
The U.S. Army Chief of Staff, *General Raymond Odierno*, wrote in a recent issue of *Foreign Affairs* that the Army needed to come to grips with “one of the most costly lessons it has learned over the last decade: how to deal with the challenge of hybrid warfare.” He went on to note that it “will be increasingly common for the army to operate in environments with both regular military and irregular paramilitary or civilian adversaries, with the potential for terrorism, criminality and other complications.”

This new book will help the U.S. Army and the entire Joint warfighting community think about this challenge. The hole in our comprehension of the history of hybrid adversaries has been fleshed out by *Hybrid Warfare*. This anthology has been edited by two superb scholars, Williamson Murray of the U.S. Naval War College and Dr. Peter Mansoor, holder of the Mason Chair of Military History at The Ohio State University. These highly-qualified historians have assembled a diverse team of subject matter experts and practitioners to detail nine cases of varying degrees of hybrid conflict. The challenge posed by hybrid threats has been discussed for the past few years, but has lacked a deep professional historical assessment. Mankind, Dr. Murray writes, too frequently “marches ever forward into the future sure that everything is new and thus fills body bags with dead soldiers rather than reaching back into the past for the lessons others have learned at such great cost.”

*Hybrid Warfare* reaches back with great depth to avoid those costs, but may introduce some terminological clouds of confusion. It is founded on a broad characterization of hybrid conflict, as a conflict that has both regular and irregular forces in the war. These forces need not be present at the same time or place, nor centrally directed by this team’s definition. Others in the literature have referred to this as compound warfare. [1]

This is also at odds with how the U.S. Army defines such threats. The Army’s conception of this threat as
defined in **FM 3-0 Operations** is a “diverse and dynamic combination of regular forces, irregular forces, criminal elements, or a combination of these forces and elements all unified to achieve mutually benefitting effects.” Some hybrid theorists depict the category as reflecting more blending or blurring of forces or modes of war, in time and place than this (see Hoffman’s *Conflict in the 21st Century*, pp. 14, 58). Notable authorities, including Colin Gray, Max Boot and John Arquilla (p. 472) have noted a distinctive blurring of regular and irregular modes of conflict.

In *Hybrid Warfare*, the editors have chosen not to make a distinction about the fusion of different forces or different modes in the same battlespace. Nor have they explicitly incorporated terrorism and criminality as part of the operational mode or force composition. Their range of cases bring out various combinations in time and space. As there is no universally accepted definition of hybrid threats or warfare, the editors are free to establish their own framework. However, crafting too broad a definition allows everything to be included and diminishes utility of the concept. From *Hybrid Warfare*, World War II campaigns like the Allied drive into France with the OSS and resistance movements could be included. This broader definition leads some scholars to plausibly argue that hybrid warfare is ubiquitous and thus not useful. Indeed, Dr. Murray concluded that “the historical record suggests that hybrid warfare in one form or another may well be the norm for human conflict rather than the exception.”

The editors explain, correctly, that hybrid threats are not novel. *General Mattis and this reviewer once claimed* that hybrid adversaries posed an “unprecedented synthesis.” However, that term was based on the inclusion of “catastrophic terrorism” and criminality in the battlespace not the rather common admixture of conventional forces and irregulars hundreds of miles apart. We are joined by many others today that depict emerging forms of conflict that include criminal behavior or transnational criminal organizations.[2] Many veterans in Iraq and Afghanistan will understand this.

While the definitional debate is not irrelevant to current force planning challenges, *Hybrid Warfare’s* impressive historical insights are worth the risk of definitional confusion, and welcome to the future warfare debate.

**Cases**

The nine case histories represent a broad swath of military history across time and civilizations. These are preceded by Dr. Mansoor’s introduction which establishes a framework for the long history of hybrid warfare; and identifies the complications of proliferating weapons, the difficulties of extended hybrid conflicts in time and space, the critical importance of good leadership, as well as the challenge of winning the battle of narratives in an information saturated world.

The first case, penned by Dr. James Lacey of the Marine Corps War College, offered a fascinating exploration into Rome’s difficult efforts to pacify Germania, especially the lost legions of Varus who was defeated by Arminius in 9 AD. Lacey’s notes that Arminius and his people had fought against and for Rome as auxiliaries and adapted their mode of fighting to offset the Legion’s disciplined tactics with a cohesive counter of their own. This has been noted previously, as true for the Boer’s against the British, the Chechens against the Russians, and Hezbollah against the Israeli Defense Force. Each was familiar with and exploited gaps in their opponent’s doctrine and approach to war. Yet, one is still left wondering if Arminius’s perfidy or Varus’ incompetence has more to do with Rome’s comeuppance than the devious combination of regular and irregular means in the Teutoburg forest.

Dr. Murray’s chapter on the American Revolution is first rate and highlights the predicament that Washington’s Regulars and Fabian style presented to British generals, while partisans in New Jersey or Nathan Greene’s irregulars in South Caroline harassed them to frustration. The author/editor notes that hybrid war should not be foreign to American policy makers since the United States was born out of
classical examples (both the French and Indian War and the U.S. war for independence). This is certainly true at the strategic level and Murray’s coverage of Bunker Hill suggests that hybrid combinations can be effective at lower levels as well, at least against rigid opponents that are arrogant in the face of determined resistance.

The Franco-Prussian War was a surprising case study, as most histories focus on Von Moltke’s staff planning for mobilization, use of railroads, and technology like Krupp breech-loading artillery or French chassepot rifles. Readers will be familiar with the rapid captures of Metz and Sedan that led to the capture of Napoleon and the collapse of the French army. The subsequent messy investiture of Paris and the swarming franc tireurs are too often ignored. Authored by Marcus Jones of the U.S. Naval Academy, this case is not hybrid in character at the tactical level but offers insights on why policy aims and military ways need to be integrated. This would have been an excellent case study for the policy shop in the Pentagon or General Franks and the CENTCOM staff to have read prior to their drive to Baghdad in 2003. It might have opened their eyes to Phase IV complexities just a bit more.

Richard Sinneich, retired Army planner and well-regarded operational artist, details the complex challenge that hybridity posed to Napoleon’s forces in Spain in the Peninsular campaign. In a war well known for introducing the term guerrilla, France found itself confronting British and Spanish conventional forces, and its lines of communication in Spain harassed by militia and various irregular elements (and many brigands). Colonel Sinnreich does not address how Wellington sought to deliberately exploit from the application of hybrid war. Dr. Murray latter argues convincingly that the irregular aspects of the campaign certainly enabled Wellington’s conventional success.

Dan Sutherland, author of A Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerrillas in the American Civil War, contributes a chapter on Union counter-guerrilla operations. His work forces us to consider the brutal reality of the American civil conflict beyond the iconic battles of Antietam, Chancellorsville, and Gettysburg. This chapter works within the framework of the book as partisan warfare was an aspect of Confederate strategy at time, and the under-appreciated influence it had on the war. Sherman’s “March to the Sea” might have been a better case study of combinations and a unique case of State-based hybrid forces on the offensive (while some Northern scholars might disagree with the inclusion of terrorism and criminal behavior).

One of the most intriguing chapters was John Ferris’ contribution which covers nearly three centuries of British experience. It’s a fascinating read, peppered with positive comments about British adaptation from conflict to conflict. Most of these campaigns were not hybrid combinations, instead they were traditional colonial policing missions against local tribes, reflecting classical Small Wars covered by C. E. Callwell. However, Dr. Ferris’ evaluation of the second Anglo-Boer war is instructive but not convincing. He is largely dismissive of Boer leadership, despite their early success and overlooks their unique pre-war adaptation. He is a bit too positive on British efforts, and overlooks Kitchner’s overwhelming superiority and the relative cost ratios for Great Britain over the nascent Boer republics. Ferris’ positive depiction of British counterinsurgency success in the Imperial era should be compared to the negative evaluation of David French, from a much narrower and more recent time frame. French’s point that the British were slow at learning lessons and sharing across theaters in the post-imperial era is just as relevant to Ferris’s chapter.

The former director of the Joint Advanced Warfighting Program at the Institute for Defense Analyses, Karl Lowe, has penned a superlative essay about Vietnam. A U.S. Army veteran, Lowe notes the complexity of Vietnam where the United States and the host nation confronted both NVA regulars and black pajama-clad Viet Cong in different regions. He also noted how the Viet Cong evolved tactically, forming larger and more conventionally armed formations up to Division scale. It would have been
interesting to detail the effectiveness of this formation and how it fared against U.S. or ARVN forces (and what approaches were used to neutralize it). Lowe’s chapter is particularly valuable as it incorporates North Vietnamese sources.

More insights from non-Western sources are found in the next essay. Noboru Yamaguchi, a retired Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force general, offers a unique chapter covering Japanese counter-guerrilla and stability operations in northern China. Yamaguchi notes Japan’s sophisticated understanding of how to deflect Communist guerrilla forces, except for their lack of an alternative ideology. This case study is particularly valuable as it brings insights from non-Western sources. Classical Chinese writings often refer to mixing orthodox and unorthodox forces (Cheng and Ch’i) in battle, and hybrid threats are not inconsistent with some elements of Mao’s Revolutionary Warfare. Modern Chinese authors have written about hybrid concepts like “Unrestricted Warfare” which go beyond traditional military means, and incorporate political, financial and information components at the strategic level.[5] The study of hybrid approaches within Chinese strategic culture is certainly worth examining, at least as much as the PLA’s vaunted “carrier killer” missile or its new aircraft carrier.

These cases have been judiciously selected and edited with care to underscore key issues related to hybrid threats, largely at the strategic level. The insights brought out hold relevance to contemporary conflict, but more might have been derived considering the operating environment that U.S. forces will face in the next decade. Discontinuities from the past, in terms of the empowerment of smaller actors with more lethal means could make hybrid threats more formidable in the future, and the increasingly rapid rate of change could foment more dangerous hybrids.

There is a no overwhelming consensus about U.S. strategy in the emerging security environment. Some argue that COIN and stability operations are “dead,” and others want to focus on high-end threats and/or the Western Pacific. History suggests that betting on point predictions or single scenarios is imprudent.[6] If we learned anything over the past decade, the enemy always gets a vote. Hybrid Warfare avoids the oversimplified reductionism that our future is contested by conventional or irregular modes. This team of scholars embraces the “and” of hybrid threats. They understand that adversaries seek to exploit seams in our understanding by combining methods and means at the strategic level. They conclude that hybrid wars are complex, difficult to resolve, and “the most likely conflicts of the 21st century.”

Conclusion

Hybrid Warfare is an outstanding start if we are to increase our understanding of this form of warfare. Hybrid threats may not be novel but this book shows they pose higher risks. As Professor Murray notes in his conclusion, hybrid wars “may well be the most difficult conflicts to win.” Judging from the cases in this well-crafted assessment, understanding the challenges of hybrid threats and being prepared for them would be very novel.[7]

The scholarship of Hybrid Warfare is an exemplary demonstration of how to use history in breadth, depth, and context. One can quibble with definitions and some conclusions drawn from its broad conception or these specific cases, but not Dr. Mansoor’s point that hybrid warfare “is a useful means of thinking about war’s past, present, and future.” Future efforts should build upon this work and assess hybrid wars at the operational level, and ascertain Clio’s lessons about defeating modern hybrids. More research is warranted in order to tease out relevant insights to our operating environment—one in which adversaries mix and meld advanced technologies and multiple modes of conflict into the same fight. Special attention should be paid to critical issues about doctrine (the viability of the Comprehensive Approach?), operational art for campaign design, force protection, training, and force design.

Hybrid Warfare is a deep dive on this subject, but it is highly readable, cohesively organized, and
enthusiastically recommended as an invaluable guide for understanding how previous antagonists have sought advantage with strategic combinations. It is suitable for serious students of military history, analysts of contemporary conflict, and professionals at the command and general staff college level.


[2] Max Manwaring, A Contemporary Challenge to State Sovereignty, Gangs and Other Illicit Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) in Central American, El Salvador, Mexico, Jamaica, and Brazil, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, January 2008; Dr. Robert J. Bunker, “Criminal (Cartel & Gang) Insurgencies in Mexico and the Americas,” Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, 13 September 2011; Robert Killebrew, “A New Kind of War,” Armed Forces Journal International, March 2012. Also see the work of John Sullivan and Colonel G. I Wilson, USMC (ret.).


[4] The Americans would reverse roles when the United States was the global hegemon, and stubbornly throw their own battalions figuratively up hill in Vietnam.


[6] I am indebted to Dr. Colin Gray, who has urged the cardinal principles of prudence and adaptability for modern policymakers, on this point.


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