COMILLAS
UNIVERSIDAD PONTIFICIA
ICAI ICADE CIHS

GUÍA DOCENTE
2026 - 2027

FICHA TÉCNICA DE LA ASIGNATURA

Datos de la asignatura	
Nombre completo	Hybrid Wars and Grey-Zone Conflicts
Código	E000013484
Impartido en	Master in International Security Management [Primer Curso]
Nivel	Master
Cuatrimestre	Semestral
Créditos	5,0 ECTS
Carácter	Optativa
Departamento / Área	Departamento de Relaciones Internacionales
Responsable	Ileana Daniela Serban
Descriptor	Global Risk Management track

Datos del profesorado	
Profesor	
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DATOS ESPECÍFICOS DE LA ASIGNATURA

Contextualización de la asignatura

Aportación al perfil profesional de la titulación

Global Risk Management track

Competencias - Objetivos

Competencias

GC1 In-depth knowledge of the main vectors of international security that shape trends in global geopolitics.

GC2 Comprehensive understanding of the impact of new security threats on the management of international security.

SC3 Ability to identify and work with multiple actors and institutions to address uncertainty in the global security landscape in an adaptive manner.

SC4 A systemic understanding and identification of interconnected security challenges.

SC6 Applied theoretical knowledge needed by any international security professional working in different security areas.

SC9 Ability to manage new security threats through the identification of opportunities for change and the adoption of related policies.

Resultados de Aprendizaje

This course explores the transition from traditional warfare to modern hybrid war techniques, which operate in the ambiguous space between peace and armed conflict. Students will be introduced to the concept of **grey zones**, encompassing activities such as economic sabotage, influence operations, cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns.

The course will focus on understanding **campaigns** by state and non-state actors that blend non-military and quasi-military tools to stay below the threshold of armed conflict. It will also examine how these unconventional warfare techniques integrate with traditional military force, threats, and hybrid strategies.

Through case studies, students will analyse how new technologies are used in grey-zone operations to obscure categorisation, attribution, and detection, complicating effective responses. They will also identify the objectives and means of hybrid warfare, which are often tailored to exploit the vulnerabilities of the target state.

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Define hybrid wars and explain their distinction from traditional and conventional warfare.
2. Understand and analyse the concept of grey zones and the spectrum of hybrid activities.
3. Identify the tools, technologies, and strategies used in hybrid warfare by state and non-state actors.
4. Analyse the vulnerabilities of target states and how hybrid war strategies exploit them.

Evaluate real-world case studies to identify hybrid warfare tactics and propose response strategies.

BLOQUES TEMÁTICOS Y CONTENIDOS

Contenidos – Bloques Temáticos

Conflict, Hybrid Wars and International Security

- Key concepts and debates on hybrid conflict.
- Contextual settings that entail hybrid conflict.
- Changing ideas and blurring theoretical remarks about peace, war and security.

Food, Water and Environmental Security: A fundamental right, and an important warfare weapon

- The relationship between basic human and environmental rights with peace and development.
- Different theoretical perspectives that enable us to understand how food, water and the environment can be used as tools for warfare.

Energy and Security

- Key theoretical debates and conceptual perspectives of energy security.
- Main areas and systems that encompass energy security.
- Energy security beyond the military nexus.

Irregular migration in hybrid contexts

- Definitions and data
- Theories on why people migrate through irregular channels
- Theories on why people in destination countries oppose irregular migration
- Theories on why destination countries combat irregular migration
- Security challenges for irregular migrants
- Security challenges for destination countries

Drones and airspace in hybrid wars

Hybrid threats in the Indo-Pacific

- What's the Indo-Pacific?
- The global significance of the Indo-Pacific
- Hybrid challenges in the Indo-Pacific
- Critical maritime infrastructure and the Indo-Pacific

METODOLOGÍA DOCENTE

Aspectos metodológicos generales de la asignatura

Lectures: Conceptual and theoretical overviews.

Case Studies: Real-world applications and critical analysis.

Workshops: Collaborative exercises on response strategies.

Group Discussions: Reflecting on emerging trends and vulnerabilities.

EVALUACIÓN Y CRITERIOS DE CALIFICACIÓN

Evaluation	(%)
Final project	50%
Participation	20%
In-class exercises	30%

Calificaciones

To be eligible to sit the ordinary exam session, students must not have unjustifiably missed more than one third of the classes. Failure to meet this requirement may result in the loss of both the ordinary and extraordinary exam sessions (Art. 93.1 of the General Regulations).

Committing a serious academic offense—such as plagiarism of previously published materials, cheating during an exam or other assessed activity, or failing to respect basic rules of conduct—may lead to disciplinary proceedings and the loss of two exam sessions.

The use of AI to generate entire assignments or substantial parts thereof, without citing the source or tool used, or when not explicitly allowed in the assignment instructions, will be considered plagiarism and regulated in accordance with the University's General Regulations.

BIBLIOGRAFÍA Y RECURSOS

Bibliografía Básica

- Hoffman, F. 2007. *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars.* Available here:

https://www.potomacinstitute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac_hybridwar_0108.pdf

- Rid, T. 2011. "Cyber War Will Not Take Place". *Journal of Strategic Studies*, *35*(1), 5–32.

https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2011.608939

- Galeotti, M. 2019. *We Need to Talk About Putin: How the West Gets Him Wrong.* Available here:

https://archive.org/details/we-need-to-talk-about-putin-why-the-west-gets-him-wrong-and-how-to-get-him-right/page/n1/mode/2up

- Chivvis, C. 2017. *Understanding Russian Hybrid Warfare and What Can Be Done About It.* Available here:

https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/CT400/CT468/RAND_CT468.pdf

Bibliografía Complementaria

Academic articles and reports (to be shared via the course platform).