

**Eugenio Cusumano & Marian Corbe** (eds.), *A Civil-Military Response to Hybrid Threats*, London and New York, Palgrave, 2018, 320 p.

*Reviewed by Francesco N. Moro*

*A Civil-Military Response to Hybrid Threats* comes as a timely contribution to the debate on how to deal with one of the most pressing issues of the contemporary global security environment: so-called “hybrid threats”. Emerging from a NATO-funded research project in line with the growing interest of the Atlantic Alliance in understanding the nature of and possible solutions to what is often listed as one today’s newest and harshest challenges, the book is a collection of essays that explore the extremely diverse components of “hybridity”. As such, it represents a successful case of the often invoked, but not always implemented, cooperation between researchers and policy-makers. Also due to this virtuous interaction, the book goes beyond strictly academic boundaries, while at the same time critically challenging some commonly-held assumptions on what “hybrid” means, and then implies in terms of responses. In doing so, the volume provides a fine-grained, comprehensive analysis of the multidimensional nature of hybrid threats and challenges, ranging from cyberwarfare to the funding of militias. This short review essay will first present the overall structure and content of the volume, then discuss more in detail three of its most important themes, relating them to current research and advancing proposals to take this contribution further.

The volume, edited by Marian Corbe from NATO’s Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence based in The Hague, and Eugenio Cusumano from Leiden University, is structured in three parts and 14 chapters. After a rich Introduction, Part I addresses in detail the inherently vague notion of “hybridity” and how civil-military cooperation constitutes an essential tool to address the challenges that derive from hybrid threats. This section contributes to a deeper understanding of the various modalities in which service members and civilians cooperate: for instance, the relatively recent notion of Civil-Military Interaction (CMI) is addressed, showing how a broader framework than CIMIC is useful to connect the different domains and ways of cooperation.<sup>1</sup> Besides the politico-military perspective, important insights are drawn from the analysis of how legal tools can be used in a strategic way (“lawfare”). Part II deals with “Actors” involved in hybrid threats, and their strategies. The section contains a wide-ranging analysis of the role played in hybrid warfare by NATO’s Centres of Excellence, the links between NATO, private contractors, and NGOs, and the European Union’s use of strategic communication and sanctions. Part III focuses on how different approaches to civil-military relations have operated in practice. Empirical analysis is, again, extensive and deals with UN action in Mali, the military’s role in strengthening State and societal resilience, and the link between cyberwar

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<sup>1</sup> Gerard Lucius & Sebastiaan Rietjens (eds.), *Effective Civil-military Interaction in Peace Operations : Theory and Practice*, Cham, Springer, 2016.

and hybrid threats. The situation in Estonia, now the classic case on cyber operations short of war, is thoroughly discussed in the context of hybrid challenges.

Given the broad scope of the volume, it is impossible to tackle every one of the themes it broaches, or engage with (the many) theoretical and conceptual constructs it offers and their relevance to gauge the empirical material. Indeed, one of the major values of the book lies in offering a valid companion to the empirical analysis of a phenomenon, hybrid threats, which is more often mentioned than thoroughly analyzed and understood. Then, without pretending to provide an exhaustive review, I will discuss here three contributions that I believe can be singled out.

First, discussing hybridity requires an effort in concept formation. The book, not least in the Introduction and Part I, makes an important effort in this endeavour. The core of the definition is the “*blend of conventional and non-conventional means*” accompanying kinetic action with “*cyber operations, forms of economic warfare such as energy disruptions, and information operations*” (p.5). Elsewhere, enduring features of hybridity are also stressed : hybridity “*can be seen as an inherent characteristic of war as a social phenomenon*” (p.18).<sup>2</sup> These definitions shed light on the fact that there is little apparent novelty in the notion of hybridity. Now-consolidated theses (starting with the work of Thomas Rid<sup>3</sup>) that stress the elements of continuity of cyberwar with previous forms of information operations for instance (different tools, of course, but similar logic), argue that the utility of hybridity as a concept derives not so much from its scientific rigour as from its centrality and usefulness in policy-making. From Russian operations in Ukraine in 2014 onwards, the related concepts of hybrid threats and hybrid wars, which were incorporated in NATO doctrine earlier on,<sup>4</sup> have enjoyed widespread popularity. In particular, according to the editors of the volume, “hybridity” is functional to maintain attention on civil-military cooperation (now “*on the brink of extinction*”: p.8) at a time when the Alliance is apparently reverting to deterrence and territorial defence. A key point that encompasses the whole volume is that the case for continuity in hybrid warfare could be subject to further scrutiny. Considerations devoted to cyberwarfare in particular would be worth expanding, as the emergence of cyber-physical systems in the civilian as well as military domains creates new avenues for integrating means (i.e. crafting hybrid strategies) and eventually create disruption.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The most important collection of essays that explored the elements of continuity in hybrid wars from ancient times to now and referenced extensively in this volume is Williamson Murray & Peter R. Mansoor (eds.), *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Rid, “Cyber War Will Not Take Place”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol.35, n°1, 2012, pp.5-32.

<sup>4</sup> See NATO Bi-Sc Input to a New NATO Capstone Concept for the Military Contribution to Countering Hybrid Threats, 2010 : [http://www.act.nato.int/images/stories/events/2010/20100826\\_bi-sc\\_cht.pdf](http://www.act.nato.int/images/stories/events/2010/20100826_bi-sc_cht.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Gianluca Baldassarre, “Critical Infrastructure Protection against Hybrid Warfare Security-Related Challenges”, pp.97-105 in Alessandro Niglia (ed.), *Critical Infrastructure Protection against Hybrid Warfare Security-Related Challenges*, Amsterdam, IOS Press, 2016. Available online at the following address : <http://ebooks.iospress.nl/volume/critical-infrastructure-protection-against-hybrid-warfare-security-related-challenges>.

The definition of the threats that the Alliance now faces is an extremely important point, but one that can be further explored as diversity in definition of what constitutes major challenges surfaces time and again in the empirical analysis conducted in Part III of the volume.<sup>6</sup> First, an issue is the effective re-orientation of the Alliance to more traditional missions, which is very much a subject of debate within NATO itself. Southern European members have repeatedly stressed how NATO's southern flank deserves as much attention as the Eastern one. Italy, for instance, is conducting a relatively silent but constant battle to maintain the Mediterranean, and the challenges associated with it, as a (if not *the*) core area of activities. Regional attention is paired with a focus on forces that can be deployed rapidly and perform missions such as sea-patrolling to address multidimensional challenges other than conventional threats.<sup>7</sup> Recent institutional changes, starting with the creation in Naples of NATO's Southern Hub in the wake of the 2016 Warsaw Summit, seem to prove that there is a strong commitment to maintaining (if not developing) initiatives in the Mediterranean area and Africa. The challenges originating from these areas are different in nature from those that are typically treated as "hybrid". Here, it would then be important to understand what applicability "hybridity" has. For sure, civil-military cooperation as the foundation of multidimensional interventions appears to be at the core of Southern flank-related operations.

The second macro-theme of the book revolves around agency. The volume identifies the (indeed, very heterogeneous) actors that play a role in countering hybrid threats. A key problem here is coordination among different agencies and international actors, often heralded as essential for actions against hybrid threats to be effective, and rather difficult in practice.<sup>8</sup> Civil-military coordination is at the core of the book, and its multiple facets are addressed through empirical analysis in various contexts. Suggesting avenues to integrate existing research, and possibly advance it, is more difficult. On the one hand, a key problem for actors relates to "measuring" the effectiveness of the activities undertaken.<sup>9</sup> Identification of metrics is an organizational pre-requisite to plan and evaluate the impact of organizational action, and the existence of metrics can also constitute a platform for organizations to share information and develop other forms of cooperation.<sup>10</sup> On the other, large political conundrums should be solved in order to address hybrid threats, and the

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<sup>6</sup> See in particular Chap.9 (by Sebastian Rietjens) and Chap.10 (by Nick Pounds, Iyad El Alam & Rudolf Keijzer).

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Michela Ceccorulli & Fabrizio Coticchia, "Multidimensional Threats and Military Engagement: The Case of the Italian Intervention in Libya", *Mediterranean Politics*, vol.20, n°3, 2015, pp.303-321.

<sup>8</sup> Lucius & Rietjens (eds.), 2016, *op.cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Sebastiaan Rietjens, Joseph Soeters & Willem Klumper, "Measuring the Immeasurable? The Effects-Based Approach in Comprehensive Peace Operation", *International Journal of Public Administration*, vol.34, n°5, 2011, pp.329-338.

<sup>10</sup> The issue of measurement is clearly a complex one, given the nature of the problems involved. Yet, there is a large body of literature on disaster management and humanitarian action from which it is possible to draw lessons, both methodological and substantive: see, for instance, Peter Tatham, Karen Spens & Gyöngyi Kovács, "The Humanitarian Common Logistic Operating Picture: A Solution to the Inter-Agency Coordination Challenge", *Disasters*, vol.41, n°1, 2017, pp.77-100.

focus on civil-military responses should not obscure the fact that broader actions are to be taken.<sup>11</sup> It is promising, for instance, that the book contains a chapter on the EU, looking at strategic communication and sanctions as tools to counter hybrid threats. This could be paired with further reflections on how the relations among international actors (for instance, NATO and the EU), including substantive differences that they might have vis-à-vis a specific crisis or threat, can affect the levels of inter-agency coordination at a more operational level.

A third broad theme is that, given the multidimensional nature of the challenge associated with hybridity, a plurality of strategies has been developed. The notion of resilience appears as a prominent one (in particular, chapters 10 and 12 of the volume). The link between the type of problem posed and the need for coordinated civil-military action to address it is clear. Perhaps, cases such as Mali would need further digging insofar as the meaning of hybridity there might refer as well to governance (in the security sector, and more widely).<sup>12</sup> Indeed, there has been a growing literature on hybrid governance that would be worth exploring more fully in further policy-oriented work,<sup>13</sup> as it would possibly allow further refinement of the notion of hybridity. In this sense, future research would be well-advised to expand, and in part refocus, its agenda so as to probe the links that exist between the type of challenges and the types of measures promoted to address them. When dealing with societal and institutional resilience, the issue is not so much the plurality of strategies that can be adopted by a rival State actor as the political, social, and economic conditions that render hybrid threats more likely.

Hybridity is a sometimes vague notion and it is possible the “hybrid fad” will pass relatively soon, supplanted by a new one. Yet, serious thinking on hybrid threats sheds light on an important feature of the current global security environment that, no matter the label, is likely to persist in the future. Focus on how civilian and military components interact in addressing crises has been an enduring theme in the last decades, along with the retreat from conventional operations as the key type of activity undertaken by NATO militaries. For these reasons, *A Civil-Military Response to Hybrid Threats* comes as a handy guide to grasp these phenomena. Scholars and policy-makers alike will find it both a *summa* of existing knowledge and a stimulating starting point for further questioning the ways of war and influence in today’s international politics.

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<sup>11</sup> Roland Paris, “Understanding the ‘Coordination Problem’ in Postwar State-Building”, in Roland Paris & Timothy Sisk (eds.), *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding: Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations*, London, New York, Routledge, 2009, pp.53-78.

<sup>12</sup> See for instance the special issue on “Hybrid Security Orders in Sub-Saharan Africa” in the *IDS Bulletin*, vol.43, n°4, 2012, pp.1-92.

<sup>13</sup> Roberto Belloni & Anna Jarstad, “Hybrid Peace Governance: Impact and Prospects of Liberal Peace-Building”, *Global Governance*, vol.18, n°1, 2012, pp.1-6.