

# Does War Ever Change? A Clausewitzian Critique of Hybrid Warfare

Written by Kieran Green

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KIERAN GREEN, SEP 28 2020

Hybrid Warfare is a concept that first emerged at the beginning of the century and has grown to particular prominence following Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014.[1] To provide a brief and general introduction of the concept, it is generally conceptualised as a form of war characterised by the mixing of conventional and unconventional forces and tactics in order to achieve strategic goals; furthermore, it is also considered to be a form of war viable for non-state actors to conduct.[2] The impact of this hybridisation, as Russian General Valery Gerasimov has noted, is the notion that the distinction between war and peace has become increasingly unclear in the modern age.[3] It is considered by many to have been adopted by actors in response to western conventional military superiority.[4] Hybrid warfare has made large inroads in the policy sphere, entering western military thinking well before Russia's actions in the Crimea brought shone a spotlight onto the issue.[5] This has led to analysts perceiving a large range of purportedly new 'hybrid threats' to have come into existence, such as the integration of cyberspace into warfighting.[6]

However, whilst hybrid warfare has become a mainstay in the policy realm, the concept has been widely criticised and many writers dispute that it represents anything new or a change in the nature and conduct of war.[7] These critiques are primarily empirical in nature, focusing on highlighting elements of hybrid warfare that have occurred historically and therefore detracting from the notion that it is anything novel. This paper intends to engage with this debate and further develop the line of thought that this form of warfare is not anything substantially different from what has come before. To that end, the research question investigated here is: does hybrid warfare represents a fundamental change to the character or nature of war? However, rather than taking a purely empirical approach, the case will instead be argued on more theoretical grounds that hybrid warfare is nothing new, and in fact in many ways conceptually unsound. This will achieve this mainly through the application of Carl von Clausewitz's theory of war, as well with consideration of the wider theoretical literature on the nature and character of war. The adoption of such an approach is warranted due to the fact that the theoretical perspective remains largely undeveloped within the literature regarding hybrid warfare, thus the aim is to fill this particular gap in the debate and more thoroughly round out the broader critique of the concept.

Hybrid warfare has become increasingly relevant to the policy community, yet its validity as a useful concept still remains contested. More broadly, armed conflict and organised violence is arguably no less prevalent than it has in the past and remains a phenomenon that has huge consequential impacts on both states and human lives worldwide.[8] Therefore, rigorously testing any claims that espouse a change in both the character or nature of war is of huge importance, as having a solid understanding of what war fundamentally is will no doubt have potentially vast impacts on how it is fought and the marks it will leave on the world. As such, there is a case to be made that it is a worthwhile endeavor to assess not only the empirical validity of hybrid warfare, but also to robustly challenge it along theoretical lines. This paper will therefore proceed by first outlining Clausewitz's theory of war in order to provide the basis for analysis. Following this, it will then assess and critique two key underlying assumptions that form a large part of the narrative surrounding hybrid warfare, a shift in the locality of war and the application of non-kinetic forms of technological warfare, namely cyber and information. From these critiques the conceptual fragility of hybrid warfare and its ineptitude to adequately describe contemporary warfare will be demonstrated.

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## Literature Review

Hybrid warfare was first developed as a concept by Frank Hoffman in 2007, referring to the growing complexity of contemporary conflict and the increasingly sophisticated mixture of conventional and unconventional tactics that were being employed.[9] His analysis stemmed from what was observed in the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006 and was in many ways very narrowly defined and unproblematic, however, since then the concept has exploded in popularity, been co-opted, and generalised to the point where in its current state it is relatively broad and ambiguous.[10] Many writers have argued that the concept is now so broad and meaningless that it is analytically redundant in its current form.[11] In today's predominant narrative, the concept is mainly used to describe Russia's approach to Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014.[12] As highlighted by Robert Johnson in his very useful and thorough review of the literature, this association is largely a result of the previously mentioned comments made by General Gerasimov.[13]

As a result of this ambiguity, hybrid warfare has been conflated with concepts such as 'new' and 'postmodern' war.[14] However, it is clear upon careful consideration of hybrid warfare that while it is similar in regard to the fact that it essentially suggests changes to the character and nature of war, it remains conceptually distinct. This is because hybrid warfare is concerned exclusively with the means with which wars are fought and places an ontological focus on the tactics and strategies employed in a very practically minded and policy focused way. This is evident throughout Johnson's review of the literature.[15] This stands in contrast to Mary Kaldor's 'new wars' for instance, which not only considers wars conduct but moreover attempts to reframe the kind of actors involved and the causes for which war is fought, with intent to achieve a normative goal in breaking down 'old' assumptions about war.[16]

Despite this conceptual confusion, there are still clearly identifiable aspects of the concept that permeate its use and the discourse surrounding hybrid warfare that have been identified by Johnson. First amongst these is the idea that the locality of conflict has shifted and it is now conducted in the blurred space between war and peace.[17] Second is the importance and centrality of technology, especially actions in cyber space.[18] Thirdly, although not highlighted explicitly by Johnson, the relevance of acts of information warfare as part of hybrid warfare, especially since the events of Crimea, cannot be ignored and is highlighted by authors such as Mark Galeotti.[19] Consequently, these are the grounds by which the concept will be assessed in this paper.

Moreover, hybrid warfare has faced a large degree of criticism from a range of writers who have argued that it is nothing new.[20] These critiques focus for the most part on placing hybrid warfare within its historical context and by this, convincingly, demonstrate that the elements purported to make it novel in fact are the opposite. Interestingly, there has not been any significant response or attempt to defend the concept from such critiques, despite hybrid warfare's prominence and popularity. Further, what is largely missing is any consideration of the theoretical debate surrounding changes to the nature of warfare, Clausewitz's name is oft invoked but his theory of war is yet to be discussed in relation to hybrid warfare in any significant detail.[21] The most serious discussion of Clausewitz and hybrid warfare come from Paul Barnes – however, it would be wrong to call his comparisons to other basic human endeavors a detailed application of Clausewitz because his argument is only in relation to wars nature and not its character.[22] As a result, there is an obvious gap within the literature for a detailed application of Clausewitz to the matter of hybrid warfare.

Finally, to consider the wider literature on the character and nature of war (besides Clausewitz), the arguments put forward in this paper will draw primarily on the work of three thinkers, Colin Gray, Thomas Rid and Tarak Barkawi. None of these writers specifically address the phenomenon of hybrid warfare and as such their work will further be applied in a new context. Rather than discuss the specifics of each author's arguments here, it is logical to do so instead where the discussion is more pertinent to each specific point being presented here on.

## Clausewitz On War

One cannot have a serious debate about the nature and character of war without consideration of Carl von Clausewitz, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Prussian general widely considered to be the master theorist of war.[23] Before being

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able to effectively critique the underlying assumptions of hybrid warfare, it is pertinent to first outline exactly what the Clausewitzian theory and conceptualisation of war is, as well as justify its primacy. The aim of this endeavor is to establish a sound theoretical basis to take forward and provide a robust critique of the underlying assumptions that inform hybrid warfare. As such, this section will begin by first outlining the Clausewitzian conceptualisation of war and highlight the difference between the nature and character of war. Afterwards, the distinction between war and warfare will also be explicated. Lastly, the relevance and analytical merits of such a conceptualisation will be defended. One thing to note beforehand is that any direct references to Clausewitz's 'On War' are from the Michael Howard and Peter Paret 1976 translation, which may of course have the unintended effect of distorting or creating a different interpretation of Clausewitz's writing than prescribed in the original text.[24]

At the very basic level, Clausewitz defines war as 'an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will'.[25] Force in Clausewitz's framework refers simply and solely to the physical means of enacting violence, and the compulsion of the enemy to the will of the victor is achieved by depriving the adversary of power to act against them – it is this that Clausewitz considers to be the 'true aim of warfare'.[26] It is from this seemingly innocuous base that Clausewitz develops his sophisticated and timeless theory of war, of which there are two key components; which as Colin Gray explains are the two natures of war, the objective and the subjective.[27] The objective nature of war is argued by Clausewitz to be permanent, immutable and consist of common features to all wars at all times; it comprises the famed trinity, 'violence and hatred, chance and probability, and reason or policy'.[28] This trinity does not form a general prescriptive theory of war in the sense that it can be used to fully account for and explain all facets of war's causes, conduct and outcomes – answering these question in detail falls to the consideration of wars subjective nature (of which further explanation will follow).[29] Nonetheless, the trinity instead serves as a descriptive tool, shedding light on the fundamental underlying nature of all conflicts.[30]

To explain the individual facets and the interactions of the trinity in more detail, the first thing to note is that there is no set relationship between them, rather as Christopher Bassford describes they are, 'inherently unstable and shifting'.[31] This ultimately means that Clausewitz's theory of war is, as he himself acknowledges, amorphously formed within the interactions between the components of his trinity and likened to an 'object suspended between three magnets'.[32] Therefore, it is in this regard that Clausewitz's theory is descriptive not prescriptive, all three elements of the trinity are ever present but one may be more prominent and impactful than the others depending on the context within which a war occurs. To account for each facet in of itself, it makes sense to first address 'chance and probability' as the other two are the 'products of the human mind', essentially the subjective and individual human factors that constitute war's nature and thus are somewhat more complex.[33] In contrast, chance and probability, as Bassford comments, 'represent purely and simply, the concrete ... reality with which the actors must cope'.[34] In essence, it is the practical constraints actors face when prosecuting war, from weather, terrain and technology to the actions and capriciousness of other humans – to give a very unexhaustive list of examples.[35] As such, this cornerstone of Clausewitz's theory essentially represents the changing situations practitioners of war are forced to conduct themselves within.

Moving onto 'violence and hatred', Clausewitz here refers not to the physical act of violence – but rather – to the necessary presence of emotion in war instead.[36] Quite simply, in order for a state of war to exist, there must also be the existence of violent emotion acting as a 'motive force'.[37] Although these emotions need not be great enough to be the cause of a conflict in their own right, such emotions must be present in war as a consequence of actual violence being enacted and will resultantly have an influence on actors to some extent or another.[38] Therefore, 'violence and hatred' or the presence and influencing effect of emotion, are considered to constitute part of the eternal nature of war.

Lastly, is the most consequential and widely drawn on facet of the trinity, 'reason and policy'; it is in consideration of this aspect of Clausewitz's theory that his famous dictum comes to the fore, 'War is merely the continuation of policy by other means'.[39] It is important to make note here that due to the nature of translated text, the choice of the word policy isn't necessarily distinct from politics more broadly and Clausewitz simply used the word *politik* which may encompass both in the original German text. [40] As George Dimitriu argues, Clausewitz's ideas need to be understood using a broad conception of politics instead of the narrow notion that war is limited to being only an extension of state policy; a broader conception is vital, otherwise Clausewitz simply wouldn't be relevant in the

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contemporary world, especially when one considers the fall in interstate conflicts and rise in non-state actors as functional practitioners of war.[41] Consequently, here both phrases will be considered to amount to both the application and distribution of power unless specified otherwise (with power being a necessarily vague and broadly defined concept in order to capture the broad strokes of 'the political')[42].

From the idea that war is simply the continuation of politics by other means, several fundamental elements of Clausewitz's conceptualisation of war can be drawn; the most obvious and important being that war cannot be and is not separate from politics, Clausewitz makes this abundantly clear when he returns to the issue in Book Eight of 'On War' stating that:

War is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means. We deliberately use phrase 'with the addition of other means' because we also want to make clear that war in itself does not suspend political intercourse or change it into something entirely different. [43]

Accordingly, war is subordinate to politics and always shaped by it. Moreover, because of this subordination to politics, war is also instrumental in the sense that it is also a tool or means by which to meet political ends.[44] To summarise then, politics and war are inextricably tied together. War is always fought within political constraints, and one must also bear in mind the fact that war itself is also a tool of policy, unilaterally employed by actors to achieve political aims.[45] More broadly, the objective nature of war is the notion that the elements of the trinity are common to all wars and that war itself is a policy of employing physical violence in order to compel an adversary to one's will.

In contrast, as alluded to above, the subjective nature of war – which from this point on will be referred to as the character of war – is essentially what a war *actually* is in relation to the context it is fought in, and is always changing in relation to said context (whether that be social, political, technological or so forth).[46] This distinction between nature and character is important because it provides Clausewitz's theory the flexibility to be applicable and of analytical value when considering conflicts throughout time and place – nobody in any seriousness could state that there are not substantial differences between the European Napoleonic conflicts of Clausewitz's era and the modern high-precision wars that have been waged in Iraq and Afghanistan in more recent times.[47] However, what is asserted is that what has changed is the character of war, not its underlying nature. The components of the trinity can materialise in different manners and influence conflicts in varied ways, but notwithstanding this, they remain present. Importantly, this also means that despite not necessarily being the focus of Clausewitz's analysis, there is no element of his framework that precludes the inclusion of non- or sub-state actors as viable wagers of war.[48]

The final thing to clarify in relation to the theoretical framework that will be taken forward in this paper is that there is a difference between war and warfare, they are not synonymous terms.[49] Whereas war consists of the political application of violence and is underscored by the trinity, warfare instead corresponds only to how war is conducted – in essence the mechanics of how fighting occurs.[50] To demonstrate this difference, Sharma gives the example of a nation winning all the strategically significant battle it fights but ultimately losing the war it is engaged in – its manner and method of fighting (warfare) is clearly effective but clearly distinct from the political pressures that led the state in question to capitulate.[51] The difference is nuanced but nonetheless crucial, hybrid warfare – as the name suggests – concerns a new form of conducting war, not necessarily a new holistic form of waging war in of itself. Although the two are indisputably closely related and therefore by no means is Clausewitz's theory of war redundant when analysing hybrid warfare, one must be mindful not to conflate the two, wars subordination to politics ultimately infers that it is inherently of greater complexity than the means and practical mechanisms with which it is fought.

With all the above said, why is a Clausewitzian conception of war the best to take forward in relation to critiquing hybrid warfare? The first thing to note is that in order to provide any degree of effective analysis a cogent and robust notion of what war actually constitutes is necessary, as otherwise there would be no measure by which to compare hybrid warfare beyond comparisons to recent strategic history – something that has already effectively been done as highlighted earlier. Furthermore, Clausewitz has long been the dominant theorist of war, therefore it only makes sense to assess hybrid warfare against the framework that has been and still very much is the bedrock of strategic studies.[52] There have been numerous attempts in the past to suggest that the nature of war has indeed changed and we have in fact moved into a 'non-trinitarian' paradigm but these have been widely critiqued and dismissed by

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those within the field of strategic studies.[53] A good indicator of the primacy of Clausewitz is the fact that Mary Kaldor, the architect of the 'new wars' thesis, felt compelled to justify her view of the changes in contemporary war in such a way that it remained compatible with Clausewitz's trinity.[54] Consequently, there does not appear to be any grounds for abandoning the dominant framework and sparing hybrid warfare from being tested against it. On the other hand, this is not to say that it would be wrong to dismiss the question of whether hybrid warfare itself merits a legitimate move into a post-Clausewitzian paradigm – however this discussion is better considered later on in this paper.

## A Clausewitzian Critique of Hybrid Warfare and its 'Newness'

Now that Clausewitz's theory of war has been comprehensively established, it can now be applied to hybrid warfare in order to form a critique of its conceptual integrity and further dispel the notion that it represents a change in the nature of war. The critique offered will address two distinct areas. Firstly, hybrid warfare is largely premised on the notion that war's locality has shifted from a clear distinction between war and peace to a 'grey zone' that lies between the two; the critique offered here is that the war/peace binary never existed and war, while conceptually distinct, has never been separable from peace. Therefore, this substantially undermines the notion that hybrid warfare represents something new in this regard. Secondly, it will be argued that the core technological and operational elements (namely acts in the cyber and information domains), that form a large degree of the discussion surrounding hybrid warfare, lack the attribution of physical violence that forms a key part of what war is understood to be and therefore are seemingly incompatible with a Clausewitzian conceptualisation. This, then, significantly neuters the concepts ability to effectively describe contemporary warfare – undercutting the argument that hybrid warfare does in fact represent a significant shift in war.

### *Hybrid Warfare and the Locality of War*

One of the underlying narratives surrounding hybrid warfare and the Gerasimov doctrine is the idea that the lines between war and peace have become increasingly blurred as a result of the combination of tactics being employed in contemporary warfare.[55] While a critique of these tactics will be offered later, what is clear is that hybrid warfare, as a concept, is largely premised on the notion that war and peace were in the past wholly separate endeavors.[56] However, such a suggestion is not only empirically unsound but also something Clausewitz would most likely scoff at.[57]

While this paper does not specifically adopt a postcolonial approach, Tarak Barkawi's Clausewitzian critique of the war/peace binary is very pertinent and applicable here. The idea that war and peace were separate states of being that have recently merged does not appear to be an illogical assumption to reach when considering contemporary patterns of conflict, given the fact that the idea of a binary between the two has been naturalised in general western discourses of war as far back as the writings of Thomas Hobbes.[58] However, the binary collapses when war is considered in the Clausewitzian conception that it is 'simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means.'[59] As Barkawi highlights, while war entails the use, or threat, of violent means, it is always enacted in a political context that means while war has conceptually well-defined boundaries, the actual ability to distinguish between the states of war and peace is marred with political fog.[60] Nuclear weapons and the Cold War act as a good exemplifier of this reasoning, the potential for the use of such weapons at any time (which would without question qualify as an act of war), hung over and influenced the political intercourse of the entire period that for the most part would be considered by most to be (relatively) peaceful period.[61] The blurred nature of war and peace is especially true when one considers that war isn't always full on large scale battle or an act of mass destruction, but can be used instrumentally by states in a very limited form to achieve greater political goals.[62]

Furthermore, what constitutes the threshold between what is considered war and peace in the political sense, is not down to the manner in which war is conducted, but, again, the context within which it is fought.[63] Therefore, what constitutes a *casus belli* or an act of 'justified' war is determined by the norms and politics of the time. Thus, the 'grey zone' or the space in which warlike acts can be conducted without causing a full blown conflict to break out is by no means fixed. Paul Barnes effectively argued this in a talk of his, when he highlights that the threshold for a *casus belli* has changed significantly over time. [64] To take a particularly compelling example, Britain went to war with Spain in

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the 18<sup>th</sup> century over the accidental amputation of a merchant captain's ear, but did effectively nothing in response to the murder of a British citizen, with a chemical weapon, on British soil in 2018.[65] As such, what may seem to be the blurring of war and peace nowadays only appears so because of the surrounding political context, there is no real empirical or historical case to argue the contrary. Consequently, the notion of there ever being any real separation between the states of war and peace is theoretically unviable, empirically unsupported, and consequently hybrid warfare is nothing new in regard to the locality of war.

Admittedly, this critique does not pose a major challenge to hybrid warfare's conceptual integrity. Simply framing the concept with the above in mind would adequately address this issue and make it practically void. What is achieved by such a critique, however, is that it challenges hybrid warfare's novelty and the claim that war has only recently been conducted in the 'grey zone'. Instead, it has always existed in some form as a condition of war inherently being tied and subordinate to the greater realm of politics.[66]

## *Hybrid Warfare and Technology*

The application of contemporary technology in new domains and the use of it in combination with other tactical and strategic measures is a central assumption of hybrid warfare.[67] Most of the discussion pertaining to the use of new technologically novel tactics, especially since the events surrounding Crimea in 2014, has focused on the use of cyber and strategic communications in particular.[68] However, it can be argued that technological movement and acts in the realms of cyber and disinformation are fundamentally incompatible with Clausewitz's theory of war. This is significant because if these core activities of hybrid warfare do not actually amount to acts of war, hybrid warfare's ability to effectively describe the contemporary conduct of war is severely undercut and incognisant. To effectively demonstrate this, it is important to consider Thomas Rid's work on why cyber war, in a distinct and unilateral form, is un-Clausewitzian and therefore actions in cyberspace do not amount to acts of war.[69] The logic of his argument can then be appropriated to further argue that engaging in acts of strategic communications for strategic ends, also fails to align with the Clausewitzian definition of war. Doing this then allows for the re-entry into this paper, the question of whether a new post-Clausewitzian approach is needed considering new technology and the potential changes this brings to the nature of war. Upon dispelling this notion and defending the Clausewitzian conception, the effects of these technologies as potential augmenters of warfare, rather than direct acts or domains of war in their own right, that hold the potential to make hybrid warfare something new and distinct certainly warrants careful consideration. The answer ultimately to this proposition however is that there simply is no empirical basis to sustain such a claim, as will be shown.

To begin then with consideration of the cyber domain, cyber warfare is defined by the think tank RAND Corporation as, 'actions by a nation-state or international organization to attack and attempt to damage another nation's computers or information networks through, for example, computer viruses or denial-of-service attacks.'[70] Disregarding the state-centric nature of the definition, one report released by the organisation concludes that while cyber-attacks are primarily utilised by states for the purpose of espionage, there have been cases where they have been employed with the intention of compelling an 'enemy' to bend to the overtly political will of the instigator – one example being Russia's use of cyber operations against Montenegro in an attempt to derail the nations attempt to join NATO.[71] Therefore, cyber warfare appears to satisfy a major element of what Clausewitz considers to be war, the coercion of the enemy to one's will. However, as highlighted by Rid, cyber-attacks fail to meet the requirements that precede Clausewitz statement about the compulsion of the enemy – that it must be done so through the conduct of a physically violent act.[72] For the most part, cyber-attacks or any action in cyberspace aren't violent in nature, although there have certainly been claims to contrary, such as the idea that a cyber-attack could cause the explosion of an oil pipeline for example.[73] However, while not impossible there has never been a proven example of such an event, and if one were to occur it would essentially be the exception that ultimately proves the rule.[74] Accordingly, based upon the known empirical pattern of cyber-attacks it is safe to say that in the contemporary world (what *may* happen in the future is an entirely different question and not in the purview of this discussion), violence is not directly enacted through the cyber domain. What cyber-attacks can do instead is help facilitate violence. Rid offers the case study of an Israeli bombing of a Syrian nuclear reactor under construction in 2007, in which a cyber-attack was most likely used to disable Syrian anti-aircraft weaponry, hence facilitating the actual act of violence in destroying the site.[75] As a result, actions in the cyber domain cannot be considered acts of

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war in their own right, for these acts do not affect violence, they simply enable it.[76]

The same logic can be easily applied to the domain of information operations, which to some observers has come to form a keystone of hybrid warfare's conceptual build up since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, and perhaps far more significant a development than the growth of cyber operations over the last few decades.[77] Evidence of this mindset can clearly be seen from the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence's (NATO CCDCOE) report into Russia's use of strategic communications and social media in the Ukraine, where it is claimed that:

The new information environment has changed the nature of warfare. The events in south-east Ukraine have demonstrated that a conflict can be won without firing a single shot and some of the key battles can take place in the cyber and communications domains rather than on the land, air and sea.[78]

The idea of strategic communications is essentially that social media and other information channels, which in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are mainly online or cyber to some extent, can be used as 'a low-cost speedy way of manipulating society's perceptions in order to cause disruptive behaviour in real life.'[79] The use of information, or disinformation as the case may be, for political or strategic purposes is nothing new and is in more pervasive than one would perhaps initially think. For instance, the former USSR's secret police or KGB ran a disinformation campaign that suggested 'that the US deliberately developed and spread HIV/AIDS' in order to undermine trust in their public health response.[80] Rather, the inferred change and novelty of strategic communications is the technological, cyber and social media aspects of it, as well as the notion that it is a tactic that can be effectively used as a force multiplier in military operations.[81] However, much like with cyber-attacks (and in fact even more so as there are practically no hypothetical scenarios available wherein they do), the use of disinformation campaigns or strategic communications do not amount to a kinetic act. Thus, again, they do not qualify as acts of war in their own right. Instead, as was the case in Crimea, they simply helped to enable operational actions within the traditional domains of war.

On the other hand, is it correct to simply state that these actions cannot constitute acts of warfare in their own right and dismiss them based on a theoretical concept developed in the era of muskets and cannons? Is there perhaps an argument to be made that that technology has advanced to the point where war's fundamental nature has changed and a post-Clausewitzian theory of war is needed where physical violence isn't a fundamental feature of war's nature?[82] Colin Gray appears to give tacit consent to this notion when broaching the topic in his seminal book examining the future of warfare by simply stating 'so what?' and instead arguing that apart from the notion of violence, cyberwar's nature is fundamentally no different than that of traditional war and is unlikely to have a transformative effect.[83] However, dropping any notion that war's means must consist of the application of physical violence risks potentially broadening the concept and thus losing the conceptual clarity that allows for effective analysis – as is argued to have happened to the concept of security more generally by many proponents of the traditional approach.[84] Without the condition of violence being central to war, then conceivably any form of coercion with the intention of compelling another to take certain action would constitute war – this is a wholly problematic outcome as the concept of war would lose much of its conceptual integrity.[85]

Furthermore, Gray's position is based on the notion that cyber constitutes its own geography or distinct space in which war is enacted.[86] In contrast, Rid effectively shows that cyber is not its own space by demonstrating that the term cyberspace is merely a metaphor for the 'widening reaches of the internet' that doesn't constitute its own domain, but instead permeates the actual geographies of war – air, land, sea and space.[87] Rather than engaging in cyberwarfare, those who carry out political cyber-attacks for the most part engage in the activities of sabotage, espionage and subversion; all of which are distinct concepts that are separate from, but oft related to, war in their own right.[88] While not explicit in this debate, the same arguments carry nicely over to the question of information operations – if one is to consider the space in which information war would supposedly be carried out on, it would be the human mind. However, this also is not a distinct geographical domain and clearly humans are prevalent in all pre-existing domains of war. As a result, it is clear that the technological advancements pertinent to hybrid warfare do not necessarily provide a significant challenge to the Clausewitzian concept of war. On the contrary, further examination of the domains of cyber and information actually reinforces the primacy of the traditional domains in which warfare occurs.

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However, the above only considers cyber warfare and strategic communication on their own, not in relation to the wider context of hybrid warfare. What has been established already does not preclude the possibility that cyber and information actions significantly augment the traditional means of warfare, such that hybrid warfare represents a marked change in wars character. Unfortunately, however, this does not appear to be empirically substantiated, as will be demonstrated in two ways. Firstly, by considering the wider literature on technologies impact on war, the argument will be put forward that technology alone rarely represents a substantial change in the nature of war. Secondly, by examining hybrid warfare holistically and empirically in the light that it is augmented by acts of disinformation and cyber-attack, it will be suggested there is nothing particularly new about the ways in which war is said to be conducted, as well as the ways in which it materialises.

Despite Colin Gray's earlier transgression in abandoning the centrality of violence to war, his critique of *Revolutions in Military Affairs (RMA)* theory is very valuable, showing that history suggests technological advances on their own don't often amount to substantial changes in the conduct and thus character of war. RMA theory predates hybrid warfare and is defined by Andrew Krepinevich as, 'It is what occurs when the application of new technologies into a significant number of military systems combines with innovative operational concepts and organizational adaptation in a way that fundamentally alters the character and conduct of conflict'.<sup>[89]</sup> Gray does not deny that that 'radical changes occur in the conduct and character of war', however he opines that technology is oft not the sole driver of such developments.<sup>[90]</sup> Instead, it needs to be remembered that technology is not 'functionally independent' and needs to be considered alongside the wider military context it arises in – offering the examples of weapons of mass destruction and coordinated artillery in World War I; both new technologies that brought fundamental changes to the way in which war was conducted, but only as a result of the wider military and political circumstances they arose from.<sup>[91]</sup> Accordingly, technologies impact on the conduct of war cannot be considered in a bubble and they must be placed and appraised within the wider military context.

To then to examine hybrid warfare holistically with Gray's aforementioned points in mind, it is nothing new and therefore it can be concluded that these technological elements have not materialised in such a way that has substantially changed the character of war. Mark Galeotti highlights three key aspects of Russian hybrid warfare (as distinct from Hoffman's original conceptualisation) that he considered to be its distinctive features, these are namely: allowing non-kinetic operations (especially information operations) to come to the fore, the utilisation of non-state actors, and the existence of a single command structure for both military and political operations.<sup>[92]</sup> Obviously, the first element of this has already been heavily critiqued and so only will be considered in relation to the other two. As for the use of non-state actors and a coherent, unified chain of command, Galeotti demonstrates how they are not new by providing a historical account of Russian warfighting from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present. For example, highlighting how all three elements are present in both the Russian Civil War and the nation's later invasion and occupation of Afghanistan throughout the 1980s.<sup>[93]</sup> At the beginning of this paper, it was alleged that Russia's use of 'hybrid warfare' was a result of the US and its allied nation's superiority in the ability to wage conventional forms of war. In some ways this appears to be true. However, regarding the conduct of war, hybrid warfare clearly is nothing new and does not amount to a substantial change in the character of war. What has changed is 'the political, military, technological and social context' that actors are having to contend with.<sup>[94]</sup> As such what we are seeing is a particular application of tactics and strategies that may appear novel, but in reality are not. As a result, proponents of hybrid warfare have ultimately fallen foul of the trap of presentism and a failure to contemplate the wider empirical and historical context that indicates as such.<sup>[95]</sup>

To summarise, the technological aspects that have come to constitute core elements of what proponents of hybrid warfare see as novel and transformative in war, simply are not. Not only do acts of cyber and information warfare fall short of qualifying as acts of war in their own right, their transformative impact on warfare more generally has not materialised. Consequently, it can be claimed with confidence that the technological emphasis prominent in the hybrid warfare narrative represents no significant shift in either the character or nature of war, and that the conceptual basis for such a claim is largely unsound.

## Conclusion

In assessing hybrid warfare in relation to Clausewitz's theory of war, the conclusion that it is not anything



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fundamentally new appears to be further substantiated. By critiquing two of the underlying assumptions of hybrid warfare, a change in the locality of war, and the transformative effect of non-kinetic forms of warfare, this paper has argued that the conceptual integrity of hybrid warfare is severely lacking because it fails to accurately describe what warfare fundamentally is. What it does describe correctly is by no means novel. Firstly, the idea that hybrid or contemporary warfare more broadly is conducted in a 'grey zone' is not an incorrect statement to make – however, the claim that it is a new phenomenon doesn't only fall flat upon empirical assessment, but is also a deeply un-Clausewitzian assertion which neglects the central role politics plays in war and its conduct. As such, any claim that hybrid warfare is novel in such a respect is misleading. Secondly, the non-kinetic actions that form a key part of the narrative surrounding hybrid warfare and its novelty have been shown to be irreconcilable with the Clausewitzian conception of war. The effect of this is that cyber and information warfare cannot actually be considered to be methods of warfare on their own, instead they simply augment the pre-existing ways in which war is conducted. However, as shown, the impact of these technological changes has not amounted to a significant change in the character of war. Instead, the character of the conflicts, as well as the tactics and strategies adopted by certain actors over the last two decades, can be explained by the political and military realities of this period, rather than an evolution in warfighting. Ultimately, there is nothing about Russia's annexation of Crimea or actions in Ukraine that suggests they are incompatible with Clausewitz's trinity, all three elements can clearly be identified.[96] Therefore, to reiterate, hybrid warfare has not fundamentally changed the nature or character of war.

Looking forward to a future research agenda, while hybrid warfare is conceptually unsound and shows no big shift in how wars are pursued, it continues to be a dominant framework with which policy makers are interpreting and assessing conflict. This is evident from its prominence at major conferences and governmental publications.[97] As such, whether hybrid warfare is new or not isn't necessarily important, actors thoughts and actions are liable to be shaped by a concept which is considered here to be largely problematic. Consequently, a direction for further enquiry would be to assess the potential policy effects and implications that may arise as a result of hybrid warfare being taken seriously. This is particularly pertinent when one considers that hybrid warfare suggests, to some extent, a considerable broadening of what war consists of. Therefore, the issue of what a generally accepted, wider conception of war would mean for policy makers, society, and politics more broadly, is worthy of serious consideration.

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*Written at: The University of Sheffield*

*Written for: Dr Matt Sleat*

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