

## Russia's Renewed Military Thinking: Non-Linear Warfare and Reflexive Control

by Can Kasapoglu<sup>1</sup>



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### Introduction: A Renewed Russian Military Thinking

Since the Russo – Georgian War in 2008, the Russian Armed Forces' new way of warfighting has been drawing attention. Especially following the Crimean campaign, which ended up with the illegal annexation of the peninsula in March 2014, and given Moscow's ongoing open and covert military activities in Eastern Ukraine and recently in Syria, many experts started to focus their assessments on what they call Russia's hybrid, or non-linear, warfare. On the other hand, there are also some voices in the Western strategic community advancing the analysis that Moscow's understanding of non-linear warfare is simply an "attempt to catch up conceptually to the realities of modern war with which the United States has been grappling for over a decade in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere."<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, the Russian and the Western understandings of hybrid warfare differ to a great extent. Without a doubt, one of the most explanatory conceptualizations on hybrid warfare was offered by Frank Hoffman in his 2007 work. He defined hybrid warfare as a fusion of war forms that blurs regular and irregular warfare. Hoffman underlined that hybrid warfare would incorporate "a full range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, referring to this conceptualization, it would be fair to say that from a Western standpoint, the key word for defining hybrid wars would be 'multi-modality.' In parallel, NATO preferred to use the expression of "wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures

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<sup>2</sup> M. Kofman and M. Rojansky, *A Closer Look at Russia's Hybrid War*, Kennan Cable, Wilson Center, no. 7, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> F. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, Virginia, 2007, pp. 7-8.