to account for the unique context of each situation. Another pitfall, as Christopher Bowers notes, is that they set the aperture too wide in identifying who and what hybrid threat is.⁹⁸ Additionally, definitions tended to focus on the employment of capabilities. The problem is that these theories, models, and definitions fail to treat hybrid warfare as a strategy, ignoring the cognitive underpinnings of hybrid warfare. Instead, they treat hybrid warfare as tactics, tending to focus on capabilities. The result of this is that it presents an overly simplistic and vague description of hybrid warfare, one that fails to consider underlying complexity of different conflicts or actors.

⁹⁷ Christopher Bowers, “Identifying Emerging Hybrid Adversaries,” *Parameters* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 40, accessed November 10, 2017, <http://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/hybrid%20Bowers.pdf>.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

Current definitions of hybrid warfare or hybrid threat tend to overlook the concept's relationship to its source of power and authority.⁹⁹ They emphasize that a nation or polity's approach to hybrid warfare is intimately tied to the political institution from which it derives its power. That polity's policy drives its ends, which guides the strategic and operational approaches. Prussian theorist Carl von Clausewitz described war as an extension of policy, noting its nature and character are shaped by the aim of the underlying policy, when he wrote "war is an act of force to compel the enemy to do our will...war is merely the continuation of policy by other means."¹⁰⁰ Thomas Mahnken developed a concept he called *strategic culture*, which describes patterns of strategic behavior exhibited by an actor, either state or non-state, and includes the set of shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behavior derived from common experiences and accepted narratives that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, which determine appropriate ends and means for achieving security objectives.¹⁰¹

Israeli military theorists describe hybrid warfare as a method of social warfare, which is unbounded by social constraints.¹⁰² This allows the Israelis to understand the concept of hybrid warfare beyond just the physical advantages gained through the combination of conventional and unconventional technology or tactics. Rather, it enables understanding the cognitive advantages presented by the lack of social restrictions that conventional state forces must adhere to such as the Law of Land Warfare, the Geneva Convention, or rules of engagement. The Israeli

⁹⁹ Amos Fox and Andrew Rossow, "Making Sense of Russian Hybrid Warfare: A Brief Assessment of the Russo-Ukrainian War," The Institute of Land Warfare, No. 112, Association of the United States Army, March 2017, accessed November 10, 2017, <https://www.USA.org/publications/making-sense-russian-hybrid-warfare>.

¹⁰⁰ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 87.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Mahnken, "United States Strategic Culture," Defense Threat Reduction Agency, Comparative Strategic Studies Curriculum, November 2006, 1-5, accessed November 10, 2017, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/dtra/mahnken_strat_culture.pdf.

¹⁰² Timothy McCullough, "The Inadequacy of Definition and the Utility of a Theory of Hybrid Warfare" (Master's Thesis, School of Advanced Military Studies, 2012), 14.

understanding of hybrid warfare focusses on the synergy created by the mixture of hybrid components — to include the cognitive — to produce a military effect rather than on the differences in functional capabilities within a hybrid threat. The Israeli’s hybrid warfare theory understands the logic or theoretical nature of hybrid warfare, rather than an “overarching description that fails to transition from one case study to another.”¹⁰³

Klaus Krippendorf, a Professor of Communications at the University of Pennsylvania, in his book *The Semantic Turn: A New Foundation for Design*, explains how people attribute meanings to artifacts and interact with them accordingly. He notes that humans do not see and act on the physical qualities of things, but on what they mean to them. He states that “one always acts according to the meaning of whatever one faces . . . and the consequences of these actions in turn become part of the meaning of what one interacts with.”¹⁰⁴ Meanings are always someone’s construction and depend on context and culture. Their actions imply the meanings they have constructed. Thus, hybrid warfare is about the meaning of a belligerent’s actions, not about the capabilities or tactics they employ. The belligerent constructs meaning contextually, thus making it his own unique strategy. Hezbollah’s actions in the 2006 conflict with the IDF were not about the physical capabilities or tactics they employed against the IDF, but were about the meaning they constructed (resisting tyranny and defending the Muslim faith).

If we are to understand hybrid warfare, we must view it as a strategic concept which develops from the aggregation of beliefs, values, norms, and behaviors of the entity that employs it, which seeks to exploit those same characteristics in the adversary. We must understand that future conflicts will be complex, and that no one model will fit universally. Though we may be able to identify some tactics or common characteristics of future threats, we must also

¹⁰³ McCullough, “The Inadequacy of Definition and the Utility of a Theory of Hybrid Warfare,” 15.

¹⁰⁴ Klaus Krippendorf, *The Semantic Turn: A New Foundation for Design* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2006), 58.

acknowledge that there will be unique characteristics derived from the very essential nature of the threat. Therefore, understanding hybrid warfare requires us to change our mindset. It requires us to move away from reliance on doctrinal descriptors and universal models, towards a mindset where we embrace — or at least accept — complexity. It requires us to acknowledge the importance of knowing our enemy rather than merely knowing how our doctrine dictates we fight. As Chinese military theorist Sun Tzu stated in *The Art of Warfare*, “he who knows the enemy and himself will never in a hundred battles be at risk; he who does not know the enemy but knows himself will sometimes win and sometimes lose; he who knows neither the enemy nor himself will be at risk in every battle.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Sun Tzu, *The Art of Warfare*, trans. Robert T. Ames (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 113.

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