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HYBRID WARFARE: RE-INNOVATING THE CONCEPT

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The Ukraine crisis since late 2013 has once again given way for a new block politics between the West and Russia. While majority of the pro-western scholars assert this tension between the West and Russia as the emergence of a new-cold war, but there is another school of thought which states that the West's reaction to Russia's involvement in Ukraine crisis is only a 'pretext' to halt Russia's resurgence in international politics. Although opinions and statements may differ based on the perceptions of various scholars, the undeniable fact is the existence of a serious crisis in Ukraine and the involvement of various stakeholders in it that includes the US, European Union (EU), Ukraine government, Pro-Russian rebels from Donbass region of Ukraine and not to forget Russia. The West claims Russia's involvement in Ukraine crisis as illegitimate, and has accused Russia of waging a 'Hybrid War' thus destabilising the geopolitics of the region. Though the claim seems appealing, repeated use and stress of the term 'Hybrid Warfare', based on western perspective has created a sense of hesitation in widely accepting the argument. It is in this context the paper aims to understand the term 'Hybrid Warfare' and the factors responsible for the use of the terminology by the West especially while referring to Russia's involvement in Ukraine crisis.

Russia is accused of conducting hybrid warfare in Ukraine due to: annexation of Crimea with the support of irregular forces occupying the region during referendum; Russia's support for rebels including alleged supply of weapons to them for fighting the Ukrainian armed forces; Russia's economic sanctions against the West and also accused of



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conducting information warfare including propaganda and cyber attacks on western targets.

The term 'Hybrid Warfare' as defined in one of the articles published by North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) - the western military alliance led by the US and mainly accused by Russia of expansionist policy in Eastern Europe, and considered to be one of the crucial factors by Russia for Ukraine crisis - is warfare in which *"the adversary tries to influence influential policy-makers and key decision makers by combining kinetic operations with subversive efforts. The aggressor often resorts to clandestine actions, to avoid attribution or retribution."*¹ In simple terms 'hybrid warfare' can be explained as a military strategy that combines conventional warfare, irregular warfare and information warfare together.

The origin of this term can be traced back to US Marine Corps, a decade ago when they constructed the term 'hybrid threats', hypothetically based on their historical analyses and references in foreign literature regarding a deliberate blending and blurring of modes of warfare. This term was then adopted into the defence services and the US Department of Defence documents including the 2006 and 2010 Quadrennial Defence Reviews. Although the term gradually gained popularity among the US strategic community, it became the buzz word only after the term was used by then US Secretary of Defence *Robert Gates* in one of his articles titled "A Balanced Strategy – Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age", published in *Foreign Affairs* journal in 2009.²

Therefore, since the terms 'hybrid threats' and 'hybrid warfare' were extremely popular among Western strategic and scholarly communities, the terminologies were used to attribute Russia for the crisis in Ukraine and also to justify Western actions and sanctions against Russia as legitimate and the most effective response against a devious adversary. Since the advent of Ukraine crisis, many Western scholars have defined the term



Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

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'hybrid warfare' according to their convenience. One such definition was given by *Frank Hoffman*, a retired US Reserve Marine officer and a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Strategic Research at the National Defence University, who stated that hybrid warfare is the act by "*any adversary that simultaneously employs a tailored mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal behaviour in the same time and battlespace to obtain their political objectives.*"³

While the West is struggling everyday to turn the tables of the Ukraine situation to their favour, it is also struggling to accuse Russia for the Ukraine situation with strong evidences. As a result of not finding concrete arguments for proving Russia 'guilty', the Western strategic and scholarly communities have resorted to propaganda against Russia by accusing it of creating 'hybrid threats' and indulging in 'Hybrid warfare' and 'shadow warfare'. Some scholars have also gone to the extent of attributing the invention of the concept of 'hybrid warfare' to *Joseph Stalin*, the former leader of erstwhile USSR.⁴

However, if one has to go by the definition published by NATO as mentioned earlier, then almost all the operations of the US agencies in the Central American and Caribbean countries conducted between 1898-1934 which led to the creation of 'Banana Republics' are nothing but 'Hybrid wars' with the exclusion of cyber attacks. Therefore, while the terms 'hybrid threats' and 'hybrid warfare' are ambiguous in nature and highly manipulated, the US led Western community uses such terminologies to create the image of a monster of Russia, which seems to have become their usual norm and strategy in order to justify its own actions across the globe with the tagline of 'securing US national interests' and acting as the 'global moral police'. However, if the same policy of securing national interests is followed by any other country - especially Russia - then the country is accused of indulging in de-stabilising the geo-politics and security of the region as well as causing disturbances to the world peace.



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It should be understood that coining new terms, inventing new concepts and defining new military strategies will not help in any way to resolve the crisis in Ukraine. On the contrary it only complicates the situation further. Therefore, it can be stated that the Western propaganda concept of 'Hybrid warfare' is nothing but 'old wine in a new bottle'.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

End Notes

¹ Peter Pindják, Deterring hybrid warfare: a chance for NATO and the EU to work together?, *NATO Review Magazine*, in <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2014/Also-in-2014/Deterring-hybrid-warfare/EN/index.htm>, accessed March 26, 2015.

² Robert Gates, "A Balanced Strategy – Reprogramming the Pentagon for a New Age", *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2009, in <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/63717/robert-m-gates/a-balanced-strategy>, accessed March 27, 2015.

³ Frank Hoffman, "On not-so-new warfare: Political Warfare vs Hybrid Threats", July 28, 2014, in <http://warontherocks.com/2014/07/on-not-so-new-warfare-political-warfare-vs-hybrid-threats/>, accessed March 27, 2015.

⁴ Paul Goble, Stalin Invented Hybrid War, Not Vladimir Putin, Archival Record Shows, *The Interpreter*, November 05, 2014, in <http://www.interpretermag.com/stalin-invented-hybrid-war-not-vladimir-putin-archival-record-shows/>, accessed March 28, 2015.
