

Towards a Taxonomy of Hybrid Warfare: Lessons from Crimea and the Donbas

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Abstract

While “hybrid warfare” has attracted considerable interest among defense intellectuals for more than a decade, it still appears conceptually flawed. The main reason for this is that hybrid warfare remains a catch-all concept encompassing various types of actions. As such, the notion of hybrid warfare seems overly broad for academic analysis and national security planning. A classification of hybrid warfare is essential to distinguish its principal types. The research question for this article is, therefore: How can hybrid warfare be classified based on its *modus operandi*? In addressing this question, the article proposes a taxonomy based on David Kilcullen’s ideal types of counterinsurgency, namely, population-centric and enemy-centric models, given that hybrid warfare can manifest in two main forms, either as a direct challenge to military forces or as a malign influence on civilian populations and decision-makers. To illustrate this distinction, it examines two classic cases of the hybrid mode of warfare: Russia’s annexation of Crimea and covert occupation of the Donbas region. The findings suggest that Russia’s annexation of Crimea reflects a population-centric hybrid warfare approach, because it was essentially based mostly on non-violent actions rather than violent conflict. On the contrary, Russia’s covert occupation of the Donbas region indicates a more violent, enemy-centric model as it prioritizes military dominance.

Keywords:

hybrid warfare; David Kilcullen; population-centric; enemy-centric; Crimea; Donbas.

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Since Russia's arm's-length operations in Crimea and Donbas in 2014, the term "hybrid warfare" has attracted significant attention in Western strategic circles. Yet, although its usage has become increasingly widespread, the idea of hybrid warfare continues to present analytical challenges. The prevailing definition of hybrid warfare is so broad that it undermines its usefulness in both academic analysis and policymaking (Wither 2016, 74). Today, the hybrid model of warfare is generally portrayed as a method of achieving political objectives by employing a blend of military and non-military means while remaining below the threshold of large-scale, force-on-force military operations (Popescu 2015, 1; European Commission 2016, 2; NATO 2024). Based on this perspective, hybrid warfare may take different forms and be implemented in diverse settings. For this reason, the case studies commonly cited as examples of hybrid warfare are often markedly different from one another, and – aside from their classification under the hybrid label – have little in common.

This article seeks to contribute to the conceptual development of hybrid warfare by proposing a new taxonomy that clarifies the differences between different types of hybrid warfare. To achieve this, it applies David Kilcullen's renowned taxonomy, initially used in counterinsurgency, to distinguish between population-centric and enemy-centric models within the context of hybrid warfare. He delineates the population-centric approach, viewing counterinsurgency as "fundamentally a control problem, or even an armed variant of government administration" (Kilcullen 2007). The core objective is to secure control over both the population and the surrounding environment. While the methods employed within this model can range from more forceful to more conciliatory ones, the core principle is that achieving control over the population is crucial, with other goals following as secondary.

In contrast, Kilcullen (2007) views the enemy-centric approach as a form of conventional warfare, with the main objective of defeating the enemy. That being said, the enemy-centric approach to counterinsurgency also includes efforts to gain control over the population and its surrounding environment. Yet, while it overlaps with the population-centric model in particular aspects, its central emphasis lies on ensuring the enemy's military defeat takes precedence over all other goals.

Drawing on Kilcullen's conceptual model, this article proposes a new taxonomy of hybrid warfare by categorizing it into two subtypes according to the nature of actions (disruptive vs. destructive) and their principal targets: *population-centric hybrid warfare* and *enemy-centric hybrid warfare*. This classification offers a more precise and nuanced conceptual lens through which to interpret the diverse manifestations of hybrid warfare.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: the next section reviews the literature on the definition and characteristics of hybrid warfare. This is followed by a discussion of the article's methodological framework. The subsequent section

examines two defining case studies of hybrid warfare: Russia's annexation of Crimea and covert occupation of the Donbas region. Each of the case studies illustrates a different variant of hybrid warfare. Afterwards, the findings relating to the case studies examined will be presented. The article concludes with a brief overview that summarizes the key arguments and discusses their implications for future research.

1. Literature Review

Hybrid warfare has become a buzzword in the Western political and academic circles since Russia's "deniable" intervention in Ukraine in 2014. However, in truth, hybrid warfare has not been the sole concept used to describe and to refer to Russia's hostile measures in Ukraine. On the contrary, there has been a broad array of concepts used for this purpose. [Radin and others \(2020, 2\)](#) stated that the term "subversion" provides an appropriate and helpful way to apprehend Russia's destabilizing activities in Crimea and the Donbas region. [Galeotti \(2019a\)](#) used George F. Kennan's construct of "political warfare" to explain the same phenomenon. [Friedman \(2014\)](#) referred to it as "limited war". [Mazarr \(2015\)](#) used the concept of "grey-zone warfare", while [Connell and Evans \(2015\)](#) preferred the term "ambiguous warfare." [Bērziņš \(2015, 157-158\)](#) pointed out that the term "new generation warfare", which is the product of Russian military thinking, captures Russian way of warfare employed in Ukraine better than any other Western-oriented concepts since "it is a methodological mistake to try to frame a theory developed independently by the Russian military as a theory developed in another country."

Nonetheless, [NATO \(2014\)](#) preferred the term hybrid warfare to describe Russia's destabilizing activities in Crimea and Donbas. With NATO's choice, as [Libiseller \(2023\)](#) has said, "hybrid warfare" became an academic fashion in Western scholarly and military-practitioner circles. In fact, the term itself had already entered the Western strategic lexicon before Russia's 2014 operations in Ukraine. It dates back to the early 1990s ([Mockaitis 1990](#)) and was popularized by [Hoffman \(2007\)](#) in the second half of the 2000s. In his seminal work, entitled *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*, [Hoffman \(2007, 14\)](#) defines hybrid warfare as a form of conflict incorporating "a range of different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder."

According to [Hoffman \(2007, 36\)](#), Hezbollah's mode of warfare against Israel during the 2006 Lebanon War represents a clear-cut example of hybrid warfare. He says that "Hezbollah's use of C802 anti-ship cruise missiles and volley of rockets represents a sample of what 'Hybrid Warfare' might look like ([Hoffman 2007, 37](#)). Hoffman's conceptualization of hybrid warfare primarily aimed to explain how and why a relatively weak actor had become successful against a superior conventional military force.

Hoffman's battlefield-centric understanding of hybrid warfare mainly dominated the literature until Russia's 2014 operations in Crimea and the Donbas region. However, since Russia's activities in Ukraine exhibited different characteristics from Hoffman's definition of hybrid warfare, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) reformulated the concept to highlight the role of non-military means. During a speech in June 2014, the then Secretary General of NATO, Anders F. Rasmussen, described hybrid warfare as "a combination of covert military operations combined with sophisticated information and disinformation operations" (Rasmussen 2014). In the 2014 NATO Wales Summit Declaration, the Alliance defined hybrid warfare as "a wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures are employed in a highly integrated design" (NATO 2014).

Over time, NATO's understanding of hybrid warfare has evolved to include "strategic ambiguity" and "plausible deniability" recognizing that Russia's operations in Crimea and Donbas can be best characterized by remaining below the threshold of an outright act of war, rather than merely conceiving such warfare as a mixture of various kinetic and non-kinetic instruments. Over the past few years, [NATO \(2024\)](#) has characterized hybrid warfare as follows:

Hybrid threats combine military and non-military as well as covert and overt means, including disinformation, cyber-attacks, economic pressure, deployment of irregular armed groups, and use of regular forces. Hybrid methods are used to blur the lines between war and peace and attempt to sow doubt in the minds of target populations. They aim to destabilize and undermine societies.

Reflecting NATO's approach, hybrid warfare has commonly been understood as a method of realizing geostrategic objectives by using any combination of kinetic and non-kinetic instruments while remaining below the threshold of a large-scale conventional war. For example, the EU's Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats states:

The concept of hybrid threats aims to capture the mixture of conventional and unconventional, military and non-military, overt and covert actions that can be used in a coordinated manner by state or non-state actors to achieve specific objectives while remaining below the threshold of formally declared warfare ([European Commission 2016](#)).

The majority of academic definitions of hybrid warfare also reflect the same understanding of hybrid warfare. Thus, they emphasize the concurrent and synergistic use of military and non-military instruments, while regarding remaining below the threshold of direct force-on-force confrontations as one of the defining characteristics of the hybrid mode of warfare ([Popescu 2015, 1](#); [Mumford and Carlucci 2023, 194-195](#)). Such a conceptualization of hybrid warfare is not that different from Kilcullen's theory of liminal maneuver. For Kilcullen, liminal warfare centers on manipulating thresholds. Revisionist powers like

Russia and China seek to pursue their geostrategic objectives without crossing the threshold into war. To that end, they conduct covert and indirect operations through economic, military, cyber, and informational tools. These operations may be detected, but their agency or sponsorship mostly remains ambiguous, and therefore, unproven ([Kilcullen 2020](#), 115-120).

With this understanding, hybrid warfare may take a broad range of shapes and be practiced in different ways. Today, the single term “hybrid warfare” has been used to describe a diverse range of strategies and tactics employed by actors with qualitatively and quantitatively different characteristics. The examples/case studies labelled as hybrid warfare span from Russia’s operations in Crimea and Donbas ([Fox 2017](#)), to China’s bullying activities in the South China Sea ([Miracola 2018](#)), to North Korea’s aggressive behaviors towards South Korea ([Kang 2020](#)), to Iran’s pursuit of regional hegemony in the Middle East ([Dalton 2017](#)). Obviously, the examples of case studies lack a clear conceptual link between them, even though they all fall under the umbrella of hybrid warfare. Given the wide scope of activities the term encompasses, developing a taxonomy would facilitate a more nuanced understanding of its diverse manifestations.

2. Methodology

This article seeks to advance the conceptual clarity of hybrid warfare by suggesting a new taxonomy that clarifies the differences between its various forms. To this end, it seeks to answer the following research question: *How can hybrid warfare be classified based on its modus operandi?* The article employs a qualitative research design based on a comparative case study approach. The case studies selected, namely, Russia’s annexation of Crimea and its covert occupation of the Donbas region, are chosen because they represent two archetypal examples of hybrid warfare and thus offer an ideal basis for illustrating the proposed taxonomy.

In categorizing the hybrid mode of warfare, the article applies David Kilcullen’s population-centric and enemy-centric models, initially developed in the context of counterinsurgency, to the field of hybrid warfare. This is because hybrid warfare can manifest in two main forms, either as a direct challenge to military forces or as a malign influence on civilian populations and decision-makers. This framework enables a systematic comparison of how different forms of hybrid warfare operate, depending on whether the principal focus is on controlling populations or defeating enemy forces.

Data has been collected from a diverse set of secondary sources, including books, peer-reviewed journal articles, think tank reports, governmental publications, and credible online materials. The findings and conclusions are drawn from the analysis of these empirical sources.

3. Case Studies

3.1. *Russia's Annexation of Crimea (2014)*

In November 2013, then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych rejected signing the EU Association Agreement, opting instead to intensify his country's ties with Russia (Traynor and Grytsenko 2013). Yanukovych's decision to halt preparations for signing the agreement sparked widespread anti-government and pro-Western protests in the last month of the year, referred to as the "Euromaidan Revolution" (or the "Revolution of Dignity") (BBC News 2013). Though the Ukrainian government resorted to violence to crush the protests, the protesters eventually succeeded in ousting Yanukovych, and he fled to Russia on February 22, 2014 (DeBenedictis 2022, 11).

Crimea was and is of great geopolitical importance to Russia as the naval base in Sevastopol, which is located on the south-western coast of the peninsula, has been the main base of its Black Sea Fleet since the 18th century (Treisman 2016, 48). The Kremlin perceived the ousting of Ukraine's pro-Russian president Yanukovych as an illegal coup d'état orchestrated by Western powers (Kremlin 2014). In the eyes of the Kremlin, the overthrow of Yanukovych constituted a major challenge to Russia's national interests by endangering its access to its naval base in Sevastopol. For that reason, Moscow came to the decision to intervene covertly in Crimea. The strategic aim of the campaign was to reassert Russian sovereignty over the peninsula (BBC News 2015).

After the Verkhovna Rada (the Ukrainian parliament) voted to dismiss then-president Yanukovych from office, large-scale pro-Russian protests erupted in Crimea, where ethnic Russians and/or Russian speakers make up the largest demographic group (Gumuchian et al. 2017). The following day, pro-Russian protestors announced the formation of the self-styled "Crimean self-defense units" (Amos 2014). Yet, these street protests were widely believed to have been orchestrated by Russia's military and intelligence apparatus, including the GRU, the FSB, and the SVR, as well as Kremlin-backed paramilitary groups such as the Wagner Group and the Night Wolves (Bugriy 2014). In truth, during the Crimean operation, the so-called "self-defense units" essentially served as a *façade*, providing Russia-affiliated forces a local image (Bukkvoll 2016, 6).

Throughout the Crimean operation, soldiers wearing green uniforms without identifying markings, commonly known as "little green men", orchestrated and carried out separatist actions such as surrounding and assaulting military bases, demolishing military infrastructure, seizing key regional government administration buildings, in order to undermine Kyiv's sovereignty over the Peninsula (Galeotti 2019b, 5-12). Simultaneously, Russia steadily deployed reinforcements from its territory to Crimea to ensure operational success (Bartles and McDermott 2014, 58; Bukkvoll 2016, 17).

While the covert action to seize the Crimean Peninsula was accomplished within a couple of weeks, Moscow also employed several non-kinetic techniques to break Ukraine's determination to oppose its aggressive activities. It seems right to say that the key non-kinetic tool used by the Kremlin during the annexation of Crimea was psychological operations. The reason for this is that Russia's destabilizing propaganda activities tailored for Russians and Russian-speakers in the Crimean Peninsula seriously eroded the image of the newly formed Ukrainian government among the local population. The Kremlin's influence operations aimed to discredit the new government in Kyiv by portraying it as "fascists" and "Nazis", instill fear among pro-Russian population in the peninsula by implying that they were under serious threat from alleged "Ukrainian Nazis" and demonstrate widespread public support for Crimea's annexation by Russia ([Kofman et al. 2017](#), 12-14; [Treverton et al. 2018](#), 18; [Bouwmeester, 2021](#), 505).

Amid skirmishes in Crimea between Russian-linked armed men and Ukrainian security forces, Russia reportedly conducted a series of cyber-attacks against Ukraine's computer networks and communications in March 2014. Russia aimed to divert public attention from Russian activities in and around the peninsula ([Przetacznik and Tarpova 2022](#), 3). Another method worth mentioning is the use of coercive economic tools. Moscow imposed a temporary ban on Ukrainian pork imports on the grounds of inadequate veterinary oversight amid the country's instability. Simultaneously, the Russian Central Bank took control of Moscomprivatbank, which was owned by a Ukrainian oligarch, Ihor Kolomoyskyi, right after he criticized Russia's disruptive activities in Ukraine and accepted a government role in Dnipropetrovsk, an oblast located in eastern Ukraine. Furthermore, Moscow exerted diplomatic pressure to undermine the legitimacy of Ukraine's post-Maidan government. President Putin framed Euromaidan protests as an unconstitutional coup and subsequently declared the new authorities illegitimate ([Kremlin 2014a](#)).

Throughout the Crimean operation, the Russian government generated strategic ambiguity about both its methods and ultimate objectives. The armed groups involved in the disruptive activities could not be directly linked to the Russian state. As such, Moscow repeatedly denied any involvement in the pro-Russian uprising in Crimea. Throughout the Crimean operation, the Russian government generated strategic ambiguity about both its methods and ultimate objectives. The armed groups involved in the disruptive activities could not be directly linked to the Russian state. As such, Moscow repeatedly denied any involvement in the pro-Russian uprising in Crimea. In early March 2014, when "little green men" seized key government buildings in the Crimean Peninsula, President Putin, during a meeting with media representatives regarding the situation in Crimea, stated that "those were local self-defence units" in response to a question about the presence of Russian troops in the region ([Kremlin 2014a](#)). In the same meeting, when asked whether Russia would annex Crimea, he replied, "No, we do not." He further emphasized that only the Crimean people had the right to determine their own future ([Kremlin 2014a](#)).

Nonetheless, an independence referendum was held on March 16, 2014, in which the vast majority of Crimean voters reportedly supported joining Russia ([Harding and Walker 2014](#)). Subsequently, the Crimean parliament declared independence from Ukraine and requested to join Russia ([BBC News 2014a](#)). On March 18, despite widespread international condemnation, Russia annexed Crimea ([MacAskill et al. 2014](#)). The entire operation lasted just 26 days and remained largely bloodless. No significant armed confrontation occurred between Russian-affiliated forces and Ukrainian troops until March 18, when Russian-backed forces attacked a Ukrainian military outpost in Simferopol, resulting in the death of a Ukrainian officer ([BBC News 2014b](#)).

3.2. Russia's Covert Occupation of the Donbas Region

The Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine, which is predominantly populated by ethnic Russians and Russian speakers, served as the political heartland of the pro-Kremlin President Viktor Yanukovych and his political party, the Party of the Regions. Thus, a significant portion of the population living in Donbas was profoundly dismayed by Yanukovych's ousting from power and felt anxious about Ukraine's political future ([Kofman et al. 2017, 34](#); [Galeotti 2019b, 14](#); [Katchanovski 2016, 54](#)).

Right after Ukraine's then-president Viktor Yanukovych was ousted, pro-Russian and anti-government protests took place across several oblasts in eastern Ukraine, most prominently in Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkiv ([Salem 2014](#)). Initially, pro-Russian activists were predominantly unarmed civilians ([Kofman et al. 2017, 33-34](#)). Their principal requests included a referendum on federalization, official recognition of Russian as a second state language, and the formation of a Customs Union with Russia ([Trenin 2014, 7](#); [Kofman et al. 2017, 36](#)). However, these demonstrations were widely perceived as political theatre encouraged, if not orchestrated, by the Kremlin.

Throughout March 2014, Moscow incited and organized anti-government rallies across eastern Ukrainian cities ([Roth 2014](#)). However, at the time, pro-Russian protests remained relatively small in scale and largely non-violent ([De Waal and Von Twickel 2020, 59](#)). Although protestors briefly occupied administrative buildings, Ukraine's security forces were able to reassert control over them during the early phase of the political unrest in Donbas ([Kofman et al., 2017, 38](#)). Still, this initial tactical success failed to stem the deeper currents of political instability spreading across the region. The chaotic situation provided the Russian Federation with a great opportunity to intervene in the Donbas region in an indirect and covert manner.

Russia eroded Ukraine's sovereignty in Donbas by using similar instruments to those employed in Crimea. However, fighting in the separatist-held areas of the Donbas was violent and protracted. As seen in Crimea, "little green men" suddenly erupted. Russia deployed these unmarked soldiers to carry out clandestine military operations. These operations were orchestrated under the Kremlin's strategic leadership. However, they were executed through several agents involving tactical battalions, elite units such as

Spetsnaz, the Russian Airborne Troops (VDV), and the Special Operations Command (SOC), along with intelligence services, including the FSB and GRU. Moscow also conducted proxy warfare against Ukraine via armed non-state actors like the Wagner Group ([Kofman et al., 2017](#)). The most intense fighting in Donbas occurred between 2014 and 2015. While the situation appeared to stabilize somewhat in the following years, hostilities never fully ceased. Between 2014 and 2022, the war in Donbas claimed more than 14,000 lives ([International Crises Group, n.d.](#)). The conflict between Ukrainian security forces and Russian-affiliated groups continued until February 24, 2022, when the Kremlin escalated its prolonged and violent hybrid warfare operation into a direct force-on-force confrontation.

As part of its prolonged hybrid warfare campaign in Donbas, alongside military measures, Russia significantly benefited from a wide range of non-military instruments to decrease the necessity for employing military force to a minimum level. Offensive cyberspace operations were of notable importance. Starting in 2014, Russia carried out several cyber-attacks to disrupt Ukraine's network infrastructure. Ukraine power grid hack (2015), paralysis of the State Treasury of Ukraine (2016), and Ukraine ransomware attacks (2017) were just a few examples of cyber-attacks carried out by Russian-affiliated groups ([Przetacznik and Tarpova 2022](#)).

Another important component of Russia's hybrid warfare campaign was propaganda. Russia conducted sophisticated propaganda activities to provoke ethnic Russians in Ukraine, demonize Ukrainian armed forces, influence the attitudes of the conflict zone population, and spread its narrative to the global audience via various media and internet platforms ([Yuhas 2014](#)). Russia also exerted economic coercion to destabilize Ukraine. For instance, in June 2014, Moscow cut off gas supplies to Ukraine as the armed conflict between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian insurgents in the Donbas region intensified and subsequently threatened to do it again ([BBC 2014c](#)).

As exemplified during the annexation of Crimea, the Kremlin employed the strategy of plausible deniability in the war in Donbas as well. Although Ukraine accused Moscow of provoking or even directly participating in the armed conflict in the Donbas region, Russian authorities repeatedly denied any involvement. For example, in April 2014, Putin stated:

Nonsense. There are no Russian units in eastern Ukraine – no special services, no tactical advisors. All this is being done by the local residents, and the proof of that is the fact that those people have literally removed their masks ([Kremlin 2014b](#)).

Likewise, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov claimed that there was no proof of Russia deploying its armed forces in the war in Donbas ([Baczynska 2015](#)). While addressing viewers in a live television program in April 2015, President Putin said: On the question whether or not our military is in Ukraine, I am telling you directly and clearly: there are no Russian troops ([Kremlin 2015](#)).

Yet, in the ensuing months, Russia subtly shifted its stance on its involvement in the war in Donbas. In late 2015, President Putin acknowledged that Russia's special operation forces were active in the region, stating, "We never said there were no people there who carried out certain tasks, including in the military sphere". Nevertheless, he highlighted that it was different from Russia's regular army (Walker 2015). Putin's remarks about Russia's role in the Donbas conflict were superficial and offered little insight into the activities of Russia's armed forces in the region. Therefore, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, it remains accurate to say that Russia maintained a level of plausible deniability during the Donbas operation.

4. Findings

Research findings suggest that the Russian annexation of Crimea and covert occupation of the Donbas region indicate two different types of hybrid warfare. Despite the existence of heavily armed groups, colloquially called little green men, in taking control of administrative buildings and critical sites in Crimea, the Crimean operation was almost bloodless. In 2014, when Kremlin-affiliated forces seized control of Crimea, cognitive operations played a central role in influencing popular sentiment and discrediting the Ukrainian administration. These methods sought to strengthen control over Crimeans, especially ethnic Russians and/or Russian speakers, coerce Ukrainian officials, and instill fear among Ukraine's pro-Western communities, primarily residing in the western and northern regions of the country. Moreover, other non-military tools, including cyber-attacks, diplomatic pressure, and economic coercion, played a role in Russia's hybrid warfare campaign in Crimea. The Russian Federation weakened or even destroyed Ukraine's control over Donbas by using the same instruments; however, the conflict was far more intense and protracted than the operation in Crimea.

As previously noted, David Kilcullen's concepts of population-centric and enemy-centric approaches may offer insight into the different forms of hybrid warfare. He draws a distinction between two models: the population-centric approach focuses on winning control over the people and their surroundings, on the assumption that once that is achieved, other goals will fall into place. The enemy-centric approach, by contrast, treats counterinsurgency more like conventional warfare, aiming first and foremost to defeat the enemy, in the belief that everything else will follow once that happens.

Relying on Kilcullen's (2007) model, hybrid warfare can be classified into two sub-categories based on the nature of the actions (disruptive vs. destructive) and their primary targets: population-centric hybrid warfare and enemy-centric hybrid warfare. This distinction stems from the fact that the hybrid model of warfare can be conducted in two principal modes, either as an intense and direct challenge to the enemy's armed forces or as a malign influence campaign on the enemy's civilian population and key political decision-makers. It appears suitable to assert that

Russia's seizure of the Crimean Peninsula is more in line with population-centric hybrid warfare, as it primarily aims to control the population and sway enemy policymakers with minimal use of force. Conversely, Russia's covert occupation of the Donbas region typifies enemy-centric hybrid warfare. The reason for this is that the principal objective of the Donbas operation was essentially the military defeat of Ukrainian forces. It is worth emphasizing that many features of the Donbas operation overlap with those of the Crimean operation. Namely, despite the use of high-intensity violence, Russia also sought to establish control over the conflict-zone population and influence enemy decision-makers during the Donbas operation. However, the strategic logic differed: in Donbas, the priority was direct confrontation and operational victory over the enemy. The comparison between the Crimean operation and the Donbas operations is shown in Table 1 below.

TABLE NO. 1
Crimean Operation vs Donbas Operation

	Crimean Operation	Donbas Operation
Objectives	Intimidation of Ukraine's political decision-making and mobilisation of Russian-speaking communities in the Crimean Peninsula	Wearing down Ukraine's military forces in Donbas and seizing critical areas
Methods	Activities that do not include direct physical force	Integration of covert/indirect military force with non-military tools
Targets	Ukraine's population and decision-makers	Ukraine's population, decision-makers, and military

Conclusion

While hybrid warfare, both as a concept and an actual mode of warfare, includes a wide variety of unfriendly behaviors, its broad definition has often led to analytical ambiguity. This article has proposed a new taxonomy of hybrid warfare by distinguishing between Russia's operations in Crimea and Donbas, which are colloquially seen as the defining examples of the hybrid model of warfare. The comparative analysis of Russia's operations in Crimea and the Donbas suggests that hybrid warfare can be operationalized in two different forms, despite sharing a common strategic logic of staying below the threshold of conventional warfare. Thus, by drawing on David Kilcullen's counterinsurgency framework, the article introduces a distinction between population-centric hybrid warfare and enemy-centric hybrid warfare. The former focuses on shaping perceptions and gaining the support or acquiescence of local populations, whereas the latter aims at defeating adversary forces. Russia's annexation of Crimea illustrates a population-centric hybrid warfare model, given that the primary aim was controlling the Crimean population and

influencing key decision-makers. In contrast, Russia's covert occupation of Donbas aligns with an enemy-centric hybrid warfare model because it involved actual fighting and bloodshed. This typological framework enhances conceptual clarity and provides a useful lens for analyzing diverse hybrid warfare campaigns. This article tries to take the first step in categorizing varied forms of hybrid warfare. Accordingly, it does not assert that it provides conclusive results. Therefore, it invites further research into other hybrid warfare campaigns by applying the proposed taxonomy to them.

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