

DOI 10.33099/2618-1614-2020-13-4-20-23
УДК 355.425

Yuriy Loboda,

*Candidate of Philosophical Sciences, Associate Professor,
Leading Researcher at the Social Science Department,
the National Defence University of Ukraine named
after Ivan Cherniakhovskiy*

The concept of «hybrid war/warfare»: origin and complexity

The article analyses the genesis, semantical shifts and contemporary role of the term «hybrid war/warfare» in the cognitive domain. The main aim of the article is to define the possible causes and consequences of the alleged semantic redundancy of the term «hybrid war/warfare». As the result of the analysis, it was concluded how the term «hybrid war/warfare» works in favour of the empowering of the «fog of war»: it substitutes the concept of the conventional war, which is commonly obvious, and directs public attention towards the semantic fuzziness, which implicitly eliminates the essential features of the conventional armed conflict. This creates a cognitive bias, which still does not seem properly analysed and understood.

Key words: hybrid war/warfare, cognitive bias, concept, semantics, public discourse, buzzwords, metaphor.

© Yu. Loboda, 2020

Introduction. Contemporary war studies are a realm where foregather different academic disciplines with different methodologies. As a result, we have interdisciplinary debates where the core concepts are discussed, which influence not only the academic circle but public opinion as well. In addition, the opposite direction is possible: civil activists, journalists, politicians may start discussions that can affect academics and the military. These cases are quite rare, but sometimes they can make significant contribution to military scholarship. One of these cases is the discussion about the essence and relevance of the concept of «hybrid war/warfare».

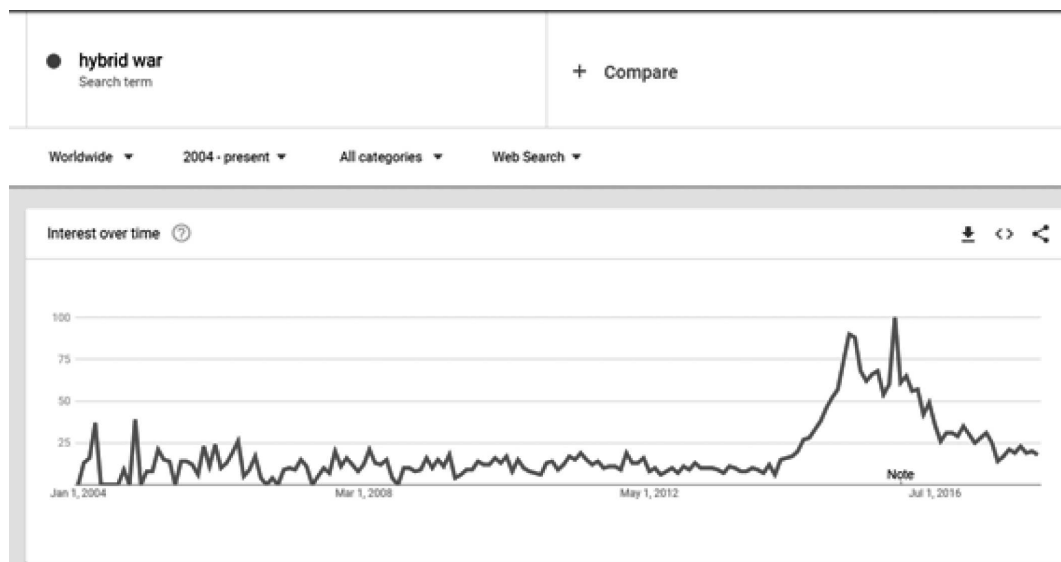
Aim and tasks. The aim of the article is to consider the concept of hybrid war/warfare in the contexts of contemporary military theory and military history in order to disclose its role in professional military agenda and public discourse. The tasks of the article are: to analyse the scholarly utterance of the term «hybrid war/warfare», to define the role of this term in the contexts of academic military narratives.

Research results. Nowadays the «hybrid war/warfare» is a very popular term widely used by scholars in war studies, military officers, journalists etc, but it still is being criticized by military historians and military academics.

According to Google Trends, the popularity of the concept of «hybrid war» has raised since August 2014 (*pict. 1*).

This can be explained by the start of the active phase of Russian-Ukrainian war. It also can signify some semantic changes of the concept «hybrid war/warfare» as it will be analysed further.

The authors and editors of the latest military encyclopedias totally ignored the concept of «hybrid war» (Encyclopedia of War (2012) [1], Encyclopedia of Military Science (2013) [2], as well as editors of the newest dictionary of the terms of the US Department of Defense [3]. Nonetheless, the term «hybrid threat/war/warfare» was represented in military scholarship before 2014. For example, it was included to doctrinal documents: «Frank Hoffman, of the U.S. National Defense University, defined the hybrid threat as, «Any adversary that simultaneously employs a tailored mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal behavior in the same time and battlespace to obtain their political objectives.» The «hybrid threat» term has likewise already been adopted in U.S. Marine corps, Army and Navy doctrines along with national-level planning documents» [4, p. 2]; «A hybrid threat is the diverse and dynamic combination of regular forces, irregular forces, terrorist forces, and/or criminal elements all unified to achieve mutually benefitting effects» [5, p. V]. Well before 2014 J. Mattis and F. Hoffman, while interpreting the experience of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, closely approached to the contemporary meaning of the concept of «hybrid war»: «In Hybrid Wars we can expect to simultaneously deal with the fall out of a failed state that owned but lost control of some biological agents or missiles, while combating an ethnically motivated paramilitary force, and a set of radical terrorists who



Picture 1

have now been displaced. We may face remnants of the fielded army of a rogue state in future wars, and they may employ conventional weapons in very novel or nontraditional ways. We can also expect to face unorthodox attacks or random acts of violence by sympathetic groups of non-state actors against our critical infrastructure or our transportation networks. We may also see other forms of economic war or crippling forms of computer network attacks against military or financial targets» [6]. Dealing with insurgents of failed and collapsed states, military theorists and practitioners at that time did not expect the highly organized, equipped, trained and funded activity directed from one state centre. Military theorists did not envisage this feature of «hybrid warfare» at that time.

In some cases, military professionals avoid the term «hybrid war/warfare» preferring «hybrid threat», like General Sir Nicholas Carter, Chief of the General Staff of the United Kingdom did enumerating conventional military threats: «A hybrid version that might involve little green men, big green tanks and huge green missiles» [7]. It is not easy to explain the reasons of avoiding the concept of «hybrid war/warfare». The possible reasons could be:

- previous criticism of military historians: «Nevertheless, as war in the twenty-first century morphs into seemingly unfamiliar forms that combine regular and irregular forces on the same battlefields, some defense analysts have posited the emergence of a new type of war – hybrid war. That buzzword has become fashionable among both civilian and military leaders in the Pentagon and elsewhere. However, as Clausewitz stated nearly two centuries ago, although war changes its characteristics in various circumstances, in whatever way it manifests itself, war is still war. War in the twenty-first century has been and will remain a complex phenomenon, but its essence has not and will not

change. Through a careful examination of history, this study illustrates that although there is little new in hybrid war as a concept, it is a useful means of thinking about war's past, present, and future» [8, p. 1]. Historians insist that there is «no anything principally new in the «hybrid war»;

- criticism of military theorists: «In brief, the theory holds that warfare has evolved through four generations: 1) the use of *massed manpower*, 2) *firepower*, 3) *maneuver*, and now 4) an evolved form of *insurgency* that employs all available networks -political, economic, social, military – to convince an opponent's decisionmakers that their strategic goals are either unachievable or too costly» [9, p. V]. The main point of Echevarria's attack against the «4th generation war theorists» is that this substitution of «hybrid war» does not contain anything essentially new: «there is no reason to reinvent the wheel with regard to insurgencies – super or otherwise – and their various kin. A great deal of very good work has already been done, especially lately, on that topic, to include the effects that globalization and information technologies have had, are having, and are likely to have, on such movements. We do not need another label, as well as an incoherent supporting logic, to obscure what many have already made clear» [9, p. 16]. It is notable that in his latest book «Military Strategy. A very Short Introduction» (Oxford University Press, 2017) he does not mention «hybrid war/warfare» at all.

It is hard to say what turns away scholars and the military from using the term «hybrid war/warfare» – it's too wide meaning, too fashionable character or mere unwillingness to join the circle of journalists and bloggers, but there are some other sides of criticism that the concept of «hybrid war» has received, maybe from the source less academic but still probably influential: «A former army intelligence

officer, Mr Donnelly spent 10 years running the Soviet Studies Centre at the UK's Sandhurst military academy and for 13 years was a special adviser to the NATO secretary-general. «The covert forms of power that Russia is using are not just military,» he says. «Firstly there is money. They buy members of parliament as consultants. They buy companies. They buy the City of London. They buy individuals: bankers who get jobs in Moscow and then find themselves compromised, blackmailed when they return to the west. Secondly, there is corruption. A lot of governments in countries around the world do not like that aid comes with strings attached. Russia is happy to bribe and use organized crime as a tool.» He also argues that Moscow is better at espionage – not just traditional undercover work but also «the standard open source analysis of the kind that the west has forgotten how to do». Hybrid war, Mr Donnelly suggests, is perhaps the wrong term. «It is hyper competition,» he says» [10]. This was claimed in August 2014, when the conventional war on the East of Ukraine approached its peak – with tank battles, heavy artillery shelling, shooting down Ukrainian military aircraft, sieges of cities, attacks with tactical rockets against terrorists. However, it is possible to agree with Mr. Donnelly in other point: the scale of non-military activity in current Russian-Ukrainian war is truly unprecedented.

Another version of criticism could be linked with a political bias of a researcher, which forces him or her to ignore the facts: «Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of the current chasm that divides Russia and NATO is the mythical interpretation that Moscow has devised a lethal and new hybrid warfare doctrine. If this is, in fact, in error, then NATO and its governments eventually will have to correct it» [11, p. 105]. Some writers even deny the relevance of the concept of «hybrid war» in particular cases: «When members of the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade in Crimea took off their unit patches and moved out to seize key roads on the peninsula in February 2014, they did not become «hybrid warriors.» They were merely naval infantry without unit patches on. Is there anything hybrid about using special forces, with the support of elite infantry, to prepare the battlespace for a conventional invasion? This is standard practice for military forces around the world, to include those of the United States. If a Russian missile cruiser lowers its ensign, does it become a hybrid cruiser about to engage in a new form of naval hybrid warfare? Of course not. There is simply not much hybrid war to be found in the case of Crimea» [12]. M. Kofman makes a mistake comparing covert operations with occupation of territories and, of course, forgetting about quantity of compared troops and their weapons.

The concept of «hybrid war» has another misleading effect: since it unites different aspects of a complex armed conflict, it can work for overshadowing of its military component. While talking about a «hybrid war» it is easy to make emphasis on the cyberattacks, propaganda and bribery of politicians, ignoring the fact of presence of the regular Russian troops on the East of Ukraine. The concept

of «hybrid war/warfare» can have all the chances to turn into another tool of propaganda.

Thus, military thinkers and civil scholars may find themselves in a very complicated situation: military historians insist on the non-originality of the concept of «hybrid war», which is not totally applicable to contemporary reality, especially in the case of cyberattacks and mass media as the tools of propaganda; theorists could find their own reasons to distance themselves from the overused term, which long ago became a favourite buzzword of journalists.

A tension of complicated academic and political debates about the concept of «hybrid war» was to a certain extent calmed down by official military and political acceptance of this concept. NATO has opened the European Centre for Countering Hybrid Threats in Helsinki [13]; a concept of «hybrid warfare» has become a core of the narrative of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence [14]. Public speeches of the former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen [15] and the current NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg have «legalized» the conventional meaning of the concept of «hybrid war»: «Of course, hybrid warfare is nothing new. It is as old as the Trojan horse. What is different is that the scale is bigger; the speed and intensity is higher; and that it takes place right at our borders. Russia has used proxy soldiers, unmarked Special Forces, intimidation and propaganda, all to lay a thick fog of confusion; to obscure its true purpose in Ukraine; and to attempt deniability. So NATO must be ready to deal with every aspect of this new reality from wherever it comes. And that means we must look closely at how we prepare for; deter; and if necessary defend against hybrid warfare... We need classical conventional forces. Hybrid is about reduced warning time. It's about deception. It's about a mixture of military and non-military means... And so when we are increasing the readiness and the preparedness of our forces, well that is also an answer to the hybrid threat. When we are doing more to increase our capacity when it comes to intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, then it's also an answer to hybrid threats» [16].

Reducing uncertainty from the concept of «hybrid war», NATO leaders did not eliminate the complexities of the sense and meaning of this term, but essentially decreased chances of its too biased interpretation.

Semantic redundancy of the concept of «hybrid war/warfare» (if to assume that the concept of «war» equals to the concept of «hybrid war») can be considered as a sign of some more fundamental and even hidden shifts of the international relations. After the «Cold War» (which has not always been a historically relevant metaphor), one of the most usable terms «deterrence» was substituted by the term «competition». This semantic elimination of the elements of rhetoric of total war, turning into more neutral and even peaceful mainstream could be interpreted as the symptoms of the policy change: radical pacifism («peace for any cost»), «no military solution» doctrines, prevailing of diplomatic methods of conflict resolution over military

ones. The term «hybrid war/warfare» can be included into this tendency.

Being implicitly opposed to the concept of «conventional war», as far as we can assume the presence of binary oppositions in the structure of popular mind, the fuzzy and obscured concept of «hybrid war/warfare» displaces unambiguous concept of «conventional war». This shift excludes connotations of «conventional war», familiar to a person who is not professional in military affairs, in favour of professional military slang, which reduces clarity of expression, turning audience to the realm of poorly defined buzzwords. Along with ambiguity, «hybrid war/warfare» excludes such essential feature of «conventional war» as aggressiveness. Such dominating elements of «hybrid war/warfare» as propaganda and cyberattacks conceal atrocities against prisoners of war, killing of civilians, wide-scale military operations of conventional troops. The term «hybrid war/warfare» brings the real conventional war into the political context rather than military, which can mean that the solution of current Russian-Ukrainian war may be directed to exclusively diplomatic, non-military way. Taking into account the implicit doctrine of «peace at any cost», which is quite fashionable in contemporary theory and practice of international relations, the emergence of the term «hybrid war/warfare» can be interpreted as a sign of the perspective of forced surrender to a side which has the wider political and economic relations with major participants of negotiation process, or an option of «frozen» or «low intensity conflict».

Conclusion. Thus, intentionally or unintentionally, the buzzword taken from the military context into discourse of public policy is able to make cognitive shift, switching attention of civil audience into non-essential and even disguising aspects of the conventional armed conflict. The question how military professionals (military bureaucracy, academics and/or decision makers) are involved into generating and spreading «buzzwords» needs further research.

Literature

1. Encyclopedia of War / ed. by G. Martel. – Hoboken : Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. – 3142 p.
2. Encyclopedia of Military Science / ed. by G. Piehler. – Thousand Oaks : SAGE Publications, 2013. – 1928 p.
3. DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms [Електронний ресурс] // Joint Chiefs of Staff. – Режим доступу : // <https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/dictionary.pdf>.
4. *Kofman M.* A Closer look at Russia's «Hybrid War» [Електронний ресурс] / M. Kofman, M. Rojansky // Kennan

Cable. – 2015. – № 7. – Режим доступу : <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/190090/5-KENNAN%20CABLE-ROJANSKY%20KOFMAN.pdf>.

5. Hybrid Threat [Електронний ресурс] : Training Circular No. 7-100 // Army Publishing Directorate. – Режим доступу : https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/tc7_100.pdf.

6. *Mattis J. N.* Future Warfare: The Rise of Hybrid Wars [Електронний ресурс] / J. N. Mattis, F. Hoffman // Proceedings. US Naval Institute. – November 2005. – Vol. 131/11/1,233. – Режим доступу : <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2005/november/future-warfare-rise-hybrid-wars>.

7. *Carter N.* Dynamic Security Threats and the British Army [Електронний ресурс] / N. Carter // RUSI. – Режим доступу : <https://rusi.org/event/dynamic-security-threats-and-british-army>.

8. *Mansoor P. R.* Introduction. Hybrid Warfare in History / P. R. Mansoor // Hybrid Warfare. Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present / ed. by W. Murray, P. R. Mansoor. – Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2012. – 329 p.

9. Echevarria II A. J. 2005. Fourth-Generation War and Other Myths [Електронний ресурс] / A. J. Echevarria II // JSTOR. – Режим доступу : <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11404>.

10. *Jones S.* Ukraine: Russia's new art of war [Електронний ресурс] / S. Jones // Financial Times. – Режим доступу : <https://www.ft.com/content/ea5e82fa-2e0c-11e4-b760-00144feabdc0>.

11. *McDermott R. N.* Does Russia Have a Gerasimov Doctrine? / R. N. McDermott // Parameters. – 2016. – Vol. 46 (No. 1). – P. 98-105.

12. *Kofman M.* Russian Hybrid Warfare and Other Dark Arts [Електронний ресурс] / M. Kofman // War on the Rocks. – Режим доступу : <https://warontherocks.com/2016/03/Russian-Hybrid-Warfare-And-Other-Dark-Arts/>.

13. NATO welcomes opening of European Centre for Countering Hybrid Threats [Електронний ресурс] // NATO. – Режим доступу : https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_143143.htm.

14. Social Media as a Tool of Hybrid Warfare [Електронний ресурс] / ed. A. Reynolds // NATO StratCom COE. – Режим доступу : <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/social-media-tool-hybrid-warfare>.

15. *Landler M.* NATO Chief Warns of Duplicity by Putin on Ukraine [Електронний ресурс] / M. Landler, M. R. Gordon // The New York Times. – Режим доступу : https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/09/world/europe/nato-chief-warns-of-duplicity-by-putin-on-ukraine.html?_r=0.

16. Keynote speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the opening of the NATO Transformation Seminar [Електронний ресурс] // NATO. – Режим доступу : https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_118435.htm.