

# Hybrid warfare

The essence, structure  
and course of the conflict

Slawomir Turkowski



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Edition I

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## ADMISSION

The events of the last decade clearly prove that the current conflicts diametrically differ from those with which we have dealt in the last few decades. Technology development, changes in the balance of power, as well as the acquired military experience and the awareness of the operational capabilities of conventional troops, have created a new type of danger, which is hybrid war. This type of combat is the most characteristic type of asymmetric conflict.

This publication aims to analyze the degree of Euro-Atlantic security, an attempt to present the essence of hybrid wars and to indicate methods and ways of reacting and preventing actions that constitute a hybrid threat from the Russian Federation.

This type of conflict has irreversibly changed both the methods of military action and the spectrum of means that are used in these conflicts. New methods of combat have emerged, strategies of conducting military operations have changed to a large extent, and the principles on which the state security policy has been conducted so far have become obsolete. Today, having an advantage in terms of the number of weapons you have is no guarantee of defeating your opponent. A modern army, forced to fight in difficult terrain, known to the local population

and poorly armed enemy soldiers, faces a rather daunting task in a situation where the methods that the enemy will use against it will be unconventional.

Asymmetric actions, which break the methods of military operations used so far, constitute a challenge for operational troops and force them to use previously unused tools and methods of combat. Course and the nature of contemporary armed conflicts indicate that the process of change in the conduct of hostilities, it will undergo further rapid development.

Therefore, the phenomenon of asymmetric conflict in the contemporary battlefield requires ongoing analyzes to fully understand such a broad issue. The events in Ukraine came as a kind of surprise to many experienced military theorists. Russian policy has proved, however, that the threats previously treated as strictly theoretical have become a fact. And this is against the provisions of international law and public opinion. Of course, the propaganda war waged by the mass media makes it difficult to understand both the causes and the course of the conflict. Their methodology clearly goes beyond typical military operations. Technological progress and globalization, apart from amenities, also entail threats. Information systems are vulnerable not only to failures but also to attacks of a scale and the degree of danger is increasing every year.

The aim of the publication is an attempt to analyze the conflict model, which is a hybrid war, to present its structure and concept, the course of its individual phases, as well as to discuss the spectrum of threats related to this type of conflict and methods of prevention. The study is also an attempt to define the phenomenon of hybrid activities and to raise awareness of the scale of the dangers it entails. The book is also a contribution to the redefinition of some of the hitherto notions related to the conduct of hostilities. The publication also aims to build awareness of asymmetric conflicts in the area of predicting and preventing such phenomena.

Author

## The genesis of hybrid warfares

Recent armed conflicts are constantly changing. New technologies bring new, previously unknown methods of operation. It is impossible not to notice that the task of hybrid operations is to achieve the goal without conducting classic military operations, which in the literature is often referred to as *"victory without a battle"*. The definitions of external threats used so far were unambiguous and did not have to be subjected to any modifications due to strict criteria and premises. This is because rarely when trying to determine the type and degree of risk, the so called non-military options.

Currently, we are dealing with recurring asymmetric conflicts with unconventional activities that require remedial measures in a much wider area than in the case of a conventional attack.

The perception of the threat and its definition is different in the event of a possible threat and when it already takes place and the probability of an attack is quite high. To determine whether we are dealing with a threatening situation, the emergence of at least two subjects of the conflict is required, one of which is a subject at risk in a subjective aspect, and the other one that poses a real threat. Of course, the threat is also a subjective factor, which does not have to correspond to the actual state in any way.

Each country has its own, defined by experience and geopolitical conditions the threat threshold, the exceeding of which constitutes an unambiguous basis to state that we are dealing with a strategic threat.

Until the end of the 20th century, armed conflicts the pattern of conflict was practically unchanged: a given country or allied association, using its military potential, carried out direct aggression against another country. Determining who the opponent was was relatively easy.

During the Cold War, the consolidation of two opposing blocs resulted in a clear and obvious division. If there were a conflict that would turn into regular military action, it would be a state-state conflict.

As a result of the collapse of the hitherto dichotomous and uniform division of the spheres of influence, this equilibrium was disturbed and peculiarly deformed. The predictability of the parties to a possible conflict was not so obvious. The process of precisely identifying the subject being the aggressor has been significantly hampered, which is especially characteristic in a cyber attack.

The rapid development of technology makes it difficult to develop effective solutions in terms of counteracting such situations, although of course this is not the state of helplessness that existed even a decade ago. The world today faces a dual challenge: to develop an effective concept and implement

a methodology to prevent future hybrid attacks, as well as to create an effective offensive strategy in this regard.

## **The specificity of hybrid warfare**

In a hybrid war, to achieve the intended effect, the enemy uses a very complex compilation of actions in which he uses not only military, political, social or financial means, but also information. It is also a combination of forces of a regular and irregular nature, including criminal or even terrorist elements.

The process of predicting a future armed conflict requires in-depth analysis in terms of the course of existing conflicts. Each war is different, it differs from the previous one both technically and in terms of the tactical methods used. You will draw conclusions and correct conclusions from previous conflicts, it seems to be an indispensable activity to properly develop concepts, ensuring safety and effective prevention of aggressive actions of the enemy.

Conventional armed conflicts seem to be a thing of the past. Today, in times of rapid technology development, progressive digitization and globalization, the most popular method of conducting actions against



another country is hybrid war.

This is the most complex and the most common type of asymmetric action. A feature of the armed conflicts of the future will more and more often be the irregularity of actions, where the conventional methods used so far will be combined with unconventional methods of fighting.

In this way of conducting activities, we will not see strictly military actions, but methods that have not been seen so far with a clear terrorist tone will come to the fore.

It would seem that hybrid war is a chaotic, inconsistent and impulsive, or even accidental, activity. Nothing could be more wrong. Despite the impression of incoherence, these are often carefully planned activities and, what is more, perfectly coordinated at all levels on which they are carried out. All this to achieve a predetermined political goal.

Thus, terrorist attacks are interwoven with cyberattacks, and there is a propaganda and disinformation war at the same time. Also economic and political interference in an even more violent and effective way intensify the chaos, which is an ideal field for the increasingly free actions of the enemy in the attacked country. The lack of awareness of the dangers of hybrid war, the lack of understanding of its essence and significance, as well as the lack of substantive preparation and the lack of human and technological resources to carry out activities that could

prevent such situations — makes the country completely defenseless.

Ukraine, attacked by the Russian Federation, when, due to confusion and surprise, was unable to control the situation, tried to find an appropriate method to counteract such aggression proved it.

Wars conducted in this way pose a huge challenge for any country that is exposed to this type of action or, worse, has already been the target of an actual attack. This challenge is, above all, a huge effort to develop a strategy plane, define new methods of prevention and combat, and establish the principles of the concept of counteracting hybrid war. It is also technological development, appropriate education of the staff, modification of the defense concept, and above all the mentality, which should be adapted to the current political conditions and the level of technological development on which the world is currently located.

## **Changes in the methodology of warfare**

A cardinal error is that commanders, who are usually reluctant to change, remain stuck in the belief that wars are always the same. Criticism of the concept of asymmetric operations results only from the lack of knowledge and reluctance to shift the conservative way of perceiving modern armed conflicts to real lines, which are a military symbol

of recent times.

Needless to say, acquiring such knowledge during an already ongoing hybrid warfare is as effective as tragic. The starting point for considerations on the topic related to the methods of combat should be prevention, based on knowledge of already conducted such activities and the technological knowledge that we already have.

Contrary to popular belief, hybrid warfare is not an entirely new type of war that has nothing to do with wars that have been fought so far. It is a type of war, which is a combination of both conventional methods, known to every modern army, and unconventional (atypical) methods, known so far from terrorists and even criminal activities. Therefore, neither the rules of tactical combat, tested and known to every soldier nor the military equipment used so far have become obsolete. The method and circumstances of their use have changed.

The enemy conducting hybrid activities is not always visible, it is not always possible to prove that he is behind specific activities (such a situation often occurs during cyber-attacks).

From time to time, opinions come to the fore in public discussions that tactical actions taken in hybrid warfare have little in common with strategic tactics used in conventional operations.

However, this view cannot be considered correct. Hybrid war is a carefully thought out multi-faceted set of actions. This type of aggression is a combination of all conventional and unconventional methods. There can be no question of any randomness here. Cyberattacks are intertwined in an almost elusive manner in destabilization activities, various types of economic sanctions are applied in a similar intensity and time as information warfare. Therefore, we cannot speak of any randomness here, all actions are carefully thought out and strictly synchronized in terms of time.

Thus, hybrid war is a strategic activity and has all the features of a well-thought-out and tactical war. A turning point Russia's aggression against Georgia in 2008 was in the way of conducting effective hostilities. At that time, the Russian tanks were completely unable to deal with irregular Georgian units in the initial phase of the conflict.

The events in Ukraine that took place in 2014, especially illegal in terms of international law, the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, and thus the change of borders, have become a kind of precedent, unprecedented since the end of the greatest armed conflict in history, which was World War II. Something that seemed impossible until now has become

a fact. In our imagination, war has so far been associated with a massive attack by individual types of troops, so it is not surprising that it was difficult to imagine aggression without visible signs of attack.

What happened in Ukraine radically changed the perception of the shape, type and scale of the dangers that threaten today's world order. Part of Central Europe felt it clearly because in this region the threat became real and probable.

The former Soviet bloc countries found themselves in a particularly dangerous situation, most of which to this day arms, there is some way economically dependent on the former occupier, in particular in terms of gas supplies. Not surprisingly, all of these countries have well-founded concerns for their own security, fearing a repeat of this happened in Ukraine in 2014. What is worse, the fact that Russia broke all possible provisions of international law as a result of its aggressive actions has not faced any consequences, apart from cosmetic sanctions. The passivity of NATO and the European Union gave the green light all too clearly for further, similar activities. Obviously, this passivity did not result from a lack of willingness to get involved in the state that was attacked.

It was a trivial thing: no one was prepared for this kind of action against another state, no response methods were developed. This was mainly

due to the lack of understanding of the essence of the actions of the Russian Federation.

Of course, it was realized that Russia has been trying to rebuild its former imperial power for over a decade, but so far, apart from minor subversive, espionage, and propaganda activities, nothing has happened that deserves special attention. This dormancy and the lack of knowledge of asymmetric activities had tragic consequences. Today, several years after the Russian aggression, this knowledge is obviously much broader, but it cannot be considered sufficient. One more thing failed in all this: the Russian mentality was not taken into account in the peace negotiations. It is unacceptable to think in Western European terms with a strong color of peace when sitting down to the table with Russia, whose leaders have always thought in a way radically different from Western democracies. Two different worlds, two different methods of communication, language, approach to functioning in the modern world — all these categories do not balance each other in any way.

The key to effective action against the existing aggression is the key to a proper conversation with someone who represents a completely different cultural model. So it is obvious that only adequate actions can achieve the expected effect. Sanctions were a very good solution, but there is no doubt that they should be applied gradually, unanimously, and in the most painful way. Western European diplomacy does not

work in contact with the Russian Federation. It will always be perceived as a weakness and a willingness to compromise.

Of course, no one talks about regular, military, and typical actions for wars conducted in the era preceding the emergence of hybrid wars, it is only about actions adequate to those taken by the enemy, and above all about understanding their mechanisms. Russia is not a country focused on development, raising the standard of living and proper relations with its neighbors. The majority of Russian society is also largely unprepared to accept democracy in the sense of European standards. Russia of the times of Gorbachev and Yeltsin, which was given such a chance, rejected it decisively, opting for a “*resolute*” leader, without going into a special analysis of the sense of his actions, and even downplaying the damage he was doing to his own country by his actions, including by accepting and accepting as facts — uncritically daily media propaganda.

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The book analyzes the phenomenon of hybrid wars as third-generation conflicts. The publication discusses the genesis of conflicts, the course as well as aspects related to combating these phenomena and indicates methods of prevention. The author intends to present the issues of hybrid warfare in a comprehensive manner and at the same time practical. This publication is the result of research and the author's practices in the area of asymmetric conflicts.

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