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## Hybrid Warfare as a Modern Form of Security Threat

**Abstract:** *Hybrid warfare is an insufficiently defined term, both in theory and in security practice, which requires a more comprehensive scientific research into this new form of security threat. Hybrid war has become a challenge for military strategists and international relations, because it implies a complex conflict in which classic military operations are combined with asymmetric tactics, cyber attacks, propaganda and other non-military activities. This paper, through an interdisciplinary approach, analyzes the concept of hybrid warfare, its characteristics and dimensions, focusing on the evolution of armed conflicts, the integration of various means and techniques, changes in the command system, the role of special military units and robotic systems. In addition, the paper points to the international dimension of hybrid warfare, emphasizing the importance of cooperation between different actors in order to effectively counter hybrid threats. The aim of the paper is to provide an insight into the complexity and challenges that hybrid warfare presents, and to emphasize the necessity of developing new strategies and policies to combat hybrid threats, preserve peace and security.*

**Keywords:** *hybrid warfare, evolution of armed conflicts, special military units, international cooperation.*

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## Introduction

The traditional division of security threats into those of human, natural and technical technological origin may cause certain doubts today. Accordingly, classic armed attacks of one state against another (conventional wars), in which large numbers of people are killed and a great deal of material damage is caused, were not contested until recently. However, today, modern states wage different wars, by abusing geophysical weapons and causing natural disasters on the territory of another state. This type of warfare results in: massive human losses, destruction of critical infrastructure, endangerment of the environment and causing great material damage (Mijalković, 2018). Classic wars are losing their primacy in social conflicts and "hybrid wars" are becoming a new strategic form of endangering security.

There has almost been no period in the history of mankind in which wars were not fought. Wars themselves can be defined as the most dangerous forms of social conflict. Hybrid wars as a modern form of armed conflict are a combination of military and non-military ways of warfare with the aim of achieving certain political, economic or other goals. This new way of warfare requires that military forces fully adapt and adopt new strategies and tactics in order to properly respond to all challenges, risks and threats that jeopardize security.

The main purpose of the wars was to subjugate the opponent and occupy the territory. In earlier times, wars were fought on a precisely defined territory, at a precisely defined time, with clearly defined parties to the conflict. That form of conflict ended in three ways: victory, surrender or truce of the conflicting parties (Rančić, Beriša, 2018).

Some authors believe that the term "hybrid warfare" was used for the first time only in 2005 by Frank Hoffman and General James Mattis at one of the US defense forums. However, it can be found in the literature that the term "hybrid war" was also used earlier, but in a narrower sense of interpreting the relationship between special forces and different types and branches of the army (Ilić, 2017).

The term "hybrid warfare" has been used since 2001, when the conflict between the US and Afghanistan began. The asymmetric relationship is the first thing that is noticed in this war, because the difference in equipment, training and strength between the conflicting parties is clearly visible (Cvetković et al., 2019).

What has changed in relation to the war itself and the use of armed forces is that the aim is to subdue the enemy without a direct armed conflict, through the execution of special operations with the maximum use of modern technology, special military units, terrorist activities and organized crime (Rančić, Beriša, 2018).

The ways of warfare that are today described as hybrid are not alien to mankind, but have been forms of armed conflict since ancient times. In the time of ancient Rome, it was not uncommon for the regular army of Rome to clash with different opponents such as criminal gangs or mercenaries practiced in their tactics from classic frontal combat to assassination (Cvetković et al., 2019: 325).

As a reaction to the hybrid form of conflict, there was the formation of civil defense and protection, the purpose of which is to respond in a timely manner to potential threats to the security of the state and to prepare all elements of society to properly react to crisis situations in order to increase the readiness of their own forces to defend against hybrid war (Milošević, 2019: 181).

The new form of world conflict knows no boundaries: spatial, temporal or social. It does not know the exact parties, fronts, means, participants, victims, aggressors or the right time of the beginning of the conflict, let alone the end and completion (Milošević, 2018: 307).

If we were to observe the statement of the Prussian general Clausewitz that war is the extended arm of politics and that war is politics by other means, a parallel could be drawn with modern armed conflicts which represent the extended arm of war with a combination of modern technologies. If war is politics by other means, then modern armed conflict is war by all means (Milošević, 2019: 174).

The frontal form of armed conflict is a thing of the past and obsolescence. Now the armed conflict is fully open and comprehensive, very complex and full of frequent changes in activities and the flow of

operations. The enemy tends to avoid direct contact with the opponent at all times so that a clear line of demarcation is not formed. Violence is no longer the main choice for achieving victory in war, but the aim is to achieve victory without the use of force (Rančić, Beriša, 2018: 257).

### **Hybrid War Definition**

Every armed conflict is based on the application of classical military means and techniques. In the Military Encyclopedia, war is defined as "a complex and intense conflict, caused by class, economic and political contradictions, which, with the application of mass armed struggle, strives to achieve the economic and political goals of certain classes, states and peoples" (Military Encyclopedia, 1974: 746).

The development of means and techniques and experiences from previous armed conflicts lead to the conclusion that the set goals can be successfully achieved by using non-military means. As the way of conducting armed conflicts changed, so did the doctrine. Hybrid war is a newly created matter and it has not yet been fully defined which forms and methods of action it encompasses (Bjerregaard, 2011).

The concept of hybrid war and its disapproval can be seen in the example of the US Department of Defense, which does not accept the concept of hybrid war and the very way of conducting hybrid war as a form of modern armed conflict (Johnson, 2010).

In order for a modern armed conflict to take the form of a hybrid war, it is necessary to apply at least three characteristics of hybrid warfare such as terrorism, conventional conflict and organized crime (Bjerregaard, 2011: 32).

Hybrid war is a form of conventional, unconventional, asymmetric, irregular, demographic, non-linear armed conflict that can include a combination of special operations, intelligence, paramilitary, terrorists, conventional armed forces and criminal elements (Milošević, 2018: 306).

In hybrid warfare, the following activities play the primary and most important role: psychological operations, influence on political leadership, media propaganda, assassinations, corruption, spin, formation of non-governmental organizations that are under the control of foreign

services, financing of certain political parties, influence on certain social groups, dissatisfaction, blackmail, causing divisions, individual acts of terrorism, emphasizing differences rather than similarities, misinforming the population, deception. The activities listed in this way represent the core of the hybrid conflict and the basis of its application (Cvetković et al., 2019: 330).

An interesting approach to hybrid warfare can be seen in the definition, which presents hybrid warfare as something that lies in the intermediate space between special and conventional warfare. It also deals with the internal point of efficiency, that is, the best use of military resources in a combination of conventional and unconventional forces (Steder, 2016). Hybrid war is defined as all-dimensional war, which includes armed and unarmed forms of aggression (Kovač, Forca, 2000).

The Eastern definition of hybrid warfare presents its characteristics and capabilities in an interesting way. The People's Liberation Army of China shows that modern wars require fewer human victims, but are on the other hand crueler compared to classic armed conflicts. In a hybrid war, it is clearly observed that there is less use of armed violence, while there is an evident increase in diplomatic, economic, psychological, and media violence. The rules of warfare have changed significantly, whereby non-military means are more important than weapons (Aleksandrić, 2018).

In hybrid warfare, the command system itself changes completely. The command should ensure the management of all state capacities and resources in order to perform the assigned tasks. The process functions of command must be fully adapted to the new changes in order to respond in a timely manner to threats to national security (Le Bon, 1989: 114).

Special military units and modern robotic systems such as unmanned aerial vehicles and other types of drones play a major role in hybrid warfare. Regular military forces would assume a major role in the post-conflict period where they would maintain peace and manage crises. The work of the intelligence services should be raised to the highest level in order to carry out a proper scan of the opponent's forces, find their weaknesses and choose the best way to neutralize the opponent (Aleksandrić, 2018).

The principle scheme of hybrid warfare implies the engagement of the following forces: regular military forces, special military units and irregular forces, for the implementation of the following activities: diplomatic pressure, economic warfare, information warfare, cyber-attacks, support for local unrest and warfare in the field of defense technologies (Aleksandrić, 2018: 24).

The activities carried out in hybrid warfare can be identified with the "Blitzkrieg" strategy, which implies quick and decisive actions in which the enemy does not have time to make decisions. Forces are used in a short period of time, most often with the use of airborne troops or modern combat vehicles (Leirner, 2020).

In 2005, the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies proposed the following definition of "hybrid warfare": "The use of military and non-military instruments in an integrated campaign to achieve surprise, seize the initiative, and gain psychological advantages used in diplomatic operations; large-scale rapid information, electronic and cyber operations; covering and concealing military and intelligence activities; in combination with economic pressure" (Randžić, Beriša, 2018: 259).

There are several other different definitions of hybrid war, and one of them defines it a combination of military and non-military means with the aim of forcing the enemy to do what they would not do voluntarily (Milenković, 2017: 317).

The strategic documents of the modern armed forces are slowly being supplemented by defining the concept of hybrid war (Milenković, 2017: 325). As a current example from July 2016, a representative strategic document on security and armed forces of the German Republic entitled "White Paper on German Security Policy and the Future of the German Armed Forces" is cited. In the very preface of the book, hybrid war is highlighted as the first on the list of security challenges (Ilić, 2017).

What is characteristic of modern armed conflict is that there has been a "feminization" of war where a large number of women are involved in important roles. Their role in classic armed conflicts was of less importance while today it has been observed that women are in

positions of exceptional importance, such as leading the fight in the front lines and making decisions at the strategic level. In addition to women, children became characteristic participants in the armed conflict (Ilić, 2017: 179).

As, by definition, hybrid war is characterized by the primary use of non-combat means, this does not mean that there is a complete absence of a classic conventional conflict, but the goals are achieved by combining these two concepts of fighting with the fact that armed force is applied as a last resort to achieve goals (Milenković, Mitrović, 2019: 249).

The Russian military doctrine of 2011 describes modern warfare as the joint action of military forces and resources of a non-military character, where the aim is to apply information warfare in order to achieve goals without the use of military forces, with the aim of achieving acceptance and approval by public opinion worldwide (Военная доктрина Российской Федерации).

The concept of hybrid warfare is based on the application of means and techniques that have not been seen before in order to outsmart the enemy and put them in a hopeless position. It is necessary to exploit all the weak points of the enemy with the least possible use of armed forces.

### **Hybrid War Characteristics**

There are several different characteristics of hybrid war contributing to its complexity, difficult interpretation, study and timely detection (Milošević, 2018: 303).

The main characteristics of hybrid war are: comprehensiveness, suddenness, vagueness, propaganda, spin, disinformation, flexibility, cyber-attacks, economic measures, synchronization of various activities, and sequence in achieving goals. According to the author N. Ilić, some of the mentioned characteristics can be determined as follows:

- 1) *Comprehensiveness* represents a characteristic related to the complexity of modern armed conflicts in which war is not fought exclusively on the battlefield, but includes all means and methods for the realization of the goal;

- 2) *The use of propaganda and spin* is one of the leading characteristics of the contemporary conflict of shaping perception and managing behavior with the aim of realizing the interests of persons who use propaganda;
- 3) *Flexibility* is the ability of opposing parties to quickly and efficiently adapt to new changes;
- 4) *Economic measures* or economic sanctions represent restrictions on trade and the use of economic resources. They mainly refer to the ban on the import of certain goods as well as the total blockade of trade (Ilić, 2017: 35).

The characteristics of modern armed conflict are that it is non-contact and unlimited, which leads to the fact that conventional armed conflicts are increasingly being abandoned, shifting towards unconventional forms of warfare with a more frequent use of modern technology, whereby human life is less threatened and put first as a protection priority (Milošević, 2018: 302). Modern conflict is characterized by taking over the structure and resources of the opponent, as well as mastering the opponent's resources, leaders, public opinion, without direct physical combat, and with minimal engagement of armed forces. In such conflicts, the armed forces do not have a dominant role, but mainly use special military units, which are specially trained for fighting in a hybrid war (Milenković, Mitrović, 2019).

According to a certain group of authors and based on examples from practice, additional characteristics of hybrid war can be distinguished, such as:

- 1) multidimensionality of the form of activity;
- 2) adjustment based on changes in the field;
- 3) denial of the conduct and existence of a hybrid war;
- 4) conformity of action; and
- 5) centralization of leadership at the strategic level (Cvetković et al., 2019: 339).

*The multidimensionality of the form of activity* represents the possibility of using different weapon systems and state structures, while striving for



the widest and most diverse use of force so that the enemy never knows what the possibilities and future plans are.

*Adaptation based on changes in the field* is a characteristic of modern conflicts due to frequent changes in the course of operations, changes in terrain, use of weapons and other means that inflict losses on the enemy.

*Denying the conduct and existence of a hybrid war* is a significant feature that is successfully used in propaganda and spinning the real picture and conflict in order to successfully gain support from world public opinion.

*The coordination of action* represents a coordinated and coordinated action of applying various forms of activity, whereby the effective destruction of the opponent is obtained.

*Centralization of leadership at the strategic level* represents a centralized and coordinated command staff located at the strategic level. Their main role is proper and timely planning of certain activities as well as commanding units (Cvetković et al., 2019: 340).

As hybrid war is a complex and complex armed conflict, and different researches provide different results and data on the hybrid conflict, the following characteristics can be attributed to this modern form of endangering national security:

- 1) media war (spreading false information and changing the roles of the culprit and the victim);
- 2) energy war (denying or hindering the supply of energy);
- 3) encouraging multiple divisions within the country (religious and ethical divisions);
- 4) difficult border control;
- 5) isolation at the international level;
- 6) pressures on the country's leadership;
- 7) reduced diplomatic, military, economic relations;
- 8) change from direct destruction to direct impact;
- 9) application of soft power;
- 10) terrorist activities;
- 11) criminal and corrupt activities;
- 12) change of warfare from physical space to human consciousness;  
and
- 13) viewing war as a natural state of the nation (Ilić, 2017 : 35).

Hybrid war represents a complex and dynamic form of conflict that includes a wide range of characteristics, requiring a complex approach and coordination of experts from different fields when determining and interpreting them.

### **Hybrid Warfare Dimensions**

Armed conflict as the basic concept of conflict between two or more states, nations or groups is a complex concept that has a large number of dimensions and structures (Cvetković et al., 2019: 327).

Hybrid warfare is a modern form of conflict that involves a combination of different: military, political, diplomatic, economic, IT and psychological elements, which are often used in synergy to achieve the goal and achieve the desired result. In the following text, we will list the key dimensions of hybrid warfare.

*The military dimension* implies the use of conventional and non-conventional military forces to carry out various forms of warfare. Modern armed conflicts last a long time, that is, fatigue strategies are used to completely exhaust the enemy. In hybrid warfare, the field of combat is not exactly defined, which leads to the fact that there is no "background" or "front" in the conflicts themselves (Subošić, 2002: 477 - 492).

*The political-diplomatic dimension* implies conducting such a policy and using diplomatic pressure in order to completely destabilize the opponent, insisting that the rules of international law of war do not apply. Procuring, lending and in speeches the daily mention of nuclear weapons as a deterrent against armed attack. This dimension of hybrid warfare is also characterized by support for certain international terrorist and criminal organizations, the spread of disinformation and manipulation in international relations, as well as the incitement of internal divisions and conflicts within the society of the target country.

*The economic dimension* aims to destabilize the entire financial sector of the opponent. And it implies the introduction of sanctions, trade restrictions, market manipulations, economic pressures, strengthening globalization, that is, the dependence of the national economy on the international community.

*The information technology dimension* is characterized by the use of advanced technologies, including cyber weapons, drones and other high-tech means. The information segment of this dimension refers to the execution of cyber-attacks, the manipulation of media and social networks, the spread of panic and propaganda with disinformation and fake news (Rančić, Beriša, 2018);

*The psychological dimension*, which is implemented by one or more states towards the population or armed forces of another state in order to influence consciousness, attitudes, morals, and behavior. It is carried out continuously, with varying intensity, both in peace and in war. Psychological operations aim to convey certain information to foreign listeners and viewers in order to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, attitudes and for the sake of achieving their own goals and interests. In addition to military special forces, renowned writers, script directors and actors are hired to support the psychological operation (Vuletić, 2018: 275).

The mentioned dimensions of hybrid war clearly show the complexity of modern conflicts and the difference in relation to classical warfare. Hybrid warfare often involves a combination of all the above-mentioned dimensions in order to defeat the set goals and defeat the opponent (Subošić, 2002: 477 - 492). We are convinced that the theory of threats to security should include the fourth type of threatening phenomena, whose etiology is "hybrid", and that soon security threats will take such forms and reach such proportions that they endanger human, national and global security (Mijalković, 2018).

### **The Concept of Prevention of Hybrid Warfare**

Prevention and preventive actions represent the most important aspect in order to preserve peace (Petrović, 2021: 170). In order to protect national security from hybrid warfare, it is necessary for the state to be ready to undertake certain activities:

- 1) readiness to respond quickly and effectively to threats to national security;
- 2) control over all the most important strategic elements such as economy, politics, culture;

- 3) readiness to engage all forces and resources in a timely manner to the most vulnerable place at the very beginning in order to completely prevent and disable further conflict;
- 4) provision of high-quality personnel who possess certain abilities, knowledge, skills and motivation to respond in a timely manner to crisis situations and prevent the further course of armed conflict;
- 5) creation and encouragement of patriotic movements within a society, which raises national consciousness;
- 6) security check of non-governmental organizations working in the country and allied countries and
- 7) the persons who are at the head of the security forces should be trained and prepared in a timely manner to prevent the emergence of hybrid military blocs.

The eighth information component represents the first line of combat against hybrid warfare, and bearing in mind the complexity of the conflict and the application of unconventional means, it is necessary to promote media freedom, reward the transmission of accurate information, and promptly sanction the spread of misinformation (Rančić, Beriša, 2018).

Prevention of hybrid warfare requires a comprehensive approach that includes different forms of action. Key elements include educating citizens about the forms and methods of hybrid warfare, improving media literacy, strengthening resistance to manipulation, with the aim of developing society's resilience. It is important to establish effective mechanisms for recognizing, monitoring and countering disinformation, and to strengthen cyber security through investments in modern technology and personnel training. In addition to the above, it is necessary to establish international cooperation, coordination of international sanctions and diplomatic efforts in order to prevent the destabilization of the state; strengthening police (Subošić, 2011: 337-348) and military capacities and readiness, developing an economic policy that reduces vulnerability to economic manipulations and pressures, as well as involving the civil society sector in decision-making processes and implementation of prevention measures.

## Conclusion

Modern conflicts increasingly rely on the execution of special operations, the use of modern technologies and various forms of organized crime, with the aim of achieving victory without a direct armed conflict, thus proving that violence is no longer the primary choice for achieving goals in war.

Hybrid wars represent an evolution in the way conflicts are conducted with a much greater focus on unarmed activities and the application of various means, such as diplomatic pressures, economic sanctions, media propaganda, cyber-attacks and psychological operations. This type of warfare includes a combination of special operations, the activities of intelligence services, paramilitary, terrorist and criminal organizations, as well as the engagement of conventional military forces.

In hybrid warfare, the command system must be adapted, that is, it is necessary to ensure the effective management of all state capacities and resources. This requirement for the integration of command and control is challenging even for experienced military strategists and commanders.

Special military units and robotic systems, unmanned aerial vehicles and drones play a significant role in hybrid warfare. These systems enable quick and precise action in different environments and conditions, with minimal risks for own forces.

Hybrid war almost always implies the involvement of international actors, and requires cooperation between several states and organizations. The mechanism of international cooperation is of vital importance for the timely exchange of information in order to effectively deal with hybrid attacks and threats.

In the end, it can be concluded that hybrid warfare is a new form of threat, i.e. an evolved form of conflict, which requires military forces to fully adapt and adopt new strategies and tactics, purchase modern equipment and weapons, as well as ensure continuous training of personnel, so that the state and society as a whole should be ready to respond to the complex challenges, risks and threats of the modern era.

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## Хибридно ратовање као савремена форма угрожавања безбедности

**Апстракт:** Хибридно ратовање је недовољно одређен појам, како у теорији тако и у пракси безбедности, што захтева свеобухватније научно истраживања ове нове форме угрожавања безбедности. Хибридни рат је постао изазов за војне стратегије и међународне односе, јер подразумева сложен сукоб у којем се комбинују класичне војне операције са асиметричним тактикама, сајбер нападима, провајангом и другим невојним активностима. Овај рад, кроз интердисциплинаран приступ, анализира концепт хибридног ратовања, његове карактеристике и димензије, фокусирајући се на еволуцију оружаних сукоба, интеграцију различитих средстава и техника, промене у систему командовања, улогу специјалних војних јединица и роботизованих система. Такође, у раду се указује на међународну димензију хибридног ратовања, налашавајући важност сарадње између различитих актера како би се ефикасно суочили хибридном претњом. Циљ рада је да омогући увид у комплексност и изазове које хибридни рат представља, те наплати неопходност за изградом нових стратегија и политика за сузбијање хибридних претњи, очување мира и безбедности.

**Кључне речи:** хибридно ратовање, еволуција оружаних сукоба, специјалне војне јединице, међународна сарадња.