

Omid Saeed Sedeeq¹

Hybrid Warfare from the Perspective of Classical Military Theories

Abstract

Hybrid warfare, a complex and evolving military strategy, combines conventional and unconventional tactics, encompassing elements like cyber operations, economic coercion, information warfare and the leveraging of non-state actors. While often perceived as a novel development in response to contemporary geopolitical challenges, this study argues that hybrid warfare has deep historical roots, traceable to classical military thought. This paper explores this historical continuity by analysing the key contributions of Sun Tzu, Emperor Maurice, strategic and ethical teachings within the Quran and Vegetius, demonstrating the enduring relevance of their insights to understanding contemporary hybrid conflict. These classical theorists, across different eras and cultures, consistently emphasised principles like deception, psychological manipulation, the integration of diverse tactics, unconventional approaches to warfare and the critical importance of adaptability, all of which are hallmarks of modern hybrid strategies. The paper also acknowledges and addresses the ongoing debate surrounding the significance and novelty of hybrid warfare.

Keywords: hybrid warfare, classical military theories, military strategy, historical analysis, strategic principles

Introduction

Hybrid warfare is characterised by the blended application of conventional and unconventional tactics which both state and non-state actors can implement.² This approach often involves integrating kinetic military actions with elements such as cyber operations, information warfare, economic coercion and the use of proxy forces.³

¹ PhD student, Ludovika University of Public Service Doctoral School of Military Sciences, e-mail: sedeeq.omid.saeed@stud.uni-nke.hu

² HOFFMAN 2007: 8.

³ MULLINS 2024: 6.

A key debate revolves around its novelty: Is it a fundamentally new phenomenon driven by technological advancements and globalisation, or a recurring feature of warfare throughout history?⁴

This paper addresses this debate by examining hybrid warfare from the perspective of classical military theory, arguing that its core principles have enduring historical roots and have been recognised and utilised in various forms across different eras. For the purposes of this study, "classical military theory" encompasses the strategic and tactical writings and teachings of influential figures from antiquity to the late Roman period. We seek answers to the following questions: Is hybrid warfare a historical or a contemporary phenomenon? Have historical hybrid warfare strategies survived into the modern era?

The main theme of this article will be four key figures, presented in chronological order to highlight the evolution of strategic thought: Sun Tzu (c. 5th century BC), whose *Art of War* provides timeless insights into deception and strategy; Emperor Maurice (6th century AD), whose *Strategikon* outlines a comprehensive approach to warfare, the importance of resilience, and the integration of faith and strategy; and Vegetius (late 4th century AD), whose *De Re Militari* emphasises the importance of discipline, training and adapting to the enemy's strengths including unconventional tactics and logistics; strategic and ethical teachings within the Quran (7th century AD), which offer a framework for just war.

These figures, representing diverse cultures and eras, articulated concepts central to hybrid warfare, including deception, psychological manipulation, asymmetric approaches and the integration of diverse instruments of power. By examining their works, this paper establishes a historical basis for understanding the strategic evolution – and persistent characteristics – of hybrid warfare.

Proponents of hybrid warfare as a novel concept emphasise its effectiveness in leveraging modern tools, like cyberattacks, social media-driven information operations and economic sanctions to achieve strategic goals below the threshold of conventional military conflict.⁵ Some also point to the increasing role of non-state actors and the blurring lines between war and peace as unique features of the modern hybrid environment.⁶

Critics, conversely, argue that it is simply a rebranding of existing strategies, pointing to historical examples of states using a combination of military, economic and political tools to achieve their objectives.⁷ This paper contributes to this debate by demonstrating how classical military thought anticipated many of the key elements of what is now called hybrid warfare, thereby providing a deeper understanding of its enduring nature. Understanding this historical context is crucial for developing effective strategies to counter contemporary hybrid threats and for informing military strategy.

Furthermore, drawing on recent scholarship in military theory, it is crucial to recognise the inherently political and state-to-state nature of hybrid conflict. As Boda argues, hybrid warfare, even when employing non-military means, ultimately

⁴ MELLO 2010: 305.

⁵ WITHER 2020: 7–8.

⁶ BILAL 2021.

⁷ GRAY 2007: 39–40.

serves as a tool for states to achieve their strategic objectives, often through indirect and deceptive means.⁸

By bridging historical theory with modern military practice, this paper offers a structured analysis of the development of hybrid warfare and its implications for global security, demonstrating that insights from classical military theorists remain highly relevant to understanding – and responding to – the challenges of 21st-century conflict. Ultimately, this study aims to inform strategic thinking by highlighting the enduring lessons of military history and their applicability to the complexities of modern warfare.

Defining classical military theory

For the purposes of this study, “classical military theory” encompasses the strategic, tactical and philosophical principles developed from antiquity through the late Roman period (roughly 5th century BC to 7th century AD). This era produced foundational works that have shaped military thought for centuries, providing enduring frameworks for understanding the nature of warfare, the elements of strategic success, and the relationship between military force and political objectives. While the technology and operational contexts of warfare have changed dramatically since this period, the core strategic dilemmas and principles articulated by classical theorists remain remarkably relevant to contemporary conflict, including the complexities of hybrid warfare.⁹

This study focuses on a selection of key figures who represent diverse historical contexts and strategic perspectives within the classical tradition. Sun Tzu (c. 5th century BC), whose *Art of War* is a foundational text on strategy, emphasises deception, psychological manipulation and the importance of understanding both one's and the opponent's strengths and the enemy's weaknesses.¹⁰ Emperor Maurice (6th century AD), writing in the late Roman/early Byzantine period, provides in his *Strategikon* practical guidance on military organisation, logistics and tactics, including unconventional warfare and the integration of different arms.¹¹

While not a military theorist in the conventional sense, the Quran (7th century AD) contains verses and narratives that have been interpreted to provide ethical and strategic guidance on the conduct of war, emphasising principles of justice, proportionality and the importance of moral considerations in the use of force.¹² Finally, Vegetius (late 4th century AD), writing during the decline of the Roman Empire, offers in his *De Re Militari* a comprehensive overview of Roman military practices, emphasising the importance of discipline, training and adapting to the enemy's strengths and weaknesses.

By examining these diverse voices within the classical military tradition, this study aims to demonstrate the enduring relevance of classical strategic thought to

⁸ BODA 2024: 7–8.

⁹ CALISKAN 2019: 12.

¹⁰ SUN TZU 2012: 11.

¹¹ MAURICE 1984: ix–x.

¹² ESPOSITO 2015: 1068–1069.

understanding contemporary hybrid warfare. These theorists, despite their different historical contexts, offer valuable insights into the enduring challenges of warfare and the persistent importance of adapting to changing circumstances and integrating diverse instruments of power to achieve strategic objectives. Their works provide a crucial foundation for understanding the historical roots of hybrid warfare and for developing effective strategies to address its complexities in the 21st century.

Sun Tzu and the enduring relevance of deception and adaptability in hybrid warfare

Sun Tzu's *Art of War*, a foundational text in military strategy, offers timeless insights into the nature of conflict that remain strikingly relevant to understanding hybrid warfare. Indeed, contemporary military theorists and strategists consistently revisit Sun Tzu's work to glean wisdom applicable to modern challenges, underscoring the text's enduring value.¹³ Sun Tzu begins by emphasising that war is a matter of vital importance to the state, a matter of survival, a concept that resonates even more strongly in an era of complex, multifaceted threats.¹⁴

Central to Sun Tzu's teachings is the emphasis on deception as a primary instrument of war. He famously wrote, "successful war follows the path of deception",¹⁵ advocating for misleading the enemy about one's intentions, capabilities and movements to gain a strategic advantage. This principle resonates deeply with the multifaceted nature of hybrid warfare, which often involves blurring the lines between conventional and unconventional tactics,¹⁶ concealing the true source of attacks, and manipulating information to influence public opinion.

The ability to create ambiguity and uncertainty is a key element in gaining an advantage in hybrid conflicts, where attribution can be difficult and the lines between combatants and non-combatants are often blurred.¹⁷ In modern hybrid conflicts, deception can take many forms, extending far beyond traditional battlefield tactics.

Cyberattacks can be disguised as acts of ordinary criminality, making it difficult to determine whether a state or a non-state actor is responsible.¹⁸ The use of proxy forces allows states to pursue their interests without directly engaging in conflict, masking their involvement and creating plausible deniability.¹⁹ The spread of disinformation through social media can sow discord and undermine trust in institutions, weakening the enemy's social fabric and creating opportunities for manipulation.²⁰ As Sun Tzu stated: "Successful war follows the path of deception."²¹

¹³ For example HANDEL 2001: 1.

¹⁴ SUN TZU 2012: 7.

¹⁵ SUN TZU 2012: 11.

¹⁶ BALL 2023.

¹⁷ MUMFORD 2020: 3.

¹⁸ CLARKE-KNAKE 2010: 12.

¹⁹ MUMFORD 2013: 40.

²⁰ FOREST 2021: 15.

²¹ SUN TZU 2012: 11.

This principle is readily apparent in cyber warfare, a key component of hybrid strategies. For example, malicious actors often pose as trustworthy sources to trick individuals into divulging their login credentials.²² Indeed, data suggests that a significant percentage of security breaches occur because of phishing attacks,²³ emphasising the continued relevance of deception in the digital realm. This highlights how classical strategic thinking remains relevant even in the face of technological advancements.

Another well-known principle of Sun Tzu is to "defeat the enemy without even coming to battle".²⁴ The non-lethal element of hybrid warfare reflects this wisdom, suggesting that the best victory is one without casualties and widespread destruction. This aligns with the concept of achieving strategic objectives through coercion, subversion and influence operations, rather than direct military confrontation.²⁵

Also, he gave special importance to intelligence and the use of information gained. Even in a time when news was not as central as it is today, he suggested using disinformation by using a "doomed spy" to spread false intelligence to the opponent.²⁶ Bilal (2021) argued that disinformation is cost-effective and can inflict real damage on opponents, even when they possess advanced military technology, highlighting its continued utility in modern conflict. The challenge, of course, lies in effectively disseminating disinformation while maintaining credibility and avoiding detection.²⁷

Furthermore, Sun Tzu stressed the importance of adaptability and flexibility in the face of changing circumstances. He argued that a successful commander must be able to adapt their plans to the enemy's actions and exploit any opportunities that arise.²⁸ He said, "attack him where he is unprepared, appear where you are least expected".²⁹ The new domains created by technological advancements often leave defences unprepared, creating opportunities for adversaries to exploit weaknesses and gaps. This requires constant vigilance, intelligence gathering and a willingness to deviate from established plans.

This principle is particularly relevant to hybrid warfare, which is characterised by its fluidity and adaptability. Hybrid actors often shift seamlessly between different tactics and strategies, exploiting vulnerabilities in their opponents' defences and adapting to changing political and technological landscapes.³⁰ Sun Tzu ever keeps emphasis on "knowing your enemy"³¹ that allows commanders to anticipate their opponent's moves and develop effective countermeasures. He stresses the importance of understanding "both your strengths and weaknesses as well as those of your opponent to achieve victory".³² It requires not only understanding the enemy's military capabilities but also their political, economic and social vulnerabilities in the context of hybrid warfare.

²² CISA 2023: 4.

²³ Home Office 2024.

²⁴ SUN Tzu 2012: 17.

²⁵ MILEVSKI 2014: 79.

²⁶ SUN Tzu 2012: 61–62.

²⁷ RID 2020: 11.

²⁸ SUN Tzu 2012: 11.

²⁹ SUN Tzu 2012: 11.

³⁰ HOFFMAN 2007: 15.

³¹ SUN Tzu 2012: 21.

³² DENSMAR-SUREN 2024: 3.

By understanding the underlying principles of Sun Tzu's teachings, military strategists can gain a deeper appreciation for the enduring relevance of deception and adaptability in the face of modern hybrid threats. The focus on intelligence gathering,³³ understanding the adversary's intentions, and adapting one's strategy accordingly are all crucial elements for success in the complex environment of hybrid warfare.

While Sun Tzu's *Art of War* does not provide a specific blueprint for countering hybrid threats, it offers a valuable framework for thinking strategically about conflict and for developing effective strategies to achieve one's objectives in a complex and uncertain world. His wisdom remains remarkably relevant, even centuries after it was first written.

Emperor Maurice and the Byzantine approach to multifaceted warfare

Maurice (582–602) was an Emperor of Byzantium who successfully concluded a war with the Persians and negotiated a treaty in which the Persians yielded most of their Armenian conquests.³⁴ This victory was not solely the result of military prowess, but also of careful diplomacy, economic manoeuvring, and skilful exploitation of internal divisions within the Persian Empire – all elements that align with a hybrid approach.

One of the key aspects of the *Strategikon* that is relevant to hybrid warfare is its focus on unconventional tactics and operations. Maurice recognised the importance of using deception, ambushes and raids to disrupt enemy operations and exploit their weaknesses in book four *Ambush*.³⁵ He also emphasised the need to adapt to different terrains and enemy tactics, highlighting the importance of flexibility and innovation in warfare.

The Byzantine army, as described in the *Strategikon*, was not a monolithic force, but rather a collection of specialised units designed to operate in diverse environments and against different types of enemies.³⁶ In his command to his generals, Maurice mentioned that they should plan to gain victory "not only by arms but also through their food and drink"³⁷ suggesting unconventional ways of fighting and thinking outside the box.

This implies that all available means should be considered, reflecting the comprehensive approach required in hybrid warfare. Fighting takes on a new dimension: soldiers no longer face each other on the battlefield, but food and drink become a threat to them. This can be interpreted to mean that all available means can be used to achieve victory, and if this were advice, today's army commanders would say the same thing. There is no restriction on the means to be used. This perspective aligns with the concept of total war where all aspects of a society's resources are mobilised

³³ SUN TZU 2012: 91.

³⁴ MAURICE 1984: xi.

³⁵ MAURICE 1984: 52.

³⁶ HALDON 1999: 114.

³⁷ MAURICE 1984: 91–92.

for the war effort.³⁸ However, Maurice's focus remained primarily on military strategy and tactics.

These principles are particularly relevant in the context of hybrid warfare, which often involves the use of irregular forces, cyberattacks and information operations to achieve strategic objectives.³⁹ Modern examples of this include the annexation of Crimea in 2014, which was achieved through the use of "deniable" special operations personnel, local armed groups, economic influence, the dissemination of misleading information, and the manipulation of existing socio-political divisions within Ukraine.⁴⁰ These tactics, which employ modern technologies, echo Maurice's emphasis that all available means must be used to weaken the enemy and achieve strategic goals.

Furthermore, Maurice's attention to logistics and supply is also crucial in understanding hybrid warfare. He recognised that a well-supplied army is essential for sustained operations and that disrupting the enemy's supply lines can be a decisive factor in warfare.⁴¹ The Byzantine army maintained an impressive logistical system that allowed it to project power across vast distances, a feat that required careful planning, efficient resource management and a secure network of supply routes.⁴² This principle is particularly relevant in modern hybrid conflicts, where economic coercion and "information flows" can be used to disrupt the enemy's economy and weaken their ability to "compel policy change, and deter unwanted actions [waging war]".⁴³ Sanctions, trade embargoes and cyberattacks targeting power grids and communication networks can have a devastating impact on a nation's ability to function, both economically and militarily.

By examining Maurice's *Strategikon*, military strategists can gain a deeper appreciation for the enduring relevance of multifaceted warfare and the importance of adapting to the complexities of modern hybrid threats. The *Strategikon* offers a valuable reminder that successful military strategy requires not only tactical skill and technological prowess but also a deep understanding of logistics, diplomacy and the political landscape.⁴⁴

While the specific tactics and technologies described in the *Strategikon* may be outdated, the underlying principles of adaptability, resourcefulness and the integration of different instruments of power remain highly relevant to the challenges of 21st-century conflict. His insights continue to provide a valuable framework for understanding and responding to the complexities of hybrid warfare.

Unlike Sun Tzu's more philosophical approach, the *Strategikon* provides practical guidance on a wide range of military matters, including organisation, logistics, tactics and strategy, reflecting the complex challenges faced by the Byzantine Empire in defending its vast and diverse territories. Maurice's emphasis on adaptability, resourcefulness and the integration of different military arms aligns closely with the core tenets of hybrid warfare. The *Strategikon* offers a remarkably detailed account of

³⁸ IMLAY 2008: 47.

³⁹ BALL 2023.

⁴⁰ BILAL 2021.

⁴¹ MAURICE 1984: 117.

⁴² HALDON 1999: 170–171.

⁴³ FARRELL-NEWMAN 2019: 45.

⁴⁴ PRICE 2005: 31–32.

how to manage a complex military force, secure its supply lines and adapt to a wide range of enemy tactics and environmental conditions.

The Quran and strategic and ethical guidance in warfare

The Quran, as the central religious text of Islam, is not a military manual in the traditional sense. However, it contains verses and narratives that have been interpreted to provide ethical and strategic guidance on the conduct of war.⁴⁵ These interpretations, while diverse and sometimes contested, offer valuable insights into the Islamic perspective on the use of force, the importance of justice and proportionality, and the role of faith and morality in warfare.

It is vital to know that "no verses in the Quran encourage or permit violence against innocent people, regardless of faith, and no verses encourage or permit war against other nations or states that are not attacking the Islamic *ummah*".⁴⁶ As an aspect of struggles that Islam passed through war and fighting became an evitable part of it. Due to this fact, there are some parts related to war in Quran. Examining these teachings from the perspective of classical military theory can illuminate their potential relevance to understanding hybrid warfare. The first and most important thing to emphasise is that, according to the Quran, self-defence based on defending "freedom to worship, dignity, honor, lives, and property" is legitimate.⁴⁷

Much of the discussion in the Western world centres around the concept of *jihad*, a word often associated with terrorism and violence. However, it is crucial to understand the diverse meanings and interpretations of this term within Islamic thought. Ghazi 2008 describes *jihad* as having several stages, with *jihad bi'l-saif* (jihad with the sword) being the last resort. "Jihad is a struggle and endeavor to achieve an object."⁴⁸ In his analysis, drawing from the Prophet Mohammed and the Quran, the ultimate aim of *jihad* is not the physical elimination of opponents but to bring peace to everyone.⁴⁹ This highlights the complex relationship between the use of force and the pursuit of peace within Islamic thought.

It is important to consider the perspective presented by General S. K. Malik (1992) in *The Quranic Concept of War*. Malik examines the Quranic perspective of war from a military standpoint, viewing it as a holy war. In his work, he uses several of the Prophet Mohammad's battles as case studies on how to conduct war. Malik draws on verses of the Quran such as Surah Al-Baqarah (216) "Fighting has been made obligatory upon you »believers«, though you dislike it. Perhaps you dislike something good for you and like something bad for you. Allah knows and you do not know."⁵⁰ He presents these verses without always referring to the explanations of Quranic experts.

Interestingly, Malik (1992) suggests that:

⁴⁵ ESPOSITO 2015: 1068–1069.

⁴⁶ HAYWARD 2010: 58.

⁴⁷ SALIFU 2017.

⁴⁸ GHAZI 2008: 74.

⁴⁹ GHAZI 2008: 80.

⁵⁰ *Quran* s. a.

"In war, our main objective is the opponent's heart or soul, our main weapon of offence against this objective is the strength of our souls, and to launch such an attack, we have to keep terror away from our hearts. [...] Terror struck into the hearts of the enemies is not only a means, it is the end itself. Once a condition of terror into the opponent's heart is obtained, hardly anything is left to be achieved. It is the point where the means and the end meet and merge. Terror is not a means of imposing a decision on the enemy; it is the decision we wish to impose on him."⁵¹

This emphasis on targeting the enemy's "heart or soul" can be interpreted as a form of psychological warfare, aiming to undermine their will to fight and create a condition of submission. Malik's interpretation highlights the potential for using fear and intimidation as tools of war, a strategy that has been employed throughout history and continues to be relevant in contemporary conflicts.

The most relevant thing to the contemporary issue of terror was shown as a strategy for war rooted in Islam. He suggests both "psychological" and "physical" means. Terror, as a means of achieving the attacker's goals, is by its very nature part of hybrid warfare. However, it is crucial to recognise that this perspective is just one interpretation of the Quranic teachings on war and peace, and it is not universally accepted within the Islamic world.

Many Islamic scholars emphasise the importance of adhering to ethical guidelines and avoiding the targeting of civilians, even in times of conflict. Ultimately, the Quran offers a complex and nuanced perspective on warfare, emphasising both the necessity of defending justice and the importance of ethical constraints.

Vegetius Renatus and the enduring importance of military professionalism

Vegetius Renatus, a late Roman military writer, offers a contrasting perspective rooted in practical military administration. Written during the decline of the Roman Empire, Vegetius's *De Re Militari* (c. 390 AD) is not as great a work of strategic theory as Sun Tzu's, but Vegetius's emphasis on discipline, training, logistics and adaptation to the enemy provides valuable insights applicable to the challenges of hybrid warfare. Vegetius specifically in book one stressed the importance of a well-trained and disciplined army. He believed that soldiers should be thoroughly drilled in the use of weapons, formations and tactics, and that they should be constantly prepared for combat.⁵²

This emphasis on military professionalism, while seemingly straightforward, has significant implications for understanding hybrid warfare. In hybrid conflicts, where the lines between conventional and unconventional warfare are blurred, and where adversaries often employ irregular forces and asymmetric tactics, a well-trained and disciplined army is essential for maintaining effectiveness and avoiding costly mistakes. A force that

⁵¹ MALIK 1992: 59.

⁵² VEGETIUS 1996: 2–3.

is well-trained in basic military skills is more likely to adapt effectively to new and unexpected challenges, and to maintain its cohesion and morale under pressure.

Moreover, Vegetius recognised the importance of adapting to the enemy's strengths and weaknesses. He argued that Roman commanders should carefully study their opponents' tactics and strategies and develop appropriate countermeasures. This emphasis on adaptability is particularly relevant to hybrid warfare, which is characterised by its fluidity and constant evolution. Hybrid actors often combine conventional and unconventional tactics, using whatever means are available to achieve their objectives.

Vegetius's emphasis, therefore, highlights the need for military forces to maintain high levels of training, adaptability and logistical preparedness. He famously stated: "He who desires peace, let him prepare for war."⁵³ This principle underscores the necessity of readiness, ensuring that armies are not only well-trained but also capable of responding to emerging threats in an unpredictable security environment.

Furthermore, Vegetius stressed the logistical foundation of military success. He recognised that supply chains, equipment maintenance and the ability to sustain forces in the field were just as crucial as battlefield tactics. In hybrid warfare, where state and non-state actors exploit logistical vulnerabilities – such as targeting supply lines or using irregular forces to disrupt military infrastructure – Vegetius's insights remain pertinent. Ensuring a reliable logistical framework is vital to maintaining operational effectiveness and countering asymmetric threats.

Additionally, Vegetius's warnings about military decline resonate in the context of modern hybrid conflicts. He observed that Rome's military failures were often due to a lack of discipline, training and strategic foresight. Today, military forces facing hybrid threats must avoid similar pitfalls, ensuring they do not become complacent in the face of evolving adversaries who continuously adapt and exploit weaknesses.

Ultimately, while Vegetius was writing for the late Roman world, his principles remain relevant for contemporary military strategy. His focus on discipline, adaptability and logistical preparedness serves as a foundational framework for countering hybrid threats, reinforcing the idea that military professionalism remains a decisive factor in modern warfare.

Hybrid warfare in practice: Echoes of the past in contemporary conflicts

Having explored the strategic insights of Sun Tzu, Emperor Maurice, the Quran and Vegetius, it is now time to examine how these classical theories manifest in contemporary conflicts characterised as hybrid warfare. As Yaron Ezrahi said in 2006: "This war will be studied in all military academies in the world as a new kind of war which requires new and unprecedented definitions of how to fight it and how to win it."⁵⁴ However, a closer examination reveals that many of the tactics and strategies

⁵³ VEGETIUS 1996: 63.

⁵⁴ MOORE 2006.

employed in these conflicts have deep historical roots, aligning with the principles articulated by our chosen classical theorists. Two prominent examples that illustrate this point are Hezbollah's operations against Israel and Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Hezbollah's hybrid approach: A modern application of ancient wisdom

Hezbollah's operations against Israel provide a compelling example of a non-state actor effectively employing hybrid warfare tactics. According to Ben-Ari (2006), Hezbollah leveraged the technologies and expertise provided by Syria and Iran to establish a military infrastructure that successfully anticipated and countered many of Israel's capabilities. This included neutralising Israeli technological superiority through clever bunker construction and camouflage, as well as acquiring advanced military capabilities such as night vision equipment, unmanned aerial vehicles and enhanced anti-tank rockets.⁵⁵

Hezbollah's success in this conflict can be attributed, in part, to its ability to effectively study the IDF's weaknesses and prepare accordingly, a strategy that aligns directly with Sun Tzu's emphasis on knowing the enemy.⁵⁶ As Hoffman (2007) notes, Hezbollah's decentralised tactics combined with the anti-armour missile system surprised the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).⁵⁷

Moreover, Hezbollah's use of media to shape public perception and "the exploitation of mass media"⁵⁸ reflects Sun Tzu's principles of deception and psychological manipulation, as well as the Quran's emphasis on the power of belief and resilience in the face of adversity, demonstrating the enduring relevance of classical wisdom in understanding modern hybrid conflicts.

Russia's annexation of Crimea: A calculated application of hybrid tactics

The annexation of Crimea by Russia provides another compelling example of hybrid warfare in practice. As Erol and Oğuz noted, Russia employed a range of tactics, including disinformation campaigns, the use of proxy forces and economic pressure, to achieve its objectives. The terror tactics used by Russia included threats and killings by supporters against Ukrainian supporters,⁵⁹ which provided the means to influence and control the population, and achieve their objectives without direct military confrontation.

⁵⁵ BEN-ARI 2006.

⁵⁶ SUN TZU 2012: 21.

⁵⁷ HOFFMAN 2007: 37.

⁵⁸ HOFFMAN 2007: 51.

⁵⁹ EROL-OĞUZ 2015: 269–271.

This approach mirrors Sun Tzu's emphasis on "defeat the enemy without coming to battle, take his cities without a siege",⁶⁰ and Malik's (1992) argument of "our main objective is the opponent's heart or soul",⁶¹ as well as the Quran's emphasis on the permissibility of self-defence, while also recognising the complexities surrounding the use of force.⁶²

Russia's ability to learn and adapt from past conflicts, dog-watching the U.S., NATO and allies, reflects Vegetius's emphasis on studying the enemy and adapting one's tactics accordingly.⁶³ Furthermore, the emphasis on logistics, although not directly visible, showcases how a well-prepared army is essential for dominance on which Vegetius dedicated his work. However, it is important to acknowledge some limitations in this analysis.

While these classical theories offer valuable insights into the underlying principles of hybrid warfare, they cannot fully account for the specific technological and political contexts of modern conflicts. Additionally, there are alternative explanations for Russia's success in Crimea, including the political instability in Ukraine at the time and the strong support for Russian annexation among a segment of the Crimean population.⁶⁴

Despite the limitations of applying old theories to new conflicts, examining these situations from the perspective of classical military strategy still gives us key insights into today's hybrid warfare. By understanding these historical frameworks, strategists and policymakers can develop more effective approaches to both preventing and countering hybrid threats, thus proving the enduring value of classical military thought in the 21st century.

Conclusion

The analysis of classical military theories and their application to contemporary conflicts provides clear answers to the research questions posed in the introduction. First, regarding whether hybrid warfare is a historical or contemporary phenomenon, this study demonstrates that hybrid warfare has deep historical roots. The principles articulated by Sun Tzu, Emperor Maurice, the Quran and Vegetius – such as deception, adaptability, psychological manipulation and the integration of diverse tactics – mirror the core characteristics of modern hybrid warfare. These classical insights, developed across different eras and cultures, confirm that hybrid warfare is not a novel invention but a recurring feature of conflict throughout history.

Second, addressing whether historical hybrid strategies have endured into the modern era, the case studies of Hezbollah's operations against Israel and Russia's annexation of Crimea illustrate the continued relevance of classical principles. Hezbollah's use of deception, media manipulation and asymmetric tactics reflects

⁶⁰ SUN TZU 2012: 19.

⁶¹ MALIK 1992: 59.

⁶² SALIFU 2017.

⁶³ VEGETIUS 1996: 92.

⁶⁴ CHARRON 2016: 252.

Sun Tzu's emphasis on psychological warfare and adaptability, as well as the Quran's focus on resilience. Similarly, Russia's multifaceted approach in Crimea, combining disinformation, proxy forces and economic pressure, echoes Sun Tzu's strategy of winning without battle, Vegetius's focus on logistical preparedness and Maurice's integration of diverse instruments of power. These examples confirm that historical hybrid solutions have not only endured but remain highly effective in addressing the complexities of 21st-century conflicts.

By bridging classical military thought with modern practice, this study underscores the enduring value of historical strategic insights. These lessons provide a robust framework for understanding hybrid warfare and highlight the necessity of blending traditional concepts with innovative tactics to navigate the multifaceted challenges of contemporary and future conflicts.

References

- BALL, Joshua (2023): *The Changing Face of Conflict: What Is Hybrid Warfare?* Global Security Review. Online: <https://globalsecurityreview.com/hybrid-and-non-linear-warfare-systematically-erases-the-divide-between-war-peace/>
- BEN-ARI, Guy (2006): Technological Surprise and Technological Failure in the Current Lebanon Crisis. *Center for Strategic and International Studies, Commentary*, 25 July 2006. Online: https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/060725_benari_commentary.pdf
- BILAL, Arsalan (2021): Hybrid Warfare – New Threats, Complexity, and 'Trust' as the Antidote. *NATO Review*, 30 November 2021. Online: <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2021/11/30/hybrid-warfare-new-threats-complexity-and-trust-as-the-antidote/index.html>
- BODA, Mihály (2024): Hybrid War: Theory and Ethics. *AARMS*, 23(1), 5–17. Online: <https://doi.org/10.32565/aarms.2024.1.1>
- CALISKAN, Murat (2019): Hybrid Warfare through the Lens of Strategic Theory. *Defense and Security Analysis*, 35(1), 40–58. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2019.1565364>
- CHARRON, Austin (2016): Whose Is Crimea? Contested Sovereignty and Regional Identity. *Region*, 5(2), 225–256. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24896628>
- CISA (2023): *Phishing Guidance: Stopping the Attack Cycle at Phase One*. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. Online: <https://media.defense.gov/2023/Oct/18/2003322402/-1/-1/0/CSI-PHISHING-GUIDANCE.PDF>
- CLARKE, Richard A. – KNAKE, Robert K. (2010): *Cyber War. The Next Threat to National Security and What to Do About It*. New York: Harper Collins.
- DENSMAN, Oyuntsetseg – SUREN, Baasankhuu (2024): Understanding Certain Aspects of Military Strategy. *International Journal of Innovative Technologies in Social Science*, 4(44). Online: [https://doi.org/10.31435/ijits.4\(44\).2024.3049](https://doi.org/10.31435/ijits.4(44).2024.3049)
- EROL, Mehmet S. – OĞUZ, Şafak (2015): Hybrid Warfare Studies and Russia's Example in Crimea. *Akademik Bakış*, 9(17), 261–277. Online: <https://doi.org/10.19060/gab.22813>

- ESPOSITO, John L. (2015): Islam and Political Violence. *Religions*, 6(3), 1067–1081. Online: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel6031067>
- FARRELL, Henry – NEWMAN, Abraham L. (2019): Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion. *International Security*, 44(1), 42–79. Online: https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00351
- FOREST, James J. (2021): Political Warfare and Propaganda an Introduction. *Journal of Advanced Military Studies*, 12(1), 13–33. Online: <https://doi.org/10.21140/mcu.20211201001>
- GHAZI, Mahmood A. (2008): The Law of War and Concept of Jihad in Islam. *Policy Perspectives*, 5(1), 69–86. Online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42909187>
- GRAY, Colin S. (2007): Irregular Warfare. One Nature, Many Characters. *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 1(2), 35–57.
- HALDON, John (1999): *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565–1204*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- HANDEL, Michael I. (2001): *Masters of War. Classical Strategic Thought*. London: Frank Cass.
- HAYWARD, Joel (2010): The Qur'an and War: Observations on Islamic Just War. *Air Power Review*, 13(3), 41–63. Online: <https://raf.mod.uk/what-we-do/centre-for-air-and-space-power-studies/aspr/apr-vol13-iss3-3-pdf/>
- HOFFMAN, Frank G. (2007): *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*. Arlington: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies. Online: https://www.potomac institute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac_hybridwar_0108.pdf
- Home Office (2024): Cyber Security Breaches Survey 2024. *Department for Science, Innovation and Technology*, 9 April 2024. Online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/cyber-security-breaches-survey-2024/cyber-security-breaches-survey-2024>
- IMLAY, Talbot (2008): Preparing for Total War: The "Conseil Supérieur de la Défense Nationale" and France's Industrial and Economic Preparations for War after 1918. *War in History*, 15(1), 43–71. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344507083993>
- MALIK, S. K. (1992): *The Quranic Concept of War*. Delhi: Adam Publishers and Distributors. Online: <https://dn790005.ca.archive.org/0/items/thequranicconceptofwar-sk-malik/The%20Quranic%20Concept%20of%20War%20-%20SK%20Malik.pdf>
- MAURICE (1984): *Maurice's Strategikon. Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. Translated by George T. Dennis.
- MELLO, Patrick A. (2010): In Search of New Wars: The Debate about a Transformation of War. *European Journal of International Relations*, 16(2), 297–309. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066109350053>
- MILEVSKI, Lukas (2014): Asymmetry Is Strategy, Strategy Is Asymmetry. *Joint Force Quarterly*, 75, 77–83. Online: <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/577565/asymmetry-is-strategy-strategy-is-asymmetry/>
- MOORE, Molly (2006): Israelis Confront 'New Kind of War'. *The Washington Post*, 9 August 2006. Online: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2006/08/09/israelis-confront-new-kind-of-war-span-classbankheadhigh-tech-tactics-fail-to-halt-rocket-firespan/af1e6e04-7db7-4c42-b097-1ef529536059/>

- MULLINS, Sam (2024): *The Role of Non-State Actors as Proxies in Irregular Warfare and Malign State Influence*. Arlington: Irregular Warfare Center. Online: https://irregularwarfarecenter.org/publications/research-studies/the-role-of-non-state-actors-as-proxies-in-irregular-warfare-and-malign-state-influence/#_ednref10
- MUMFORD, Andrew (2013): Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict. *The RUSI Journal*, 158(2), 40–46. Online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2013.787733>
- MUMFORD, Andrew (2020): Ambiguity in Hybrid Warfare. *Hybrid CoE Strategic Analysis*, (24). Online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2013.787733>
- PRICE, Jason T. (2005): *An Analysis of the Strategy and Tactics of Alexios I Komnenos*. Master Thesis, Texas Tech University. Online: <https://deremilitari.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/pricej.pdf>
- Quran (s. a.). Online: <https://quran.com/en/al-baqarah/190>
- RID, Thomas (2020): *Active Measures. The Secret History of Disinformation and Political Warfare*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- SALIFU, Shamsudeen (2017): Warfare and War Ethics: An Islamic Perspective. *The Strategy Bridge*, 23 June 2017. Online: <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2017/6/23/warfare-and-war-ethics-an-islamic-perspective>
- SUN TZU (2012): *The Art of War*. New York: Chartwell Books. Translated by James Trapp.
- VEGETIUS (1996): *Vegetius: Epitome of Military Science*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. Translated by N. P. Milner.
- WITHER, James K. (2020): Defining Hybrid Warfare. *Per Concordiam*, 10(1), 7–9. Online: https://perconcordiam.com/perCon_V10N1_ENG.pdf