

# The Blurring of Interstate Wars, Civil Wars, and Peace – “Hybrid war” as an expression of conceptual and political disorientation in the twenty-first century\*

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**Abstract:** The term “hybrid war” draws attention to the fact that traditional concepts of war no longer provide the guidance we need to tackle twenty-first-century challenges to peace and security. As the demarcations between “interstate war,” “civil war,” and “peace” have blurred, the conventional semantics of war are no longer useful. Can the term “hybrid war” help rectify our conceptual and political disorientation – or does it only indicate and even increase our disorientation? This paper examines the potential usefulness of the “hybrid war” semantics. It analyzes and historicizes the current disorientation and clarifies the problems and prospects of a reorientation on the new, shapeless security terrain.

**Keywords:** Hybrid war, interstate war, civil war, peace, Carl von Clausewitz

**Stichwörter:** Hybrider Krieg, Staatenkrieg, Bürgerkrieg, Frieden, Carl von Clausewitz

The term “hybrid war” draws attention to the fact that traditional concepts of war no longer provide the guidance we need to tackle twenty-first-century challenges to peace and security. As the demarcations between “interstate war,” “civil war,” and “peace” have blurred, the conventional semantics of war are no longer useful. However, whether the term “hybrid war” can help us get our bearings on the new, shapeless security terrain is not clear. Is this “just semantics”—or could the term “hybrid war” help rectify our conceptual and political disorientation?

I examine the potential usefulness of the “hybrid war” semantics in five steps. First, I use examples of public and political discourse regarding wars in the twenty-first-century to indicate how unfocused such discourse often is in the absence of a clear understanding of what contemporary war involves. Then, I argue that talk of “hybrid war” has done little to diminish our conceptual and political disorientation; instead, by invoking Carl von Clausewitz’s chameleon metaphor to illustrate the peculiarities of hybrid war, it has sometimes increased our disorientation. Third, I discuss challenges related to the admittedly ambiguous term “hybrid war” to elaborate on the disorientation that inspired its recent use and popularity. Fourth, I trace the re-emergence of these challenges to Europe’s historical experience with conventional wars, civil wars, and peace: Once our conventional understanding of war, based on European wars of the past three and a half centuries or so, has been eroded and undermined, history seems to lose its power to guide us. Finally, I describe “hybrid war” as a chimera instead of a chameleon to test how that could help us rethink peace and security policy in the twenty-first century. I suggest that twenty-first-century war be regarded as a “hybrid” chimera following the standard meaning—a creature that possesses hybrid elements and characteristics but is not specifically defined—to help us combat it both conceptually and practically.

## 1. Early twenty-first-century disorientation: What is “war”?

On the evening of 19 December 2016, Tunisian Anis Amri ploughed a stolen truck through the Christmas market at Berlin’s Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, killing twelve and wounding 48 visitors, some severely. The next morning people were talking about a “state of war.” Saarland’s Interior Minister and President of the German Interior Ministers’ Conference, Klaus Bouillon, told Saarland Broadcasting, “We must acknowledge that we are at war, although people who only ever want to see things positively don’t want to acknowledge that.” After his comments were heavily criticized, the Christian Democrat corrected his choice of words: “In the future I will no longer use the term ‘war’. It is terrorism.”<sup>1</sup> The proper terminology for a similar terrorist attack had likewise been sought in Nice six months earlier on 14 July 2016 after Tunisian Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel drove a refrigerator truck through the crowd gathered to watch Bastille Day fireworks on the Promenade des Anglais: 84 people died at the scene and more than 300 were wounded, some gravely. The day after that attack, which clearly inspired the one in Berlin, France’s Ambassador to Germany Philippe Etienne used martial terms that would be repeated by Klaus Bouillon. Standing on the Pariser Platz by Berlin’s Brandenburg Gate, he announced, “We will win this battle.”<sup>2</sup> One is prompted to ask: What “battle”? Where and how will it be fought? How can it be “won”?

Both the Saarland’s Interior Minister and the French ambassador chose martial rhetoric to demonstrate decisiveness in the face of the terrorist challenge. Was this appropriate? They probably did not give much thought to their choice of vocabulary and simply used language that had become current in the aftermath of Islamist attacks on the editorial office of the satirical magazine “Charlie Hebdo” and a kosher supermarket in Paris on 7 January 2015, when headlines in

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1 Saarländischer Rundfunk, 20 Dec. 2016 (author’s translation), at: [http://www.sr.de/sr/home/nachrichten/politik\\_wirtschaft/kriegszustand\\_bouillon\\_reaktionen100.html](http://www.sr.de/sr/home/nachrichten/politik_wirtschaft/kriegszustand_bouillon_reaktionen100.html).  
2 Berliner Zeitung, 15 July 2016 (author’s translation), at: <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/politik/anschlag-in-nizza-michael-mueller-hass-darf-nicht-unsere-antwort-auf-hass-sein-24401430>.

the conservative French newspaper “Le Figaro” announced that France was at war. Following the 13 November 2015 attack on the Bataclan concert hall and bars and restaurants in central Paris, as well as at the soccer match between the French and German national teams, French President François Hollande repeated, “France is at war.”<sup>3</sup> Some months later, on 22 March 2016, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls used his Socialist Party comrade’s terms when commenting on Brussels’ Maalbeek metro station and Zaventem Airport attacks: “We are at war.”<sup>4</sup> What kind of “war” is this? What “battles” can “we” fight or “win”?

The references to war, battles and victory over terrorism so common in contemporary political and public discourse hint at the deeper problem of general disorientation regarding the current complex challenges to peace and security. This disorientation not only concerns transnational terrorism, which is based on a strategy of avoiding decisive battles; it also concerns Russia’s destabilization of eastern Ukraine and annexation of Crimea in 2014 in defiance of international law. Many observers, including those from the OSCE, are unsure: Is this peace or is it war? With a latent risk where the threat of new terrorist acts, the general feeling of insecurity and the intensity of repeated violent outbreaks in eastern Ukraine preclude describing the opaque security situation there as “peaceful.” However, the standard antonym for peace, “war,” seems equally inappropriate to describe eastern Ukraine. The violence there does not exhibit any of the key characteristics that have come to be associated with “war” ever since the nationalization of collective violence in the Early Modern Era: decisive battles, clearly demarcated fronts, uniformed soldiers, and unequivocal victories.

If eastern Ukraine is not an interstate war but also not a situation of peace, could it be an example of a “civil war”? This term, which usually describes intrastate wars, also appears inappropriate for describing novel situations of the kind we are dealing with here. In cases of transnational terrorism and in conflicts like the one between Russia and Ukraine, it is not just a matter of countries and citizens fighting each other for supremacy. Along with civilians, many inter- and transnational actors are involved, as well as regular state security forces who sometimes operate conventionally and militarily but may also operate unconventionally and non-militarily. Since civil and political methods are employed in the guise of “peace” alongside robust military means, these conflicts cannot be described as either “interstate wars” or “civil wars”, nor can the usual differentiation between war and peace be applied.

How can we describe and understand such complex conflict constellations? As things stand, we seem to lack adequate terms. This is particularly problematic when we seek to get our

bearings regarding security policy and peacemaking tasks in relation to the conflict landscape of the twenty-first century. “Imagine that we’re at war but no one knows when, where or how it’s being fought.” This could be a description of the current confusion. Questions about how to appropriately react to twenty-first-century challenges will remain unanswered as long as we lack the proper terms, including answers to the questions of whether these challenges should be addressed by the police or by the armed forces, and what role conventional and unconventional strategies should play in their respective responses. The German Chancellor pointedly did not say whether the confrontation with jihadi terrorism should be understood and carried out as a “struggle” (German “*Kampf*”) or as a “war” (German “*Krieg*”). In her 28 July 2016 statement on the terrorist attacks on a train near Würzburg on 18 July and at a music festival near Ansbach a week later, both of which were attributed to the “Islamic State,” Angela Merkel said, “I believe that we are in a fight or, as far as I’m concerned, also in a war against IS.”<sup>5</sup> A “fight”? Or a “war”? Following the terrorist attack on the Christmas market at Berlin’s Kaiser Friedrich Wilhelm Memorial Church on 19 December 2016, the Chancellor refrained from characterizing the conflict and confessed that she was unsure about how to react to “this act”: “I have no simple answer.”<sup>6</sup> A fight, or a war? Neither? Both? What difference does it make, anyhow?

The German Chancellor’s indecisive language—which may well have reflected practical political concerns—expresses the widespread uncertainty about how to describe and overcome twenty-first-century challenges to peace and security. Lacking better alternatives, we repeatedly resort to martial terms although we are aware that they are inappropriate. Such terminology brings to mind images of decisive battles in European interstate wars like those evoked by the French ambassador: wars with clear outcomes that paved the return to peace for victors and vanquished, and created a landscape of battlefields and of triumphal arches and monuments to victorious heroes and the fallen in action in Europe’s capital cities. Brandenburg Gate, where Philippe Etienne called for decisiveness in the “battle” against terrorism in July 2016, dates from that era. The crowned female figure steering the quadriga atop the Brandenburg Gate can be viewed as the goddess of victory—or the goddess of peace. Monuments and statues that symbolize battles, victories, and peace seem anachronistic nowadays. They may even distract us from the new challenges to peace and security. The same can be said for traditional war terminology, which, being closely linked to Europe’s conventional interstate wars that featured decisive battles, obvious victories, and definitive peace agreements, threatens to blind us to the real nature of twenty-first-century violence. Could and should we use a new concept of war to guide us—the concept of “hybrid war”?

3 Le Figaro, 7 Jan. 2015 (author’s translation), at: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/societe/2015/01/07/31003-2015-0107ARTFIG00452-alexis-brezet-quand-la-guerre-est-la-il-faut-la-gagner.php>. “Discours du président de la République devant le Parlement réuni en Congrès” [The President’s speech to the two Parliamentary chambers], 16 Nov. 2015, at: <http://www.elysee.fr/declarations/article/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-devant-le-parlement-reuni-en-congres-3/>.

4 Le Figaro, 22 Mar. 2016 (author’s translation), at: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2016/03/22/97001-201603-22FILWWW00103-attentats-de-bruxelles-nous-sommes-en-guerre-dit-manuel-valls.php>.

5 Die Zeit, 28 Jul. 2016 (author’s translation), at: <http://www.zeit.de/news/2016-07/28/bundesregierung-merkel-praesentiert-neun-punkte-plan-fuer-mehr-sicherheit-28135804>.

6 Bundesregierung, 20 Dec. 2016 (author’s translation), at: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Artikel/2016/12/2016-12-19-weihnachtsmarkt-breitscheidplatz.html>.

## 2. A remedy for—or expression of—our disorientation? What is “hybrid” war?

Our search for terms to describe the new type of violence committed in this century has led us to “hybrid war”—among other recent innovations. The term’s coinage and spread can be understood as a reaction to the impression that conventional war terminology cannot capture the nature of recent violence. Even those who continue to employ traditional terms do so with reservations. When French President Hollande spoke of “war” on 16 November 2015, he emphasized that the war against jihadi terrorism was, of course, “another type of war against a new opponent”.<sup>7</sup> However, the French president did not specify what exactly constituted the “other” and “new” in this type of war. Could “hybrid war” serve to describe the otherness and novelty of wars in the twenty-first century—and help us understand them? If this is not the case, i.e. if the term “hybrid war” does not remedy our disorientation regarding peace and security in this century, should it, then, be regarded as a symptom of this disorientation—perhaps even one that makes the situation worse?

The term “hybrid war” seems particularly unlikely to help guide us when we consider a metaphor that has recently been used: that of a “chameleon.”<sup>8</sup> In his magnum opus, “On War,” published after his death in 1831, the Prussian general and military theorist Carl von Clausewitz famously described war in its seemingly constant metamorphosis by likening it to a chameleon. War, like the chameleon, “changes its nature in some degree in each particular case.”<sup>9</sup> Much as the chameleon changes color, so does war—depending on the contextual conditions, which dramatically changed during Clausewitz’s lifetime. Following the Napoleonic Wars and confronted by the violent repercussions of the French Revolution, the Prussian general contrasted the wars of his time with the “cabinet wars” of the era of Europe’s absolute monarchies. However, reviving Clausewitz’s chameleon to characterize “hybrid war” raises conceptual questions: Has war once again changed its color? If so, what color has it assumed? Does “hybrid” war have a new and different color? In particular, is it “new” and “different” in comparison with competing conceptual or strategic innovations such as “small-scale wars,” “new wars,” and “asymmetric wars”?<sup>10</sup>

These other conceptual proposals in recent war theory sometimes make “hybrid war” seem more like a synonym than a true conceptual alternative.<sup>11</sup> Yet only as the latter could “hybrid war” rightly claim to be a “different” and “new” contribution to help orient us in the “different” and “new” security environment of the twenty-first century. Arguably, the specificity of hybrid war is its amalgamation of a variety of previously clearly distinguishable colors of war, including those that war theory once used to demarcate the various types of war: the small and the big, the old and the new, the asymmetric and the symmetric. Such a mixture appears to be “hybrid” because blurring the internal differentiations of the war typologies mentioned here also blurs the “external borders” which had characterized war since it became nationalized in the Early Modern era, and which distinguished it from civil war, on the one hand, and from peace, on the other.<sup>12</sup>

If hybrid war blurs and mixes what were once easily distinguishable colors, it is not clear how far this “colorful” composite being that combines warlike and non-warlike “old” and “new” elements can be captured using the conventional terms of classical war theory. In this regard, Clausewitz’s metaphor should be viewed skeptically because it suggests that hybrid war simultaneously adopts many colors of very different types of war: interstate war, civil war, and even peace. A creature with so many different colors clearly overstretching the chameleon metaphor, just as hybrid war escapes classification attempts based on familiar conceptual and theoretical terms and guiding conventional political and practical strategies. If “hybrid war” is to significantly reduce our current disorientation about security and peace, we should take a closer look at the disorientation that inspired the semantics of “hybrid war” and made it possible in the first place.

## 3. The nature of our disorientation: “Hybrid war” as a manifold challenge

In February 2015, at the Munich Security Conference, Germany’s Minister of Defense Ursula von der Leyen described hybrid warfare as one of “the most urgent questions concerning future security policy.” According to her, “what is fundamentally new is the combination and the orchestration of this undeclared war which requires an overall assessment of the single pieces to reveal the aggressive nature of the scheme.” This new warfare

7 “Discours du président de la République devant le Parlement réuni en Congrès”, 16 Nov. 2015 (author’s translation), at: <http://www.elysee.fr/declarations/article/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-devant-le-parlement-reuni-en-congres-3/>.

8 Cf. Peter Mansoor, Introduction: Hybrid Warfare in History, in: Williamson Murray/Peter Mansoor (eds.), *Hybrid Warfare. Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*, Cambridge 2012: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-17, cf. p. 1. Herfried Münkler, *Hybride Kriege. Die Auflösung der binären Ordnung von Krieg und Peace und deren Folgen* [Hybrid Wars: The disintegration of the binary opposition of war and peace and the consequences], in: *Ethik und Militär* [Ethics and Military] 2/2015, pp. 1-4, cf. p. 1, at: <http://www.ethikundmilitaer.de/de/themenueberblick/20152-hybride-kriege/muenklier-hybride-kriege-die-aufloesung-der-binaeren-ordnung-von-krieg-und-peace-und-deren-folgen/>.

9 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*. Translated by Colonel J. J. Graham, from the 3<sup>rd</sup> German ed., London 1873 [1832-1834]: N. Trübner & Co., p. 13.

10 Cf. Christopher Daase, *Kleine Kriege – Große Wirkung. Wie unkonventionelle Kriegführung die internationale Politik verändert* [Small Wars – Big Impacts. How unconventional warfare is changing international politics], Baden-Baden 1999: Nomos; Herfried Münkler, *Die neuen Kriege* [The New Wars], Reinbek 2002: Rowohlt; Felix Wassermann, *Asymmetrische Kriege. Eine politiktheoretische Untersuchung zur Kriegführung im 21. Jahrhundert* [Asymmetric Wars. A political-theoretical analysis of warfare in the twenty-first century], Frankfurt am Main 2015: Campus.

11 Hybrid wars are seldom clearly distinguished from asymmetric wars. The latter appear to be subtypes of the former in Rob de Wijk’s chapter, *Hybrid Conflict and the Changing Nature of Actors*, in: Julian Lindley-French/Yves Boyer (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of War*, Oxford 2012: Oxford University Press, pp. 358-372, cf. pp. 358 and 368. Conversely, hybrid wars are regarded as subtypes of asymmetric warfare in Josef Schröfl/Bahram Rajaei/Dieter Muhr (eds.), *Hybrid and Cyber War as Consequences of the Asymmetry. A Comprehensive Approach Answering Hybrid Actors and Activities in Cyberspace. Political, Social and Military Responses*, Frankfurt am Main 2011: Lang, cf. pp. 11, 287f., and 297.

12 The twenty-first century phenomenon of types of war and strategies mixing has also been described with other terms, such as “Ungleichzeitige Kriege [Non-simultaneous wars]” by Thomas Jäger, *Ungleichzeitige Kriege*, in: (ed.), *Die Komplexität des Krieges* [The Complexity of War], Wiesbaden 2010: VS Verlag, pp. 287-305, or as “postmoderne Aufstandsbekämpfung [postmodern counterinsurgency]” by Hans-Georg Ehrhart, *Aufstandsbekämpfung revisited? Zum Formenwandel der Gewalt am Beispiel Mali* [Counterinsurgency revisited? On the changing forms of violence using the example of Mali], in: *Sicherheit und Frieden* [Security and Peace] (S+F) 2/2014, pp. 81-86.

requires new countermeasures: “It is the unconventional and diverse instruments of hybrid warfare that need to be countered with unconventional and diverse methods.”<sup>13</sup> The defense minister employed the American strategic theoretical semantics of “hybrid wars” coined in 1998, which only began to be used more widely in 2005. It received significant attention in 2014 in the wake of Russia’s activity in eastern Ukraine and Crimea, as well as “Islamic State” operations in Syria and Iraq that were also described as “hybrid.”<sup>14</sup>

Von der Leyen makes us consider the challenges that hybrid war presents for twenty-first century peace and security policy. There may well be a whole bundle of them—belonging to three main types. The first type of challenge concerns the appropriate strategies for waging hybrid war. To paraphrase von der Leyen, how can a society “unconventionally and diversely” react to hybrid war? In order to effectively defend itself, must society apply “unconventional” means and itself act in a “hybrid” fashion? In addition to regular soldiers, should it also send covert fighters who do not wear uniforms and insignia into hybrid battles, as did pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine and during the annexation of the Crimea? Should it extend its combat operations into the realms of the media and social networks, and the civilian, religious and cultural spheres where the “Islamic State” assaults Western freedoms of opinion, religion and travel with videos of brutal decapitations and terrorist attacks on caricaturists, “infidels,” and train and plane passengers? Is an open and democratic society able, willing, and well advised to use such methods, or would it risk abandoning the very openness and basic values it seeks to defend?

To answer these political-strategic questions, which affect the whole of society, we must first gain a better understanding of hybrid war. This brings us to a second type of challenges—those of a terminological-theoretical nature. What is meant by “hybrid war”? What exactly is hybrid in this war, and how does hybridity affect warfare and the outcomes of war? What are, in von der Leyen’s words, the “single pieces” that require “an overall assessment...to reveal the aggressive nature of the scheme”? What, then is the benefit of using this term? As long as we lack answers to these questions, “hybrid war” tends to be just a fashionable label featuring phenomena that are not yet understood. It is a non-term, or a fake term, a placeholder for something we do not understand: namely the complex security situations in eastern Ukraine, Syria and Iraq, where we lose confidence in our conventional terms and tested repertoire

of actions because in those regions war and peace, interstate war and civil war all merge. Precisely this seems to be the basic problem with the term—or fake term—“hybrid war”: When faced with the “undeclared wars” that von der Leyen refers to, we no longer trust our old concepts and strategies.

With conventional concepts and strategies unsuitable for dealing with hybrid war, do we have to both think and operate differently in every respect? Or could the past still help us to conceptually and politically manage the hybrid challenge? This third type of question is directly connected to the first two types of challenge. Altogether, they indicate the problem of seeking guidance from the past. Are today’s hybrid wars so different from both our earlier political-strategic experiences of war and our conceptual-theoretical notions of war shaped by these experiences that we can no longer learn anything from history? Or can our experiences and concepts still guide our understanding of current and future war? Western security and peace policymakers urgently need answers to these questions. The hybrid advances by NATO’s adversaries only surprised the Western alliance to such an extent because after “winning” the Cold War, it seemed less willing and able to learn.<sup>15</sup> The political scientist and peace researcher Karl Deutsch once described power as “the ability to afford not to learn.”<sup>16</sup> At the beginning of the twenty-first century, no single international actor appears to be so powerful that it can rely on its “superior power” alone instead of continually making the effort to learn, and sometimes to re-learn. If “hybrid war” describes a challenge which creates surprises because there seem to be no applicable “lessons learned” to apply, the West urgently needs to learn and re-orientate itself in order to manage and master this challenge.

#### 4. Historicizing the disorientation: “Hybrid war” challenges our historical understanding of war

To understand the challenge of hybrid warfare, it seems useful to regard the historical context: It is not enough to ask whether hybrid war is something genuinely new or even something very old in the history and theory of war.<sup>17</sup> Instead, the challenge of hybrid war arises from its combination of very old elements with very new ones in ways that are surprising and disorienting for a particular actor in a particular context. This context-dependency of surprise and disorientation suggests that beyond examining supposedly binary questions about the historical continuity or discontinuity of hybrid warfare

13 Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, Manuskript der Rede der Verteidigungsministerin anlässlich der 51. Münchner Sicherheitskonferenz, München [German Defense Ministry, Speech by the Federal Minister of Defense on the Occasion of the 51st Munich Security Conference], 6 Feb. 2015, p. 6 (author’s translation).

14 Frank Hoffman, an American strategy theorist who was commissioned by the U.S. Marines in 2005 to analyze changes and challenges of future war, made the most important contributions to the discussion of “hybrid warfare”, including “Conflict in the Twenty-First Century. The Rise of Hybrid Wars”, Arlington 2007: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, at: [http://www.potomac institute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac\\_hybridwar\\_0108.pdf](http://www.potomac institute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac_hybridwar_0108.pdf). Referring to the unpublished M.A. thesis by Robert Walker from 1998 as the origin of the concept “hybrid wars” (p. 9), Hoffman goes on to define: “Hybrid Wars can be conducted by both states and a variety of non-state actors. Hybrid Wars incorporate a range of different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder” (p. 14).

15 Regarding NATO’s “learning difficulties” that have been exposed by Russian hybrid warfare, see Andreas Heinemann-Grüder, Putins Krieg im Osten. Beschwichtigen oder abschrecken? [Putin’s War in the East. Appeasement or Deterrence?], in: Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik [Journal on Foreign and Security Policy] 4/2015, pp. 573-588: “Die mächtigste Militärrallianz der Welt demonstriert [...] ihre Schrecklähmung gegenüber Russlands hybrider Kriegführung. [The mightiest military alliance in the world demonstrates [...] its terror in the face of Russia’s hybrid warfare]” (p. 574); as well as Alexander Lanoszka, Russian hybrid warfare and extended deterrence in eastern Europe, in: International Affairs 1/2016, pp. 175-195: “Hybrid warfare is something that a military alliance alone, such as NATO, might not be able to deter” (p. 193).

16 Karl Deutsch, The Nerves of Government. Models of Political Communication and Control. With a New Introduction, New York 1966: The Free Press: “[P]ower [...] is the ability to afford not to learn” (p. 111).

17 This question is addressed in Williamson Murray/Peter Mansoor (eds.), Hybrid Warfare. Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present, Cambridge 2012: Cambridge University Press.

and hybrid war theory, we must also look at the complex reciprocal relationship between historical experiences of war and current ideas about war. What experiences and notions continue to influence Western understanding of both war and peace in a way which allows recent hybrid wars to have such large and disorienting surprise effects? The West's adversaries were only able to score such dramatic shock effects recently because they had proven themselves more capable and ready to learn than the West. Both Russia and the "Islamic State" seem to have drawn the "right" strategic lessons from the changes in the international order and in warfare since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the global rise of transnational terrorism, with 11 September 2001 just an early highlight. Both actors entered the hybrid terrain between interstate war and civil war, and between war and peace. On the Crimean peninsula and in eastern Ukraine, Russia strategically switched from symmetric, regular, hierarchical and conventional state warfare to asymmetric, irregular, "networked" and unconventional non-state tactics.<sup>18</sup> In Syria and Iraq, the "Islamic State" took the opposite route: Beginning with the asymmetric, irregular, networked and non-conventional non-state warfare that it first practiced as an Al-Qaida offshoot, the "Islamic State" then switched to more symmetric, regular, hierarchic and conventional quasi- or proto-state-like warfare.<sup>19</sup> Both actors combine the "unconventional and diverse methods" of hybrid warfare that are forcing Western security and peace policymakers to reconsider how they view and manage war.

The Western concept of war is firmly associated with symmetric, limited power struggles governed by international law—between two belligerents in control of state territories that acknowledge each other as equal in principle. This concept has developed since the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, which made it possible to generate mutual obligations among "equals" within a constantly expanding geographic area defined as "Europe"—at least for a certain period of time, and despite all exceptions and deviations in the history and theory of war which have challenged it ever since. In light of this conventional understanding of war, early twenty-first-century hybrid war appears new, different, surprising, and disorienting. Hybrid wars erode the demarcations that ideal-typically characterized conventional wars between European states: demarcations between soldiers and civilians, combatants and

non-combatants, front and homeland, military and police, foreign and domestic policy. In the end, the conventions distinguishing interstate war and civil war, as well as war and peace, also disintegrate.

Hybrid warfare surprises and disorients by undermining conventional war's limits. One case in which the boundaries of war were deliberately removed was the deployment of "little green men" wearing unmarked uniforms to fight in eastern Ukraine. They challenge the conventional view of limited war—like the "humanitarian" convoys that were also used for warfare in this theatre. Distorted news reporting makes the latter difficult to assess, even for "neutral" observers like those of the OSCE. "Islamic State" terrorist attacks in which hybrid actors from quasi-state logistical, military, and ideological bases in Syria and Iraq hit "soft" symbolic civilian targets in Western metropolises also obliterate formerly accepted boundaries. Suddenly, instead of soldiers, it is civilians who find themselves on an invisible front in the borderless terrain of a hybrid war: caricaturists, shoppers, visitors to concerts, restaurants, and football stadiums, subway, train and plane passengers, as well as bystanders at large national holiday festivities and Christmas markets.

Such a war is "hybrid" because it makes the limits that define our conventional understanding of war disappear. Hybrid wars have neither official declarations of war nor formal peace agreements. Obvious front lines, fixed territorial borders, identifiable uniforms with unmistakable insignia, and binding rules of war conduct all lose their significance. For hybrid war, we need to relearn where the battlefield is, and how the battle on this field is fought: Where is the front? What weapons and strategies are used? Who is a soldier or combatant, who a civilian? When does a war begin, and how can this be decided? What is victory or success? How is peace agreed? When does the war end? What laws of war or warfare do the belligerents observe? Who can be considered neutral? Who is in charge of the media and reporting? Who establishes the "facts" and "truths" of war?

In the era of conventional wars between states, it was possible, at least in principle, to answer these questions more or less unambiguously and firmly. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, these questions reappear in the guise of limitless hybrid warfare, creating major conceptual and political problems. "Hybrid war", then, stands for the fact that these questions may not have unequivocal answers any more. "Hybridität", then, means that, along with the dissolution of the limits of conventional wars, earlier answers to these questions also vanish because the components and images of interstate war, civil war, and peace have become amalgamated. The Westphalian state system sought to prevent confusion by proposing terminological and theoretical differentiations regarding war and international law, as well as by establishing and defending various types of political-practical limits and borders. In the course of historicizing our disorientation, we can indeed learn from the past for current and future challenges: how hybrid warfare is undermining and subverting our concept of war, which has its roots in Early Modern Europe.

- 18 The Russian Ambassador to NATO Alexander Grushko expressed this move toward asymmetry when he announced to the TV station "Rossija 24" on 31 Mar. 2016 that Russia would react "thoroughly asymmetrically" to the news that US armored brigades would be stationed in the eastern NATO countries (author's translation, cf. <http://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article153840562/Russland-will-asymmetrisch-auf-US-Truppen-reagieren.html>). Grushko thereby conceptually followed Russian Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov who in his January 2013 speech at the Russian Academy of Military Science outlined the increasingly "asymmetric" nature of future wars – and Russian warfare (cf. Robert Coalson's English translation of this speech at: [https://www.facebook.com/notes/robert-coalson/russian-military-doctrine-article-by-general-valery-gerasimov/1015218486\\_2563597](https://www.facebook.com/notes/robert-coalson/russian-military-doctrine-article-by-general-valery-gerasimov/1015218486_2563597)).
- 19 Regarding the hybrid nature of the "Islamic State" between symmetry and asymmetry, see Felix Wassermann, *Im Irrgarten der Asymmetrie. Eine politiktheoretische Expedition auf unübersichtliches Terrain* [In the labyrinth of asymmetry. A political-theoretical expedition on confusing terrain], in: *IP – Internationale Politik* 3/2015, pp. 52-59, as well as Sebastian Lange, "Bleiben und Ausdehnen". Ideologie, Organisation und Strategie des "Islamischen Staats" ["Stay and Spread Out." The Ideology, Organization and Strategy of the "Islamic State"], in: *Die Friedens-Warte* 3-4/2015, pp. 283-310.

## 5. Problems and prospects of a reorientation: “Hybrid war” as chimera not chameleon

In view of the challenge that hybrid war poses to our conventional understanding of war, we should ask how traditional concepts of war like Clausewitz's can assist our terminological and political reorientation. Anyone who considers the early nineteenth-century Prussian general and war theoretician to be primarily concerned with conventional, limited wars between states, and with war as the “continuation of political commerce [...] by other means,”<sup>20</sup> would not expect him to offer any useful suggestions. Likewise, anyone focusing on the problems associated with using the chameleon metaphor for today's “multicolored” hybrid war might simply reject Clausewitz's work as anachronistic. However, Clausewitz also accounted for the timelessness and transcontextuality of war, which he described as a “wonderful trinity,”<sup>21</sup> the first element of which is a blind instinct for waging war with primordial violence, hatred and animosity. The second element is the play of chance and probability that any military commander must master in order to reach the war's strategic goals. The third element is the rational calculation that state policies bring into play in defining the aims and using war to pursue them. Clausewitz thought that it was possible to understand the historical variety of individual wars through the combinations of these three elements: instrumental brutality, strategic creativity, and political rationality. Can these conceptual instruments and Clausewitz' analysis still help us to understand hybrid war and reorient our twenty-first-century security and peace policies?

Whoever enquires about the specific mix that the “wonderful trinity” of brutality, creativity and rationality assumes in hybrid war should probably not focus on the latter two, i.e. on strategic goals and political purposes. Hybrid wars often appear to be guided by conventional goals and purposes such as expanding or destabilizing territorial sovereignty through conquest or defense. In fact, the uniqueness of hybrid war emerges from its violent methods and their creative combinations or, as the German defense minister put it, from the “orchestration” of “unconventional and diverse methods.” “Unconventional methods” refers to instruments unlike those used in conventional interstate wars: instruments that purely military power struggles normally do not imply, such as civilian combatants, humanitarian convoys, and indirect operational methods supported by or targeted at the civil society. “Diverse methods” refers to the combination of unconventional instruments with conventional instruments, i.e. the use of irregular fighters alongside regular soldiers, of humanitarian convoys together with military vehicles, and of indirect strategies in interplay with direct strategies. The simultaneous use of various instruments makes hybrid war a creature that defies our conventional understanding of war but does not destroy Clausewitz's analytical framework.

How can such a hybrid creature be conceptualized? The political scientist Andreas Herberg-Rothe advised those who wish to understand twenty-first-century changes in war to “think both

with and beyond Clausewitz.”<sup>22</sup> Thinking *with* Clausewitz could mean adapting his concept for our analysis—wherever possible. Thinking *beyond* Clausewitz could mean looking for terms and metaphors beyond the “wonderful trinity” and the “chameleon”, which could characterize hybrid war and enhance our understanding of it. Metaphors, in particular, could prove to be heuristically useful because the term “hybrid war” per se highlights and represents the disintegration and failure of traditional war concepts, and perhaps even the futility of attempting to conceptualize this phenomenon by clear definitions and notions. A metaphoric approach, moreover, lends itself to hybrid war because “hybridity” in itself is nothing but a metaphor: an expression originally used in biology and then transferred to political-strategic discourse.<sup>23</sup>

When we acknowledge the biological origin of the hybrid metaphor, we gain yet another reason for viewing hybrid war as a chimera rather than a chameleon, i.e. as a creature found in Greek mythology that is composed of several animals. Homer's “Iliad”, the oldest war epos in the Western tradition, describes a fire-spitting monster made of three different animals: a lion, a goat, and a dragon.<sup>24</sup> Like this three-headed creature, hybrid war can be understood as a combination of three different “species”: interstate war, peace, and civil war. The ancient hero Bellerophon, according to the “Iliad”, defeated the chimera by enlisting another hybrid creature, the winged horse Pegasus, from whose back he overwhelmed the chimera by aiming a spear studded with lead nuggets into the monster's maw. The lead melted in its fiery mouth, destroying the beast by its own means from within.

Security and peace policymakers may well protest, “political theoreticians may consider ancient mythology but we've got pressing contemporary problems to solve!” In fact, these two activities may be quite close. When it comes to hybrid war, theory is not far from practice, and history is closer to the present than the buzzword “hybridity” sometimes might suggest. To master the combined elements of interstate war, civil war, and peace that are found in hybrid war, it could be both clever and necessary to create a cunning counterstrategy like the one Bellerophon used to slay the chimera. Germany's defense minister sounded as if she was thinking along these lines when she recommended using “unconventional and

22 Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Clausewitz and a New Containment: The Limitation of War and Violence, in: Hew Strachan/Andreas Herberg-Rothe (eds.), Clausewitz in the Twenty-First Century, Oxford 2007: Oxford University Press, pp. 283-307, cf. p. 307.

23 Regarding the biological origin of the hybrid metaphor, see Brian Stross, The Hybrid Metaphor. From Biology to Culture, in: The Journal of American Folklore 445/1999, Theorizing the Hybrid, pp. 254-267; for the specific biological metaphors of infectious disease and immunity that are used in connection with hybrid warfare, see Colleen Bell, Hybrid Warfare and Its Metaphors, in: Humanity. An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development 2/2012, pp. 225-247.

24 Homer, The Iliad. Translated, with an introduction and notes, by Stephen Mitchell, London 2012: Phoenix. In the sixth book, verses 185-188, he portrays “the raging Chimæra, born of the gods, inhuman, a monster who had the head of a lion, a serpent's tail, and the body of a goat, and whose every breath was a blaze of fire” (p. 100). Cf. also Hesiod, The Theogony. Works and Days. Testimonia. Edited and translated by Glenn W. Most, Cambridge/Massachusetts/London 2006: Harvard University Press. Hesiod describes the “Chimæra” in Theogony, verses 319-325, as a creature, “who breathed invincible fire, terrible and great and swift-footed and mighty. She had three heads: one was a fierce-eyed lion's, one a she-goat's, one a snake's, a mighty dragon's. Pegasus and noble Bellerophon killed her” (p. 29).

20 Carl von Clausewitz, On War, loc. cit., p. 12.

21 Ibid., p. 13.

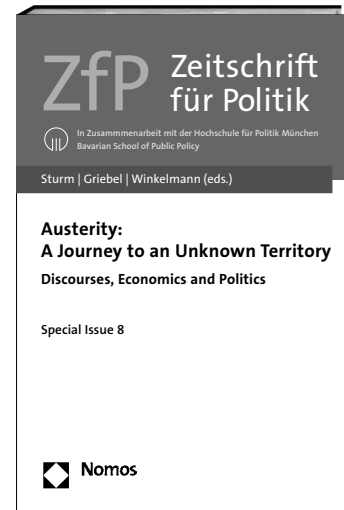
diverse methods." This, however, is just the beginning of the real problem that has already been mentioned: How far can and will an open, democratic society want to engage in hybrid battles with the "hybrid war" monster? How can we avoid or overcome the normative and strategic dilemmas of limitless war?

These pressing issues cannot be answered without re-defining the twenty-first-century security and peace terrain. This calls for a good dose of political-strategic intelligence, if not also cunning, as well as a review of our own historical notion of war, and most importantly, a debate involving the whole of society about the hybrid challenge. With respect to this societal debate, which has to engage theory and practice, Carl von Clausewitz could prove to be a good teacher once again. As for his theory of war, he proposed "bring[ing] it so far into harmony with [German: "befreunden mit", i.e. "to befriend"; F. W.] action, that between theory and practice there shall no longer be that absurd difference which an unreasonable theory, in defiance of common sense, has often produced."<sup>25</sup> Given the way that Russia and the "Islamic State" are shifting and removing the borders and limits of war, a theory of war—as well as one of peace—that is "befriended" with action seems to be needed now more than ever. However, we must also use a practice that is "befriended" with thinking. Finally, political theoreticians and practitioners alike should respond to the encroachments and attacks on civil society by demonstrating a strong "friendship to society"—extending beyond "unreasonable" notions of "hybridity", and promoting Clausewitz's "healthy common sense." This implies, most importantly, seriously addressing the conceptual, political and societal problems represented in the term "hybrid war." Refusing to do so corresponds to an unwillingness to remedy our contemporary disorientation about security and peace policy—and a disinterest in learning from past emergencies for likely ones in the future.



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25 Carl von Clausewitz, On War, loc. cit., pp. 55-56.