

**Ofer Fridman, Vitaly Kabernik & James C. Pearce, eds. *Hybrid Conflicts and Information Warfare: New Labels, Old Politics*. Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2019. ISBN: 978-16-26-37751-6. Pp. 271. Hardback, \$85.00.**

*Hybrid Conflicts and Information Warfare* is an excellent collection of essays broadly focused on the rapidly growing role and impact of global media and new information technology (e.g., smart phones) and platforms (e.g., social media) as tools of warfare. The range of analyses includes chapters on hybridity in conflicts; contemporary information warfare, including Russia and Western perspectives; and how the Islamic State (IS) uses information warfare.

The overarching argument is that two events in 2014 – Russia’s aggression in Ukraine and the rise of IS in Iraq and Syria – marked a ‘turning point’ in global security, particularly as a result of, in the authors’ view, the use of new information tools to ‘influence the hearts and minds of targeted audiences’ in a manner that was significantly more effective than if Russia or IS had used only other tools. While the authors rightly recognize that information warfare itself isn’t new, they contend that the new technology simply makes it much easier to disseminate particular views and to a broader audience than traditional information warfare campaigns. Thus, in their view, the technological and information advances since the dawn of the twenty first century have highlighted the growing danger of non-kinetic or non-military means in modern warfare. In this regard, they emphasize three critical concerns: 1) the growing combined use—what the authors define as hybrid—of kinetic and non-kinetic tools, and just below the threshold of overt warfare, 2) the increased importance of information warfare tools to achieve political objectives, and 3) the rise of IS and how it can easily spread its ideology and influence using the new information tools at its disposal. Indeed, as we’ve seen in the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria, as well as IS’ operations across the Middle East and elsewhere, modern warfare increasingly entails a reliance on non-kinetic tools, even if supported by kinetic activities, and often in a manner that facilitates plausible deniability or elicits less than a conventional military response.

While all chapters offer important contributions to the discussion of modern warfare, a couple of them merit highlighting here. The chapter by Georgy Filimonov on color revolutions offers an important perspective on how Russia and the West differ sharply on the subject. Georgy describes how, from Russia’s viewpoint, these

revolutions –in Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Arab Spring states– are a form of Western-backed regime change using mostly non-kinetic tools to foment instability, followed by protest movements advocating for political change and international support for such change, and ultimately the ousting of the incumbent regime in favor of a more pro-Western regime. While most Western analyses of these revolutions tend to disagree and instead argue that they're grassroots in origin –'revolutions from below'– Georgy claims that such revolutions are seen in Russia as a new form of Western hybrid warfare. While one may disagree with this claim, Georgy's point shouldn't be completely discounted since this is how the Kremlin views these events. As such, Western scholars and practitioners need to consider Russia's perspective, whether or not they agree with it, in order to inform sound policy-making and engagement with Russia on issues that it deems critical to its security and which can impact Western security as well.

Vladimir Sotnikov's chapter on IS adeptly summarizes the organization's rise—including its origins, organizational structure, ideology, and military capabilities and tactics. He concludes that IS is a 'long-term, civilisational, and ideological threat' to the West given its ideology of anti-Americanism, strong following across the Islamic world, and vast information warfare and other capabilities. He claims that IS is more of a threat to the West than Russia or China. In order to respond to the threat posed by IS, he advocates a unity of Western and Russian efforts. While the West and Russia have had solid counterterrorism (CT) cooperation since 9/11 in particular, and this likely remains one of the few channels of active cooperation between the US and Russia, continued disagreements between Russia and the West over a number of issues –nuclear non-proliferation and Ukraine, for instance– likely means that such CT cooperation in the near-term may be limited.

In closing, the present collection of essays is highly recommended for policymakers and scholars. It offers an impressive array of viewpoints –including from American, European, and Russian scholars– on how information technology is exploited by state and non-state actors to achieve political ends and often without needing force in doing so. Additionally, the consensus of the authors, that information warfare isn't new, regardless of the label, hybrid or otherwise, attached to it, is refreshing. A number of other analyses over the past few years have tended to overly focus on finding a label to describe modern warfare while often overlooking the fact that the information warfare tool is not new. What is new, however, as rightly

highlighted throughout the book, is the array of information platforms available to state and non-state actors, and the general population, to influence and be influenced by. Nevertheless, on the issue of labels, significant debate exists in academic and policy circles surrounding the term hybrid warfare. The term is used so frequently to describe a plethora of actors, means, and contexts that it has lost its value as a moniker in describing modern conflict. The final chapter by James C. Pearce attempts to address some aspects of the debate by rightly arguing that, based on Clausewitz's infamous axiom that warfare is an extension of politics by other means, 'regardless of the modes and the characteristics,' and that 'no war or conflict is confined purely to one space, is fought solely by military means, or spans a period that can be defined explicitly by military actions' (p. 249). Nevertheless, a number of analyses beyond this volume fail to distinguish between the tools themselves—which are new—and why they're being used—to influence views toward a particular perspective or to sow discord, confusion, or doubt—which isn't new—and that war itself consists of many different means. As a result, this book would have benefitted from an assessment of the debate over labels.\*

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\* The author would like to note that the views expressed herein reflect his personal opinions and are entirely the author's own. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) or the United States Government. USAID is not responsible for the accuracy of any information offered herein.