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**Gibridnaya Voyna in Light of the War in Ukraine:  
Analysing Changes in Russian Interpretations and the  
Use of Hybrid Warfare Concept.**

Master's thesis

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## **Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 01/08/2023

Anastasia Filina

## References

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## **Abstract**

After military invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russian Hybrid Warfare went from being a convenient 'bogeyman' of Russian military strategy interpretation, to a conceptual pariah of Western political and strategic discourse. This was not, however the case in Russia, where, admittedly, *gibridnaya voyna* transformed into the phase of 'rationalisation propaganda' in an attempt justify Kremlin's self-made threat perception. This study aims to fill the research gap in Western contemporary analysis of *gibridnaya voyna* by conducting an exploratory research to see if there have been any changes in the interpretation and the use of *gibridnaya voyna* in Russian military scholarship after Russia's military invasion of Ukraine. The study will demonstrate that although conceptual understanding of the term remains the same, its interpretation in military and linguistic (buzzwords) domains experienced significant changes.

## **Abstrakt**

Po vojenské invazi na Ukrajinu v roce 2022 se ruská hybridní válka přestala být pohodlným "strašidlem" pro interpretaci ruské vojenské strategie, Ale stala se konceptuálním vyvrhelem západního politického a strategického diskurzu. Tohle neplatilo pro Rusko, kde se *gibridnaya voyna* přeměnila do fáze "racionální propagandy" s cílem ospravedlnit vnímání hrozby, kterou si Kreml vytvořil sám. Tato studie si klade za cíl vyplnit výzkumné mezery v západní současné analýze *gibridnaya voyna* prostřednictvím provádění průzkumného výzkumu, abychom zjistili, zda došlo k nějakým změnám v interpretaci a používání *gibridnaya voyna* v ruském vojenském výzkumu po ruské vojenské invazi na Ukrajinu. Studie ukáže, že ačkoli konceptuální pochopení termínu zůstává stejné, interpretace *gibridnaya voyna* v oblasti vojenského a jazykového (klíčových slov) domén prošla významnými změnami.

## **Keywords**

Hybird warfare; Russia; West

## **Klíčová slova**

Hybridní vedení války; Rusko, Západ

## **Title**

Gibridnaya Voyna in Light of the War in Ukraine: Analysing Changes in Russian Interpretations and the Use of Hybrid Warfare Concept.

## **Název práce**

Gibridnaya Voyna ve světle války na Ukrajině: Analýza změn v ruské interpretaci a užívání konceptu hybridního vedení války

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## Introduction

Hybrid warfare was coined in early 2000's by Frank G. Hoffman (2005), but it was NATO's use of the term in relation to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 that put it to the forefront of the security debate. For years, Western scholars have been attempting to rationalise Russia's covert behaviour in its near abroad through the lens of Russian Hybrid Warfare concept. After military invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russian Hybrid Warfare went from being a convenient 'bogeyman' of Russian military strategy interpretation, to a conceptual pariah of Western political and strategic discourse. This barely comes as a surprise, however, since its interpretation was strongly dependant on non-military aspects and avoidance of military confrontation. Despite the dawn of Russian hybrid warfare in the West, *gibridnaya voyna* in Russian military discourse has found a second life and has been developing ever since, shaping not only Russian military rhetoric, but also dictating significant doctrinal changes of strategic security document of the Russian Federation. There is no doubt, that conceptual development of *gibridnaya voyna* has been unavoidably shaping Russian threat perception in one way or another, dictating its foreign decision-making. Despite an increased interest of Russian military academia in the concept after the war, there has been limited studies published exploring this aspect.

*Gibridnaya voyna*, should not be seen as a blind adaptation of its Western counterpart, but rather, understood as a 'Russified' concept, developed, and influenced by Russia's internal security concerns. Russian actions in a post-2022 environment has put under question initial Western assessment of *gibridnaya voyna* and calls for a reassessment of the term, its origins and its role in influencing Russian security perceptions, in a new geopolitical reality, in light of the war in Ukraine. As a nuclear power and a permanent member of the UN Security Council with a veto power, Russia cannot be ignored into peace, regardless of how ridiculous, even paranoid, their interpretation of *gibridnaya voyna* waged by the West might seem. It is only by assessing change and continuity within its threat perception towards the West, that one can start to search out new avenues for possible peace negotiation or a more effective foreign policy making.

Present study aims to fill the current research gap in the current Russian hybrid warfare interpretation, or lack of thereof, by conducting exploratory research to see if there have been any changes in the interpretation and use of *gibridnaya voyna* after Russia's military invasion of Ukraine. The research will focus on providing a conceptual assessment

of *gibridnaya voyna* interpretation in Russian military scholarship and official security documents. In addition, the use of various contextual buzzwords, in connection to *gibridnaya voyna* will be outlined, to track whether, if at all, the commencement of ‘special military operation’, followed by its initial failure have changed the overall rhetoric of term’s interpretation. Finally, after an overall assessment of the concept, the study will suggest possible research avenues that could be pursued in the future.

First chapter of this study deals with the literature review, outlining main interpretation pathways taken by Western academic assessment of Russian hybrid warfare. Literature sources are split into ‘Russian-centric’ and ‘Western-centric’ sections, outlining conceptual differences of the term, from both perspectives and discusses how the difference in analysis effects overall interpretation of Russian decision-making. Semantic differences of ‘hybrid warfare’, ‘Russian hybrid warfare’ and ‘*gibridnaya voyna*’ are also highlighted.

Second chapter outlines overall methodological approach of the present study, highlighting rationale behind the choice of used resources, as well as listing potential research limitations.

Third, and final chapter is dedicated to the demonstration of main research findings. It consists of three sections, divided into historical periods of contextual significance to Russia’s interpretation of *gibridnaya voyna* and overall understanding of the nature of contemporary conflicts, before and after the start of military operation in Ukraine. First section deals with emergence of scholarly debates on ‘new wars’ that laid groundwork for the development of New Generation Wars concept and the, so called, Gerasimov’s Doctrine in a pre-2014 period. Second and third sections, outline *gibridnaya voyna* interpretations of Russian military scholars along with assessment of doctrinal development of a post-2014 and post-2022 periods respectively. Finally, a section on change and continuity presents a retrospective outlook on *gibridnaya voyna* through conceptual, doctrinal and linguistic (buzzwords) changes.

# 1. Literature review

## 1.2 Western perspectives on Russian Hybrid Warfare

We can roughly split the debate on Russian Hybrid Warfare by Western scholars into two main categories. First, there are those who analyse Russian Hybrid Warfare/*gibridnaya voyna* through the cultural lens, looking into Russian strategic thought and historical background to better understand their perceptions of contemporary conflicts. Second, further divided into two sub-groups, use Hoffman's definition of hybrid warfare to outline operational strategy, which can be applied by Russia to counteract NATO and others who believe that the concept of Hybrid Warfare brings more confusion than clarity, arguing that Russia's war waging mindset remains the same but uses more means available at their disposal.

This chapter will first outline conceptual interpretation of hybrid warfare and *gibridnaya voyna*, which has been used by Western academia on all sides of the debate. Secondly, it will outline the most prominent academic works in the 'Russia-centric' and the 'West-centric' arguments. Finally, overall limitation of Western scholarship will be outlined, which will form the exploratory basis of the present research.

### 1.2.1 Hybrid Warfare: Definition

Whether it is referred to as irregular, asymmetric or hybrid warfare, conceptually, these terms attempt to classify and underline a significant shift in conflict waging tactics in a post- 9/11 security environment. This shift presented itself as a change from an overwhelming use of conventional forces towards a broader deployment of all available means in the battlefield. Hybrid tactics, improved by easier access to information and technological advancements by state and non-state actors posed a significant threat to operational success of conventional forces. The emerging trend further testified to contemporary challenges faced by Western societies in a globalised environment. The world of endless opportunities in technological, political and societal realms also became that of "asymmetric and ethnopolitical warfare", as Michael Evans puts it, in which "machetes and Microsoft merge, and apocalyptic millenarians wearing Reeboks and Raybans dream of acquiring weapons of mass destruction" (Evans, 2003). Conventional military power by itself became insufficient to address the broadening of security threats faced by the Western world, and America, in particular (Hoffman, 2007).

Hybrid warfare as a concept was introduced by a US military theorist Frank G. Hoffman in the beginning of 2000s in an attempt to address a unique planning dilemma facing the US military, in light of fast evolving nature of contemporary conflicts. The term was first mentioned by Lieutenant General James N. Mattis and Lieutenant Colonel Frank Hoffman in 2005 in *Proceeding Journal*. Article suggested that future conflicts cannot be neatly presented in four separate distinctions, such as traditional, irregular, catastrophic, or disruptive (U.S. Department of Defense, 2005) and that they would likely mimic ‘menu choices’ from which opponents’ would pick, employing their tactics simultaneously in a targeted manner to achieve a synergetic effect within the main battlespace. This merger of different modes and means of war, the “unprecedented synthesis”, is what Hoffman and Mattis (2005) referred to as Hybrid Warfare.

Hybrid wars, they argued, would range from dealing with failed and rogue states, radical terrorism groups, as well as random acts of violence involving attacks on state’s critical infrastructure or computer networks attacks, to name a few (Mattis & Hoffman, 2005). Later, analysing Hezbollah’s tactics in the Second Lebanon War in 2006, Hoffman summarised the phenomenon of Hybrid Warfare as a “multi-modal or multi variant... form of warfare [that allows for greater] blurring and blending of war forms in combination of increasing frequency and lethality” (Hoffman, 2009). Thus maintaining, that it is the “blurring of who fights, and what technologies are brought to bear” that gives conceptual novelty to the term (Hoffman, 2007).

Hoffman’s development of the concept was influenced by a multitude of works by other scholars in 1990’s and early 2000s who identified similar tendency of blurring of the lines between regular and irregular forces and their capabilities in contemporary battlefield. Concepts such as ‘Unrestricted Warfare’ (Qiao & Wang, 1999), ‘Fourth Generation Warfare’ (Hammes, 2004; Lind, 2004) and ‘Compound wars’ (Huber, 2002) underlined core rationale behind developing and refining of the Hybrid Warfare construct by combining various factors that characterised conflicts of the future (Fridman, 2018; Hoffman, 2007). These concepts, combined, outline a roadmap of potential challenges in tomorrow’s hybrid environment, planning for which, at that time, has remained outside of the orthodoxy of Western military thinking. Omni-dimensionality and combinations of means, blurring nature of the conflict with the growing danger of State’s loss of monopoly on violence, as well as the power of networks mixing conventional and unconventional capabilities, all presented a

growing complexity to the strategic, operational, and tactical military planning (Hoffman, 2007).

On strategic level, Hoffman's development of Hybrid Warfare concept largely centres around his overview of US National Defence Strategy (2005) combined with analysis of US military operations in the Middle East and the efficacy of diverse means employed by hybrid organisations such as Hezbollah and Hamas. Evolving character of the conflict defined by the merging of the physical and psychological, the kinetic and non-kinetic, combatant and noncombatant further testified to the uncomfortable reality that "tomorrow's enemy will still get a vote" making them even more lethal and adamant to achieve their goals (Hoffman, 2009). Ultimately, Hoffman's concept of Hybrid Warfare argued for the need of the US military to be able to adapt to the new operational reality by training leaders with decision-making skills to be able to quickly adapt and react to the unknown as well as transforming institutional mechanisms to create greater overall coordination.

Frank Hoffman's success in outlining conceptual and strategic aspects of Hybrid Warfare to US military planning has created a surge in the interest of the concept among other military thinkers and academic scholars (Bond, 2007; Williamson, 2009). Despite an increased discussion of non-military means, however, US military scholars remain consistent that military factor remains at the core of contemporary conflicts, it is the wide range of hybrid threats that are utilised by an opponent, however, that present a potential threat to conventional U.S. military strategy (Fridman, 2018).

In 2010 NATO released a strategic concept for the military contribution to countering hybrid threats, defining the latter as those "posed by adversaries, with the ability to simultaneously employ conventional and non-conventional means adaptively in pursuit of their objectives" (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 2010). The document (2010) framed hybrid threats as a significant and ongoing security challenge faced by the Alliance, across multiple domains, such as domestic, international, and non-physical (including cyber, informational, and financial domains). Until 2014, Western academic and security analysts referred to hybrid threats in a broadly general manner, applicable to actions of various state and non-state actors. After Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 however, hybrid warfare concept, in Western rhetoric, came to the forefront of security discussion and started to be associated specifically with Russian covert actions in Ukraine. The concept of hybrid warfare was outlined in the Military Balance 2015 as "politico-military methods employed by Russia". Russian military and non-military methods applied in Ukraine were seen as

integrated campaigns designed to psychological and physical advantages over the opponent through informational, electronic and cyber operations, as well as covert and overt military and intelligence action, designed to create cognitive dissonance in foreign decision-making circles, delaying active response time (The Military Balance, 2015).

The concept that has been used to describe Russian military and non-military operations in Ukraine after 2014 is polygenetic. The term ‘Russian Hybrid Warfare’ is used by a group of Western scholars, which analyse Russian actions in accordance with Hoffman’s understanding of the ‘hybrid warfare’ concept. Analyses presented by these scholars tend to be more on the operational side *vis-à-vis* Western strategic response (Seely, 2017; Clark, 2020). *Gibridnaya voyna*, a direct translation of hybrid warfare, refers to the Russian understanding of hybrid war and is used by another group of Western scholarship, mainly focused on descriptive analysis of Russia’s conceptual origin of the term (Fridman 2018; Galeotti, 2019). The latter, argue that works of Russian émigré officer Evgeny Messner on *Myatezhevoyna* (subversion war), Alexandr Dugin on net-centric wars and Igor Panarin on information warfare, form a conceptual base for *gibridnaya voyna* (Fridman, 2018).

*Myatezhevoyna* conceptualised by Evgeny Messner (1971) suggested that contemporary wars will increasingly be taking place in the fourth, psychological, dimension of the battlefield. He argued that strategies to weaken opponent’s political will, by influencing its populations’ hearts and minds, would become an integral part of future wars (Fridman, 2018). Inclusion of all societal aspects in future conflicts, referred to as ‘nationalisation of war’, would further underline the erosion between war and peace, making people involuntary war participants (Messner, 1971). Therefore, main aim of contemporary wars, according to Messner, was no longer about gaining physical superiority over one’s opponent, but the psychological one, being able to “knock down [opponent’s] ideological positions... bringing confusion and discomfiture into [their] soul” through propaganda and agitation (Messner, 1960; 1971). One of the most interesting parts about Messner’s work is his vision of the role of the propaganda as a war strategy. In his work, he differentiated between ‘defensive’ and ‘offensive’ propaganda seeing former as a tool of enforcing the patriotic spirit of one’s population, an “elixir of life... [to counteract] the enemy’s poison”, whilst the latter is created to weaken enemy’s spirits, specifically targeting enemy’s psyche (Messner, 1971; Fridman, 2018). Thus, *Myatezhevoyna* is seen as a systematic strategy aimed to erode adversary’s socio-cultural and military cohesion through chaoticization of

enemy's internal domains, such as political, social and religious, to name a few (Fridman, 2018).

Dugin's take on conceptualisation of net-centric wars, and Panarin's understanding of information warfare in the 21<sup>st</sup> century environment, could be seen as an extension of Messner's work, further exploring the consequences of shifting battleground from real to virtual domains (Fridman, 2018). Dugin, in his book *Geopolitika Postmoderna* (2007), adopted a wider interpretation of net-centric wars, suggesting that as created image or interpretation of the event becomes more important than reality, those in control of the informational 'network' dimension, control everything. Thus, outlining that war has been long fought in the informational domain, sidelining military operations to the supportive role (Dugin, 2007; Fridman, 2018). In a similar manner, Panarin considers information war, where strategies such as information manipulation, disinformation, blackmail, and others, are used in order to control the opinion of targeted social masses in an attempt to gain particular political benefit (Panarin, 2006; Fridman, 2018).

Although both authors identify the West as a main infiltrator into Russian political affairs by taking advantage of new means warfare, one would have to be blind not to see a striking similarity between so-called Western strategy and Russian actions in Ukraine, which were classified as Russian hybrid warfare (Reisinger & Golts, 2014; Shandra & Seely, 2019). Whilst the resemblance is indeed uncanny, academically, there is no direct evidence that abovementioned scholars had any impact on the formation of *gibridnaya voyna* concept. Nevertheless, Western authors often quote Messner, Dugin and Panarin's text in an attempt to explain Russian hybrid behaviour (Fridman 2017, 2018).

### **1.2.2 Russia-centric Argument**

Proponents of the Russian-centric argument agree that Russian understanding of *gibridnaya voyna* is not a mere adaptation of Western hybrid warfare, but rather a reconceptualization, or a 'Russofication', of Frank G. Hoffman's conceptualisation designed to fit Russia's political and military reality embedded in its strategic culture (Adamsky, 2015; Fridman, 2017). There is a general agreement within this branch of Western analysis that Russia's new way of war prioritises deployment of non-military means over military as a way to disorient its opponents, limiting their responsiveness.

Ofer Fridman's book on *Russian "Hybrid Warfare": resurgence and Politicization* (2018) has been one of the first attempts to showcase a multitude of differences between

Western and Russian interpretation of Hybrid Warfare. It builds on conceptual scholarship, injecting the existing debate on the issue with new analytical insights, demonstrating how the concept of hybrid warfare not only infiltrated foreign policy domains and strategic thought on both sides, but also contributed to the worsening of relations between Russia and the West through increased politicisation (Renz, 2019). It should be outlined that after a rigorous analysis of Western concept of hybrid warfare and Russian concept of *gibridnaya voyna*, Fridman's interpretation of the latter is based on theories of subversion and net-centric wars and is "solely based on non-military means" intended to undermine and subvert opponent's will from within (Fridman, 2018). Despite undoubtedly contributing to the conceptual debate, Fridman's conclusions are limited, as they only highlight what two hybrid warfare concepts outline, rather than suggest further foreign security pathways beyond the fact that "politics is politics" (Galeotti, 2018).

Mark Galeotti, in *Russian Political War: Moving Beyond the Hybrid* (2019) and *The Weaponisation of Everything* (2023) includes a deep dive into Russian domestic political structures and historical context which he sees as major influences of Kremlin's threat perception. Galeotti argues that *gibridnaya voyna* should be understood as Russia's fearful projection of Moscow being a victim and a target of Western hybrid aggression, aimed at regime destabilisation from within (Galeotti, 2019). From the Russian perspective, they are simply using various forms of non-military coercion in a "defensively offensive way" out of fear to be undermined by the West (Galeotti, 2017). Majority of Galeotti's publications on the subject maintain that Western understanding of the term 'hybrid war' became too enriched with meanings and tend to be widely, and falsely, used to describe everything (Galeotti, 2019). In contrast to Ofer Fridman (2018) he argues that *gibridnaya voyna*, as a term, has limited analytical value as it is seldom used in conjunction with the Western understanding of waging war, which Russians are simply trying to counteract (Adamsky, 2015; Bērziņš, 2015; Galeotti 2019). To this extent, Galeotti differentiates non-military tactics, being ends in themselves, as political warfare, and hybrid war as a political warfare in addition with eventual military invasion (Galeotti 2016).

Aforementioned view strongly corresponds with Dmitry Adamsky's (2015) interpretation of current Russian art of strategy as he suggests that in order to understand Russia's contemporary military theory and practice, one must situate it within the context of strategic culture, analysing a broader ideational milieu, in order to grasp the full picture of Kremlin's geopolitical threat perception. Adamsky' analysis of Russian military discourse



further indicated that many, within the Kremlin's decision-making capacity, possess a genuine belief that Russia has been continuously operating under an attack from the West, which aims to undermine and destroy the country in geopolitical terms. This line of argument corresponds with that made by Galeotti (2019; 2022) and suggests that Moscow's justifies its international behaviour as defensive, seeing non-military attacks launched against it across various domains, such as diplomatic, military, economic and societal (Adamsky, 2015). In his paper on *Cross-domain coercion* (2015), Adamsky expands the mainstream analysis of Russia's hybrid actions to incorporate aspects of non-linear, informational and nuclear domain within a unified program, which best enables state coercion in an attempt to deter and compel adversary's actions. His analysis suggests that despite Russia's military peacocking their overall foreign strategy adopts a passively coercive character that attempts to dissuade a conventionally stronger opponent by creating an image of superiority (through coercion or intimidation) with using minimal, if any, violence (Adamsky, 2015; Thornton, 2016; Galeotti, 2019).

Adamsky's analysis of the *cross-domain coercion* concept, outlines the primal utility of the nuclear factor, as Russia's most valuable card to play in the geopolitical arena. Tactically, Adamsky refers to this as an immune manoeuvre space (*strategicheskii proctor*) which is often achieved through nuclear manipulations, which when successful, supports the achievement of other tangible results, preferably without the use of force. By painting an image of unacceptable consequences, Russia makes sure that West remains in temporary paralysis of assertiveness and limits its response times, as seen in multiple instances in Ukraine, including the annexation of Crimea (Adamsky, 2015).

Galeotti (2017; 2019), alternatively, suggests that based on his detailed analysis of Soviet military tactics, Putin's preferred 'way of war' can be best characterised as "guerilla geopolitics". The term suggests that Russia tends to avoid conflicts where it is weak and work on shifting the battle to the terrain of its choosing through employing military notion of hybrid war and political war to disorient and confuse its opponent (Galeotti, 2017). Whilst some express direct concern over the possibility of Russian non-military tactics spilling over in the military domain (Adamsky, 2015; Bērziņš, 2015), Galeotti, in most of his work on the nature of Russian hybrid war suggests that analysis of Russian rationale behind their hybrid strategy demonstrates that Kremlin is unlikely to pursue a full-blown military campaign against the West, instead engaging in an aggressive campaign of "divide, demoralise and distract" in their attempt to uphold its status as a Great Power (Galeotti, 2019)

Although Western Russia-centric scholarship has made significant contributions by providing detailed analysis of Russian military scholarship on *gibridnaya voyna* and outlining Russia's governmental rationale, it seems to be overly concerned with coming up with new terms to outline Russian non-military foreign policy actions. Most proponents of this argument identify Russia's use of non-military means towards the West as main *modus operandi*, however their assessment of Russian military thought origins and the degree to which future military employment is possible, varies. Certain similarities in operational techniques of Russian *gibridnaya voyna* can be outlined. Overreliance on informational and psychological warfare in an attempt to manipulate opponent's forces and civilian population from within in order to avoid military action, as well as the employment of coercion tactics on the geopolitical arena seems to be recurring factors to describe Russia's strategic conduct. Overall, there seems to be an agreement that *gibridnaya voyna* has shifted Russia's military priorities from strictly pursuing traditional military capabilities to developing non-military tactics with a particular emphasis on the human mind, as the main battlefield.

### **1.2.3 West-centric Argument**

Proponents of the West-centric argument, when it comes to analysing Russian military strategy can be classified into two sub-groups. Those who analyse Russian Hybrid Warfare through Hoffman's interpretation of the term, putting more emphasis on the operational, rather than historical-cultural lens (Seely, 2017; Clark, 2020) and those who, argue against the usefulness of the term to begin with, suggesting that it brings more confusion than clarity to the overall debate (Charap, 2015; Monaghan, 2015; Fabian, 2019). Overall, this branch of scholars tends to agree that Russian hybrid warfare has become more of a Western myth, than a genuinely developed Russian military strategy. There is an agreement with the Russia-centric scholars that, overall, Russia is unlikely to deliberately seek out a military conflict and would prefer to stay in the shadows, delegating covert operation below the level of conventional conflict.

Both Robert Seely (2017) and Mason Clark (2020) outline the operational side of Russia's preparation for hybrid war with the West. Seely highlights that their hybrid strategy itself holds nothing new and instead is just a rebrand of 'Active Measures' from the Soviet period. A tactic used to covertly intervene in the politics of another country, manipulating a favourable outcome through subversion and coercive tools (Seely, 2018). The overall

uniqueness of, what Seely refers to as ‘Contemporary Russian Conflict’, is its evolutionary use of state power, in both military and non-military domains, that intertwines all tools of national power together (Seely, 2017; 2018). Despite providing a well-researched report on outlining Russia’s potential ‘soft power’ coercion tools such as *maskirovka* (camouflage), disinformation or ‘reflexive control’ (conducting a psychological analysis of the opponent in order to defeat them with their own methods) the lack of use of Russian sources, apart from Gerasimov’s Doctrine interpretation, provide a limited West-centric view that risks painting Russia into something that it is not (Seely, 2017).

Mason Clark’s interpretation of Russian Hybrid Warfare has similar downfalls as the abovementioned author. He argues that Russian understanding of hybrid warfare has been clearly defined by Russian academic and doctrinal sources, aiming at gaining control over the fundamental worldview and orientation of a target state, primarily through informational campaigns. Being primarily an offensive strategy, according to the author, its overall success of should be awarded to Russia’s ability to effectively coordinate its departments, establishing a continuum among military and non-military means in order to conduct unified campaigns (Clark, 2020). Clark’s policy paper is US-centric, with an aim to securitise Russian Hybrid Warfare, making it a bigger threat for US security than it is. Seeing Russian hybrid warfare as a coherent offensive strategy that had been long defined on the doctrinal level, suggests that he fell into the trap of interpreting many of the Russian academic sources literally, without putting Russian *de-facto* behaviour into perspective (Clark, 2020).

This brings this analysis to the second, and more vocal, branch of West-centric scholarship, that argues that by mythologising aspects of Russian hybrid warfare and misinterpreting their true meaning, Western scholarship risks believing in a ‘bogeyman’ which they themselves created (Charap, 2015). In his infamous paper on *The Ghost of Hybrid Warfare* (2015) Charap suggests that although there have been new developments in Russian military strategy that allowed for a swift achievement of their desired outcome in Ukraine in 2014, it can be barely considered a blueprint to defend NATO. Although there has been an increase in coordination of national power that allowed for a successful use of subversion, cyber and information operations in conjunction with covert military operation, to deter and coerce targeted opponent, conducted under the cover of nuclear umbrella, referred by Adamsky (2015) as *Cross-Domain coercion*, this approach is not new and only worked effectively in Crimea and Donbas due to an innate pro-Russian support, common

language and shared cultural traditions (Charap, 2015). Sandor Fabian (2019) comes to the same conclusion regarding the novelty of Russian actions, arguing that Russian hybrid Warfare strategy is “rather a western myth than a comprehensive Russian strategic concept”.

Finally, Andrew Monaghan’s contribution to the Russian Hybrid Warfare debate suggests that Western scholarship should shift its priorities from analysing *hybrid* to analysing *warfare* in ‘hybrid warfare’ (Monaghan, 2015). He suggests that whilst the popularity of the term contributed to the development of a better Western understanding of specific elements of Russian security behaviour, it simultaneously adopted an interpretative tunnel vision that led to Western thinking about Russia becoming increasingly abstract, painting a picture of a security threat that could not have been taken further away from reality. Interestingly, it is the “distorting light shed by hindsight” that, according to Monaghan, makes Western analysts see what is simply not there (Monaghan, 2015).

This literature review aimed to conceptualise hybrid warfare and outline existing debates on the topic from Russia-centric and West-centric perspectives. Although each strand adds its own analytical contribution to the debate, it does so not without an equal amount of limitations. Three main limitations from both sides of the scholarships are outlined below.

First, Western perspectives on Russian Hybrid Warfare have noticeably reached their expiration date after Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine in 2022, as the concept was deemed no longer relevant, by those who advocated for its immense importance not long beforehand. Despite getting an immense academic attention in Russia, the concept of *gibridnaya voyna* is no longer ‘in fashion’ for the Western academic audience, due to their faulty overreliance on its non-military components. This creates a significant research gap within analysis of Russian decision-making at times of Moscow’s most unpredictableness, questioning the reliability of previous findings.

Second, the time period of reading of academic contributions matter. Security analysis of Russian Hybrid Warfare had always been more focused on its potential threat to NATO and the West, ignoring the fact (consciously or otherwise) that Russian perception of its near abroad is neither and therefore should not be treated to carry similar international significance. Meaning, that while most of the academic analyses pointed towards strong unlikelihood of Russia using military force to achieve their geopolitical goals in the West, they were not wrong, because Ukraine has always been seen by Russia as part of its Soviet

legacy. It is only after the war that European media started to look at Ukraine as part of the ‘Collective West’ which Russia is attempting to counteract.

Thirdly, Western scholarship has a habit of recycling Russian academic resources. This point was mentioned by Andrew Monaghan (2015), Sandor Fabian (2019) and Samuel Charap (2015) as they outlined that oftentimes, Western academia would use same combination of sources, interpreted by others, causing the former to come to similar conclusion. After the Ukraine war in 2022, there has not been a comprehensive assessment done on analysing of hybrid warfare interpretation in Russian academia in a post-war environment.

Present study aims to address abovementioned limitations of Western scholarship by conducting an exploratory research into the subject.

## 2. Methodology

This study is conducted in a form of an exploratory research that uses aspects of discourse analysis and interpretative analysis in an attempt to contextualize the development of Russian literature on *gibridnaya voyna* before and after the launch of ‘special’ military operation in Ukraine in 2022. This approach will allow to gain an in-depth understanding of Russia’s interpretation of the concept and trace potential linguistic and conceptual changes connected to the term within the context of Russian-led foreign policy in Ukraine, if there are any. In this case, linguistic changes refer, specifically, to a combination of buzzwords, the usage of which becomes associated with *gibridnaya voyna* in Russian scholarship (Wicker, 2023). Broad nature of the study will allow to maintain an all-inclusive understanding of *gibridnaya voyna* without a risk of excluding any important aspects prematurely, as the research question can only be answered after an in-depth literature analysis is conducted (Swedberg, 2020). Given a limited, if any, prior scholarly engagement with assessing Russia’s interpretation of *gibridnaya voyna* after the start of the military operation in Ukraine, suggests that limiting research, at his stage, into a narrower scope of analysis will do more harm than good.

The nature of *gibridnaya voyna* is subjective, as it has no set definition, and in the case of Russian interpretation, is often seen to take on a role of a ‘security chameleon’, thus its meaning should be interpreted through the collection of ‘soft data’ such as written academic and governmental documents, which will require the conduct interpretative

research (Morse, 2022). Finally, discourse analysis of written texts will allow to extract a particular thematical, conceptual and linguistic patterns of the concept, where placing it within the geopolitical context, will help identify whether, if at all, the way how *gibridnaya voyna* has been interpreted in Russian scholarship had changed since the invasion (Antaki, 2008).

Given that the pool of written and media resources which could be analysed for this study is vast, the research will be limited to written sources, analysing academic research by military scholars, published in open-access journals, as well as the official doctrinal security documents of the Russian Federation. Although not exclusively, however, primary data will be first identified in Russian academic journals such as *Voennaya Mysl'* (Military Thought) and *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk* (Journal of the Academy of Military Sciences), later referred to as *Vestnik*. An online resource, *CyberLeninka*, Russian equivalent of *JSTOR*, will be also used to conduct search on other available articles on *gibridnaya voyna* published by Russian military scholars. It should be noted that it is not considered essential for the article to include a phrase 'gibridnaya voyna' for it to be included for further analysis, the source can also discuss 'new wars', 'new generation wars', 'hybrid threats' and 'colour revolution'. This conceptual broadening will allow to trace the development of Russian understanding of the 'new war' concept, before hybrid warfare, as a term, came to the forefront of the academic discussion. Potential doctrinal changes will be evaluated through analysis of published security documents such as *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* and *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation*.

Data access to written sources should be considered as one of the primary research limitations. It should be noted that a lot of Russian academic literature, especially in the military security field have not been digitised and can only be accessed in person. Ongoing war actions in Ukraine have made it impossible to be physically present in the country to collect data and therefore the researcher will only be able to use open-access information. Although majority of *Voennaya Mysl'* and *Vestnik* journal articles are available online, the latter's access to publications has been restricted in 2022, slightly limiting the variety of analysis available of post-2022 *gibridnaya voyna* concept. In addition, participating in the war effort has limited some scholars from publishing, meaning that the interpretation of post-2022 *gibridnaya voyna* might be missing an input of otherwise influential scholars.

The decision to exclude media sources from the analysis was deliberate. Russian media is used as the principal element of state propaganda, where it is almost impossible to distinguish between state's genuine interpretation of *gibridnaya voyna* and its use as a buzzword for the purposes of vilifying the West and maintaining population's war approval rating. Although it would be an interesting avenue to pursue, this research will be focused solely on interpreting Russia's military understanding of *gibridnaya voyna* and its influence on foreign policy and overall threat perception.

### **3. Findings**

This chapter will outline main trajectories, which Russian military scholarship has taken in its interpretation and use of *gibridnaya voyna*. The chapter will consist of three main sections outlining historical context, *gibridnaya voyna* interpretation and doctrinal changes of each period, pre-2014, post-2014 and post-2022. It should be noted that although pre-2014 barely deals with the concept, later referred to as *gibridnaya voyna*, the overall assessment of scholarly understanding of contemporary conflicts prior to popularity of *hybrid wars* will allow to analyse changes in Russian military interpretation to the fullest.

Last part of the section will deal with change and continuity factor of *gibridnaya voyna*. It will outline all significant changes to the concept in the post-2022 environment based on three main factors, conceptual, doctrinal and linguistic (buzzwords). Finally, implications of these changes for academic and policymakers will be discussed.

#### **3.1 Before (pre-2014)**

Overall consensus of military scholars in a pre-2014 environment was based on the overwhelmingly material understanding of international security that, since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has been an intensification of states' competition for geostrategic space, economic and natural resources, often achieved at the expense of others. Alongside discussing military side of material interstate confrontation, military theorists started to highlight the changing nature of 'new wars'. Being products of Soviet times, Russian military analysts remained suspicious of US and the West in general as they used examples of Persian Gulf War 1991, US missions in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 to outline new military and non-military means through which contemporary wars were fought.

Revisionist scholars argued for the necessity to update and further develop the conceptual and methodological understanding of military confrontation in the era of globalisation (Minic, 2023). Theoretical works of General Makhmut Gareev (2003), Colonel Kiselev (2008), Colonel Babich (2008; 2009), General Kruglov (2006) as well as General Danilenko (2008) have significantly contributed to the development of Russian strategic understanding of the nature of ‘new wars’ in the post-Cold War era and have arguably formed the foundation of later *gibridnaya voyna* conceptualisation. In addition, whilst not excluding the possibility of the use of military forces, analysts argued that the analysis of ‘nontraditional’ means should come to the forefront of the military discussion as its active application in all types of state confrontations has prompted the shift in traditional understanding of ‘war’.

### **3.1.1 Emerging Debates on ‘new wars’**

Russian military thought has identified the need to re-evaluate their understanding of ‘war’ from the theoretical standpoint after the collapse of the Soviet Union. General Danilenko (2008) is one of the most respected contributors to the field, whose work is often either heavily supported or criticised by fellow military academics. In his work, he continuously outlines the need for creation of a fundamentally new theory of war, compiling an updated methodology from philosophical, political, economic and sociological studies of war. He suggested that in order to develop a standing military strategy to compete with Russia’s adversaries, study of war should first be seen as a social phenomenon. His analysis further critiqued Soviet way of looking at the idea of war as something exclusively involving military means and argued that in order for the theory to further develop in a fast-globalising world, it must do so without being influenced by political or ideological factors. Danilenko used lessons drawn from the Cold War to demonstrate that ‘war’ as a socio-political phenomenon has transformed itself to achieve strategic goals without using strictly military means, but rather by using various ‘nontraditional’ methods available (Danilenko, 2008).

Vladimir Babich (2009), similarly, saw the nature of Cold War as a “comprehensive uncompromising struggle with the use of economic, diplomatic, political, ideological, information and other nonmilitary means and methods”. His paper, however, argues that the logic of war in Clausewitzian terms hasn’t changed, though it is the shift in its domain, role and proportion of employing various military and non-military means that created theoretical and strategic change (Babich, 2008). Babich often heavily criticised Danilenko’s work for



abandoning the Soviet theoretical military thinking and wanting to create a theory without considering Russia's national interests or lessons learned from the past (Babich, 2009).

Lastly, Kruglov's (2006) argument can be positioned halfway between Danilenko and Babich, as he recognised operational failures in Soviet understanding of war waging, he used the theory of chaotic symmetry and order<sup>1</sup> to postulate that conflicts occur during the disbalance of power when one country (America) is attempting to use another (Russia) to resolve its own problems in the fields of economy, ecology or energy. Thus, he postulates, that new wars should be prevented before they even start by the state working on compiling an array of various military and non-military means, in order to deter potential attack (Kruglov, 2006). It is worth noting, that Kruglov identified two types of war: just and unjust. The former refers to wars that arise from the disbalance of harmony in the society or between states, producing civil wars or interstate conflicts, in an attempt to regain lost balance. The latter are the wars waged for the sole purpose of making the state a "sacrificial donor in [another country's] selfish resolution of global problems" by attempting to exploit their resources. Although not directly mentioned by other authors, this understanding speaks to the overall mentality of Russian military community in the early post-Soviet period, which heavily influenced their threat perception.

Writings of General Makhmut Gareev (2003) are much more practical in reviewing the character of future wars. In a similar fashion to all abovementioned scholars, he conceptualised that Russia is facing three main clusters of threats. First, is a long-term agenda of enemy states to strip Russia of its sovereignty from within. Second, possibility of the US and NATO states to use their nuclear weapons against Russia and third, introducing terrorist groups and other military organisation to weaken Russian and post-Soviet borders. Although Gareev argues that wars can only be fought by military means, in case of 'new wars' with long-range high precision missiles, nonetheless he agrees that contemporary globalised environment have increased the possibility of using economic, diplomatic, informational and psychological factors to wage a successful nonmilitary confrontation. He sees the latter utilised by unfriendly states mainly for purposes of infringing "disinformation and destruction from within". He concludes that due to the flexibility of means available to wage contemporary conflicts, it will be essential for Russia to learn how to utilise its military and non-military potential effectively (Gareev, 2003). Similarly, Kiselev's analysis of 'new

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<sup>1</sup> Theory of evolution based on the understanding of symmetry.

wars' based on the Gulf war in 1991 attributes the use of high-precision long range weapons, as well as the use of intellectual and psychological technologies, such as information warfare to the new way of war (Kiselev, 2008).

Even back in early 2000's military scholars, such as Gareev (2003) argued that the military-political situation in the world will be determined simultaneously by the desire of the Western countries, including the US, to dominate world processes and the newly evolving tendency towards multilateral world order. This summary of early Russian military thought suggests that Russian post-Soviet mentality remained suspicious of the United States and the West, which significantly affected their threat perception and dictated their overall analysis of security in the 21st century. Active scholarly debate within military academia should also be noted, as it outlines the predominance of theoretical discussion and demonstrates the ability of military academia to openly address, and even critique, any developments within the military sector. Ultimately, discussions of 'new wars' being fought by a simultaneous engagement of military and non-military means paved the way for further research.

### **3.1.2 New Generation Wars and 'Gerasimov Doctrine'**

The theory of New Generation Warfare (NGW) is closely associated with academic work of Colonel Sergey Chekinov and Lieutenant General Sergey Bogdanov since early 2000s on exploring the changing nature of contemporary conflicts. Arguably, their work has shaped not only the views of Russian military academia, but also laid groundwork for later publications of Valery Gerasimov, Russian Chief of the General Staff (Fridman, 2018). Sergey Bogdanov saw the struggle of the 21st century to be material in character, suggesting that rapid globalisation has deepened the gap in economic and military power between developed and developing countries, which significantly intensified the struggle for spheres of influence, strive for global and regional dominance and natural resources. In addition to creation of new military threats, increased use of informational and military technologies served as the basis for creating new ways of waging war (Gorbunov & Bogdanov, 2009).

Despite putting a lot of emphasis on the military aspect of new wars, Bogdanov outlines the emergence of non-military forms of confrontation, where "military actions will either not be carried out at all or will not play main role" (Gorbunov & Bogdanov, 2009). The latter strategy was later identified by Chekinov and Bogdanov as a "strategy of indirect

action” (Bogdanov & Chekinov, 2011). Largely influenced by the work of the Chinese military scholar, General Sun Tzu on using the factor of deception in war, military theorists put informational warfare at the forefront of ‘indirect action’ strategy as a way to disorient state’s military and governmental apparatus (Bogdanov & Chekinov, 2011). It is important to note, that an overwhelming reliance on information warfare is put due to the assumption that future conflicts will be fought by using unmanned vehicles and artificial intelligence, thus by targeting the heart of what is predicted to be nation’s control and command centres, it is seen to definitely affect state’s ability to perform effectively.

It is only in 2013 that Chekinov and Bogdanov classified all above-mentioned factors of new means of confrontation as a concept of New-Generation War (NGW) (Chekinov & Bogdanov, 2013). The article consolidates the idea that non-military options have come to play a greater role in achieving state’s political and strategic goals, if used strategically they can even be more superior to the power of military weapons. Thus, it is the ability to “keep the man outside of the battlespace [that] makes future wars and armed struggle cardinally different” (Chekinov & Bogdanov, 2013; 2017). Military aspect, however, is not completely absent in NGW, but rather seen to play a supportive role to reach a final impact at the very end, by employment of special military forces. NGW is the first time that military academia suggested that information technologies and psychological warfare should be combined and put forth to lay groundworks, seeking to achieve superiority in troops and weapons control, as well as attempting to morally depress opponent’s military personnel and its overall population. Importantly, Chekinov and Bogdanov do not exclude the importance of asymmetric actions in the battlefield either, but rather, they suggest that it should be used in an attempt to diminish enemy’s superiority in armed struggle by using a combination of indirect means, such as political, economic, information and technological campaigns (Chekinov & Bogdanov, 2013).

Finally, special attention is paid to the preparatory factor of NGW in creating favourable strategic environment. Authors outline two main strategies, first the launch of disinformation to mislead state’s political and military leaders about attacker’s intentions and heavy propaganda to spark discontent within defender’s population and disorient armed forces. These strategies of information warfare are designed to help the attacker to morally depress and psychologically paralyse all domestic administrative systems of the defending government to then send the ground forces in expecting minimal resistance from the population, if any at all (Chekinov & Bogdanov, 2013).

Gerasimov's article on *The Value of Science in Prediction* (2013), often referred by the West as 'Gerasimov's Doctrine' (Galeotti, 2014), published in a lesser-known military journal VPK (*Voенно-Promyshlenniy Kurier*), surprisingly carries nothing conceptually novel from what was discussed earlier by military theorists in this section. The article does, however, attempt to outline the most current threats in need of being studied further by the military academia. It uses the concept of New Generation Warfare to outline a growing trend of conflicts in the 21st century for states to use nonmilitary means, covert military operations and technological advancements to blur the lines between war and peace. Particular attention is paid to the discussion of colour revolutions in the Middle East and asymmetric strategies deployed by the U.S during operations in Iraq in 1991 and 2003. For Gerasimov, Arab Spring was the perfect example of the colour revolution strategy deployed by the US, because it demonstrated how easily a "quite prosperous state can turn into an arena of ruthless armed struggle, becoming a victim of foreign intervention, in months or even days" (Gerasimov, 2013). The article further consolidates the widespread understanding and fear within the Russian government on West's mission to orchestrate an array of colour revolution within post-Soviet space and consequently Russia itself.

Gerasimov outlines an increasing role of nonmilitary means in achieving state's political and strategic goals, with the help from the protesting part of the population, where covert military operations are used to finalise one's overall victory. Asymmetric strategies are defined as the use of special operation forces and domestic opposition in an attempt to construct a "functional frontline on the territory of the opposing state", using information technologies to further destroy the opponent from within. Overall, the article suggests that the ration of nonmilitary to military means of contemporary conflicts is 4:1 with the former being constantly changed and updated (Gerasimov, 2013).

Finally, Gerasimov discusses strategic and operational role of technological advancements in contemporary conflicts suggesting that as they become more dynamic, there is an increasing need to utilise these opportunities to create more efficient coordination between military and the state. He also notes an increasing role of using remotely operated military equipment, such as high precision weapons in the battlefield, suggesting that soldier to soldier frontal assaults are becoming obsolete. Interestingly, in the similar manner to all abovementioned military scholars, Gerasimov underlines the need for military theorists to create a cohesive theory which will include the study of asymmetric military actions and address key questions, such as the role of military in contemporary environment, what

technologies should be implemented in the battlefield and what is the nature of new wars (Gerasimov, 2013).

Despite revealing limited conceptual novelty, Valery Gerasimov's article (2013) have successfully identified some weak areas of the Russian military security in light of the changing character of contemporary warfare, arguably, motivating structural change to the organisation of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. On June 23rd, 2013, Vladimir Putin signed off on changes made to the Decree on the role of the General Staff, specifically in the section "on defence" to add additional responsibilities on coordination between inner-departmental Organisations, development of official defence documents as well as domestic defence plans (Ministry of Defence, 2013; Gerasimov, 2014).

In his speech during the military-academic Conference at the Academy of Military Sciences, Gerasimov outlined, echoing his previous conclusions in the article (2013), that new measures are being put in place as transition time between utilising exclusively non-military means and the use of force have shortened, increasing the need for simultaneous decision on strategic and operational role of troops to be made (Gerasimov, 2014). As military inner-departmental coordination becomes an essential element in successful confrontation in an era of new generation wars, the National Defence Command Centre<sup>2</sup> of the Russian Federation was established. The idea behind its organisation is to have an entity in charge of coordinating actions of the entire military organisation, making it possible to receive and analyse information received by various channels at once and prepare proposals for state leaderships' decision-making on responding to any crisis situations domestically and abroad (Gerasimov, 2014). Since becoming operational in 2018, Centre's overall functionality is questionable due to the lack of available information, however it does demonstrate that Gerasimov's academic views, although not groundbreaking, carry significant weight in Russia's overall military decision-making.

### **3.1.3 Doctrinal Outlook**

Major concern expressed by Russian military scholars in relation to new ways and means to wage new types of wars through non-military means (Kruglov, 2006; Danilenko, 2008; Babich 2009) in an attempt to challenge state's sovereignty from within (Gareev, 2003; Gorbunov & Bogdanov, 2009) were addressed by the National Security Strategy of

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<sup>2</sup> Original phrase in Russian: "Национальный центр управления обороной Российской Федерации"

2009 and consequently by the Russian Military Doctrine of 2010. Both documents characterise globalised international environment as transforming from a bipolar 'block confrontation' to becoming multipolar. Despite recognising United Nations and UN Security Council as central elements of stability capable to uphold the basis of international law, military conflicts arising in light of resource competition, the possibility of new emergence of non-nuclear arms race, as well as growing spread of worldwide extremism and terrorism are considered to be major threats to world security.

Military Doctrine document expands on military and non-military threats. The section on foreign threats and aspects of contemporary conflicts prioritises military aspects of confrontation. Some major concerns outlined are NATO's military enlargement closer to the Russian sphere of influence and an ongoing development of missile defence systems, militarisation of space, as well as the development of non-nuclear high precision weapons, all of which jeopardise global stability. Non-military means are discussed in relation to domestic threats and features of modern military conflicts. Complex application of military and non-military means simultaneously in an unpredictable manner is seen as the core aspect of the latter. Alongside the possibility of opponents using political and economic means, the Doctrine (2010) specifically outlines the use informational warfare measures to achieve one's political goals without the use of military force in order to form a favourable reaction in the world community. Additionally, the latter strategy is seen to be utilised by unfriendly states in an attempt to force change upon Russian constitutional order, undermining its sovereignty by achieving complete disorganisation of the functioning state systems such as military facilities and information infrastructure (Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2010).

Foreign Policy Concept adopted on the 20th of February in 2013 is built upon aforementioned National Security Concept (2009) and the Military Doctrine (2010) as well as other domestic law-making documents. The Concept reiterates Russia's willingness to maintain positive relations with neighbouring states and to cooperate with the U.S. on global issues of terrorism and weapon proliferation. It, however, also states that as globalisation processes have increased the factor of civilisational identity, increasing re-ideologization, xenophobia and intolerance, threatening any regime to be dragged into a conflict, sliding into chaos, is on the rise. The section also highlights the role of 'soft power' in the international political arena as a tool for solving foreign policy problems by utilising capabilities of civil society, informational and communication as means of "exerting

political pressure on sovereign states, interfering in their internal affairs, manipulating public opinion through sponsoring humanitarian project abroad” (Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2013). Overall, work on New-Generation War by Chekinov and Bogdanov (2013; 2017), as well as Gerasimov’s article (2013) both, attempt to explore main security threats outlined by the Foreign Policy Concept further.

## **3.2 Before (post-2014)**

### **3.2.1 Contextual Background**

For many Western analysts, Russia’s swift annexation of Crimea in 2014 without (almost) any casualties and being able to publicly deny their involvement, became a go-to example of Russian Hybrid Warfare (Freedman, 2015; Clark, 2020; Galeotti, 2023). As Viktor Yanukovich refused to sign an EU Association Agreement in a surprise exchange for \$15bn of cheap credit and discounted gas from Russia on December 17th, 2013, this betrayal was the last straw for protestors in Central Kiev’s Independence Square (Maidan Nezalezhnost). The protest grew in strength and desperation in 2014, as a response to the ruthless acts of the Berkut anti-protest police, over a hundred peaceful protestors were killed on 20th and 21st of February (Open Society Foundations, 2019). Yanukovich’s forced exile on February 22nd was seen as a major blow to Kremlin’s reputation domestically and internationally. Without hesitation, under the pretext of protecting Russian interests and nationals abroad, on the 27 February, covert Russian forces, often referred to as “little green men” or “polite people” as they were wearing no identifying insignia, occupied the Crimean Peninsula and seized major governmental buildings, quickly orchestrating a referendum resulting in an overwhelming pro-Russian support of 95.5% (BBC, 2014; Galeotti, 2023).

As Galeotti (2023) pointed out, Crimea has been taken in an operation where subversion tactics, criminality and misdirection matter as much, if not more, than any other military aspects. Soon after, the fighting in the Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine (Donetsk and Luhansk) broke out between Ukrainian government and pro-Russian separatist forces led, at the time, by Igor Girkin (Strelkov). On the 2nd of November, after, less than international recognised elections, Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, went under the leadership of pro-Russian militants declared their sovereign a “state of sovereignty” of LNR (Luhansk People’s Republic) and DNR (Donetsk People’s Republic). This created a deadly media-

worthy frozen conflict, in which Kremlin got to play both, a mediator and a covert instigator role (Grigas, 2016).

It was Putin's 'occupation without occupation', creation of a strong pro-Russian nationalist narrative to ensure his own population's support, as well as positioning Russia to be a regional 'saviour' on the grounds of humanitarianism and the responsibility to protect, that disoriented initial Western response time, classifying it as a "distinctly [hybrid] form of warfare" (Dunn & Bobick, 2014).

Domestically, Russian anti-regime analysts were not convinced that Russian actions in Ukraine were orchestrated as a strategic response to NATO's enlargement into its sphere of influence, neither were they about protecting Russia's access to the Black Sea, as some have passionately argued (Mearsheimer, 2014; Treisman, 2016). Report researched by Nemtsov (finalised by Ilya Yashin and other colleagues after his assassination) in 2015 titled "Putin. War" argued that Russian annexation of Crimea was nothing more than a new way for Putin to increase its domestic support, which had been steadily declining since 2012. Since March 2014 his rating indeed has skyrocketed from 45% to 58%, reaching 74% in March 2015 (Nemtsov, 2015). Covertly sponsored war in Donbas has put Putin in a much stronger negotiating position on the international arena, where he was able to utilise International Law in his favour, by taking advantage of his plausible deniability and being an active party to the Minsk agreements in 2014 and 2015.

Significant part of the report was dedicated to the analysis of state TV propaganda on domestic population in relation to the Ukraine Crisis since 2014. Although there has always been a significant amount of state propaganda, but never to that extent. Military rhetoric in connection to the Second World War, known as the Great Patriotic War in Russia, got weaponised, as Ukrainian government was referred to as 'Bandera' and 'Nazi', giving Russia, arguably, moral right to defend itself against fascism by any means necessary and almost at total support of the veteran and patriotic parts of the population (Nemtsov, 2015). A detailed report released by Levada Centre in 2016 that questioned rationale behind Russian citizens' support of war came to a similar conclusion. The study identified that although wars always were hybrid in nature, utilising different means, especially domestic propaganda to unite and motivate its nation, the main characteristic of contemporary wars is its virtualisation in media. The more invisible consequences of war on the general public are, more likely it will be supported (Kolesnikov, 2016). This is evident by statistics monitored by Levada Centre that shows that Putin's support began to decline in 2018, reaching all time



low in 2020 as he polled at 60% support, his rating plummeted after the start of Russia's military operation in Ukraine in 2022 reaching 83% (Levada Centre, 2023).

Whilst official Russian military scholarship disagrees with abovementioned interpretation of what has happened in Ukraine in 2014, by adopting a universal understanding of the event it inevitably proved right the argument of Russia's mythologisation of Soviet wars in the public sphere to draw a specific understanding of who the 'enemy' is. In discussing the situation in Kiev with journalists on the 4th of March 2014, Vladimir Putin said that there can be only one possible interpretation, that it was an "unconstitutional governmental coup and an armed seizure of power" which left "neo-Nazi groups running around the country unpunished". Interestingly, official military academia, such as *Vestnik* and *Voennaya Mysl'*, up until 2016 rarely featured military analysis connected to Ukraine, instead focusing on Russia's triumphant experiences in the Great Patriotic War and military lessons learned from Soviet period (Academy of Military Sciences, 2015a; 2015b).

Protests in Ukraine in 2014 were later contextualised as a civil war (particularly referencing Maidan and the conflict in Donbas) and discussed within the context of West engineered 'colour revolution', similar to those performed in North Africa and the Middle East in an attempt to "dismantle unwanted political regimes" (Manoylo, 2015; Bartosh, 2017). The latter is often seen as one of the 'hybrid' methods employed by the aggressor-state to achieve military-political goals by covert non-military means. Gerasimov argued that enemy's ability to manipulate open-access informational sources, primarily the Internet, for the purpose of re-writing history and manipulating people's minds, in realities of the 21st century, is used as the main catalyst of hybrid wars and colour revolutions, as seen by the aftermath of successful orchestration of nationalist movements in Ukraine (Gerasimov, 2016). Similarly, Manoylo (2015; 2017) argued that Ukraine's Maidan Revolution was a prime example of the workings of colour revolutions, as it took a "thriving state and turned it into ruins, in a matter of months". Mechanically orchestrated revolutions, according to the author, often exploit youth protest movements guided by various Western sponsored organisations as a form of political blackmail of legitimate government to pursue foreign interests (Manoylo, 2015; 2017).

This line of argument was reiterated in the Russian National Security Strategy (NSS) document adopted on the 31st of December in 2015, suggesting that unconstitutional governmental coup in Ukraine was instigated and supported by U.S and the EU due to their

inability to accept the global shift towards multipolarity and the desire to maintain the “block-like” relations in the international domain. Furthermore, NSS highlights that it was solely West’s decision to strengthen Ukraine’s far-right nationalist ideology, forming an image of Russia as the enemy and to use military force in an attempt to solve an international contradiction that led to socio-economic crisis and the creation of a long-term hotbed of instability and violence in Ukraine. Section 18 of the NSS, additionally, points out to an increasing practice of overthrowing a sovereign state by provoking and organising a governmental instability and conflicts from within (National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation, 2015). It is the first instance where Russian governmental security documents were country-specific in their analysis of international security threats, which could indicate that doctrinal publications are designed more for the purpose of attracting attention of foreign policy makers, rather than carrying any valuable decision-making value for Russian actions abroad.

### **3.2.2 Gibrinaya Voyna Interpretation**

It is important to note that in contrast to the Western understanding of Russian annexation of Crimea and covert support of separatists in Donbas, seen as a prime instances of Russian hybrid warfare, for Russia, it was mainly the Maidan Revolution which was interpreted as an attempt of the collective West to orchestrate a governmental coup by using hybrid methods, such as colour revolution. Both, annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas rarely get mentioned in any state-sponsored military publications, or by pro-Kremlin academics, as they are primarily seen as a by-product of America’s attempt to strengthen their anti-Russian campaign across Europe and Post-Soviet space (Kartapolov, 2015).

After 2014, Russian scholarship increased its use of the term *gibrinaya voyna* as a go-to concept, alongside ‘colour revolutions’, to refer to main security threats faced by Russia in the 21st century in its ‘righteous’ fight against unipolar world order. Despite strong conceptual similarities to the concept of New Generation Wars, discussed in the previous section, connection to the latter is not officially drawn and instead, understanding of *gibrinaya voyna* is deliberately kept as broad as possible, seen as a predominantly U.S. created technology of nonlinear warfare capable to covertly form new political reality in the minds of unsuspected victim-state’s population, forcing false ideas of “democratisation” and non-existent “liberal values” to sow chaos, in order to prepare grounds for a military invasion (Bartosh, 2014; Manoylo, 2015; Gerasimov, 2016). Despite an almost identical

interpretation of the term expressed by Russian military scholarship, concrete definition has not been developed. As quote marks were taken off the *gibridnaya voyna* term, Russian interpretation of emerging military and non-military threats remained descriptively the same, however an increase in the use of linguistic securitisation of historical past and lack of differentiation between various concepts such as ‘asymmetric warfare’, ‘nonlinear warfare’ and ‘proxy wars’ which are often used interchangeably alongside *gibridnaya voyna* should be noted.

Alexander Bartosh, military diplomat and an expert in military security and hybrid warfare, first, in light of Ukrainian Revolution in 2014, argued that West’s ability to achieve their political goals by non-military means, by exploiting economic, social and political instability can be analysed through the prism of ‘theory of controlled chaos’ (Bartosh, 2014). The latter refers to an ability of foreign powers to infiltrate and, when appropriate, manipulates all essential governmental systems in an attempt to create chaos and limit the effectiveness of state’s response. The article suggests that this theory can be found at the core of colour revolutions and *gibridnaya voyna* strategies, as both take advantage of artificially created chaotization of key governmental structures. Bartosh believed, that by weakening the system, it will be possible for the adversary to target existing political elites and replace them with pro-Western ‘agents’ without being noticed (Bartosh, 2014). This stands in line with official Kremlin rhetoric, when discussing any revolutionary attempt of post-Soviet state and even Russia itself (Nikolaev, 2023).

Later publications by Bartosh, similarly focused on underlining that ‘new war’ strategies, predominantly utilised by the West, reduced the need for traditional military confrontation and instead utilised a combination of non-military means, such as economic, psychological or informational warfare, to name a few, to suppress opponent’s will, taking away its sovereignty without necessarily deploying a full-scale military force (Bartosh, 2017). In this case, Bartosh saw *gibridnaya voyna* as a principal strategy to be able to “provoke an avalanche-like chaotization of the situation [to achieve] disorganisation of state and military systems from within” (Bartosh, 2017). Although noting the lack of inherent novelty in the concept, author outlines that technological advancements, along with growing interconnectedness and interdependence in the context of globalisation added additional sharpness and sophistication to modern conflicts. Utilisation of these hybrid methods, would allow an opponent to achieve their political goals with minimal use of military means, mainly used as a supportive measure (Bartosh, 2017).

Andrey Manoylo, an expert in disinformation and information warfare, in discussing hybrid wars and colour revolutions, reiterated that the fact that these concepts have ‘war’ and ‘revolution’ in their names, point towards their high level of danger (Manoylo, 2015). He adopts Hoffman’s interpretation of hybrid wars, although not specifically stated, understanding the concept as a type of modern war that uses a combination of means, such as informational, ideological and economic, in order to weaken opponent’s military abilities and achieve military-strategic superiority, coercing to accept peace on ‘aggressor’s’ terms (Manoylo, 2015). Furthermore, Manoylo differentiates between the terms *gibridnaya voyna* and colour revolutions, arguing that while the former refers to a combination of military and non-military instruments used by an opponent to force its desired political reality, colour revolutions is a method utilised exclusively to orchestrate a governmental coup and dismantle state’s political regime by non-military means, whilst imitating a legitimate civil uprising. He further argues that main aim of *gibridnaya voyna* is still that of any ordinary ‘traditional’ war, which is military defeat, destruction and eventual surrender of the enemy (Manoylo, 2015).

In his article, Bartosh (2017) argues that contemporary conflicts can be classified in two types: traditional and hybrid, where both hybrid wars and colour revolutions belong to the latter, as they exhibit similar strategy characteristics. Whilst both are used to achieve political aims with minimal military involvement through the use of contemporary informational and cognitive technologies, colour revolution often pursues the “strategy of anguish”, whereas *gibridnaya voyna* is used as a “strategy of attrition” (Bartosh, 2017). The former is seen as a separate type of non-linear warfare that uses strategy based on fast and highly dynamic actions, which in case of colour revolutions, include, preparation of mass protests, sponsorship of West-based international organisations and establishment of biased media channels. The strategy of *gibridnaya voyna* is more of a long-term strategy. Its covert nature allows an aggressor country to secretly attack governmental, economic, informational and cultural structures, with help of foreign agents, to weaken the country from within (Bartosh 2017; 2018).

Valery Gerasimov’s outlook on the nature of hybrid wars in 2016 outlines similar conclusions, suggesting that opponent’s use of non-linear and asymmetric strategies to achieve political means with minimal military engagement is primarily done through information warfare and colour revolutions (Gerasimov, 2016). Interestingly, the latter component’s main function is seen as state’s ability to falsify information and re-write

history in order to manipulate the mind of victim-state's citizens, as seen in Ukraine and during the Arab Spring. Unlike, Bartosh and Manoylo, however, Gerasimov maintains that non-military means, despite their sophistication are not enough to successfully win hybrid war. Through his analysis of war in Syria (as hybrid) he concludes that *gibridnaya voyna* still requires state's possession of high-precision weapons (Gerasimov, 2016).

After 2018, Russian military scholarship gained a more confident footing in their analysis of *gibridnaya voyna*, presenting the concept as an embodiment of 'new wars' rather than a separate strategy of thereof. Non-military means became everything from information wars, psychological operations and cyber attacks to economic sanctions, organisation of anti-government protests and support of separatist movements. For instance, Igor' Panarin's assessment of hybrid war, on top of above-mentioned aspects, includes organisation of colour revolutions, negatively impacting state's stability through foreign sponsorship of terrorist and extremist organisations (Panarin, 2019). Similarly, to Panarin, Bartosh (2019) enlarges his understanding of hybrid threats to include terrorism, illegal immigration, maritime piracy, extremism and separatism. Colour revolutions are seen as catalyst to the main *gibridnaya voyna* strategy. Military means remained limited to the use of high precision weapon systems and special military operations, the degree of their involvement tends to vary depending on the assessment of the scholar (Anisimov, et al., 2021).

Discussion of *gibridnaya voyna* in a post-2014 environment, as seen above, is taking an increasingly domestic character, suggesting that it is not simply a new way of war in the 21st century, as seen in the early 2000's, but rather a specific strategy used by the West against Russia. Despite maintaining military aspect, most of scholarly attention is focused on foreign orchestrated *coup d'états*, exploiting youth movements, and sponsoring pro-Western organisations. Phrases such as 'aggressor-state' and 'victim-state' are being widely used to linguistically underline sides of the conflict. Increased emphasis on non-military means, such as information warfare and cognitive warfare demonstrate a shift toward an ideological confrontation between Russia and the West. At this point, linguistic securitisation of historical past is less obvious than that used by pro-state media outlets.

### **3.2.3 Doctrinal Outlook**

National Security Strategy (NSS) published on 31st of December 2015, outlined significant changes to Russia's international security outlook. Whilst security threats

associated with military confrontation due to an increasing globalisation and multipolar world order remained relevant, the use of non-military means by unfriendly states started to be seen as a major impediment to Russia's domestic and international security. NSS 2015 outlined that contemporary confrontations arise because Russia's pursuit of an independent domestic and foreign politics causes unwanted competition for US and its partners, who are trying to safeguard their status as a dominant 'block'. According to the Security Strategy document (2015), West's containment policy involves creation of political, economic, military and information pressures to weaken the victim-state from within.

In addition to specifically mentioning the Ukrainian Crisis of 2014, outlined earlier in this section, the Strategy (2015) also stated that the practice of overthrowing sovereign state by provoking instability and conflicts from within is becoming widespread. State's informational and communications domains is seen as the weakest security points, as it can be used to falsify history and manipulate public's minds to achieve geopolitical goals. This stands in line with Bartosh's (2014) and Manoylo's (2015) understanding of *gibridnaya voyna* and colour revolutions, especially since informational warfare is considered to be essential to the overall success of the operation.

National Security Strategy of 2021, on the other hand, has fully embraced that Russia is being undermined by other, predominantly Western states, who are waging hybrid war, through the strategy of colour revolutions, against it as an attempt to secure their hegemony in world politics. The Strategy refers to "unfair economic competition" increasingly presented in the form of protectionism and imposition of illegal sanctions as well as engagement of information campaigns against Russia by the West as main security concerns. The Security Strategy defines colour revolutions as a non-linear method, used by unfriendly states, that exploits Russia's socio-economic weaknesses in an attempt to destroy its unity, by radicalising its nationals with protest potential to aid the inner division of Russian society. Information and communication technologies are used to form a hostile image of Russia domestically and abroad by diluting traditional values, distorting world history, masking Russia's rightful role in it and rehabilitating fascism. Such non-linear strategy, according to the document, are used to create and maintain long-term instability within the country. This corresponds with post-2018 merging of *gibridnaya voyna* and colour revolutions concepts to refer to a broader spectrum of non-military tactics (Panarin, 2019; Bartosh, 2019).

It is interesting to note that National Security Strategy of 2009 is structurally very different from subsequent strategies of 2015 and 2021. Apart from the latter becoming increasingly ideological and spiritually oriented to uphold traditional values, the second section on “Russia in contemporary world: tendencies and opportunities” of both Strategies (2015; 2021) reads as a ‘pat on the back’. Authors praise cohesiveness of Russian society and their support for protecting traditional values. They also outline that majority of non-military threats targeting domestic security have been successfully intercepted, congratulating Russia’s economic resilience in spite of unfairly imposed Western sanctions (NSS 2021). This, once again, puts under question the intended audience of such governmental documents and their true value in relation to the overall state decision-making.

Military Doctrine released in 2014 expands on its understanding, from previously published Doctrine (2010), of contemporary conflicts as a comprehensive use of military, political, economic, informational, as well as other forms of non-military means, used in tandem with protest potential of the population and special military forces to destabilise internal political systems and social situation in the country, enforcing wanted constitutional change (Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2014). Although discussion of military aspects of international conflicts remained the same, the 2014 Doctrine outlined an increasing international competition carrying ideological character, rather than purely material. Information warfare and security of Russia’s international domain is put at the forefront of security discussion. The use of information and communication technologies for military and political purposes is seen to be used unlawfully to undermine another state’s sovereignty, posing a threat to international peace, security, as well as global and regional stability.

Since the Military Doctrine was published before the National Strategy Document, ideological narrative is less apparent. Interestingly, Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept adopted in 2016 also brings nothing significantly different from its previous version. It does however argue that an ongoing Western pursuit to undermine and hinder Russia’s development calls for a more profound education of traditional moral and spiritual values within Russian society along with increased patriotic education. Overall, a closer analysis of Russia’s Doctrinal documents suggests that there is no particular context or time correlation between military scholarly publications and doctrinal release.

### **3.3 After 2022**

#### **3.3.1 Contextual Background**

Putin's decision to invade Ukraine on the 24 of February 2022 came as a surprise to many, analysts and civilians alike, despite prior CIA warnings of Kremlin's preparations to invade (Ward & Forgey, 2022; Bianco, et al., 2023) and reports of a large-scale Russian troop build-up near Ukrainian border (International Crisis Group, 2021). In 2014, having successfully annexed Crimea and established a 'frozen' conflict in Luhansk and Donetsk regions with, arguably, minimal consequences for Russia from the international community, it seemed almost illogical to launch a large-scale military operation on a foreign land (Grigas, 2016; Cooley, 2017). Russia has a long history of taking advantage of frozen conflicts, which were established in its sphere of influence, such as in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Donbas to name a few, in an attempt to exert its influence over the Eurasian continent and be seen as a regional power (Cooley, 2017). In addition, such conflicts allowed Kremlin to gain long-term control over the separatist regions, often through exploiting cultural and economic ties to the Russian community and leveraging international outcomes without resorting to the annexation, Crimea being an exception. Up until 2023, Russia's hybrid war in Ukraine was presented to the public in two ways. Internationally, it was seen as a form of covert Russian military involvement in Donbas, for domestic audience, however, Russia appealed to common cultural, linguistic and religious values to rationalise Putin's decision to 'protect' (ethnic) Russian speakers from being discriminated and mistreated by Ukrainian authorities, acting as proxies to the 'collective' West (Grigas, 2016). Strategically, the main purpose of sustaining these hybrid operations in Donbas was to keep Kiev distracted and divided, unable to concentrate on their priorities, which also suggests that it would have been never in Russia's best interests to stop covertly sponsoring Donetsk and Luhansk separatists (International Crisis Group, 2016). Nevertheless, a decision to militarily invade Ukraine's sovereign borders was made.

Less than a week before the invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin released two address speeches, one on the 21st of February and another on the 24th of February, 2022. Whilst the former called for an immediate acceptance of LNR and DNR's independence, the latter declared the commencement of a special military operation in Ukraine on the grounds of a signed friendship agreement on the 22nd of February with independent Donetsk and Luhansk Republics and the Article 51 of the UN Charter. Both speeches are written in line



with overall Kremlin rhetoric about the situation in Ukraine since 2014, outlined in academic literature as well as doctrinal domains. Linguistically, the text ticked all of the civilian threat perception boxes, which were traditionally discussed within the context of West engineered hybrid wars and colour revolutions. Mentions of Soviet legacy and post-Cold war historical injustices combined with references to ‘Nazism’ and ‘protection of civilians’ created a specific mental image in the minds of Russian population, gain their unconditional support of the mission. Distortion of historical past and West’s unlawful international behaviour added legitimacy to the overall message of Vladimir Putin. Arguably, the primary target of *gibridnaya voyna* became Russian citizens.

The earlier address focused on Russian historical background since the 1917 Revolution. Putin commenced his speech stating that Russia and Ukraine both share the same history, culture and religious beliefs, because “contemporary Ukraine was fully created by Russia, to be more precise, by the Bolshevik, communist Russia”. In the process of guiding his viewers through the memory lane of ‘glorious’ Soviet past, current government of Ukraine was accused of enabling the rise of far-right nationalism, advocating aggressive ideas of ‘Russophobia’ and ‘neo-Nazism’, which in itself was a result of Ukraine’s “policy of denial [by trying to] distort people’s consciousness and historical memory” (President of the Russian Federation, 2023). The speech on the 24th of February concentrated on demonstrating the crisis of the international order, where the West is seen to “establish its own order, causing the creation of international terrorism and extremism” by recalling NATO illegitimate operations in Iraq, Syria and Libya. Putin reiterated that NATO posing an ongoing and ever-present threat to Russia as the Alliance keeps its expansion to the East, seen as hegemon’s last attempt to keep its dominance by all means necessary. The mission of special military operation was, lastly seen as “the protection of people, who have been subjects to abuse and genocide by the Kiev regime for eight years” where Vladimir Putin made a decision to “demilitarise and de-nazify” Ukrainian government (President of the Russian Federation, 2023).

Despite being in possession of Soviet-built military equipment with a questionable effectiveness, between military parades and endless military exercises, Kremlin has successfully been scaring the West with a ‘bogeyman’ of its military superiority. Russia’s swift operation in Crimea has, falsely, become a testament to Russia’s reformed military operational command after the appointment of Sergei Shoigu as a defence minister in 2012, which suddenly gained the ability to tailor its combat operation to unique operational

environment, becoming an effective instrument to wield national power for Putin (Boston & Massicot, 2017). Military invasion of Ukraine in 2022, however, demonstrated that despite numerous changes made to the military organisation and its equipment, at least on paper, Russian armed forces demonstrated significant logistical and command failures at the get-go (Dalsjö, et al., 2022). In line with an overall logic of the Russian regime, any physical weaknesses of the Russian army were covered and disguised by the skilful propaganda machine. *Gibridnaya voyna* took the centre stage for conflict interpretation.

### 3.3.2 Gibridnaya Voyna Interpretation

After the start of a ‘special’ military operation in the beginning of 2022, Alexander Bartosh became the leading military expert to publish on the topic of *gibridnaya voyna* in the Military Thought journal. Both articles, Interaction in Hybrid Warfare (2022a) and Laws and Principles of Hybrid Warfare (2022b) transformed from a mere explanation of ‘new wars’ strategies and hybrid methods utilised by the West on Russia, to a broader analysis of various characteristics of contemporary conflicts in an attempt to outline pathways to escalation and de-escalation of hybrid wars. His newly released book on Questions on the Theory of Hybrid Warfare (2023) provides a useful analytical background to the shape of contemporary conflicts in the 21st century, primarily addressing the strategy of West’s created hybrid warfare and how its methods should be addressed in Russia’s governmental security documents. First chapters of the book provide a unique assemblage of Russian and Western theoretical perspectives on the nature of contemporary conflicts, whilst later chapters address the way different aspects of *gibridnaya voyna* (including ‘technosphere’ and cognitive warfare) can be utilised to create a functional governmental counteraction security strategy (Bartosh, 2023).

Conceptually, understanding of *gibridnaya voyna* as a dominant characteristic of ‘new wars’ that, in addition to military means, uses non-military forms of confrontation, such as diplomatic, economic and ideological means, remained more or less the same (Bartosh, 2022a; 2022b). Bartosh’s attempt at defining *gibridnaya voyna* as “coordinated use by the aggressor-country of numerous instruments of violence targeting, vulnerabilities of the target-country, covering the entire spectrum of social function to achieve a synergistic effect and subjugate opponent to one’s will” moves its interpretation closer to Hoffman’s understanding of ‘new wars’ (Bartosh, 2022a). In his book, Bartosh describes hybrid warfare

as a form of collective violence that uses a combination of military action, organised crime and mass violations of human rights, helping ‘collective’ West achieve global domination. *Gibridnaya voyna* starts to be interpreted as an “instrument of military escalation” rather than its avoidance. Overall aim, however, remains the same (Bartosh, 2023).

Military aspect of hybrid wars became more prominent. Previously considered defensive strategy of counteracting West’s hybrid aggression (zderzhivanye) turned into offensive to offset an artificially created environment of uncertainty (often referred to as creation of ‘grey zones’) by employing economic pressures and manipulating the mind of civilian population through cognitive and information warfare (Bartosh, 2022a). Furthermore, situation in Ukraine is seen as an example of a successful US-led policy of “advanced reflection”<sup>3</sup> that, for the last 30 years, managed to “infiltrate the core mentality and self-identification of Ukrainian society” as part of the overall strategy of “US and NATO hybrid war against Russia”. Advanced reflection policy is defined as a long-term vision of how military conflict will develop (Bartosh, 2022b). The latter policy is based on the ability of military science to develop a “speculative synthesis of the future”<sup>4</sup> that should have the ability to construct adaptive long-term defensive and offensive strategies as well as dictate overall state’s policy objectives (Bartosh, 2023).

Finally, whilst the remote possibility of hybrid war turning into military confrontation was always present, post-2022 literature advocates for it’s almost certain transformation from non-military confrontation into a full-scale war, suggesting that the strategy of attrition in a form of hybrid warfare, in fact, should be seen as a bridge that necessitates a “gradual transition from non-violent actions in political, economic, informational and psychological domains to military operations” (Bartosh, 2022b). Post-invasion scholarship no longer excludes the possibility of nuclear confrontation with the West, discussion on which once again come to the forefront of hybrid warfare strategies (Bartosh 2022a; 2023).

Bartosh’s writing in a post-2022 environment adopts an analytical approach with an increasing use of other scholarly references and discussion of ‘new wars’ concepts, despite retaining a pro-governmental narrative. A more detailed exploration of Conclusions for Russia sections in his *Voennaya Mysl’* article (2022a) and last chapters of Questions of the Theory of Hybrid Warfare book (2023) should be examined in more detail, as it

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<sup>3</sup> Original phrase in Russian “фактор опережающего отражения”

<sup>4</sup> Original phrase in Russian “умозрительное синтезирование будущего”

advocates for the need for *gibridnaya voyna* to be part of the official doctrinal security strategy and outlines possible challenges that should be considered. Bartosh argues that the only effective way for the Russian government to counteract destructive effects of hybrid war would be through adopting necessary administrative, political, financial and cultural changes, addressing the issue on state level. Acceptance of *gibridnaya voyna* strategy, currently waged by the West against Russia on the official level, will, according to the author, aid a clear departmental and systemic interaction in organisation of various defensive and offensive strategies. These strategies, to counteract effects of hybrid war and colour revolutions should include increasing patriotic education in schools, decreasing state's dependence on foreign imports and taking measures to protect Russia's vital interests in post-Soviet space, from both military and cultural perspectives (Bartosh, 2022a). Recently published book additionally refers to threats connected to an overwhelmingly fast development of technological advancements and transfer of the information through social media platforms, suggesting that aspects of cognitive warfare should also be addressed on the official level (Bartosh, 2023).

It should be noted, that both literature sources use very deliberate word-choices to refer to Western hybrid warfare tactics as “sponsoring media-foreign agents<sup>5</sup> and education projects to try and change the consciousness of the Russian people to surrender to... external and internal Russophobes” (Bartosh, 2022a). Collective West is no longer seen as adversaries, but rather are described as enemies, arguing that Russia's military strategy in “imposed *gibridnaya voyna* by the West should exclusively take offensive character” (Bartosh 2022a; 2023). Underlined words have become a widely used buzzwords, after the war, that help carry negative mental images of the West.

As mentioned previously, the *Journal of Academy of Military Sciences* has restricted access to its publications after the start of the military operation, making it challenging to collect all existing data on *gibridnaya voyna*. However, certain patterns can be outlined by examining excerpts to the *Geopolitics and Defence Security* section of *Vestnik* from 2022 and 2023 entries.

Articles published in 2022 deal mostly with individual aspects of hybrid warfare employed in Ukraine as a proxy battleground to West's confrontation with Russia. Controlled political transformations (colour revolution) are still seen as the main strategy

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<sup>5</sup> In Russian, the phrase “СМИ-иноагенты” (foreign agents) has been used to refer to media, as well as certain individuals that have publicly announced their disagreements with Russian foreign policy (war).

deployed by the ‘collective’ West to forcefully maintain their geopolitical dominance and create a “perimeter of strategic encirclement of Russia” (Kulakov, 2022). Information warfare is discussed in the context of special military operation, focusing specifically on “Western technologies for distorting the memory of the Great Patriotic War and rewriting the history of the Great Victory” (Karpovich, 2022) and the “nature of reformatting the consciousness of citizens in order to create anti-Russia on the territory of Ukraine” (Ovsyannikova, 2022). Finally, cognitive warfare is framed as a novel approach of a new generation of armed conflicts that includes the involvement of public institutions (Stupakov, 2022). In 2023, discussion of *gibridnaya voyna*, however, adopts a broader understanding with an emphasis of the concept being originally created by the West, which has been rarely mentioned by Russian military scholars before the war (Manoylo & Goncharenko, 2023).

Although conceptually, as previously mentioned, the term maintained its continuity, a more ideological turn of *gibridnaya voyna* in a post-2022 environment can be demonstrated through the mention of keywords used by the abovementioned authors to describe their articles. Terms such as ‘nazification’, ‘special military operation to denazify and force Ukraine to peace in Donbas’ (phrase used as a keyword by all authors writing about Ukraine), ‘the “Collective West”’, ‘demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine’ and ‘Ukrainian Neo-Nazis’ are some of the most commonly used phrases to refer to academic work on hybrid warfare or its aspects. It is noteworthy, that both of Vladimir Putin’s address speeches contained these exact buzzwords, as they intensify patriotic sentiments of The Great War and create an image of military action in Ukraine being West’s fault, since Russia is actively calling for ‘peace’.

### **3.3.3 Doctrinal Outlook**

The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation adopted on the 31st of March in 2023 outlines Russia’s foreign policy intentions as “peaceful, open, predictable, consistent and pragmatic character... with desire for international cooperation”. Current state of international relations, in the document, is seen to be dominated by states, that are used to the logic of global dominance and neocolonialism, wishing to hinder a natural world transition towards multipolarity. Whilst some of the methods used by these states “to eliminate undesirable competition” are long-standing, such as unfair use of sanctions or bypassing UN Security Council mandates, others, appear in the document for the first time,

such as the triggering coup-d'état and imposing “destructive neoliberal ideological ideas” on them (Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2023). These changes are consistent with an abovementioned scholarly rhetoric.

One of the most noteworthy aspects of the document, however, is its mention of *gibridnaya voyna*. Although Foreign Policy Concept does not provide its definition, Russia's national interests include safeguarding Russian citizens and Russian organisations against foreign influence, creation of safe informational space, securing the latter from foreign psychological influence. Finally, the document talks about the need to strengthen Russian traditional values and safeguard “historical truth and the memory of Russia's role in world history abroad” (Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2023). Abovementioned attempts to counteract effect of West's waged hybrid war are almost identical to conclusions made in Bartosh's article (2022a) and his book (2023) where he strongly advocated for the need to address *gibridnaya voyna* methods on the strategic level.

### **3.4. *Gibridnaya Voyna: Change and Continuity***

There is a definite continuity in the way how Russian military scholars, from separate contextual periods (from pre-2014 to post-2022) have been interpreting the nature of *gibridnaya voyna*, or its earlier counterpart, *New Generation Wars*. Broadly put, both are seen as aspects of ‘new wars’, developed by the West to forcefully maintain its global dominance in an increasingly multipolar world, by utilising military and non-military means. Information and psychological warfare are seen as most malign aspects of *gibridnaya voyna*, as they are used in tandem to covertly manipulate opponent's population and disorient state's military and governmental apparatus, this strategy became known as ‘colour revolution’. Although non-military means are considered to do the most damage to country's domestic security, the use of military means at the last stage of confrontation, such as the use of special military operations or peacekeeping forces have never been excluded, often contrary to Western understanding of *gibridnaya voyna* (Fridman, 2017; 2018). Overall, even after military invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia maintained its position of considering itself a victim of West's hybrid warfare.

At the same time, post-2022 *gibridnaya voyna* interpretation brings significant changes from its post-2014 counterpart. The former adopts a more comprehensive approach in its analysis of *gibridnaya voyna*. With Alexander Bartosh being seen as a lead scholar on the issue, he strengthens the debate by analysing both, Western and Russian theoretical

understandings of hybrid war (Bartosh, 2023). As Manoylo (2023) publishes an article on West's perception of 'Gerasimov's Doctrine' and its securitising appeal, it could be argued, that Russian military academia no longer analyses *gibridnaya voyna* in a vacuum of Russia's historical past but is becoming 'self-aware' of its international environment. Although Russian scholarly debate was never attempting to differentiate between terms such as 'New Generation War', 'colour revolutions' and 'hybrid wars', since Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 they have been gradually merging together in their conceptual meaning.

*Gibridnaya voyna* is no longer seen as purely defensive in nature (Gerasimov, 2013; Bartosh, 2014; Manoylo, 2015), but rather as offensive, attempting to offset the environment of uncertainty (Bartosh, 2023). This is perhaps one of the most significant shifts in term's interpretation as it is now seen as an "instrument of military escalation" rather than its avoidance (Bartosh, 2023). Debates, outlining the possibility of nuclear conflict have been increasing in frequency (Bartosh, 2022a; 2022b; 2023) It's evolvement beyond scholarly realm is also supported by the fact that newly released Russian Foreign Policy Concept (2023) adopts a sound strategy of counteracting *gibridnaya voyna* waged by the West.

Finally, *gibridnaya voyna* concept has infiltrated all public and governmental domains, which can be seen through the scholarly use of 'buzzwords' in connection with the term. Post-2022 military academia started to use words such as 'foreign agents', 'Collective West', 'nazification' and 'demilitarisation' to name a few which have equally appeared in speeches made by Vladimir Putin on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022 however, they were not present in the post-2014 environment. Therefore, whilst *gibridnaya voyna* rhetoric for the Russian academia does seem to be dependent on 'fashion', the concept itself, however, is unlikely to be purely a "transitory phenomenon" (Libiseller, 2023).

Undoubtedly, Russia's military intervention of Ukraine in 2022 has presented a massive threat to the overall European security, however Russia's interpretation of *gibridnaya voyna*, albeit paranoid and, at times, delusional, cannot be swept under the carpet. Neither will it be productive for Western academia and policymakers to rely on outdated interpretation of Russia's contemporary security threats. Although it does appear that Russia's use of *gibridnaya voyna* has surpassed Messner's (1971) two dimensional 'defensive' and offensive' propaganda aspects and initiated a third phase of 'rationalisation' propaganda, in an attempt to construct the reality, which would justify its threat perception.

For the West, how it deals with the latter, would be key in future peace restoration, at the same time, ensuring political stability of a nuclear state.

## Conclusion

This paper focused on filling the research gap on the topic of *gibridnaya voyna*, attempting to outline change and continuity in its use and interpretation within Russian military scholarship and strategic security documents in the context of Russian military invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Present exploratory research concentrated on assessing potential changes to *gibridnaya voyna* by analysing the concept through conceptual, doctrinal and linguistic (buzzword) parameters.

First chapter dealt with conceptual definition and literature review of the hybrid warfare term. Main interpretation avenues taken by Western academic scholarship of Russian hybrid warfare were outlined. Second chapter included the methodological assessment of the present study outlining source selection and research limitations in researching Russian academic literature on *gibridnaya voyna*. Finally, third, and final chapter, discussed collected findings on the subject. Latter chapter outlined Russian *gibridnaya voyna* interpretation in the context of Ukraine crisis from 2014 until now. The section on change and continuity had summarised all the findings and outlined aspects in which the interpretation and use of *gibridnaya voyna* have changed after the commencement of military operation in Ukraine.

Despite original expectations that *gibridnaya voyna* in the post-2022 environment, would have been abandoned as an academic concept and instead used by the propaganda machine, given its ability to explain everything and nothing at the same time, it does not appear to be the case. Overall, conceptual nature of the term, as a method of confrontation waged by the ‘Collective West’ on Russia in order to covertly undermine its sovereignty from within, by non-military means, maintaining its status as a dominant hegemon, did not change. Although escalation of the conflict in the physical domain, could be seen as a change, however, despite misconceptions of certain Western scholarship on the nature of *gibridnaya voyna* the use of military means, such as deployment of special military operation or peacekeeping forces, have always been considered as a possibility by the Russian military scholarship (Gerasimov, 2013; Manoylo, 2015; Bartosh, 2023).



General interpretation of the term did change however, from seeing *gibridnaya voyna* as a predominantly non-military confrontation with the West to considering it a form of collective violence used in tandem with military action, organized crime and mass violations of human rights (Bartosh, 2023). With adaptation of an increasingly aggressive anti-West and anti-Ukraine rhetoric, linguistic changes to the writing of Russian military academia are present. The use of buzzwords such as ‘collective West’, ‘Russophobia’ and ‘Nazification of Ukraine’ outline that Russian scholarship, in tandem with media outlets and doctrinal documents have been increasingly utilizing securitized military rhetoric of the Great Patriotic War in order to cement a particular narrative of military actions in Ukraine in subconscious minds of the Russian speaking population.

Finally, research outlined that the interpretation of *gibridnaya voyna* by Russian military scholarship in a post-2022 environment, in contrast to what was expected to be the case, became much more clearly defined and self-aware. It is no longer analysed in contextual isolation, as was the case in a post-2014 environment, but rather Russian scholarship is seen to acknowledge not only US influences of hybrid warfare, but also West’s interpretation of the ‘Russian Hybrid Warfare’ (Manoylo & Goncharenko, 2023; Bartosh, 2023). Appearance of *gibridnaya voyna* in the recent Foreign Policy Concept, further supports the abovementioned conclusion.

Admittedly, it is too soon for the farewell of *gibridnaya voyna* concept after all. Its continuous use by the Russian scholarship outlines its influential role in informing Moscow’s threat perception and, consequently Russia’s overall decision-making process. Regardless of how unrealistic some of concept’s interpretations may seem, it does appear to influence the formation of Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept, determining its worldview outlook. Arguably, the way how West deals with the Russia’s rationalisation of *gibridnaya voyna*, would be key to the process of future peace restoration, which would secure political stability of a nuclear state.

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