



GEORGIAN FOUNDATION FOR
STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

“HYBRID WARFARE” AND RUSSIA’S “MODERN WARFARE”

NIKOLOZ KAVTARADZE

201

EXPERT OPINION





საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობათა კვლევის ფონდი
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The publication is made possible with the support of the US Embassy in Georgia. The views expressed in the publication are the sole responsibility of the author and do not in any way represent the views of the Embassy.

Technical Editor: Artem Melik-Nubarov

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ISSN 1512-4835

ISBN

“The supreme manifestation of the art of war is to subdue the enemy without a fight.”

Sun-Tzu

The 21st century is marked by widespread discussion of “Hybrid Threats” and “Hybrid Warfare” by international policy researchers, military strategists, journalists, politicians, non-governmental organizations, and ordinary citizens. Thousands of papers, analyses, broadcasts, and more have been devoted to these issues worldwide.

This publication will attempt to inform the reader on the origin and development of the theory of “Hybrid Warfare”, while in the second part it will juxtapose this theory with the “modern warfare” produced by the Russian Federation, thereby creating a basis for independent conclusions by interested parties.

Hybrid Warfare

The term attempts to explain the complex nature of 21st century warfare, which involves multiple actors, and blurs the lines between war and peace (Wither 2019).

Francis Hoffman is considered the founder of the concept of “Hybrid Warfare”. He developed it based on the works and theories of various authors published in the late 90s and early 2000s. The term itself was first used by Robert Walker in his unpublished master’s thesis in 1998 - “Spec Fi: The US Marine Corps and Special Operations”.

According to Hoffmann “Hybrid war” encompasses different modes of warfare. Among them, conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, acts of terrorism manifesting in isolated acts of violence, and disorder incited through the criminal actions¹. These multi-modal activities can be carried out by both state and a variety of non-state actors². The key is to achieve operational and tactical coordination within the main battlespace in order to obtain a synergistic effect.

Hoffman does not assert that the fusion of conventional and non-conventional components is something new. He explains that in hybrid warfare, these components come together on the same battlefield, while in other types of warfare, these components are used in different theaters and in various formations (Hoffman 2007).

According to Hoffmann, the goal of “Hybrid War” - to suppress the political will of decision makers - acquires a much greater importance than it is described when discussing the theories of other types of wars.

Kilcullen argued about the same in 2009. He noted that the “Hybrid Warfare” is a phenomenon that combines military and non-military actions used by both state and non-state actors to influence the domestic and/or international arena, with or without the use of direct or indirect violence (Kilcullen 2009). However, in contrast to Hoffmann’s approach, this definition refers to a more strategic level.

A “Hybrid war” attracted particular interest in 2014, when the Russian Federation carried out illegal annexation of Crimea and military operations in the eastern regions of Ukraine. The term regularly appears everywhere from newspaper articles to official documents (Cramers & Caliskan 2018). Understandably, in such conditions the term has changed and acquired new elements.

While Hoffman explained that the theory he developed was about the tactical and operational level, during the last decade “Hybrid War” has become corresponding to the strategic level and reached the zenith of popularity. Consequently, the criticism has also increased: due to the vagueness of “Hybrid Warfare”, it can be used as a convenient title to describe any type of warfare nature of which is not yet fully understood (Puyvelde 2015), or it can “ collect everything that Moscow does under one banner “ (Kofman & Rojansky 2015).

Internationally, the term first appeared in the NATO Wales Summit Declaration: “We will ensure that NATO is able to effectively address the specific challenges posed by hybrid warfare threats, where a wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures are employed in a highly integrated design” (NATO 2014).

Similar to NATO, hybrid threats also appeared in the EU documents defined as “mixture of coercive and subversive activity, conventional and nonconventional methods (i.e. diplomatic, military, economic, and technological) that can be used in a coordinated manner by state or non-state actors to achieve specific objectives while remaining below the threshold of formally declared warfare” (Maas 2017). Although both definitions are similar to Hoffmann’s, they place more emphasis on non-military aspects of strategy, such as diplomacy, economics, and technology (Cramers & Caliskan 2018).

All of the above confirms that there is no unique and overarching definition of the “Hybrid Warfare”.

Is modern Russian warfare hybrid?

The selection and use of the appropriate method of warfare serves to achieve a specific goal. There is a lot of discussion on Russia’s geopolitical goals, but let’s distinguish two points of view: first - Putin is forming long-term strategies aiming to sever the US connection with Europe, disintegrating the European Union and NATO; the second - Putin is mostly in a reaction mode, having an absolute decision-making power he tries to maintain Russia’s position in the international arena (Nelson 2020).

The problem for Russia is that it cannot engage in open confrontation with its rivals, neither in political nor military domain. The Russian government feels that its conventional capabilities are far inferior to those of the West. As Russia cannot compete symmetrically, it chooses to damage its rivals in asymmetrical ways (Boulègue & Polyakova 2021).

The above-mentioned asymmetric approaches have been called “Russian Hybrid Warfare” by the vast majority of Western society (researchers, journalists, politicians), especially after the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014. This has led many to believe that Moscow has devised a new strategy to achieve its goals without entering into a direct confrontation with the militarily superior West.

In addition, some of Putin’s earlier speeches³ have been re-examined and pre-existing signals were searched for in the lesser-known sources. One of such cases was a paper published in 2013 by Russian Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov (Monaghan 2015), which was later called the “Gerasimov Doctrine” (Galeotti 2014).

Before diving into the review of the “Gerasimov Doctrine”, it is important to remember that the term “Hybrid Warfare” (“Гибридная Война”) did not originate in the Russian Federation. Official Moscow has also never used the term to describe its own actions. In the Russian literature, it is mostly used to describe the actions of the “West”, including the “new generation warfare against Russia” conducted by the US and NATO.

The Russian dissident Evgeny Messner was one of the rare and first Russian military thinkers to explain hybrid elements without using the term “hybrid” itself. As early as 1931, he explained that: “...the war will

be comprised of not only the traditional elements of open war, but also of civil war: sabotage, strikes, unrests, insurgencies [which] will shake the state's organism, proper functionality that is much required at moments of lethal struggle with an external enemy... [and by which] the enemy will enter the hearts of people..." (Messner 2005).

"The Gerasimov Doctrine"

The "Gerasimov Doctrine" as a term was first used by the writer Mark Galeotti in 2014 (Galeotti 2014), which was then widely picked up by the Western media as if it were a "manual for modern Russian hybrid warfare". Galeotti later regretted coining the term.⁴

According to his assessment, Gerasimov in his work described a new Western form of warfare when he spoke about the absence of clear boundaries between war and peace and the growing role of non-military means to achieve political and strategic goals (Galeotti 2020). In particular, Gerasimov claimed that the rules of war had changed due to the "Colour Revolutions" and the "Arab Spring". He named the new generation war to be a combination of economic, political, and diplomatic activities along with military actions. This method has made it possible to achieve goals that were previously only attainable through the direct military actions, while now it is possible without them or at least before they are deployed (Murphy 2016). The concept of "indirect and asymmetric means", interpreted by the West as "Hybrid Warfare", is perhaps the most misunderstood part of Gerasimov's article (Bartles 2016).

Discussions about Gerasimovian "Hybrid Warfare" may misjudge Russia's behavior, as the term does not exist in the Russian military theory and it cannot fully describe the modern Russian warfare. At the same time, Russia's "Active Measures", which are a continuation of Soviet-era methods, allow us to explain how a state can use all means at its disposal against a target country (Duncan 2017). This is not really a new phenomenon. However, here we should take into account that the West considers non-military components as a means of preventing war, while Russia considers them as a means of conducting a war (Bartles 2016).

Some historians believe that the "Gerasimov Doctrine" reflects a pre-designed plan that Russia used in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. They point out that it does not matter how the theory was developed, what matters is how the Russian military leadership understood and applied

it (Bartles 2016). Some historians simply do not believe that the Russia's military strategy was completely changed in 1 year after the publication of Gerasimov's work, and a brilliant operation with elements of hybrid warfare was carried out in Ukraine. Moreover, Michael Kofman believes that the annexation of Crimea in 2014 was an ordinary covert military operation using special forces without any distinguishing insignia (Kofman 2016).

“The Russian Hybrid Warfare”

Even Francis Hoffman, in an article published after the annexation of Crimea, talks about the contradiction of his own theory. On the one hand, it is partially acceptable for him to use the term “Hybrid Warfare” when characterizing Russia's actions, for example, in the 2008 Georgia-Russia war or in the Eastern Ukraine in 2014. On the other hand, he notes that: “The definition of hybrid threat... fails to capture non-violent actions. Thus, it does not address instruments including economic and financial acts, subversive political acts, covert use of non-governmental organizations, information operations using false websites and newspaper articles” (Hoffman 2014).

It is difficult to perfectly apply any definition of “Hybrid Warfare” to the modern war waged by Russia, although we should not rule out that Russia has mirrored the methodology discussed in Western circles for decades.

It is important not to miss the fact that many tools and methodologies considered hybrid were used by the Russians even in the Soviet period, for example: Covert Activities - the dark side of typical international activities in the economic, political, or military spheres, for which the Soviet Union did not take responsibility; “Active measures” - the well-known method of the KGB, which includes such actions of special services as propaganda, disinformation, support of collaborators, bribery of agents of influence; Deception - a political and military strategy that masks the true goals; “Invasion invitation”, for example as it happened in Czechoslovakia in 1968; Information Operations and many more. When contemporary literature describes aspects of “the Russian Hybrid Warfare,” inevitably we recall active measures taken by the Soviet regime (DeBenedictis 2022).

Any theory reflects the novelties that arise in the subjective characteristics of the nature of war. As Clausewitz described, the methods of fighting are changing along with the development of man. Swords have been replaced

by rifles, machine guns, tanks, and the time has come to use new forms of “weaponry” - Facebook, Twitter, mobile phones, tablets, and drones. In the end, the essence of the conflict remains unchanged - break the will to resist.

Penetrating deep into the enemy’s “territory” using unconventional means to approach the consciousness of the population (in most cases without physically being there) aims to create enough influence to suppress the political will to fight. In this context, the term “enemy” can refer to the state, government, decision makers, population, military. The Russian Federation combined its experience with the Soviet “inherited” knowledge of conducting special and covert operations, which allowed it to act stealthily avoiding international reactions (Cantwell 2017).

Despite the differences of opinion on applying the term “Hybrid Warfare” to the modern Russian warfare, we cannot ignore the enormous influence it has gained around the world.

In relation to Russian activities, the terms “Hybrid War/Threats” have also taken their place in strategic documents of the international level. NATO 2021 Brussels Summit Communiqué (NATO 2021) and NATO 2022 Strategic Concept (NATO 2022) include the direct list to describe the above actions. The elaboration of the list is probably intended to avoid possible interpretation caused by the lack of a clear definition of “Hybrid Warfare”.

In general, taking into account the diversity of the elements of the Russian warfare, the use of the term “Russian Hybrid Warfare” can technically be considered appropriate, since, for example, the word “hybrid” is defined in the Oxford dictionary as “the product of mixing two or more different things” (Oxford Dictionary 2022). Regardless of the terminology, Russia pursues its national interests beyond its own borders, by employing a variety of tools of power and influence, using whole of government and society approach.

Characteristics of the “Russian Hybrid Warfare”.

“Hybrid Warfare” significantly reduces or eliminates the need to use military force. Russia is well aware that it cannot enter into a direct military confrontation with the “collective West” or any country of relative “weight”, and in this way tries to avoid unwanted material or non-material

costs in case of a such conflict (Chivvis 2017). However, as we can see on the example of Georgia and Ukraine, hybrid methods do not exclude the use of military force, if the main goal, in those cases the disruption of integration with the West, is not achieved.

A “Hybrid War” takes place “below threshold” - on the one hand, it avoids a strong international reaction, and on the other hand, it blurs the boundaries between peace and war, which allows to quickly shift actions in one direction or the other, and therefore increases the pressure on the target state. It is difficult to define the “red lines” that will trigger a backlash (Bilal 2021). Russia is trying to covertly use a combination of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic means in such a way as not to provoke a concerted NATO response (Fox 2021).

Russian “Hybrid Warfare” is mainly aimed at the population - the purpose of using information operations, proxies, and other influence operations is to sway citizens by using already existing political and social systems.

The goals of the Russian “Hybrid Warfare” can be following:

- The control of territory without the use of conventional force;
- Creating a pretext for a military invasion. For example, the Russian Federation creates a narrative that a target state is oppressing national minorities, and then uses that narrative to launch a military intervention to “protect” a Russian-speaking and/or other minority. Such action is supported by the information and special operations;
- Influencing the politics of the target countries so to alter it in accordance with the interests of the Kremlin to serve its purpose (Chivvis 2017).

Regarding the main elements of the Russian “Hybrid Warfare”, Robert Seely, in his work, classifies at least 50 instruments of modern Russian warfare. These instruments are coordinated by a unified state approach and grouped according to different areas: politics; culture and governance; economics and energy; military power; diplomacy and public outreach; information warfare.

Seely focuses on the importance of “short” and quick communication with the top political leadership to make the whole of government approach more effective (Seely 2018).



It is worth describing some instruments in more detail:

- Information Operations:** Many researchers consider hybrid activities to be a separate, independent dimension in the information field due to its comprehensive nature, diversity, and impact. The information domain is used by an adversary as the means of covering its own hostile activities or as a tool, or target, or domain of conducting operations (Giles 2016) and includes methods such as disinformation, propaganda, psychological operations, fake news, social media, manipulation of photo-video content, and many more. The result of such operations is to create ambiguity and cast doubt on the objective truth, while the goal is to influence politics in a way that is beneficial to the Russian interests (Paul & Matthews 2016);
- Cyber Operations:** Similarly, cyber operations are considered as an independent warfare due to the same characteristics that information warfare has. From the perspective of modern Russian warfare, cyber operations are part of the information warfare (Giles 2016) and used in two main directions – direct attack on information systems to influence political and public processes, and obtain secret information;
- The use of puppet or the so-called “proxy” forces:** The use of separatist forces, private military companies that operate independently under the instructions from the Kremlin, or conduct operations alongside the Russian armed forces (Worcester 2014).

- **Energy and economic leverage:** Russia influences the politics of various states using both direct and indirect economic leverage. Until 2022, the Kremlin had significant influence on European countries who depended on Russian energy. Nord Stream 2 was a good illustration of Russia's efforts to further increase its influence by financing and acquiring stakes in new pipelines and other infrastructure. Even if the economic activities of Russian companies abroad are legal, the total control of the Russian government in this area should lead us to believe that such actions can seriously damage free markets and democratic institutions. The same category includes price manipulation of energy sources, trade embargoes (Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus), and others.
- **Clandestine measures:** Russia actively uses espionage, as well as bribery, blackmail, and other means to influence decision-makers in favor of its own goals.

In addition, Russia uses such hybrid elements in its neighborhood as: terrorism, assassination, „passportization“, rewriting history, „borderization“, sabotage, and many others.

Examples of the „Russian Hybrid Warfare“.

Russia considers the neighborhood a part of its Soviet heritage, so it uses all the hybrid tools at its disposal to pursue national interests. The Kremlin's rhetoric, covert actions, full-scale war against Georgia, the annexation of Crimea, and finally the unprovoked military invasion of Ukraine in 2022 are the clear indications of this. At the same time, the NATO membership is no guarantee of protection from elements of Russian hybrid warfare, even more so in the situation where Russia is avoiding crossing the “red lines” as not to trigger Article 5.

Russia's hybrid activities in Georgia and Ukraine began long before the August 2008 invasion of Georgia. The Russian regime perceived so-called “Colour Revolutions” in Georgia in 2003, and in Ukraine in 2004, as a significant threat. Russia translated the fear of the ongoing democratization process in the neighborhood into a foreign threat, which Gerasimov spoke about in detail in his famous speech in 2013. The Kremlin decided to act more actively to stop the Western integration of Georgia and Ukraine. The Russian regime used a number of hybrid instruments against both states, nature thereof was basically the same, although it differed according to the area of application and circumstances.

- **Economic leverage.** Under the pretext of protecting the health of its population the Russian regime banned the import of Georgian agricultural products, wine, and mineral water into the Russian Federation in 2005-2006. Moreover, in violation of the 1993 agreement between the countries, Russia unilaterally closed the border checkpoint (Livny, 2010) and banned transport communication, including air, sea, and even postal (Radiotavisupleba 2006). These actions were aimed at causing maximum economic damage to the citizens of Georgia and provoking their dissatisfaction with the government.

In 2013, Russia launched a trade war against Ukraine to stop its pursuit of integration into the EU institutions. Embargo was imposed on imports from Ukraine to Russia (Danilova 2013).

- **Forced deportation.** Russia began using migration as a tool of hybrid warfare long before it facilitated mass migration from Syria to Europe in 2016, and supported Belarus' "migration war" against the Baltic states and Poland in 2021. In 2006, 2,300 Georgian citizens were forcibly deported from the Russian Federation, costing two lives (Human Rights Watch 2007). According to various estimates, the Kremlin regime deported 900,000 to 1.6 million Ukrainian citizens, including 260,000 children, from the territory of Ukraine to the Russian Federation in 2014-2022 (US State Dept. 2022).

Incidentally, by the decision of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, an arrest warrant was issued for the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, and Maria Lvova-Belova, the President's representative for the protection of children's rights on March 17, 2023 (ICC 2023). They are accused of illegally deporting and resettling people from the occupied territories of Ukraine to the Russian Federation, which is considered a war crime (ICC 2011).

- **Energy leverage.** Energy levers are a classic tool of "Russian Hybrid Warfare". In 2009, through the Russian efforts the energy transit function of Ukraine was weakened under the pretext of price disagreements, thus limiting the supply of natural gas to the Central and Eastern European countries. Russia also made great efforts to build the "Nord Stream 2" gas pipeline, which bypassed Ukraine and other third countries and connected directly to Germany, among others, aimed at weakening Ukraine's influence on the transit of energy resources (Zarembo & Solodkyy 2021). A gas pipeline exploded near the Russian-Georgian border in 2006, which

caused a serious energy crisis in Georgia. During the next 2 years, the price of Russian gas for Georgia increased 4 times from 65 to 230 dollars (Indans 2007). The Russian occupation line incorporates a 1 km section of the Baku-Sufsa oil pipeline within the territory of the occupied Tskhinvali region (Nazarenko 2015). The importance of regional pipelines has increased even more since 2022, on the one hand, due to the European embargo on Russian energy and the reduction of its transit function, and on the other hand, the doubling of the volume of Azerbaijani energy to be delivered to the EU (Azertac 2022), and the increase in demand for the transit of Kazakh oil through Georgia (Agenda.ge 2022). Russia openly used its energy leverage against Estonia in the early 90s. However, it soon stopped, as the eastern neighbor soon realized that the Russian-speaking population was the most affected. Nevertheless, energy leverage remained relevant until the last period, as even by 2022 Estonia's energy was still 1/4 dependent on Russian natural gas (Stoicescu 2021). With the strategic decisions of the Estonian government and through the advance preparation, the country managed to stop importing natural gas from Russia painlessly (Estonian Government 2022).

- **Assassination of opponents, causing destabilization, and terrorism.**

In September 2004, the former president of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko, the creator of the "Orange Revolution", was poisoned with the substance dioxin. Although the identity of the perpetrator is still unclear, before the poisoning, Yushchenko was last seen with Ukrainian politicians known to have ties with the Russian Federation (Mendoza 2022). In 2014 and 2015, explosions occurred at the military equipment warehouses in Czech Republic and Bulgaria; official and independent investigations identified the involvement of GRU (Russian Military Intelligence) in these operations. The goal was to disrupt the supply of military equipment to the Ukraine. The poisoning of the Bulgarian military entrepreneur was also part of this operation. GRU was also involved in the following operations: the annexation of Crimea, political and public destabilization attempts in Moldova, the failed coup in Montenegro, the destabilization attempt in Spain, during the Catalan independence referendum and the assassination attempt of Sergei Skripal in Great Britain, FSB's participation in the assassination of Zelimkhan Khangoshvili in Germany (Bellingcat , 2021). It should be noted here that the terrorist act carried out in Gori in 2005, which cost the lives of 3 Georgian policemen, was planned by GRU according to the confessions of the detainees (Peuch 2005).

- **Rewriting history.** In the famous letter of 2021, the President of the Russian Federation Putin asserts that the Russian and Ukrainian people are one people with a common language, common region, common history, and living area. Such a distortion of historical facts calls into question the statehood of Ukraine in favor of Russia (President of Russia, 2021). Before that, in 2019, Putin falsified the history of Georgia referring Abkhazia and so called “South Ossetia” as the territories occupied by Georgia in the 19th century (Agenda.ge, 2019).
- **“Passportization”.** In 2002, Russia began the process of “distributing” Russian passports to the population of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region. By 2006, 90% of ethnic minorities held Russian citizenship. One of the justifications from the Russian side for the 2008 military intervention was the protection of Russian citizens. The same was done in Ukraine for the population of Donetsk and Lugansk regions (Bescotti, Burkhardt, Rabinovych & Wittke 2022).
- **Information and cyber-operations.** As already mentioned, Russia views information and cyber-operations as part of a single domain and uses them in concert. These tools are used not only as an independent hybrid element, but also in the process of preparing military intervention.

A notable example of this is Russia’s actions during the annexation of Crimea and subsequent actions in the east of Ukraine, where it managed the information field with the large-scale use of information and cyber-operations, starting with the dismissal of the Simferopol parliament and holding a referendum, and ending with massive influence on the mood of the population to pursue its own interests. Russian information warfare targets the physical, logical, and social dimensions of communication using multiple spectrums of cyber and non-cyber communication (NATO StratCom 2015). According to the information of the Security Service of Ukraine, Russia started using cyber-operations against Ukraine as early as in 2010 by using espionage software against Ukrainian officials. In 2015, cyber-operations became more active, they were used for the identification of military targets, as well as disruption of energy infrastructure (Gotsiridze 2019). The documented peak of these operations were reached in 2020-2021, when Ukraine experienced 685 thousand cyber-attacks (Vision of Humanity 2022). Russia’s political narrative, intended for both domestic and international audiences, speaks of the “Russian world” (Русский мир), “Russian ideals,” and “the Russian spirit.” It breaks down in the form

of a pyramid starting with the speeches of Putin and Lavrov and ending with society, media, and social space. It is aimed at influencing not only Russian nationals, but also any Russian-speaking person, and naturally spreads throughout the world (Levin-Jaitner 2015). In these conditions, social media has gained even greater importance. It is not only a tool for propaganda, disinformation, and intelligence gathering, but it is also a cheap mean to influence and incite the public in “adversary countries” to promote Russian desired actions. This is of course done through bloggers and trolls managed and supported by the presidential administration and special services (NATO StratCom 2015). In the 2014 Odesa fire, a fake story of “pro-Ukrainian” forces burning Ukrainian citizens of Russian nationality and threatening Jewish people was created by the Russians through a fake Facebook user account (Schreck 2014). In just one day, the aforementioned post had 5 thousand shares on various social media and it was soon translated into English, German, and Bulgarian languages. This was followed by a supportive narrative from Russia and its allies in Ukraine that Kiev is collaborating with Nazi and anti-Semitic forces.

Russia’s cyber and information war started even earlier in Georgia and Estonia. A few weeks before the August 2008 military intervention, hacker groups carried out cyber-attacks on the Georgian information space. Since July 20, cyber attacks have taken down Georgian servers, and even the websites of the President, Parliament, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, news agencies, transport companies, and banks were paralyzed during the war (Markoff 2008). The goal was to block the sources for disseminating objective information and to clear the way for the dissemination of own propaganda, which was manifested, for example, in blaming Georgia for starting the war, in the genocide of the minority, and in justifying the need for Russian military intervention under the pretext of protecting the civilian population (Kurdadze & Kintsurashvili 2018). A massive attack against Georgian institutions was repeated in 2019, which paralyzed the functioning of dozens of official and commercial websites (Burkadze 2019). As already mentioned, NATO membership is not a guarantee of protection against the Russian threats. Since 2007, Estonia has been the victim of hundreds of thousands of cyber-attacks and information campaigns. The main wave started after the decision of the Tallinn City Hall to move the monument of the Red Army from the city center to the cemetery. A massive pro-Russian information campaign led to two days of riots in the city, with participants protesting the Estonian government’s “oppression”

of the Russian-speaking population (Stoicescu 2021). Cyber-attacks on the Estonia's infrastructure succeed in many cases. "Hackers" managed to paralyze official and commercial structures, for example, during one of the attacks, the population had restricted access to the banking transactions and ATMs for several days. Such actions have even been called "cyber-terrorism," which is directed not only against critical (including energy, transportation, and government) infrastructure, but also to intimidate civil society and undermine trust in government (Mastalski 2021).

Russia actively uses managed non-governmental organizations, clergy, and even political parties to spread its own narratives in the neighborhood. Researches conducted on the non-governmental organizations (for example, "Eurasian Institute", "Eurasian Union") found that their founders are in many cases representatives of the same circle. Pro-Russian and so-called "Pro-Georgian" political entities that support Georgia's non-block and/or neutral position will also be used in information warfare. By propagandizing the uselessness of European and Euro-Atlantic integration, they are trying to induce cynical attitude and frustration in the population towards this process. Instead, they offer the positive side of a pro-Russian or neutral position (Tangiashvili 2016).

There is no doubt that the Russian-language TV-media has a great influence on the population of Georgia, especially in the regions inhabited by minorities. Based on various studies, in 2016-2020, 69-77% of the population of Georgia received information through television. 47% of the population also watched non-Georgian language TV channels, among which Russian TV channels stood out in popularity (HTB, OPT, PTP, the first channel of Russia) (Kokoshvili 2016). Estonia, where 27% of the population is ethnically Russian, has been significantly affected by propaganda from the Russian TV channels broadcasting across the country. After the start of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war, Estonia blocked the broadcast of the Russian news channels and television companies on its territory (CNN 2022).

The main goal of Russia's information war is to fuel anti-Western narratives, devalue Western values, such as: democracy, rule of law, human rights, etc. In favor of its own interests, the Kremlin creates and supports conspiracy theories, spreads half-truths and fake information to sow doubt, fear, and enmity among the population.

- **Support for the separatist and so-called "proxy" forces.** There are many similarities in the use of these hybrid tools in Georgia and Ukraine. In

the first days of August, before the start of the 2008 war, 4,000 residents of Tskhinvali were “evacuated” to the Russian Federation. In the same days, a large number of Russian journalists arrived in the Tskhinvali region (Kaszuba 2019). The operation carried out by the Kremlin through the separatist forces was aimed at blaming the Georgian side for the “aggression” against the Ossetian population. On February 18, 2022, a few days before the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, a similar operation was carried out with the mass “evacuation” of the local population from the Donetsk (RBC 18 Feb, 2022) and Luhansk (Mazurenko 18 Feb, 2022) areas to the Rostov district of the Russian Federation; the separatist forces of the occupied regions of Ukraine were directly involved in these events. On February 27, 2014, military formations with unrecognizable insignia occupied the buildings of the Supreme Council of Crimea and the Council of Ministers in Simferopol. Subsequently, under the control of the military named “Little Green Men”, the Crimean Parliament deposed and replaced the Prime Minister. Later, the Russian president admitted that Russian troops were behind the “Crimea Defense Forces”, and 1 year later, Putin announced that on February 22, 2014, he gave an order to “ bringing Crimea back to Russia “ (DeBenedictis 2021).

- **Military presence and demonstration of military force.** Before the August 2008 war, a large-scale military exercise “Кавказ 2008” was held in the Southern Military District of the Russian Federation, near the northern border of Georgia, which ended on August 2, 2008. The military units participating in the training, the number of which was 30-40 thousand military personnel, did not return to their permanent deployment locations. On August 7, the 58th Russian Army invaded Georgia. Similar events unfolded in 2022, near the Russian-Ukrainian border, when the Russian units participating in the joint Russian-Belarusian exercise “Союзная решимость - 2022” violated the deadline for staying in the region and, moreover, increased the number of military forces to 150 thousand (Kunchulia 2022). Modernization of the Western Military District of the Russian Federation and large-scale exercises in the immediate vicinity of NATO’s eastern flank with the involvement of Belarus and the Kaliningrad District have always created a lever of serious pressure on the small Baltic states. The Suwalki corridor is considered one of the most vulnerable areas, the so-called “NATO’s Achilles’ heel”, the capture of which would cut off NATO’s land communication with the Baltic states (Struye de Swielande, 2021). However, Finland’s accession to NATO will radically change this

situation. The above-mentioned actions put enormous pressure not only on the governments and people of Georgia, Ukraine, and the Baltic states, but also on the Western partners of these countries. In addition, Russia has been actively using the so-called “peace forces” to exert influence in their own neighborhood since the 90s. A staged attack on the “Russian peacekeeping forces” was used as one of the pretexts for the invasion of the Russian army into the territory of Georgia in 2008 (Independence 2015). The conduct of peacekeeping operations by the Russian side as part of its foreign policy is radically different from the concept of UN peacekeeping operations (Gilder 2022). After the Russian authorities recognized the independence of the separatist regions of Ukraine on February 21, 2022, Putin issued a decree on the deployment of Russian military forces in the region “to ensure peace” (Antonov & Osborn 2022), which turned into a full-scale invasion of the Ukrainian territory.

Conclusion

Russia’s geopolitical goal was to restore its status as a regional and global leader. Since it cannot directly compete with the West, neither militarily nor economically, Moscow tried to act in such a way as to avoid an international reaction.

Although there is no clear definition of the term “Hybrid Warfare”, it is widely used around the world. This makes it even more difficult to categorize Russia’s actions within this theory. Is the “modern war” produced by Russia a “hybrid” one?! Questions about this probably arise because usually Russia cannot achieve the results it wants only through a “Hybrid Warfare” and resorts to a conventional one.

Russia’s military intervention in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine in 2014 can be considered a failure of the Russian “Hybrid War”. The same can be said about Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine in February 2022, which it calls a “Special Military Operation”. However, in this case, Russia received a completely opposite effect than it had imagined, including a consolidated response from the West. In parallel with the conventional war in Ukraine, which itself contains hybrid elements, Russia has expanded the “Hybrid Warfare” even more widely in its neighborhood and the western countries.

Until 2022, Russia has been relatively successful in achieving its goal, which has been facilitated by two factors: first, given its Soviet heritage, Russia

has a long tradition of using non-military means against target states; Second, the Western society did not respond appropriately to its actions.

The roots of most of Russia's "hybrid" activities can be traced back to the Soviet past. The main difference here is that in the Soviet period "hybrid" activities were planned by the special services and various cells of the Communist Party, and were carried out with the support of state institutions, while in the case of modern Russia, not only are practically all state institutions involved, but also the private, non-governmental, and media sectors. And all these occurs in an environment where the circle of people making strategic decisions is inadequately small.

Despite the fact that from a politico-military point of view the Russian Federation has been significantly weakened, states like Georgia should constantly strengthen their own resilience, especially when it is expected to see Russian hybrid actions grow in intensity as its military potential shrinks.

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References

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2. This is precisely how it differs from the theory of “4th Generation Warfare”.
3. It refers to Putin’s famous statement in his annual address in 2005 that “the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical calamity of the twentieth century,” leading to the “breakup of historic Russia.” Also, Putin’s famous speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, in which he accused the West of unipolar rule and using unfair methods.
4. “When I used the term ‘Gerasimov Doctrine,’ I just wanted to come up with a catchy title. It is more of an observation of specific aspects of 21st century wars, of course there is no reason to refer to it as the Russian way of conducting a war. So stop it, please!” Galeotti writes.