

HYBRIDNÍ PŮSOBENÍ: OD PARTIKULARITY KE KONTINUU

Empirický test vícerozměrného konceptu „hybridu“

HYBRID INTERFERENCE: FROM THE PARTICULAR TO A CONTINUUM

Empirical Test of the Multi-Dimensional Concept of “Hybrid”

Vladimír Bízik,^a Dominika Kosárová,^b Adam Potočňák,^c Richard Stojar^d

Abstrakt

Cílem článku je empiricky otestovat použití čtyř dimenzí odolnosti vůči hybridním hrozbám na konceptu hybridního působení. Článek představí případové studie hybridních operací z prostředí Izraele, USA, Francie, Tchaj-wanu, Ukrajiny a Iráku/Sýrie, které využily jednu nebo více z těchto dimenzí, přičemž jeho hlavním cílem je demonstrovat obecnou užitečnost, ale také určité empirické nedostatky čtyř-rozměrového uchopení hybridního působení. Článek nakonec představí hlavní charakteristiky konceptu hybridního působení založené na teoreticky a empiricky opodstatněných a relevantních kritériích.

Abstract

The aim of this article is to empirically test the applicability of the four dimensions of resilience against hybrid threats on the concept of hybrid interference. The article shall present case studies of hybrid operations from Israel, USA, France, Taiwan, Ukraine, and Iraq/Syria that have exploited one or more of these dimensions with a principal goal of demonstrating the general utility but also empirical shortcomings of using the four-dimensional understanding of hybrid interference. The article shall finally present the main characteristics of the hybrid interference concept, based on theoretically and empirically salient criteria.

^a Centre for Security and Military Defence Studies, University of Defence. Brno, Czech Republic. E-mail: vladimir.bizik@unob.cz. [H-7140-2018](https://doi.org/10.3849/1802-7199.22.2022.01.075-088).

^b Centre for Security and Military Defence Studies, University of Defence. Brno, Czech Republic. E-mail: dominika.kosarova@unob.cz. [AAQ-6845-2020](https://doi.org/10.3849/1802-7199.22.2022.01.075-088).

^c Centre for Security and Military Defence Studies, University of Defence. Brno, Czech Republic. E-mail: adam.potocnak@unob.cz. [AAE-7665-2022](https://doi.org/10.3849/1802-7199.22.2022.01.075-088).

^d Centre for Security and Military Defence Studies, University of Defence. Brno, Czech Republic. E-mail: richard.stojar@unob.cz. [ABF-8914-2020](https://doi.org/10.3849/1802-7199.22.2022.01.075-088).

Poděkování

Tento článek byl zpracován jako výstup z úvodní fáze grantového projektu „*Resilience ozbrojených sil a ozbrojených bezpečnostních sborů vůči hybridním hrozbám*“ (VJ01010122), řešeného v rámci programu Ministerstva vnitra ČR Strategická podpora rozvoje bezpečnostního výzkumu ČR 2019 - 2025 (IMPAKT 1).

Acknowledgements

This research is part of the project “*Armed and Security Forces Resilience Towards Hybrid Threats*” (VJ01010122) supported by the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic as part of the programme “Strategic Support of the Security Research Development in the Czech Republic 2019-2025 (IMPAKT 1)”.

Klíčová slova

Hybridní hrozby; hybridní působení; konceptualizace; případové studie; testování

Keywords

Hybrid threats; hybrid interference; conceptualization; case studies; testing

INTRODUCTION

The concept of “hybrid” accompanying various terms such as “warfare”, “operation”, “campaign”, “threat” and the like, has always been quite vague and time-variable. Its conceptual instability is evident from the dramatic shift in understanding the concept in the 1990s, 2000s and its current meaning, with the Ukrainian crisis of 2014 being the most significant turning point. In its original concept by Robert G. Walker (1998)¹ or Francis G. Hoffman (2007),² hybrid actions posed a purely military threat, more precisely, a “hybridization” of conventional combat management with unconventional operations. Hybrid actions were seen both as a complex threat that the armed forces must learn to face (for example, in counter-insurgency operations), but also as a capability that the NATO armies should develop themselves to be able to combine various types of operations more flexibly. The economic, diplomatic, cultural or (dis)information aspects did not yet figure in these original concepts of hybrid warfare.

No new or revolutionary concepts of “hybrid” or “hybrid interference” appeared until 2014. Then it was intrinsically connected to Russian interventions in Ukraine as a “Clausewitz-style” demonstration of new ways of achieving political goals by, in this case, means under the threshold of war.³ The non-military and non-violent forms of conflict such as propaganda, embargoes, deceptions, or cyber-attacks came to the fore, all supposed to fatally destabilize the society of the targeted country and break its will to resist. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) today defines the phenomenon as a combination of “*military and non-military as well as covert and overt means including disinformation, cyberattacks, economic pressure, deployment of irregular armed groups and use of regular forces*”,⁴ meaning, that in today’s concept of hybrid warfare, it is possible to actively wage a hybrid war without firing a single shot. It arguably contradicts the original understanding of the concept by Walker or Hoffman,⁵ which is currently better

¹ WALKER, Robert G. 1998. *SPEC FI: the United States Marine Corps and Special Operations* [online]. Monterey, 1998 [cit. 2022-01-04]. Available from: <https://calhoun.nps.edu/handle/10945/8989> Master Thesis. Naval Postgraduate School. Thesis Supervisor: John Arquilla.

² HOFFMAN, Francis G. 2007. *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* [online]. Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007 [cit. 2022-01-04]. Available from: https://www.potomacinstitute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac_hybridwar_0108.pdf

³³ GIEGERICH Bastian. The Hybrid Warfare and the Changing Character of Conflict. *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* [online], 2016, 2 (15), 65-72. [cit. 2022-01-04]. Available from: https://www.jstor.org/stable/26326440?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents Paradoxically, a similar Russian concept is based on the same but reversed assumption - namely, that it is the West, which under the auspices of the United States, wages an active “*gibridnaya voyna*” (hybrid war) against Russia. See KORYBKO, Andrew. *Hybrid Wars: The Indirect Adaptive Approach to Regime Change* [online]. *People’s Friendship University of Russia*, 2015 [cit. 2022-01-04]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/bk8mi>

⁴ NATO. NATO’s response to hybrid threats. NATO [online]. 2021 [cit. 2022-03-14]. Available from: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_156338.htm

⁵ For a well-argued critique of the current ambiguous and almost all-encompassing concept of (Russian) “hybrid warfare”, see for instance RENZ, Bettina. “Russia and ‘hybrid warfare’”. *Contemporary Politics*, [online], 2016, 22 (3), 283-300 [cit. 2022-05-19]. Available from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13569775.2016.1201316> or FRIDMAN, Ofer.

conceptualised by the concepts of “irregular warfare”⁶ or “fifth generation warfare”.⁷ These concepts are more military-oriented, focusing on tactical and operational levels of warfare, excluding (grand) strategy and politics from considerations. The current understanding of “hybrid warfare” got blurred so much that it instead recalls the older concept of George Kennan’s “political warfare” from the onset of the Cold War,⁸ whose revival recently highlighted authoritative works by RAND Corporation,⁹ Mark Galeotti¹⁰ or Kerry Gershaneck.¹¹

This article strives to help further refine the concept of “hybrid threats” by utilizing the conceptualization of resilience by Divišová et al. in relation to hybrid interference in four distinct dimensions. It does so by testing the utility of these four dimensions as a concept and subsequently testing the theory’s applicability in different empirical scenarios. This test shall be performed on case studies from Israel, USA, France, Ukraine Taiwan, Ukraine, and Iraq/Syria that were selected for their topicality and theoretical relevance. Once the testing provides its results, a brief discussion on the recommended “hybrid interference continuum” will conclude the article.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND METHODS

The term “hybrid threat”, for reasons alluded to above, is too narrow and does not reflect the actual scope of activity it aims to describe. The concept and all its derivatives are substantially pervasive, ambiguous, and include almost everything between conventional war and harmonious relations between the state and non-state entities. A more suitable term to use would be “hybrid interference” since it presumes activities beyond the military area and beyond short-term active measures of an adversary. Hybrid interference entails long-term political and non-political activity, clandestine and open, to fulfil and

Russian Hybrid Warfare. Resurgence and Politicisation. London: Hurst y Company, 2018. 1st Edition. ISBN 978-1-84904-881-1.

⁶ GRAY, Colin S. “Irregular Warfare: One Nature, Many Characters”. *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, [online], 2007, 1 (2), 35-57. [cit. 2022-05-19]. Available from:

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26267370?seq=1>.

⁷ QURESHI, Waseem Ahmad. “Fourth- and Fifth-Generation Warfare: Technology and Perceptions”. *International Law Journal* [online], 2019, 21 (1), 187-216. [cit. 2022-05-19].

Available from: <https://digital.sandiego.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1293&context=ilj>.

⁸ KENNAN, George. The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare. *Wilson Center, Digital Archive, International History Declassified* [online], 30 April 1948 [cit. 2022-01-05]. Available from: <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114320.pdf>.

⁹ ROBINSON, Linda, HELMUS, Todd C., COHEN, Raphael S., NADER, Alireza, RADIN, Andrew, MAGNUSON, Madeline, MIGACHEVA, Katya. *Modern Political Warfare. Current Practices and Possibilities.* RAND Corporation, [online], 2018 [cit. 2022-05-019]. Available from:

<https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1085363.pdf>.

¹⁰ GALEOTTI, Mark. *Russian Political War. Moving Beyond the Hybrid.* Abingdon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2019. 1st Edition. ISBN - 978-1-138-33595-0.

¹¹ GERSHANECK, Kerry K. „Political Warfare. The People’s Republic of China’s Strategy „to Win without Fighting““. *Journal of Advanced Military Studies*, [online], 2020, 11 (1), 64-93. [cit. 2022-05-19]. Available from:

https://www.usmcu.edu/Portals/218/JAMS_11_1_Political%20Warfare_Kerry%20Gershaneck.pdf.

adversary's political goals vis-à-vis the targeted country. The dividing line between hybrid interference and a military conflict is the (kinetic) use of military power. Hybrid interference thus aims at the aspects of the targeted state that can facilitate changes desirable to the adversary. Targeting security and military structures, institutions and personnel represents a logical part of the hybrid interference of a hostile actor. They are exactly these hybrid operations against the national security and, more specifically, military targets we focus on in our study to highlight the disruptive potential of hybrid interference. More specifically, there are several dimensions of vulnerabilities within the national security sector and military that can be targeted by any hybrid interference. To the contrary, an ability to withstand potentially harmful effects of the hybrid interferences and an ability to ensure the proper functioning of the security institutions, including military forces, is called resilience. Divišová et al. have conceptualized resilience in relation to hybrid interference in four distinct dimensions: psychological, social, institutional, and national.¹²

Psychological resilience can be defined as

“the ability to withstand pressure from various ideas spread’. [Psychological] resilience is akin to a ‘firewall’ at both collective and individual levels, which ‘prevents the disinformation from taking root and being internalised by members of the target audience’, at the same time allowing for the free flow of information including the harmful ones. Other authors liken the concept to a vaccination that ‘makes potential receivers [of propaganda] immune’, while conceding that, unlike conventional viruses, the recognition of the harmful effect by the receiving body can be more nuanced and even welcomed by a segment of the society. At the practical level, [psychological] resilience is mostly associated with critical thinking enabling the audience to build awareness of propaganda and disinformation and to distinguish between facts and fiction. [Psychological] resilience thus presents a specific attribute of an individual’s capacities to deal with external pressure that targets cognition of the given population as part of a hybrid campaign.”¹³

In the context of hybrid interference, social resilience has been defined as

“the ability of a society to prevent, manage and recover from hybrid attacks without losing its essential values, cohesion and identity’. Similarly, Kalniete and Pildegovičs used the definition of resilience (with no modifier) to hybrid threats by Dunay and Roloff as the ability to ‘to deter, resist and overcome the impact of external interference, particularly in terms of demonstrating institutional capacity, good governance and societal cohesion’, which puts at the forefront not only social relations but also institutions that should serve the society.”¹⁴

¹² DIVIŠOVÁ, Vendula, FRANK, Libor, HANZELKA, Jan, NOVOTNÝ, Antonín, BŘEŇ, Jan. “The Whole is Greater than the Sum of the Parts”. Towards Developing a Multidimensional Concept of Armed Forces’ Resilience Towards Hybrid Interference. *Obrana a Strategie* [online], 2021, 21 (2), 3-20. [cit. 2022-03-13]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/9K8mQ>

¹³ Ibid. p. 11.

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 15.

As for institutional resilience,

“an institution is resilient to the extent that it maintains its effectiveness over time despite changing external conditions’. Effectiveness then refers to ‘the extent to which the institution fulfils the core mission envisioned by its founders’. Any public organisation needs to be agile and adaptive to the changing external conditions to remain effective, including the armed forces usually considered a conservative and slow-changing institution.”¹⁵

The most hard-to-grasp dimension of resilience is, finally, the national dimension, due to its similarity to the social dimension. It could be, however, seen as

“the ability of a society to withstand adversities and crises in diverse realms by implementing changes and adaptations without harming the society’s core values and institutions. Nevertheless, Kimhi et al. argue that this concept is ‘probably the most elusive concept of resilience’ as apart from the ability to withstand adversity, while keeping the values and institutions of the entity intact, it should also account for the ability of a society to ‘cope with a changing, sometimes hostile environment by changing and readjusting in new innovative ways’.”¹⁶

Another approach sees national resilience as

“the balance of perceived national strength and vulnerability after an adversity or a traumatic event’, in which feelings of vulnerability are acknowledged as an inseparable part of rebounding after the event.”¹⁷

This text follows up on this work but does not deal with the concept of resilience. Instead, it focuses on hybrid interference as the “other side of the coin” of resilience. However, it builds on the concept of the four dimensions. This article’s goal is to test theoretical framework of Divišová et al. and its applicability on the concept of hybrid interference (as opposed to resilience). The utility of such a test is twofold: it tests the utility of these four dimensions as a concept; and it tests the applicability of the theory in different empirical scenarios.

To further this goal, the method of this article is that of a multi-case study of hybrid interference as conceptualized above. We will select cases where an adversary applied hybrid interference on the targeted state as a whole, with special attention being paid to its military. It is, however, clear that the military being an integral part of the society it serves, it would be unfeasible to focus only on cases where the military is the sole target. The cases were selected for their theoretical relevance (exhibiting the properties listed above) and topicality. Even though the selected cases are not equal to the entire population of possible cases, they form a representative and diverse bulk of all possible post-2014 cases. In each case we will identify which dimensions were targeted by hybrid interference.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 13.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 15.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 16.

These four dimensions demonstrate the adversary's intent to target the state as well as the other side of the same coin: the target state's resilience against exploitation of these vulnerabilities. The goal of the empirical part of the article is to test the applicability of the concept of hybrid interference and whether the four distinct dimensions are salient and applicable in this setting, further expanding and calibrating the theoretical framework.

CASE STUDIES

Israeli Troubles with “Cherchez la Femme”: Exploiting the Vulnerabilities in the Psychological Dimension

Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have repeatedly faced hybrid campaigns from various regional non-state actors, especially Hamas. The Palestinian political-military movement has used traps to lure Israeli soldiers via social media to gain access to information and data, giving it a particular advantage in its fight against Israel. In January 2017 and July 2018, Hamas operatives were posing on social media as attractive women trying to establish communication with IDF members and make them disclose sensitive information. In another case, Hamas operatives used social media like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, or Telegram to create fake profiles of young Israeli immigrants, establish contacts and “friendship” with Israeli soldiers. Upon succeeding, the Hamas operatives disguised for Israeli women sent IDF members a link, allegedly for a photos exchange application. However, the links actually led to the malware enabling the perpetrators to infiltrate the soldiers' phones and gain access to their data, including their photos, contacts and current location. On some occasions, the attackers could even gain remote control over the device and shoot videos or photos without their owners being aware.¹⁸ In February 2020, Hamas unsuccessfully tried to repeat the old practice for the third time, this time being repelled by Israeli military intelligence. According to the IDF sources, “low hundreds” of conscripted servicemen were affected. Nevertheless, Hamas allegedly did not succeed in obtaining any significant intelligence.¹⁹ This advanced and sophisticated hybrid campaign highlighted serious vulnerabilities in the psychological dimension of individual soldiers, a serious level of vulnerability when it came to opposite sex and attractiveness and an astounding degree of carelessness in handling their private electronic devices. This reflects the conceptualization of the *psychological dimension* of hybrid interference - a campaign against the critical thinking enabling the audience to build awareness of propaganda and disinformation and to distinguish between facts and fiction.

¹⁸ BBC News. Israeli soldiers 'caught in Hamas online honey trap'. *BBC News* [online], 12 January 2017 [cit. 2022-01-05]. Available from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-38594669> and also BBC News. Israeli soldiers duped by Hamas 'fake women' phone ruse. *BBC News* [online], 17 February 2020 [cit. 2022-01-05]. Available from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51530311>

¹⁹ GROSS, Judah Ari. IDF: Hamas again tries catfish soldiers with fake women on social media. *The Times of Israel* [online], 16 February 2020 [cit. 2022-05-11]. Available from: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-hamas-again-tries-to-catfish-soldiers-with-fake-women-on-social-media/>

Veterans Entrapped by Conspiracies: Exploiting the Social Vulnerabilities

Various conspiracy theories and extremist ideologies have been gaining ground within the US military, with some active-duty officers or veterans even having joined particular extremist groups. Two-thirds of the “Oath Keepers” members, including its founder Elmer S. Rhodes, have a military or law enforcement background. Around 10% of the movement’s members are still on active duty in various positions, including special forces operators, psychological operation experts, or military intelligence.²⁰ Another movement that, over the past few years, witnessed an influx of supporters within the army servicemen and veterans is QAnon. As of 2020, it gained nationwide popular support, which brought some experts to the conclusion that it had already established a “fifth column” within the ranks of the US Army with thousands of supporters.²¹ Active-duty servicemen and veterans participated even in the assault on the US Capitol in January 2021 - one-fifth of the arrested were veterans,²² one of them even died in skirmishes during the assault.

Several risk factors contribute to the extended support for conspiracy groups and movements from the veterans and active-duty personnel. Many of them protest against the limitations on the right to bear arms as these groups often have paramilitary character and intransigently support the second amendment to the US constitution. Veterans then constitute a particularly vulnerable group for various reasons:

- They usually feel a solid internal need to protect the weaker and more vulnerable persons (which was often the main reason for them to join the ranks)²³ and desire to be a part of “something bigger”, to be seen as an “elite” with a higher purpose or mission.
- No less solid is their simplifying “black-and-white” manner of thinking that always distinguishes us (the good) versus them (any wrongdoers), this dichotomy persists long

²⁰ GIGLIO, Mark. A Pro-Trump Militant Group Has Recruited Thousands of Police, Soldiers, and Veterans. *The Atlantic* [online], November 2020 [cit. 2022-01-05]. Available from:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/11/right-wing-militias-civil-war/616473/>

²¹ BEMBENEK, Christina. Conspiracy Stand Down: How Extremist Theories like QAnon Threaten the Military and What to do About It? *The War on the Rocks* [online], 10 March 2021 [cit. 2022-01-05]. Available from:

<https://1url.cz/vK8mo> See also LEE, Carol E. In secret Facebook groups, America’s best warriors share racist jabs, lies about 2020, even QAnon theories. *NBC News* [online], 16 April 2021 [cit. 2022-01-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/mK8mN>

²² BUTLER, Matthew. Misinformation in the Military Community and the Next National Security Strategy. *The Strategy Bridge* [online], 14 April 2021 [cit. 2022-01-05]. Available from:

<https://1url.cz/rK8mq>

²³ For instance, the group Veterans on Patrol (fighting against sex trafficking of children) directly addressed the veterans’ need to protect the vulnerable by using pictures of alleged child victims of sexual abuse, while these were the pictures of children having survived an explosion in a war zone. Subsequently, many veterans striving to protect children joined the group. Moreover, QAnon used the hashtag “*Save the children*”, claiming it protected the children against sexual abuse and ritual murders, which again is believed to attract veterans perceiving themselves as protectors against evil. See THOMPSON, Caitlin. How US veterans get sucked into QAnon. *Coda* [online], 30 October 2020 [cit. 2022-01-05]. Available from:

<https://www.codastory.com/disinformation/information-war/qanon-military-veteran/> See also BATEMAN, Ben. Episode five: QAnon - exposing extremist views within the ranks. *Stars and Stripes* [online], 1 October 2020 [cit. 2022-01-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/cK8mB>

after they have left the military, only with a substitute enemy, for instance, the state bureaucracy, demonised as “*the deep state*”.²⁴

- Leaving the military usually means losing a structured community, the social network and its internal identity, veterans then may feel abandoned, isolated and frustrated, which brings them to search for a new structure and community that could replace the lost one, with conspiracy movements providing precisely that feeling of belonging to a wider community.
- Finally, upon leaving the army, the conspiracies often “explain” to veterans the world and society they usually do not recognise, do not understand and cannot find a place in, since they have spent many years (or even decades) within the specific “army subculture”; it is then easier for them to believe that their misery is caused by “sinister” secret forces controlling the world (like Satanists, Reptilians, paedophiles...) than acknowledge their inability to adapt to the “real” world they have not encountered for a long time.²⁵

Extremist groups exploit all these vulnerabilities to attract individuals with the military background to their ranks as these people possess unique experience, specific skills, discipline, and may have access to arms and intelligence. When it comes to active-duty officers, Oath Keepers tried to address them directly by distributing leaflets in front of the base or parking a car belonging to one of the movement’s members and equipped with the movement’s stickers to attract the attention of other soldiers, potential recruits to the group.²⁶ The social media seem to be a particularly effective recruitment tool because veterans and servicemen use them daily for communication with their families, friends, or former colleagues.²⁷ Consequently, soldiers, veterans, and their families have also been targeted by foreign-entities-created social media pages resembling the actual web pages of US veterans or military-related organisations. These web pages then published extremist and racist narratives, ultimately appealing to tens of thousands of sympathisers.²⁸

²⁴ BATEMAN, Ben. Episode five: QAnon - exposing extremist views within the ranks. *Stars and Stripes* [online], 1 October 2020 [cit. 2022-01-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/AK8mR>

²⁵ These factors played a crucial role in the case of the mentioned veteran who lost her life during the US Capitol attack as she was reported to have problems in her relationships, business, and court orders, upon which she started to incline to disinformation and conspiracies. See BUTLER, Matthew. Misinformation in the Military Community and the Next National Security Strategy. *The Strategy Bridge* [online], 14 April 2021 [cit. 2022-01-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/rK8mq>

²⁶ GIGLIO, Mark. A Pro-Trump Militant Group Has Recruited Thousands of Police, Soldiers, and Veterans. *The Atlantic* [online], November 2020 [cit. 2022-01-05]. Available from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/11/right-wing-militias-civil-war/616473/>

²⁷ GALLACHER, John D., BARASH, Vlad, HOWARD, Philip, N., KELLY, John. Junk News on Military Affairs and National Security: Social Media Disinformation Campaign Against US Military Personnel and Veterans. *COMPROM Data Memo* [online], 9 October 2017 [cit. 2022-01-05]. Available from: <https://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/1802/1802.03572.pdf>

²⁸ GOLDSMITH, Kristofer. An Investigation Into Foreign Entities Who Are Targeting Servicemembers and Veterans Online. *Vietnam Veterans of America* [online], September 2019 [cit. 2022-01-05]. Available from: <https://vva.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/VVA-Investigation.pdf>

All these examples demonstrate extremist and conspiracy groups' endeavour to recruit US military personnel and veterans utilizing hybrid strategies to exploit the target's weaknesses. The main vulnerability that veterans often share is a feeling of isolation and frustration upon their departure from the service. These miseries are then cunningly addressed by extremist groups and their hybrid campaigns, exploiting *social dimension* of vulnerability among American veterans and an active-duty service-members. This corresponds to the concept of hybrid interference in the *social dimension* and as such aims at the society's essential values, cohesion, and identity.

Pro-Russian Sympathies and Russian Influence in the French Military: an Example of Vulnerability in the Institutional Dimension

The French military environment bears a traditionally strong right-wing orientation, preferring a strong state and traditional values - in 2017, more than 40% of military personnel voted for the radical right-wing *Front National* (currently *Rassemblement National*).²⁹ This provides the Kremlin with an opportunity to present the Russo-French relations as consensual and complementary ones, creating the potential for strengthening cooperation against common threats. The deteriorating relationship between the entire geopolitical West and Russia is then interpreted as a consequence of the activities of global powers' competition, interested in permanent weakening of the French as well as Russian positions in the world.³⁰ The hostile Russian activities within the French military milieu are assessed as significantly less relevant threats compared to the threats from geographically closer areas - in France, the term "hybrid warfare", for example, is traditionally associated not that much with Russian subversive activities but with jihadist nexus in the Sahel or in France itself.³¹ The impact campaigns and targeted infiltrations within the French military are then enabled and facilitated by a certain degree of Russophilia³² based on traditional geopolitical considerations, historical ties, presence of the post-revolutionary Russian diaspora within the French ranks, and finally by shared conservatism, resistance to progressivism, and deeply rooted anti-Americanism.³³

The Russian narratives that are being spread, mainly through social networks, misuse the traditional French scepticism toward the US-hegemony and the growing fears of terrorism, Islamic radicalization, and domestic socio-cultural polarization. A whole array of websites spreading pro-Russian contents bring scathing critiques of the domestic political situation, current political representation, and the functioning of the EU and NATO. The Anglo-Saxon allies are interpreted in this respect as notoriously unreliable, selfish partners that ignore France and its persistent national interests. On the other hand, the Russian

²⁹ ROUX, Christophe, SAVARESE, Eric, VAN HAUTE, Emilie, SAUGER, Nicolas et al. *Science politique*. Brussels: Bruylant, 2017. 1st Edition. ISBN - 9782390131472.

³⁰ VAISSIÉ, Cécile de. *Les Réseaux du Kremlin en France*. Paris: Les Petits Matins. 2016.

³¹ PETERSSON, Magnus, VOSMAN, Andreas. European Defence Planning and the Ukraine Crises: Two Contrasting Views. *Institut Français des Relations Internationales* [online], June 2015 [cit. 2022-03-07]. Available from :

https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/fs58petersson_vosman.pdf

³² The article reflects the situation before the Russian invasion of Ukraine at the end of February 2022.

³³ HÉNIN, Nicolas. *La France Russe. Enquête sur les Réseaux Poutine*. Paris: Fayard 2016.

Federation is portrayed as a nascent global superpower that respects and sensitively perceives the French power and the national interests of the *République*. Therefore, Russian controversial or even hostile activities in the international arena are being legitimized and defended. A similar pro-Russian environment exists within the French internal paramilitary, the *Gendarmerie Nationale*, represented by yet notorious website *Profession Gendarme*, founded (in 2013) and run by retired *Gendarmerie* officers. It is often rated as controversial or conspiratorial, presenting harsh criticism and conspiracies related to President Macron,³⁴ liberal progressivism, French membership in the EU and NATO, and recent measures against the COVID-19 pandemics, such as mandatory vaccination of soldiers and *Gendarmerie* officers. No wonder Éric Zemmour, one of the leading candidates in the 2022 presidential election, is very popular among the site's supporters. The former journalist is known for his critical stance on the EU, NATO as well as his admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin.³⁵ Even though the website often presents explicitly pro-Russian narratives,³⁶ no direct link to Russian authorities or any support from Russia have ever been proven. The website gained more than 3.7 million visits in 2021 alone.³⁷ Anyway, its existence falls within the context of the Russian-led influential operations related to the security apparatus of the French Republic and its specific institutions, thus targeting the vulnerable spots within the *institutional dimension*. This is reflective of the *institutional dimension* of hybrid interference, which is aimed against an institution's effectiveness over time despite changing external conditions.

Chinese Hybrid Operations against Taiwan: Targeting the Vulnerabilities of the Entire Nation

Starting in the late 2010s, the People's Republic of China (PRC), through the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) together with the Publicity Department of the Chinese Communist Party and United Front Work Department, has stepped up its activities related to social media and impact operations.³⁸ These operations are oriented not only to guarding PRC's own vulnerabilities in this sphere, but also strive for bolstering the morale of the PLA's forces and demoralizing its adversaries during the pre-kinetic phases of the

³⁴ AUDUREAU, William. Derrière la rumeur sur Brigitte Macron, la crainte d'une trumpisation des débats politiques en France. *Le Monde* [online], 20 December 2021 [cit. 2022-03-07]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/1K8m3>

³⁵ ACKERMAN, Galia. Vu de Russie: Éric Zemmour, un nouvel espoir de Moscou. *Desk-Russie* [online], 29 October 2021 [cit. 2022-03-07]. Available from: <https://desk-russie.eu/2021/10/29/le-nouvel-espoir-de-moscou.html>

³⁶ PROFESSION GENDARME. MH17 abattu: l'armée russe rejette toute responsabilité et accuse Kiev. *Profession Gendarme* [online], 29 May 2018 [cit. 2022-03-07]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/NK8mj>

³⁷ PORTEVIN, Clarisse. Qui est derrière le site «profession-gendarme.com», aux tendances complotistes? *Libération* [online], 26 May 2021 [cit. 2022-03-07]. Available from: https://www.liberation.fr/checknews/qui-est-derriere-le-site-profession-gendarmecom-aux-tendances-complotistes-20210526_6ULTMA6IKBG6XIPILN7A7Z7D5M/

³⁸ HOFFMAN, Samantha. Engineering social consent: The Chinese Communist Party's data-driven power expansion. *Australian Strategic Policy Institute* [online], 14 October 2019 [cit. 2022-03-07]. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/y8edvbsh>

conflict. It mostly achieves this goal by portraying PRC's adversaries as isolated, ineptly led, divided at home and abroad, and without hope for any significant victory. PRC uses both domestic social media (such as WeChat) as well as foreign ones, such as Facebook, LINE, or PTT, with the targeted audiences. The content is spread either by official outlets (such as *China Daily* or *Global Times*) or seemingly private accounts, which are hard to attribute to PRC's authorities. The disinformation campaigns then range in various forms from an on-going effort to exploit social divisions, lower loyalty to the state and to democracy, to targeted impact operations against more specific objects, trying to smear specific policies, figures, delegitimize elections, etc.³⁹

The main target of these activities is predominantly the Republic of China (ROC, Taiwan), which The People's Republic of China considers a breakaway province, however, the techniques PRC applies against Taiwan are subsequently often used to target strategic rivals, first and foremost the United States.⁴⁰ The prominent targets are, among others, ROC military officers, either retired or still on active duty. One of the earliest examples dates back to 2016: following the election of president Tsai in 2016, PRC-linked accounts disseminated rumours of her mismanaging the army and disrespecting traditional culture.⁴¹ Furthermore, of specific sensitivity for people working in the defence and security apparatus, disinformation was spread that the Tsai administration wanted to give away Taiwanese territory to the US Navy as a firing range.⁴² In 2018, rumours were fabricated and disseminated that Honduras, which had diplomatically recognized Taipei, was about to recognize Beijing as the government of China - the disinformation fooled even government officials and almost caused a diplomatic incident.⁴³ Other recent examples of misinformation include rumours that public employees and military personnel would get their benefits cut, which led to a downward trend in Tsai's popularity, especially within the security apparatus of ROC.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the campaigns do not target only specific politicians, parties or policies, but increasingly focus on social and cultural issues, such as controversies of same-sex marriage or what name should Taiwan actually use (e. g., in the Olympic competitions). Beijing strives for sowing divisions in the nation as a whole - there were scores of fake social media accounts (mainly in Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn) created to help elect Beijing-friendly candidates in the

³⁹ HAROLD, Scott W., BEAUCHAMP-MUSTAFAGA, Nathan, HORNUNG, Jeffrey W. Chinese Disinformation Efforts on Social Media. RAND Corporation [online], 2021 [cit. 2022-03-07]. Available from: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4373z3.html

⁴⁰ MANANTAN, Mark Bryan. The People's Republic China's Cyber Coercion: Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the South China Sea. *Issues & Studies* [online]. 2020, 56 (3), 1-29. [cit. 2022-03-07]. Available from: <https://www.worldscientific.com/doi/10.1142/S1013251120400135>

⁴¹ FOCUS TAIWAN. Authorities deny rumor of ban on incense, ghost money burning. *Focus Taiwan* [online], 21 July 2017 [cit. 2022-03-07]. Available from: <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/201707210016>

⁴² TAIPEI TIMES. News that the US could rent Itu Ba is 'fake,' institute says. *Taipei Times* [online], 1 July 2018 [cit. 2022-03-07]. Available from: <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2018/07/01/2003695894>

⁴³ HAROLD, Scott W., BEAUCHAMP-MUSTAFAGA, Nathan, HORNUNG, Jeffrey W. Chinese Disinformation Efforts on Social Media. RAND Corporation [online], 2021 [cit. 2022-03-07]. Available from: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4373z3.html

⁴⁴ Ibid.

2018 and 2020 elections and simultaneously discredit candidates unpalatable to communist PRC.⁴⁵ The ultimate goal of these actions is to gradually widen the cleavages within the government, institutions and society “*by a thousand cuts*”, leading to creation of conditions favourable for doubt about the viability of Taiwan’s sovereignty, fatal weakening of Taiwanese cohesion, resilience, and disinformation resistance, and finally, for acceptance of Beijing’s implementation of the one-China policy.⁴⁶ Military personnel are often targeted specifically, but mostly as part of the whole nation, since these hybrid campaigns seek to exploit the vulnerabilities in the ***national dimension***. As such, it is a manifestation of hybrid interference against the ***national dimension***, because it aims against the ability of a nation to withstand adversity and cope with a changing, sometimes hostile environment by changing and readjusting in new innovative ways.

Multidimensional Exploitation of Vulnerabilities: Russia’s 2014 Crimean Annexation and ISIS Propaganda

Each of the previous chapters provided an example of exploiting vulnerabilities within the national security institutions or military, covering one of the four identified dimensions - psychological, social, institutional, or national. However, recent history also knows several examples of such complex events and hybrid operations that interference in all four dimensions of vulnerability can be identified within them. We chose the Russian annexation of Crimea from 2014 and recent propaganda of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) as illustrative and telling examples.

Ukraine’s geographical, historical, and linguistic proximity to Russia had been making it an ideal target for Russian hybrid operations for several years prior to 2014. Russia’s hybrid campaign preceding, accompanying and following the annexation of Crimea is to these days considered a blueprint for conducting hybrid operations in an aggressor-friendly environment.⁴⁷ The vast (dis)information warfare has been waged through the local and regional media as well as social networks since 2014, targeting and exploiting the naturally existing and long-term social, political, regional and ethnic cleavages within the Ukrainian society. These enabled further Russian incursions of various types but posed also a threat to withstand a hybrid interference of an enemy within the dimensions of ***psychological and social dimensions***.⁴⁸ After the internationally unrecognized plebiscite that resulted in Crimea’s integration into the Russian Federation, many Ukrainian soldiers stationed in the peninsula made a fateful choice in favour of their “new motherland”.

⁴⁵ HO CHUN, Herbert Cheng, HAIDER, Samar, FERRARA, Emilio. Digital Civic Participation and Misinformation during the 2020 Taiwanese Presidential Election. *Media and Communication* [online], 2021, 9 (1), 144-157. [cit. 2022-03-07]. Available from:

<https://www.cogitatiopress.com/mediaandcommunication/article/view/3405>

⁴⁶ HAROLD, Scott W., BEAUCHAMP-MUSTAFAGA, Nathan, HORNUNG, Jeffrey W. Chinese Disinformation Efforts on Social Media. *RAND Corporation* [online], 2021 [cit. 2022-03-07]. Available from: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4373z3.html

⁴⁷ ZAREMBO, Kateryna, SOLODKYY, Sergiy. The Evolution of Russian Hybrid Warfare: Ukraine. *The Centre for European Policy Analysis* [online], 29 January 2021 [cit. 2022-03-08]. Available from: <https://cepa.org/the-evolution-of-russian-hybrid-warfare-ukraine/>

⁴⁸ CLARK, Mason. Russian Hybrid Warfare. *The Institute for the Study of War* [online], September 2020 [cit. 2022-03-08]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/yK8m4>

Combining carrots (the promise of higher and more regular earnings in the Russian Army and other perks) and sticks (threat of violence and physical extermination), Russia achieved that about 2/3 of the 18,000 Ukrainian troops, marines and sailors deployed in Crimea defected to its side⁴⁹ - including admirals Sergei Yeliseyev⁵⁰ and Denis Berezovsky.⁵¹ The hybrid campaign thus worked out well and targeted the **institutional vulnerabilities** of the entire Ukrainian national security apparatus. Through its hybrid interference, Russia created the intended synergic effect that kept sowing distrust and instability within the entire society and country, drove several wedges into the society, delegitimized the government and deepened the alienation of society from the authorities. All these conducts strive for a joint aim - significantly exploit Ukrainian vulnerability in the **national dimension** of hybrid interference.

Various militant, insurgent, and terrorist circles were always interested in recruiting ex-soldiers of Saddam Hussein's army, who had to quit the service after the invasion of Iraq and the subsequent dissolution of the Iraqi army in 2003. As a result, scores of men who knew how to use weapons ended up unemployed, frustrated, angry, and desiring revenge. Given their combat expertise and weapons handling skills combined with their miseries, these persons constituted ideal recruits for Al-Zarqawi's nascent terrorist group, Al Qaeda in Iraq, later known as the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Reports say that 25 out of 40 top leaders of the later ISIS used to serve in Hussein's army.⁵² In luring these people into their ranks, Al Qaeda and ISIS played mainly on "emotional strings", depicting the allied forces as brutal and ungodly "crusaders" who handed over the state to their puppets, the local Shia Muslims elites. The torture of captured Iraqis in Abu Ghraib and other detention facilities by American soldiers also came to the propaganda fore.⁵³ However, Al Qaeda/ISIS propaganda did not only aim to recruit former soldiers. It also strived to demoralise the new Iraqi army, which it did not consider legitimate. It is believed that the release of the movie *Clanging of the Swords* on social media two weeks prior to the group's conquest of Mosul in June 2014 fatally weakened the morale of Iraqi soldiers and made the conquest easier for ISIS.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ SHUSTER, Simon. Ukraine Troops in Crimea Face Dilemma: To Defect, Fell or Fight. *The Time*, [online], 9 March 2014 [cit. 2022-01-06]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/dK8mZ> See also KHPG. Putin hands out flats to turncoats who betrayed Ukraine in Russian-occupied Crimea. *Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group* [online], 14 May 2020 [cit. 2022-01-06]. Available from: <https://khpg.org/en/1589326279>

⁵⁰ KOMMERSANT. Ukraina obvinyayet vitse-admirala VMF Rossii Sergeya Yeliseyeva v gosizmene i dezertirstve. *Kommersant*, [online], 4 August 2015 [cit. 2022-01-06]. Available from: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2782132>

⁵¹ WALKER, Shaun. Ukraine navy officers reject plea to defect to Russian-backed Crimea. *The Guardian* [online], 3 March 2014 [cit. 2022-01-06]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/03/ukraine-navy-officers-defect-russian-crimea-berezovsky>

⁵² THOMPSON, Mark. How Disbanding the Iraqi Army Fuelled ISIS. *The Time* [online], 28 May 2015 [cit. 2022-01-05]. Available from: <https://time.com/3900753/isis-iraq-syria-army-united-states-military/>

⁵³ FERNANDEZ, Alberto M. Here to stay and growing: Combating ISIS propaganda networks. *Brookings* [online], October 2015 [cit. 2022-01-05]. Available from: <https://1url.cz/nK8mS>

The case of ISIS propaganda in Iraq is significant mainly due to its multidimensional outreach in terms of hybrid interference as it bears features of all four dimensions. The cognitive abilities to resist the ISIS propaganda and brainwashing among former Iraqi soldiers, as part of *psychological dimension*, had been underdeveloped, fatally weakened or absent altogether. As a result, they succumbed to the ISIS propaganda quickly, easily, and in large numbers. Simultaneously, given the socio-economic miseries, frustration and despair they shared after losing their army positions, their vulnerabilities in the *social dimension* were exposed for enemies to be fully targeted and exploited. The fatal lack of motivation and determination to resist the ISIS raids and attacks then points to the severe weakness of *institutions* within the new, post-invasion Iraqi army. Last but not least, it was suggested that Shia Muslims in the new army desired to protect only the Shia-dominated territory in south Iraq and simply abandoned Sunni populated areas. This would indicate a serious national identity and cohesion weakness, an ideal opportunity to further weaken Iraq in its *national dimension*.

A WAY FORWARD: TOWARDS THE CONTINUUM OF “HYBRID INTERFERENCE”

The four dimensions, based on the conceptualization by Divišová et al., this article focused on are a useful tool to distinguish between various aspects of the society at large that can be exploited by an adversary’s hybrid campaign. However, as especially the last two case studies have shown, a specific single dimension is typically exploited only in initial or latent stages of a hybrid conflict. Once an adversary decides to *up the ante* and fully engage, an attack on all four of these dimensions can be expected. It can be argued that such a holistic attack is a culmination of long-term efforts of low-intensity targeting of a specific dimension of vulnerability. Additionally, once an opportunity to exploit more than one vulnerability/resilience dimension presents itself, it can be expected of the adversary to target them. As the case studies have demonstrated, the boundary between the dimensions is hazy and usually they form a continuum.

In other words, hybrid interference is a tool that aims to weaken an opponent internally (through polarization, fragmentation, social and political decay, etc.) to fulfil a specific strategic goal. Targeting a specific dimension is not the interference originator’s goal and is not relevant for their strategic objectives. As such, the targeted dimensions will be fluid based on realities on the tactical and operational levels.

Therefore, we argue that the four dimensions are merely an artifice borne out of the necessity for a theoretically salient categorization. This artifice, if useful in some circumstances, is not universally applicable to empirical research and forces us to adapt reality perception to the needs of a theoretical model, rather than vice versa. A theoretical model that is guided by empirical data should therefore be constructed. Furthermore, the cases show us that “hybrid threats” would be a highly unsuitable conceptual framework. The adversaries’ long-term political and non-political activity, both open and clandestine, is best described as “hybrid interference”: a non-political activity short of war to meet political goals, as per Clausewitz. Having learned from the cases, hybrid interference can be conceptualized for further research as follows: an activity in conflict with the interests of the targeted state; below the threshold of war; should seek to actively destabilise the attacked parts of the state and disrupt their functioning; the ultimate goal is primarily a psychological impact on the infected

components and their internal decomposition at the systemic and structural levels. Further research should thus focus on these characteristics in examining, testing, and applying concepts related to hybrid interference and/or resilience against it.

CONCLUSION

This article sought to test the conceptual framework of Divišová et al. on empirical cases of hybrid interference and identify whether they conform to the four different dimensions of hybrid interference: psychological, social, institutional, and national. Having examined these case studies, the main takeaway is that these four dimensions are applicable to hybrid interference, however, their delimitation is hazy, and they form a continuum within a hybrid interference campaign. Targeting a single dimension seems more of a tactical compromise than a strategic goal of an adversary and the dimensions tend to form a continuum. Therefore, the article suggests further research should focus on conceptualizing hybrid interference differently. Such actions should interfere with the interests of the state; be below the threshold of war; be carried out clandestinely; should seek to actively destabilise the attacked parts of the state and disrupt their functioning; and their ultimate goal is primarily a psychological impact on the infected components and their internal decomposition at the systemic and structural levels.