

ELEMENTS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HYBRID WARFARE SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF A GREAT ROMANIAN DIPLOMAT

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ABSTRACT

The article is trying to emphasize the elements and characteristics of the hybrid war in the work of a great Romanian diplomat, Mircea Malița. The volume “Between War and Peace” is a true manual about the study of the wars, enhancing theories, schools of thoughts and strategic visions regarding future conflicts. Beside the interesting ideas and perspectives, the author underlines some elements and characteristics of the modern wars, placing the author among the greatest visionaries of what many scholars named, “hybrid wars”. “Asymmetry”, “*disruptive innovation*”, “the gray zone of war and peace”, “ambiguity and attribution” are some of the elements of the hybrid wars encountered in Mircea Malița’s volume. Hybrid warfare takes in consideration informational warfare, including “cognitive warfare”. Marsili (2023) distinguishes two types of “information disruption”: “cognitive disruption”, including disinformation and propaganda and “functional disruption”, referring to cyberspace and electromagnetic attacks. Besides the actuality and the popularity of the concept among the scholars, hybrid war has somehow another connotations in geopolitical discourses. It encompasses and reinforces „the ontological insecurity as a phenomenon”, as Ljungkvist (2024) and what some authors (Eberle and Daniel 2022) named, “the anxiety geopolitics”. Mainly after the Russia’s annexation of Crimea, hybrid threats, cyberthreats and disinformation campaigns are related to East/ West geopolitical axis and “*grey zone* war/conflicts have taken centre stage in Western security discourses”. It can be related to the geopolitics of fear, metanarrative used often in critical studies, critical geopolitics or in the analysis of risk and uncertainty.

Keywords: *hybrid war, cognitive warfare, Mircea Malița, war, peace, geopolitics.*

INTRODUCTION

Throughout this research article, we argue that understanding the psycho-Great scholar and diplomat, the initiator of institutions and a theoretician of international relations, Mircea Malița is a pioneer in the studies of peace and war. His diplomatic and international relations efforts place him among individuals with

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vocation and vision in the circle of academics, and among the great strategists. Therefore, the initiative to publish his major works is considered a significant gain for the Romanian diplomatic and international relations school.

The volume *“Between War and Peace”* is the first in a series of reprints of the academician and diplomat Mircea Malița’s works. The book is a true manual for those studying theories about war, the causes and factors leading to conflicts, theorists and schools of thought that have approached conflicts from various perspectives, as well as strategic visions regarding future conflicts. Furthermore, beyond the remarkable analyses of conflicts from ancient times to the present day, including their negotiation and mediation methods, Mircea Malița is also a precursor to what we call now “hybrid warfare.” With remarkable skill, the Romanian diplomat reveals elements that are inherent to this type of warfare.

The volume, structured into chapters and larger sections, delineates analyses and studies on wars and peace, schools of international relations, and theoretical perspectives, institutions founded on peace issues, negotiation techniques, relations between small countries and great powers, etc.

The first chapters of the book address war from the perspective of various schools of thought: behavioral, gestalt psychology, Darwinian, and rationalist. Studies, most of them published after 1980, describing theories of wars based on the "classic theory of power balance, cycle theory, systems theory, imperialism theory" are mentioned in the first chapters. (Malița 2022, 97).

The chapter that focuses on projections regarding the agenda of the XXI century and the profile of the conflicts in the XXI century is very interesting. The list of changes in the global agenda includes, among others, UN reform, cooperation between great powers, the increasing role of diplomacy and negotiations, the perfecting role of the system of collective security, the increasingly important role of conciliation and the appropriate way to deal with the “reality of new conflicts” (Malița 2022, 449). Behind the interesting ideas and theories offered by the author, there is a perspective less studied that transcends all the Malița’s work from the volume *“Between War and Peace”*– the perspective of hybrid warfare. The concept is not mentioned by the great diplomat, but there are described some elements and characteristics that define the modern type of war.

COGNITIVE WARFARE AS A COMPONENT OF HYBRID WAR

In the case of the hybrid warfare, in addition to conventional weapons, unconventional weapons are also used. In modern conflicts, hybrid wars most often include an informational warfare component. Moreover, informational warfare remains a key element in any strategy involving hybrid warfare.

Hybrid warfare takes into consideration informational warfare, including “cognitive warfare”. Marsili (2023) distinguishes two types of “information

disruption”: “cognitive disruption”, including disinformation and propaganda and “functional disruption”, referring to cyberspace and electromagnetic attacks. Disinformation plays an important role in cognitive wars. As Marsili (2023) notes that “the novelty in “cognitive war” is the speed and power of dissemination of beliefs – false or true – instilled deeply in the consciousness of targets”. The same author describes cognitive science as „an autonomous academic discipline which studies the mind and its processes from different perspectives and approaches” (Marsili 2023). Concerning cognitive science, there are different theories and views.

Paul Thagard (1996) shows the connection between cognitive science to mental operations and experimental psychology, “linking them to the mid-50s, when primitive computers appeared, and artificial intelligence (AI) started to become conceptualized” (Thagard, 1996 apud Marsili 2023). The appearance of neural networks as part of cognitive science was a real challenge. Alan Turing’s seminal paper “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” from 1950 brought into attention the importance of AI, which „comes from a deep learning approach based on neural networks” (Thagard apud Marsili 2023). The intersection between information and cognitive domains and the novelty in the technology opened the way to cognitive operations. As Marsili (2023) mentions, cognitive war influences individuals, groups, „large numbers of citizens selectively and serially within society, with the potential to fracture and fragment an entire society or disrupt alliances”. The COVID- 19 infodemic took to the disruption of the realtions and to the fragmentation of the society in antagonistic groups. The nowadays geopolitical reality demonstrates that cognitive dimension becomes more and more relevant.

ELEMENTS OF THE HYBRID WARFARE IN MALIȚA’S VOLUME “BETWEEN WAR AND PEACE”

Mircea Malița notes, in the study of wars, something we encounter today in all environments, namely the presence of technology that “changes minds and perspectives”. “We live in the era of technology, televised images, instant connections. Any clash is experienced on a global scale. Information technology has changed the human environment and restructured minds” (Malița 2022, 99). Here, Marshall McLuhan is cited by the Romanian diplomat. He introduces the idea: “the medium is the message,” largely referring to the virtual, informational environment that can broadly influence war perspectives. As other authors emphasize, technological advances have allowed hybrid strategies to be executed in other forms, through cyber-attacks and informational attacks (Primrose and Bachmann 2022).

Asymmetry is one of the characteristics of the hybrid warfare. In this type of war, the capacity of state and non-state actors is unequal. State actors are using

technological weapons in contrast to non-state actors. Also, state actors are using legal norms to achieve wars, but non-state actors are using illegal and violent ways to attain their objectives. Regarding the strategies of new conflicts, the goal of the “authors of war,” Malița notes, is “to demoralize the society they consider an enemy, to break social and national solidarity, to paralyze the mechanisms that ensure its functioning, and to destabilize and dismantle its fundamental institutions” (Malița 2022, 451). For this purpose, the diplomat adds, they use deadly attacks, “planning explosions, fires, spreading diseases, kidnappings, and other acts of sabotage” (Ibidem). The author also mentions the danger of the emergence of terrorists. As the Romanian diplomat points out “they resort not only to conventional weapons but also to unconventional ones (atomic, bacteriological, chemical)” (Malița 2022, 102).

“*Disruptive Innovation*” is used as a tool in hybrid warfare. Using disinformation campaigns in cyber domain and media, non-state actors want to sabotage the political system and to create a climate of distrust. In addition to the use of violence, “hybrid wars also involve other techniques and acts of manipulation and sabotage” (Malița 2022, 102). Adversaries aim to disrupt or damage the political system through a combination of violence, control, subversion, manipulation, and dissemination of (false) information” (Nilsson 2021). The purpose of the hybrid warfare is “to create and exacerbate polarization both at the national and international levels” (Bilal 2021). This may lead to the erosion of the democratic values and to the decreasing of the people’s trust in institutions and in decision-making capabilities of political leaders. Fortifying trust remains the hard-core element of creating resilience “in the face of hybrid threats that acutely imperil the security at the state and societal levels” (Bilal 2021). The new security environment has evolved into a *gray zone of war and peace* (Nilsson 2021). “Conflict in the gray zone can incorporate conventional and unconventional techniques or can be based entirely on unconventional tactics” (Carment 2018).

After creating a typology of conflicts, describing violent conflicts or identity-based conflicts, as well as international relations theories regarding conflict resolution, Mircea Malița profiles the conflicts of the 21st century, mentioning that “in the 21st century, the battlefield and the enemy are no longer clearly identifiable; they have become diffuse and ubiquitous. In this new setting, military engagement is replaced by point and counteraction” (Malița 2022, 451). The grey zone related to hybrid threats has been used by Western thinkers to describe the tactics used especially by Russia and China, but also by Iran and North Korea and/or non-state actors (Ljungkvist 2024). As the author cited above observed, “notions of hybrid threats in the grey zone lack a consensual definition but typically refer to a particular mode of waging war involving both kinetic and non-kinetic means”.

Another defining characteristics of this war are *ambiguity and attribution*, elements discussed by Mircea Malița. “Hybrid attacks are often marked by much

uncertainty. Hybrid warfare blurs the lines between conventional and unconventional war, as well as the distinction between times of peace and war” (Primrose and Bachmann 2022). This obscure demarcation line between war and peace is also discussed by Mircea Malița. As Ljungkvist (2024) mentions, the increasing competition between the great powers and “the uncompleted shift from unipolarity to great power competition could not generate a transparent and overt military confrontation, so the pursuit of ambiguous hybrid warfare therefore becomes the strategic-political answer”.

HYBRID WAR’S ROLE IN THE GEOPOLITICAL DISCOURSE

Nowadays, hybrid warfare is a concept more relevant in the description of the crises, but it also appears in geopolitical discourses. As Arsalan Bilal (2021) mentioned, “hybrid wars entail an interplay or fusion of conventional as well as unconventional instruments of power and tools of subversion”. The concept of hybrid war emerged as a response to changes in the global security environment. As some authors said, “studying hybrid tactics helps us understand the growing uncertainty that surrounds situations of both peace and war, it can help us focus on how actors relate to each other and how they intend to fight” (Bargues and Bourekba 2022).

As Bilal (2021) claimed, “hybrid wars are now becoming the main instruments of geopolitical confrontation, which actualizes the search for counteraction to such threats” (Bilal 2021). According to one EU definition, hybrid threats “range from cyberattacks on critical information systems, through the disruption of critical services such as energy supplies or financial services, to the undermining of public trust in government institutions or the deepening of social divisions” (European Union 2018 apud Eberle and Daniel 2022). Considering this, hybrid wars take into consideration a series of pre-existing social issues, political cleavages and security vulnerabilities” (Eberle and Daniel 2022). Eberle and Daniel (2022) analyzed hybrid war in terms of “*anxiety geopolitics*”. Ó Tuathail noted that “anxiety geopolitics is an ultimately ambivalent, Janus-faced way of ‘writing global space” (Ó Tuathail 1996 apud Eberle and Daniel 2022). Maria Mälksoo shows “how hybrid wars triggers ‘anxiety about the difficulties of concretising unknown and indeterminate threats” (Mälksoo 2018, p. 378 apud Eberle and Daniel 2022).

Some critics say that, because of its elements of ambiguities and uncertainties, hybrid warfare discourse took to a perpetuation of anxieties that are already instaled (Eberle, Daniel 2022). As Bargues and Bourekba (2022) mentioned, “hybrid warfare abounds with uncertainty. It is difficult to trace responsibility for cyber and other types of attack, or to prove who has organised disturbances”. In the conventional wars, the state and the army responsible for

attacking other state or states are usually known, but “hybrid warfare may involve proxies, hackers, criminal gangs, drug traffickers, paramilitaries, terrorists” (Bargues and Bourekba 2022) and it’s difficult to know exactly in some circumstances who began the attack.

Building on the idea of the two authors, Eberle and Daniel, Mälksoo (2017, 286 apud Ljungkvist 2024) argues that “the hybrid warfare discourse exemplifies ontological insecurity as a phenomenon, while also pointing to its ‘problematic prospect of compromising the already fuzzy distinction between politics and war’”. Many authors see hybrid threats, cyberthreats and disinformation campaigns, mainly related to East/ West axis. Mainly after the Russia’s annexation of Crimeea, “the concepts of *hybrid* threats/war/warfare and *grey zone* war/conflicts have taken centre stage in Western security discourses” (Ljungkvist 2024). Eberle and Daniel (2022) claimed that the hybrid war discourse followed “a traditional East/ West geopolitical imaginary” axis (Eberle and Daniel 2022 apud Ljungkvist 2024). It can be subsumed to “emotional geopolitics of fear”, as some authors claim (Pain et al. 2010; Hunter 2010). Geopolitical fear is used by some scholars in relation to the “war on terror” (Hunter 2010). “‘Fear’ is the name we give to our *uncertainty*: to our *ignorance* of the threat and what is to be *done*” (Bauman 2006, p. 2 apud Pain et al. 2010). Turam (2023) is using the concept „the geopolitics of fear” in relation to the migration factor, more exactly, to refugee politics an the securitization of the borders. He is subsuming all the phenomena to *the geopolitics of emotions* “that covers intense emotions generated by the hyper-securitized border geography” (Turam 2023). The metanarrative of fear is often utilized in critical studies, critical geopolitics or in the analysis of risk and uncertainty.

CONCLUSIONS

Beyond the nature of the geopolitical discourse, and how the concept of hybrid war is used and interpreted, taking into account all the dimensions and tactics of the modern wars helps us understand better “the growing uncertainty that surrounds situations of both peace and war” (Bargues and Bourekba 2022) and to analyze the methods and means that allow an actor to act, regarding the evolution in the international stage. As Bargues and Bourekba (2022) said, “it can help us focus on how actors relate to each other and how they intend to fight”.

Mircea Malița has perceived the advances of the new technology and the evolution of the wars in terms of tactics and methods, but also the development of the new security environment into *a gray zone of peace and war*. *Asymmetry, disruptive innovation, ambiguity and attribution* are characteristics and elements of *the hybrid wars*, described by the Romanian great diplomat even before the

appearance of the new type of war. This thing makes him a visionary. It would be interesting to see if the references about the hybrid wars appears also in other author's works.

According to the new context of the international relations and the new challenges, hybrid wars are seen as having multi-dimensional approaches related to the strategic and the security sector, but also to the military preparedness and international communication. Concerning the new challenging aspects of the hybrid wars, including disinformation, propaganda, cyber-attacks, the defense mechanisms of the states have to be upgradated all the time to face the enemies and to maintain international stability.

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