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COMPREHENDING HYBRID THREATS AND HYBRID WARFARE: THE HYBRIDITY BLIZZARD MODEL¹³

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To fully comprehend and counter hybrid threats and hybrid warfare (HT&HW) is a complex task, but also a very important one. In this paper we will outline a schematic model for how to comprehend hybrid threats and hybrid warfare: the “Hybridity Blizzard Model”. The model comes in three versions, of which the first presents a simplified picture of the dynamics of and between HT&HW, as well as responses and countermeasures. The second version adds a temporal dimension to this relationship, demonstrating how short term actions and responses relate to long-term vulnerabilities and resilience. The third version, in contrast, aims to provide a more accurate picture of the complex real-world situation. The aim of the model is to enable not only a better understanding of the dynamics themselves but also how to identify, comprehend and act against HT&HW .

The simplified Hybridity Blizzard Model outlines a schematic model of the dynamics of the interrelated relationship between defender and attacker in the short term as well as long term perspective, and how the different time and actor dimensions interact. The model depicts these interactive and temporal relationships as an ecosystem, which we believe is a good

¹³ This paper is adopted from the authors conclusion of a volume on Hybrid Warfare: Weissmann, Mikael, Niklas Nilsson, and Björn Palmertz. "Moving out of the blizzard: Towards a comprehensive approach to hybrid threats and hybrid warfare." *Hybrid Warfare: Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations*. By Mikael Weissmann, Niklas Nilsson, Björn Palmertz and Per Thunholm . London: I.B. Tauris, 2021. 263–272. Download here: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795.0025>. We would like to acknowledge support received from Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (RJ) (Grant No. F16-1240:1).

analogy for understanding the dynamics of hybridity, ecosystem being defined as “all the living things in an area and the way they affect each other and the environment.” While admittedly not alive in a traditional sense, “living” is an excellent way to model the intelligent social actors on the battlefield and their use, deception, and denial of using different means and tools in hybrid conflicts. It is also a beneficial way of thinking about the relationship between HT&HW, responses and countermeasures, as well as long-term vulnerabilities and resilience. In short, as an environment where all parts affect each other, and all parts are actively affected by intelligent social actors aiming to defeat the opponent.

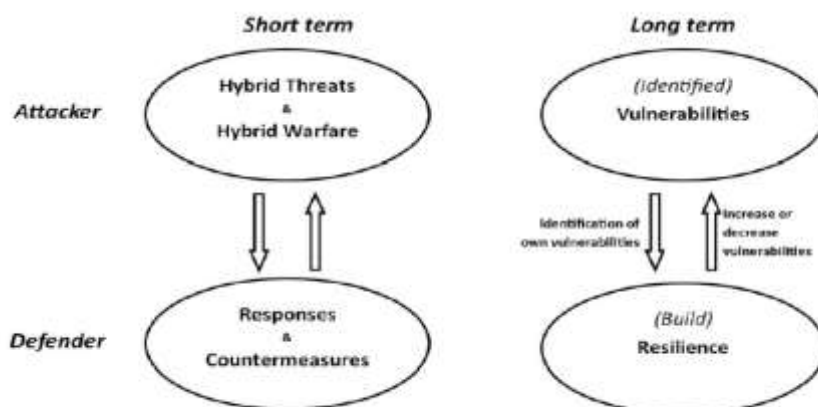


Figure 17.1 Hybridity Blizzard Model, simplified version. Source: Authors.

One problem with the simplified model is that while it provides a schematic picture of hybrid conflicts, it fails to account for the chaos, deception and denial aspects of real-world HT&HW. While the simplified model is analytically sound, it simply does not fully account for the mess out there. In order to provide a complementary and more accurate view of the complex security environment, we propose a more complex version of the ‘Hybridity Blizzard Model’. The imagery of a blizzard is useful to depict a situation where the target of HT&HW will be blindly attacked from all possible angles all the time by innumerable small attacks, which cannot be separated from one another or localized, rendering the defender unable to respond and act.

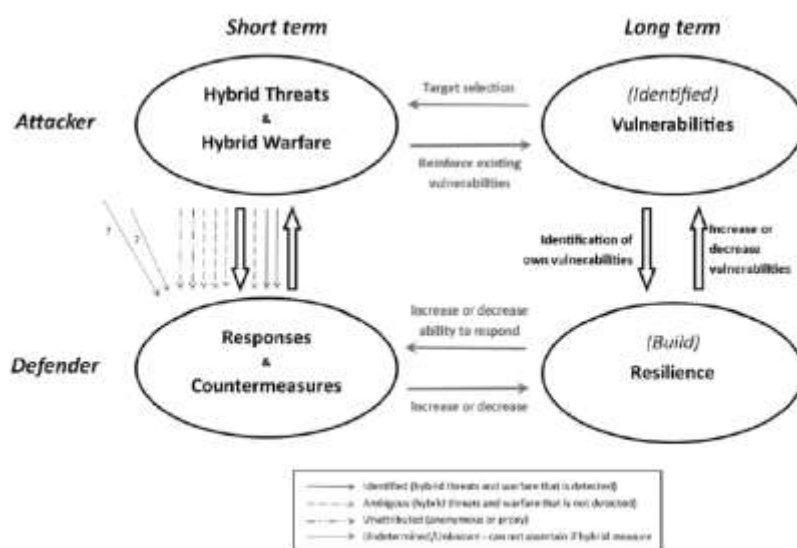


Figure 17.3 Hybridity Blizzard Model. Source: Authors.

In principle, we could probably add several arrows in the model between all parts. However, this would be of little use to enhance our understanding. Instead, we have focused on the short-term side, outlining the crucial components that best link hybrid conflicts with a blizzard. What makes the situation so messy is the fact that the threats and warfare targeting

the defender is not always ‘identified’, but ‘ambiguous’, often ‘unattributed’ and sometimes even ‘undetermined or unknown’. As outlined above, HT&HW are frequently ambiguous and undetected. Adding to the complexity is the risk of false-positives, which not only pose a problem in their own right (crying wolf); they may also in themselves be part of a larger hybrid strategy.

Moreover, HT&HW may be unattributed – inherent in the deception and denial of hybridity – where the origins are either anonymous or covered through the use of proxies.

As if not enough, observed actions or events can be undetermined or unknown, where you do not know if you are observing a hybrid measure or something else. For example, are you observing someone’s proxy, or is the ‘proxy’ in fact the origin and not part of someone’s larger strategy/plan? Are the problems with the electricity grid or the glitch in your banking system a manifestation of hybrid warfare, or simply a ‘glitch’. Is the threat you perceive against medical or food supply chains a hybrid threat, or is it simply a ‘threat’ but with no actor origin?

In short, hybridity is depicted not as two schematic arrows back and forth, but as the base of a blizzard of events and actions where the ‘normal situation you were supposed to be a part of is now so totally screwed up as to turn the entire scenario into a farce’. And this farce is the reality we live in and have to learn to manage. Sometimes a tale is told of the man who was lost somewhere in Scotland, who asked a farmer if he could tell him the way to Edinburgh. ‘Oh sir’, the farmer replied, ‘if I were you, I shouldn’t start from here!’ It is not the best joke, but nevertheless a reasonable metaphor for the situation of Western democracies today.³ We may not be where we want to be, but it is where we are. If we are to be successful in countering HT&HW while at the same time upholding our values and norms, there is no other option than to accept the place we are at.

This paper draws on the authors concluding chapter of the just published book “Hybrid Warfare Security and Asymmetric Conflict in International Relations” (I.B. Tauris, 2021).

Buy the book: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781788317795>.

The book can be freely downloaded here:

<https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/book/hybrid-warfare-security-and-asymmetric-conflict-in-international-relations/>

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ГІБРИДИЗАЦІЯ СУЧАСНИХ ПОЛІТИЧНИХ КОНФЛІКТІВ: ОСОБЛИВОСТІ РЕАЛІЗАЦІЇ

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HYBRIDIZATION OF MODERN POLITICAL CONFLICTS: FEATURES OF REALIZATION

На сучасному етапі в умовах посилення глобалізації можемо спостерігати тенденцію перетворення регіональних конфліктів в у глобальні, що здійснюють значний вплив на розстановку сил та перерозподіл сфер впливу на міжнародній арені. Використання новітніх технологій та інформаційних стратегій дає можливість швидких атак, дезінформації та ослаблення супротивників. Відтак дедалі більшого поширення набувають військово-політичні конфлікти гібридного типу, жертвами яких стають не лише військові, а й представники цивільного населення.

Новітньою формою військово-політичних конфліктів в глобальному та регіональному масштабі є так звані конфлікти «гібридного типу» або «гібридні війни». У сучасному науковому дискурсі немає одностайного тлумачення даного поняття. Різні дослідники для позначення гібридної війни також використовують терміни «неконвенційна», «змішана», «нелінійна», «іррегулярна», «дистанційна», «асиметрична» війна. Проте варто зазначити, що дані дефініції не імplementовані в офіційних міжнародних документах.

Вперше поняття «гібридної війна» використали у своїх доробках американські дослідники Р. Гленн, Б. Неметт, Ф. Хоффман, Дж. МакКуен. Вони розглядали війну гібридного типу, як модерну форму партизанського спротиву, що органічно сполучає й використовує сучасні технології та оманні методи мобілізації. Проте, на нашу думку, недостатньо вивченими є ознаки та специфічні прояви гібридних війн, їх вплив на політичні процеси в різних регіонах та перерозподіл сфер впливу в світі.