



# HYBRID WARFARE. BORDERS AND TERRORISM

A medic tends to a casualty of the 2015 Paris attacks

Lina Kolesnikova reports on the changing face of warfare

**D**uring the last two years, hybrid warfare and hybrid war have become quite fashionable topics among both civilian and military leaders. When we talk about inter-state war with the use of conventional forces, we mean conventional warfare. After 9/11, however, everything changed and we started to use the term 'asymmetric warfare' and generally assume international terrorist groups were the enemy. Hybrid

warfare falls somewhere in the middle. It is a combination of conventional, asymmetric and various irregular means, including persistent manipulation of political and ideological conflict, and can also include: a combination of special operations and conventional military forces; high employment of intelligence agents; activation of political provocateurs or alternative non-formal 'leaders'; active use of mass media and/or alternative media (social

media); economic intimidation and pressure; cyber attacks and the use of paramilitary, terrorists and criminal elements. Each hybrid war is unique, making it difficult to formulate any precise definition. This is a reason why the term isn't always used correctly.

The current state of the world affairs suggests that the future operational environment will be characterised by hybrid threats: combinations of regular, irregular, armed and non-armed, as well as terrorist and criminal groups that decentralise and syndicate against state actors and that possess capabilities previously monopolised by nation states (ie multi-channel projection and enforcement of their 'truth'). These hybrid threats create a more competitive security environment, and it is for these threats that we must be adequately prepared.

The European security environment has begun another major shift. For many years, security as distinct from defence was not a widely held concern. Today it is. Security has become the over-arching term for a lengthening list of threats, and it is now on most people's minds.

## EUROPE UNDER ATTACK

Europe now faces multiple, simultaneous security challenges from traditional state actors and transregional networks of sub-state groups – all taking advantage of rapid technological change. The much greater volatility of security threats around the world is of a very different nature. Security is now subject to and involves a new and wider set of actors and requires long-term strategies reaching into many different areas of decision making, which is very different from how it used to be just couple of decades ago. Future conflicts will become more rapid, last longer and take place on a much more technically challenging battlefield. Complexity and rapid change characterise today's strategic environment, driven by globalisation, the diffusion of technology and demographic shifts.

When applied to conflicts, hybrid warfare serves to increase ambiguity, complicate decision making and slow down coordination for effective responses. Europe has got all of it, further complicated by its own complexity, historical experiences and prejudices.

Given its geographic position as the hub between Europe, Africa, and Asia, the Mediterranean is particularly sensitive to the world's highest numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons since World War II. The paradoxical fact is that the Mediterranean is the most dangerous border among countries that are technically not at war with each other. The existence of this level of mass migration without the occurrence of conventionally understood state versus state warfare presents significant challenges for the state-led response mechanisms. Ongoing hybrid conflicts along the Mediterranean's shores and in its neighbouring regions provide a contextual framework for understanding the record-breaking immigration to Europe. Irregular migration in the Mediterranean is a particularly complex phenomenon as it crosses through and involves the continents of Europe, Africa and Asia.

The former president of Malta and founding member of the Barcelona Process, Professor Guido de Marco, may have said it best when he proposed that: "There can be no security in Europe unless there is

security in the Mediterranean and there can be no security in the Mediterranean unless there is security in Europe".

Tensions in Europe are high as the immigration influx is occurring at a time when Europeans are particularly concerned with terrorism, foreign fighter transit and the fragile state of the Euro zone.

And now comes the threat. How can IS take advantage of the refugee crisis? All of these migratory waves have become a tool for terrorists in a hybrid war. Hybrid war aims to destabilise the West and divide Europe. We have to remember that IS is not all about territory – it is more about ideology. Despite potentially beating IS in Iraq and maybe Syria, it

## SECURITY HAS BECOME THE OVER-ARCHING TERM FOR A LENGTHENING LIST OF THREATS

still exists in Africa and Europe. We may witness the creation of new more radical ideology on the basis of IS. Let's not forget that the average 'life expectancy' of a terrorist group is about 50-60 years. It might be even more – as IRA history tells us.

There are a variety of different ways that ISIS can use the situation to threaten Europe. Terrorists might come to Europe disguised as refugees. We already have proof that IS terrorists came as refugees to carry out attacks in Europe (the attacks carried out in Paris in 2015, for example).

## CUBS OF THE CALIPHATE

Minors can be used by terrorists as potential weapons as well. IS, Taliban, Boko Haram and Palestinian militant groups are notorious for using children. The exploitation of children by terrorist groups is not new, but these groups are using them in increasingly disturbing ways. The move is strategic as it is shocking. It provides heightened media attention and allows terrorist groups to groom more loyal members among adults. IS has launched a series of child suicide bombers ("Cubs of the caliphate") on civilian targets in Iraq, Syria and Turkey. It has trained over 1,000 children to become suicide bombers, according to the Iraqi human rights commission. Minors, who came with refugees' flow with the purpose of involvement in terrorist activities, can be used also to help local cells. Trained teenagers can 'sleep' for some time, and then after growing up, become local trainers and distribution channels.

Radicalised family groups are equally as effective as a strategy as well. In Berlin, an Algerian couple suspected of planning a terrorist attack was arrested on suspicion of belonging to IS. They entered Germany in 2015, having applied for asylum as Syrian refugees.

Terrorists can start the propaganda work and create sleeping cells in ghettos. Salami-slicing tactics or grey-zone warfare coupling with radicalisation, can effectively lead to the creation of zones of social unrest. A 'grey zone', according to IS, is a place where Muslims have rejected an "us-versus-them" world of belief and unbelief that puts the caliphate in

the right and the “crusader coalition” in the wrong. The grey zone, for Daesh, is a state of hypocrisy, existing not only in the West, but also in the Arab world. From the perspective of IS, the Muslims that live in predominantly Christian realms have to make a choice: they can drop everything, travel to Raqqa and take up arms on behalf of IS or they can stay in the enemy camp. ISIS intends its bombings to make it more and more difficult for Muslims to choose the second option, as they’ll increasingly stay in increasingly inhospitable “crusader countries”. ISIS’ goal in the West is to destroy the grey zone, and make it simply impossible to be a Muslim in the West.

### SHIFT TO THE RIGHT

The actions of terrorist groups results in the growth of far-right ideology, weakening the ability to make decisions and to self-defend, and this is precisely what is happening in many European countries. They play on the very real fears of citizens that feel at risk. They raise the topics that concern most people. It is the resentment of politicians towards these topics combined with a clear lack of protective action that allows ISIS and others to increase their impact.

As the third law of Newton states, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

When advancing our cause, we need to clearly understand that adversaries will rather tend to exploit our weaknesses and attempt to turn or to misuse our strengths against us, than try to overcome our strengths in a frontal assault.

The lines of warfare in the 21st century are becoming increasingly blurred. At least in the immediate future, European conventional military superiority will force terrorist groups to develop alternate means to achieve their goals. Potential enemies will blend various approaches of war to suit

## EUROPE’S MIGRATORY WAVES HAVE BECOME A TOOL FOR TERRORISTS IN THE HYBRID WAR

their strategic culture, historical legacy, geographic reality and economic means. Against such enemies, technological superiority is useful, but insufficient. One technological advance might be challenged by another not necessarily symmetrical technological or even non-technological tool. We need out-of-the-box multi-dimensional thinking to make us capable of withstanding the threat ●

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**Terrorist groups are increasingly using refugees as cover to sneak their own cells into Europe**

