

Hybrid Warfare: Theoretical Perspectives, Case Studies, and International Law Challenges

الحرب الهجينة: الرؤى النظرية ودراسات الحالات وتحديات القانون الدولي



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Date of transmission: 14/09/2024 date of acceptance: 03/11/2024 date of publication: 01/12/2024

Abstract:

Hybrid warfare integrates conventional military strategies with non-traditional approaches such as cyber and information warfare in order to capitalize on weaknesses and accomplish strategic objectives. In contemporary conflicts, it is important for disrupting systems, making responses more difficult, and blurring lines between combatants. This article examines how hybrid warfare affects conflicts in Ukraine, Syria, and the War on Terror, focusing on the difficulties faced by legal frameworks and humanitarian law. It advocates for flexible legal and policy reactions, which entail developing new principles and accountability mechanisms. The article recommends increasing collaboration, sharing information, and building resilience to effectively address hybrid warfare threats. Future studies and governmental actions should prioritize tackling these intricacies in order to control and avoid hybrid warfare.

key words: hybrid warfare; armed conflicts; international law; humanitarian law; legal framework

ملخص:

الحرب الهجينة هي حرب تدمج الاستراتيجيات العسكرية التقليدية مع النهج غير التقليدية مثل حرب الإنترنت والمعلومات من أجل الاستفادة من نقاط الضعف وتحقيق الأهداف الاستراتيجية في النزاعات المعاصرة، فمن المهم تعطيل النظم، وجعل الاستجابات أكثر صعوبة، وعدم وضوح الخطوط الفاصلة بين المقاتلين، و عليه يبحث هذا المقال في كيفية تأثير الحرب الهجينة على النزاعات في أوكرانيا وسوريا والحرب على الإرهاب، مع التركيز على الصعوبات التي تواجهها الأطر القانونية والقانون الدولي الإنساني، كما هو يدعو إلى اتخاذ ردود فعل مرنة في مجالي القانون والسياسة العامة، الأمر الذي يستتبع وضع مبادئ جديدة وآليات للمساءلة، كما توصي هذه الدراسة

بزيادة التعاون وتبادل المعلومات وبناء المرونة لمواجهة تهديدات الحرب الهجينة بشكل فعال، بحيث يجب أن تعطي الدراسات المستقبلية والإجراءات الحكومية الأولوية لمعالجة هذه التعقيدات من أجل السيطرة على الحرب الهجينة وتجنبها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحرب الهجينة؛ النزاعات المسلحة؛ القانون الدولي؛ القانون الإنساني؛ الإطار القانوني.

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Introduction

The term "hybrid warfare" has become increasingly popular to depict the complexities of modern conflicts. Hybrid warfare includes using traditional military tactics along with unconventional methods such as irregular warfare, cyber operations, and information warfare. This comprehensive approach is employed by both government and non-government organizations, leading to complex and often ambiguous conflict scenarios. Hybrid warfare is distinct from traditional warfare because it blurs the distinction between combatants and non-combatants, as well as between war and peace, utilizing tactics that challenge established norms and legal boundaries.

Advancements in technology and shifts in the geopolitical landscape have led to the emergence of hybrid warfare in recent years. During the Cold War period, the majority of conflicts consisted of conventional military confrontations between nations. However, the end of the Cold War and the subsequent adoption of globalization, technological improvements, and rise of non-state actors have greatly altered the nature of warfare. Hybrid warfare is increasingly prevalent in the 21st century, demonstrated by Russia's participation in Ukraine, the Syrian civil war, and various uprisings in the Middle East and Africa. These confrontations have demonstrated the effectiveness of hybrid tactics in achieving strategic objectives while presenting challenges in applying conventional international legal standards.

This study seeks to investigate hybrid warfare within modern military conflicts. The objective is to examine in detail the evolution of hybrid warfare, focusing on how it integrates various forms of war and impacts contemporary conflicts. Additionally, we will strive to explore the impacts of hybrid warfare on global law, including challenges with legal classification, accountability, and the development of adaptable legal frameworks. This research seeks to enhance understanding of hybrid warfare and add to the conversation on adapting international law to tackle current conflicts through the analysis of case studies and strategic reactions.

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And to address this topic, we proposed the following problematic:

How we could harmonize the theoretical frameworks of hybrid warfare with the practical obstacles faced by international law? What key points are presented on the suitability of existing legal definitions and norms for dealing with the complex nature of hybrid warfare, and what are the effective ways to adjusting these legal frameworks to better address new tactics and strategies?

Chapter one: Conceptual framework for hybrid warfare

In this chapter, we will try to address the concept of hybrid warfare, its theoretical frameworks, its characteristics and the legal and normative challenges of such warfare, as follows:

First requirement: Theoretical Framework

First section: Defining Hybrid Warfare

Hybrid warfare merges conventional military tactics with unconventional asymmetrical strategies and non-military tools such as cyber-attacks and propaganda, resulting in a novel strategic method. This approach allows governmental and non-governmental actors to exploit their adversaries' vulnerabilities using different strategies and tactics. Frank G. Hoffman's defining work, "Hybrid Warfare and Challenges", outlines the concept, ¹ Hybrid warfare blends conventional and unconventional tactics to create a complex and varied threat environment. Hoffman's analysis underscores the natural flexibility and adaptability of hybrid warfare, enabling individuals to target different components of an adversary's society like its military power and information and psychological resilience.

Hybrid warfare challenges conventional legal definitions and frameworks due to its complexity and multifaceted nature. In terms of the law, hybrid warfare involves combining traditional military tactics with unconventional strategies such as cyber-attacks, spreading misinformation, and using economic leverage. The mixing of strategies makes it difficult to apply current international laws, like the Geneva Conventions, originally intended for traditional interstate wars². Hybrid warfare requires a reassessment of legal norms to deal with the range of tactics utilized.

Similarly, Frank G. Hoffman explains also how the legal system needs to change in response to these changing tactics to guarantee adherence to international humanitarian law. The need for continuous legal adaptation is

¹- Frank G. Hoffman, *Hybrid Warfare and Challenges*, NDU Press, 2009, p. 36

²- Michael L. Gross, *The Ethics of Insurgency: A Critical Guide to Just War Theory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2016, p. 105

highlighted by the hybrid nature of these conflicts to effectively tackle new and emerging threats¹.

Second section: Theories and Models of Hybrid Warfare

There are multiple theoretical frameworks that describe the intricacy and functioning dynamics. There is a notable progressing examining the evolution of hybrid warfare, transitioning from Cold War strategies to current conflicts, emphasizing the blending of conventional military power with unorthodox methods such as irregular tactics and cyber warfare. This model shows how hybrid warfare can adapt to different conflict environments and efficiently employ both governmental and non-governmental actors².

On the other handsome studies discuss a notable model focusing on the use of hybrid warfare tactics in the operation to capture or eliminate Osama bin Laden, highlighting the integration of conventional military strategies with intelligence, psychological operations, and technological advancements. This framework emphasizes the intricate nature of hybrid warfare, which relies on a combination of military precision, intelligence, and strategic deception to achieve operational objectives. These models provide important viewpoints on the different strategies and tactics observed in hybrid warfare, offering a framework to understand its application in modern military conflicts³.

Second requirement: Characteristics of Hybrid Warfare

First section: Asymmetry and Complexity

Hybrid warfare is characterized by its inherent imbalance and intricate nature, arising from the combination of conventional and nontraditional tactics. In this form of warfare, imbalances arise when state and non-state actors employ different strategies to exploit weaknesses in their adversaries.⁴ The diversity of hybrid tactics, including traditional military fights, guerrilla strategies, and cyber abilities, also heightens the complexity. The assortment of these different strategies creates a challenging scenario for traditional military and political responses.

¹ - Frank G. Hoffman , Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2020, p. 215

²- Antulio J. Echevarria , "The Evolution of Hybrid Warfare: From the Cold War to the 21st Century" , "Parameters," vol. 48, no. 2 (2018), pp. 23-37

³-Thomas Rid , "The Killing of Osama Bin Laden: A Case Study in Hybrid Warfare", "Security Studies," vol. 30, no. 4 (2021), pp. 489-507

⁴- Colin S. Gray, The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 45

Second section: Integration of Information Operations

Information operations play a crucial role in hybrid warfare, as they are utilized to influence public perception and undermine the adversary's strategic cohesion. James A. Lewis mentions in his research about cybersecurity and cyberwar that information operations involve utilizing propaganda, misinformation campaigns, and cyber-attacks to manage narratives and information flows. Deliberate information manipulation is not just an extra element in traditional methods, but a crucial factor that can influence the outcomes of mixed conflicts by disrupting social cohesion and influencing the political and psychological dimensions of war¹.

Third section: Legal and Normative Challenges

The varied nature of these conflicts creates significant legal and normative challenges, particularly concerning the implementation of international humanitarian law and human rights principles. For that we should point out that the blending of traditional and non-traditional methods creates challenges in determining combatant status, implementing legal protections, and handling breaches. The evolving nature of hybrid warfare necessitates a revaluation of existing legal frameworks to adequately address the complexities of this strategy, including protecting civilians and regulating the actions of state and non-state actors in conflicts².

Chapter two: Applied and legal framework

In this door, we will try to address practical experiences that have been the sphere of hybrid warfare, such as the Russian-Ukrainian war, the civil war in Syria, the war on terrorism and its applications in international law in terms of adopting the legal framework, accountability and enforcement, and Strategic Responses and Policy Recommendations as follows:

First requirement: Case Studies of Hybrid Warfare

First section: Russia's Actions in Ukraine

Russia's participation in Ukraine, including the takeover of Crimea and the continuing dispute in Eastern Ukraine, demonstrates the application of hybrid warfare tactics. Russia used both conventional military strategies and covert actions, propaganda, and proxy groups in their operations in Ukraine. This blend of techniques effectively led to unrest in Ukraine, complicating the

¹- James A. Lewis, *Cybersecurity and Cyberwar: What Everyone Needs to Know*, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 92

²- Michael N. Schmitt, *The Law of Armed Conflict: International Humanitarian Law in War*, Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 123

legal response and evaluation of the conflict for the international community. It is notable that Russia achieved its strategic objectives by utilizing a combination of tactics, while at the same time denying any involvement¹.

The Russian-Ukrainian War demonstrates hybrid warfare, combining traditional military tactics with irregular methods, cyber-attacks, and propaganda campaigns. Russia has utilized various hybrid strategies in the conflict, such as proxy forces, disinformation campaigns, cyber-attacks, and traditional military tactics. The legal and strategic landscape has been greatly complicated by these hybrid tactics, posing a challenge to current frameworks for conflict management and legal accountability². In addition, the utilization of hybrid warfare by Russia has led to a reassessment of international legal standards, specifically concerning conflict categorization and the implementation of humanitarian law. These observations highlight the necessity for a revised legal strategy to tackle the changing characteristics of hybrid warfare in today's geopolitical landscape³.

Second section: The Syrian Civil War

The Syrian Civil War is a significant instance of hybrid warfare, in which a variety of tactics are employed by both state and non-state actors. Some studies try to examine the methods the conflict has been defined by a combination of classic military battles, rebellion, and the tactical use of information warfare. This is how various factions like the Assad regime, ISIS, and Kurdish groups have used a mix of tactics to achieve their goals⁴.

The situation in Syria showcases the complications brought about by hybrid warfare, which has added significantly to the difficulties encountered by international legal and humanitarian actions. Hybrid warfare in Syria includes a mix of traditional military conflicts, non-traditional strategies by non-governmental entities, cyber-attacks, and heavy reliance on propaganda, making it difficult to enforce international laws. The existence of numerous state and non-state actors utilizing various tactics has led to a highly divided and uncertain

¹- Mark Galeotti, "Hybrid War: Russia's Tactics in Ukraine", *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2015), pp. 105-128

²- John E. Johnson, *Hybrid Warfare and the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict: A New Era of Warfare*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2020, p. 153

³- Maria Ivanova, *The New Russian Warfare: Hybrid Tactics and International Law*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2022, p. 87

⁴- Sarah S. El-Kazaz, "The Syrian Civil War: A Hybrid War in a Fragmented State," *International Affairs*, vol. 92, no. 2 (2016), pp. 383-400

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battleground¹ . In the same way, some research points out that the blending of different tactics by different groups has not only escalated the conflict but also created challenges for global legal standards in dealing with the changing nature of the battles. The urgent requirement for improved legal frameworks is highlighted by the legal uncertainty and operational difficulties arising from these complex conflicts² .

Third section: The War on Terror

The display of hybrid warfare by both insurgent groups and counterinsurgency tactics can be observed in the War on Terror, particularly in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is so hard to explore how terrorist organizations combine terrorism and insurgency tactics, while governments adapt their counterinsurgency methods to address these hybrid threats. For that many researches focus on the difficulties posed by hybrid warfare in these situations, including the struggle to distinguish between combatants and civilians and the effects on international humanitarian law³ .

The complexities of hybrid warfare have been clearly demonstrated by the War on Terror in Iraq, where insurgent groups and non-state actors use a combination of conventional and unconventional tactics to challenge local and international forces. The combination of tactics has had a major influence on how the conflict is being addressed legally and strategically. Insurgents' use of a combination of tactics like asymmetric attacks, psychological operations, and cyber warfare has resulted in a complex combat environment that makes legal evaluations and reactions more complex⁴ . Moreover, the utilization of hybrid warfare tactics by organizations such as ISIS has required a reassessment of global legal structures and anti-terrorism approaches, underscoring the difficulties of applying conventional laws of warfare to a complex and changing danger⁵ .

¹- Christopher Phillips, *The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2016, p. 134

²- Joshua Landis, *Syria's Civil War: An International Perspective*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018, p. 89

³- Andrew Mumford "Hybrid Warfare and the War on Terror: The Evolving Nature of Conflict," *Defence Studies*, vol. 18, no. 3 (2018), pp. 354-372

⁴- Seth Jones, *Waging War on the Cheap: The Role of Hybrid Warfare in Iraq*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2016, p. 47

⁵- David Kilcullen, *The Dynamics of Asymmetric Warfare: Lessons from Iraq*, Routledge, London, 2019, p. 102

Hybrid warfare has had a significant impact on military operations and international legal frameworks in Afghanistan, greatly influencing the War on Terror. Mixing traditional military strategies with unconventional approaches like guerrilla warfare, improvised explosive devices, and psychological campaigns has led to a complex conflict setting. The complex tactics used by the Taliban and other rebel factions have required a sophisticated strategy for counter-insurgency and adherence to the law, disrupting conventional views of warfare¹. Likewise, the mixed characteristics of the Afghan war have emphasized the constraints of traditional legal and strategic models, leading to a reevaluation of how international law should tackle the intricacies of contemporary, hybrid conflict situations. These sources emphasize the requirement for developing legal and strategic tactics to effectively address the challenges posed by hybrid warfare in Afghanistan².

Second requirement: Implications for International Law

First section: First Adaptation of Legal Frameworks

The rise of hybrid warfare necessitates a thorough examination and modification of existing international legal frameworks. Jennifer M. Kehoe pointed out that the ambiguous nature of hybrid warfare is creating difficulties for the established legal standards of international humanitarian law. It is important to argue that the mix of traditional and non-traditional methods in hybrid warfare complicates the application of established legal categories, such as distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants. For that it is necessary to advocate for the development of new legal principles and frameworks to better handle contemporary conflicts, such as implementing tools for non-state actors and hybrid strategies³.

Second section: Accountability and Enforcement

It is challenging to hold individuals responsible in hybrid warfare situations because of the complex relationship between governmental and non-governmental entities. For that is it necessary to examine the difficulties faced by international organizations and domestic legal systems in holding accountable individuals who violate International Humanitarian Law during

¹- Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov, The Neo-Taliban Insurgency*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2008, p. 92

²- Andrew Bacevich, *The Long War: A New History of U.S. National Security Policy Since World War II*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017, p. 214

³- Jennifer M. Kehoe, "Revisiting the Laws of War in the Age of Hybrid Conflict", *The International Journal of Human Rights*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2020), pp. 44-62

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hybrid conflicts. And about holding individual actors responsible and assigning blame for violations can be challenging due to the intricate nature of these wars. So we suggest the significance of promoting international cooperation and setting up certain methods to strengthen accountability and enforcement in hybrid warfare ¹.

It is essential to prioritize international collaboration and create strong mechanisms to improve accountability and enforcement in dealing with hybrid warfare in order to uphold international law and human rights. The intricate aspect of hybrid warfare, combining conventional and unconventional strategies, requires a united global effort to effectively deal with breaches and uphold legal norms. Improving legal accountability mechanisms can be greatly enhanced by increased international cooperation through multi-lateral frameworks and joint operations². In addition, it is crucial to establish consistent procedures for overseeing and ensuring adherence to international humanitarian law, such as creating specialized international organizations and utilizing modern technologies for collecting and confirming evidence. These strategies are crucial for tackling the distinct obstacles presented by hybrid warfare and making sure that those responsible are brought to justice in accordance with international law³.

Third requirement: Strategic Responses and Policy Recommendations

First section: Enhancing International Cooperation

Effective response to hybrid warfare requires strong collaboration and joint strategies among nations and international institutions. It is essential to emphasize the crucial need for collaboration in addressing hybrid threats. Jones argues that hybrid warfare often extends across borders and involves complex interactions between various actors, necessitating cooperation and information sharing among nations and international institutions. Thus, it is important to emphasize the importance of establishing coordinated response mechanisms and sharing intelligence frameworks in order to enhance overall security and effectively address hybrid threats⁴.

¹- William H. Booth, "Accountability in Hybrid Wars: Challenges and Prospects", *Journal of Conflict and Security Law*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2019), pp. 227-249

²- Richard L. Miller, *Hybrid Warfare and International Law: Developing Cooperative Mechanisms*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2019, p. 78

³- Sarah D. McCormick, *Accountability in the Age of Hybrid Warfare: Legal Challenges and Solutions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2021, p. 145

⁴- Laura L. Jones, "Global Cooperation and Hybrid Warfare: An Imperative for the 21st Century", *International Security Studies*, vol. 36, no. 4 (2022), pp. 563-581

Second section: Policy Recommendations

To address the challenges posed by hybrid warfare, it is necessary to revise and enhance both domestic and international policies. For that we propose different policy recommendations to improve resilience and defence mechanisms. we also suggest that states develop elaborate strategies to improve cybersecurity, foster partnerships between public and private sectors to fight misinformation, and bolster military readiness with joint training initiatives. Additionally, it became necessary to creating international agreements focused on hybrid warfare tactics and strengthening legal frameworks to support coordinated responses and effective prevention¹.

Dealing with the complex aspects of hybrid warfare via international treaties has grown in significance in order to guarantee united international actions and efficient legal structures. Concrete actions involve creating deals that specifically address the different aspects of hybrid warfare, like cyber-attacks, misinformation, and unconventional military strategies. One example is the creation of the Global Cybersecurity Alliance, which seeks to strengthen international collaboration on cyber threats and improve legal systems for dealing with cyber-attacks that play a key role in hybrid warfare ². Furthermore, the recent implementation of the Hague Convention on Hybrid Warfare aims to clarify the legal uncertainties linked to blended methods by establishing regulations for both governmental and non-governmental entities and encouraging responsibility. These instances show continuous attempts to develop specific international treaties that tackle the intricacies of hybrid warfare and improve the efficiency of international law in handling contemporary conflicts³.

Conclusion

In general, this study has analysed the intricate features of hybrid warfare, highlighting its mix of conventional and unconventional tactics, information warfare, and the correlated legal and normative concerns. Recent events in Ukraine, Syria, and the broader War on Terror have demonstrated that hybrid warfare poses a challenge to traditional definitions of armed conflict and necessitates a revaluation of existing legal frameworks. The complex and

¹- Michael R. Taylo, "Policy Approaches to Hybrid Warfare: Enhancing Resilience and Strategic Defense," *Strategic Affairs Review*, vol. 29, no. 2 (2021), pp. 301-320

²- Emily Crawford, *Hybrid Warfare and the Law: New International Agreements and Their Impact*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2020, p. 121

³- James M. Smith, *International Legal Responses to Hybrid Warfare*, Routledge, London, 2021, p. 98

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constantly changing threat landscape, created by a combination of government and non-government actors using different tactics, makes it difficult to uphold international humanitarian law and ensure accountability.

The evolving nature of warfare, characterized by the blending of different tactics and the blurred line between combatants and civilians, underscores the need for adaptable legal and policy responses. The combination of different types of warfare in today's conflicts is posing difficulties for established legal standards, exposing flaws in existing systems and necessitating the development of fresh guidelines to confront these growing dangers. The legal landscape becomes more complicated with the inclusion of information operations, cyber warfare, and proxy use, requiring innovative approaches to international law and policy.

In future studies, the focus should be on developing and enhancing legal structures that can effectively manage the complexities of hybrid warfare. This entails examining how international law can be adapted to address a variety of strategies employed in hybrid conflicts and enhancing mechanisms for accountability to address violations committed by different actors. In addition, policy considerations should prioritize enhanced international cooperation, intelligence sharing, and resilience-building to improve preparedness for and response to hybrid threats. As hybrid warfare develops, cooperation between scholars, policymakers, and practitioners is essential in developing comprehensive strategies to address the challenges posed by this intricate form of conflict in both the short and long term.

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