

# **The Evolution of the Concept of Russian New Generation Warfare: Implications for European Security**

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Since the beginning of the Crimean operation, it was difficult for many to find a term to define the way Russia conducted its operation. In the very beginning, some called it fourth generation warfare, referring to William Lind's idea that warfare presents a generational evolution. The First Generation of Modern War (1648-1860) was marked by line and column tactics, and battles were formal and the battlefield was orderly. Its significance is the establishment of a military culture, resulting in the separation between "military" and "civilian". The second generation surged as a development to address the contradiction between the military culture and the disorderliness of the battlefield. Its objective was attrition in a way that centrally-controlled firepower in synchrony with the infantry: the artillery conquers, the infantry occupies. The Third Generation was a development of the second, and is commonly known as the *Blitzkrieg* or maneuver warfare. Finally, the Fourth Generation represents a return of cultures being in conflict. The state loses the monopoly of violence and war, and finds itself fighting non-state adversaries (Lind 2004). Therefore, since Fourth Generation Warfare is basically about non-state actors fighting a culture war, this concept is too narrow to characterize the Russian way of conducting warfare.

One of Putin's closest advisors, Vladislav Surkov (under the pseudonym of Nathan Dubovitsky) coined the term "Non-Linear Warfare" in an article describing what would be the Fifth World War, the one where all fight against all (Dubovitsky 2014). The idea is that traditional geo-political paradigms no longer hold. Therefore, the Kremlin may gamble with the idea that old alliances like the European Union and NATO are less valuable than the economic interests it has with Western companies. Also, many Western countries welcome obscure financial flows from the post-Soviet space, as part of their own mode of economic regulation. Therefore, the Kremlin believes this means that Russia can get away with aggression (Pomerantsev 2014). Although this concept may explain Russia's idea of a war of civilizations (Vladimirov 2012), it fails to reflect the way it is conducting warfare.

The most accepted term for referring to Russian New Generation Warfare is Hybrid Warfare. NATO itself has adopted it. The seminal work about Hybrid Warfare is Hoffman's "Hybrid Warfare and Challenges". The author developed the idea that a hybrid strategy is based on tactically employing a mix of instruments, resulting in being difficult to fully understand and establish a proper strategy to deal with it. The main challenge results from state and non-state actors employing technologies and strategies that are more appropriate for their own field, in a multi-mode confrontation. It may include exploiting modern capabilities to support insurgent, terrorist, and criminal activities, the use of high-tech military capabilities, combined with terrorist actions and cyber warfare operations against economic and financial targets (Hoffman 2009). Therefore, it still largely presupposes the application of kinetic force, thus of military power to defeat the enemy.

A last and one more attempt to call New Generation Warfare something else was a paper published on the Journal of Slavic Military Thought by Jonsson and Seely (2015). They proposed to call it "Russian Full-Spectrum Conflict".

There are two problems. First, all these approaches still presuppose the application of kinetic force. Russian New Generation Warfare does not. Second, it is a conceptual mistake to try to fit Russian New Generation Warfare, the result of a long military academic discussion, on Western concepts. The word hybrid is catchy, since it may represent a mix of anything. However, since as military concept it is the result of American military thought, its basic framework differs from the one

developed by the Russians. Therefore, it is a methodological mistake to frame a theory developed independently by the Russian military within a theory reflecting other culture, way of thinking, and strategic understanding about the way of conducting warfare.

Also, an often ignored aspect of the Russian military art is the idea of asymmetry in warfare. As Vladimir Putin put himself already in 2006, “Quantity is not the end (...) Our responses are to be based on intellectual superiority. They will be asymmetrical and less expensive, but will certainly improve the reliability of our nuclear triad” (Putin 2006). In its classic definition, asymmetry is the strategy of a weaker opponent to fight a stronger adversary. The main idea is, as Clausewitz put it, that war “(...) is not merely a political act but a real political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, a carrying out of the same by other means. (...) The political design is the object, while war is the means, and the means can never be thought of apart from the object” (Clausewitz 2000, p. 280). As a result, since the objective of war is to achieve political objectives, the instruments of warfare may be military or non-military. This means that a direct attack followed by territorial occupation and annexation might not be necessary, therefore warfare may be direct, indirect, or both at the same time.

Russia’s campaign against Ukraine is the operationalization of a well-orchestrated operation of asymmetric warfare, using direct and indirect, and linear and non-linear tactics, mixed with symmetric methods, at the same time using clear political, psychological, and information strategies. It is the fully operationalization of “New Generation Warfare”. Its success can be measured by the fact that in just three weeks, and without a shot being fired, the morale of the Ukrainian military was broken and all of their 190 bases had surrendered. Instead of relying on a mass deployment of tanks and artillery, the Crimean campaign deployed less than 10,000 assault troops – mostly naval infantry, already stationed in Crimea, backed by a few battalions of airborne troops and Spetsnaz commandos – against 16,000 Ukrainian military personnel. After blocking Ukrainian troops in their bases, the Russians started the second operational phase, consisting of psychological warfare, intimidation, bribery, and internet/media propaganda to undermine resistance, thus avoiding the use of firepower.

The objective of this paper is to analyze the Russian military literature to present the theoretical evolution of the concept of New Generation Warfare. It presents a clear conceptual evolution from the first time the term appeared until the concept of Network Centric Warfare was merged with Asymmetric Warfare as Russian New Generation Warfare’s formative elements. It analyzes the works on the subject of Chichkan, Velesov, Kononov, Tsygichko, Kuralenko, Dulnev, Slipchenko, Vladimirov, Gerasimov, Chekinov, Bogdanov, and others. The paper then presents a schematization of the theoretical findings, first proposing a general formalization of phases of New Generation Warfare and, second, presenting its operational schematization. It follows a discussion of the results in the shadow of the war in Ukraine, and its implications for the European security.

#### Literature used on this Abstract

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