

USING HYBRID WAR THEORY TO SHAPE FUTURE U. S. GENERATIONAL DOCTRINE

Articles

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Blurred Lines

“Russia has dedicated their efforts over the last 20 years to two main areas: learning from their own conflicts in Chechnya and Georgia, and learning from our involvement in the Global War on Terror. The combination of these has resulted in focused modernization that began in earnest in 2008 designed to defeat U.S. systems, prevent effective command and control, and deny key weapon systems access to the battlefield. Now the onus is on the U.S. Army to look inward and determine how to adapt to the modern threat environment.”^[1] – US Army Asymmetric Warfare Group 2016

For the last 20 years of continuous conflict around the globe, state and non-state battlefield actors have rapidly shifted doctrines and tactics in the face of quickly developing threats to account for the new and changing way of war. This has created a soul-searching atmosphere for the US military as it struggles to define itself after spending trillions of dollars to produce strategic outcomes and endstates that appear to be a step backwards. Amid these fluctuating variables and competing theories, defense analysts continue to explore new ideas for how to describe these changes so that effective countermeasures can be developed. This has been difficult as the United States has been engaged in conflict and competition against multiple adversaries which present many different state and non-state threats and actors to study, stressing American defense systems and the academic response. The United States is now seeking new generational doctrines to focus the nation’s defense community energy to better tackle these emerging and continuous threats into the future.^[2]

During that time, the Russians have used the Gerasimov Doctrine to successfully impose their will on the Ukraine, Crimea, Chechnya, Georgia, and Belarus to achieve geo-political gains on the international stage.^[3] A good argument can also be made that they recently extended their influence and control over the Caucasus Region by negotiating a peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan after 6 weeks of conflict.^[4] These gains are not by accident. Russia’s actions and sometimes setbacks in Chechnya and Georgia forced them to adopt hybrid warfare capabilities as new technologies and tactics were used by threats on the battlefield. This doctrinal innovation by the Russians to blur the line between politics and war may require a paradigm shift in defense vocabulary and doctrine to properly explain and counter these modern war developments.^[5]

Since the end of the Cold War, some defense analysts expected nation-state conflict to dissipate as the nuclear option was too high a cost to bear in challenging American hegemony. They assumed that large nuclear nations, if engaged in direct conflict, would inevitably escalate towards using nuclear options. Therefore, the theory went, no one would engage in major conflicts, especially after the First Gulf War, for fear of complete destruction.^[6] This is also evident in the proxy wars fought by major powers who avoided direct contact with their adversaries at all costs. But the opposite is occurring. Because nations are too afraid to use the nuclear option for fear of their own country becoming decimated in retaliation (mutually assured destruction is not game-theory prudent), Russia and others have resorted to “going small” and finding innovative ways to fight and win without risking any type of major conventional or nuclear escalation with the West. “If you cannot use your most powerful conventional weapon because it will bring about your own destruction”, the saying goes, and you cannot openly challenge other countries for fear of American conventional responses, what are other ways to accomplish lethal and non-lethal political and military objectives? This is what led to the Russians becoming so adept at using hybrid warfare to focus all the elements of Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic (DIME) national power at the proper place and time for maximum effectiveness and success on the battlefield.^[7]

In a 2019 US Army War College monograph titled, “Deterring Russia in the Gray Zone”, authors McCarthy et al. argue that “The United States lacks a cohesive strategy to deter Russian aggression in the ‘gray zone.’ The gray zone refers to the conceptual space between peace and war where nations use a hybrid combination of conventional

and unconventional actions to achieve national objectives.”^[8] The following article presents Hybrid War Theory as a potential strategy to shape future generational doctrine for that gray zone and other unnamed areas of lethal and non-lethal competition which are important for US planners and strategists to design defeat mechanisms against potential adversaries operating in these areas. This article will argue three things:

1. Hybrid War Theory, as a unique concept described in this article, is a viable foundation to help shape generational doctrine into the future based on current and historical examples.
2. The United States should continue to study theories about hybrid warfare and include them among current discussions and development of joint doctrine, and,
3. Hybrid War Theory is a forward-looking theory that can better prepare Western and Coalition joint forces for future hybrid conflicts.

Preparing for the Unknown

“As the military tried to define the threat in the post-Cold War landscape, numerous ideas emerged to better conceptualize the seemingly growing complexity of threat actors within the environment that did not conform to traditional enemy characterization. These include the Three Block War, Fourth Generation Warfare, Contemporary Operating Environment, Network-Centric Warfare and most recently revisiting population centric Counter-Insurgency (COIN). The hybrid threat concept synthesizes relevant aspects of these constructs in conjunction with a pragmatic application of unrestricted operational art.”^[9] – Major Brian Fleming

In the past, “Generational Doctrine”, doctrine that is updated at longer periods of time until codified in official publications, was used to anchor the way the US fights its wars. Much like the development of a new weapon platform can take decades, so too can certain generational doctrinal advances take years and decades to develop before they come to fruition. Examples of past US military generational doctrines include Active Defense, AirLand Battle, AirSea Battle, Counter Insurgency (COIN), and many others. These generational doctrines are designed with specific threats in mind and usually incorporate the latest and greatest battlefield technologies and tactics. Past generational doctrine was nothing more than a simplistic prediction model: “The belief is that x will occur in the next conflict, so prepare with y .” Doctrine should empower units forward, however, and current attempts only provide a stovepipe doctrine that is rigid and slow in responding to battlefield advances. Hybrid War Theory is meant to be flexible and fast within conceptual limits. A merging of these two concepts, Generational Doctrine and Hybrid War Theory, can yield benefits to joint forces in the future.

Merging these two is beneficial because it provides an evolving forward-looking framework instead of trying to fit a nice box around everything currently observed. Current doctrines are based exclusively on what is known now, not what might be known later. By the time these generational doctrines move from lengthy doctrinal publications through time consuming dissemination channels to the force after years of academic study, it is already out of date when it is published. This is a *reactive* process rather than *proactive* one. Hybrid War Theory as a doctrinal concept is *proactive*. Previous attempts at all-encompassing generational doctrinal frameworks are reactive and keep us behind the power curve. This distinct difference allows strategic, operational, and tactical units in Hybrid War Theory to build on the doctrine while encountering new threats, factions, actors, and conflicts to better prepare American and coalition forces for the future.

General (Ret.) David Perkins, former TRADOC commander, was quoted as saying in a 2015 speech to the U.S. Naval War College, “What we’re saying the future we’re going into, we don’t know who we’re going to fight, we don’t know what the coalition is, we don’t know what the ROE- uh, rules of engagement will be, we don’t even know what weapon system the enemy is going to have [...] and that’s a completely different kind of world. So I tell folks look, I only need to know: do you want me to design an Army to deal with a known problem or an unknown problem? That’s all the level of clarity I need cus’ those are two different kinds of Armies. If you are building an Army to deal with a known problem, with a known enemy in a known part of the world, known coalition, you train people differently, you develop people differently, you buy different kinds of material and you buy things differently. Very different. If you say: I want to build an Army for the unknown, you train people completely different, you develop them differently, you buy different stuff, and you buy stuff differently [...] from my point of view that’s the only amount of clarity I need: Do you want an Army to deal with a known problem or an unknown problem? Two different kind of Armies.”^[10] This shift from known threats to unknown threats requires a change in training and doctrine.

Understanding Hybrid Warfare

Understanding hybrid warfare has been difficult because of the breadth of the subject matter. The work done by Amos Fox in his 2017 monograph *Hybrid Warfare: The 21st Century Russian Way of Warfare*, is a wonderful starting point to understanding not only the theory behind Hybrid War Theory but also its combat applications by Russia and others in the new century. He defines hybrid warfare as “Warfare that merges the instruments of national power within operational design—all of which is nested in time, space, and purpose to achieve political objectives.”^[11]

Let us update and rewrite that with the ideas from this paper for a new working definition as: Hybrid War Theory synchronizes the war and political instruments of national power (Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic) using Unrestricted Operational Art, all of which are nested in time, space, and purpose to achieve National Objectives. This links *actions* (DIME), with objectives.

This article advocates the idea that American Hybrid Warfare Doctrine be synchronized using *Unrestricted Operational Art*, a synthesis of American, Russian, and Chinese theories to assist commanders in being successful on the battlefield, in either political or military spheres, or a hybrid combination of both.^[12] Its simplicity is designed to empower subordinates and leaders on the battlefield to work more efficiently towards mission success at all levels of war. This concept is based on American work on Russian developed “operational art”, and incorporates the Chinese described “unrestricted warfare.” Chinese unrestricted warfare originates from a paper written in 1999 by two Chinese officers, entitled, *Unrestricted Warfare*.^[13] Fleming summarizes the concepts in it by saying, “Qiao and Wang conceptualize unrestricted warfare as transcending ideology and exceeding the boundaries that restrict warfare within a specified range.”^[14] He goes on to describe operational art by saying, “[T]he term ‘operational art’ is credited to the Soviets and their theoretical exploration of deep operations that mobilized a diverse array of combat power and orchestrated the effects of an overall operation sequentially and simultaneously in three dimensions. As a practitioner of unrestricted operational art, the contemporary hybrid threat operates from the same principles the Soviets envisaged for conventional war. They aggregate a combination of simultaneous and sequential military actions to attain political and military objectives potentially in five dimensions, with the emergence of military activities in space and cyber space.”^[15]

War and Peace

The January 2020 edition of The Naval War College Review published an article titled *Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking*, co-written by Donald Stoker and Craig Whiteside. In it, the authors purport to demonstrate that the term *hybrid war* and *gray zone* “should be eliminated from the strategic lexicon.”^[16] One of their major criticisms is that hybrid war and gray zone too closely blend the concepts of war and peace into one indistinguishable mass which can lead to confusion and problems. They go on to write, “Summers correctly identified a ‘serious flaw’: the spectrum fails to delineate between war and peace.”^[17]

However, as one of my college history professors use to say, “that’s a feature, not a bug,” when responding to students’ critiques of things they were shocked to learn about in history class.^[18] The same can be said here. While these and other authors find the blurring of lines between war and peace as a bug in the theory, it is in fact a feature. As a feature, it allows operational artists and planners to be more creative in designing solutions to defense problems while incorporating political as well as military means in continuous action or in finalizing their culmination. Previously those two realms were kept apart with poor results as adversaries utilized this feature and American defense planners dismissed it as a flaw.

The first major issue with defining the line between war and peace in sublime detail is that it does not account for unexperienced or undocumented conditions of conflict and competition that are inconceivable, thus creating a blind spot for planners and strategists for future unforeseen threats. The second issue is that it assumes your enemies will honor your definitions of these terms and their boundaries, rather than their own definitions. This is what has partially allowed non-state actors to avoid direct conflict with the United States. There is no delineation between war and peace because that distinction is an arbitrary creation in the authors’ minds, with no bearing on reality or in the minds of the enemy. At no point will the enemy throw down their weapons or cease trying to achieve greater power simply because a “peace” has been declared. This “delineation” between war and peace is a magic line the authors have drawn on a whiteboard and it prevents strategic planners from further development of counter strategies against actors who do not abide by any rules. As David Ucko and Thomas Marks say in *Crafting Strategy for Irregular Warfare*, “U.S. security institutions have clung to outdated expectations concerning interstate warfare and competition and assumed—fatally—that their adversaries would do the same.”^[19]

A better way to describe this idea for the future is by contrasting *War* and *Politics*, both of which exist simultaneously within Hybrid War Theory. If war is not being used, then politics is the primary method of national power projection and influence, and there is a continual hybrid relationship between the two. Politics is inherent competition, thus, there is no such thing as peace, only periods of either politics or war, or more accurately, **varying**

concurrent degrees of both, perpetually. Perhaps Clausewitz did not go far enough when he said, “War is a mere continuation of policy by other means.” Rather, they are an interconnected concept: War is a mere continuation of politics by other means, and politics is a mere continuation of war by other means. The area of overlap is where Hybrid War Theory can bridge the gap and better describe the relationship between the two for enhanced operational alignment and pragmatic action.

As a counter to the argument made by these and other authors regarding their criticisms of hybrid warfare concepts, Hybrid War Theory is right to blend war and peace more closely into one so that threat defeat mechanisms are in constant production in the interest of our national security.^[20] The authors of *Blurred Lines* go on to say on page 15 of their article, “If there is nothing new here, then why needlessly complicate matters with a new concept or a new theory?”^[21] The answer to that is simple: If it cannot be named, it cannot be actioned. Hybrid War Theory is an attempt to solve that problem.

An eloquent approach to describe this weakness in the argument by the Naval War College Review authors is highlighted by Major Amos Fox in a Military Review article, *The Strategic Relevance of Tic-Tac-Toe*, where he uses the game of tic-tac-toe to illustrate that “obedience to a rules-based system leaves one open to nonlinear strategies that are purpose-built around exploiting those rules to further one’s aims.”^[22] This is occurring as strategic planners, who have been educated in the self-imposed rules-based defense system of the last 50 years, are adhering to arbitrary rules which opponents and adversaries simply do not follow. Why would they follow them? This naivety by strategic planners should be of concern to those interested in sound American defense policy. Designing defense strategies based on the expectation and assumption that the enemy will follow externally imposed rules of war and politics does not appear to be an ideal defense strategy. Fox goes on to say, “In today’s era of great-power politics and great-power competition, it is vital to understand that the rules of international order, while idealistic, are often irrelevant.”^[23] If this is true and it would appear so, the important question to ask then is, why is defense doctrine bound to irrelevant idealistic rules of international order instead of being tied to pragmatic and realistic growth in national defense doctrine and knowledge about war and politics?

Grand Strategy

As the following diagram illustrates, unrestricted operational art can synchronize the levels of war and politics by commanders and state officials to align strategy, operations, and tactics with National Objectives serving as mission objectives (*auftragstaktik*). If these are not in alignment, the pillar becomes weak and is unable to function properly, like the “ends, ways, and means” concept which will be mentioned later. National Objectives at the bottom provides the multi-generational foundation for doctrine and theory to influence leaders and decision makers at the Grand Strategy level. One notable concept in this diagram is the “Time” component added to the levels of war. This allows strategic planners to nest the application of activities within a scheduled open-ended timeline for mission completion, helping prevent subjective time dilation biases within the operations process by frequent leader turnover.



If one of the National Objectives is “Counter *a, b, or c*” or some form thereof, this will influence doctrine from the tactical level all the way up to the strategic level to assist those implementing Grand Strategy for the nation, and grand strategic leaders will hopefully apply it correctly in the war and political spheres to achieve those National Objectives using unrestricted operational art. In the 2018 unclassified version of the National Military Strategy (NMS), it indicated five mission areas of focus: “Respond to Threats, Deter Strategic Attack (and proliferation of WMD), Deter Conventional Attack, Assure Allies and Partners, [and] Compete Below the Level of Armed Conflict (With a Military Dimension)”.^[24] While these have certainly evolved since that document was published, the example shows that all of them easily fit within Hybrid War Theory. That last mission is noteworthy as it can be interpreted as an evidential nod to the ideas expressed in the “war and peace” discussion earlier describing “peaceful competition” as “politics”. Politics here is simply competing below the level of armed conflict.

This also aligns with what G.K. Cunningham describes writing in his article, *Designing Effective Military Strategies under Uncertainty*, in the Summer 2020 edition of the US Army War College's quarterly journal *Parameters*: "Joint Planning, Joint Publication 5-0 (2017) begins with a description of Lykke's model: 'Joint planning is the deliberate process of determining how (the **ways**) to use military capabilities (the **means**) in time and space to achieve objectives (the **ends**) while considering the associated **risks**.' To the degree these three legs might be misaligned (tilt), the military strategist would likely encounter risk to assigned missions and tasks."^[25]

In applying Grand Strategy, the political and military unrestricted operational artist must properly align war and political strategy, operations, and tactics to accomplish National Objectives. When these become tilted or misaligned, achieving those National Objectives is much more difficult. Cunningham also writes, "Coherency between national or Grand Strategy and military strategy becomes hard to maintain when corresponding national-level guidance or direction is not part of the planning paradigm, a condition that impedes the assessment of risk."^[26] This issue is mitigated with the Pillar of Grand Strategy and National Objectives by stream-lining the coherency between the two via Hybrid War Theory and doctrine based on incorporating the concepts presented here in national planning processes.

As the world enters an era of Great Power Competition, the United States will need a doctrine that reflects this new approach. The following diagram illustrates how this could look being aligned with Unified or Geographic Combatant Command hierarchies (COCOMs) within the current civil-military structure. By creating a more unified relationship between the two, the United States can develop much greater efficiency in accomplishing hybrid objectives and countering conventional, irregular, and hybrid threats across the globe.



One historical example of this hybrid concept seen in previous conflicts is the North Vietnamese communists' use of it first against the French in their Indochina wars and then again against the United States during the US War in Vietnam: As Lieutenant General (Ret.) Philip Davidson, Chief of Intelligence under both Gen. Westmoreland and Gen. Abrams, said in his book, "Vietnam at War", "Giap's strategy of revolutionary war totally integrated two principal forms of force—armed force and political force, which the North Vietnamese called military *dau tranh* (struggle) and political *dau tranh*. Their combined use created a kind of war unseen before: a single war waged simultaneously on several fronts—not geographical fronts, but grammatical fronts—all conducted by one and the same authority, all carefully meshed."^[27] With significantly outmatched economic and military resources and supplies, the ability of the North Vietnamese to strategically defeat the French and the United States using very explicit hybrid war doctrine should be of great interest and warrant much greater study for US strategists. It would be unwise to ignore the historical lessons here.

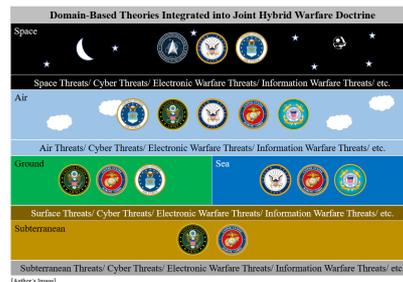
Incorporating Domain-Based Theories

According to the U.S. Army's Training and Doctrine Command, "Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) describes how the U.S. Army, as part of the joint force, can counter and defeat a near-peer adversary capable of contesting the U.S. in all domains, in both competition and armed conflict. The concept describes how U.S. ground forces, as part of the joint and multinational team, deters adversaries and defeats highly capable near-peer enemies in the 2025-2050 timeframe."^[28] This concept has now morphed into Joint All-Domain Operations (JADO). Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Hyten describes All-Domain Operations as combining "space, cyber, deterrent, transportation, electromagnetic spectrum operations, missile defense — all of these global capabilities together ... to compete with a global competitor and at all levels of conflict."^[29]

This can be expanded out from an understanding that all the service branches have domains within which they operate. Next, merging these domain-based concepts into a joint doctrine based on Hybrid War Theory illustrates the focus areas for service specific analysts to direct their analytical energy in devising defeat strategies across their domains while preparing for potential hybrid adversaries or threats. By codifying the domains that exist, different

branches can further synchronize their operations while training for and fighting hybrid conflicts and threats within JADOs. This also introduces the subterranean domain into Hybrid War Theory. In 2017, the Army released Training Circular TC 3-21.50, *Small Unit Training in Subterranean Environments - Preparing to Fight in Underground Facilities, Bunkers, Subways, Sewers, Caves, Tunnels, WMD Bases with Applicability to North Korea*, to address the lack of focus in this area of study.^[30] The consensus, however, is that the Army and Marine Corps still have a lot of work to do in developing greater doctrine focused on the subterranean domain.^[31]

The following diagram illustrates how domains across all branches can seamlessly integrate into Hybrid War Theory and joint doctrine. Using a common framework like Hybrid War Theory will help improve efficiency as combatant commands are joint formations and need a common language regardless of the parent branch and associated MDO experience.



Joint Hybrid Warfare Doctrine

Hybrid War Theory enables all branches’ doctrine to fall under its umbrella and be flexible enough to determine intelligent links between different services’ strategic plans, operational campaigns, and tactical missions. For example, Naval de-mining operations would fall under the same hybrid warfare doctrinal framework as Army Large-Scale Combat Operations (LSCOs). So too would Marine Corps, Air Force, Space Force, and Coast Guard operations. These branches can develop branch specific hybrid warfare doctrine at their respective educational institutions and tailored for their specific types of operations, joint and otherwise. This allows the different branches to develop their own organic doctrine as a foundation for their commanders to use, while being cognizant of similar joint doctrine. Thus, the different branches would be incentivized to create the best doctrinal framework to dominate the domains they fight in and prepare to handle any threats they might encounter, while being able to work with other branches seamlessly by “plugging in” to joint hybrid warfare doctrine. As Isaiah Wilson III and Scott A. Smitson say in their article *The Compound Security Dilemma: Threats at the Nexus of War and Peace*, “US strategists need a theory and analytics-informed network model that can highlight the [nexus] between drivers of instability, horizontally and vertically and between ecosystems.”^[32] This creates physical geographic and threat planes as attack vectors that require domains for deconfliction.

Material Acquisitions Process

Hybrid War Theory can act as a framework for acquisitions to help shorten schedules for new weapon upgrades over time. Acquisitions in a Hybrid War Theory system are based on raw improvement, not trying to determine what strategists think the future will hold based on guesses. This will speed up development as weapon designers and engineers are focused not on designing weapons based on threats a think tank might dream up, but are instead focused on designing and improving weapon systems based on current and historical use feedback so that joint forces have the best weapons regardless of the opponents or threats they might see on the battlefield. Much of this feedback would be continuously provided via operations and training exercises. Instead of looking for threats or scenarios to use certain weapon systems in, Hybrid War Theory advocates building the best weapons possible, then allowing the commanders to use unrestricted operational art in their employment.

The United States should build the best weapon system possible, not just aim for “doctrinal weapon systems”. This will help unleash the arms industry as development and innovation can be decoupled from bureaucratic requirements and red tape micromanagement and tied to training and exercise feedback. By using Hybrid War Theory, the United States can leverage current advantages over “potential” near-peer adversaries like China or Russia. Instead of spending time trying to develop technologies and doctrine for those potential threats, the United States may miss greater evolutionary jumps in both because they are too focused on fitting theoretical ideas into restrictive generational boxes based on perceived threats.^[33]

Air Force General James Holmes discussed a similar concept regarding acquisitions in a 2018 defense talk at the Brookings Institute as then Commander of Air Combat Command where he responds to the question of evolutionary improvements vs incremental improvements by saying: “So I think it means you have to do both. We learned to do that in the ’50s and ’60s when we were facing a peer adversary that focused all our efforts and intensity on defending our way of life. And so, we fielded new systems routinely and periodically and we fielded them incrementally. F-84s might have straight wings one lot and the next lot had swept wings because we had learned they were better; or we added a new sensor to it or we added a new part of the weapons system or a new weapon to it periodically. We’ve lost some of our ability to do that because there was -- in the absence of a peer threat, we could draw a line as far into the future kind of as we wanted to, we could take as long as we wanted to to get to that next capability, and we’d still be there ahead of our adversaries. Because that’s changed, we have to make evolutionary changes to things that we have and then we have to think about fielding the new things, the missing parts faster. And in Air Combat Command we talk about accepting risk to bring the future faster. Our part of that is we can’t take two and a half years to define the requirement anymore for something. We’re going to have to start with requirements that are achievable in the short term and make our requirement document a living document so that we can trade it off with our acquisition partners as we go forward and decide what can we get now. Is that better than what we have? And if so, let’s go do that instead of trying to think 10 years into the future.”^[34]

Political Advantages

Hybrid War Theory is designed to scale across the spectrum of civil-military national power. It can be used to improve the relationship and working efficiency between the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of State (DoS) in achieving national objectives by aligning missions for greater execution of *auftragstaktik*-style mission command across departments and *befehlstaktik*-style mission command for contingencies.^[35] If for instance the State Department is working with the military for some sort of operation against a near-peer opponent, they can use Hybrid War Theory to analyze historical conflicts which resemble the types of characteristics present in their current situation, and use this information to better develop and push solutions and plans to quickly deal with threats. That is the crux of the argument in this paper: That these types of doctrinal theories will further allow the US Government to pragmatically address violent and non-violent competition across the war and political spectrum using all elements of DIME.

Hybrid War Theory can also help plan for yet-to-emerge power dynamics in the future which are not currently seen nor understood, scaling American abilities in the future political realm. The current doctrines and experiences are only based on governmental and political systems currently seen or previously interacted with. If in the future, for example, Russia, China, or Europe were to hypothetically internally split into competing monarchies as their preferred way of governance, then Hybrid War Theory would be able to easily incorporate that new power dynamic into an understanding of potential diplomatic or conflict zones. Instead of rewriting entire doctrine as the defense community would likely attempt after any plausible power shift like those examples, they could write a few intelligence reports as the regional power structures would likely remain somewhat intact and incorporate that knowledge into the next periodical doctrine update. This allows Hybrid War Theory the ability to account for future unforeseen political or bureaucratic systems that have not yet been encountered.

One potential course of action related to this theory of warfare would be to merge the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) into the Department of State and give the DoS foreign political intelligence capabilities to provide Combatant Commanders with enhanced political instruments in their AORs. This would equip the political arm of the government with increased tools to further enable the completion of National Objectives. Putin himself is a former KGB officer. The only way to counter that type of political and military meshing advantage Russia possesses or others might possess in the future is to align the DoS with the CIA and DoD strategy. This type of doctrinal realignment could also positively influence unit restructuring via simplification within all the different branches. Certain US Army and Marine Corps branches like Psychological Operations and Civil Affairs for instance, could be merged with DoD and DoS units for enhanced operational effectiveness. This could enable greater cross branch utilization of military and non-military tactical instruments of national power, while maintaining separate branch core competencies and cultures. Streamlining those bureaucratic hierarchies would theoretically increase American offensive and defensive hybrid war capabilities.^[36]

Hybrid War in the Future

Ultimately, the Hybrid War Theory in this article is a juxtaposition of Jominian and Clausewitzian ideas about war for better doctrine as described by a US Military Academy text from 1945: “The main differences in their theories of war are: Jomini is the constructive author of a system of war [science], while Clausewitz is the destructive skeptic denying that any system can give success; Jomini favors the developmental patterns for military maneuvers—so long as these patterns are applied with intelligence—while Clausewitz believes that a general should learn the nature of war, ...and then use his own common sense to apply this knowledge to the solution of any problem confronting him [art]. These differences may be more apparent than real.”^[37]

As of the writing of this article, the US Secretary of State recently announced that the political autonomy of Hong Kong no longer existed but was subordinate to China.^[38] The Chinese used many similar hybrid warfare strategies and tactics against Hong Kong also used by Russia in their takeover of the Crimea and others. One of the reasons the US has been unable to counter these offensive hybrid takeovers is simply because strategic planners do not want to adjust to this new form of warfare and would rather attempt to sweep it under the rug, much to the advantage of near-peer threats. As Major Brian Fleming said, “Emerging RMAs [Revolutions in Military Affairs] are a threat to the established status quo and thus organizations often fail to respond to them properly. Typically, an organization’s response to a paradigm shift threatening one of its core competencies is: denial, escape or diversion, or acceptance and pertinent action. Denial is often the selected course of action. This is evidenced in the British and French militaries being aware of the claims made by proponents of what would become the Blitzkrieg RMA, but choosing to deny fundamental change was transpiring. This phenomenon is not limited to the military, as many business practices undergo the same experience. Only through exploring new concepts and developing new insights can successful and relevant military innovation emerge and consequently plan and prepare for [it].”^[39]

Chinese military power has been steadily growing the last few decades as the Chinese Communist Party has consolidated power and increased the budget for power projection in the Pacific. As their military budget has expanded, so too have their political tools. China’s expansion into Southeast Asia provides analysts a convenient way to evaluate the efficacy of hybrid warfare theories relevant to current geopolitical hot zones and describe the multi-domain hybrid aspects of China’s strategy in the region. A doctrine based on hybrid principles may be required to counter their increasing success in eroding regional containment strategies.^[40] As China sees its power grab in Hong Kong as successful, it will attempt to use the same strategies and tactics that were successful there in other places, like the contested Spratly Islands or Taiwan, while gaining valuable operational experience. In fact, in the future, China may apply Russia’s hybrid playbook towards Taiwan, and are probably already doing so at the time of this article’s writing, just like was seen with Hong Kong.^[41] These hybrid operations are well documented: “China’s development of, investment in, and presumptive annexation of artificial islands—patrolled by “dark” fishing fleets that serve as a de facto private navy while masking their true intentions—are a lightly veiled attempt to extend its domestic waters in the South China Sea.”^[42]

And finally, the Russians have become masters of this strategy as well: “Moscow employed maskirovka at the beginning of the 2014 conflict in Ukraine, when media reported on the presence of ‘little green men’ in Crimea who strongly resembled Russian soldiers although they wore uniforms without insignia identifying their origins. President Putin insisted they were ‘self-defense groups’ or ‘volunteers.’ By the time Moscow admitted to the presence of Russian troops in Crimea, this deception had created enough confusion to forestall significant international intervention in the conflict, and the ground reality was irreversibly tipped in Russia’s favor.”^[43]

These and many other examples demonstrate that Russia and China have intentionally blurred the lines between war and politics to avoid confrontation with American military forces while American strategic planners scratch their heads in confusion. The American Hybrid War Theory presented here incorporates these types of ambiguous problem sets into a Grand Strategic view of security for a new American Way of War.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are solely those of a civilian author and do not reflect any official policy or position of the Department of Defense or any U.S. Government Agency.

Biographical Note

Justin Baumann has completed graduate degrees from the University of Southern California and Arizona State University in public and business administration. He served with the 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment (OPFOR) in Afghanistan and the 82nd Airborne Division in Iraq before getting out of the Army. Thanks to Stephen Harnsberger, Major Dave, and the Small Wars Journal Team for their feedback.

Endnotes

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- [3] The “Gerasimov Doctrine” is a very contentious term that many have rejected. Its use here, specifics aside, is to denote the general advances in hybrid warfare doctrine and technology the Russians have made while the US was focused on fighting Counterinsurgency (COIN) and other counter-terror operations around the world for the past 30 years. The term provides a broad starting point for those interested in modern Russian Combined Arms and political warfare strategy and the term will be used throughout this article.
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