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# Hybrid Warfare: Between Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism<sup>1</sup>

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**Hybrid Warfare: Between Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism.** Since the Annexation of the Crimea there is an increasing interest in hybrid warfare. This article attempts to place the concept of hybrid warfare into the context of three principal international security theories which helps to discover and develop three different perceptions on hybrid warfare. While realism allows us to place hybrid warfare into the context of power politics, liberalism enables us to look closely at the effects of hybrid warfare and explore its soft power dimension in the context of disinformation and propaganda. This is also the case of constructivism which offers the lens for analysing impacts of disinformation and propaganda on (re)construction of identities, values and changes in political discourse. All three theories shall not be considered as exclusive but rather complementary, allowing the creation of a complex analytical framework for various dimensions of hybrid warfare.

**Key Words:** Hybrid warfare, hybrid threats, disinformation, propaganda, Russia, realism, liberalism, constructivism

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## 1. Introduction

Origins of hybrid warfare may be traced back to before consolidated theories of international relations and concepts of international security were established. This is because fighting and war is inherent in human history and some hybrid forms of warfare

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were used by creative commanders during their campaigns. Some of the first references might be found in very old sources. For example Sun Tzu (545–470 BC) wrote in his treatise *Art of War* that: “Hence to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting” (Sun Tzu 2008: 8). While Sun Tzu referred to individual battles, in modern times hybrid warfare was promoted through a much more complex strategy and was developed in a doctrinal way. With the progress of technology and the means of communication hybrid warfare has become a very complex method of conduct using a high variety of available tools, which might be interpreted in the context of existing theories of international security.

The main aim of this article is to place hybrid warfare in the context of existing theories, especially in the context of (neo)Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism. This assessment will help lead to a better understanding of hybrid warfare and the logic behind it. The theories presented are contributing to our understanding of different aspects of hybrid warfare: while realism is helping to place hybrid warfare in the context of power politics, liberalism helps to explain its aims in the context of regime and constructivism is putting more clarity into ways of conduct. For this reason, the article is divided into three parts, each dedicated to one theoretical prism. These prisms are not seen as concurring, but rather as complementary, despite some basic conflicting lines between all three theories.<sup>3</sup>

Hybrid warfare as such is a very wide term, which might cause misunderstanding (see for example Wither 2016: 73–87). When starting with a definition, it is worth looking at both words. Probably the most known definition of war is that of Carl von Clausewitz: that war “is an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will” where physical force is the means (Clausewitz 2017: 10). Warfare then refers to organized activities or efforts aimed for conducting war. Nonetheless, wars were always fought by various means as physical force has many faces: from professional armies to conscripts, from mercenaries to proxies, guerrillas, insurgents and terrorists. Next to the actors involved, there are also the methods developed over time due to progress in technologies. Also, warfare itself (in its systemic sense) may have different forms of organization depending on the scale of war ranging from a geographically limited strike to a long term confrontation with the total involvement of whole nations. Hence, when defining “hybrid warfare” it is necessary to answer the question: the hybridity of what?

To answer this question it is not easy as today hybrid warfare is a catchy word which can contain anything mentioned above. Hybrid warfare has become increasingly

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<sup>3</sup> For example while realists focus primarily on states as exclusive actors and treat them as a “black box”, liberalism helps to explain internal factors going deeper inside the states and the role of other actors. While realism is based on the rational choice theory and the logic of consequences, constructivism draws on reality construction and the logic of appropriateness.

debated after the annexation of the Crimea in relation to Russian conduct using “hard power” and “soft power” instruments. However, the employment of both instruments does not yet establish hybridity, but rather a “mixture”. For example, as pointed out by Diego A. Ruiz Palmer (2015) many experts see hybrid warfare as the mixture of tools used during the Cold War era, including: (1) “Agit Prop” – tools designated to influence and mobilize a targeted audience; (2) Maskirovka – concept of all-encompassing deception, concealment and camouflage measures and tactics; (3) Spetsnaz – involvement of special operation forces conducting special (unconventional) operations; (4) Use of operatives, intelligence services, including “sleeper agents”; and (5) Radio-Electronic Combat to enable enemy communication, command and control, including cyber warfare (Palmer 2015: 9). Since the end of the Cold War the above mentioned tools underwent a transformation due to new technologies and were adapted to a new geostrategic political reality where large scale confrontation on a frontal basis is increasingly less likely.

Important part of hybrid warfare is information war. According to definition of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation information war is: “the confrontation between two or more states in the information space with the purpose of inflicting damage to information systems, processes and resources, critical and other structures, undermining the political, economic and social systems, a massive psychological manipulation of the population to destabilize the state and society, as well as coercion of the state to take decisions for the benefit of the opposing force.” (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation 2019). This new reality, excellently put by this definition, has been reflected in the official politico-military course set by Yevgeny Primakov and Valery Gerasimov.

The following parts are trying to place hybrid warfare into the context of international security theories. However, this is done with several limits or starting premises. First, hybrid warfare is in some aspects not considered as a neutral category of warfare as it has been formulated in reference to Russian hybrid warfare. This might have some implications for the universality of the concept. On the other side it is important to note that the employment of hybrid warfare in every conflict is unique based on different tools and changing contextual influence. Second, this article focuses more on the Central European perspective: of countries integrated in the EU and NATO, not directly facing Russian power as for example Ukraine, Georgia or the Baltic States. This has implications on giving less emphasis to hard power tools of the hybrid warfare (e. g. Maskirovka or Spetsnaz) and giving more emphasis on soft power tools (e. g. disinformation and propaganda, the use of intelligence etc). In other words, Central European countries are not facing an increased threat of direct military confrontation with Russia, but are experiencing the use of soft power tools aimed at increasing Russian

influence, which might be well considered also as part of the Russian hybrid warfare. The third premise is directly related to hybrid warfare. The definition of Clausewitz considers war as an “act of violence”. The author of this article assumes that hybrid warfare in its soft power dimension can be free of violence as the conflict is taking place in a non-violent form aimed at breaking the will of the enemy without fighting.

## 2. Realism: Why do states use hybrid warfare

Realism offers unique and probably the most nuanced view on the motivations for employing hybrid warfare. Authors dealing with realism often start with a reference to Thucydides and his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, where he excellently described the conduct of individual actors or to the works of Niccolò Machiavelli, to whom the statement (put out of the context) that the end justifies the means is attributed. Machiavelli’s consequentialism developed in the *Prince* might be well translated into a realist logic as for a realist the supreme end of a state is its survival and in order to do so, states are seeking to maximize its power as only a state powerful enough can survive. Hans J. Morgenthau (1973) stated in his book *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* that the international politics is based on interests defined in terms of power (Morgenthau 1973: 5). This basic principle has important implications for the behaviour of states. Moreover, due to its universality it has a similar strength to laws of nature: the struggle for power is permanent.

The international system according to realists is characterized by the state of permanent anarchy where there is a lack of “world government” or supreme power able to enforce global order and maintain peace. As a result states are fighting for securing its existence by seeking more power and due to competing interests states have to rely only on themselves in a “self help system”. Security interests are superior to other interests and to morality. As put by Morgenthau “Political realism refuses to identify moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe. As it distinguishes between truth and option, so it distinguishes between truth and idolatry” (Morgenthau 1973: 11). Simply said, some actions of the states are not fully in accordance with universal moral principles, due to the superiority of security interests. Truthful and moral behaviour is just one of many options and moral standards may be subject of relative interpretations favouring power interests. For example, as pointed by Serdar Yilmaz and Doğan Çay (2018: 179), realism is characterized by consequential ethics.

As some states are weak due to objective reasons (e. g. geography, lack of natural resources, low manpower etc.) they are using behavioural strategies to minimize the loss of power that endangers survival. The literature distinguishes two main tactics: bandwagoning (siding with a threatening state) and balancing (joining a coalition

against the threatening state) which helps the states to ensure their survival and react to the behaviour of their potential enemies. According to some realists, this behaviour is a product of anarchy and contributes to its preservice. As noted by Barry Buzan: “the balance of power and the international anarchy are opposite sides of the same coin” (Buzan 1983). Buzan based his argument on Vattel's (1758) classic definition of the balance of power: that it is a state of affairs when no power is in a position where it is preponderant and can lay down the law to others (Vattel, cited in Bull 2002: 97).

The primary source of power for realist is the army associated with “hard power”. It is in the best interest of the state to maintain a capable army in order to defend the state against the military threats of other states or to destroy potential threats before they turn into existential threats for the states survival. Arms are important tools to ensure security but serve as the catalyst for a security dilemma and lead to an arms race. The dilemma is based mainly on two forces behind it. First, it is not possible to distinguish between the defensive and offensive nature of the weapons. This is because of the duality of most of the weapons or the simple fact, that an improved defence may be used later for the strengthening of offensive capacities. And second, that security is seen in a relative perspective: when the security of state A is increasing due to new armaments, then the insecurity of state B is increasing, which forces state B to react in order to prevent power loss and subsequently a potential threat to its survival.

According to realists, the international system is unstable and due to the ongoing fight for power it is permanently changing (Donnelly 2000: 8). As a result of development, it may from time to time happen that one or more superpowers in the system may occur and create a uni, bi or multipolar world, depending on the number of superpowers in the system. However, due to permanent competition and confrontation the system changes. As a consequence there are states with increasing power, which are satisfied about their actual position in the system (*status quo* advocates) and states which are unsatisfied due to the loss of power and their unsatisfactory position in the system (revisionist states). Good examples of revisionist states are Germany after the first World War or Russia after the fall of Communism.

As already mentioned, hard power and reliance on military capabilities is of primary importance for realists as hard power is the main tool for ensuring survival and might be used for improving their position in the international system. However, sometimes employment of the army is limited by its low capacity, older technologies, lack of resources or in general the geo-political context. The large-scale deployment of the army is limited by practical means, the logic of economy or other rational reasons. For this reason, states might turn to different options in order to pursue their state interests (e.g. power struggle) and one of them is hybrid warfare.

It is the hybridity of warfare, which makes warfare more effective and a more available tool for pursuing power interests. Moreover, hybrid warfare as a mean may lead to the same ends as non-hybrid warfare: power reduction of the adversary or the enemy and contribute to effective control. Morgenthau is not dealing with hybrid warfare, but in line with his thinking, hybridity may well contribute to the control of man over man: “Power may comprise anything that establishes and maintains the control of man over man” and that “its content and manner of its use is determined by the political and cultural environment” (Morgenthau 1973: 8). Despite many realists primarily focusing on hard power, hybridity makes it possible for hard power to be used more effectively by the involvement of soft power tools or to fully employ a civilian dimension for the same purposes as that of hard power. As Joseph S. Nye (1990) wrote: “Co-optive [soft] power is the ability of a country to structure a situation so that other countries develop preferences or define their interests in ways consistent with its own. This power tends to arise from such resources as cultural and ideological attraction as well as rules and institutions of international regimes” (Nye 1990: 168). This definition is partially consistent with the aims of hybrid warfare in its civilian dimension in relation to disinformation and propaganda: to persuade countries (through the indoctrination of the domestic population) to change their interests, sometimes also against consistency.

For example Barbara Kunz (2011) stresses, that Max Weber’s thoughts about power and politics might be very important in connection with filling the space between the concepts of Hans J. Morgenthau and that of Joseph S. Nye (2004). She develops the concept of Weberian *Herrschaft* and his three ideal types of legitimacy (rational, traditional and charismatic) for the soft power (Kunz 2011: 204). From a certain perspective Weberian logic might be used also for analysing a selected part of hybrid warfare as especially disinformation and propaganda targets the legitimacy of the enemy, without the stimulation of direct physical violence.

The involvement of a civil dimension in hybrid warfare is an important point within the debates over realism and its relationship to violence (see Williams 2004: 646). Because “weaponization” of civilian methods under hybrid warfare may lead to the same results as conventional warfare, the absence of violence can no longer be a valid argument for distinguishing legitimate and illegitimate forms of political power or at least, makes the distinction significantly blurred.

Direct control in the form of occupation requires the direct confrontation between armies, the establishment of an occupation authority and high long-term expenditures in order to maintain stability as the conflict may gain asymmetry. The US Coalition conduct in Iraq or Vietnam and the Soviet invasion to Afghanistan are just the most visible examples where regular armies met with asymmetry and were pushed to lose. Hybridity allows them to minimize costs and maximize the effectiveness as full

direct control is no longer necessary to make the enemy weaker or paralyzed. Confrontative frontal wars are costly, hybrid wars are cheaper as a single hashtag may have a much more destructive impact than bombs dropped from a plane. Moreover, hashtags and fake news do not destroy property.

Critics may admit, that hybrid operations vary from those with a dominant military dimension (e. g. the annexation of the Crimea) to that with a dominating civilian dimension (e. g. the Russian interference in the US presidential elections<sup>4</sup> or Brexit referendum<sup>5</sup>). However, damages on democracy can be hardly calculated and expressed in money terms. The fairness of elections, the rule of law, the quality of the media can be hardly compared with military expenditures and effectiveness. Surely, hybrid warfare has the ability to destroy and can have the same destructive qualities as a pure military intervention which might have the same aims: either changing political decisions or more control.

In recent years many scholars were thinking in hard power and soft power dichotomy and debating about hard power and soft power as a separate category. The example of Russia shows, that states with limited hard power and limited soft power can develop a very high and genuine category of hybrid power by combining and utilizing vital elements of both. When combined, soft power tools can make hard power more effective, which has been visible during the annexation of the Crimea. However, hybrid power also has its limits. Despite the annexation of the Crimea, Russia failed to extend power outside Luhansk and Donetsk (Kharkiv or Odessa where Russian influence was traditionally strong are good examples of such a failure) or legitimize its actions (Snyder 2018). Moreover, Russian hard and hybrid power met its limits on the Syrian battlefields. A slightly different situation is on the Western front. Russian interference into the US presidential elections or Brexit shows, that Russia is capable of utilizing its soft power on social media and the internet. The soft power element in the form of disinformation and propaganda allows it to hide its hostility behind a “fog” of a civilian dimension which might be effective tactics against western democracies and its institutions.

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<sup>4</sup> The report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election (2019) claims that the Russian interference involved a social media campaign, hacking and the release of materials and that Russian interference was conducted via the Russian Internet Research Agency in a “sweeping and systematic fashion”.

<sup>5</sup> Several pieces of research were conducted on Russian interference in Brexit. 89up analysis revealed, that RT and Sputnik published no fewer than 261 articles on the EU which had after communication via Kremlin owned channels 134 million potential impressions, in comparison with a total social reach of official campaigns Vote Leave and Leave.EU, which stood for 33 million or 11 million respectively (89up 2018).

### **3. Liberalism: Inside the black box**

Liberalism is in many aspects opposite to realism and rejects the primary focus on power. It focuses on various concepts including the theory of democratic peace, the importance of trade, the role of international law and acknowledges other actors in international relations including international organizations and other non-state actors. Moreover, it deals with the issues of globalization and interdependence and allows us to look “inside the state” and deal with the nature of the regime.<sup>6</sup> These intrastate domains, crucial for liberalism, are both: potential tools and targets of hybrid warfare.

Liberalism is a very rich theory and can be divided into many streams from political liberalism to commercial liberalism, republican liberalism, regulatory realism or various liberal sub-theories. It is out of the scope of this part to provide a detailed overview. For this reason, it is worth exploring the basic elements and concepts, which might be useful for the assessment of hybrid warfare. Andrew Moravcsik (1992) summarized three key assumptions of the liberal theory in international relations: claims on essential social actors and their motivations, the relationship between state and civil society and the ways states make choices in the international system (Moravcsik 1992: 6). States are representing individuals and other private subjects who seek improvement and warfare. In meeting the demands of the domestic actors, states set preferences in foreign policy. In other words, the character of the foreign policy is not given by “natural laws” as perceived by realists but comes from inside the states. This basic perception of the liberal mechanics has many implications for the international system and international security, which is according to liberals based on four main instruments: international law, international organizations, political integration and democratization (Baladan 2009: 73, cited in Pirnuta and Secerea 2011: 105). As a result, liberalism is standing on several pillars.

One of the pillars of liberalism is the theory of democratic peace which posits that democracies are hesitant to enter war or armed conflict with other democracies. This theory has important implications for the nature of international relations and possible war prevention as the type of domestic political regime may determine the behaviour of the state. As a result democracies profit from partnership with other democracies and cooperation may result in more institutionalized forms. The European Union is a very good example of the project, which contributes to generating prosperity among EU members and serves as a politico-institutional anchor of democracy among its members. With EU membership, EU members are stronger in facing global challenges than standing alone.

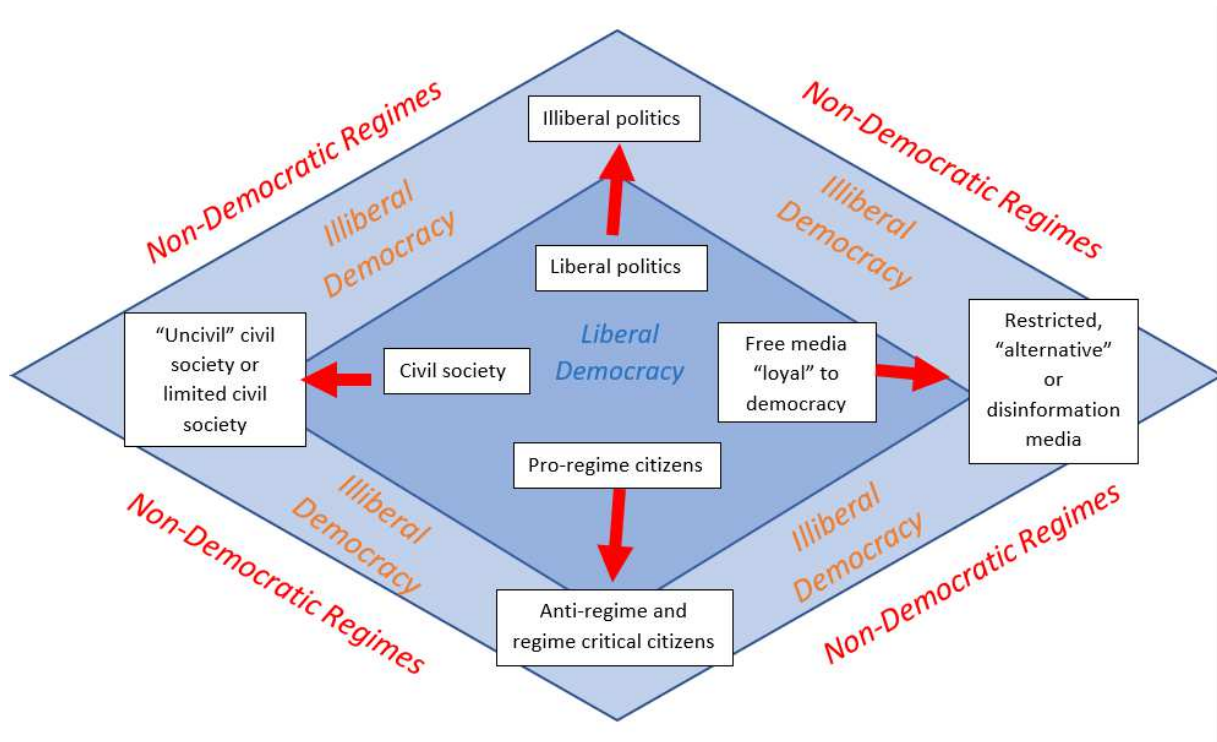
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<sup>6</sup> Many realists and neorealists build their argumentation without making internal aspects of the state relevant. For example Wolfers created an analogy where states are behaving like billiard balls and their politics is the result of mutual reactions (1962).



As a source of stability and a space of shared prosperity the EU as such together with its member states are potential targets of hybrid warfare, respectively of its civilian dimension. Russian media are very ready to criticise EU for its style of governance and there is “genetic” communication problem between EU and Russia causing tensions (Gulyaeva 2013: 189). Russian hybrid warfare may be well employed to create difficulties for the EU by the alienation of its members. From interference into the Brexit referendum (on the leave side), through the financial support of nationalist and Eurosceptic parties throughout Europe to disinformation campaigns aimed at the alienation of its inhabitants in the target countries Russia seeks to use the democratic mechanisms to undermine the prestige of the EU which will help Russia to exert more effective influence in divided Europe as negotiations with individual countries is for Russia more beneficial than negotiation with all under the umbrella of the EU. In this sense regular elections, party competition, guarantees on the plurality of competing opinions or free access to media are used as gates and tools of hybrid campaigns to support “sliding moves” friendly to Russia’s own interests, but generally negative for liberal democracy. This assumption is based on a fact, that media, parties or politicians friendly towards Russia are hostile to liberal democracy and sometimes to democracy as such. Sliding moves are visualized in the Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Sliding moves in the democratic system



Source: Author.

Sliding moves are supported in four main dimensions. First, Russia supports politicians and political parties friendly towards Russia or promoting interests in line with Russian interests (critical towards NATO and EU). These political forces include former Communists, Nationalists and Populists. Support of illiberal politics is in line with its second sliding move in the medial area. Russia is having influence through various disinformation webs and media, promoting Russian interests outside Russia. The third dimension is civil society: Russia is known for its restrictive attitude towards NGOs (Law 121-F3) and this attitude is via Russian propaganda promoted in other countries. “Political NGOs” are under pressure, while “uncivil” parts of the civil society are supported as they are often critical to liberal values, including environmentalism, human rights, LGBT and minority rights etc. Fourth, at the centre are citizens who may serve Russian interests well when their protest potential is awakened. Citizens play the most important role in democracies as they provide legitimacy during elections and their attitude is reflected in politics and as such indirectly affects foreign policy also. From the liberal perspective the Russian hybrid warfare is attacking liberal institutions of the democratic states in order to initiate changes from a liberal democracy to an illiberal democracy or other flawed forms, which are closer to Russia. As put by Timothy Snyder, because Russia failed to transform itself to be like western democracies, it aims to transform others into being more like Russia (Snyder 2018).

Another pillar of liberalism is the commercial peace theory. Simply saying that increasing trade between countries increases dependence and decreases the likelihood of war. However, trade might also be used as a weapon or a tool in hybrid warfare. When Russia annexed the Crimea and escalated war against Ukraine, EU member states approved economic and political sanctions against Russia in order to create pressure on Putin's regime. Despite the impact of sanctions being disputable,<sup>7</sup> there are certain areas which were almost untouched. This is especially the oil and gas sector in which mutual dependence between EU and Russia exists due to infrastructure and routes to Europe. The EU aims to diversify its energy mix and support for renewable resources (which leads to self-sufficiency and decreases dependence on Russian oil and gas) are cautiously seen by Russia as Russian energy export to the EU is a significant part of the state budget. For this reason, EU energy policy and energy policies of EU member states are under constant propaganda pressure aimed at the demonization of renewables and ecology in general. On the other side Russia is also pushing for bilateral relations and aims to put countries against the EU. North Stream 2 is a good example of such an attitude.

Liberals focus on international law and international organizations which may help do increase the predictability of international relations and reduce the security

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<sup>7</sup> On one side Russian media claims that sanctions are not working, on the other side Russia is strongly pushing for its removal (see for example RT 2018).

dilemma. However, hybrid warfare might use these liberal instruments as a means of warfare. International law put in a different context and disinterpretation, linked to international organizations may provide seemingly more legitimacy to ongoing operations or serve as a platform for diplomatic campaigns advocating or denying the employment of hybrid warfare. For example, one of the lies spread by Russian media is that UN approved, that Crimea belongs to Russia (see for example Rossia 1 2019 or RuBaltic.ru 2019) or that Ukraine violated international law (see RT 2019a). Above reservations regarding international organizations and international law are in line with realist thinking as realists stress that international law is merely the tool of superpowers and when not serving the purpose is violated. Similarly, international organizations are reduced to platforms used for increasing the power of some over others and may well serve to enrich propaganda.

Employment of hybrid warfare and ongoing disinformation and propaganda has again shown, that liberalism offers a very optimistic lens for analysis and some concepts (such as interdependence) are overestimated. For example Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye in their excellent article published in 1998 in *Foreign Affairs* optimistically claimed that: “Not all democracies are leaders in the information revolution, but many are. This is not an accident. Their societies are familiar, with the free exchange of information, and their institutions of governance are not threatened by it. They can shape information because they can also take it.” (Keohane and Nye 1998: 93). This is partially, because what they described as “free information” available to citizens has become a tool of hybrid warfare and a means of manipulation of a target population. Their article, however, is a fulfilled prophecy in many parts as they correctly expected, that the information revolution will affect politics and it will have significant consequences for security. The openness of democracy turns to be a weakness when it comes to hostile disinformation and propaganda turned against the regime. As put by Václav Havel: “It is a natural disadvantage of a democracy that it ties the hands of those who wish it well, and opens unlimited possibilities for those who do not take it seriously” (Havel 1971).

The liberal perspective is valuable due to its focus on the regime nature and contrary to realism does not consider a state as a “black box” due to its institutional element. In other words, liberalism links a domestic level to an international arena and as a result can explain different historic periods of peace and cooperation to that of war. This encourages us to think about the aims of hybrid warfare in the terms of institutions and regime change in favour of the interest of the attacker or at least policy changes of the state due to a changing in domestic setting. This change might not be formal (e. g. change from democratic to authoritarian regime) but rather may take the form of internal reformulation when people friendly or supportive to the aggressor are placed in to the

key positions of the state. With the “right people” in the “right places” states employing hybrid warfare may gain benefits in the terms of trade relations, access to critical infrastructure, arms deliveries or desirable changes in the foreign policy of the “hacked” state. In other words, new elites do not follow the interest of their own state, but are following the interests of a foreign entity which provides them support to stay in power. This is the case of the Russian support for nationalist and extremist parties in Europe who are friendly towards Russia or the case of other powers who support groups (proxies) friendly to the supportive power. However, placing the right people into the right positions is just one of many aspects as the soft aims of hybrid warfare might be much more complex. This complexity might be further explored under the constructivist approach.

#### **4. Constructivism: Hybrid warfare and reality construction**

Constructivism is sometimes perceived as a theory standing in the middle between realism and liberalism (Adler 1997). Therefore, there are many different approaches to constructivism which were successfully developed over last thirty years. The difference is made by the individual interpretation of the contributing authors, significantly extending the understanding of constructivism. Unfortunately, this extension sometimes led to a lack of internal coherence or diverging positions, so some authors attempted to “reconstruct constructivism” at a meta level (see for example Guzzini 2000: 147–182) or to create a systematic classification based on different ontological and epistemological positions. Based on Sismondo (1996) and Sayer (1992) Nik Hynek and Andrea Teti in their article distinguished between naïve empiricism, naïve realism, naïve constructivism, constructivist empiricism, constructivist realism and social constructivism (Hynek and Teti 2010: 174). Their detailed analysis and classification is too complex for the purposes of the article which uses a necessary simplification. It seems that there are two basic tenets that constructivists share: (1) that the structure of human association is determined by shared ideas rather than material forces and that (2) the identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than being given by nature (Wendt 1999: 1). According to a constructivist reality is a subject of perception. A state exists but its conduct is subjective, depending on the perception which may vary from friendly to hostile. This perception is influenced by the identity of the actors, acknowledged values and ideas, which were secondary or foreign to realist thinking (Jervis 1994: 861).

However, in some aspects constructivism is agreeing with realist assumptions. For example as put it by Alexander Wendt in his article *Constructing International Politics*, which is mainly built upon the argumentation with realist principles presented by John J. Mearsheimer, constructivism (as understood by Wendt) shares five realist

assumptions: (1) anarchy of the international politics, (2) existence of the offensive capacities of states, (3) uncertainty of the other's intentions, (4) interest to survive and (5) a certain rationality, also together with a state-centred focus on international politics and the importance of systemic theorizing (Wendt 1995: 72 commenting on Mearsheimer 1994). Where both authors are diverging is the social construction. Wendt simply says, that negative behaviour of states is a “self fulfilling prophecy” due to agency and structure, which was well summarized in his article “Anarchy is What States Make of It” (Wendt 1992). Behaviour of states (agency) is influencing structure due to logic of reciprocity (Wendt 1995: 77). As summed up by Wendt: “To analyse the social construction of international politics is to analyse how the process of interaction produce and reproduce the social structures – cooperative or conflictual- that shape actor's identities and interests and the significance of their material context” (Wendt 1995: 81). Wendt's logic has significant importance for hybrid warfare, especially its civilian dimension in reference to disinformation and propaganda.

It allows the conduct of hostile actions with limited impact on the negative construction (perception) of the attacker from the side of the target as hybridity allows it to hide hostility under an “information fog” or, what Johann Schmid (2019) calls “*operating in the shadow of various interfaces*” which are used to attack the vulnerabilities of the enemy, and which are challenging traditional lines of order and responsibilities (Schmid 2019: 5). What matters in constructivism are ideas and discourse which influences beliefs and perception. When ideas (values) are close enough and both states perceive each other in a positive way, then relations are friendly. However, conflicting values or negative identity (for example influenced by negative historical experience) leads to unfriendly relations. Instead of the rational choice, constructivists focus on the logic of appropriateness. States act according to appropriateness, which also helps to define their identity. Identity further helps to create content and understand ideas. The problem is, that ideas and their content is changing over time. Ideas, such as “democracy” or “rule of law” might be differently understood by actors with a different identity and a different perception may lead to conflict.

Thinking about hybrid warfare within the constructivist perception offers two main interrelated issues for debate. It might be expected that hybrid warfare will take place between states with diverging values which are essential to the identity of the actors. Activities conducted under hybrid warfare (mainly within a civilian dimension) are thus conducted for changing or reformulating the content of ideas or values and influence the identity of the target in order to become more closer to that of the attacker. In other words the attacker seeks to create a target more alike or at least more distant

from the others in order to disrupt cooperation and further integration between allies.<sup>8</sup> In other words, hybrid warfare from the constructivist perspective is war over ideas, values, discourses, identities and finally also about perception.

Disinformation and propaganda employed within hybrid warfare offers many opportunities how to create a positive perception by focusing on the positive aspects of the attackers identity while attempting to imprint negative aspects into the perception on others. This attitude is a key element of propaganda however in hybrid warfare goes beyond the construction or reconstruction of identities. Aims under hybrid warfare are more aggressive as they might indoctrinate a target population and through various manipulations (e. g. reflexive control and cognitive dissonance) guide it, often without being aware of it, against the main pillars of the state, prosperity, freedom and democracy. This form of hybrid warfare may reconstruct or undermine key historical events, which contributed to the forming of a national identity, awareness and civic consensus in the target societies. Attacking factual and objective interpretations of national history together with attempts to redraw the historical memory of the target population, including the imprinting of interpretations favourable to the interests of the attacker might be contrary to the interests of a target country and cause a schism and identity crisis. On the other side, propaganda and disinformation may be used to strengthen cohesion and mobilization of the domestic population. All the above mentioned is in line with Russian attempts to create “information sovereignty”, from their own media and their own social networks (VKontakte) to own version of “Russian” Wikipedia.

Russia is doing all the above mentioned operations aimed at the reinforcement of its own identity and the reconstruction of foreign identities. A good example of the first is the domestic change in history education. At Russian schools children are taught about the “Great patriotic war” starting in 1941 by the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union and the sacrifice of the Soviet people in defeating Nazism and the “liberation” of Europe. The collaboration of Stalin with Hitler under the pact Molotov-Riebbentrop, annexation of the Baltic states and the war against Finland are avoided or intentionally disinterpreted: that Soviet union was de-facto forced to sign a pact with Hitler, or that the signing of the pact was part of the strategy against the aggressor (Sputnik 2019, RIA Novosti 2019). Next to the attempts to rewrite its own history, narratives of Russian propaganda are also aimed at creating a negative perception of others, most notably “fascist” Ukraine (see for example Izvestiya 2019), aggressive USA or NATO (RT 2019b).

Similarly, Russia is very sensitive and defensive to attempts, which might endanger its achieved results and grounds for Russian propaganda. For example in 2018

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<sup>8</sup> Especially political integration requires a certain level of values cohesion as various historical examples show (e. g. European Union history, limits in European Free Trade Association, limits in NORDEK cooperation etc.).

the Czech Information Service (BIS) informed, that one of the grounds for a successful Russian propaganda is the pro-Soviet interpretation of post-War history which was inherited in education plans from the Communist era (BIS 2018: 7). Subsequently politicians started to debate possible changes which led to a strong reaction from the Russian Embassy in Prague protesting against attempts to change historical facts.<sup>9</sup> The conflict was escalated, when the new leadership of the Prague municipality decided to remove the statue of Marshall Konev<sup>10</sup>. The decision was strongly criticised by the Russian Embassy in Prague.

The above mentioned examples are good illustration of tools used for constructing a different version of the reality which better serves Russian interests and are a good example of how hybrid warfare may be conducted in civilian matters without the realization of a broader context by citizens who might think about both issues in a broader context. Russian propaganda in relation to Konev and the “liberation” of Czechoslovakia often highlights the high number of casualties during the “liberation” of Czechoslovakia, which is sometimes (out of historical context) compared with the loses of Western allies. Part of the propaganda is retaken by pro-Russian political parties (e. g. the Stalinist wing of Czech Communists).

Interpretation of history is very important for defining the identity and principal values, influencing the reality perception. Constructivism adds an important part into the puzzle of hybrid warfare, especially regarding its civilian dimension. Hybrid warfare may well be used to change key values and influence the identity of the target country in order to prevent cooperation with enemies or develop and secure control on the country's attitude. Power over changing perception is a very powerful aspect of hybrid warfare.

Critics might admit, that there is a difference between construction as a tool and constructivism as a paradigm. Conflict between the West and Russia over Ukraine may be well explained in the constructivist approach (Dias 2013: 268). Taking into consideration constructivism as a paradigm, hybrid warfare is just a method involving a palette of tools of which some (Agit Prop) aim to de-construct, re-construct or construct reality. And its revealed employment may help to create the identity of the enemy as friends does not wage hybrid warfare against each other. However, to recognize a negative identity is not always easy. When unlabelled “green men” started to occupy Crime, Vladimir Putin publicly denied Russian involvement. He did support existing

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<sup>9</sup> What was meant by facts by the Russian Embassy are in reality constructs of Soviet and Russian propaganda on a Worldview.

<sup>10</sup> The commander of the army “liberating” Czechoslovakia (but also the Commander who suppressed the Hungarian uprising resulting in hundreds of civilians killed) is a symbol and as a such a valuable source for Russian propaganda.

construction, respectively idea, that Russia is innocent. Paradoxically, later Russian propaganda started to claim, that Russia is not part of the conflict but is helping to solve it (RT 2019c). Another created construction is that Russia is reacting in self-defence, or that the west is decadent and infected with homosexuality<sup>11</sup> and Russia is the protector of traditional conservative values contrary to the decadent West. These and other narratives are helping Russia to keep support (positive identity) and paint the enemy with a negative identity (NATO, EU, USA etc).

## **Conclusion**

This article provided a basic insight into the three theories of international security and tried to put hybrid warfare in the context of realism, liberalism and constructivism. All theories have a different value in their usability to interpret the phenomenon or at least its key aspects. The general reservations to realism deal with its incapacity to account for international change as reactions of a state due to ongoing anarchy are like that of laws of nature. Maybe, it is just a matter of the time period used as a lens for assessing state behaviour. Russia has a rich history of territorial expansion and lust for dominance. The annexation of the Crimea, the hybrid war against Ukraine or even the invasion of Georgia may be well understood in the realist context. From the longer perspective, the nature of the power interests of Russia did not change much and in a relatively peaceful 1990s were only put back by its own hard power transformation.

Contrary to the realist perspective liberalism tends to ignore the role of power as a genuine driving force for state interest. Instead, it helps to explore the “black box” and link domestic settings with state interests. This is extremely important in relation to hybrid warfare as it may be used well against key political institutions and principles of the state. Political parties may be used to promote foreign interests and the same is valid for the media, parts of civil society or manipulated citizens who might via an election change the nature of the regime and depart from the liberal democracy towards different regimes. From the liberal perspective hybrid warfare may be used to attack the key institutions of the state shaping the character of the regime. This argument is not unproblematic as some realist metanarrative is present: regime change (even unintended) is made as a part of the power struggle.

While realism and liberalism have a high predictive value, constructivism in comparison with both theories is less predictable about the future due to its inability to anticipate changes in the context of ideas and identity transformation. However, its role

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<sup>11</sup> An excellent explanation of how ideas matter in Russian foreign policy is *The Road to Unfreedom* by Timothy Snyder (2018) where the author explores the strong influence of Ivan Ilyin's philosophy on contemporary political thinking in Russia.



in hybrid warfare, especially regarding disinformation and propaganda, is undisputable as disinformation and propaganda helps to construct a reality. This is happening by deconstructing and re-constructing key ideas, principles and at the end also the identity of the target country and reinforcing its own identity by home targeted propaganda.

If we take into count the historical context and predictions of realism and liberalism, we can very easily observe arguments in favour of realism. Realists expected, that the nature of international relations will not change and power politics will continue. Russia has proven to be a revisionist power which is currently trying to overcome the results of the Cold war with updated and adjusted methods. This was happening despite the great progress in trade liberalization, cooperation at international organizations level, guarantees made under international law (the de-nuclearization of Ukraine in exchange for territorial integrity guarantee) and attempts to democratize the former Soviet block including contemporary Russia. In all the above domains there are significant reservations, relatively friendly relations with Russia at the beginning of Putin's era were changed into the politics of sanctions after the violation of international law on the side of the Russian Federation. Cooperation at the level of international organizations is limited as there are significantly deviant perceptions on key security issues. Taking into consideration this context in relation to hybrid warfare, even when assuming liberalism or constructivism, there is always a hidden a realist aspect. This results in a sort of “realist liberalism” where classical liberal tools (e. g. international organizations, law, trade, NGOs, networks etc.) might be used as a part of the hybrid warfare doctrine or realist constructivism: where the attacker uses constructivist strategies to promote its power politics with the use of hybrid warfare.

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