

Hybrid War:

ISIS and Russia in Action, A Comparative Study of Non-State and State Forms of Non-Linear Warfare

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This paper will address the ‘hybrid warfare’ approaches of a non-state actor, the Islamic State, in Iraq and Syria over the course of the past several years and of an important global state actor, the Russian Federation, in Ukraine in 2014-2015. The paper will begin by placing the term hybrid warfare in theoretical and historical context. The term ‘hybrid warfare’ has not yet achieved definitional rigor and it competes with a myriad number of other terms that tend to crowd that sub-field of Strategic Studies that looks at the bloody battlefields of sub-conventional warfare in the post-Cold War era. Supporters of a hybrid threat concept counter that contemporary threat actors are creating a new type of warfare through the employment of 21st century technologies and communications networks, unrestricted operational art, and novel combinations of conventional and non-conventional capabilities that are distinct from traditional irregular warfare methods. Frank Hoffman was the man most behind the articulation of the theory. He argues that the characteristics of ‘hybrid warfare’ include the following:

- Blended modalities. Hybrid threats use a combination of conventional and non-conventional tactics combined with terrorism and criminal activities.
- Simultaneity. Hybrid adversaries can employ different modes of conflict simultaneously in a coherent way.
- Fusion. Hybrid threats are comprised of a mix of professional soldiers, terrorists, guerrilla fighters, and criminal thugs.
- Criminality. Hybrid threats use criminal activity to sustain operations and, in

some cases, as a deliberate mode of conflict.

It has definitely made a splash and I will argue here that it captures the essence of much of the characteristics of warfare in contemporary times as waged by both non-state actors and state actors. Hoffman's articulation of it was more geared at the non-state actor as hybrid threat, I argue in this paper that state actors can use 'hybrid warfare' characteristics to their advantage as well.

The paper will then proceed to address the specificities of hybrid warfare as practiced by non-state actors and by state actors. Obviously non-state actors are weaker than state actors and the latter due to their ability to extract greater resources from the territories and population under their control can develop a large repertoire of hybrid capabilities. Nonetheless, it would behoove us not to view the hybrid capabilities of non-state actors like Hezbollah – whose ability to withstand Israel in 2006 brought the term hybrid warfare into prominence – and of Islamic State, formerly known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Non-state actors with developing hybrid capabilities, I argue, can fight across a conflict spectrum ranging from terrorism, guerrilla tactics, and use semi-conventional mobile units in parallel – using all capabilities simultaneously – or slide up and down the scale of the conflict spectrum according to environment and the enemy they are confronting at a specific time and place. States may develop and use hybrid warfare capabilities either to avoid escalation to all out war with the target of their attack or to prevent the allies of their victim from coming to the aid of the targeted state. Russia has done this in Ukraine. State actors may also develop hybrid warfare capabilities for use in 'real' warfare against opponents that may be superior technologically, as might Iran, the PRC and North Korea against the United States.

The bulk of the paper will analyze the hybrid warfare capabilities and operations of IS in both Syria and Iraq and then of Russia in Ukraine. This section will include detailed examination of IS operational art and tactics on the ground in Iraq and Syria and how they learned to improve their capabilities by 2015. The section on Russia will address the 'historical' affinity of Russians for this type of war from the early Soviet days to the present. Russian doctrine for hybrid warfare will be addressed and then its application in the Crimea and Donbass regions will be examined. Russia's seemingly strange approach to war is not that strange. She has done it before against Estonia and

more recently against Georgia. Moreover, the Russian Chief of the Armed Forces, Valery Gerasimov, explained in some detail Russia's version of hybrid war in a January 2013 speech in which he articulated an approach to war that included the use of non-military and military means in parallel to achieve strategic and policy goals. Not surprisingly, senior policy officials in the West, particularly those working within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have focused their energies on trying to ascertain what Russian hybrid warfare entails both conceptually and operationally in the field in the Ukraine conflict.