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The eleventh in our series of expert comment and analysis, by General Sir Richard Barrons, Commander Joint Forces Command (2013-2016), now Co-Chairman of Universal Defence & Security Solutions, and GSF Advisory Board member. As always, the views expressed are those of the author and not of Global Strategy Forum unless otherwise stated.

Confrontation With The Gloves On: The Integrated Review And Hybrid Campaigning

Since at least 2010 the UK has wrestled with the challenge of what is variously labelled 'hybrid', 'grey space' or 'tolerance' warfare: how states confront each other in ways that stop short of armed conflict. This is not new of course, but it is an everyday feature of the contemporary strategic landscape that is blooming.

It will – or certainly should - form part of the bailiwick of the delayed Integrated Review as a core aspect of fixing our defence and security. We see how the UK and its interests are being targeted, we have struggled to deter and defeat this and we have not yet built a sustained response above the level of 'event management'. This will not do as we find our way in the more turbulent world to come.

The attractiveness of hybrid confrontation has obviously risen in the eyes of the UK's opponents. First, in a much more globalised world of heavily interconnected economies and long, monopolistic supply chains, the *risks and consequences* of war getting out of hand and the economic price that would accompany are huge. One of the by-products of the current pandemic may well be to unpick some supply chains, but the point still stands: no developed country is so isolated that it can make war without substantial challenges to its own daily life.

Second, the ideological fervour that underpinned the Second World War and the Cold War has evaporated, or at least substantially diminished. This does not mean that confrontation is over nor that war is impossible, it just means differences occur for more prosaic reasons on a different calculus. This aspect needs care: states certainly want to fight less and less often now, but in a harder world ahead the sparks of existential conflict will multiply, so states may still feel compelled to fight – and to fight unconstrained when they do. Mankind has not yet evolved so brilliantly that fighting is history: even if Europe has enjoyed a generation free from it much of the rest of the world has not and the future doesn't look easy.

The third factor reinforcing the prominence of hybrid conflict is that the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan exposed again the very high price of occupying territory where the invader's presence is widely resented and resisted. Russia, for example, cannot think that it could sustain a general invasion of NATO: even if a surprise attack was initially widely successful, it could cope with neither the subsequent full-scale mobilisation of the latent power of the Alliance nor the consequences of occupying territory where hundreds of millions of people opposed it. This is not the same, however, as Russia contemplating rapidly occupying discrete areas where the population may be cooperative or at least supine – the methods used in Crimea or East Ukraine illustrate the point. Again, the lean towards hybrid conflict does not presage the 'end of history' for armed conflict – it may supplant it in many cases and presage it in others.



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As the point of fighting is declining and the price of fighting rising, a whole new set of capabilities for confrontation have arisen in parallel on the back of the Digital Age. Some of this technology is also changing the character of military hard power, particularly the development of long-range precision conventional missiles to deny very large areas in defence and to inflict great damage on critical national infrastructure in attack.

But digital tech is also now in daily use in the soft power capabilities harnessed in hybrid confrontation: cyberattack on information, networks, infrastructure and resources, and the disruption at scale of public will through the manipulation of news and all forms of media, especially social media. It is this opportunity to blend traditional ways states compete, influence or confront another through politics, diplomacy, aid, sanctions and commerce etc with new and highly influential modern systems that makes the current state of the 'hybrid' art such a handful.

Most states are alive to the risk, they have seen opponents tinkering about in their election processes, commercial media content, government and commercial data, critical national infrastructure control systems, and – above all – in the manipulation of public sentiment via social media. Some of this activity is enduring, such as a standing espionage effort against government and industry and some of it has been much more episodic - but no less significant - such as the attempt to murder Skripal with nerve agent in Salisbury.

So far, much of this has been annoying rather than strategically damaging, but it is nonetheless disturbing and destabilising and holds the prospect of very real damage occurring in the future. It is also generally well understood that should fighting break out, then this hybrid confrontation doesn't stop in any way, it becomes a vital part of how war can be prosecuted against the enemy's public will. War today between developed states is more likely to be prosecuted by depleting the continuity of the opponent's daily national life than by seizing untenable territory or by defeating Armed Forces.

We are also quite clear that democracies struggle to be tactically effective in hybrid confrontation. This is a result of: the separation of powers in government; the

separation between public and private sectors; and above all because of adherence to the rule of law. Some of the UK's opponents operate monolithic national political systems and are much less constrained by the laws and values that we recognise, enabling them to assemble more centrally directed, broader spectrum and higher tempo hybrid activities. This should not be overstated, as the fundamental resilience of democracies is generally well established and the operational clunkiness of some opposing states is also a matter of record. Nonetheless, where an opponent of the UK has the means, the method, and the opportunity to inflict hybrid harm, it does appear to be quite readily taken up.

The UK's recent response has been framed by the Fusion Doctrine set out in March 2018. This captured the character of the risk very well and set out a basic framework by which it could be understood and tackled. A great deal of emphasis was placed on the role of Senior Responsible Officers, generally at three-star official level, who would lead the government's effort across all departments. This was a good conceptual start and was matched by some sharp form in competent event management. The coordinated expulsion of intelligence officers by many countries after Skripal was a marked success. The problem is not that the challenge is not well articulated, nor that occasions cannot be risen to, the problem is that the response has been too thinly and narrowly cast to be able to mount the campaigns of enduring, effective responses and initiatives that are needed against the global competition.

In the face of the more monolithic, directed hybrid challenges posed to the UK, our preference is still for light touch coordination across Whitehall, this is a collegiate, consensual approach to activities where Departments often determine what they will offer as well as how. Where closer, more-centralised control has been employed it is often only in response to an incident right in the public eye. These moments have been dominated by pressing very short-term imperatives (particularly media-related), and more enduring and strategic considerations have perhaps been under-represented in the balance of measures adopted. The risk is that the 'whole is less than the sum of its parts'. This matters less from the perspective of resource efficiency, rather



more that if it is not competitive against less constrained, more aggressive and richer opponents waging their own long-term campaigns, especially if sharp-edged, strategic differences are at stake.

We need to find the will and the way to advance from event management to enduring hybrid campaigning. An accumulation of the measures offered up by Departments and Agencies calibrated against their own views of their resources and priorities will have value, but this blobbing-up approach does not readily constitute a rigorous reconciliation of ends, ways and means. Doing better could include: the ability for SROs to establish and disseminate a single common understanding of the problem; SROs being required and resourced to articulate a single, common campaign plan – endorsed by the NSC - which directs the effects to be contributed by Departments over time (just the ‘what’, not the ‘how’); and SROs’ having the authority and the means to coordinate delivery, review progress and to hold delivery to account. SROs in turn would be accountable to the NSC via the NSA.

This is a tall order for Whitehall in its present form, especially as resources are issued direct to Departments, each of which has a keen-eyed Minister and PUS to account for them. SROs may see their loyalty stretched between their cross-Whitehall coordinating role and their Departmental leadership’s views (including of their future careers). The problem is exacerbated by the lack of a common grounding in how hybrid confrontation works and how to manage it (the military would call this doctrine. Substantial investment is needed in common education and training for officials (and ministers) so that there is at least a universal lexicon and conceptual framework to draw on.

The height of the order is made much greater still by the realisation that everything noted above has been about the coordination of the public sector. This is clearly very important; the combined power of the UK government should be globally influential. But the way the UK makes its way in the world is much more dependent upon the power of the country’s private sector: banking, insurance, industry, professional services, law, etc., and extraordinary

cultural influence exercised through literature, TV, film, theatre, art and sport – especially global phenomena such as Premier League football.

Some opponents have no difficulty in aligning by diktat across government, banking, law, energy and commerce, and they may interpret the UK’s inability to do this as inconsistency or weakness. For example, when travel sanctions are applied to a named individual it may not mean that the property, financial, and legal aspects of their related enterprises are also constrained. For as long as the UK juts its chin out in a confrontation with certain countries, and yet permits their elites to buy up Knightsbridge and educate their children in the UK, there is unhelpful dissonance at the heart of our hybrid campaigning. We might think it better to live with this, but it is worth a hard look.

The orchestration and integration of the public and private sector will advance better by informed coordination and cooperation, but there will probably be a requirement for legally enforceable restraints - particularly in support of sanctions or national resilience. The resilience dimension is especially important and reinforced by the pandemic: there is limited value in imposing hard-nosed influence on an opponent abroad if there are large open goals for retaliation at home.

Effective deterrence requires resilience as much as the ability to strike and so also effective hybrid campaigning requires the ability to take hits at home. Some of this is physical, such as the ability to manage the effects of disruptions to the flow of daily life through power cuts or supermarket distribution challenges, and most of this is about the mental and spiritual resilience of civil society. Citizens have an important part to play in understanding how the world works around them and in being prepared through information, education and some training to play their part on a bad day. This is an aspect of hybrid confrontation where a huge amount remains to be thought about and done.

The challenge is also not a national dilemma any more than military security is an entirely national issue. The collective security arrangements that we take for granted



through NATO are not replicated in hybrid organisation or process with our friends and allies. NATO deals only in military hard power, even if it understands the hybrid risk pretty well it does not control the levers of soft power and many allies do not want it to. The European Union has elected (so far) not to align either its small military or its considerable soft power with its economic strength, and post-Brexit will also need to strike a different arrangement for coordination with the UK.

In facing down the major hybrid challenges of our time, which will include shaping the character of most European states' relations with China, it is necessary to build coordination with partners in the hybrid arena. This cooperation will be across politics, diplomacy, economics, commerce, sanctions, messaging, cyber and much else, and protecting each nation's best interest means that this cooperation has to be better than a shapeless profusion of medium-sized forays against vastly bigger players. This is going to take a while to arrange, in fact it means reversing some of the current flow back towards the dominance of states over multilateralism, but the imperative to do better is clear.

To conclude, for the UK to exert the influence it must in competition, confrontation and conflict, it will need to align the combined potential of military hard power

(generally in a supporting role), public sector soft power, and private sector soft power. This is a central part of the modernisation and transformation of defence and security that the Integrated Review must tackle. In resolving to do better we will must resist thinking that the degree of choice we have is determined by our institutional preferences and habit.

We can rely on the will and cooperation of our friends and the forbearance of our opponents only so much and this is a competition that has already started and in which we are running whether we wanted to or not. The only choice we really have is where do we want to come in the race, and we can be certain that there will be few prizes just for effort.

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