



NATO's Response to Hybrid Threats

**Guillaume Lasconjarias
and Jeffrey A. Larsen
Editors**

**Foreword by
General Philip Breedlove
Supreme Allied Commander Europe**



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NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE

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List of Acronyms

A2/AD	Anti-Access/Area Denial
ACE	Allied Command Europe
ACO	Allied Command Operations
ACT	Allied Command Transformation
ADIR	Adversaire Irrégulier
AFCENT	Allied Forces Central Europe
AMF	Allied Mobile Force
ASSR	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
ATGM	Anti-Tank Guided Missile
AWACS	Airborne Warning and Control System
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BMD	Ballistic Missile Defense
CAS	Close Air Support
CBR	Central Bank of Russia
CCOMC	Comprehensive Crisis and Operations Management Centre
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFE	Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe
CHOD	Chief of Defense
CIA	Concept Interarmées
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (U.S. Government)
CICDE	Centre Interarmées de Concepts, de Doctrine et d'Expérimentation (France)
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CJSOR	Combined Joint Statement of Requirements
CNN	Cable News Network
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
CV90	Combat Vehicle 90
C2	Command and Control
C4ISR	Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance systems
DDPR	Deterrence and Defence Posture Review

DNR	Donetsk People's Republic
EPF	Explosively Formed Projectiles
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War
EUBG	European Union Battle Group
EU	European Union
FHQ	Force Headquarter
FOC	Full Operational Capability
FRG	Family Readiness Group (U.S. Army)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMBH	Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung (Company with limited liability)
GPS	Global Positioning System
G-RAMM	Guided Rocket Artillery and Mortar and Missiles
GRU	Glavnoye razvedyvatel'noye upravleniye (Chief Intelligence Directorate of the Soviet General Staff)
GTA	Guards Tank Army
IMF	International Monetary Fund
HR	Human Resources
ICBM	Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
ICI	Istanbul Cooperation Initiative [NATO]
IDF	Israeli Defense Forces
IEA	International Energy Agency
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
INF	Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty
IOC	Initial Operational Capability
IRAM	Improvised Rocket-Assisted Mortar
IRF	Immediate Response Force [NATO]
IS	Islamic State
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force [NATO in Afghanistan]
ISI	Islamic State of Iraq
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JCC	Joint Control Commission
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
KGB	Komitet gosudarstvennoj bezopasnosti (Committee for State Security)
LDPR	Liberal Democratic Party of Russia

LNG	Liquid Natural Gas
MANPADS	Man-Portable Air Defense System
MD	Mediterranean Dialogue
MD	Military District
MEK	Mujahedin-E-Khalq
MILAN	Missile d'Infanterie Léger Antichar (Light anti-tank infantry missile) (France)
MIRV	Multiple Independently targetable Reentry Vehicle
MOD	Ministry of Defense
NAC	North Atlantic Council
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCDD	National Centre for Direction of the Defence
NCS	NATO Command Structure
NDC	NATO Defense College
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIDS	National Institute for Defense Studies
NOD	Non-Offensive Defense
NORTHAG	Northern Army Group
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
NRF	NATO Response Force
NSIP	NATO Security Investment Programme
NTM-I	NATO Training Mission in Iraq
NTV	National Television (Russian television channel)
OHQ	Operational Headquarters
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OUN	Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists
PGM	Precision-Guided Munitions
PKK	Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PLA	People's Liberation Army
POW	Prisoner of War
PR	Public Relations
P-5 plus 1	Permanent members of the UN Security Council (U.S., UK, FR, RU, China) plus Germany
QDR	Quadrennial Defense Review
RAP	Readiness Action Plan (NATO)
RFP	Response Forces Pool (NATO)

RIA Novosti	РИА Новости (Russian Information Agency News)
RMA	Revolution in Military Affairs
RT	Russia Today
R2P	Responsibility to Protect
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander Europe (NATO)
SAM	Surface-to-Air Missile
SAP	State Armaments Program
SCIRI	Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SHAPE	Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (NATO)
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SLBM	Submarine-launched ballistic missile
SNCO	Senior Non-Commissioned Officer
SOF	Special Operation Forces
START	Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty
STAVKA	Stavka Verchovnogo Glavnokomandovanija (Highest Political-Military) Authority of the Soviet Union (WWII, USSR)
STO	Science and Technology Organization
TOW	Tube-launched, Optically tracked, Wire-guided (missile)
TVD	Teatr Voennykh Deistvii (Theatre of War)
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USA	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VBIED	Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Device
VEO	Violent Extremist Organizations
VJTF	Very High Readiness Joint Task Force

Foreword

NATO's greatest challenge coming out of the Wales Summit is to take on two different forms of strategic challenge from the East and South simultaneously. These challenges are composed of very different actors, and various forms of modern hybrid warfare.

For the Alliance, these security challenges have some common characteristics. Firstly, each Alliance security mission is extremely complex with vast scale, scope, and density of challenges and relies on cooperation, crisis management, and Article 5 preparations to be successful. Each security mission also confronts competitors who have designed, programmed, and operationalized their strategies. Secondly, both challenges are strategic scale challenges requiring the full depth and breadth of the Alliance to address as well as requiring working in concert with partners and other organizations toward common strategic ends. Additionally, both NATO security missions face the threat from ballistic missiles and the threat of proliferation. Furthermore, the risks and threats from the East and South directly challenge front-line Allied states, requiring adaptation measures for these states, and adaptation throughout the Alliance to build the strategic Alliance depth that is required to solve these problems – this adaptation process has started and is now an on-going work. Finally, resources, marshaled and focused, to achieve specific objectives at specific points of time, are required to deal with these challenges.

The Russian hybrid warfare approach differs from other non-state actors like ISIS to the South, yet the common threat is clear. Competitors have operationalized hybrid strategies and brought together multiple lines of effort to achieve goals that can threaten our security. Our fundamental task is to operationalize our strategies, closing the gap that our competitors

have made with already operationalized strategies. Let's consider now the Russian challenge and the challenge from the South.

Russian military actions in the Ukraine crisis reflect a sophisticated, complex, multi-variant approach to the use of force to achieve decisive political objectives. Russian military strategists and planners have taken the classic elements of Soviet and Russian military thinking, combined them with 21st century tools, tactics, and capabilities, and created new models for military action that are adapted to Russia's strategic situation. These methods exploit non-attributable means like cyber, information warfare, surprise, deception, extensive use of proxy and special forces. On the unconventional side as well, we have also seen the use of political sabotage, economic pressure, intelligence operations, and special operations. At the same time, we have observed the posturing of conventional forces for a wide range of options for their possible commitment into the conflict. This continuum of threat, including unconventional and conventional methods, is what we now commonly refer to as hybrid war.

One of the key challenges in addressing hybrid warfare is to, first, identify unconventional, subversive activity within an Alliance nation; and then to successfully attribute this activity to a group or state. National preparation and readiness for this kind of threat in its most early stage is critical.

On the conventional side, we have seen heavy weapons being distributed in extremely large numbers, the presence of Russian forces along Ukraine's borders to pressure and coerce Ukraine, and, as we witnessed in August 2014, the commitment of the Russian armed forces directly into Ukraine and in some instances into the battle.

It is now less relevant how many Russian Forces we can count inside Ukraine, as Moscow has developed a capable force of separatists, well trained and equipped with substantial numbers of heavy weaponry, and able to achieve Russian objectives with less support than previously required.

As Russia has been conducting this strategic campaign against Ukraine, the Russian armed forces have conducted training and exercises on a tactical, operational, and strategic scale that is also concerning. Snap exercises demonstrate a clear Russian capability to use in-place forces, without major mobilization preparation, and move them quickly and decisively in large numbers. We have also observed longer maritime deployments, and strategic exercises involving all components of the armed forces. The Russian military is in the midst of a major rearmament and modernization program including equipment, command and control, mobility and a revision of its military system and organization of its nationwide defense mechanism. In addition, Russia's exercise of its nuclear triad has been prominently used to remind us all about its place as a global nuclear superpower at the same time as we have observed deployments of nuclear capable delivery systems in Kaliningrad and Crimea. Taken together, Russia's exercises reflect the integration of its unconventional, conventional, and nuclear capabilities into a single continuum and an overall military strategy for potential military operations.

To the Alliance's South, we face a very different form of challenge compared to the state-to-state competition posed by Russia. This challenge has unique characteristics requiring unique NATO approaches to maintain security for the Alliance. The Alliance must strengthen the defense of its Southern Flank from a wide range of risks and threats, including civil war, extremism, terrorism in both small-scale and large-scale configurations, population movements, and proliferation. The Alliance also faces a great challenge from a continent with chronic strategic dilemmas that fuel acute security threats. Food insecurity, water insecurity, poverty, disease, breakdown of governance and health systems, and disenfranchisement of populations serve as challenges to sustaining societies and nations in Africa and equally serve as fertile ground for developing extremism, violence, terrorism, and civil war.

This is a multi-decade challenge and one that will require less traditional understandings of how the Alliance can and should contribute to solving these problems. North Africa, Sahel, and Sub-Saharan contain

transnational risks and threats that emanate from the region, transit the region, or reside in the region. However, these threats do not remain in that distant region, as demonstrated by the terrorists attacks and activities in Europe. The diverse nature of the challenges from the South requires tools, resources, and flexibility for cross-organizational and multi-national cooperation on a scale and level the Alliance has yet to exercise.

Opportunities for expanding the role of partnership in this region will have a key place in realizing the aims of our efforts in this region. We have also identified several lines of effort, such as focused engagement, defense capabilities, expanded situational awareness, defense capacity building. They could contribute to countering proliferation and terrorism, greater maritime security, and potentially greater stability in the region. These lines of efforts will be further developed under a strategic Framework for the South that the Alliance needs to establish.

In sum, each Alliance security challenge is extremely complex with vast scale, scope, and density of challenges and relies on cooperation, crisis management, and Article 5 preparations to be successful. We are confronting competitors who have designed, programmed, and operationalized their strategies. These challenges from the East and South are the new norm for the NATO, and the Alliance will need to sustain a strategic approach to addressing these challenges that is as strategic, as flexible, and as durable as the strategic frameworks and capabilities possessed by our challengers.

NATO nations are responding nationally, multi-laterally, and collectively to address the risk of hybrid warfare in its various forms. Implementing and operationalizing the Readiness Action Plan is fundamental to our security and addressing the evolving strategic security environment as are the multiple lines of work NATO has initiated since the Wales Summit. Combined, these Alliance actions will make us more prepared for hybrid warfare and more secure in this very challenging and dangerous 21st century.

To respond appropriately to a hybrid threat, we must be able

to promptly recognize and attribute hybrid actions and anticipate unconventional activity, as well as the conventional actions. Anticipation requires cooperation at all levels, across multiple ministries and throughout various lines of effort, pursuing a comprehensive approach across the DIMEFIL spectrum.¹ National, bi-lateral, and collective Alliance efforts must be integrated and mutually reinforcing. We must develop resilience and readiness to resist hybrid actions and we must count on a quick decision-making process to enable our own actions. This is fundamental to our success.

Philip M. Breedlove
General, U.S. Air Force
Supreme Allied Commander Europe

1 DIMEFIL: diplomatic/political, information, military, economic, financial, intelligence, legal.

Preface

“Knowledge is Power”

-- Francis Bacon

The NATO Defense College fulfils its mission against the backdrop of world events and rising challenges to North Atlantic security. As the Alliance’s primary academic institution, the College has made it its business to look beyond the apparent, and to take nothing for granted. The curriculum evolves along with the international security situation as it develops (and sometimes erupts). Those participating in our courses and events are thus faced with the difficult task of putting elements in perspective, and devising an approach by which to understand highly complex scenarios. Clearly, there is no such thing as an easy and ultimate answer. The quest is to find common ground and agreement, and create a workable basis for identifying the most appropriate path.

Discussions about the (re-)emergence of hybrid warfare intensified in the run-up to the 2014 Wales Summit, leading to a focused agenda for the discussions. Subsequent actions showed a determination by the Alliance and its member states to cope with the many challenges raised by this new threat. Meaningful actions were developed, and NATO’s leaders expressed a commitment to have tangible and operational Alliance responses ready by the next summit, scheduled for July 2016 in Warsaw. The NDC followed these developments closely, and supported Alliance leaders by focusing part of its Senior Course study projects on issues of importance to NATO Headquarters. The College hosted its largest-ever academic conference in April 2015, on the subject of NATO’s response to hybrid warfare, bringing together scholars and senior decision-makers from across the Alliance for a two-day session in Rome. The conference

was a good start, but in itself was just that – a beginning to what has become an active, ongoing commitment to academic study of hybrid warfare.

This book combines facts, points of view, and opinions as offered at the hybrid conference, as well as in independent papers commissioned and published by our Research Division. The subject is, after all, an example of a fluid and fast evolving phenomenon. This book does not mark the end of an activity, but merely a milestone in the expansion of our knowledge and understanding. I wish to sincerely thank the participants and the staff of the NDC for making the hybrid conference truly valuable, memorable, and a great source of pride. I also thank the authors of the chapters in this volume, as well as the editors, for their interest, motivation, and contributions.

Finally, I am grateful to the NATO leadership and the nations for the trust vested in the NDC. The College will remain committed to providing a forum for exchanges of information, looking beyond the horizon, expanding knowledge, and finding common ground. By making judicious use of the College's principle of academic freedom, it will be possible to enlarge the focus beyond the more familiar areas of study, combining all three elements of the NDC mission: Education, Research and Outreach. It is this principle that drives the NDC, its staff, and its course participants.

As the Alliance prepares for the Warsaw Summit, I hope this collection of essays will help shape the environment in which effective policy making takes place.

*Major General Janusz Bojarski, Polish Air Force
Commandant, NATO Defense College*

Acknowledgments

The NDC Research Division is pleased to bring you this collection of readings on NATO's response to Hybrid Warfare. The Division serves as a small think tank contributing to the education of the Alliance and its member states, as they consider how best to respond to the greatest threat facing Europe in the past generation. The Editors would like to thank several key individuals for their role in this project.

First, to our copy editor and administrative expert, Ms Claudia A. Vitiello, who was with us for several months and spent much of that time working on this manuscript. Her positive attitude, attention to detail, and professionalism were a model for us all.

We were also greatly assisted by the NDC Linguistics Branch, particularly Peter Mead and Caroline Curta, who faithfully check the English language versions of all our works, this book included.

We appreciated the quick turn-around by all of those authors whose works were previously published by the NDC Research Division and who agreed to update their papers prior to having them reprinted in this volume. A special thanks to our authors who were commissioned to write new chapters, all of whom wrote excellent papers for us in the course of two or three months. Your timely responses added significantly to the quality of the final product.

Chapters 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 were originally published between February 2014 and October 2015 as NDC Research Papers and are available at the NDC web site: www.ndc.nato.int. The remaining chapters were written for this volume.

Finally, thanks to our long-time publishing partner, DeBooks of Rome, for their excellent layout, formatting, printing, and final production work, and for meeting our schedule requirements.

With the right combination of intellectual study, dynamic leadership,

political will, adversaries with limited strategic ambitions, and a little bit of luck, we can peacefully pass into a new era of modern containment that may in some ways resemble the Cold War. But we must not be sanguine about the future. The goal of a Europe whole, free, and at peace is still a vision, not a reality. It will take renewed efforts by NATO in the short term to retain its credibility as a military alliance, to continue the mission upon which it was founded in 1949, and to ensure that the European dream remains a viable one.

Jeffrey A. Larsen
Guillaume Lasconjarias
NATO Defense College, Rome, November 2015

1

Introduction: A New Way of Warfare

Guillaume Lasconjarias and Jeffrey A. Larsen

“If it be not now, yet it will come – the readiness is all.”

-- William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 5, Scene 2

A hybrid approach to war is not new. This is the general conclusion among the books, articles, and papers written by strategists, civilian professors, military historians, and practitioners on hybrid conflict. Still, as one author recently put it, “Although there is little new in hybrid war as a concept, it is a useful means of thinking about wars past, present and future.”¹ NATO’s Secretary General agreed when he said that “the first hybrid warfare we know of might be the Trojan Horse, so we have seen it before.”²

As fashionable as it looks at the moment, therefore, the topic is not just a buzzword. It is, however, something of a novelty that makes it worth studying. There are changing dynamics within the international security environment that make this type of warfare look different. Moreover, it looks as if old tools have been reinvented and used in innovative ways to bring to bear a new kind of pressure on an opponent, in order to achieve faster, quicker and sometimes dirtier political goals. Hybridity in war is simply the increased level of blending between conventional and unconventional

1 Peter R. Mansoor, “Introduction” in Williamson Murray and Peter R. Mansoor (eds), *Hybrid Warfare. Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p.1.

2 NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, “Zero-sum? Russia, Power Politics, and the Post-Cold War Era,” *Brussels Forum*, March 20, 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_118347.htm.

forms of conflict, which are characterized by agility and adaptation – for instance through technological means – in an attempt to achieve decisive effects on both the physical and psychological battlefield. As such, this marks the next phase of an almost decade-old debate about “new” forms of warfare that was initiated in the early 2000s with discussions within the strategic community about asymmetry and irregular warfare.

Of course, the buzzword would not have received such a welcome were it not for the implications it has for the Alliance, as expressed by the NATO member states during their Summit in Wales. While Heads of State and Government vigorously condemned “Russia’s aggressive actions against Ukraine,” they also expressed concern about growing threats on the southern flank, especially vis-à-vis the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).³ Both the rise of a revanchist Russia destabilizing a sovereign state at the margins of Europe, and the actions waged by ISIL to undermine Iraq and Syria, echo the need to understand what is at stake and raise awareness among NATO’s member states and partners. The Alliance needs to think about possible solutions and develop the tools, structures and instruments it needs to fight this new phenomenon. One key question for NATO will be whether this review will lead to a consensus requirement for a stronger military force, able to respond to this challenge, or alternatively to a decision to tone down any rhetoric or actions that may potentially provoke greater Russian aggression. Either way, it will be important for NATO to convert reassurance into readiness in Eastern and Central Europe.

A recently retired NATO military commander has said that “hybrid warfare is not real – it is simply warfare, imposing your view on others, by force if necessary.”⁴ The authors in this volume partially agree with this assessment, but they also believe that hybrid warfare does represent a new variant of warfighting, or at least a particularly useful early phase of a conflict. This makes the subject vitally important for the security of Europe.

³ NATO Heads of State and Government, *Wales Summit communiqué*, September 5, 2014, paragraphs 1 and 33.

⁴ Presentation at NATO Defense College, Rome, October 2015.

A Short Definition

In the absence of an official and reliable definition of hybrid warfare, one can agree that the key word is indeed “hybrid:” the true combination and blending of various means of conflict, both regular and unconventional, dominating the physical and psychological battlefield with information and media control, using every possible means to reduce one’s exposure. This may include the necessity of deploying hard military power, with the goal of breaking an opponent’s will and eliminating the population’s support for its legal authorities.

Hybrid wars are complex, because they don’t conform to a one-size-fits-all pattern. They make the best use of all possible approaches, combining those which fit with one’s own strategic culture, historical legacies, geographic realities, and economic and military means.⁵ They are sophisticated and come into play at every level of the spectrum of conflict, from the tactical to the strategic. They can be conducted by states and by a variety of non-state actors (with or without state sponsorship). Adaptive and flexible, they use a wide array of means to convey a political or ideological message from the battlefield to the world without regard for international laws or norms, and without even necessarily proposing an alternative model.

The way Russia waged its war in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, compared to the way ISIL conducted its campaign in Iraq and Syria, represent two types of hybrid courses of action. They both blended the “lethality of state conflict with the fanatical and protracted fervor of irregular warfare.”⁶ When addressing the Russian case, General Philip Breedlove, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, pointed out that “what we see in Russia now, in this hybrid approach to war, is to use all the tools ... to stir up problems they can begin to exploit through their military tool.”⁷ Another analyst has described the difference between Western definitions of hybrid warfare – a

5 Peter R. Mansoor, “Introduction,” p.2.

6 Frank G. Hoffman, “Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars,” Arlington, VA, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007, p.28.

7 J. Vandiver, “SACEUR: Allies must prepare for Russia ‘hybrid war’,” *Stars and Stripes*, September 4, 2014, <http://www.stripes.com/news/saceur-allies-must-prepare-for-russia-hybrid-war-1.301464>.

conflict encompassing multi-modality – and that of Russia, where “hybrid” is seen in terms of offensive deep penetration and reflexive control.⁸ Again, what characterizes the hybrid approach is the fact that all the means at a state or non-state actor’s disposal – irregular, conventional, cyber, nuclear, strategic communications, and even the most ambiguous and dirty tricks – are combined to achieve a political goal.

A Short Background

In his testimony before the US Senate Armed Services Committee in January 2009, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates used the term *hybrid* for the first time in public when he said that “we’re going to have to ... take a look at the other elements of [the Future Combat System and] see... what is useful in this spectrum of conflict from what I would call hybrid complex wars to those of counter-insurgency.”⁹ This form of public acknowledgment that hybrid threats were a growing concern was initially linked to a series of events in the Middle East, after the war between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006, and the enduring crises in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, at the beginning the question was less about the nature of the game than the ability to adapt to it. Frank Hoffman summarized this situation in a seminal article written in 2007, arguing that the premium was to focus on the “operational adaptation of forces as they strove to gain a sustainable advantage over their enemy.”¹⁰

This notion goes beyond the dialectic relationship between the sword and the shield, the permanent “action-reaction” process that has governed military adaptation throughout history. One key feature that also characterizes the rapid changes observed during this period, and that was

8 See Can Kasapoglu, “Russia’s Renewed Military Thinking: Non-Linear Warfare and Reflexive Control,” *NDC Research Report*, forthcoming November 2015.

9 Robert Gates, *Challenges Facing the Department of Defense*, US Senate Committee on Armed Services, 111th Cong., 1st session, 27 January 2009, quoted by Robert Wilkie, “Hybrid Warfare. Something Old, Not Something New,” *Air and Space Power Journal*, Winter 2009, vol. XXIII, no. 4, pp.13-17.

10 Frank G. Hoffman, “Hybrid Warfare and Challenges,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 52, 1st quarter 2009, pp.34- 39 (quote p.34, on Thucydides and the Peloponnesian Wars).

already seen as a true game-changer, was the blurring of the distinctions between the levels of war (from the strategic to the tactical) and the nature of various actors (from traditional state-based threats to non-state actors and criminal groups), thus enabling war by proxy. For the U.S. military, and most notably for the Army and the Marine Corps, the understanding that potential adversaries would use every means and every available tool to span the full range of military operations was not new. The challenge was to convince political stakeholders that it was in their interest to maintain an organizational ability to respond to all threats, rather than focus on a reduced military force relying only on high-end technologies. Put another way, the goal was to advocate the unique expertise and role of land forces while facing hybrid threats. Whatever the nature of the conflict – state-on-state or intra-state – only a full-spectrum military would be able to respond at all levels. Understood as part of the negotiations between military services for their share of the budget, what was at stake was the justification of armies that needed to be strong and capable of challenging every type of adversary. Such armies needed to maintain a whole range of men, materials, and skills to avoid – or at least limit – a painful, expensive, and lengthy adaptation to any new form of conflict that they might encounter. In these debates, the model most closely studied was that of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) between 2006 and Operation *Cast Lead* (2009), where the continued value of knowing the basics of military and land forces doctrine (i.e., combined arms fire and maneuver) was shown once again.¹¹

NATO, under the supervision of Allied Command Transformation, followed a slightly different path, thinking more strategically and looking further ahead. In 2009-2010, a Capstone Concept analyzed the challenges posed by hybrid threats, focusing on the necessary policies and strategies to adopt. In particular, four subtopics were identified as key Challenge Areas: Environmental Understanding, Communication of Action, Increasing Access to High-end Technology and CBRN Materiel for Non-state Actors,

11 David E. Johnson, “Military Capabilities for Hybrid War: Insights from the Israel Defense Forces in Lebanon and Gaza,” *RAND Occasional Paper*, 2010, see especially pages 7 and 8, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2010/RAND_OP285.pdf.

and Adaptability and Agility of Actors.¹² However, and maybe because of the pre-eminence of the Afghanistan mission, nothing tangible was really established. Arguably, the document found that NATO could only decisively act within a “holistic framework ... through which it can both support the international community and generate early partnerships ... whilst engaging adversaries ... across all domains (political, military, economic, social and information).”¹³ The conclusion of this assessment was particularly prescient with respect to hybrid warfare:

the range and dimensions of the challenge do, however, stress the need for the enhancement of a comprehensive approach. Many elements of any response to counter a hybrid threat will likely depend on factors outside the current remit of the NATO military sphere; this particularly includes the problematic issues surrounding cooperation with non-military actors and thorough understanding of the civil-military interfaces required to achieve unity of effort.¹⁴

Russia, Crimea and Hybrid War 2.0?

“Then came the Ukraine crisis.”¹⁵

The demonstrations on Maidan Square in Kyiv, the dismissal of President Yanukovich, and the stealth invasion of Crimea in March 2014 turned things upside down in Eastern Europe in a way no one could have predicted. A lot of NATO member states were caught off-guard because they had firmly believed Russia was a strategic partner, a state with which one could do business and discuss matters of common interest.¹⁶ Within a couple of months, however, that perception changed radically: Russian

12 NATO, *Bi-SC Input to a New NATO Capstone Project for the Military Contribution to Countering Hybrid Threats*, August 25, 2010, para II.3.

13 *Ibid.*, para 25.

14 *Ibid.*, para 38.

15 Judy Dempsey, “Why Defense Matters. A New Narrative for NATO,” *Carnegie Europe*, June 24, 2014.

16 Chatham House, *Responding to A Revanchist Russia*, September 12, 2014, p.2.

actions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine prompted a reassessment of what might yet become a return to cold war. The Alliance decided to suspend all practical civilian and military cooperation with Moscow, and found itself having to reconsider the balance between its three core tasks as defined in the 2010 Strategic Concept.¹⁷ From a strategic and operational standpoint, the issue was now to understand Moscow's strategy and Putin's plans for Russia, and how they would be implemented through this "new" form of warfare. Crimea was, in short, a wake-up call for European security.

Some commentators immediately identified what was new: rather than simply the use of asymmetric, covert, and otherwise innovative military tools, it was the way in which Russia combined the use of military force with other state tools that was seen as an inflexion point.¹⁸ This idea was set against the wave of articles that shortly followed the Crimea campaign, portraying the poor showing of the Russian armed forces as the outcome of an unsuccessful two-decade-old transformation of the Russian military. Renowned specialists discussed the results of these reforms, stating with few exceptions that Russia had overestimated its ability to conduct effective and efficient reforms. This had led Moscow to build a military that was not as powerful or efficient as the West thought, crippled as it was with bureaucratic inertia, a nebulous agenda, and inherent flaws which would leave the state "heavily reliant on the nuclear deterrent."¹⁹ At the same moment, and while sharing the opinion that on the political-strategic level the transformation was not yielding rapid results, others admitted that

17 These three tasks are collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security. During the 15 years prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine the Alliance had understandably emphasized the latter two responsibilities more than collective defense, since there was consensus among the member states that Europe was whole and at peace, with no imminent threats to its security. See *Active Security, Modern Defence: Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, Adopted by Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Lisbon, 19-20 November 2010, available at http://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/pdf/Strat_Concept_web_en.pdf.

18 Kristin Ven Bruusgaard, "Crimea and Russia's Strategic Overhaul," *Parameters* 44(3) Autumn 2014, p.81-90, http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/issues/Autumn_2014/11_BruusgaardKristin_Crimea%20and%20Russia's%20Strategic%20Overhaul.pdf.

19 Igor Sutyagin, "Russia's Overestimated Military Might," *RUSI Newsbrief*, March 2014, vol. 34, n°2, p.3-5 and Roger McDermott, "The Brain of the Russian Army: Futuristic Visions Tethered by the Past," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, January-March 2014, Vol 27, pp.4-35.

at the strategic-operational level, whether by accident or by design, the Russian military had achieved some success after learning its lessons from Chechnya in the 1990s and Georgia in 2008.²⁰ Russia was caught between a conception of itself as a rising power returning to the international stage, and the recognition that it had to live with limited resources. This became even more evident after several rounds of Western sanctions were implemented by the European Union in response to the Ukrainian crisis. Russia still balanced “between preparing for internal and regional conflicts and preparing for conflicts with other great powers; between training for counterinsurgency and training for conventional military operations; between a legacy 20th century force and a 21st century force.”²¹

Thus Moscow needed a new “strategy” or more innovative tools.²² This recognition came in response to a threat perception that Russia inherited from the USSR and its earlier tsarist period, a strategic culture “deeply rooted in its Eurasian setting ... and defined by persistent concerns about foreign intervention on its periphery, which Moscow sees as unstable.”²³ The pro-Western direction that Yeltsin had adopted in the 1990s was replaced by an imperialist willingness to reassert control over Russia’s neighbours. The wars in Chechnya and Georgia and the period that followed (until the opening of the Ukrainian crisis) witnessed the Kremlin using a vast array of tools, mixing diplomacy, strategic information, arms sales, status-of-forces agreements, and military operations to secure its sphere of privileged interests and shift the balance of power in its immediate neighbourhood. All of these, together with a single purpose, perfectly define what the West and NATO recently rediscovered and labelled “new-generation”, “non-linear,” or “hybrid” warfare.

20 Ariel Cohen and Robert E. Hamilton, “The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications,” *Carlisle*, Strategic Studies Institute, June 2011, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB1069.pdf>.

21 *Ibid.*, p.63.

22 According to specialists, the notion of Russian ‘Grand Strategy’ doesn’t make sense (cf. Andrew Monaghan, “Putin’s Russia: Shaping a ‘Grand Strategy?’” *International Affairs* 89, 5 (2013), pp.1221-1236).

23 Jacob Kipp, “Smart Defense From New Threats: Future War From a Russian Perspective: Back to the Future After the War on Terror,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, January-March 2014, Vol 27, pp.36-32, quote p.40.

However, in the Kremlin's eyes, this new approach was initially a trial balloon which had almost no success. The Rose and Orange Revolutions in the early 2000s had brought to power in Russia's immediate neighbourhood political *élites* that were radically pro-Western.²⁴ This had already led to direct military interventions, which Moscow fought "as a deterrent ... to deter the West from thinking about further NATO enlargement and the countries in the region from seeking it."²⁵ The Kremlin and the Russian General Staff claimed the West was manipulating individuals, the media, institutions, and states, using non-traditional tools in an effective and less controversial way. A Russian military theorist admitted: "The break-up of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the parade of the 'colour revolutions' in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, and so on, show how principal threats exist objectively, assuming not so much military forms as direct or indirect forms of political, diplomatic, economic and informational pressure, subversive activities, and interferences in internal affairs."²⁶

Moreover, clearly identifying NATO and the United States as a major threat towards its national security, Moscow recognized that Russia had to "dislodge [Western ideals] using soft power or direct military efforts against all neighbouring anti-Russian regimes, and limit Western influence."²⁷

24 At the 3rd Moscow Conference on International Security (MCIS), S. Shoygu, Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, explained how colour revolutions were implemented: The 'colour revolutions' phenomenon is becoming a major factor in the destabilization of the situation in many regions of the world. Foreign values are being imposed on peoples under the guise of expanding democracy. The socio-economic and political problems of individual states are being exploited in order to replace nationally-oriented governments with regimes which are controlled from abroad. These in turn ensure that their sponsors have unimpeded access to the resources of those states. The 'colour revolutions' are increasingly taking the shape of armed struggle and unfolding according to the rules of the art of war, deploying all available means in the process, primarily the resources of information warfare and special forces. Full-scale military force may be used for greater effect. This is evidenced by the war against Serbia, strikes against Libya and interference in the conflict in Syria. The pretexts for external interference have been different in each specific scenario but there is a universal pattern in its implementation: information action – military pressure – a change of political leadership and an alteration of the state's foreign-policy and economic thrust" (MCIS, Conference Proceedings, May 23-24, 2014).

25 Ronald A. Asmus, *A Little War that Shook the World. Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*, New York, Palgrave-MacMillan, 2010, p.221.

26 According to General Makmut Gareev, quoted by Oscar Jonsson and Robert Seely, "Russian Full-Spectrum Conflict: An Appraisal After Ukraine," p.8.

27 Pavel Felgenhauer, "Russia is Building an Iron Fist to Deter the West; A National Consensus in Moscow on Pursuing a Revisionist Strategy," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 13(19), Jamestown Foundation, September 17, 2012.

Claiming that NATO and the United States were in fact the first to use hybrid techniques, Russia has embarked on a strategy that adopted the same tools with the aim to pursue its long-term goals without being officially involved.²⁸ The unveiling of what was then described as “ambiguous,” “asymmetrical,” “unconventional,” “non-linear,” or “non-contact” warfare was the result of recent developments by the Russian military staff (as reflected in the so-called Gerasimov doctrine), as well as factors that had been part of the Soviet/Russian military for generations.²⁹ Using *maskirovka* (deception measures), special forces, and covert operations is not particularly new, and belongs to the category of “dirty tricks” played by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. However, Russia’s well-planned use of information warfare is striking: cyberwar; manipulation of mass media, and utilization of “shock pictures” that aim at undermining the opponent’s legitimacy; brainwashing one’s own population; and attracting, all over the world, friends and supporters.³⁰ Of course, all these means and tools serve the state’s political interests while remaining under the threshold that would provoke a Western escalation or retaliation.

This also highlights how new conflicts may be played out in the near future, when a resolute adversary can use old and new tools, utilizing all the levers of national power while ignoring internationally recognized borders and norms. It proves again that strategic initiative and a willingness to act can be decisive. By playing high and low, hard and soft, and blurring the lines between war and peace Russia does not create a new strategy *per se*. But these actions do cause the West to reappraise the very nature of war as the continuation of politics by other means. Russia really does see the world differently, whether the West agrees with that perspective, or even wants to admit it.

Developing a response to hybrid threats will be neither easy, nor

28 For understanding the Russian point of view, see Andrew Korybko, *Hybrid War: The Indirect Adaptive Approach to Regime Change*, Moscow, Peoples’ Friendship University of Russia, 2015, pp.9-10 (<http://orientalreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/AK-Hybrid-Wars-updated.pdf>).

29 See Oscar Jonsson and Robert Seely, “Russian Full-Spectrum Conflict: An Appraisal after Ukraine,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 28:1, March 2015, pp.1-22.

30 This also belong to ISIS’ panoply to threaten their enemies and attract new recruits.

cheap. But it would be naïve to believe that Russia could be deterred without incurring any costs. The hybrid threat posed by Russia may not be existential, but it is nevertheless very serious. The fact of declining resources for security in the West should not be the primary determinant in precluding recognition of the threat or of developing realistic responses. The costs NATO's member states may have to bear in better posturing their military forces to deal with a revitalized Russian threat that entails multiple aspects of the spectrum of conflict would be nothing compared to the potential strategic consequences of a successful Russian hybrid move against Alliance territory or interests. Deterrence, while not easy, is better than many of the alternatives. As a military Alliance dedicated to the protection of its member states' territories, populations, interests, and values, it is incumbent on NATO to carefully consider and respond to this unwelcome but nonetheless very real danger.

The Alliance has developed a number of responses to the hybrid threat already. Many of them were announced at the Wales Summit or in follow-on ministerial meetings. These include the Readiness Action Plan, a roadmap for building capability packages, a comprehensive concept for creating an enhanced NATO Response Force, a strategy for hybrid warfare, and a cyber security action plan.³¹ In order to prepare for its long-term adaptation to the new international security situation, there are additional steps that the Alliance could take: an increased military presence along its Eastern Flank, including the institutionalization of a permanent plan for ground forces and pre-positioned equipment in the region; a stronger NATO force structure, including high end capabilities; enhancements to NATO's command structure; and a real defence investment pledge to which all countries will adhere.³²

31 NATO's Hybrid Strategy is due for release in December 2015, shortly after the publication of this book. It will be a classified document.

32 From presentations at a conference on "NATO-Russian Relations," Wilton Park, UK, October 2015.

A Short Overview of the Book

This book was designed to serve as a reader for the scholar, student, and practitioner on hybrid warfare and NATO's initial responses to this new challenge. It comprises a combination of new chapters with papers previously published by the NATO Defense College Research Division. All of those papers were published since Russia's capture of Crimea in early 2014, and all have been reviewed and updated where necessary by their authors. The Editors are pleased to offer this collection to the intellectual community that is thinking about these issues and trying to determine the best way for the West, Europe, and NATO to respond.

In the first section of the book, "Strategic Dimensions: Russia as a Game-Changer," the authors look at Russian foreign and security policy in today's international security environment. They consider the rationale and justification for Russian behavior in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, and try to assess why Moscow is suddenly acting the way it is.

The second section, "A New Type of Warfare," examines the history of this supposedly new type of conflict that we have labeled hybrid warfare. As it turns out, it is not so new. One of the earliest episodes of the deception and non-traditional approaches to conflict that we now ascribe to Russia was the infamous, possibly apocryphal, and ultimately successful use of the Trojan Horse some 2,500 years ago. Nor is this a new approach for Russia. Several of our authors highlight the Soviet use of *maskirovka* and other techniques during the Cold War.

The third section examines a series of case studies of hybrid warfare along the borders of NATO. From the most well-known case of Ukraine and Crimea, to the potential threat to Estonia and the Baltic States, to the Islamic State on NATO's southern borders, and even to unexpected arenas such as energy security, our authors trace the development of this concept and its adaptation by Moscow and ISIL.

The final section considers "NATO's Adaptation to Hybrid Warfare." Here, our chapters consider some specific responses that the Alliance has

already made to these new threats, including conventional initiatives, a revival of discussions over the importance of nuclear deterrence, the development of strategies for dealing with the threat and, in the case of the Southern Flank, a decision to do very little. The book concludes with a review of the main themes of the text and some thoughts about future research opportunities in this field.

We hope you find this book useful in your analysis of Russia's introduction of a new form of hybrid warfare on the fields of Europe since 2014, and the similar approach taken by states and non-state actors in the Middle East.

A NEW STRATEGIC DIMENSION:
RUSSIA AS A GEOPOLITICAL
GAME-CHANGER

2

What Mid-Term Future for Putin's Russia?

Stéfanie Babst

Point of Departure

For 16 years – the equivalent of four American presidential terms – Russian President Vladimir Putin has been presiding over the largest nation on the globe, one in possession of the world's most powerful nuclear arsenal and massive natural resources. Yet there is still debate about who he really is, what his intentions are, how long his rule could possibly last and whether Putinism will outlive his departure. Russia's growing assertiveness vis-à-vis its neighbours and former partners in the West has, thus far, culminated in its annexation of Crimea as well as in a stand-off over Ukraine. This, together with the Kremlin's military muscle-flexing and anti-Western rhetoric, has reinforced the widespread perception that Putin has increasingly become unpredictable, aggressive and thus dangerous for the West. For these reasons, the question of Russia's mid-term future has become ever more pressing.

More broadly, this assessment is focused on two sets of questions:

First: Following Moscow's annexation of Crimea and destabilizing actions in Ukraine, how stable is the current Russian political regime? What are the main drivers of President Putin's future course of action and what type of challenges will he have to face at home in the next 12-18 months? Are there serious challengers to his rule and if so, how strong are their ambitions to create the political grounds for a post-Putin order in Russia?

Second: In light of Western economic sanctions against Russia, which are the most important challenges that the Muscovite leadership has to cope

with in the socio-economic domain? Are any of those challenges prone to become game changers, encompassing the potential to trigger disruptive change(s) in Russia in the mid-term future? And how do these challenges affect Putin's ability to remain in power?

Overall, this analysis is geared to help create a plausible scenario for Russia's mid-term future, which should be useful for political decision-makers who are contemplating how to frame the West's future engagement with Russia.

Putin's Russia Today—and Tomorrow

Russia in 2015 is not a united, forward-looking country but a nation full of contradictions. Under Putin's rule, Russia has grown wealthier but has become more fragmented and feudal. It has Europe's largest online presence and one of the world's biggest social media markets, but its society and political opposition suffers from one of the most rigid and repressive regimes. Russia's real income increased by 140% in the last decade, but it ranks 160th out of 175 countries in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) corruption index. While elements of the old Russian and Soviet political cultures still prevail and influence state-society relations, as well as the defence and economic spheres, there are nevertheless small pockets of change, in particular among the young, urban middle class and political activists in the regions.

In late 2011 and early 2012, those pockets almost caused the tectonic plates underlying the Russian political order to shift. An emerging urban middle class that had grown confident and increasingly politically sophisticated was demanding change. The elite was divided between technocrats advocating political reform and economic modernization and hard-liners seeking to maintain the status quo, and Putin himself seemed to be losing his aura of invincibility. His vital role as "The Decider" – a trusted broker among elite factions – appeared to be in jeopardy. There was even talk of a battle of succession emerging among his most trusted

lieutenants. And Russia's economy, heavily dependent on energy exports, appeared headed for a deep recession. Taken as a whole, it looked like a perfect storm, creating hope that Putinism could, at some point in the future, exhaust itself.

Putin rightly sensed that the situation had become dangerously shaky, and decided to strengthen his position by achieving some "successes" abroad, by "bringing Crimea home to Russia" and fostering the narrative of "Russia's patriotic awakening." Now, with nationalist fervour unleashed by the annexation of Crimea and the Ukraine crisis, he has re-emerged as Russia's ever stronger leader.

Authoritarianism and Inner Circles

Over the past 16 years, Putin has been able to remain in power mainly because he successfully managed to strike a balance between the various competing interest groups that jointly control the country's main strategic assets. This "give-and-take" system allowed Putin to accomplish two core objectives: first, to have a free hand in consolidating the country, primarily strengthening Russia's defence, bolstering government revenues, stabilizing the economic system and suppressing dissent, whether from the political opposition or from militants in the Muslim Caucasus, and second in transferring the country's economic, financial and energy assets to a small group of people that is neither accountable to the government and/or the parliament nor enjoys any form of democratic legitimacy. Preserving and strengthening the political system that he has created was, is and will be the top priority for Putin.

Under Putin's current presidency, Russia has now almost fully turned into an authoritarian state, making the modernization efforts of former President Dmitry Medvedev a thing of the past. In today's Russia, there are no checks and balances that could effectively limit presidential power. The Kremlin has direct control over the executive, legislative and judicial bodies. Similar to the Politburo in the former Soviet Union, the Presidential

administration prepares and takes all important policy decisions, reducing the role of the Prime Minister and his cabinet to recipients of the President's instructions. Whereas Putin stages his public appearances with imperial pomp, underscoring that he is the ultimate holder of Russia's "vlast" (the source and owner of state power), Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev has to take the blame for the government's poor performance.

Putin's inner circle is composed of a number of top oligarchs, best friends, senior officials and directors of state corporations. Many of them have personal ties to Putin dating back to the years they spent together in St. Petersburg; others have only been selected by Putin for tactical, short-term purposes, and others simply belong to the various groups because of their immense personal wealth. Overall, the members of Putin's power structure lack any firm ideological belief. Their principal objective is to ensure continued access to the country's economic-financial resources and political power, allowing them to enhance their personal wealth and position as well as those of their supporting networks. In this sense, the Kremlin's current power structure can best be visualized in a spider diagram with Putin as the key manager and ultimate decision-maker. The key advantage of this inner-circle system for him is that none of its members have a realistic chance to challenge his rule: they all owe their power, positions and personal wealth to him.¹

Since early 2014, not everyone seems to be happy with the president's current course of action. Due to the current sanctions regime, some of Russia's oligarchs have suffered substantial financial losses owing to the decrease in value of their shareholdings in various Russian companies and banks. Alischer Usmanov, Vladimir Lisin, Mikhail Prochhorov, Mikhail Fridman and many other top business people are said to be among them. Understandably, they not only fear the impact of more Western sanctions

¹ At present, Putin's most influential associates include top Presidential administration officials Sergey Ivanov, Vyacheslav Volodin and Yevgeny Shkolov; Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin; Rosneft chief Igor Sechin; the head of the Investigative Committee Aleksandr Bastrykin; heads of state corporations and companies like Vladimir Yakunin (Russian railways) and Sergey Chemezov (Rostekh), as well as private businessmen who accumulated fortunes thanks to Putin's backing, such as Yuri Kovalshuk, Gennady Timchenko, and Arkady Rotenberg.

on their companies but are also concerned that Putin could soon decide to halt their attempts to secure their money outside Russia. Other members of Putin's inner circle appear to be worried about remaining "on a boat that could eventually sink:" ex-Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin openly distanced himself from "the current anti-Western rhetoric," arguing that Russia's growing international isolation would "seriously damage Russia's business interests."

At the end of 2014, Putin gave a compelling example of how he seeks to handle "unpatriotic" business leaders. The Kremlin placed Vladimir Yevtushenkov, chairman of the Sistema conglomerate, under house arrest on charges of money laundering in connection with Sistema's acquisition of the Bashneft oil company. Only Rosneft CEO and close Putin ally Igor Sechin stands behind these accusations. Sechin had approached Sistema about the possible sale of the Bashneft oil company. Reportedly, Yevtushenkov declined Rosneft's offer to buy Bashneft because he considered the initial offer too low. The case against Yevtushenkov is indicative, because he did not challenge Putin's regime but was part of the system. He was a politically loyal businessman who played by the rules, but the attack against him was provoked by his unwillingness to make sacrifices "for the good of the Motherland" – an alarming signal for the Russian business community as well as for foreign investors. His arrest demonstrates that the economy is entering a "state of siege" in which all relations are governed in the interests of the "key players" whose survival guarantees the stability of the regime.

Vertical Power

While Russia, according to its constitution, is a federal state, the Kremlin has turned the so-called "vertical power" structures into an effective instrument to control and direct the country's 85 regions, which are all dependent on Moscow's financial subsidies. Per his own presidential decree from 2000, Putin can appoint his personal envoys to the now eight federal districts. The regime has few problems in ensuring that the posts of 85 governors and other key posts in the regions are filled with obedient

Kremlin cronies. A recent example thereof is the regional elections held in Russia in September 2014, which resulted in victory for the United Russia party. In the race for governors' seats, the ruling party candidates scored an average of 77.2%, a record number since the return of direct elections. But the picture of United Russia's triumph was marred by a low turnout in many regions. In central Russia, only 25–30% of voters went to the polls, about as many as in the Far East. The capital experienced a record-low turnout: only 21% of Muscovites turned out to elect the Moscow City Duma deputies. During the voting, party observers noted more than 1,500 violations: in St. Petersburg, for example, the two United Russia candidates miraculously received 103% and 117% of the vote.

Russia's Patriotic Surge

The “2014 - Year of Russian Culture” campaign was one of the latest Kremlin-sponsored efforts, aimed at strengthening a broader surge of Russian patriotism and nationalism that is geared toward mobilizing Russian society and inspiring future generations. The glorification of the country's tsarist and Soviet history has become a key priority for the Kremlin, supported by patriotic organizations that have mushroomed across the country. One of the main bodies responsible for steering and promoting Russia's patriotic pivot is the “Directorate for Social Projects.” Created in 2012 as part of the Presidential Administration, it is tasked to “strengthen the spiritual and moral foundations of Russian society” and to improve “government policies in the field of patriotic upbringing.”

Putin first sketched out the contours of his patriotic project at his state-of-the-nation address in December 2012, leaving little doubt that he sought to make Russian patriotism the ideological cornerstone of his future policies. “Russian society today is experiencing an obvious deficit of spiritual bonds,” he said during the address, adding that his fellow countrymen should draw “inner strength” from their 1,000-year history. “We must not only develop confidently, but also preserve our national and spiritual identity, not lose ourselves as a nation. To be and to remain

Russian,” he said, quoting former Soviet dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn, is a “natural, organic feeling.”

Since his speech in late 2012, Putin has restlessly stoked patriotic sentiments throughout the country: by attending military anniversaries, renewing calls for the Russian Orthodox Church to “anchor the moral framework of public life and national statehood,” praising the creation of a new patriotic core group (Siet – network) within the pro-Kremlin youth movement “Nashi,” and sanctioning patrols by brigades of Cossacks to help “maintain law and order.” He even shared some of his personal favourite early 20th century philosophers – Nikolai Berdyaev, Vladimir Solovyev and Ivan Ilyin – with his countrymen, advising Russia’s regional governors and United Russia leaders to read these authors during the 2014 winter holiday. The main message of these authors is Russia’s messianic role in world history, the preservation and restoration of Russia’s historical borders, and the unique role of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Putin’s vision of Russian patriotism is clearly framed by anti-Western and anti-liberal ideas, against which the “Russian civilization” must guard, be it through enhanced “patriotic education” or the banning of foreign languages from Russian schools. One of the latest draft laws that his Minister of Culture, Vladimir Medinsky, has put to the State Duma aims at “the protection of Russian children against unpatriotic (i.e. Western-liberal) information.” In the absence of any other compelling vision for the country’s future, the Kremlin’s nation-wide patriotic surge is likely to last.

Russia’s Political Parties

Putin’s ability to maintain the political status quo is also due to Russia’s weak and anachronistic party system which, with the slight exception of the Communist Party, does not offer any convincing alternative vision for the country’s future. In the past, the lack of any strong political competitive force helped Putin to create party-like organizations like United Russia in order to mobilize Russian voters and ensure a comfortable majority in

the State Duma. The United Russia faction holds 237 of the 499 seats in the Russian parliament, allowing Putin to receive legislative support for whatever he wants.²

Clearly the Kremlin has its own, very special view of what should constitute political pluralism in Russia. Since it was forced to introduce some liberal revisions of the electoral laws in 2012 (following the series of public protests), the overall number of parties has reached 77. However, there has been no increase in competition among parties. In order to prevent such competition from developing, the Kremlin has gone to great lengths. It has successfully created or facilitated the creation of both right-wing and left-wing “patriotic” parties (for example, the Right Cause Party and the Patriots of Russia Party) and has forced the opposition to compete with spoilers and multiple mini-parties, the names of which confuse voters. The government can meet with the leaders of these parties in the Kremlin, listen to their proposals, and invite them to State Duma meetings without worrying about them causing any trouble. In most cases, these parties are built around a “nobody,” surrounded by a couple of his or her political consultants.

With this practice, the Kremlin is evidently trying to secure itself against a new setback in United Russia’s poll standings by encouraging the appearance of a large number of political parties, of which only a few will stand a chance of gaining a seat in parliament. In the 2016 parliamentary elections, the regime will rely on candidates from single-member districts, who, in order to avoid the “crooks and thieves” label, will participate in elections as independent candidates. Real opposition parties and their candidates, on the other hand, will find it very difficult to obtain the right to take part in the elections.

Overall, the prospects for Russia’s small liberal opposition remain grim. First of all, the Kremlin will likely continue to suppress any form of political opposition. But even more, there is no leading figure that could mobilize Russia’s middle class, which is still small in size and not politically well-

2 The Russian Communist Party holds 92 seats, the Just Russia party 64 seats and the LDPR 56 seats.

organized. Moreover, 35-40% of Russians who could be attributed to the middle class are state employees – the vast majority of them would not dare to fundamentally challenge the current political system.

Repressive Legislation

Since his return to the presidency in 2012, Putin has made intensive use of Russian legislation to restrict and, where possible, eliminate political opposition and dissent through enforcing a series of harsh laws. These laws increased the control of the internet, dramatically hiked fines for participating in unsanctioned street protests, expanded the definition of treason, and branded nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that accepted foreign grants and engaged in vaguely defined “political activities” as “foreign agents.”

In June 2013, Putin signed a law introducing several legislative amendments directed at toughening Russia’s laws on fighting extremism. These include imprisonment for funding extremist activities and calling for extremism via the Internet. “Extremism” is a nebulous term, since in today’s Russia, any displeasure with the authorities is equated to extremism – especially if it is publicly expressed. For example, Grani.ru has been declared an extremist website. There were no court proceedings – officials from Roskomnadzor (the Federal Supervision Agency for Information Technologies and Communications) simply decided that the website was an extremist one, and ordered Russian Internet providers to block access to the online publication.

Russian citizens can now be sentenced to up to five years of imprisonment for inciting extremist activity through the Internet. More recently, on 26 September, the State Duma passed a draft law limiting foreign ownership of the country’s media to 20%. The text now has to be passed by the upper house, the Federation Council, and be ratified by President Vladimir Putin before it becomes law. If implemented, the law will require owners of media companies with foreign-owned stakes of more than 20% to lower these

stakes by February 2017.

With the cooperation of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Kremlin has also sought to bolster its popular support by scapegoating immigrants and minorities in Russian society. In June and July last year, Putin signed laws that effectively outlawed lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender activism and expression, and banned gay couples in foreign countries from adopting Russian children. The government's hostile stance has spurred a spate of homophobic attacks across the country, to which the state authorities largely reacted with indifference.

With the experience of the Ukrainian protests and other so-called "colour revolutions" in mind, the Kremlin is prone to add more restrictions and pressure on Russian opposition groups in the future. But it must not fear the emergence of a "Russian Maidan movement." Thanks to the constant flow of state propaganda, most Russians think that their country is an island of stability and peace in comparison to neighbouring Ukraine, which they believe has sunk into chaos and anarchy.

State Propaganda

Over the last years, Russia has crafted a state media force which routinely circulates misinformation at home and abroad. To this end, Putin has restructured and invigorated the country's domestic and international media, investing over U.S. \$1.6 billion annually. In March 2014, he declared that the newly created state media agency 'Rossiya Sevodnya' bears "strategic importance for the country's security and defence." The results of the regime's investment to boost state propaganda are profound. Today's Russian media has reached levels of centralization and homogeneity which have not been seen since the days of the Soviet Union.

Domestically, Russian state media appears to be having the most tangible effects. Deprived of comparable alternatives, 70% of the Russian population turns to state-run television for news. Without competing narratives to contrast against the state's media, it becomes almost impossible for Russian

viewers to decipher what is truth from what is speculation or fabrication. According to a 2013 Levada survey, almost two-thirds of the Russian population believes that Russian television provides an objective source of news. State-run channels such as the all-news Rossiya24 are complemented by NTV television, owned by Gazprom Media. Ren-TV and Channel 5 are owned by billionaire Yury Kovalchuk, a close adviser to Putin (and among the officials targeted by U.S. sanctions). With this in mind, Putin can use state media to rally popular support for his political agenda – a technique which has been exemplified by the conflict in Ukraine.

Within this multifaceted approach, the Russian government has recently been investing heavily in an international television network: RT, formerly known as Russia Today. Inspired by the state-controlled media of the Soviet regime, Putin's order aims at “making a concerted effort to break the monopoly of the Anglo-Saxon mass media” and to “illuminate abroad the state policies” of the Kremlin. The country now invests around U.S. \$136 million each year just to influence public opinion abroad.

Putin's Popularity

Undoubtedly, Putin's “*coup de Crimée*” and the constant flow of patriotic state propaganda have enormously helped to bolster his popularity at home. In July 2014, a staggering 83% of Russians approved Putin's performance as President (his ratings already increased from 64% in December 2013 to 80% in March 2014). This is an 18% hike since the beginning of the year and just short of his 88% record, reached in September 2008, the month after Russia's war with Georgia over the pro-Moscow breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In mid-September 2014, a poll by the Public Opinion Foundation found that Putin is seen as “Russia's highest moral authority.” One third said no. Of the two-thirds of respondents who said yes, 36% see Putin as a shining beacon of morality.³ Early in 2015, Putin's

3 Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu lagged far behind, being considered moral authorities by 6% and 5% respectively. LDPR leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy received 4%.

public support rate had not changed much and was still above 82%.

That Putin has always been especially popular when his country was locked in a military confrontation is no coincidence. During each of the three conflicts waged under his leadership – in Chechnya, Georgia, and Ukraine – Putin has tapped into Russian national pride and a deep-seated feeling that Russians are misunderstood and mistreated by the West. Before the crisis erupted in Kyiv last fall, his ratings had been at an all-time low. In September 2013, Putin's approval rates were at 61%. Even the Olympic Games held in February in Sochi, Putin's pet project, failed to boost his ratings by more than 3-4%. Interestingly, Moscow's assertiveness against Ukraine also boosted the approval ratings of Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev (from 49% in September 2013 to 65% in May 2014) and the government (from 41% in September 2013 to 60% in May 2014).

Political Apathy

It is seemingly one of the contradictions of modern Russia that, while public support for Putin is extraordinarily high, the majority of Russians are nevertheless politically indifferent. According to a sociological survey conducted by the Public Opinion Foundation in September 2014, the level of Russian civic engagement has dropped to nearly *zero*--a record low. Over the last two years, more than 90% of respondents could not express their civic or political position; 95% were not affiliated to any political party and did not support a particular politician by collecting signatures; 91% did not act as observers at elections; and 94% did not engage in campaigning against any legislative initiative. In other words, neither the notorious Dima Yakovlev Law that imposed a ban on Americans adopting children from Russia, nor the proposal to punish Internet users for using indecent language on the web, have stirred much discontent among ordinary Russians.

Maintaining Russia's Economic Growth

Despite the successful consolidation of his power at home, Putin still faces a range of problems, most of which fall into the socio-economic domain. To avoid falling behind the economic development of other emerging powers, Russia would have to embark on a comprehensive reform programme, including institutional, regulatory, fiscal, labour market, financial sector, judicial, and many other reforms. Before the 2014 February events, there was already little political appetite among the Russian leadership to initiate far-reaching reform, chiefly because it would require taking on the vested interests of some key power factions and individuals close to the president. Now, with growing political and economic pressure from the West, Putin and the conservative-statist political forces close to him will feel even less inclined to initiate far-reaching socio-economic reforms.

But the Moscow leadership will have to find some answers to Russia's pressing economic problems if it wants to sustain at least a small degree of economic growth. The economy already started to slow down in 2012, growing by just 1.3% (instead of the 3.5% forecast). In June 2014, the Russian government announced that it would raise its annual growth forecast from 0.5% to around 1%, but in July 2014 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) downsized its estimate by 1.1 points to just 0.2% growth.

Russia's economy is heavily dependent on exports of crude oil, natural gas and petroleum products, which, in 2013, represented 68% of all Russian exports. Without the revenues from oil and gas exports as well as the related taxes and tariffs, Russia's state budget would suffer a deficit of 10.2% of GDP. The flip side to Russia's dominance of the energy sector is not only the vulnerability of global oil and, to a lesser extent, gas prices; it has also weighed on the development of those sectors where productivity growth tends to be fast, notably manufacturing. The huge earnings from oil and gas exports have led to a sharp increase in Russia's real exchange rate over the past decade, which, in turn, has made it harder for manufacturing companies in other economic sectors to compete

internationally. Subsequently, Russia's manufacturing sector has declined steadily in recent years. Moreover, Russia's large dependency on oil and gas has undermined long-term sustainability of the country's public finances. The non-oil budget deficit has now widened to 10% of GDP, from just 4% a decade ago.

The fall in oil prices over the past year poses another headwind for Russia's struggling economy. The price of Urals crude, which is Russia's main export blend, fell from U.S. \$114 per barrel in June 2014 to below U.S. \$50 a barrel for the first time since May 2009. A major concern for Russia would be for oil prices to fall further and then stay low for a prolonged period. This is a realistic possibility and is a key reason to expect Russia's growth to remain extremely weak over the coming years. Russia loses about U.S. \$2 billion in revenues for every dollar fall in the oil price, and the World Bank has warned that Russia's economy will shrink by at least 0.7% in 2015 if oil prices do not recover.

Russia's infrastructure is largely outdated and requires thorough modernization. Due to the lack of adequate transportation means and capacities (airports, ports, electricity, highways, trains) Moscow's state budget loses 7 to 9% every year. Up to 2030, the government will seek to invest U.S. \$125 billion in large infrastructure projects, but it is doubtful that Russia will be able to improve the precarious situation in the mid-term future.

While consumption rates remained rather high between 2011 and 2013, the country's industrial production rates continue to be low (in comparison to Brazil, South Korea, China or other emerging economies). As an example: Russia imports 100% of all mobile phones, 95% of all computers, 85% of all aircraft and 70% of all medical products. A main factor that constrains productivity growth is Russia's large number of inefficient companies. Much of Russia's industrial capacity was built during Soviet times and is now outdated. One example of this is Russia's "mono-towns" – towns employed by one factory that is often loss-making and

propped up by government subsidies.⁴

Since 2007, the Russian economy has suffered from a shrinking labour force. Admittedly, the decline in the working age population has been mitigated by increased immigration into Russia. According to official Russian statistics, net migration has accelerated over the past five years and since 2007 has totalled 1.5 million (with 1.8 million migrants arriving in Russia). But this only partly offsets the 3 million decrease in the domestic working age population over the same period. What is more, immigration has been largely limited to lower-skilled jobs, while emigration is likely to have been from the highly-skilled segment. As a result, Russia is starting to experience shortages of highly-skilled professionals. According to the HR firm Antal Russia, nearly 90% of companies surveyed in 2012 had difficulty hiring highly-skilled workers.

For some time Russia has been suffering from declining investment rates. Investment as a share of GDP is currently around 21% – well below the nearly 30% average of other emerging economies. Public investment is especially low. In other emerging economies, a low investment rate is the consequence of a low domestic savings rate. But in the case of Russia, weak property rights and high levels of corruption are two key factors deterring interested investors from doing business.

The share of the public sector in Russia's economy is high; according to the European Bank for Research and Development it accounted for 35% of GDP in 2010, the highest share in the region. The government's participation in the economy appears to have increased even further in recent years. Some estimates suggest the public sector now accounts for

⁴ The official definition of a "mono-town" is a settlement where either at least 25% of the population works at a single factory (or a group of closely related factories) or where at least 50% of all production is manufactured by such a factory. Currently, the government estimates that there are a total of 342 mono-towns in Russia. Mono-towns account for around 1/4 of the country's GDP and 1/4 of its population. In most cases the dominant enterprise of a mono-town is inefficient and loss-making. The 2008/09 crisis revealed the fragile nature of mono-towns, with many factories going bankrupt. However, fearing an eruption of public unrest, the government provided over U.S. \$2 billion in subsidies to help keep the factories open and prevent mass lay-offs. This prevented a spike in unemployment in 2008/09 but reinforced the fundamental problems of inefficient mono-towns, which remain an issue today. A reform program is currently under discussion, with proposed measures including financial assistance for laid-off workers to reeducate or to move to another city.

as much as half of overall GDP. Of course, a large public sector is not in itself necessarily a bad thing. But in Russia's case, public companies are notoriously inefficient. What is more, in many sectors, over-mighty public companies prevent the emergence of more efficient private competitors. This problem is made worse by excessive state regulation. The combination of a dominant public sector and of a high cost of doing business has led to a sharp drop in the creation of new businesses. As a result, Russia suffers from some of the least competitive markets in the world.

Corruption in the government and business world is pervasive, and a growing lack of accountability enables bureaucrats to act with impunity. Russia's huge state bureaucracy employs 1.84 million officials, who not only put a heavy burden on the federal budget but also make Russia's administration slow at every level. According to Russian sources, corrupt state employees allegedly steal around €220 billion every year from the federal budget. The regime frequently announces anticorruption campaigns, but their main purpose is to ensure elite loyalty and prevent the issue from mobilizing the opposition. In April 2013, Putin signed a decree forcing state officials to give up any assets they hold abroad, leaving them more vulnerable to disfavour from the Kremlin and less exposed to international human rights sanctions. In December, Putin set up a new department in the Presidential administration to fight corruption, but few observers expected it to produce real results. According to Transparency International, only 5% of the population thinks that the government's anticorruption efforts are effective.

Mitigating the Impact of Western Sanctions

The "Level 3 sanctions" that the EU and the U.S. imposed on Russia at the end of July 2014 and further reinforced on 12 September 2014 come together in three parts. The first consists of financial sanctions on state-owned banks, which dominate Russia's banking system, as well as a number of major state-owned non-financial companies. The measures prevent these companies from raising long-term finance in European and U.S. financial

markets. The second part is an arms embargo, and the third a ban on exports of oil-related technologies and dual-use items to Russia. Of these, the arms embargo will probably have the smallest impact on Russia's economy. Arms exports only account for around 3% of Russia's total exports, and only a fifth of that goes to Europe. The other two elements of the sanctions package could have a more significant impact on the economy. In addition, dozens of senior Russian officials and separatist leaders are now subject to Western asset freezes and travel bans. Still, the gas industry, space technology and nuclear energy are excluded from the sanctions.

The financial sanctions have already shown damaging effects on the economy, as Russia's major state-owned banks and a number of large companies can no longer raise funds in Europe and the United States. Subsequently, most of them are struggling to roll over maturing external debts. Russian non-financial companies and banks had to repay over U.S. \$80 billion in external debt by the end of 2014, forcing the Central Bank of Russia (CBR) to provide financial help to any companies that ran into trouble.

Indeed, the CBR has already pledged to support the sanctioned banks in the past months. But while this means that a wave of defaults (and thus widespread disruption to financial markets) should be averted, it does not mean that the sanctions will have yielded no impact. After all, 20-30% of the banking system is now locked out of Western capital markets.

At present, around a third of bank loans in Russia are financed by borrowing on the wholesale market. Admittedly, only a small part – roughly a third – of this comes from overseas. But with the CBR having to raise interest rates to stem capital outflows, domestic financing conditions are tightening at a time when access to external finance is also being restricted. The net result is that credit conditions have become much tighter for Russian companies – and all of this will weigh on an economy that is already on the edge of recession. The Russian government is said to have reserve funds of U.S. \$170 billion in place, but much of these funds will soon be used to stabilize the ruble, grant credits to Russian firms and bail

out state banks and companies. Moreover, if hydrocarbon revenues shrink in the future, Russia's federal reserves will come under additional pressure to do "damage control" and investment at the same time.

Looking beyond the next year, the ban on the export of technologies – particularly in the energy sector (the three major Russian state oil firms targeted are Rosneft, Transneft and Gazprom Neft, the oil unit of gas giant Gazprom) – could pose a serious threat to the economy over the medium term. Of course, this will depend to a large extent on how long the sanctions remain in place. But with most of Russia's oil production currently coming from Western Siberian fields that rely on outdated infrastructure, new investment and technology are needed in order to explore production in new fields, modernize production techniques and raise productivity. Without this, growth in Russia's key energy sector is likely to be sluggish, hitting overall economic growth and, in time, exports and government revenues.

Interestingly but unsurprisingly, Chinese banks and companies have upgraded their efforts in the past months to fill the various gaps on the Russian market by offering fresh money, purchasing state bonds, or creating joint ventures with local firms. This trend is likely to become more prominent in the future.

The Kremlin's Likely Course of Action

Now that the economic crisis has reached a threatening dimension for Russia, the Kremlin will find it increasingly hard to compensate for the combined impact of economic sanctions, decreased oil prices, and delayed macro-economic reforms. For 2015, the World Bank expects the economy to contract by 2.9% – an outlook that could become even worse if oil were to average U.S. \$50 a barrel this year. In such a scenario, Russia's federal budget would face a shortfall of U.S. \$46 billion and an inflation rate of 15-17%. Thus far, the Kremlin has primarily used the national reserve and welfare funds to stabilize the economy but this is clearly not a long-

term solution. The two funds could run out much faster than the Kremlin anticipates, in particular if oil prices do not rebound. When discussing the future of the sanction regime, the European Union (EU), for its part, would need to seriously consider a scenario of a Russian economic collapse in the medium future because it is evident that Moscow does not have an efficient recipe to mitigate the effects of this “perfect storm.”

Putin’s approach to solving both the country’s short-term and endemic economic problems appears to be based on the concept of state-driven economic modernization in preference to trust in the market. Already over the past few years, he started to strengthen state control over the energy industry and committed enormous sums to increasing defence spending, large infrastructure projects, and a revival of plans to develop Russia’s Far East. This will come at the expense of health and education spending. One must assume that the Russian leadership will reinforce its efforts to promote economic self-reliance, i.e. to move away from importing goods and to foster domestic production and managed (joint venture) relations with global companies.

The political consequence of this is that the liberal policy elite – hitherto well entrenched in Russia’s key economic policy positions in the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Economic Development, as well as the Central Bank of Russia--will likely become marginalized, as economic policies that are consistent with a more statist and xenophobic government take hold. Factions in favour of even greater military spending will become emboldened and the prospects for future liberal economic reform will be considerably diminished.

Influential figures, such as Sergei Glazyev (Putin’s economic adviser) and Dmitry Rogozin (Deputy Prime Minister overseeing the defence industry), have already called for increased state investment to boost domestic production in strategic industries, the imposition of greater control over the financial system, and a general shift away from two decades of integration with the largely Western-led global economic system. In the same vein, Putin has now urged the Defence Ministry to redouble its efforts to wean

the defence sector off foreign suppliers. Russian firms currently make their own versions of just 58 of the 206 types of defence products that the country imports, but state development programmes should add another 40 to their repertoire by 2020.

Overall, the longer Russia feels isolated from the global economy and the longer sanctions persist, the more likely these conservative forces will come to dominate economic policy-making in Russia. From a political perspective, U.S. and European economic sanctions have helped Putin and will continue to do so in the near future. Indeed, Russia looked to be heading towards recession before the Ukraine crisis began. But Putin can now shift the blame for any economic downturn onto external forces. While well-informed academics and policy-makers might think otherwise, current surveys demonstrate that a vast majority of Russian voters agree with the President.

Outlook – Can there be a Future NATO-Russian Relationship?

With a view to the mid-term future, there are no reasons to believe that Putin will not remain in power for many years to come and preserve the current political system. There is neither a serious political challenger on the horizon nor mass resistance to the Kremlin's repressive, authoritarian rule. To this end, any hopes for a gradual liberalization of the country are unfounded. The next political test for Putin will be the parliamentary elections at the end of 2016. If he succeeds in maintaining the current degree of public national euphoria and in mitigating the negative effects of Western sanctions on the economy, there is very little to prevent him from passing this test successfully. A victory in the 2016 elections would considerably help consolidate Putin's power base; he would, in all likelihood, then decide to run for a second presidential term in 2018, which would enable him to remain Russian president until 2024.

With Russia's economic growth likely to decline further in the mid-term, there may well be some sporadic public protests in Moscow and

St. Petersburg, but these should not pose a fundamental challenge to the Kremlin. In order to demonstrate leadership and address some points on which public concern has been raised, Putin could well decide to reshuffle the government to some extent and replace a few individuals from his inner circle with other loyal supporters.

In 2015, the stand-off between Russia and the West over Moscow's illegal annexation of Crimea and its destabilizing actions in eastern Ukraine have endured. President Putin seems to be unwilling to compromise on his strategic goals over cooperation with the West. He will neither give back Crimea to Ukraine nor drop his support for the separatists in Luhansk and Donetsk. Russia's ongoing actions in eastern Ukraine and its continuous resistance to accept Georgia's and Moldova's Euro-Atlantic aspirations provide sufficient reasons to believe that the West will have to face a protracted stalemate with the Kremlin over Europe's eastern neighbourhood.

That said, Russia's harsh economic realities may inspire Moscow to look for a gradual, de-escalatory and face-saving approach on Ukraine in order to mend fences with the EU and ease the burden of economic sanctions. In relations with the Alliance, Moscow will likely be less inclined to soften its political rhetoric and military actions along NATO's eastern flank, while, in turn, NATO cannot go back to the political status quo ante. Providing credible defence and deterrence for its member countries will be NATO's greatest challenge in 2015 and beyond.

Against this background, NATO will have to start thinking about how it seeks to engage with Russia in the future. A related central question is how NATO could help its partners in Eastern and Northern Europe become more resilient against Russia's assertiveness. The most difficult political challenge for NATO, however, will be to imagine a policy towards Moscow that aims not at turning Russia into a country the Alliance would like to see, but at enabling the two to coexist. If the Kremlin perceives the Alliance as a strategic competitor or even threat, NATO needs to build its future strategy towards Russia so as to reflect its strategic advantages and

weaknesses vis-à-vis Russia. There may be some useful lessons for NATO to learn from how the United States manages its relationship with China through a combination of deterrence, engagement, and balance. Russia, like China, is far too interwoven into the global system to be “contained” or “isolated;” but, before NATO prepares to re-engage Russia, it needs to be clear on what terms and in relation to what issues (for example, jihadist terrorism, Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan). The notion of “coexistence” may be a useful starting point to re-think the future of a complex NATO-Russia relationship. Coexistence would mean recognizing that NATO and Russia are both interdependent and in competition with each other. It would start from the presumption that both sides can accept differences between them, but also lay down red lines for behaviour according to what could be perceived as an existential threat by one side or the other.

In reality, accepting diverging views will be the most difficult thing. Russia, for example, will not likely change its opposition to NATO’s Open Door policy, while the Alliance, in turn, will not be prepared to give up one of its founding principles. But can NATO find a way to manage these diverging views without the relationship becoming adversarial? Will the two sides be able to live with those disagreements, and at the same time collaborate on issues of mutual interest? Is there any viable alternative?

A coexistence approach would entail at least three different dimensions: first, a credible and strong defence and deterrence posture in support of NATO member countries (for which the NATO 2014 Summit in Wales has already laid the groundwork); second, a flexible dialogue and engagement dimension; and third, a dedicated effort to strengthen the Allies’ and partner’s resilience against Russian efforts to exert influence on them (for example, through energy diversification, and in the fields of technology export and defence capacity building). To help conceptualize a coexistence approach with Russia, the Allies may wish to consider mandating a team of experts from Allied countries to informally reflect on some of the key principles.

To be clear, the process of re-engaging Russia can only be gradual

and selective, taking into account the degree to which Moscow responds positively, first and foremost to the full implementation of the Minsk Agreement. It would also need to be pursued in close cooperation with other international organizations, chiefly the EU and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The latter could also be a good venue for the Alliance to re-engage with Russia directly. Flexible formats dictated by substance of discussion might be the best way forward, with a view to re-establishing a dialogue with Russia on selected issues of common concern between the Alliance, its partners, and Russia.

Cold War Déjà Vu?

NATO, Russia and the Crisis in Ukraine

Roger McDermott, Heidi Reisinger, and Brooke Smith-Windsor

Russia's behaviour in the Ukrainian crisis has been described by some as giving rise to "the most dangerous situation in East-West relations since the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968."¹ For one, a retired NATO Supreme Allied Commander has called for immediate action in response. This could include, for example, bringing the NATO Response Force – a sea, air, land, special forces capability – to a higher state of alert, and sailing NATO maritime forces into the Black Sea.²

Has the Cold War returned? Irrespective of the comments above, not for NATO, even if some in Vladimir Putin's Russia might prefer it that way; to get back to simpler times when military might and great power politics determined the course of international (dis)order. This is evident in (1) Moscow's political and legal approach to the crisis as well as (2) its return to Soviet style military tactics to achieve its ends. This chapter explains, however, why the West must not follow suit.

Russia's Challenge to the UN and International Order

The UN Charter provides for the orderly management of international peace and security. This includes very clear guidance on the lawful use of force by one state against another:

1 Peter Apps, "Ukraine crisis gives NATO, West no good options," *Reuters online*, March 3, 2014.

2 James Stavridis, "NATO needs to move now on Crimea," *Foreign Policy Argument online*, March 1, 2014, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/03/01/nato_needs_to_move_now_on_crimea.

- “The inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations... “ (Article 51) or;
- Peace enforcement actions authorized by the Security Council with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace and acts of aggression (Article 42).
- The International Court of Justice has further clarified that armed intervention may be acceptable with the prior invitation and consent of another state under certain conditions.”³
- Since 2005, the international community has also agreed to the additional norm of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) confirming its preparedness “to act through the Security Council, in accordance with the Charter, including Chapter VII, on a case-by-case basis ... should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities are manifestly failing to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.”⁴

As explained here, Russia’s seemingly “hidden” intervention in Crimea, however, meets none of these criteria. It thus risks turning the clock back to a “might makes right,” “winner takes all” reckless power politicking of a by-gone era.

Notwithstanding the absence of any Security Council authorization, President Putin’s further justification for intervention to protect Russian citizens and interests in Ukraine has endeavoured to evoke the spirit of R2P: “In connection with the extraordinary situation in Ukraine, the threat to the lives of citizens of the Russian Federation, our compatriots, and the personnel of the armed forces of the Russian Federation on Ukrainian territory (in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea) ... I submit a proposal

3 Philip Kunig, “Prohibition of Intervention,” *Oxford Public International Law*, April 2008, <http://opil.ouplaw.com/view/10.1093/law:epil/9780199231690/law-9780199231690-e1434?rskey=nMHcdy&result=1&prd=OPIL>.

4 UN General Assembly, *2005 World Summit Outcome*, available at [http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/world%20summit%20outcome%20doc%202005\(1\).pdf](http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/world%20summit%20outcome%20doc%202005(1).pdf) (accessed 3 March 2014).

on using the armed forces of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine until normalization of the socio-political situation in the that country.”⁵

On 3 March 2014, Putin’s Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, was making similar petitions at the UN: “This is a question of defending our citizens and compatriots, ensuring human rights, especially the right to life.”⁶

During the Euro-Maidan revolution, however, Russian military interests – namely the Black Sea Fleet at Sevastapol – and citizens in Crimea were never under any serious threat. The epicentre of the violence was Kyiv, not Crimea’s capital, Simferopol. Crimea was in fact one of the most stable regions throughout Ukraine in the run up to Yanukovych’s departure from office. True, the large Russian speaking population of Crimea may have felt discriminated against by the law passed by the new government on 24 February 2014 making Ukrainian the sole state language. However, the current administration has never planned or engaged in anything remotely resembling acts of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, or crimes against humanity. As the Chairman of the Russian Council for Foreign and Defense Policy, Fyodor Lukyanov, remarked: “If Russia realized the threat to send forces to Crimea, she will find it difficult to prove, including in the UN SC [Security Council], that these measures comply with international norms. From a political point of view it is clear what led to this situation, but not de jure.”⁷

A visit to the website of the Russian Federation Embassy in London, moreover, ironically and ominously presages the recent factional clashes in Crimea and threat of Ukrainian civil war that has accompanied the unlawful armed intervention there: “As regards intrastate conflicts, the need to protect civilians must not be used to change regimes by providing

5 “Putin: Russian citizens, troops threatened in Ukraine, need armed forces’ protection,” *RT*, March 1, 2014, <http://rt.com/news/russia-troops-ukraine-possible-359/>.

6 Ed Zuckerman, “Russia: Ukraine Intervention about ‘Ensuring Human Rights,’” *Talk Radio News Service*, March 3, 2014, <http://www.talkradionews.com/top-stories/2014/03/03/russia-ukraine-intervention-ensuring-human-rights.html#.UxWVK181iHs>.

7 Olga Vandyshva, “NATO will not defend Ukrainian territorial integrity,” *Expert Online*, March 2, 2014, <http://expert.ru/2014/03/2/fedor-lukyanov-nato-ne-budet-zaschischat-territorialnuyu-tselostnost-ukrainyi/>.

external support to one of the opposing sides. As a rule, such actions are not conducive to alleviating the suffering of the peaceful population; on the contrary, they foster violence and can precipitate the country into a full-scale civil war.”⁸

More recently, Russia’s Ambassador to the UN, Vitaly Churkin, endeavoured to justify the presence of troops in Crimea by pointing to a letter reportedly received in Moscow on 1 March 2014 from ousted President Yanukovych requesting the armed intervention. Even if the letter is genuine, Russian-backed “local self-defense forces” began arriving in Crimea as early as 27 February 2014. Furthermore, under the Ukrainian constitution (Article 85) the national parliament would have had to have endorsed the request, which it did not.

In a press conference on 4 March 2014, Vladimir Putin stressed that he does not see a need “yet” to send troops to Ukraine and that Russia does not plan to annex Crimea,⁹ while at the same time the Russian Duma prepares legislation that will pave the way to incorporate new “subjects” (i.e. territory) into the Russian Federation. In addition, laws are being crafted to make it easier to become a Russian citizen. Considering that the Russian diaspora is practically everywhere, and not just in Ukraine/Crimea, Georgia or Moldova, does raise questions about the intentions behind the use of this political instrument of “protection.”

The West, therefore, must ensure the manipulative and false interpretation of the R2P principle by Russia as described above, be perceived *internationally* as an unacceptable aberration.

In addition to Russia’s geopolitical actions, Russia’s military tactics also harken back to Cold War approaches.

Russia’s Return to Cold War Military Tactics

Russia’s Defence Minister, Army-General Sergei Shoigu, strongly

8 Russian Federation, *Russia’s Approach to the notion of ‘Responsibility to Protect’*, Website of the Russian Embassy, London, <http://www.rusemb.org.uk/in3a> (accessed 27 February 2014).

9 Official site of the President of Russia, <http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/news/6763>.

advocates the Soviet-style practice of large-scale “snap inspections” within the Armed Forces to test combat readiness in preparation for action. A pre-planned snap inspection of Russian units in its Western and Central Military Districts (MDs) was ordered by President Putin on 26 February 2014. Many Western commentators failed to identify this crucial context.¹⁰

Interfax reported Shoigu explaining that troops in Western and Central MDs would include the 6th and 20th Armies and also the 2nd Army, the commands of Aerospace Defence Forces, Airborne Troops, and Long Range and Military Transport Aviation. The naval component included the Northern and Baltic Fleets, while the exercise was divided into two phases: the first (26-27 February 2014) focused on raising combat readiness in the participating units, and from 28 February to 7 March two operational-tactical exercises concerning inter-agency and intra-branch coordination. With the instrument of snap inspections, Russia remains prepared for even more drastic military action in Ukraine if required.

Meanwhile, Russia’s ostensible military intervention in Crimea moved rapidly to cut off and establish effective control of the peninsula, by seizing the strategically important Perekop Isthmus (connecting Crimea to mainland Ukraine) and securing the Sivash shallows in the Sea of Azov. Russian military movements into Crimea mainly stemmed from the Black Sea Fleet base, with low-scale reinforcement from mainland Russia. Mass movement of Russian troops and heavy equipment into Crimea depends on the use of railways and sea ferries across the Kerch Straits. Consequently, with relative ease, exploiting the weakness of the interim government in Kyiv, Russian forces rapidly established a new reality on the ground, albeit with calculated risk of conflict escalation.

Thus, Putin’s military steps in Crimea, subsequent questioning of the legitimacy of the interim government and his continued threat to use further military force “if necessary” indicate a potential willingness to

10 “Russian Upper House speaker Rules Out Military Intervention in Ukraine,” *RIA Novosti*, February 26, 2014; *Interfax*, February 26, 2014, <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/txt/361371>.

escalate the conflict. Yet, in reality the risks of further escalation of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine are arguably as high for Moscow as for other regional powers; the long term prospect of isolation and economic consequences especially for the investment climate in Russia must factor into the Kremlin's planning.

Putin's gamble is based on other powers accepting the changes on the ground, and maximizing Russia's leverage in shaping the future of its close neighbour at minimal cost.

How to React to Russian Brinkmanship without Falling Back into Cold War

Russia's domestic development into a "managed or sovereign democracy" where the right of free expression and freedom of the media get more and more limited seems to confirm the long-standing warnings that Russia under Putin is moving in the wrong direction. After the appearance of Russian-backed troops in Crimea, Putin's brinkmanship has reached a new level: German Chancellor Angela Merkel, reportedly "told [U.S. President] Obama by telephone ... that after speaking with Mr. Putin she was not sure he was in touch with reality. ... 'In another world,' she said."¹¹

Putin seems to think that Russia's and especially his image in the West is damaged anyway with nothing more to lose as he seeks to create new geo-political realities the Russian way. Russia's credibility in the court of world public opinion, together with its stock markets, however, will nonetheless suffer and already have. Even Russian commentators are aware of this. The prestigious Russian newspaper "Vedomosti" calls any decision to send Russian forces to Ukraine "worse than a crime."¹² So, in the end, the West must remain optimistic that in the longer term Moscow will see the disadvantages of its unilateralism.

11 Gordon Lubold, "Obama's Big Test in Crimea," *Foreign Policy's Situation Report*, March 3, 2014.

12 Константин Сонин, Хуже, чем преступление, *Vedomosti*, March 3, 2014.

In the meantime, this is what NATO can do:

1. No military solution

Despite suggestions and demands for a strong NATO reaction that makes use of all available military options to react to the Russian creeping intervention, there are no viable military solutions to the political problems in Ukraine. In fact, neither the United States nor the 28-nation Atlantic Alliance has drawn up contingency plans, and this should remain the case with preference given to diplomatic and economic measures.¹³ As German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier states: “Crisis diplomacy is not a weakness, but it is now more important than ever for us not to fall into the abyss of a military escalation, not to blunder into this abyss.”¹⁴

2. Support a multilateral approach to the crisis and keep the dialogue open

NATO is only one player among many with a stake in the outcome of the crisis. NATO must ensure that it does not default to an East vs. West narrative because what happens in Ukraine and Crimea has implications for what constitutes an acceptable use of force in the contemporary international system writ large. Therefore NATO should not only use its existing dialogue forums such as the NATO-Russia Council or the NATO-Ukraine Commission, but also leverage its flexible dialogue formats at 28+n (NATO nations plus partners) to bring together NATO member states, Ukraine and Russia, and also other NATO partners to seek a peaceful solution to the crisis.

3. Continue intense cooperation with the new Ukrainian leadership

- NATO-Ukraine relations are stable: Ukraine took part in every NATO-led operation and significantly contributes to the

¹³ Adrian Croft, “NATO Commander Plays Down Tensions with Russia over Ukraine,” *Reuters online*, February 27, 2014.

¹⁴ “RPT-Diplomacy key to avoiding escalation in Ukraine- Steinmeier,” *Reuters*, March 3, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/03/ukraine-crisis-germany-steinmeier-idUSB5N0LP00E20140303>.

NATO Response Force (NRF). NATO supported the profound transition of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and will continue this close partnership.

- Ukraine was on the fast track for membership for many years. On its 2008 Bucharest summit, NATO promised that Ukraine (together with Georgia) would someday become a member. Ukraine under its former president Yanukovich took the issue off the political agenda in 2010 and went for a non-aligned status. With the change of government, however, the question of Ukraine membership may be raised again. Under the new conditions it will be – as in the case of Georgia – even more difficult, and likely to antagonize its Russian neighbour even further. But the Alliance open door policy will remain.

From a NATO point of view the new Ukrainian government has to get three things right: (1) keep calm, do not give Moscow the pretext for a (full-scale) invasion, (2) do not disenfranchise the pro-Russian speaking parts of the country,¹⁵ and (3) normalize relations with Russia as early as possible.

¹⁵ The Maidan movement not only failed to involve Russian speaking parts of the Ukrainian population, but alienated them. All the activists, with the exception of Vitali Klychko, spoke Ukrainian. In the counties' East and in Crimea people simply did not understand what this revolution is all about and relied on the information of the Russian official TV channels where the Maidan movement was described as criminal and fascist. In addition, the aforementioned language law has served to alienate Russian speaking parts of the country.

4

Back to the Future? Russia's Hybrid Warfare, Revolutions in Military Affairs, and Cold War Comparisons

Diego A. Ruiz Palmer

Conflicts over the last two decades have often been described as ushering in a “new way of war” characterized by complexity, ambiguity and asymmetry in means and stakes.¹ While the “fog of war” is inherent to warfare,² hostilities in this new age of asymmetry have exhibited, nearly universally, complex combinations of actors, narratives, tactics and technologies – as well as an ambiguous interaction between the local, regional and international contexts in which they take place. In its most recent and evolved form, as witnessed during Russia's illegal annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula in March 2014 and its active involvement in supporting pro-Russian separatist movements in Ukraine's Donbas region, this new way of war has often been designated as “Hybrid Warfare.”³

What sets Russia's brand of hybrid warfare apart from the asymmetric tactics and techniques traditionally associated with non-state actors – a weaker opponent attempting to outsmart or grind-down a superior

1 Regina Karp, Aaron Karp and Terry Terriff (editors), *Global Insurgency and the Future of Armed Conflict: Debating Fourth Generation Warfare*, London, Routledge, 2007.

2 Barry D. Watts, “Clausewitzian Friction and Future War,” revised edition, *McNair Paper* No. 68, Institute of National Strategic Studies, Washington, D.C., National Defense University Press, 2004.

3 There is no unanimity of views on the terminology “hybrid warfare,” variously designated as “ambiguous warfare,” “non-linear warfare,” “no-contact warfare,” and “nth generation warfare.” Furthermore, “hybrid warfare” is *not* a Russian home-grown set of terms. See Dave Johnson, “Russia's Approach to Conflict - Implications for NATO's Deterrence and Defence,” *Research Paper* No. 111, NATO Defense College, Rome, Italy, April 2015, pp.1-2.

adversary – is its *scale*. This gives a nation-state, such as Russia, the strategic capacity to use a mix of hard and soft power instruments to isolate and coerce weaker neighbors, while intimidating and deterring more distant, but also more capable, opponents. Unlike non-state actors, which often can only attempt to leverage their asymmetric methods by fighting against their opponents, Russia aims to achieve politically decisive outcomes with, if possible, no or only a limited and overt use of military force, while being prepared to act militarily, with devastating effect at the operational level, if necessary. It is this broad spectrum of Russia's expanding capacity to mix hard and soft power tools that represents the greatest challenge for the formulation of strategies designed to expose and counter Russia's hybrid warfare "model."

In effect, Russia's adoption of hybrid warfare is the product of a *combination* of strategic opportunity and necessity, tailored to today's environment of heightened societal connectivity, fragility and vulnerability⁴ – the *opportunity* to pursue and achieve policy objectives of the highest importance through the active, but calibrated, employment of mostly non-military means, together with the *necessity* to avoid a highly destructive, and potentially decisive, use of force by an adversary. Failure to adhere to these precepts could result, through miscalculation, in what Russian military doctrine terms "threats to the very existence of the State,"⁵ including the risk of unintended and uncontrolled escalation to strategic nuclear use.

Necessity and opportunity are the mirror-image of one another: where advances in technology that support key military functions – e.g., intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance; information fusion; communications; navigation; precision targeting – offer the prospect

4 In an article published in February 2013, Army General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the Russian General Staff, warns that "In terms of scale of the casualties and destruction, the catastrophic social, economic, and political consequences, such new-type conflicts are comparable with the consequences of any real war." General V.V. Gerasimov, "Prediction is what science is valued for," *Voyenno-promyshlenniy kur'yer* No. 8, February 27 - March 5, 2013.

5 For an enlightening analysis of the 2014 version of Russia's Military Doctrine, see Polina Sinovets and Bettina Renz, "Russia's Military Doctrine and beyond: threat perceptions, capabilities and ambitions," *Research Paper* No. 117, NATO Defense College, Rome, Italy, July 2015.

of attaining decisive military advantage *in the context of hostilities*, other advances in technology – web-based information technologies; instant, mass communications; computer hacking; the persistent use of cyber warfare to inflict damage on foreign information infrastructure; etc. – aim at attaining a decisive political advantage *short of war*. In effect, hybrid warfare bridges the divide between the hard and the soft power applications that result from the technological and information revolutions of the last three decades in ways that maximize asymmetric advantages for Russia, as well as minimize risks and costs. It is partly strategic influence and partly strategic resilience, reflecting the combination of confident defiance and a deeply-rooted sense of physical vulnerability that has often characterized Russian attitudes.

Looking to the wider implications for European security and for NATO's strategy in the wake of Russia's political behavior and military performance against Ukraine, Russia's embrace of the hybrid warfare paradigm has prompted speculation over:

- (i) Whether hybrid warfare represents a new transformation of warfare and should qualify as a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) that will set out a new strategic paradigm;⁶ and
- (ii) Whether Russia's new political posture and countering Russia's hybrid warfare challenge effectively amount to a revival of the Cold War⁷ and the restoration of the familiar operational patterns of the NATO-Warsaw Pact strategic competition of the 1970s and 1980s.⁸

6 The connection between hybrid warfare and the concept of Revolutions in Military Affairs is addressed in Dave Johnson, "Russia's Approach to Conflict," *op. cit.*, pp.2-3; Thomas Bjerregaard, *Hybrid Warfare: A Military Revolution or Revolution in Military Affairs*, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2012. For an alternative view, see Frank G. Hoffman, "Complex Irregular Warfare: The Next Revolution in Military Affairs," *Orbis*, summer 2006, pp.395-411.

7 Paul J. Saunders, "Seven Ways a New Cold War with Russia Will Be Different," *The National Interest*, 11 May 2014; and Andrew Monaghan, "A 'New Cold War'? Abusing History, Misunderstanding Russia," London, Royal Institute of International Affairs, May 2015.

8 Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, "The NATO-Warsaw Pact competition in the 1970s and 1980s: a revolution in military affairs in the making or the end of a strategic age?" *Cold War History* Vol. 14, Special Issue, 4/2014, pp.533-573.

Considering these two different questions in tandem offers the prospect of identifying applicable insights for the future from a bygone era, as a means to decipher Russia's thinking, anticipate potential hybrid situations, and craft a suitably calibrated NATO strategy, while avoiding the pitfalls of subscribing to the appeal of historical analogies that can turn-out to be deceptive or deficient.

Against this background, this article addresses key features of Russia's hybrid warfare model and explores how, and to what extent, the RMA construct and comparisons with the Cold War might help shed light on its strategic implications for European security and for NATO.

The Rise of Russia's Hybrid Warfare Model

The Ideological Dimension and Geopolitical Ambition of Russia's World View

Russia's reliance on hybrid warfare as an adaptable instrument of foreign and security policy proceeds from an ideological vision and political ambition to achieve several aims concurrently: (a) restore Russia's international rank, through military power, as well as other forms of Moscow-centered hard and soft power; (b) assert its privileged position at the center of Eurasia, and project its exclusive influence on its periphery;⁹ and (c) contribute to the build-up and consolidation of a distinct and self-contained (and, seemingly, increasingly self-delusional) "Russian world" (*Russkiy mir*) that does not adhere, and is hostile, to Western values of universality and inclusiveness.¹⁰ Its ideological impetus is to pull away from cooperative processes that are described as dominated by the West and one-sided in

9 Russia's "Eurasian moment" is described in *Toward the Great Ocean 3: Creating Central Eurasia*, Valdai Discussion Club, Moscow, June 2015.

10 On the notion of a "Russian world," see Caterina Becker, Heidi Reisinger, Polina Sinovets and Brooke Smith-Windsor, "Ukraine and its Neighbourhood: How to Deal with Aggressive Russia," *NDC Conference Report* No. 2/15, NATO Defense College, Rome, Italy, March 2015; and Marlene Laruelle, "The "Russian World"," Washington, D.C., Center on Global Interests, May 2015.

nature, to the detriment of Russia. In this respect, Russia's suspension of its compliance with the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe stands as a compelling example.

This increasingly formed ideological construct is underpinned by a determined and expansive process of transformation of the armed forces that traces its growing momentum back to an acute awareness of Russia's post-Cold War military decline and the resulting capability shortfalls and strategic vulnerability. These were revealed, in particular, by the scale, effectiveness and outcome of successive Western air campaigns, from Operation *Desert Storm* in 1991 to Operations *Odyssey Dawn* and *Unified Protector* in Libya two decades later, as well as the mixed performance of the Russian armed forces in the two Chechen wars and in the conflict with Georgia in 2008. Since the end of the Cold War, three episodes of extensive analysis and intense debate within the Russian military over the lessons learned and the implications of these conflicts stand out:

- (i) *Early 1990s*: the rise of "aerospace war" in the shadow of the Gulf War;¹¹
- (ii) *1999*: the challenge of countering both high-end and low-intensity opponents, brought home by Operations *Allied Force* and *Noble Anvil* in Kosovo¹² and by the end of the First Chechen War that year, and Russia's first post-Soviet attempt to exercise a strategic capacity to plan and conduct operations, in the form of exercise *Zapad 99*;¹³ and

11 Timothy L. Thomas, "The Soviet Military on 'Desert Storm': Redefining Doctrine?" *The Journal of Soviet Military Studies* Vol.4, No. 4, December 1991, pp.594-620; and Mary C. Fitzgerald, "The Russian Image of Future War," *Comparative Strategy* Vol. 13, 1994, pp.167-180.

12 Yoshiaki Sakaguchi and Katsuhiko Mayama, "Significance of the War in Kosovo for China and Russia," *NIDS Security Reports* No. 3, March 2002, pp.1-23.

13 The name *Zapad* is associated with a series of important theater-scale, live and command post exercises led by the Soviet General Staff during the last two decades of the Cold War, aimed at perfecting operational concepts and command and control arrangements for executing a theater strategic operation against NATO. The first *Zapad* exercise of the Cold War seems to have been executed in 1969, following the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia, and the last one in 1985. The most notable *Zapad* exercises were held in 1977 and 1981. Ruiz Palmer, *Cold War History*, op. cit., pp.546-552. Russia held a one-time *Zapad* exercise in 1999 - at the time the largest of its kind since the collapse of the USSR in 1991 - and resumed holding *Zapad* exercises regularly in 2009.

- (iii) *2008*: the jolt produced by Russia's less-than-stellar military performance during the conflict with Georgia.

These three episodes provide the conceptual, as well as ideological, subtext to an increasingly militant narrative of Russia's necessary military recovery and international resurgence.

Russia's Military Transformation and the Overtaking of a Post-Cold War Legacy of Decline

Since the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the Russian armed forces have undergone considerable change, as a result of major force reductions and successive, often aborted reforms.¹⁴ Starting in 2007-2008, there has been a steady increase in the Russian military's operational capacity, readiness and resulting performance that can be observed from their military operations to occupy the Crimean peninsula and to support separatist forces in eastern Ukraine, as well as the ever higher pace and wider scope of their training and exercising activities across and around Russia.¹⁵ Four key strands stand out:

(i) *Command and control*:

Russia has replaced Soviet-era military districts and theater-level high commands¹⁶ with four military districts that perform administrative and logistical functions – West, East, Center and South – and four,

14 Marcel de Haas, "Russia's Military Reforms: Victory after Twenty Years of Failure?" *Clingendael Paper* No. 5, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, The Hague, November 2011; and Roger N. McDermott, "The Brain of the Russian Army: Futuristic Visions Tethered by the Past," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* Vol. 27, Issue 1, March 2014, pp.4-35.

15 Dave Johnson, "Russia's Approach to Conflict - Implications for NATO's Deterrence and Defence," *op. cit.*; Andras Racz, "Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine," *FIIA report* No. 43, Stockholm, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2015; and Oscar Jonsson and Robert Seely, "Russian Full-Spectrum Conflict: An Appraisal After Ukraine," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* Vol. 28, Issue 1, spring 2015, pp.1-22.

16 During the Cold War, Soviet military operations were planned and would have been executed within the boundaries of pre-identified theatres of operations designated *teatr voennykh deistvii* or TVD. Two such TVD commands were established in 1980 – the Western and South-Western – opposite NATO. Michael Sadykiewicz, *The Warsaw Pact Command Structure in Peace and War*, Santa Monica, California, The Rand Corporation, September 1988.

corresponding operational-strategic level Joint Commands that exercise command and control for exercises and contingencies within the scope of a “strategic direction.”¹⁷ In parallel, the air force and aerospace defense forces have been consolidated twice since 2011, reportedly to better prepare the Russian military to confront the danger represented by the global rise in conventional precision-strike capabilities and to ensure effective early warning and other support to Russian strategic nuclear forces.¹⁸ The implications of these new command and control arrangements for the employment of the Russian air force, navy fleets and army aviation assets in theaters of operations, however, remain unclear.

(ii) *Force structure:*

Soviet-era divisions have been replaced by smaller, more agile brigades, which are being re-equipped with post-Soviet equipment, although concerns have been expressed that their combat potential might be too limited.¹⁹ Divisions still exist in the airborne forces, which remain a special branch and enjoy particular priority as a reliable asset that can help manage fast-developing contingencies. More intriguing is the recent re-establishment of tank and motorized rifle divisions as part of a resurrected 1st Guards Tank Army in the Western Military District,²⁰ which suggests a new interest in reconstituting large combined-arms formations capable of deterring or repulsing an adversary on or beyond Russian territory.

17 It is notable that in a recent statement, Army General Yury Yakubov used the terminology “Western strategic theater of operations” to designate the region on Russia’s Western borders. Karoun Demirjian, “Russia says it would match any U.S. military build-up in Eastern Europe,” *The Washington Post*, June 15, 2015.

18 Ionna Nikolettta Zyga, “Russia’s new aerospace defence forces: Keeping up with the neighbours,” *Quick Policy Insight*, European Parliament, Brussels, Belgium, February 22, 2013; and Marc Bennetts, “Kremlin beefs up air defences to meet threat of NATO attack,” *The Times*, August 5, 2015.

19 Army General (ret.) Makhmut Gareev, Russia’s foremost military thinker over the last three decades and currently the president of Russia’s Academy of Military Sciences, has criticized the brigades for being “2.5 - to 3-fold weaker” than the divisions they replaced. See Roger McDermott, “Putin Considers New ‘Defense Plan’ as ‘Reform’ Dies,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* Vol. 10, Issue 21, 5 February 2013, p.3.

20 Roger McDermott, “Russia Set to Strengthen Hard Power Options,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* Vol. 12, Issue 146, August 4, 2015. The 1st Guards Tank Army has a prestigious historical lineage in the Russian Army. During the Cold War, the 1st GTA was one of the large elite formations of the Group of Soviet Forces in (East) Germany that, in a hypothetical conflict with NATO, would have spearheaded a theater strategic operation towards the Rhine River.

(iii) *Training and exercising:*

The Russian armed forces' manpower is being partly professionalized, to reduce dependence on conscripts, create a cadre of well-educated professionals, and form a pool of well-trained and combat-effective formations. Officers and personnel under contract now represent about two-thirds of the armed forces' total manpower.²¹ Land force training days, ship-days at sea, and flying hours have been increased markedly.

The training cycle now includes a yearly, theater-level joint exercise, which rotates among the four Joint Commands – *Zapad* (West) in 2009 was followed by *Vostok* (East), *Kavkaz* (Caucasus) and *Tsentr* (Center) in 2010–2012, and a new cycle was inaugurated by *Zapad* 2013. These exercises test the capacity of staffs and formations to plan and execute large-scale and complex combined-arms operations. Starting in 2004, strategic nuclear forces have also been subjected to an increasingly challenging series of exercises to rehearse the sequence of a hypothetical nuclear war.²² Long-standing weaknesses in terms of basic education, recruitment, and professional competence, however, will likely persist.

(iv) *Readiness and responsiveness:*

Particular attention has been given to enhancing the readiness of Russian forces by means of large-scale “snap alert” exercises, starting in the spring 2013. Reportedly, the Russian General Staff has set a benchmark of 65,000 troops to be deployed over a distance of 3,000 kilometers within 72 hours for these exercises.²³

Often, snap-alert exercises coincide with preparations for a theater exercise in the *Zapad-Vostok* series, but they have also been held to support Russian

21 Martin Russell, *Russia's armed forces*, European Parliament Research Service, Brussels, Belgium, April 2015, p.11.

22 Reportedly, the nuclear exercise conducted in February 2004 was the largest and most ambitious exercise up to that time since the unprecedented nuclear exercise conducted by the USSR in June 1982. Vladimir Isachenkov, “Russia Plans Large-Scale Exercise,” *The Washington Post*, January 30, 2004; and “Russia Begins Nuclear War Exercise; Rivals 1982 ‘Seven Hour Nuclear War’,” *Missile Threat*, February 11, 2004, <http://missilethreat.com?russia-begins-nuclear-exercise> (accessed on August 27, 2015).

23 Dave Johnson, “Russia’s Approach to Conflict,” op. cit., p.3.

troop rotations along the border with Ukraine and to demonstrate Russia's new capacity to redeploy and concentrate forces rapidly and effectively across Russia's vast territory to meet changing strategic circumstances. Their scheduling, without prior notification, is an important component of Russian signaling for purposes of potential coercion vis-à-vis Russia's neighbors and intimidation towards NATO.²⁴ The rapidity with which Russia was able to deploy fighter, fighter-bomber and close-air-support aircraft to an air base near Latakia in Syria and initiate air operations in September 2015 also suggests that the readiness and responsiveness of Russian forces have improved markedly.

These four categories of force improvements are supported by a 10-year, rolling State Armaments Program (SAP) that defines the scope of the military requirements to be met, the research, development and procurement strategies to meet them, and the associated resources. The first SAP, running from 2011 through 2020, was approved in 2010. Although Russian defense expenditures is difficult to estimate reliably, because of the opacity of the Russian military and security establishments and associated budgeting processes, there is a widespread consensus among observers that it has been increasing steadily for a decade.²⁵ Admittedly, higher Russian defense expenditures over the last ten years has to be compared with very low levels of defense spending in the 1990s and the need to replace older, often obsolete equipment and modernize the supporting infrastructure.

An updated SAP, covering the period 2016-2025 is expected. Whether the stated goal under the current SAP of modernizing 70 percent of the Russian armed forces' equipment by 2020 is attainable cannot be answered confidently without greater insights into the state and direction of Russia's economy. The Russian economy faces increasingly adverse prospects as a result of subdued economic activity worldwide, a steep decline in the price

24 Ian J. Brzezinski and Nicholas Varangis, "The NATO-Russia Exercise Gap," *Atlantic Council of the United States*, Washington, D.C., February 23, 2015.

25 The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimates that Russian defense expenditures increased by 87 percent between 2005 and 2014 and now reach USD 85 billion, which would place Russia in the third position behind the United States and China, "Trends in World Military Expenditures, 2014," Stockholm, SIPRI, April 2015, p.2.

of oil, international economic sanctions imposed in the wake of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, and a failure to reform and modernize. It would be prudent to remember, however, that, during the Cold War, Western observers often overestimated the size of the Soviet Union's gross domestic product and underestimated the scale of its defense expenditures, as well as misjudged the capacity of the Soviet regime and people to weather difficult times, under adverse economic conditions domestically, as well as challenging external circumstances.²⁶

As has often been the case in earlier times, military transformation in today's Russia is deeply-rooted in notions of identity and ideology, and cannot be disassociated from a reflexive impulse to confront asserted foreign hostility and perceived strategic, economic and technological vulnerabilities with zero-sum security assessments that derive from postulated zero-sum outcomes. It is a key component of a broader "build-up; pull-back; and pivot" strategy that strands across the strategic, ideological, and economic dimensions of Russia's current foreign policy and domestic politics, and that pursues separation from the West, reorientation towards Asia, and alignment with a global, "anti-hegemonic" stance.

A New RMA? Russia's Military Transformation and the RMA Impulse

The strengthening and modernization of the armed forces also aim to restore within the Russian military establishment the transformational impulse that drove the Soviet RMA of the 1970s and 1980s and that was brought abruptly to a near halt by the end of the Cold War.²⁷ However, it has a distinct focus on 21st century, distant, "no-contact warfare," instead

26 Edwin Bacon, "Perspectives for Russia's Future," in Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska and Richard Sakwa (editors) *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives*, Bristol, United Kingdom, E-International Relations Publishing, 2015, p.248.

27 Jacob W. Kipp, "Operational art and the curious narrative on the Russian contribution: presence and absence over the last 2 decades," in Stephen J. Blank and Richard Weitz (editors), *The Russian military today and tomorrow: essays in memory of Mary Fitzgerald*, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2010, pp.226-240.

of Cold War, close-range, force-on-force engagements. As remarked by General Gerasimov in his February 2013 article, “Frontal engagements of large formations of forces at the strategic and operational level are gradually becoming a thing of the past. Long-distance, contactless actions against the enemy are becoming the main means of achieving combat and operational goals.”²⁸

The Enduring Aura of “Deep Operations”

In part, this transition towards precision targeting at long range reflects the philosophy of “shooting the archer instead of the arrows.” At the same time, “no-contact warfare” conforms to an enduring Russian operational preference for “deep operations,” as the most accomplished means to create spatial separation with a capable adversary, deny him access to the common engagement space, and restrict his freedom of maneuver. In a conflict, modern-day Russian deep operations would aim at acquiring geographic depth away from Russian territory in order to degrade, as well as absorb, successful enemy precision-strike attacks; at isolating a theater of operations, to deprive enemy formations positioned closest to Russian territory from their rear support, notably external reinforcements by allies, prior to neutralizing or destroying them; and at bringing about a stark, favorable and irreversible change in the regional “correlation of forces.” These objectives would be pursued while keeping the enemy under the constant threat of Russian nuclear first use, to prevent a resort to escalation and to impose a favorable de-escalatory outcome.²⁹

Russia’s approach to deep operations in an era of no-contact warfare

28 V.V. Gerasimov, *Voyenno-promyshlenniy kur’er*, op. cit.

29 James T. Quinlivan and Olga Olikier, *Nuclear Deterrence in Europe: Russian Approaches to a New Environment and Implications for the United States*, Santa Monica, California, The Rand Corporation, 2011; and Jacek Durkalec, “Nuclear-Backed “Little Green Men:” Nuclear Messaging in the Ukraine Crisis,” Warsaw, The Polish Institute of International Affairs, July 2015. A preference for avoiding nuclear weapon employment, unless imposed by the prospect of imminent enemy nuclear first use or the prospect of defeat, has been an enduring theme of Soviet and Russian operations planning since the mid-1960s. Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, *Cold War History*, op. cit., p.542.

finds expression in a growing “anti-access/area-denial” capacity, combining overlapping air and missile defenses; dense concentrations of surface-to-surface ballistic missile and land, air and sea-launched cruise missile batteries; and layered anti-submarine warfare capabilities, all anchored on three “strategic outposts” – Murmansk, Kaliningrad and Sevastopol – along Russia’s northwestern, western and southwestern periphery. In wartime, these outposts would have a key role in the prompt and successful execution of anti-access and area denial operations in the Barents, Norwegian, Baltic and Black Seas and associated airspace, as the prerequisite for establishing a “glass dome” over part or all of these sea areas and adjacent territories.

This transformational impulse should not be ascribed solely to Cold War nostalgia.³⁰ It should be recognized as reflecting also a well-established Russian awareness that warfare is inherently evolutionary and has undergone substantial change since the end of the Cold War, as a result of continuing advances in information and guidance technologies. Advances in prompt and precise targeting of opposing forces can alter radically and unpredictably the course of operations and help achieve strategically-decisive outcomes, as witnessed during the *Deliberate Force* air campaign in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the summer of 1995, which helped create in a matter of weeks the necessary conditions on the ground for initiating the Dayton peace process.

Russian theorists term contemporary, “informatized” operations “sixth generation warfare.”³¹ In particular, the concentration on no-contact warfare reflects a growing concern over a putative vulnerability of various categories

30 For an exhaustive analysis of the importance given to military transformation in Russia, see Colonel Carl W. Reddel (editor), *Transformation in Russian and Soviet Military History*, Proceedings of the Twelfth Military History Symposium, United States Air Force Academy, Washington, D.C., Office of Air Force History, 1986.

31 The term “sixth-generation warfare” was coined by the late Major General Vladimir Schlipenko, who at the end of the Cold War was Head of the Scientific Research Department of the Russian General Staff Academy, to describe the rise of a post-nuclear era dominated by conventional, high-precision weapons-systems, whose effects in war would have strategic impact and could lead to the prompt and irreversible defeat of an adversary, without the economic costs associated with long-duration conflicts and without the devastation that would be inflicted by the use of nuclear weapons. Mary C. Fitzgerald, *Comparative Strategy*, op. cit., pp.168-169; Army General Makhmut Gareev and Major General Vladimir Schlipenko, *Future War*, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Foreign Military Studies Office, 2007; and Jacob W. Kipp, “Russian Sixth Generation Warfare and Recent Developments,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* Vol. 9, Issue 17, January 25, 2012, pp.1-2.

of Russian forces to Western advances in global, prompt conventional strike and ballistic missile defense capabilities that was already in evidence in Soviet military literature and official statements in the 1980s.³² In effect, advanced conventional strike capabilities are seen by Russian military theorists as an outgrowth, with strategic impact, of the “deep attack” technologies associated with NATO’s Cold War “Follow-On Forces Attack” concept that aimed at enhancing deterrence by threatening in a hypothetical conflict to break decisively the forward momentum of a Warsaw Pact offensive operation against NATO. Concurrently, the precedence now given to “fires over forces” represents an extension of premonitory Soviet efforts in the 1980s to develop integrated “reconnaissance-strike complexes” able to deliver massed artillery and missile strikes promptly and accurately into the depth of an adversary’s military deployments and infrastructure.³³

Hybrid Warfare as “Control War”

What would qualify Russia’s hybrid warfare model as an RMA is its conceptualization of the dynamic interaction between hard and soft power as a new form of war that extends the military contest to society as a whole. This makes hybrid warfare in the early 21st century an accomplished form of “control war” over the ends, ways and means of nations, communities and societies.

In the Russian view, hybrid warfare as allegedly practiced by the West merges the military dimension of “no-contact” warfare with economic coercion, political subversion and the manipulative employment of “information dominance” to weaken and demoralize an adversary and

32 On Russian views of U.S. conventional prompt global strike and layered ballistic missile defenses as constitutive of a “unified counterforce concept” to disarm and neutralize Russian nuclear capabilities, see Dima Adamsky, “If War Comes Tomorrow: Russian Thinking About ‘Regional Nuclear Deterrence,’” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* Vol. 27, Issue 1, March 2014, p.169. In his February 2013 article, General Gerasimov stated that “Now the concepts of ‘global strike’ and ‘global missile defense’ have been worked out, which foresee the defeat of enemy objects and forces in a matter of hours from almost any point on the globe, while at the same time ensuring the prevention of unacceptable harm from an enemy counterstrike.” V.V. Gerasimov, *Voyenno-promyshlenniy kur’yer*, op. cit.

33 Dave Johnson, op. cit., p; 2-3; and Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, *Cold War History*, op. cit, p.550.

to create the conditions of “controlled chaos” necessary for an overthrow of its constitutionally-established political regime by means of “color revolutions.” In the typically Russian (and Soviet) practice of ascribing to foreign countries the paternity of concepts and practices developed and implemented by Russia (and, in its time, the USSR), the hybrid warfare concept described by Russian military theorists as the core of the West’s devious foreign policies is, actually, the compass that Russia has been employing, to a greater or lesser degree and in various forms, in its relations with its CIS neighbors – notably Ukraine,³⁴ Georgia and the Republic of Moldova – but also to intimidate NATO member nations.³⁵

The annexation of the Crimean peninsula, as well as the enduring hostilities in eastern Ukraine, are indicative of the application by Russia of this new hybrid warfare model, however with important differences between the two instances that illustrate the range of applicable soft power-hard power combinations. In Crimea, military forces played an important role in completing Russia’s occupation of the peninsula, although in a deliberately ambiguous way;³⁶ the actual use of lethal force, however, was very limited, exercised only to underpin a wider political and information campaign. In eastern Ukraine, Russia’s involvement has taken a variety of forms, with the role of military forces remaining largely concealed. However, the covert use of lethal force, in support of the local, pro-Russian

34 One of Russia’s active agents of influence in Ukraine following the end of the Cold War was Ukrainian-born Army General Ivan Gerasimov, successively commander of the USSR’s Kiev Military District between 1975 and 1984 and of the Warsaw Pact’s Southwestern TVD high command between 1984 and 1990, prior to his retirement from the Soviet Army and, thereafter, president of Ukraine’s Veterans’ Union.

35 The most authoritative Russian military statement to date on the essence of hybrid warfare is by Colonel S.G. Chekinov (Res.) and Lieutenant General S.A. Bogdanov (Ret.), “The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War,” *Voennaya Mysl*, October-December 2013, pp.12-23.

36 One of the ambiguities during the Russian force deployment into the Crimean Peninsula in March 2014 resulted from the lack of national insignia on the uniforms of what Ukrainians designated as “little green men,” to prevent attribution, although, following annexation, Russia acknowledged that the soldiers were, indeed, Russian. Kathy Lally, “Putin’s remarks raise fears of future moves against Ukraine,” *The Washington Post*, April 17, 2014. It should be noted, however, that international law does not require regular military forces belonging to a nation-state to exhibit national insignia on their uniforms. Shane R. Reeves and David Wallace, “The Combatant Status of the ‘Little Green Men’ and Other Participants in the Ukraine Conflict,” *International Law Studies* Vol. 91, 2015, pp.394-395. The expanded practice of wearing national insignia on uniforms results primarily from the increasing involvement of national military contingents in multinational operations over the last two decades.

separatist forces, has been pursued with devastating effect on Ukrainian forces, through the use of artillery barrages targeted by drones and delivered promptly and accurately by highly effective multiple rocket launchers.

At critical moments in a hybrid warfare campaign, military power can be the indispensable enabler for soft power, facilitating or accelerating the emergence of a favorable outcome. As remarked by General Gerasimov in his February 2013 article, “the open use of forces (...) is resorted to only at a certain stage, primarily for the achievement of final success in the conflict.”³⁷ However, if properly employed, soft power can be an attractive complement and, ideally, a substitute for military power. In the same article, General Gerasimov stressed that “the role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness.”³⁸ The Russian Ministry of Defense’s National Command and Control Center for State Defense, with its expansive coordination functions across the Russian government’s ministries and agencies, encapsulates this perspective.³⁹

It might be premature to declare Russia’s hybrid warfare model a new Revolution in Military Affairs. The historical record shows that RMAs are often only recognized with confidence in retrospect. At the same time, it would be unwise to turn a blind eye to the possibility that Russia’s brand of hybrid warfare exhibited in 2014 may well turn out to be an RMA revelator or precursor, and to the strategic implications of such a development for deterrence and defense.

A Cold War Revival? Deterrence and Defense for a New Era

Russia’s new political belligerence has triggered speculation on whether

37 V.V. Gerasimov, *Voyenno-promyshlenniy kur’yer*, op. cit.

38 V.V. Gerasimov, *Voyenno-promyshlenniy kur’yer*, op. cit.

39 A leading analyst of the Russian military has warned that “Russia now benefits from a highly developed information warfare arsenal which will be a key facilitator in preparing for further actions which the West will find unthinkable in advance and unacceptable after the fact.” Keir Giles, “Russia’s Hybrid Warfare: a Success in Propaganda,” *Working Paper* 1/15, Bundesakademie fur Sicherheitspolitik, Berlin, 2015, p.5.

Russian military developments and activities and NATO's military measures adopted in response in the run-up to, and at, the Wales Summit in September 2014 herald a return to the Cold War era of East-West confrontation.

The fundamentally changed geopolitical conditions in Europe today, by comparison with their antecedents of the 1970s and 1980s, suggest persuasively that assessing relations between Russia and NATO through the obsolete prism of the Cold War can be deceptive and unhelpful. Happily, the distinct geopolitical and strategic circumstances of the Cold War – a divided Europe, as well as massed forces and a large infrastructure of barracks, bunkers and air bases on both sides of the Iron Curtain – cannot be recreated a quarter-of-a-century later. The Cold War architecture of confrontation has been dismantled irreversibly. Instead, comparisons with Cold War conditions in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s should be focused on how, and to what extent, Cold War concepts and practices influence current thinking and might apply to the transformed security environment ushered by Russia's behavior.

Old Soviet Wine in New Russian Bottles

A widespread view among specialists is that much of Russia's hybrid warfare arsenal represents a smartly updated version of a well-documented tool box that has roots sometimes dating back to Bolshevik times and even tsarist Russia.⁴⁰ During the Cold War, the USSR would have turned to this kit to "prepare and shape the battlefield" – here understood to mean the entire space of contest – ahead, and in the early stages, of a conflict with NATO. They include, but are not limited to:

- (i) "Agit Prop" – a Russian language contraction of the Bolshevik-era terminology for "agitation and propaganda" (*otdel agitatsii i propagandy*) – that designates measures aimed at influencing and mobilizing a targeted audience;

40 Dave Johnson, "Russia's Approach to Conflict," op. cit., p.1.

- (ii) *Maskirovka*, the Russian word that designates the concept of all-encompassing deception, concealment and camouflage measures and tactics;
- (iii) *Spetsnaz*, the special operations forces that are trained and equipped to conduct unconventional warfare operations in ways that comply with, and help deliver, *Maskirovka*;
- (iv) Clandestine operatives from the Warsaw Pact's various civilian and military intelligence services, including "sleeper agents;" and
- (v) Radio-Electronic Combat, in effect the Soviet Union's early version of offensive cyber warfare, aimed at incapacitating an opponent's technical ability, through communications means, to command and control its forces in an effective and timely way, by targeting and disrupting fixed and mobile networks.

Many of these instruments were employed effectively by Russia in its war with Georgia and to occupy and annex the Crimean peninsula, as well as foment and support separatism in the Donbas, including large-scale jamming.⁴¹ Russia's military take-over of Crimea also exhibited some of the features of Soviet Cold War intervention practices in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Afghanistan in 1979, including the anticipatory setting-up of the necessary field communications networks and the tailored employment of *Spetsnaz* and clandestine operatives. In Crimea and the Donbas, Russia benefited, in addition, from nearly perfect intelligence on the territories being targeted and, particularly, on the local military and civilian infrastructure, that were key parts, two-and-a-half decades ago, of the USSR.⁴²

41 C.J. Chivers and David M. Herszenhorn, "In Crimea, Russia Showcases a Rebooted Army," *The New York Times*, April 2, 2014; and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "On the frontlines in Ukraine, a technological gap," *The Washington Post*, August 31, 2015.

42 During the Cold War, Ukraine hosted the USSR's Kiev Military District, which, in a hypothetical war with NATO, would have played the role of a strategic pivot, astride the Western and South-western TVDs, both because of its geographic position and its role in hosting a large complement of tank divisions and a powerful strategic air army headquartered at Vinnitsa.

The Threat of Coercion and Limited Aggression - Is This New for NATO?

As addressed earlier, a constitutive aspect of hybrid warfare is its deliberate ambiguity, which implicitly raises the hypothetical risk of Russia being tempted to coerce or undertake limited aggression against an Ally in the expectation that it might not elicit a NATO response.⁴³ While the Russian hybrid warfare model represents a new way of war for a new era, NATO's Cold War record persuasively demonstrates that, during the Cold War, the Alliance was keenly aware that an attempted invasion of Western Europe by the Warsaw Pact would likely have included a mix of the various "active measures" referred to above, to conceal preparations for a full-scale attack or for a *more limited act of aggression*, either of them preceded by a campaign to intimidate and coerce individual Allies and break NATO apart:

- (i) NATO's Strategic Concept of May 1957, often referred to as the strategy of "massive retaliation," included guidance that warned specifically against the threat of "operations with limited objectives, such as infiltrations, incursions or hostile local actions in the NATO area, overtly or covertly supported by themselves, trusting that the Allies in their collective desire to prevent a general conflict would either limit their reactions accordingly or not react at all;"⁴⁴
- (ii) NATO's "forward defense" strategy to defend NATO territory all the way up to the borders with Warsaw Pact countries included, for West Germany, special provisions for defending the geographically-exposed city of Kassel in a way that would have prevented its capture and occupation, through a limited Soviet incursion, and its "return" to the FRG in exchange for France, the United Kingdom and the

43 *Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part 2 - NATO*, Third Report of Session 2014-15, HC 358, House of Commons, London, paragraph 44, p.30.

44 NATO Military Committee document MC 14/2 (Revised), *Overall Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Area*, classified NATO Secret, dated May 23, 1957, p.11; declassified and disclosed in *NATO Strategy Documents, 1949-1969*, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Brussels, Belgium, October 1997.

United States terminating their military presence in West Berlin;⁴⁵

- (iii) Trilateral contingency planning by France, the United Kingdom and the United States (under the umbrella of the *Live Oak* arrangements) for protecting Allied access to Berlin, in the face of Soviet and/or East German interference with, or denial of, that access, explicitly acknowledged the need to cater for ambiguity and for situations short of a full-scale attack on West Berlin, and included a wide menu of military and non-military response measures;⁴⁶ and
- (iv) NATO contingency planning for the defense of Denmark and Norway, and of Italy, Greece and Turkey, on NATO's Northern and Southern Flanks respectively, was oriented deliberately to deterring, preventing and defending against a limited Soviet "land grab," by emphasizing high responsiveness and Allied solidarity, in the form of the land and air components of the multinational Allied Mobile Force (AMF).⁴⁷

The arrangements above suggest that NATO's Cold War planning assumed that a hypothetical Warsaw Pact offensive operation against Western Europe would likely be preceded by a deteriorating political-military situation across the continent that would be characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty, and by the risk of accidental escalation, rather than by a sudden, "out-of-the-blue" attack, even though the possibility

45 In March 1960, the headquarters of the 1st Belgian Corps in West Germany activated in Kassel a "Covering Forces Command" (*Commandement des Forces de Couverture*), tasked in wartime, in cooperation with the 2nd *Panzergrenadierdivision* of the adjacent IIIrd Corps of the *Bundeswehr*, to prevent a Soviet advance from Nordhausen, in East Germany, towards Kassel. *Historique des Forces de Couverture, Forces Belges en Allemagne*, undated. This step was in consonance with higher NATO guidance to enhance surveillance in peacetime of the Inner-German Border. See "Peacetime Surveillance of the Iron Curtain in NORTHAG," 3340/CEAG/305/61, *History for 1960*, classified NATO Secret, Headquarters, Allied Forces Central Europe (AFCENT), Fontainebleau, France, 1961, p.15, declassified and disclosed by NATO, November 2013; and Sean Maloney, "Fire Brigade or Tocsin? NATO's ACE Mobile Force, Flexible Response and the Cold War," *Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 27, No. 4, December 2004, pp.588-589.

46 Bruno Thoss, *NATO-Strategie und nationale Verteidigungsplanung* (Munich: R. Oldenburg Verlag, 2006), pp.291-329.

47 Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, "From AMF to NRF: the roles of NATO's rapid reaction forces in deterrence, defence and crisis response, 1960-2009," *NATO review*, spring 2009; and Bernd Lemke, *Die Allied Mobile Force 1961 bis 2002*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter GMBH & Co., 2015.

and threat of a surprise attack with little warning was not excluded and explicitly catered for.⁴⁸

There is much from NATO's Cold War experience, therefore, that could be examined and leveraged to enhance NATO's current deterrence and defense posture vis-à-vis Russia, and countering Russia's new style of warfare has meant rediscovering and recovering some of the operational concepts, practices and capacity largely abandoned at the end of the Cold War and recasting them in NATO's post-ISAF transformation drive.

NATO's Post-ISAF Military Transformation and Russia's Hybrid Warfare Challenge

For NATO, military transformation has been a long-standing impulse since the end of the Cold War. At NATO's Chicago Summit in 2012, Allies adopted a new transformation blueprint – “*NATO Forces 2020*” – and agreed the completion of combat operations in Afghanistan and the resulting disbandment of ISAF in December 2014. Together, these agreements shaped what was soon termed a transition from a “deployed NATO” to a “prepared NATO,” or from a “campaign” to a “contingency” paradigm.⁴⁹ A central aspect in this transition was the desirability of preserving key gains in interoperability, as Allied and partner forces embarked upon a draw-down and returned to their home stations in Europe and North America. These aims were to be achieved, notably, by pursuing an ambitious program of education, training and exercising under the auspices of the Connected Forces Initiative.⁵⁰

A strategic insight of greater consequence from operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere was that Allied forces were at risk of excessive specialization in counter-insurgency warfare and needed to prepare for a wider spectrum of potential missions and engagements. This meant aiming to regain a

48 Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, *Cold War History*, op. cit., pp.552-553.

49 *NATO after ISAF staying successful together*, Remarks by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the Munich Security Conference, February 2, 2013, Brussels, North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

50 *Connected Forces Initiative*, Fact Sheet, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, updated August 31, 2015.

capacity for operational maneuver at *larger scales of effort*,⁵¹ in order to be able to deter and, if necessary, defend against a capable and determined adversary that, while competent in the employment of the tactics and means of asymmetric warfare, would also benefit from the advantages afforded by the possession of the means for conventional, high-intensity operations. Russia's behavior in 2014 gave this requirement new urgency.

NATO's new ambition has multiple implications in terms of doctrine; tactics, techniques and procedures; force structure; equipment; maintenance and logistical sustainment; command and control; and training and exercising. Addressing them satisfactorily will require resources and constancy of purpose. For instance, developing a sustainable *capacity* to conduct high-intensity, joint and combined-arms operations will require NATO's Command and Force Structures to redirect their focus towards the planning and execution of larger-scale operations by larger-size formations. For land forces, this would mean a rebalancing of capabilities and training towards corps and divisional-scale operations involving the movement, integration, and potential engagement, over a compressed timetable,⁵² of a much larger increment of forces and logistics than has been envisaged and practiced since the conduct of exercise *Strong Resolve*⁵³ and the creation of the NATO Response Force in 2002.

The Readiness Action Plan (RAP) adopted at the Wales Summit⁵⁴ and exercise *Steadfast Juncture* held in the autumn of 2015⁵⁵ largely respond

51 Major General Mungo Melvin, "Exercise United Shield 2008: Revisiting Military Strategy for the Twenty-First Century," *RUSI Journal* Vol. 154, No 3, June 2009, pp.36-43. At the time of exercise *United Shield* in 2008, General Melvin was the commander of British forces in Germany.

52 For exercise *Spearpoint*, conducted by the 1st British Corps in West Germany in September 1980, the British Army of the Rhine was able to redeploy 130 main battle tanks by road, using tank-transporters, over a distance of 160 kilometers, in one night. Walter Bohm, *Cold War Exercise Spearpoint* 80, Erlangen, Verlag Jochen Vollert, 2015, p.5.

53 Exercise *Strong Resolve 2002* was the last, major, live NATO exercise held in Europe that rehearsed the employment of joint forces in a demanding operational environment, in the form of a sea-based combined joint task force, before the Alliance's expanding engagement in Afghanistan absorbed an increasingly large share of Allies' forces and resources. The creation of a NATO-Russia Council that year also reaffirmed that NATO and Russia did not see each other as adversaries and removed any residual requirement for large-scale exercising of NATO forces in Europe until Russia's illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula in March 2014.

54 *The Readiness Action Plan*, Fact Sheet, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, updated September 1, 2015.

55 *Trident Juncture 2015: NATO's most ambitious exercise for over a decade*, North Atlantic Treaty

to this requirement to underpin a recast NATO deterrence and defense posture with a demonstrable capacity to deploy forces quickly and on a large scale, to match Russia's new ability to mass forces and concentrate threatening weapons systems quickly. The RAP's ultimate effectiveness in strengthening deterrence and defense, however, will also depend on the components resting at the RAP's lower and higher ends:

- (i) At the lower end, the RAP's effectiveness will depend on the Allies' ability, individually and together, to generate the forces and resources necessary to give NATO's new rapid reaction capacity at larger scales of effort the suitable operational depth, by restoring the required maneuver capabilities at divisional and brigade levels and developing the applicable operational and logistical art.⁵⁶ While a particular focus of these enhancements should be on upgrading armored and mechanized infantry forces capable of defending against and repulsing an adversary's comparably-equipped forces, attention should also be accorded to the further development of rapidly-deployable airmobile forces and other capabilities optimized to counter short-notice Russian air assault and sea-landing operations. This is a collective effort that will require an equitable sharing of the burden among the Allies and, necessarily, military arrangements based on a rotation of forces;⁵⁷ and
- (ii) At the higher level, the effectiveness of NATO's deterrence and defense posture will depend on the Alliance's capacity to address the decision-making implications of having available a capacity for rapid reaction and counter-concentration, by developing an overarching crisis-management concept for deterrence and defense in Europe that takes account of the risk of ambiguity and uncertainty.⁵⁸ Where

Organization, July 15, 2015.

56 "We need to rebuild competency on several levels," Major General Duane A. Gamble, commander of the U.S. Army Europe's 21st Theater Sustainment Command headquartered at Kaiserslautern, Germany, quoted in John Vandiver, "Renewed Focus," *Stars and Stripes*, September 2, 2015, p.2.

57 This represents a dissenting view from that presented by Dr. Martin Zapfe, "Efficacy, not Efficiency: Adjusting NATO's Military Integration," *Research Paper* No. 118, NATO Defense College, August 2015.

58 NATO's core task of "crisis management" is often associated, erroneously, with the conduct of "out-of-

applicable, it could be modeled on the experience from the Cold War and link warning indicators, alerting procedures and transfer of authority arrangements from Allies to NATO. Countering hybrid threats in their full complexity will also require an appropriate set of military and non-military crisis-management measures, including those that would require cooperation with other international organizations, notably the European Union.

This comprehensive, three-level approach would help ensure that the inherent complexity and ambiguity of Russia's hybrid warfare model can be countered successfully through a mix of alertness, preparedness and resilience. As importantly, it would convey the Allies' determination to stand firm for one another, in all circumstances, and expose the futility of policies that promote confrontation over cooperation.⁵⁹

area" crisis response operations only, which represents a misreading of the Alliance's intent. Crisis-management also applies to the prevention of a conflict that would result from a failure of deterrence and an attack on one or more Allies.

59 This Research Report is dedicated to the memory of two distinguished NATO commanders – General John R. Galvin, U.S. Army, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR), 1987-1992; and General Hans-Henning von Sandt, German Army, Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces, Central Europe (CINCENT), 1987-1991.

5

Russia's 2014 Military Doctrine and Beyond: Threat Perceptions, Capabilities and Ambitions

Polina Sinovets and Bettina Renz

Today the major part of the structure of Soviet power is committed to the perfection of the dictatorship and to the maintenance of the concept of Russia as in a state of siege, with the enemy lowering beyond the walls. And the millions of human beings who form that part of the structure of power must defend at all costs this concept of Russia's position, for without it they are themselves superfluous ...¹

The gist of this 1947 quotation, attributable to the father of containment strategy George Kennan, is in some ways an accurate ideological summary of Russia's 2014 Military Doctrine.

Published on 26 December 2014,² the new doctrine did not attract a large deal of public attention, especially in the West. Contrary to expectations and widespread rumours in the run-up of its publication, the Kremlin neither issued a doctrine of nuclear pre-emption, nor explicitly named its perceived foes. Indeed, at first sight, the new text looks very similar to the Military Doctrine of 2010. Like the previous doctrine, the current document contains some chapters dedicated to military dangers as well as military threats. Military *threats* include international factors

1 X. [G. Kennan], "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1947, p.571.

2 *Voyennaya Doktrina Rossiyskoy Federatsii* [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], December 26, 2014, <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf>.

and external events, which could trigger a conflict involving the use of armed force. In contrast, military *dangers* are situations with the potential to escalate into a military threat. Like in the 2010 doctrine, the movement of military infrastructure of NATO member states towards Russia's borders as well as the development and deployment of strategic missile defence systems are considered military dangers. Large-scale military exercises in Russia's neighbourhood are described as threats. An important nuance in the 2014 doctrine is the fact that, unlike in the 2010 version, cooperation with NATO is no longer regarded as a means to reinforcing collective security.³ The 2014 doctrine merely mentions NATO as a potential partner for "equal dialogue." This seems to indicate that Moscow abandoned any hope or ambition for future cooperation with NATO. Instead, the doctrine emphasises the importance of cooperation with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) as well as partners in the CIS and OSCE. As Heidi Reisinger has put it, "the Russian leadership has turned its back on cooperation with Western partners and is working on the creation of alternatives."⁴

The 2014 doctrine, in comparison to its predecessor, stands out for emphasizing domestic threats to national security. Such threats include destabilisation of the political situation, including terrorist activities as well as outside political influence on Russia's population.

The 2014 military doctrine's major changes and messages can be summarised as follows:

- 1) The chapter on "military dangers" was expanded to include the "information space and the internal sphere." For the first time, the doctrine contains a chapter dedicated to domestic military dangers. This emphasises in particular the threat of what the doctrine calls "the informational influence over the population ... aimed at undermining spiritual and patriotic

³ *Voyennaya Doktrina Rossiyskoy Federatsii*, February 5, 2010, http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/461.

⁴ H. Reisinger, "Putin's neue Militaerdoktrin," *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, February 19, 2015, www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/putins-neue-militaerdoktrin-gefahren-lauern-ueberall-1.2356395.

traditions.” This clearly demonstrates the Kremlin’s anxiety over social stability, expressed in the explicit fear of subversive activities conducted by the intelligence services of Western states aimed at provoking social unrest in Russia. One of the principal refrains in the doctrine is the importance of state policy aimed at countering the influence of outside actors/the West in Russia’s domestic affairs and in its so-called sphere of vital interests.

- 2) As discussed in more detail below, Russia’s perceived need to defend what it sees as its vital sphere of interest is central to the 2014 doctrine. No state belonging to this sphere of influence is named explicitly, but Russia’s concern over the establishment of regimes in “bordering states, whose policy threatens the interests of the Russian Federation,” is unambiguous. According to Sergey Karaganov, the West misperceives Moscow’s policy as being concentrated only on Ukraine, whereas Russia’s aim is broader and aims at “preserving the territories, which must be considered of vital importance for its survival.”⁵ In terms of averting perceived threats to Russia’s vital sphere of influence the doctrine is sending a clear message to potential foes and neighbouring states that it not only regards military exercises and the mobilization of forces in bordering states as a military threat. The military dangers chapter also expresses concerns about “the use of information and communication technologies ... against sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of certain states, endangering peace and international security.” And in spite of the fact that this information has already been published at the Kremlin website, it is quite new in the text of the military doctrine. It seems to be a telling case of “mirror-imaging” that exactly

5 S. Karaganov, “Prichina etogo konflikta – zabluzhdeniya Zapada, potomu russkiye ne sdadutsya,” *Rossiya v Globalnoy Politike*, September 24, 2014, www.globalaffairs.ru/pubcol/Prichina-etogo-konflikta-zabluzhdeniya-Zapada-potomu-russkie-ne-sdadutsya-16975.

such an approach characterises Russia's current strategy vis-à-vis Ukraine.

- 3) For the first time, the 2014 doctrine mentions the “prompt global strike” concept as a military danger.⁶ It seeks to counter this challenge by strategic deterrence with high-precision conventional arms. Although the latter point was carried over from the 2010 doctrine, Russia's ambitions to strengthen its non-nuclear deterrence capabilities look more credible today in light of extensive modernisation plans and investments in the development of precision-guided munitions (PGMs) and other high-tech weaponry. Although, as discussed further below, contemporary Russian conventional deterrence cannot yet compete with more developed militaries, and especially with NATO, the new doctrine clearly shows the country's ambition to develop such capabilities in the long term.

Russia's Reception of Strategic Vulnerability

The term “neighbourhood” (more precisely “states bordering the Russian Federation”) is widely used in the 2014 doctrine. Some main military dangers and threats, according to the doctrine, stem from: a) regime change in the neighbourhood, and b) military exercises, as well as military mobilization in the neighbourhood.⁷ Clearly, these concerns are closely connected to current events in Ukraine. However, as Karaganov pointed out above, it would be a strategic mistake to consider Russian interests as limited to Ukraine and perhaps Georgia.

Russia does not explicitly outline the perimeter of its sphere of vital interest. A likely explanation for this is the wish to create some strategic

⁶ The concept of Prompt Global Strike was developed by the U.S. Department of Defense. It enables the United States to develop non-nuclear weapons capable of hitting distant targets anywhere around the world within just one hour's notice.

⁷ *Voyennaya Doktrina Rossijskoy Federatsii*, December 26, 2014, <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf>.

ambiguity for potential opponents, including NATO. Certainly, this ambiguity poses serious questions that the Alliance will need to address. Does “bordering states” include only those former Soviet states that still do not have NATO membership? Would Alliance membership guarantee that there will be no “little green men” on a country’s? It is impossible to answer these questions conclusively. However, it is clear that, although Russia’s geographical “red lines” are not explicitly defined, the 2014 military doctrine is sending clear message to Russia’s neighbours and beyond: the Kremlin considers the former Soviet area its vital sphere of interest and has a high level of commitment to its defence.

To a certain extent, the doctrine’s emphasis on the need to protect the country’s vital sphere of interest can be explained by peculiarities in Russian strategic culture, usually recognized as a deep-set feeling of insecurity and the desire for projecting a great power status.⁸ Despite the enormous size of Russia, the strategic depth of its European territory is limited, and it has regularly been attacked and occasionally invaded by different enemies throughout history: Tatars, Poles, French, and Germans – some of whom were successful in reaching Moscow. The 2014 doctrine, as did its predecessors, addresses a multitude of geographical threats, including potential instability and conflict in the Caucasus and Central Asia and so-called “emerging security challenges” like transnational terrorism and organised crime. However, in addition to this, all post-Soviet Russian military doctrines and other security documents have continuously emphasised “traditional” threats, such as the need to project global power and compete with rival state actors and military alliances, especially in the West. From this point of view, Russia’s perceived vital sphere of influence is to be maintained as an important buffer zone, which explains the fact that the enlargement of NATO has been consistently seen as a central threat to Russia’s national interests and security since the early post-Soviet years. This point is important particularly for NATO vis-à-vis the potential success of any renewed future cooperation with Russia. It also goes some way towards

8 I. Facon, “The Russian Way of War: In Crisis?” in *The Oxford Handbook of War*, ed. Julian Lindley-French and Yves Boyer, Oxford University Press, January 2012.

explaining Russia's resistance against the costs of economic sanctions and its readiness to persist engaging in the Ukrainian conflict.

Another interesting nuance of the 2014 doctrine is the inclusion of the Arctic in Russia's vital sphere of interest for the first time. In connection with this, some previous comments by Vladimir Putin on the Arctic issue further confirms Russia's feeling of strategic vulnerability. When in 2013 a Professor of the Higher School of Economics, Sergey Medvedev, suggested that Russian should take control over the Arctic for the benefit of the international community as a whole, Putin dismissed his remarks as "unpatriotic." He also reminded the audience that U.S. nuclear submarines based near Norway would take only 16-17 minutes for their SLBMs to strike Moscow.⁹ The inclusion of the Arctic in Russia's proclaimed vital sphere of interest in the 2014 doctrine could be interpreted as a signifier by Russia to other states with a stake in the Arctic region that perceived undue influence will not be acceptable.

The Restoration of Russia's Great Power Status and Military Might?

A peculiarity of Russian strategic culture is the clear interconnectedness of the "greatness" of the state and its military power. This idea was borne out by the experience of the Russian empire, when military power became the "chief institutional foundation of Russian statehood."¹⁰ This peculiarity goes some way towards explaining the renewed attention paid to the restoration of Russia's great power status and military might under the Putin regime.

9 "Putin nazval professor VSHE 'Pridurkom,'" *Interfax*, October 13, 2013, http://tvrain.ru/articles/putin_nazval_professora_vshe_pridurkom-353637/.

10 F.W. Ermarth, "Russian Strategic Culture in Flix Back to the Future?" *Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction. Culturally-based insights into Comparative National Security Policy Making*, ed. J.J. Johnson, K.K. Karchner and J.A. Larsen, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2009.

Conventional Military Capabilities

Until recently, conventional capabilities and deterrence were considered Russia's weakest points, although the situation has started to change. A significant and steady rise in the defence budget over the past decade in addition to the implementation of systematic reforms since 2008 has led to a resurgence of Russian conventional military capabilities. However, conclusions that the Russians have "regained their capability to mount large conventional military operations [and are] now some years ahead of us if we started to train for the same thing today" require contextualisation.¹¹ Recent improvements in Russian military capabilities – though impressive – need to be seen against the background of almost total neglect throughout much of the post-Soviet era. Boris Yeltsin's relationship with the armed forces was shaped by mutual mistrust and he lacked both the political will and financial means required for pushing through fundamental modernisation. Although several rounds of reforms were announced during his presidency, they amounted to little more than a scaling down of the remnants of the Soviet army he had inherited. Throughout the 1990s the Russian armed forces received next to no new hardware like tanks, aircraft or naval vessels, not even to mention the high-tech equipment their Western counterparts were increasingly growing accustomed to. With a defence budget that had collapsed from more than \$ 300 billion towards the end of the Cold-war era to a mere \$ 20.8 billion by 1998 there was no money for training flights or large-scale military exercises.¹² As a result of low salaries, poor working conditions and corruption, the prestige of the military profession slumped, making any ambitions Yeltsin might have had to do away with the unpopular system of conscription and move towards a professional military a pipe dream.

11 UK House of Commons Defence Committee, *Oral evidence: Towards the next security and defence review*, Part II: NATO, HC 358, June 24, 2014,

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/defence-committee/towards-the-next-defence-and-security-review-part-two-nato/oral/11114.html>.

12 Figures in \$ U.S. in constant 2011 prices and exchange rates as per the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2014, www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database.

The Russian military's fortunes changed with Putin's election to the presidency in 2000. From the outset he afforded military-related matters more political importance and pledged to return the defence budget to a more realistic level. Assisted by a recovering economy and growing GDP, not least due to rising oil and gas prices, the Russian defence budget has increased to almost \$ 90 billion by 2013. The boost in funding was accompanied by thorough and systematic plans for reforms, announced by then-Defence Minister Anatoly Serdiukov in 2008. In addition to emphasising the need to procure new equipment with the goal of modernising 70% of military hardware and technology by 2020, the reforms sought to increase the general efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the armed forces: streamlining central command bodies; decreasing the size of the officer corps, which had made the Russian military particularly top-heavy; cutting the number of military units in favour of a smaller band with permanent readiness status; and driving up the recruitment of professional soldiers to lessen reliance on conscription. As the 2008 reforms were distinguished by unprecedented political will at the highest level, significant structural changes were implemented with impressive speed. The modernisation of equipment has also proceeded at a rapid pace. Some questions remain about the Russian defence industry's ability to deliver certain products in the areas of sophisticated computer technology and shipbuilding. Western economic sanctions will exacerbate this problem. The inability to acquire such technology domestically meant that defence procurement included foreign imports for the first time in recent years. As none of Russia's allies within the former Soviet space are in a position to supply the latest in military equipment, purchases have been made from Western states, including the U.S., France, the United Kingdom and Germany. Of course, the sanctions have closed Russia's access to Western advanced military technology, at least for the foreseeable future. Having said this, the achievement of 2020 procurement and modernisation targets does not seem entirely unrealistic.¹³ Problems with the recruitment and

13 For a more detailed assessment of rearmament see Dmitry Gorenburg's posts on the state of procurement plans of the Russian ground forces, navy and air force posted on his <https://russiamil.wordpress.com/> blog on

retention of military personnel, however, do not yet seem to have been resolved. On the one hand, serious efforts have been made to improve service conditions, including a significant increase of salaries paid to officers and privates. On the other hand, the continuing low prestige of military service, coupled with Russia's demographic challenges, has meant that the recruitment of sufficient numbers of conscripts, let alone enough soldiers for a fully professional force, continues to be a challenge.

Improvements in Russian military capabilities since 2000 are certainly impressive. However, given the neglect the armed forces had experienced throughout the 1990s, recent developments first of all should be evaluated as salvaging measures that were long overdue, rather than *per se* as a quest for "remilitarisation." Even a cursory look at developments in the Russian defence budget supports this point. Throughout Yeltsin's presidency the defence budget consistently fell to reach a low of \$ 20.8 billion in 1998. To put this figure into context, the United Kingdom and France, both with much smaller countries to secure and militaries to maintain, in the same year spent \$ 46.8 billion and over \$ 60 billion respectively. Although the Russian defence budget rose steadily starting from 2000 it only caught up and overtook UK defence spending by 2009 and that of France by 2011. With a budget of around \$ 90 billion by 2013, Russian defence spending is still a far cry from the around \$ 619 billion spent by the U.S. or even the \$ 171 spent by China in the same year.¹⁴ Especially compared to China, whose current impressive expenditure on defence increased from a budget not dissimilar to Russia's in 1998 (\$ 29.9 billion), the rate of change in Russia's defence budget appears not all that spectacular. A look at Russian defence spending as percentage of GDP further puts increases experienced under Putin or the perception of "militarisation" into perspective. As table 1 below shows, the percentage of GDP expended on defence has been fairly consistent throughout the post-Cold war era. Average spending as percentage of GDP under Yeltsin (1992 – 1999) was 4.1 percent, which

January 5, 14 and 27 respectively.

¹⁴ Figures in \$ U.S. in constant 2011 prices and exchange rates as per the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2014, www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/milex_database.

even exceeded the average of 3.7 percent of the GDP spent on defence under Putin and Medvedev between 2000 and 2013.

Whilst in a European context Russia's 4.1 percent of GDP spent on defence in 2013 are, of course, far above average (only Azerbaijan spent more with 4.7 percent), the country is roughly on a par with the U.S., where 3.8 percent of the GDP were spent on defence in 2013 (a decrease from 4.4 percent in 2012).

An issue worth mentioning here is the fact that in 2015 Russia finally withdrew from the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE). From a practical standpoint this might not mean a great deal, as Russia ceased abiding by its obligations under the Treaty some years ago. Moscow's subsequent announcement on the future of the CFE looked to be symbolic, implying the final removal of the integrated CFE-based confidence-building and arms control measures, as an integral part of the security system.¹⁵ This may or may not signal Russia's readiness to escalate the conflict were NATO to increase its pressure over the Ukrainian issue. The recent large-scale military exercises, demonstrating the rapid deployment of the "Iskander" missiles in the Kaliningrad oblast, seem to add credibility to this signal.¹⁶ Alternatively, it may carry the message that Moscow is ready to start a dialogue over the proposal of a new treaty on conventional forces in Europe. Such an ambiguous "carrot and stick" approach seems to be a characteristic of the 2014 doctrine, as currently demonstrated by Russia's behaviour.

Russian conventional military capabilities have experienced a resurgence of kind in recent years. The 2008 reform programme's structural and organisational changes as well as a significantly bigger spending compared to the 1990s have borne fruits and these efforts will continue making the Russian military increasingly more effective. However, these developments

15 I. Antony, "12 Mar.2015: Death of the CFE Treaty: The need to move arms control back to the centre of security policy," *SIPRI*, March 17, 2015, www.sipri.org/media/expert-comments/12-mar-2015-death-of-the-cfe-treaty.

16 Vzglyad, *U NATO net zashchity ot operatsii, khod kotoroy otrabatyvaet Rossiya*, 2015, <http://vz.ru/politics/2015/3/17/734911.html>.

need to be seen within the context of neglect of the armed forces throughout the 1990s. The idea that the Russian military transformed itself into a conventional rival to NATO within the matter of a few years is simply unrealistic. Large-scale military exercises Russia is again able to stage, like *Zapad 2013* or the snap exercise held near the Ukrainian border in spring 2014, are certainly intimidating in terms of the sheer size of troops deployed and serve as a show of force to its neighbours and to the West. However, the bulk of the troops deployed in these exercises continue to be poorly trained conscripts and the combat readiness of the soldiers involved remains far from certain.¹⁷ Russia's operational performance in Crimea was down to small units of elite special forces, which account for less than one percent of Russia's armed forces overall.¹⁸ From this point of view it needs to be borne in mind, as Dmitry Gorenburg has argued, that Russian operations in Crimea and in East Ukraine tell us nothing about "the extent to which the Russian military has increased its ability to conduct complex combined arms operations that involve ground, naval and air units all working together against a capable enemy."¹⁹ Recent evidence also suggests that the crisis in Ukraine has overstretched Russian military capabilities, and limitations in military and financial resources mean that military operations in and around Ukraine could not be sustained for more than one year.²⁰

Russian "hybrid warfare" tactics have attracted particular attention in the aftermath of Crimea and in view of the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine. However, as discussed elsewhere, the implications of this particularly vis-à-vis NATO defence capabilities are not straightforward.²¹

17 See also: J. Norberg, *The use of Russia's military in the Crimea crisis*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 13, 2014, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/03/13/use-of-russia-s-military-in-crimean-crisis/>.

18 I. Sutyagin quoted in UK House of Commons Defence Committee, *Oral evidence: Towards the next security and defence review*, Part II: NATO', HC 358, June 24, 2014.

19 D. Gorenburg, *Crimea taught is a lesson, but not about how the Russian military fights*, War on the Rocks (blog), May 14, 2014, <http://warontherocks.com/2014/05/crimea-taught-us-a-lesson-but-not-about-how-the-russian-military-fights/>.

20 I. Sutyagin, "Russian Forces in Ukraine," *RUSI Briefing Paper*, March 2015, p.2, www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/201503_BP_Russian_Forces_in_Ukraine_FINAL.pdf.

21 H. Reisinger and A. Golts, "Russia's hybrid warfare: waging war below the radar of traditional collective defence," *Research Paper No. 105*, NATO Defence College, November 2014, www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=455.

Crimea demonstrated that Russian military thinking was not as stuck in Cold-war conventional warfighting as often presumed. It also showed that the 2008 military reform aims of increasing mobility and rapid reaction capabilities were achieved inasmuch as the country now has the capacity for well-coordinated special operations work. However, the effectiveness of similar approaches in countries other than former Soviet states that cannot match these capabilities is far from certain. As a result, to make up for shortcomings in conventional capabilities, Russia's nuclear arsenal is likely to continue to form the backbone of the country's deterrence against the West for the foreseeable future.

The Role of Nuclear Weapons

Nuclear weapons continue to form the cornerstone of the Russian deterrence arsenal. Besides the seat in the UN Security Council, the only superpower criterion Moscow inherited from the Soviet Union was nuclear weapons, so they still play a paramount role not only in Russian military strategy, but also in its worldview.

In particular, nuclear weapons occupy special place in Russian religious, ideological as well as political posturing. In particular, the Russian Orthodox Church accepts the idea of a nuclear Russia in the spirit of a so-called Russian Doctrine, or nationalist worldview, based on the idea of Russian consolidation and confrontation with the West. In particular, Patriarch Cyril, who was appointed Honorary Professor of the Russian Academy of Strategic Nuclear Forces in 2010,²² publically referred to the opening of the Federal Nuclear Centre in the city of the holy Seraphim Sarovsky as “God's commandment” (“bozhiy promysel”). He has also often stated that nuclear weapons “provide sovereignty to Russia.”²³

In the words of Egor Holmogorov, journalist and philosopher, former

22 RIA Novosti, “*Patriarkh Kirill stal pochetnym professorom akademii RVSN*,” April 7, 2010, <http://ria.ru/religion/20100407/219137447.html#ixzz3UZvKTLiq>.

23 Grani.ru, *Patriarkh Sozdanie yadernogo oruzhiya - bozhiy promysel*, September 12, 2009, <http://grani.ru/War/Arms/Nukes/m.157112.html>.

editor of the *Edinaya Rossiya* website and author of the “Atomic Orthodoxy” concept: “In order to fulfil this mission successfully [to approach God], Russia cannot be an Orthodox state only; it should be a powerful state so that nobody and no weapon could silence our testimony of Christ.”²⁴ The main principle of the “Atomic Orthodoxy” idea, according to Holmogorov, is that “to stay Orthodox, Russia should be a strong nuclear power, and to stay a nuclear power it should be Orthodox.” Holmogorov takes this idea from the concept of nuclear parity, which not only prevents states from waging war, but brings their rivalry into the mental and spiritual arena. That is why, together with a traditional military defence, “the Russian State has to protect the nation, by conceptual means from mental threats.”²⁵

From the political standpoint Moscow’s attitude towards nuclear weapons was perfectly expressed by Russian experts, who always attributed the United States’ support of global zero to its desire to “secure its overwhelming military superiority in the field of high precision munitions and to diminish the nuclear potential of other nuclear states by radical nuclear disarmament and the creation of a global American BMD system.”²⁶ This situation, the reasoning goes, is unfolding at a time when a global struggle for domination still exists and the predictability of the Cold War has been replaced by multiple sources of instability and growing international asymmetries. This, in turn, increases the possibility of war between Russia and the West. According to Nikolai Kosolapov, “a war between the United States and Russia appears possible now, not only technically, but also politically and psychologically. The two countries are gradually approaching the line at which they risk being much closer to war than the USSR and the United States ever were.”²⁷

In spite of the fears expressed by some observers in the run-up to the publication of the 2014 doctrines that Russia might decide to lower its

24 Y. Kholmogorov, *Atomnoe Pravoslavie*, Pravaya.ru, 2007, www.pravaya.ru/leftright/472/12686.

25 *Ibid.*

26 S. Kortunov, “Yaderniy Gambit Baraka Obamy,” *Indeks Bezopasnosti* No. 3, 2011, p.42.

27 N. Kosolapov, *Porogovyy uroven i veroyatnost konflikta SShAs Rossiiy*, Mezhdunarodnye Protsessy, November 12, 2013, www.intertrends.ru/eighteenth/003.htm.

nuclear threshold in response to heightened tensions with the West, the nuclear component of the latest doctrine did not change substantially. On the contrary, the notion of a nuclear first strike in “situations critical for national security,” which had been mentioned in the 2000 doctrine, disappeared from the text already in the 2010 edition. Having said this, the idea underlying this concept was not abandoned altogether. The current doctrine still envisages the potential use of nuclear weapons in two types of conflict: large-scale and regional ones. This typology had already been introduced in the 2000 doctrine to define the role of nuclear weapons as a deterrent against any aggression against the Russian Federation, including the use of conventional force. The fact that the main task assigned to Russian military forces in the current doctrine is not only to defeat potential enemies, but also to compel them to stop military actions against Russia, is reminiscent of the concept of “tailored damage,” which was developed in the 2000 military doctrine and is still implicit in the most recent doctrine. “Tailored damage” was defined in 2000 as “damage subjectively unacceptable to the enemy, as being higher than the advantages the aggressor expects to gain from the application of military force.”²⁸ The advantage of using the term “tailored damage” is its greater flexibility compared to the classical notion of “unacceptable damage,” as it links the damage, necessary for effective deterrence to the opponent’s specific stakes in a conflict. The “tailored damage” concept is addressed to the two types of conflict – deterrence of the large-scale war, and the deterrence of a regional war with the use of conventional weapons.

The implications of the “tailored damage” concept for any potential adversary are clear: intervention by outside actors into Russia’s vital sphere of influence will be deterred by the country’s full spectrum of capabilities to compel the enemy “to stop military actions” and to withdraw from the region. For NATO this implies that military support to Ukraine or Georgia might not be an option unless it is willing to risk nuclear escalation, at least in theory. The 2014 doctrine contains a similar warning in specifying that

28 *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, *Voyennaya Doktrina Rossiyskoy Federatsii*, April 21, 2000, www.ng.ru/politics/2000-04-22/5_doktrina.html.

any military exercises held close to Russia's borders are considered a military threat. In this context, it is clear that Russian tactical nuclear weapons (of which Russia still has the largest stockpile, totalling more than 2,000 warheads²⁹) are still seen as a compensatory measure for conventional inferiority vis-à-vis the West and NATO. Indeed, official statements prove that some tactical as well as certain strategic nuclear weapons (equipped on the bombers Tu-22M3) have already been deployed in Crimea.³⁰

Although the 2014 doctrine did not significantly change its stance on strategic nuclear weapons, the number of deployed Russian nuclear warheads has actually increased. The New START Treaty biannual exchange of data shows that, contrary to the imposed limitations (1550 warheads and 700 carriers deployed), since 2012 Russia increased the number of deployed warheads from 1,492 to 1,643, thus exceeding treaty limits. For the moment the significance of this should not be overstated, as both sides agreed to comply with the treaty until 2018. Having said this, it could be regarded as a gesture aimed at catching public attention domestically and internationally. The number of deployed delivery vehicles was increased from 494 to 528, which still keeps Russia within the START limits, but it might indicate Russia's desire to demonstrate its current nuclear capabilities more explicitly.³¹ Of course, this step is more a symbolic flexing of muscles than a real act of intimidation. However, it may be interpreted as a potential signal to the West, especially as the gap between Russia and the U.S. in this respect is expected to grow in the coming decade. Owing to the planned mass withdrawal of the old ICBM-like SS-18s in 2022 and a low deployment rate for new systems (even considering new rapid modernization programmes), by 2020 Russia is projected to have 220-250

29 The Center for Arms Control and Nonproliferation, *Fact Sheet: Global Nuclear Weapons Inventories in 2014*, April 30, 2014, http://armscontrolcenter.org/issues/nuclearweapons/articles/fact_sheet_global_nuclear_weapons_inventories_in_2014/.

30 Espresso TV, *Turchinov rospoviv yaku yadernu zbroju Rosia roztashuvala v Krymu*, May 28, 2015, http://espresso.tv/news/2015/05/28/turchinov_rozpoviv_yaku_yadernu_zbroju_rosiya_roztashuvala_v_krymu.

31 U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Arms Control, Verification, and Compliance, *New START Treaty Aggregate Numbers of Strategic Offensive Arms*, April 6, 2012, www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/178058.htm; U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Arms Control, Verification, and Compliance, *New START Treaty Aggregate Numbers of Strategic Offensive Arms*, September 1, 2014, www.state.gov/t/avc/rls/235606.htm.

ICBMs, three or four ballistic missile submarines with 44–60 deployed submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and 40–50 heavy bombers. In other words, Russia will have 350–400 delivery vehicles and 1,000–1,100 warheads.³² The START statistics for 2015 show that today Russia is still mostly relying on old Soviet ICBMs, produced by Ukrainian industries. The rising number of warheads is mostly due to the increase in warheads on the delivery systems, a process which will increase the percentage of MIRved ICBMs from 35% in 2013 to 70% in 2022.³³ This step also might be regarded symbolic for the time being but, taking into consideration the rapid shift in the global security situation, it might carry a number of risks for future strategic stability. The assumption is that Russia will substitute its old, outdated ICBMs with new, solely Russian-made ones by 2022.

Certain plans in this field have already been adopted. According to the state armament programme, the new edition of the “Topol-M,” called “Yars,” started deployment in 2009. From 2018 onwards, the “SS-18” will be gradually substituted by the new heavy liquid-fuel ICBM “Sarmat,” capable of carrying ten nuclear warheads.³⁴ Unlike the modernisation plans for conventional capabilities discussed above, this domain will not substantively be affected by Western economic sanctions, as most nuclear technologies were inherited from the Soviet Union and the investments in research and development have already been made.

Missile Defence - A Stumbling Block or Real Chances for Cooperation?

The 2014 doctrine seemingly has kept open a window of opportunity for cooperation with the West by referring to the possibility of creating

32 A. Arbatov, “Gambit or Endgame? The New State of Arms Control,” *The Carnegie Papers*, March 2011, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/gambit_endgame.pdf.

33 H. Kristensen and R. Norris, “Russian Nuclear Forces in 2014,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* No. 70, 2014, <http://bos.sagepub.com/content/70/2/75.full.pdf+html>.

34 N. Sokov, “Upping the Ante: The Implications of Russia’s Pursuit of Precision Conventional Strike Weapons,” *WMD Junction*, James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, December 20, 2013, http://wmdjunction.com/131220_russia_precision_conventional_strike.htm.

“common missile defense systems with equitable Russian participation.”³⁵ Unfortunately, it is less than clear whether this point is aimed at the Russian public, rather than presenting a real opportunity for re-engagement with the West. In some ways, it is reminiscent of the spirit of Soviet “peace-making” initiatives, which were presented to domestic audiences as a struggle for peace at a time when official military doctrine called for preemptive nuclear action.

It is a fact that Russia considered the U.S. withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in 2001 as a major strike against the “cornerstone of strategic stability.” In Moscow’s eyes, the U.S. withdrawal was a first step towards nullifying the deterring effects of mutually assured destruction, which maintained a strategic balance between the two nuclear giants during the Cold War, and is still seen by many nuclear proponents as relevant today. In light of this any subsequent U.S. plans of a related nature, for instance the deployment of missile defence in Europe, were interpreted by Russia as an attempt to undermine its capabilities for strategic deterrence.

The Obama administration’s “reset” policy in the dialogue with Russia gave hope for the possibility of NATO-Russia cooperation over a missile defence project. This was proposed to Russia at the 2010 NATO Summit in Lisbon, but it did not deliver the desired results. Moscow met this gesture with continued opposition to any European missile defence system that did not include binding guarantees to respect Russia’s nuclear deterrent.

It is unlikely to have come as a surprise to Moscow that its own demands regarding the creation of common missile defence systems were unacceptable to the U.S. and NATO. Russia pushed the idea of creating a system where it would be responsible for the security of the Eastern flank of NATO (Poland and the Baltic states), and also be able to provide common missile defence capabilities if considered necessary. This proposal challenged NATO’s Article 5 commitment to collective defense and also was rejected by the United States, which does not consider missile defence as a subject for bargaining. From this point of view, the 2014

35 *Voyennaya Doktrina Rossiyskoy Federatsii*, February 5, 2010, http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/461.

military doctrine's article on "equal cooperation" on missile defence might not so much be a step towards cooperation, but rather Russia's demand for parity with NATO. If indeed this article is intended foremost for a domestic audience, as speculated above, it could be used as the pretext for the growing militarization of the Russian economy. Officially, Moscow professes to strive for dialogue and cooperation. At the same time NATO is portrayed in a negative light, rejecting the Kremlin's peaceful initiatives and inspiring anti-Russian revolutions in the neighbourhood. Again, such an interpretation of events evokes images of past practices that emphasised the purportedly peaceful initiatives of the Soviet Union whilst blaming the West for warmongering.

Conclusion

To what extent does the 2014 military doctrine add anything substantially new to the understanding of contemporary Russian politics? Although on the surface the 2014 doctrine does not differ significantly from its previous versions, the devil is as always in the detail. And this detail, as it turns out, is not very reassuring. The main theme of the doctrine is rivalry with the West, which it politely calls "equitable cooperation" whilst avoiding the word "partnership." It is important to bear in mind that the doctrine has two audiences: internal and external. The internal Russian audience receives the message that all signs of social unrest in the state, as well as Moscow's role and position in neighbourhood crises, are the result of the West's unlimited geopolitical aspirations and of the activities of their foreign services, aimed at undermining the prestige of the Kremlin. The second message is that Russia should confront these challenges with dignity, while developing conventional and nuclear arms. "Si vis pacem, para bellum" (if you want peace, prepare for war), as one expert kindly characterized the 2014 Military Doctrine.³⁶

For foreign audiences the message also appears to be quite clear.

36 A. Baklitsky, *Si vis pacem*, December 29, 2014, www.pircenter.org/blog/view/id/180.

Changes made since the 2010 version explain Russia's vital concerns vis-à-vis its neighbourhood, which are discussed under both headings of military dangers and military threats. The implication of the latter is to show potential adversaries, including NATO, that intervention in Russia's neighbourhood could, in certain circumstances, be interpreted by Russia as a *casus belli*. Those states considered part of this neighbourhood are not explicitly named in order to preserve ambiguity. Overall, the 2014 doctrine gives an impression of déjà-vu, and harks back to the great power doctrines of the past. In the manner of the Monroe doctrine, it sends Western powers the message that Russia's neighbourhood should be regarded as its sphere of influence, which Moscow is ready to defend, if necessary by all means. The implicit concern in the doctrine over the threat to Kremlin-friendly regimes in neighbouring states is like a modern version of the Brezhnev doctrine, where direct military intervention is camouflaged by hybrid war-type activity.

The successful use of hybrid tactics in Crimea and to an extent in eastern Ukraine has been the Kremlin's most successful military endeavour in the past two decades for those states that Russia considers to be a part of its sphere of vital interests, this is a major concern, especially since those outside of the NATO alliance do not have the capacity to stand up against such approaches alone. Improving conventional capabilities and strong nuclear posture will only exacerbate such fears, as they deter any powerful actor or nation from interfering in conflicts in Russia's neighbourhood.

A NEW TYPE OF WARFARE

6

Hybrid Warfare in the Strategic Spectrum: An Historical Assessment

Élie Tenenbaum

Introduction

War, as Clausewitz wrote, is a chameleon; it can change its aspect at each occurrence, reflecting the features of the competing political entities that engage in it. The marketplace of ideas in the field of strategic studies may help to identify and put a name on such variations. However, fashionable new concepts may also be only distantly related to actual changes in warfare and be far more suited to building up arguments in view of domestic political or bureaucratic struggles. The distinction between these two kinds of concepts is not always easy and sometimes initially sound ideas are diverted to influence discussion of another order, often related to capability and budgetary arbitrations. Such may well be the case of the concept “hybrid warfare;” an originally sound concept whose meaning has been diluted to the point of absurdity, as it might now refer to matters as different as the rise of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, drug-related violence in Mexico or the political strategy of Russia in Ukraine.

Faced with such a large spread of expression, it might prove helpful to provide a short genealogy of this idea. The very term of “hybrid war” first appeared in November 2005 under the pen of two senior officers of the U.S. Marine Corps, General James N. Mattis and Colonel (ret.) Frank G. Hoffman, in the journal *Proceedings*.¹ The main objective then was to bring

1 James N. Mattis and Frank Hoffman, “Future Warfare: The Rise of Hybrid Wars,” *Proceedings* 131, No. 11, November 2005, pp.18-19.

some arguments to the debate around the coming Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) of 2006. U.S. armed forces were at that time bogged down in Iraq and were increasingly departing from the Transformation agenda that Secretary Donald Rumsfeld had pushed forward four years before, in the 2001 QDR.

While “transformation” heavily stressed the need for high-tech, mostly airborne, firepower in conjunction with special forces and light footprint operations, the requirements for the occupation of Iraq gave new arguments to the supporters of a “boots on the ground” capability: it was the time of counterinsurgency’s great comeback, emphasizing human rather than technical skills and prompting a rethink on where to locate the center of gravity in conflicts.² In their article, Hoffman and Mattis were quite clearly emphasizing this aspect, stressing the new complexity of modern warfare which they decided to call hybrid. According to them, America would now likely have “to simultaneously deal with the fall out of a failed state that owned but lost control of some biological agents or missiles, while combating an ethnically motivated paramilitary force, and a set of radical terrorists who have now been displaced.”³ This new mix, whose description offers an uncannily accurate picture of Iraq in the years 2003-2004, would be more lethal and destabilizing than anything the West had faced in the previous decade or so.

Hybrid warfare remained a theoretical notion, however, and it was not until the following year with the Israeli-Hezbollah war in August 2006 that it really started to take shape. At that time, the Western strategic community was taken aback by the sophisticated capabilities of the Lebanese non-state actor who stood up to the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), themselves torn between an air force overly confident in the efficiency of its standoff strategic strike capability and an Army tailored for low intensity conflict in Palestinian territories. The idea emerged that there was a “middle ground”

2 David H. Ucko, *The New Counterinsurgency Era: Transforming the U.S. Military for Modern Wars*, Georgetown University Press, 2009.

3 James N. Mattis and Frank Hoffman, “Future Warfare: The Rise of Hybrid Wars,” *Proceedings* 131, No.11, November 2005.

of the spectrum that had been neglected in favor of both ends; that there could be irregular actors whose capabilities and tactical skills were now of a “regular” nature (aircraft artillery, anti-tank missiles, drones, etc.) while continuing to enjoy the traditional benefits of irregularity (elusive tactics, moral asymmetry, popular support, etc.). Such adversaries were then labeled as “hybrid threats.”⁴

While “hybrid warfare” initially emanated from a doctrinal thrust toward irregular warfare, the concept then changed direction and was used to serve a more traditional stand regarding the preservation of heavy combined arms capabilities that some feared to see disappearing in favor of the new counterinsurgency mantra embodied by the figure of General David Petraeus. A new series of articles were published along those lines in the years 2007-2009, many of them still signed by Hoffman in view of weighing in once again on the 2010 QDR debate whose final report would eventually refer to the phrase “hybrid warfare.”⁵

At roughly the same time as the concept made its way to NATO through Allied Command Transformation (ACT), a new command established in 2003 that was tasked to investigate the forms of future conflict. It is not pure chance that ACT’s new Supreme Commander in 2007 was General Mattis, the very same officer who co-authored the 2005 article, and who logically introduced the concept to NATO structures. The term really started to spread in the years 2008-2009, while ACT took a major share in the preparatory works for NATO’s new Strategic Concept to be adopted in 2010.⁶ Along the way the meaning of the phrase was also expanding: it was no longer limited to a specific portion of the capability spectrum between irregular and conventional warfare, but now started to embrace any aspect related to the increasing complexity of modern conflicts, extending to themes such as cyberwar, organized crime, propaganda, or economic warfare. “Hybrid warfare” started to resemble the strategic potluck that it is

4 David E. Johnson, *Hard Fighting: Israel in Lebanon and Gaza*, Santa Monica, CA, RAND, 2011.

5 U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, Washington, DC, February 2010, p.8.

6 Allied Command Transformation (ACT), *Multiple Futures Project – Navigating towards 2030*, Final Report, Norfolk, April 2009.

today. Each member state, sub-agency or center of excellence understood it its own way, so that they could use it to push their own agenda: the Baltic states and Poland started to use it to describe Russia's covert aggression policy against them, while France was using it in its 2013 defense review with the jihadist nexus in Sahel in mind.⁷

While references to “hybrid warfare” are now proliferating at every corner of the strategic community, the concept is already shaping debates that will in turn have critical consequences for Western states' equipment and force structures. This is why it is so essential to validate the relevance of the concept and the nature of the phenomena it aims to identify by name. To answer this, it is important to analyze the features and the location of hybrid warfare at the three different levels of war: the political and strategic level; that of operational art; and, finally, the tactics and weapons systems.

Regular or Irregular? Hybrid Warfare as a Mode of War

With few exceptions, the major strategic ideas and operational concepts that we use today were introduced between the 17th and the 20th centuries in the context of European conventional warfare. The idea of regular or conventional warfare, often—and wrongly—considered to be the norm throughout history, actually refers to a specific set of tactical, strategic and socio-political realities that can be labeled as a “mode of war.”⁸ As such, regular warfare can be defined by three major characteristics.

The first attribute of regular warfare is undoubtedly the uninterrupted development of firepower, with all the Western technological and industrial background it brings with it, from the introduction of black powder to the advent of nuclear weapons. This gradual increase in firepower has, in the last few decades, involved the use of precision-guided munitions which

7 Magnus Petersson and Anders Vosman, “European Defense Planning and the Ukraine Crisis: Two Contrasting Views,” *Focus stratégique* No. 58, June 2015; *Livre Blanc sur la Défense et la Sécurité nationale*, Paris, La Documentation française, 2013, p.85.

8 Stéphane Taillat, “Modes de guerre: stratégie irrégulières et stratégies hybrides,” in *Guerre et stratégie: approches, concepts*, ed. Joseph Henrotin, Olivier Schmitt, and Stéphane Taillat, Paris, PUF, 2015, pp.253–67.

radically increase its effectiveness. Directly associated with this first item is the gradual adoption of linear tactics, making it possible to combine fire with movement, thus giving birth to the modern idea of maneuver. This trend paved the way for the emergence in the early 20th century of the idea of front and rear, which is still today a central feature of our social representation of war.⁹

The second feature of the regular mode of war is the slow emergence of a military discipline that transformed wild bunches of warriors into effective instruments of a political authority. This change is concomitant with the birth of modern statehood as well as basic international law, whose first role was especially to regulate armed conflict (*jus in bello*). The wearing of uniforms – introduced by Gustavus Adolphus in the 17th century and quickly adopted all across Europe – best exemplifies this policy, while allowing the fundamental legal distinction between combatants and non-combatants.

Last but not least, strategy is the contact point between tactics and politics, the keystone that provides the unity of the regular mode of war. Taking good note of the social and political separation of civilian and military worlds, as well as of new material attributes of armed forces, the strategy traditionally associated with regular warfare is akin to what General André Beaufre labeled as “direct strategy,” one in which the main objective is the neutralization of the enemy’s armed forces through overwhelming force.¹⁰

Irregular warfare can be defined as the exact opposite of this consistent picture. Just like the regular mode of war, it combines legal, political, strategic and tactical features. Unlike regular warfare, however, it is not the result of a homogeneous historical process. Irregularity, therefore, does not always express all its features: non-compliance with any one of the three aforementioned attributes of regular warfare is sometimes enough to some analysts to label a conflict as irregular. This “incomplete irregularity” brings

9 Trevor N. Dupuy, *The Evolution of Weapons and Warfare*, New York, Da Capo Press, 1990.

10 André Beaufre, *An Introduction to Strategy*, New York, Praeger, 1966, p.43.

about the possibility of a hybrid option between the two modes of warfare.

At the tactical-operative level, the most emblematic trait of irregularity is guerrilla warfare. In the simplest meaning of the word, guerrilla tactics are “the sudden alternating offensive and retreat.”¹¹ For centuries, if not millennia, guerrilla warfare has rested on simple tactics such as raids and ambushes by light forces against heavier, less mobile units, whose movements are usually predictable. Such techniques are not unknown to the Western world, where they have been practiced since antiquity – from the Roman Empire to the Napoleonic wars – but they were often shunned, judged despicable and dishonorable in light of a “regular” view of military values, associated with frontal force, without guile and without retreat. This is the reason why, during World War Two, allied commandos and paratroopers, while operating in uniform and respectful of the *jus in bello*, were still considered as irregulars by the Germans, who refused to grant them POW status.¹²

But it is at the social and political level that one finds the main difference with regular warfare. The rejection of the distinction between combatants and non-combatants is a central feature, typically embodied by the absence of uniforms among irregulars. As they hide among the population, irregular fighters expose civilians to repression and thereby turn their military opponent into a police-type force. This raises the question of the link between irregular warfare and statehood. National armies embody the modern conception of the state as the custodian of the monopoly of legitimate violence; any non-state armed forces therefore appear as irregular from a political perspective. If political motivation generally distinguishes irregular fighters from mere bandits, postmodern phenomena such as neo-mercenaries, “warlordism” or third generation gangs may further nuance

11 Carl Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan: Intermediate Commentary on the Concept of the Political*, Telos Press Pub., 2007. One can also find this idea in Mao Zedong’s famous essay *On Guerrilla Warfare*: “The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue,” quoted from Mao Zedong (presumed author), “Yu Chi Chan (Guerrilla Warfare) 1937,” in *Mao Tse-Tung on Guerrilla Warfare*, ed. Samuel B. Griffith, New York, Praeger, 1961, pp.37–116.

12 “Hitlers Befehl über die Vernichtung von Kommandotrups und Fallschirmspringern,” *Kommandobefehl*, October 18, 1942, available at: <http://www.documentarchiv.de/ns/1942/kommandobefehl.html>.

this distinction and add further actors to the realm of irregular warfare.¹³

Despite some overly restrictive definitions, non-state actors do not have a monopoly on irregular warfare, as they may well “be sponsored by and participate to the indirect strategy of a State,”¹⁴ including in peacetime. This may be especially true of clandestine or paramilitary agents, operating without uniform but on behalf of a state. Whether state-sponsored or not, such activities can be considered irregular insofar as they depart from the rules, set since the 17th century, regarding the role of the sovereign state in the international system.

As in the case of regular warfare, tactics and political features of the irregular mode of war combine in a peculiar strategic concept. While regular strategy was direct in nature and mainly based on the neutralization of enemy armed forces and the conquest of its territory, irregular strategy tends to be more focused on slowly eroding the enemy’s willpower and the control of its population. Several courses of action exist to serve this purpose: psychological operations, social and economic activities, subversion or even terrorism are various ways to control the population, while sabotage, harassment by guerrillas and diplomatic activism can erode willpower quite effectively.

Regularity and irregularity are theoretical concepts, ideal categories invented to underline prominent points in warfare. The reality is naturally more colorful, and actual wars fitting exactly into such categories are quite rare. As André Beaufre wrote more than fifty years ago, “both ‘modes’ exist and are complementary [...] strategy, like music, can be played in either a major or a minor key.”¹⁵ If one defines hybrid warfare as any conflict combining regular and irregular modes of fighting, then it undoubtedly applies to most wars, past and present: from the Thirty Years War to Vietnam, via Napoleonic campaigns and both World Wars, all combined

13 Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 1999.

14 Centre Interarmées de Concepts, de Doctrine et d’Expérimentation (CICDE), Concept Interarmées (CIA) 3.4.4, *Les opérations contre un Adversaire Irrégulier* (ADIR), 2^e éd., March 2011, p.15.

15 André Beaufre, *An Introduction to Strategy*, New York, Praeger, 1966, p.43.

regular and irregular elements. This makes it pointless to search for hybrid specificity at the strategic level. This may not be the case at the operational level, however, where the specific features of a hybrid maneuver might stand out more clearly.

Hybrid Maneuver at the Operational Level of War

If war as a human activity is hybrid by nature, the combination of regular and irregular modes of fighting in a single maneuver can prove a formidable weapon against a “single-mode” opponent. In its regular component, hybrid maneuver requires the opponent to concentrate forces in order to maximize firepower – a basic principle of regular warfare. At the same time, the maneuver’s irregular component compels him to disperse these same forces, so they can protect the rear and supply lines. Of course, this dilemma of concentration vs. dispersion can only play to the advantage of the hybrid fighter if he is able to leverage greater operational mobility, either by splitting his forces in two well-coordinated components or by acting in a swarm-like fashion, i.e. to converge rapidly on a target, attack and then re-disperse.¹⁶ Military history offers three main types of operations where such patterns provided added value at the operational level of war: compound warfare, techno-guerrilla warfare and protracted warfare.

The Offensive Option: Compound Warfare

The first type of hybrid maneuver was practiced long before it was baptized “compound warfare” by the American historian Thomas Huber.¹⁷ As the name will suggest, it aims at launching an offensive action by combining two distinct forces, one regular and one irregular, so as to catch the opponent in a pincer. In its most common practice, regular forces would

16 Sean J.A. Edwards, *Swarming and the Future of Warfare*, Santa Monica, CA, RAND Corporation, 2005, p.2.

17 Thomas M. Huber, ed., *Compound Warfare: That Fatal Knot*, Fort Leavenworth, KS, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press, 2002.

provide the main effort and use local irregular forces (trained, equipped and possibly controlled by the former) to harass or even interdict the enemy's access to its supply and communications lines, exhausting him in a greater mobilization of his resources.

This was the model of the “*guerre de partis*” or “*guerre de postes*” that was extensively practiced throughout the 18th century in both Europe and North America (typically in the French and Indian Wars).¹⁸ During the Napoleonic Wars, Britain also used it to offset its relatively weak ground forces against the French, especially during the Peninsular War (1807-1814) in which Wellington made good use of local guerrilla groups to scout, reconnoiter and continuously harass the *Grande Armée*.¹⁹ A century later, a not so dissimilar concept was implemented by the British General Staff during the Great War, when they sent T.E. Lawrence to coordinate the Arab revolt with General Allenby's regular forces in the Levant.

In the mid-20th century, compound warfare was deeply transformed thanks to two new technologies: aviation and radio. The former now allowed parachuting of regular airborne troops directly on the enemy's rear, so that they could join up with local guerrillas – this was the beginning of modern-day special operations forces (SOF), many of which thus share a common heritage with paratroopers. Radio, in the meantime, offered the crucial opportunity to retain a command and control channel in spite of spatial non-linearity. This proved to be an important contribution during World War II, as the British-supported resistance movements and the Soviet partisans diverted a significant number of German regular units from the main battle fronts.²⁰

There can be variations of this form of hybrid maneuver: for instance, the irregular component can develop into the main force while regular

18 Sandrine Picaud-Monnerat, *La Petite Guerre Au XVIIIe Siècle*, Bibliothèque Stratégique, Paris, Institut de stratégie comparée, Economica, 2010.

19 Richard H. Sinnreich, “That Accursed Spanish War: The Peninsular War, 1807-1814,” in *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*, ed. Williamson Murray and Peter R. Mansoor, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp.104–50.

20 Ben Shepherd and Juliette Pattinson, “Partisan and Anti-Partisan Warfare in German-Occupied Europe, 1939–1945: Views from Above and Lessons for the Present,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, No. 5, 2008, pp.675–93.

forces will limit themselves to providing logistical, financial and possibly fire support – thanks to land- or sea-based long-range artillery or close air support (CAS). This configuration allows a “light footprint” approach to operations, as was the case with Operation *Enduring Freedom* in Afghanistan. Following the 9/11 attacks, Washington could not afford to wait and deploy a full-fledged expeditionary force to defeat the Taliban; it therefore chose to let the Northern Alliance irregulars carry out the bulk of ground operations, while the U.S. Air Force provided CAS, coordinated by combat air controllers from special operations forces.²¹

An even lighter form of maneuver, since it limits the action of the regular component to covert logistical and financial support, was exemplified by CIA support to Afghan mujahedeen in the 1980s. Supporting “conventional power” of this sort allows irregular groups to benefit from means that would normally only be available to modern regular forces (night vision goggles, strategic intelligence, surface-to-air missiles, etc.). Once again, such a pattern is not new and has been known for decades as “proxy war,” from the Spanish Civil War to the current conflict in Syria. As in the previous case, special operations and/or clandestine services – depending on the level of commitment of the sponsoring state – are instrumental in building relations with local fighters and keeping their activities in line with the overall strategy.

The Defensive Option: Techno-Guerrilla Warfare

The second type of hybrid maneuver is of a defensive nature. It can be applied when an actor – whether state or non-state – is attacked by another whose material strength is considerably higher, so that the defender cannot hope to stop him through a purely regular maneuver. He will therefore try to make the most of his strengths by dispersing his forces and focusing on the rear of the enemy forces, so as to slow them down and deprive them of

21 Stephen D. Biddle, “Allies, Airpower, and Modern Warfare: The Afghan Model in Afghanistan and Iraq,” *International Security* 30, No. 3, 2005, pp.161–76.

the initiative.

Military history, once again, is replete with such delaying maneuvers. One can find a good example in that of the Roman general Fabius Maximus, who won the nickname *cunctator* (the “delayer”) by his rearguard actions against Hannibal’s armies as they advanced into the Italian peninsula. During the late Cold War, nonconformist strategists from the 1970s came up with the concept of non-offensive defense (NOD): this was supposed to help Western Europe to defend itself from a Soviet invasion, by means that the USSR could not interpret as a threat – in other words, the very opposite of the “forward defense” doctrine that was then advocated by the United States. The concept involved large-scale, decentralized fighting throughout the whole of the theatre. Small and mobile motorized units using landmines and anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM) would have harassed the Soviet armored divisions with hit-and-run tactics, slowing down their advance and eventually immobilizing them like a fly trapped in a spider’s web. It was only then that the “spiders” – i.e. the few heavy forces which had been carefully kept on standby – would have been activated to destroy the enemy’s main battle force.²²

In many respects, this defensive pattern is reminiscent of that adopted by Hezbollah during the 2006 war in Lebanon. Following the kidnapping of two IDF officers across the border, the Israeli air force began a strategic bombing campaign against the Shia movement which, in return, launched a barrage of short- and medium-range rockets over Galilee. After a month of intense bombing, Israel’s precision-guided weaponry had achieved no decisive military result. Hezbollah’s hardened and often concealed infrastructure was deployed across an extensive web of camouflaged bunkers, connected by buried lines of communication (resilient to electronic attack) and human couriers hidden among the population; this made it extremely resilient in the face of standoff airpower, leading the IDF to engage in a ground offensive.²³

22 Joseph Henrotin, *Techno-guérilla et guerre hybride: le pire des deux mondes*, Paris, Nuvis, 2014, pp.67–81.

23 Stephen D. Biddle and Jeffrey A. Friedman, *The 2006 Lebanon Campaign and the Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy*, Carlisle, PA, Strategic Studies Institute, 2008, pp.63–66.

It was during the land phase of the war that Hezbollah's hybrid maneuver was the most obvious. Hezbollah forces were divided in two: first, the "village guard" units, veteran fighters from the 1990s, operated in lightly armed small local groups using classic guerrilla tactics. In addition, the uniformed "special units" of the Nasr Brigade were trained and equipped by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps to use rocket artillery, ATGMs, encrypted communications, or even unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). After ten years of low intensity operations in the Palestinian territories, Israeli soldiers were used to facing a relatively weak but elusive enemy. Confronting the Hezbollah, they had to quickly readapt to the hard realities of enemy firepower and combined arms tactics. Under international pressure, Israel had to withdraw less than a month after the beginning of the operation, giving Hezbollah the opportunity to claim "victory" over the invader.²⁴

While its resources were undoubtedly more limited than those imagined by the European strategists of techno-guerrilla warfare (the Nasr brigade never came close to the heavy forces envisioned for the "spiders" of NOD), Hezbollah's defensive maneuver did demonstrate that the combination of the two modes of war could indeed enable a weaker side to stand up to, and even keep in check, one of the best armies in the world.

The Transformational Option: Protracted Warfare

The last form of hybrid maneuver borrows from the two previous models, but in a different context: that of a popular insurgency without external support. The aim is for a non-state organization to take power over all or part of a given territory, through a pattern of protracted warfare. Although intuitively practiced here and there throughout history, this concept was developed, especially, by Mao Zedong during the Chinese Civil War (1927-1949). The very notion of protracted warfare was clearly stated in a seminal essay from 1938, in which the Chinese leader distinguished three

²⁴ Johnson, *Hard Fighting*, pp.46-54.

successive phases of a hybrid campaign combining regular and irregular modes of fighting (called “mobile” and “partisan” warfare, respectively).²⁵

The first phase is subversion: the organization – in this case the Chinese Communist Party – must develop its legal political activities (strikes, propaganda, etc.) and its alliances with other opposition groups, so as to form a united front against the regime. The second stage sees the emergence of armed struggle in the form of guerrilla actions avoiding frontal combat, favoring the establishment of “liberated” bases and regions where civil society will be carefully shaped through “mass organizations.” This popular support (which can be obtained by consent as well as by coercion) will provide insurgents with the resources they need to move to the third and final stage: offensive mobile warfare. The best guerrilla bands will be converted into regular units and all efforts will be aimed at capturing industrial regions capable of supporting a modern regular army. Although irregular warfare is instrumental in Mao’s conception, final victory can only come from conventional capabilities.

The last phase of the Chinese Civil War (1946-1949) pretty much fit this pattern, when the communist People’s Liberation Army (PLA) focused on Manchuria, whose material resources allowed it engage in modern mobile warfare. While a mode of fighting was much more demanding in terms of numbers and supplies, it benefitted all the more from the enormous popular support network that had been developed in the previous phases of the war and was maintained thereafter, albeit with a lesser role for guerrillas. Regular and irregular methods therefore unmistakably combined to give birth to a truly hybrid maneuver.²⁶

Some aspects of the final phase of protracted warfare may look akin to compound warfare; its distinctive feature is an even greater integration of command and control, since it relates not to distinct forces but to a differentiated one – more like the techno-guerrilla warfare pattern, but in

25 Mao Zedong, “De La Guerre Prolongée (1938),” in *Écrits Militaires de Mao Tse-Toung*, Pékin, Editions en langues étrangères, 1969, pp.213–308.

26 Harold M. Tanner, “Guerrilla, Mobile, and Base Warfare in Communist Military Operations in Manchuria, 1945-1947,” *Journal of Military History* 67, No. 4, 2003, 1177–1222, doi: 10.2307/3396886.

an offensive perspective. It is the evolving (or “protracted”) nature of the maneuver that makes it so special: while irregular warfare in the traditional Western conception is supported (or even engineered) by state actors, Maoist theory inverts the paradigm and makes irregular warfare the starting point for any conventional capability. Like a molting butterfly, guerrillas evolve into a “modern” and victorious army.

Tactical and Technological Game-Changers

If historical examples amply demonstrate that hybrid warfare is anything but a new phenomenon, it is nonetheless impacted by tactical and technological developments that may alter the relationship between the two main modes of war. For several decades now, technological trends such as miniaturization and computerization of weapons systems have been slowly transforming the military balance, allowing small tactical groups – and even isolated individuals – to dispose of firepower and precision that were previously the prerogative of comparatively large, regular formations.

Missiles and new-generation guided rocket artillery and mortar (G-RAMM) are undoubtedly among the most relevant technologies in this respect. ATGMs clearly showed their potential during the Yom Kippur War in 1973, when they contributed to challenging the supremacy of tanks on the battlefield.²⁷ In the Sinai as on the Golan, the Soviet-made wire-guided missile AT-3 Sagger wreaked havoc among Israeli tanks. Although relatively complex to use, this system is operable by small infantry teams and thus suitable for guerrilla tactics. Its world-wide distribution – more than 200,000 systems built in the USSR/Russia (not counting illegal reverse engineering by Chinese and Iranians) – have made it the most common ATGM among irregular and hybrid actors. There are also many other systems that have contributed to the proliferation of anti-tank missiles, such as the U.S.-made TOW missile or the French MILAN, recently

27 Ian V. Hogg, *Tank Killing: Anti-Tank Warfare by Men and Machines*, London, Pan Books, 1997.

delivered by Germany to Kurdish peshmergas.²⁸ Even more modern systems – for example, with laser guidance and tandem charges to increase their efficiency against reactive armor – have recently emerged among the ranks of irregular fighters. One of these is the Russian-made AT-14 Kornet, effectively used by Hezbollah against Israeli Merkavas (considered among the best protected tanks in the world).²⁹

The development of short-range, light-vehicle or even man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS) offers a further example of how a capability normally limited to regular warfare – e.g., shooting down military aircraft and interdicting a certain layer of airspace to enemy aviation – have become accessible to irregular fighters. These too were popularized in the 1970s, with Soviet-made SA-7 Grail missiles. MANPADS then experienced a qualitative leap with the arrival of new, more efficient systems – in terms of both speed, guidance and C2 integration: examples are the famous FIM-92 Stinger issued to Afghan mujahedin by the United States in the mid-1980s, or the Russian Iгла (SA-16/18/24), of which several dozen may be circulating right now in Libya, Syria, or the Sinai. An even more worrying prospect is the threat of high-end medium-range surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems that have fallen into the hands of irregular groups, like the Russian Buk system (SA-11/17), a “double-digit SAM” whose range and performance make it much more deadly than any MANPADS, and which is now available to the pro-Russian militias fighting in eastern Ukraine. In that respect, the spectacular shooting down of the civilian MH17 aircraft by the Russian Buk is only part of an impressive tally (including two Ukrainian MiG-29 jet fighters), demonstrating the lethal potential of this capability.³⁰

ATGM and SAM systems are not the only weapons altering the regular-irregular tactical balance. Modern rocket launchers (shoulder-launched

28 Matt Cetti-Roberts, *We Watched Kurdish Troops Train With Guided Missiles*, War is Boring, available at: <http://warisboring.com/articles/we-watched-kurdish-troops-train-with-guided-missiles/#>.

29 Pierre Razoux, “Après l’échec: les réorientations de Tshahal après la deuxième guerre du Liban,” *Focus stratégique* No.2, October 2007, p.12.

30 “Ukraine Counts its loss of weaponry in conflict with rebels,” *Indian Defence Research Wing*, available at: <http://www.indiandefence.wiki/threads/ukraine-counts-its-loss-of-weaponry-in-conflict-with-rebels.1783/>.

or fixed), precision mortars, armored vehicles, and other conventional military equipment are now swelling the ranks of many irregular groups. This development, however, is seriously impeded by the complexity of the technology involved, as well as the sky-rocketing costs of maintenance and technical support associated with such advanced weapons systems. According to the type of hybrid maneuver, there can be various answers to these challenges: either strengthening ties with the sponsoring state – e.g., Hezbollah’s training and support needs being provided by Iran – or developing internal capabilities – e.g., over time the Tamil Tigers developed a small industrial base capable of maintaining their armed forces. But hybrid warfare’s real strength is precisely to dodge the Western trend of having to engage in a technological arms race, which is increasingly counterproductive as a result of diminishing marginal returns: while the acquisition and carrying costs of advanced weapons systems grow faster than their productivity, a hybrid player’s preference will naturally go to equipment that may be considered outdated but whose price-quality ratio (or cost-military power ratio) is significantly more favorable. A U.S.-built M1 Abrams tank, whose unit cost is estimated at around 8 million dollars, is roughly equivalent to ten AT-14 Kornet launchers and a hundred missiles – and this does not even include maintenance costs, which probably make the discrepancy even larger.³¹

These considerations are even more relevant as regards dual-use technologies, developed for civilian use but with military potential. The trend in terms of an irregular/hybrid “catch-up” is most marked in the field of information technology, which has been the main source of the military transformation and of Western conventional supremacy following the end of the Cold War. Without achieving the increased accuracy and hardening of military technologies, many devices for civilian use now offer readily actionable capabilities for combat operations. Google Earth’s high definition satellite imagery, GPS and other navigation systems, civilian UAVs, night vision goggles and even laser guidance systems are all available on any

31 Cost assessment is from “9K129 Kornet anti-tank guided weapon system,” in *IHS Jane’s Infantry Weapons* and “General Dynamics Land Systems M1/M1A1/M1A2 Abrams MBT,” in *IHS Jane’s Land Warfare Platforms*.

e-commerce platform at very reasonable cost. Information superiority can no longer be taken for granted by military forces. Many irregular groups also make good use of social media and other user-generated content web platforms, to communicate and conduct state-of-the-art propaganda and psychological warfare campaigns more skilfully than their regular opponents.³²

Dual-use technologies are not limited to the field of information. They can also be found in more traditional areas such as the automobile industry – for example, with the transformation of sports utility vehicles into “improvised tanks” by Mexican drug cartels, or even into “missiles on-wheels” (often labeled Vehicle-Borne Improvised Explosive Devices, abbreviated as VBIED), used during the Beirut bombings in 1983 and now on a daily basis by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.³³ The construction industry is another seemingly benign sector that has long seen strategic investment by hybrid warriors: tunnels, bunkers and camouflage material played an important part in Vietcong survival tactics during the Vietnam War, as they do now for Hezbollah or Hamas. They contribute to the implementation of passive defense tactics, combining especially well with the hybrid defensive maneuver described above.

Conclusion

At the political-strategic level, the hybrid warfare concept is essentially based on porosity between the two modes of war; at the operational level, it comprises a subtle blend of dispersion and concentration. In tactical terms, the heavy conventional, capabilities traditionally associated with regular warfare are associated with typically irregular, non-linear tactics. The interest of this three-dimensional analysis is to convey the difficulty of pinning down the expression precisely, and of deciding whether a conflict,

32 Thomas Rid and Marc Hecker, *War 2.0: Irregular Warfare in the Information Age*, Westport, Conn, Praeger Security Internat, 2009.

33 Jessica Lewis McFate, “The ISIS Defense in Iraq and Syria: Countering an Adaptive Enemy,” *Middle East Security Report* No. 27, ISW, May 2015.

a strategy, a maneuver, or a tactic can be labeled as hybrid. As long as there is no precise definition of the term or specific level of policy to which it can be related, the concept of hybrid warfare will unfortunately suffer from having to be understood in too broad a perspective. The various phenomena it points at are, however, very real and, if the Western powers intend to deal with them, they must first accept the need to achieve a far closer understanding of them.

7

Russia's Hybrid Warfare: Waging War below the Radar of Traditional Collective Defence

Heidi Reisinger and Alexander Golts

“You can't modernize a large country with a small war”

Karl Schlögel

“Ukraine is not even a state!” Putin reportedly advised former U.S. President George W. Bush during the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest. In 2014 this perception became reality. Russian behaviour during the current Ukraine crisis was based on the traditional Russian idea of a “sphere of influence” and a special responsibility or, stated more bluntly, the “right to interfere” with countries in its “near abroad.” This perspective is also implied by the equally misleading term “post-Soviet space.”¹ The successor states of the Soviet Union are sovereign countries that have developed differently and therefore no longer have much in common. Some of them are members of the European Union and NATO, while others are desperately trying to achieve this goal. Contrary to what Professor John Mearsheimer may suggest. In his article “Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault” he argues that NATO has expanded too far to the East, “into Russia's backyard,” against Moscow's declared will, and therefore carries responsibility for recent events; however, this seems to ignore that NATO

1 Comprising the 15 successor states of the Soviet Union: the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania); Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and the Russian Federation; the South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan); and the Central Asian States (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan).

was not hunting for new members, but found them knocking at its door.²

Ukraine's membership aspirations were off the agenda from 2010, and the whole crisis was triggered not by NATO but by the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement. It is true that the Russian leadership felt threatened, not by NATO's "open door" but by the prospect of the EU's soft power transforming its neighbour, the "brother" nation or "Little Russia" as Ukraine has been referred to since the 18th century. This prospect raised the possibility of an alternative to Vladimir Putin's "managed democracy." There was fear that "democratic change in brotherly Ukraine could therefore spread to Russia."³ It was this fear of "regime change" and a "colour revolution"⁴ that prompted the Putin regime to go to war and use *all* means available – if necessary.

All this is nothing new. The Kremlin's growing concern, as autocratic regimes were swept away in the Arab Spring or in colour revolutions, was plain for all to see. Such developments were seen as having been inspired and orchestrated by the West, and the Russian leadership felt increasingly cornered with the fear to be "next."

This chapter discusses the military aspects of the crisis in Eastern Ukraine, focusing specifically on the following points: (1) how Russia redefined war; (2) how it used its rapid deployment forces; and (3) how Ukraine responded conventionally. Finally, how NATO could respond to those undeclared wars in Europe.

2 John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2014, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141769/john-j-mearsheimer/why-the-ukraine-crisis-is-the-west-s-fault>.

3 Maria Snegovaya, "Ukraine's Crisis Is Not the West's Fault," *The Moscow Times*, September 15, 2014, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/ukraine-s-crisis-is-not-the-west-s-fault/507100.html>.

4 Term used for people's uprising that led to regime change on the Balkans, in the successor states of the Soviet Union and also in the Middle East. Most famous are the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, and the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon in 2005.

It was All on the Cards – Moscow “Threatened” by Colour Revolution

President Putin’s Chief of General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov wrote in early 2013: “Armed conflicts, including those associated with the so-called color revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East, have demonstrated, that a prosperous state, in a matter of months or even days, may turn into a bitter armed conflict, becoming a victim of foreign intervention, falling into chaos, a humanitarian catastrophe and into civil war.” The lessons learnt for Russia were twofold: avoid a colour revolution at all costs; and take a close look at how to make the use of your own military and non-military resources more sophisticated.

Gerasimov continues: “The very ‘rules of war’ have changed significantly. The use of non-military methods to achieve political and strategic objectives has in some cases proved far more effective than the use of force. [...] Widely used asymmetrical means can help to neutralize the enemy’s military superiority. These include the use of special operations forces and internal opposition to the creation of a permanent front throughout the enemy state, as well as the impact of propaganda instruments, forms and methods which are constantly being improved.”⁵ To make a virtue of necessity Russian military planners understood that they can bridge existing conventional gaps also with hybrid means and get easier to the goal to have armed forces that can effectively be used.⁶

At the end of May, when the war in South East Ukraine was at its peak, the Russian Ministry of Defence organized the “Moscow Conference on International Security.”⁷ The main topic was the “colour revolution,” defined as a major threat to national security. During the conference, Russian military leaders came to the conclusion that the “colour revolution

5 Valery Gerasimov, “Tsennost nauki v predvidenii,” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* 8(476), February 27, 2013, <http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>.

6 See also Bettina Renz, “Russian Military Capabilities after 20 Years of Reform,” *Survival* Vol. 56, No. 3, June–July 2014, pp.61–84.

7 Moscow Conference on International Security (MCIS), 23/24 May 2014, based on the model of the Munich Security Conference (MSC), but with very limited participation from Europe and the United States.

is a new form of warfare, taking the form of armed struggle according to the rules of military engagement but, in this case, involving all available tools,” Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu stated in his speech.⁸ The idea was developed by the Chief of the General Staff Main Operations Directorate in Moscow, Vladimir Zarudnitskiy:

“First, [...] the military potential of countries organizing the overthrow of the enemy government is used for open pressure. The goal of this pressure is to prevent the use of the security forces to restore law and order. Then, with the deployment of the opposition hostilities against government forces, foreign countries begin to give the rebels military and economic aid. Later, a coalition of countries [...] can start a military operation to assist the opposition in the seizure of power.”⁹

This scenario explains the plan that Moscow implemented in South East Ukraine. First, it concentrated its armed forces on the border, as a show of force (special forces might have crossed the borders at a fairly early stage, though). Then it began to support the separatists, sending armaments and trainers to the conflict area. Finally, Russia invaded directly but covertly. In this context, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine can be considered as a kind of “counter-colour revolution.”

Russia’s Hybrid Methods

Russia’s recent behaviour and actions are often referred to as “hybrid warfare.” They have been an effective and sometimes surprising mix of military and non-military, conventional and irregular components, and can include all kinds of instruments such as cyber and information operations. None of the single components is new; it is the combination and orchestration of different actions that achieves a surprise effect and creates ambiguity, making an adequate reaction extremely difficult, especially for

⁸ See Yuriy Gavrilov, “Igrы s nulevym rezul'tatom,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, May 26, 2014, www.rg.ru/2014/05/23/konferenciya-site.html.

⁹ Aleksandr Tikhonov, Otkuda izchodyat ugrozy miru, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, May 27, 2014, <http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/newspaper/item/16298-otkuda-ishchodyat-ugrozy-miru>.

multinational organizations that operate on the principle of consensus.

The Russian approach seems to be based on the lessons learnt at various testing grounds, especially during and after its war with Georgia in 2008, where Russian armed forces won, though not very convincingly. This time Moscow used mainly special forces and its “soft power” such as propaganda and technical assistance.¹⁰ Additional components, such as energy security and economic pressure, will come to the fore during the oncoming winter. However, the following five key aspects, which are interlinked and overlap, seem to be central to the current Russian approach:

“Po Zakonu” - In Accordance with the Law: Actions with an Appearance of Legality

Inside Russia: in March, the Russian Federation Council authorized the Russian President to use Russian armed forces in Ukraine; in asking Parliament to revoke this decision in June, Putin created a façade of legality that was irrelevant to the *de facto* (and undeclared) use of the Russian military in Ukraine. Officially, Russia is not a party to the conflict. In addition, several laws and regulations have been introduced or simplified, in order to facilitate Crimea’s (or any territory’s) integration into the Russian Federation and the recognition of new Russian citizens.¹¹

In Crimea: the so-called referendum did not meet international standards – it was carried through very quickly, with unidentified military forces on the street and a total absence of credible international oversight. The results were nevertheless as intended, making it possible to counter accusations that Moscow has broken international law by picturing the

10 For instance, when the power supply in Luhansk was shot down, Russian teams came to “repair” it by connecting the city to Russian systems and create facts. See Sabine Adler reporting from Eastern Ukraine for Deutschlandfunk, September 8, 2014, http://ondemand-mp3.dradio.de/file/dradio/2014/09/08/df_20140908_0715_c1740ed1.mp3.

11 This can also be seen as a Russian lesson learnt from the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where Russia has earned the obligation to feed the newborn “independent” states (especially in the case of South Ossetia) and has not been able to obtain recognition of their independence even by Russia’s closest allies (with the exception of Nicaragua, Venezuela and Nauru).

take-over of the region as “the will of the people in Crimea.”

In Eastern Ukraine: consistent with earlier observations that Russian passports had been freely distributed in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria, journalists reported that applications for Russian passports in Eastern Ukraine were being encouraged with food packages.¹² This increases the number of Russian citizens that have to be protected.

Military Show of Force and Readiness: Snap Inspections

On 26 February 2014, in the midst of the Maidan clashes, Russia started bringing troops and equipment on a large scale to the Russian Western Military District, close to the Ukrainian border, for a so-called snap inspection and an unannounced large-scale military exercise.¹³ A build-up of 30-40,000 Russian troops at the border with Ukraine, according to NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), General Philip Breedlove, left no doubt about Russia’s readiness to invade Ukraine “if necessary.” A few weeks later, Russia conducted another snap inspection in the Central Military District, involving more than 65,000 troops, 177 planes, 56 helicopters, and 5,500 vehicles and armoured vehicles. Military units in full formation were ready for deployment within 72 hours.¹⁴

Snap inspections, formerly used during the Soviet period, were reintroduced in 2013 and have been carried out eight times since then. They are hardly effective in terms of any actual improvement in military capacity, but are giving the Kremlin the opportunity to flex its muscles again and prepare a military intervention in its neighbourhood, wherever and whenever needed. This is a long way from the idea of using the armed forces as a last resort: here, their use is seen as the continuation of policy by other means. Having armed forces continually ready for deployment in this way is contrary to the many international efforts to make security more

12 Sabine Adler reporting from Eastern Ukraine for Deutschlandfunk, 8 September 2014, http://ondemand-mp3.dradio.de/file/dradio/2014/09/08/dlf_20140908_0715_c1740ed1.mp3.

13 Ordered by the Commander in Chief, the Russian president.

14 Working meeting with Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu, July 2, 2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/22590>.

predictable by means of arms reduction regimes.

To avoid inviting foreign observers as required by the Vienna Document, and to have a completely free hand, the Russian Minister of Defence announced that Russian troops were engaged in “intensive combat training” according to a schedule of spring and summer exercises. Ostensibly, each unit “individually” pursues its own learning activities, which may include moving more than 500 kilometres to unfamiliar testing grounds. Russian officials insisted that no joint manoeuvres were being performed, and that the number of participants in each exercise thus remained within the limits specified by the Vienna Document, which does not make specific provision for this kind of “combat training.” Consequently, Russia was not obliged to invite any observers. Officially, Moscow did not even recognize the existence of the military build-up along the border.¹⁵

Putin’s Masked Ball: “Little Green Men”

The “little green men” (or “polite people”, as Putin prefers to put it) are Russian special forces in their familiar green apparel, acting as “local security forces,” without national or other identification tags.¹⁶ Although this phenomenon has been in the news only recently, it is actually nothing new. A long-standing practice of the Spetsnaz, the Special Forces, it was also a feature of the Chechen war in 1994.

In Crimea, the presence of these unidentified special forces was a means of psychological warfare. Would these gunmen answer questions politely,

15 This scenario had already been “tested” in Russia’s ZAPAD 13 exercise. Analysis of photos and videos posted on social networks, as well as reports of the Ukrainian and Russian press, suggests that some elite units sent their battalion tactical groups for “training” in the border region with Ukraine – for instance, the 4th Guards Tank Division (Kantemirovskaya) and the 2nd Guards Motorized Rifle Division (Taman) from Moscow, the 76th Guards Air Assault Division, the 31st Guards Air Assault Brigade, the 106th Guards Air Assault Division, and the 23rd Motorized Rifle Brigade 25. Following the capture of Russian troops in late August, this list should be completed with the 98th Airborne Division and the 18th Motorized Rifle Brigade. See <http://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/article/653491/koncentraciya-bez-gruppirovki>.

16 The phenomenon produces strange effects. See Tom Balmforth, “Russia mulls special day to recognize its ‘polite people,’” *rferl*, October 4, 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-ukraine-crimea-little-green-men-polite-people/26620327.html>.

or shoot immediately? Against the military backdrop of the large-scale snap inspection, the little green men set the scene locally: a show of force, the readiness to use violence, with an unclear level of ambition, and zero political responsibility. The last point made the difference, as the Russian leadership stuck to a narrative according to which the snap inspections were a “normal” instrument to enhance combat readiness; and the “little green men” had nothing to do with Russia, as they were “local defence forces.” One month later, Putin mentioned in another interview that “of course, the Russian servicemen did back the Crimean self-defence forces. They acted in a civil, but decisive and professional manner.”¹⁷ They proved to be a precise instrument: the “little green men” captured the Crimean Verkhovnaya Rada and as a result, a presiding group of the parliament voted for the referendum on independence, whereas this motion had not been passed in full session the day before.¹⁸

Even the open question whether the appearance of “little green men” was a violation of the Geneva Conventions demonstrates the intended ambiguity. As the show of military force was enough to take Crimea, the situation did not get to the point where the Geneva Conventions would even come into play.¹⁹

Taking Advantages of Local Tensions and Local Militias

The technique was to team up and support local Russian minorities in venting their dissatisfaction with the local political leadership, before moving on to covert militarization of these movements. For the outside world, this is labelled “protecting Russians abroad.” With a content Russian

17 Direct Line with Vladimir Putin, April 17, 2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/7034>.

18 Aleksandr Golts, “The forth conquest of Crimea,” *Pro et Contra* Vol. 18, Issue 3-4, May-August 2014, <http://carnegie.ru/proetcontra/?fa=56758>.

19 David B. Rivkin Jr. and Lee A. Casey see a violation of the Geneva Conventions in their article “The Outlaw Vladimir Putin,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 10, 2014; others sources see a farce, as Russian soldiers were easy to identify, but no violation. See for instance Alberto Riva, “Why Putin’s use of unmarked troops did not violate the Geneva Convention,” *International Business Times*, March 5, 2014, <http://www.businessinsider.com/alberto-riva-putin-did-not-violate-geneva-convention-2014-3>.

minority, loyal to the Ukrainian government, Russian activity in Ukraine would have been doomed to failure.

For Ukraine, fighting the Russian-backed separatists poses many problems. The war in Eastern Ukraine is a combination of actions by paramilitary groups and the regular army. The transition from guerrilla warfare to classic military operations was actually rare in the course of previous proxy wars during the Cold War, for obvious reasons. Both sides preferred to avoid a direct military confrontation. However, there are precedents in other theatres. South Africa provided support to the UNITA forces during the civil war in Angola, in 1970-1980. Whenever the rebels were defeated by government troops, units of the South African regular army crossed the border into Namibia, in order to save the proxy forces.

Almost the same has happened in Eastern Ukraine. In the first stages of the operation in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, Russian special forces acted as trainers and experts in the use of sophisticated military hardware. However, when the Ukrainian military began to push back the separatists, threatening to cut off the border with Russia, Moscow covertly sent Russian troops across the border to give direct military support to the separatists. The Russian troops fought as battalion tactical groups deployed from four airborne divisions, located in the area, together with the 18th Army Brigade (a total of no more than three or four thousand soldiers). The superiority of the Russian troops was evident; however, the offensive against Mariupol in August 2014 was stopped. Most likely, the Russian government did not want to dispel the illusion of non-participation in the war. However, the escalation of operations had already reached a level where it no longer made any sense to deny the participation of Russia. The number of their casualties had inevitably grown. This forced Moscow to adapt its narrative.

Propaganda or Simply Imprudent Lies?

In May 2014, Russian President Putin awarded medals to about 300 journalists, cameramen and technicians who were involved in reporting

events in Crimea. All were working for state media outlets. The group also included the head of the Russian consumer organization responsible for the shutting down of unwanted websites. The Kremlin is fully aware of the important role of media like the Russia Today TV channel, social media and internet portals, as well as PR campaigns worldwide. All of these were extensively used to prepare the ground for action in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. The full fledged disinformation campaign included multiple components.

Targeted and systematic disinformation: This took different forms, like labelling the Maidan movement as “fascist” to awaken memories of the Soviet fight against Nazi Germany. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, for example, spoke about “Nazis, who continue to march in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities.”²⁰ In the same vein, Kyiv’s military campaign was described as war against the Ukrainian people. Putin even compared Ukrainian military action to that of the German troops blockading Leningrad: “The Ukrainian army has surrounded small towns and big cities and is firing directly at residential areas in order to destroy infrastructure and crush the will to resist and so on. Sad as it is to say, this reminds me of the events of World War II, when the Nazi troops surrounded our towns, in particular Leningrad [...] and fired directly on the towns and their people.”²¹ The Russian accusation that Ukrainian armed forces were not only keeping specifically residential areas in Eastern Ukraine under heavy fire but also knocking out economic infrastructure is not borne out by data on the output of Eastern Ukrainian industry. For example the production of coal

20 “U Kremlya mogut byt dva plana po Ukraine,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, October 21, 2014, http://www.ng.ru/editorial/2014-10-21/2_red.html.

21 See interview at the Russian youth camp “Seliger 2014,” August 29, 2014, <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/46507>. See too, on YouTube and RuTube, videos of mortar attacks on the Ukrainian armed forces under U.S. command and the resulting casualties (see, for example, <http://rutube.ru/video/a736d2f5bd67b7018d0a37f5790eed52/>). The way Moscow has exploited collective memories of World War II (from the fascism narrative to the humiliation of Ukrainian prisoners being paraded through the centre of Donetsk on Ukrainian Independence Day, with the streets cleaned after them) would deserve and require an own analysis. Especially as the Kremlin extends this narrative beyond the Ukraine crisis. Vladimir Putin mentioned in an interview in Serbia “the open manifestations of neo-Nazism that have already become commonplace in Latvia and other Baltic states.” See Putin: “Nazi virus ‘vaccine’ losing effect in Europe,” *RT*, October 15, 2014, <http://rt.com/politics/official-word/196284-ukraine-putin-nazi-europe/>.

in the region declined by merely 13.3 percent compared to the same period in 2013 – even in July 2014, in the midst of the fighting, 2.4 million tons of coal were produced.²²

Plausible denial: To cover up their real aims and actions, Russian officials offered strange explanations to the world public. Some sound bizarre, such as the Russian president stating on 4 March 2014 that the unidentified troops in Crimea were not Russian soldiers, since the green uniforms they were wearing could be purchased in any second-hand-shop.²³

Russia denied its involvement in the fighting in Eastern Ukraine, even in the face of growing evidence to the contrary. In the beginning, one explanation was that Russian soldiers turned up in Eastern Ukraine by mistake. When a group of Russian paratroopers was arrested close to the Ukrainian city of Mariupol, the Russian news stated that “they patrolled the border and got lost.” After the battle for Donetsk Airport on 26 May,²⁴ with the first reports of Russian casualties and burials of paratroopers, the official narrative changed. Reportedly Russian servicemen were now “volunteers” following their convictions to fight for freedom. These volunteers were fighting in Ukraine, without their commander’s or unit’s knowledge, “during their vacation.”²⁵ Soldiers also reported that they were taken to the Ukrainian border and offered the choice between fighting there, after signing an application for leave, or de-facto deserting.²⁶ If Russian servicemen then did not come home safely from their “vacation,” Russian authorities needed more time to adjust the narrative.

22 See Christian Neef, “Putins Lügen,” *Spiegel Online*, September 2, 2014, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/wladimir-putin-wie-russlands-praesident-in-der-ukraine-krise-luegt-a-989247.html>.

23 See <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6763>.

24 Mariya Turchenkova, “Gruz 200. Continuation,” *Novaya Gazeta*, June 2, 2014, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/63873.html>.

25 Before going on leave, a soldier is obliged to write a report, in which he has to point out the exact address of where he intends to spend this holiday. Commanders have to approve the report, before the leave is confirmed.

26 Birgit Virnich, “Russland: Mütter suchen ihre gefallenen Soldaten,” *ARD Weltspiegel*, September 7, 2014, <http://www.daserste.de/information/politik-weltgeschehen/weltspiegel/videos/russland-muetter-suchen-ihre-gefallenen-soldaten-100.html>; Andrew Higgins and Michael A. Gordon, “Putin Talks to Ukrainian Leader as Videos Show Captured Russian Soldiers,” *The New York Times*, August 26, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/27/world/europe/ukraine.html>.

The families of Russian soldiers who were listed as missing or killed in action were pressured to stick to the “vacation narrative,” for example by deleting postings on the Facebook site “Gruz 200.”²⁷ When the number of casualties grew, Russian TV channels even reported the burials and there was local media coverage. For example, in early September the local state TV channel reported the funeral with military honours of 28-year old paratrooper Anatoliy Travkin, who died in action in Donbass, where he had gone while “officially on leave.”²⁸ The emphasis turned to the heroic idealism that brought Russian soldiers to fight “fascism” (again).²⁹

The pro-Russian rebels also stuck to this version, as it emphasized their own narrative of a fight for ideals and for freedom. Pro-Russian separatist leader and “prime minister of the DNR,” Aleksandr Zakharchenko, said in an interview that 3,000–4,000 Russian servicemen were fighting Ukrainian troops alongside his units: “Among us are serving soldiers, who would rather take their vacation not on a beach but with us, among brothers, who are fighting for their freedom.”³⁰

The humanitarian narrative: When the Ukrainian army seemed to be regaining territory occupied by the separatists, the Kremlin changed tack by projecting itself as the defender of humanitarian issues. Daily news about Russian humanitarian aid convoys, Russian calls for escape corridors for civilians and encircled Ukrainian military, was beefed up with pictures of the “protesting Russian minority” (actually, in many cases, Russian citizens being taken by bus to Ukraine as “tourists”). Another example was the queue at the Ukrainian-Polish border showing Ukrainians purportedly

27 “Gruz 200” is the Russian Armed Forces code for casualties brought home in zinc coffins. After the activist Yelena Vasilyeva created a Facebook page under this name, where information is shared about Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine, the code became a synonym for Russian servicemen dying in the fight against Ukrainian forces. The TV channel “Dozhd” maintains a list of missing/captured and killed Russian soldiers, <http://tvrain.ru/soldat/>.

28 “V Kostrome prostilis s desantnikom Anatolijem Travkinym, kotoryy pogib v boju na vostoke Ukrainy,” September 4, 2014, <http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/266969>.

29 “Rossiyskiye i inostrannyye dobrovolcy v Donbasse: My priyekhali zashchishchat mir ot fashizma,” September 4, 2014, <http://russian.rt.com/article/48536>.

30 Interview on the Rossia 24 TV channel, August 28, 2014, <http://www.vesti.ru/videos?vid=onair>; <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/angela-merkel/11060559/Serving-Russian-soldiers-on-leave-fighting-Ukrainian-troops-alongside-rebels-pro-Russian-separatist-leader-says.html>.

trying to escape fascism and move to safety in Russia. The propaganda machinery was pulling out all the stops.

At the UN, Russian ambassador Churkin highlighted the humanitarian challenges throughout the conflict;³¹ Russia sent convoys with humanitarian aid into Eastern Ukraine and demanded humanitarian corridors for refugees and Ukrainian soldiers. In a discussion with young teachers, Vladimir Putin mentioned with compassion the difficult situation of Ukrainian soldiers lost on Russian territory and receiving treatment in Russian hospitals: “I saw in the news reports above all, and also from the reports of our special services what is happening. I saw the reactions of mothers and wives of these Ukrainian servicemen who are surrounded. This is a tragedy for them too. This was why I appealed to the Donbass militia to open a humanitarian corridor so that people could leave. Many of them have been there for several days without food or water. They have run out of ammunition. They should be given the chance to leave.”³²

Last but not least, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, under the authority of the President, started enquiries on the grounds that “unidentified persons from the top political and military leadership of Ukraine, the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the National Guard of Ukraine and the right wing have given orders to kill solely Russian-speaking citizens living in the Luhansk and Donetsk republics, violating the Convention of 1948 on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and other international legal acts condemning genocide.”³³ While there have been reports of atrocities on the Ukrainian side, it is nevertheless suspicious to rely on a covert belligerent to verify them.³⁴

Novorossiya – How branding helps to realize an agenda: With Russia’s

31 See, for instance, Igor Rozin and Vitaly Churkin, “Crisis in Ukraine may lead to humanitarian catastrophe,” *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, July 4, 2014, http://rbth.com/international/2014/07/04/vitaly_churkin_crisis_in_ukraine_may_lead_to_humanitarian_catas_37941.html or *Churkin to UN: Don't children in East Ukraine deserve safety?*, August 8, 2014, <http://rt.com/news/179112-un-russia-ukraine-children/>.

32 Putin, during his visit to the Seliger 2014 National Youth Forum, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/22864>.

33 See website of the Russian Investigative Committee, September 29, 2014, <http://sledcom.ru/actual/4174771>.

34 See the reports of Human Rights Watch at <http://www.hrw.org/europecentral-asia/ukraine>.

true ambitions still unclear, the controversial concept of “Novorossiia” (“New Russia”) emerged. “Novorossiia” was proclaimed on 24 May 2014, one day before the presidential elections, by the “people’s governor” Pavel Gubarev. The “People’s Republic of Donetsk and Luhansk” announced the independence of the new state “Novorossiia,” comprising Donetsk, Luhansk, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, Odesa, Mykolaiv, Kharkiv and Kherson – quite patently a land connection to Crimea.

On 17 April 2014, Putin explained in his already mentioned “direct link” interview that this region was historically not part of Ukraine. He had already used the term “Novorossiia,” meaning Eastern Ukraine. At the end of August, Putin made an appeal to the Novorossiia militia, highlighting their success against Ukrainian violence and calling for humanitarian corridors for the Ukrainian services, “giving them the opportunity to leave the combat area unimpeded and reunite with their families, to return them to their mothers, wives and children.”³⁵ The term, indicating the amputation of no less than a third of Ukrainian territory, was evidently to be a lasting fixture.

Only with effective media exposure was it possible for the Russian leadership to develop and maintain its narrative nationally and, most importantly, worldwide. Within Russia, the few independent TV channels such as TV Dozhd were marginalized and are accessible only via internet. One of the most important differences from the war with Georgia in 2008 was that, in 2014, the Kremlin was able to make effective international use of the *Russia Today* (RT) TV channel. While comparable international channels in the U.S. or Europe are faced with financial cuts and shrinking ratings, RT is still on the rise – even overtaking BBC World News and CNN on some parameters.³⁶ The German news magazine *Der Spiegel* has even called RT “the [Russian] Ministry of Media Defence.”³⁷ In the

35 President of Russia Vladimir Putin addressed Novorossiia militia, August 29, 2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/22863>.

36 See Gemma Pörzgen, “‘Soft Power’ und Imagepflege aus Moskau,” *Osteuropa* 1/2014, pp.63-88, here p.66.

37 Benjamin Bidder, “Putin’s Weapon in the War of Images,” *Spiegel Online*, 13 August 2013, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/business/putin-fights-war-of-images-and-propaganda-with-russia-today-channel-a-916162.html>.

current conflict in Ukraine, the channel has played exactly this role, not only representing a pro-Kremlin line but also working with targeted disinformation.

In an interview in 2013, RT editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan made clear that objectivity was never her goal. RT was set up in 2005 to send a specific message. In her view, information and media are also weapons: “In peacetime an international channel will not be absolutely necessary. But in war times it can be crucial. [...] An army is also not set up a week before the war begins.”³⁸

It was also RT’s mission to prevent an image disaster for Russia comparable to the 2008 war with Georgia, when the media focused predominantly on the destruction caused by Russian armed forces. Simonyan is therefore right, when she says that “if 2008 happened today, the media images would be different.”³⁹

Not only would the images be different, but so would the actual use of military resources. This time Russian regular armed forces were used only to create the right backdrop or, at most, to support local militias. The main players were specialized units, present in Crimea as “little green men.”

The Course of the War in Eastern Ukraine – Limitations of Russian Capabilities

In Eastern Ukraine, the most likely reason the “Crimean script” was not repeated was the limited level of Russian capabilities. The Kremlin did not have the necessary troops available to occupy the Luhansk and Donetsk regions. It is important to note that *all elite units* of the Russian army had already been used. The most important result of the military reform, which took place from 2008 to 2012, was the discontinuation of mass mobilization of reservists. Instead, the emphasis would be on forming

38 Tina Kandelaki, “Ne sobirayus delat vid, chto ja obyektivnaya,” Interview with Margarita Simonyan, March 7, 2013, <http://lenta.ru/articles/2013/03/07/simonyan>.

39 *Ibid.*

15-20 units of professional soldiers capable of operating within a few hours of receiving orders. This ability for rapid deployment was demonstrated during the Crimean stage of the operations in Ukraine, and again during the invasion of the Donbas region. Russia presumably kept its forces in permanent readiness close to the border, exchanging one battalion tactical group with another from the same division or brigade.

The Kremlin began in 2013 to set up a pool of rapid deployment forces, in order to be able to intervene in its neighborhood. These well equipped, well trained, modern forces consist of Airborne Forces (four divisions, five brigades), Marines (four brigades, eight separate regiments), GRU Intelligence Special Forces (GRU spetsnaz) brigades, three or four elite Ground Forces units, as well as air and naval support. The defence ministry planned that, in the coming years, all these units would be made up of professionals.⁴⁰ On this basis, the Airborne Forces count already up to 20 battalions. There is every reason to believe that the 30,000-40,000 troops transferred in February to the south-eastern border of Ukraine are the backbone of these rapid deployment forces.

While the existing pool of these forces is sufficient to deal with the current situation in Eastern Ukraine, they have reached their military limits. It was relatively simple to cut Crimea off from the rest of Ukraine by controlling the highway and railway through the Isthmus of Perekop, but the Donetsk and Luhansk regions cannot be dealt with in the same way. Here, Russian troops would have to establish “state” borders where they have never existed. Hundreds of roads linking the area with the rest of Ukraine would have to be cut off. Something like this cannot be done in a secret operation, or even a covert invasion, but would require the establishment of traditional checkpoints on all reasonably important lines of communication and the ability to prevent troops arriving from the rest of Ukraine. Even if the Kremlin has indeed been able to concentrate about 40,000 troops on Ukraine’s borders, more than twice that number would

40 Aleksandr Golts, “The forth conquest of Crimea,” *Pro et Contra* Vol.18, Issue 3-4, May-August 2014, <http://carnegie.ru/proetcontra/?fa=56758>.

be needed for an occupation.

Ironically, Russian strategists seem to have created these rapid deployment forces along the lines recommended by former U.S. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell: they must be able to secure a quick victory and then withdraw immediately. Such an approach lends itself to containing the Taliban within Afghanistan, beating any attempts to break into the territory of the Central Asian states; but these troops are neither sufficient nor particularly well suited for the occupation of several regions in Ukraine.

Kyiv did not get far with a Toolbox full of Old Tools

With hybrid warfare techniques, own deficits can be compensated. At the same time these techniques allow optimal exploitation of the opponents' vulnerabilities. Ukraine under President Janukovych was fragile, fragmented, corrupt and on the whole badly governed, offering an easy target for Russia's hybrid tactics. Kyiv's military answer to the separatists and the Russian invasion was desperate, and might have made matters even worse.

After the Russian annexation of Crimea, the Ukrainian leadership was under increased pressure to take action and avoid losing any more territory. In early April 2014, they decided to carry out an "anti-terrorist operation," using the regular army against the Moscow-backed warlords. This was Kyiv's main military and political mistake. Few (if any) armed forces in the world could win a war like this against paramilitaries, waging urban warfare, hiding in the cities and actually turning the inhabitants into a human shield. The task would have required special forces prepared for combat in urban areas, not regular forces, who would not be able to make effective use of armoured vehicles, artillery or air strikes. Ukrainian regular forces were in a critical condition and had to deal with several major crises in rapid succession: Maidan, the Russian annexation of Crimea, and subsequent unrest in the south-eastern regions escalating into an armed rebellion. The army had been seriously underfinanced for twenty years, and

dramatic troop reductions were not countered by systematic reconstruction and transition. In the fall of 2013, President Yanukovich agreed to another sharp reduction in troop numbers and a transition to a fully professional army. The Ukrainian units deployed were thus made up mostly of conscripts in their final months of service.

Explaining to the Verkhovna Rada why it was not possible to organize military resistance to the seizure of the Crimea, acting Defence Minister Ihor Tenyukh painted a bleak picture of the state of the Ukrainian army: the total number of ground forces was 41,000 men, with combat-ready unit totalling 20,000 men on paper but actually reaching no more than 6,000.⁴¹

The situation then worsened. The authorities delayed the demobilization of conscripts who had been called up for military service in the spring of last year. The Ministry of Defence set up a partial mobilization for more than 90% of the available resources. In Kyiv, only every tenth reservist was mobilized voluntarily, according to Military Commissioner Vladimir Kidon. The armed forces were in a critical condition and also the Ukrainian oligarchs refused further support.⁴² The plight of the armed forces is described by Maksim Muzyka, a parliamentarian from the new pro-European party “United Ukraine,” who supports the *Narodnyy Tyl* (“People’s replenishment”) organization for bringing supplies to soldiers in Eastern Ukraine. He estimates that “only ten percent of the Ukrainian armed forces’ needs in terms of equipment, protective clothing, medicines and meals are covered by the government. Sixty percent of supplies come from donations that are brought by volunteers to the soldiers, and the men have to buy the remaining thirty percent themselves.”⁴³ A senior Ukrainian advisor to the NATO Liaison Office in Kyiv describes the dilemma when he was called up to fight in Eastern Ukraine, of whether he should spend

41 Aleksey Nikolskiy, “Ukraina ne boyets,” *Vedomosti*, March 12, 2014.

42 Gundarov Vladimir, “U Kiyeva zakanchivayutsya mobilizatsionnyye resursy,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, July 4, 2014.

43 Andreas Schenk, “Versorgung der ukrainischen Armee ist ein Fiasko,” September 19, 2014, <http://www.ostpol.de>.

privately two thousand U.S. dollars for the necessary military equipment or to bribe his way out of the army: “It’s impossible for the average family to equip their sons and brothers for war.”⁴⁴

Further rounds of mobilization are under way, but such efforts are completely anachronistic and inappropriate for operations in Eastern Ukraine. Reservists, who have not touched any military equipment for years, even decades, have no place there. They would be in danger and also represent a danger to others. They would have no chance of standing up to local militias or making appropriate use of technological superiority on the ground and, most importantly, in the air. They would probably even damage relations with the local population.⁴⁵

It is no surprise that, during the entire operation, the morale of Ukrainian soldiers was very low; many of them surrendered and tried to escape. Exceptions were volunteer battalions, formally commanded by the Ministry of the Interior’s National Guard, with good morale but a low level of training.

On the Ukrainian side, a total of almost 50,000 men were involved. All units and formations comprised military reservists, fighting alongside the newly created volunteer units of the National Guard, the special units of the Security Services and the Ministry of the Interior, other troops and a number of volunteer militias, created under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior.⁴⁶ Efficient command and control under such circumstances is illusory, as seen in the many divergences of opinion between the commanders of the armed forces and volunteer battalions.⁴⁷

44 Aleksandr Lapko, “Ukraine’s enemy within,” *The International New York Times*, October 8, 2014.

45 All of this could be observed in 1990, when the Soviet leadership tried to use reservists in the suppression of riots in Baku. It is no coincidence that Russian generals also rejected the idea of mobilization even in the most pressing situations, for instance when Chechen rebels broke into Dagestan in 1999.

46 The fact that Kyiv used the judicial police’s special Griffin unit highlights the military command’s serious lack of human resources. An important role in fighting was played by volunteer formations, not subordinate to the state. These make up the Azov Battalion (with only one company formalized as a Ministry of the Interior unit). The battalion is made up of activists from the Social-National Assembly, Patriot of Ukraine, Avtomaydan, Bratstvo and Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) movements, as well as fans of the Dynamo football club.

47 For example, Semen Semenchenko, commander of the “Donbass” volunteer battalion, complained that

“The more Ukrainian army battalions or brigades are brought up, the more troops there are from the Russian Federation,” Ukrainian President Poroshenko said in an interview. His admission that Ukraine lost 65 percent of its military hardware on the front line during fighting in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions gives a strong indication that there is no military solution to the conflict.⁴⁸ Military action has made it worse, creating deep resentment on both sides. For many people in Eastern Ukraine, staying in Ukraine now seems an impossible prospect.⁴⁹ The conflict in Eastern Ukraine will hardly lead to positive options for the region, but long term instability. Subsequently it pushes Ukraine “successfully” away from potential membership in the EU or NATO. And away from Russia. Russia may continue its destabilization of the Ukraine for the foreseeable future, but all possibilities of a closer political co-operation have been lost. Whatever will be left of Ukraine, will turn to the West.

NATO and Russia: Seeing the Future through the Rear View Mirror

Russia’s hybrid warfare in Ukraine demonstrated the new capabilities of the Russian armed forces, following the military reform launched in 2008: enhanced deployability (tactical and strategic airlift), a relatively high level of training, and professional forces. At the same time, however, it is clear that these rapid deployment units are not sufficient to carry out large-scale military operations like the occupation of two Ukrainian regions, though proving remarkably effective in the hybrid war scenario. They would still not pose a new direct military threat to the countries of the Alliance. Where military capabilities are not sufficient, the Kremlin is ready to bridge the gap with all non-military means available, hand tailored to the vulnerabilities

the Ukrainian military ignored his requests for support when his unit was encircled near Ilovaisk. See: <http://south-west.net.ua/novost/konflikt-mezhdu-batalonami-dobrovolcev-i-armiei-shta/>.

48 “Poroshenko Says No Military Solution To Conflict,” *rferl*, September 22, 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/ukraine-poroshenko-truce-/26599248.html>.

49 See Birgit Virnich, “Ukraine: “Neues Russland” - Traum und Schrecken,” *ARD Weltspiegel*, September 28, 2014, <http://www.daserste.de/information/politik-weltgeschehen/weltspiegel/sendung/ndr/2014/ukraine-140.html>.

of the target.

At the same time, the Kremlin may be inspired by its success in Ukraine to repeat the venture in other post-Soviet states like Moldova or Kazakhstan. In addition, the fact that Russia owns the world's second-largest nuclear arsenal takes on new relevance under these circumstances. In the recent past the world relied on the rationality of Kremlin leaders, and believed that under no circumstances would they be prepared to "press the button."

Now the situation might have changed. Russia is becoming a lonely pariah, without real allies or sufficient conventional military capabilities to achieve its grown objectives. This means that the Kremlin might conceivably be ready to use its tactical nuclear resources, and it plans to fully renew its nuclear arsenal by 2020, according to Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin.⁵⁰

Even Belarus has distanced itself from its closest ally. President Lukashenko rejects the recognition of the republic of Donetsk and Luhansk and in an interview with Euronews he is hoisting his own petard: "Many say that Crimea was once unjustly given to Ukraine, that Crimea is a genuine Russian territory. It is an incorrect approach. Let's take a look back at the time of Khan Batyi, the time of the Mongol-Tatar Yoke. We would have to give virtually entire Russia, Western Europe, and Eastern Europe to Kazakhstan, Mongolia or someone else. Except for Belarus because they reached us somehow but left intact. There is no sense in going back to the past."⁵¹

The position of President Lukashenko confirms the quiet but growing unease that Russia's hybrid war cannot be deterred outside NATO territory. To this end, Russia's aggressiveness has strengthened solidarity within NATO as a military alliance: perception of its collective defence commitment has

50 Russia to fully renew nuclear forces by 2020, September 22, 2014, <http://rt.com/politics/189604-russia-nuclear-2020-mistral/>.

51 "Lukashenko: Belarus is against the destruction of the Ukrainian state," October 3, 2014, http://eng.belta.by/all_news/president/Lukashenko-Belarus-is-against-the-destruction-of-the-Ukrainian-state_i_76220.html.

increased, underlining that today only the borders in Europe guaranteed by NATO are safe.⁵²

NATO was not the trigger of the crisis in Ukraine, but the crisis quickly became a defining moment for the Alliance. It was clear from the very beginning of the Ukraine crisis in early 2014 that for NATO there is no military option vis-à-vis Ukraine/Crimea. First of all, Ukraine is not a member of the Alliance. Secondly, nobody wanted to wage an apparently anachronistic war against Russia. The challenge for the Alliance was to react adequately and at the same time to avoid returning to Cold War thinking, or to the action/reaction logic associated with that period. Thirdly, and most importantly, this war was undeclared. Russia's actions were deliberately placed beneath the radar. It was not a party in the war; its invasion of Eastern Ukraine was run by several thousand fully equipped servicemen officially spending their vacation in battles between Luhansk and Donetsk. The Russian hybrid model thus outflanked NATO's reaction patterns. The Alliance and its 28 nations have therefore remained bystanders during the war in Ukraine, though the conflict could clearly extend far beyond Ukraine and goes politically beyond Ukraine. The result, however, has proved paradoxical: Germany, for instance, delivered military equipment to the Iraqi Kurds in the Middle East but not to desperate Ukraine. Former Polish Foreign Minister Sikorski hit the nail on the head when he reportedly stated at NATO's Wales Summit that the Alliance had "given Ukraine every support short of help."⁵³

Taking into account the diversity of Alliance members and the dramatic developments in Ukraine and the Middle East, the Alliance members demonstrated remarkable solidarity at the Wales Summit, agreeing on a number of important deliverables. Among these was the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), which is intended to ensure that NATO has the right forces

52 Ulrich Speck, "Russia's New Challenge to Europe," April 17, 2014, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2014/04/17/russia-s-new-challenge-to-europe/h8dy>.

53 The NATO member states U.S., UK, Canada, France, the Netherlands, Poland and Slovakia supplied Ukraine with "military and technical equipment", see Institute of World Policy, Kyiv, "Ukraine is not Alone. How the World Supports Ukrainians in Countering Russia's Aggression," *Policy Brief*, September 15, 2014, <http://iwp.org.ua/eng/public/1242.html>.

and the right equipment, in the right place and at the right time.⁵⁴ In addition, the implementation of more than 40 military exercises in Eastern Europe in 2014 demonstrates that NATO nations are sending a clear signal not only to Allies and Partners in the region, but also to Russia.

NATO reacted in a cautious way to the Russian aggression. It did not follow an agenda of confrontation or *tabula rasa*, but tried to keep dialogue channels open in order to ensure that balance could be restored in security. In other words: this approach is an attempt to give time to politics and diplomacy so that Russia can realize that its current politics will not be successful in the long run.

Russia's hybrid warfare cannot be answered by a military alliance alone. NATO can take care to have the right forces available, to overcome its political disagreements, and enhance the comprehensive approach with other international organizations such as the EU and the OSCE also in addressing hybrid threats;⁵⁵ main components of the Russian model are non-military and need to be addressed with economic and information campaigns which NATO does not and should not control. The nations, however, carry major responsibility to prepare and prevent becoming a target of Russia's hybrid methods mainly through good governance and, not to forget, appropriate minority rights.

NATO's SACEUR made clear that NATO Allies are aware of the questions raised by hybrid warfare and are ready to act, as was reported also in the Russian media. "Clearly we had great acceptance among the NATO allies that if you attribute this little green men issue to an aggressor nation, it was an Article 5 action, and it would mean all assets would come to bear,"

54 NATO's Readiness Action Plan (RAP) builds on the reassurance measures currently in place (inter alia, more than 40 military exercises to ensure a visible NATO presence in Eastern Europe) and adaptation measures such as an upgrade of the NATO Response Force (NRF), spearheaded by the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF); Land, Air, Sea, Special Forces); enhanced intelligence gathering and sharing; updated defence plans; enhanced exercise and training programmes; and infrastructure upgrades to support deployment requirements.

55 At NATO's Wales summit, for the first time NATO Foreign Ministers met with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to discuss closer cooperation. See Summit Declaration, para. 100 ff, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.

Breedlove said, referring to the Allies' collective defence doctrine."⁵⁶ The Alliance has to prepare for this kind of undeclared war in Europe, including to clarify what could require it to invoke Article 5. It does not have to reinvent the wheel – discussions on emerging security challenges, including cyber defence and energy security, have been on the agenda for years. Optimization of information and intelligence sharing is also necessary, as well as streamlining of the decision-making process.

In this regard, while visiting Poland on his first trip, NATO's new Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg sent a strong message: "We need to keep NATO strong, we need to help keep our neighborhood stable in cooperation with our partners and we need a rock-solid bond between the United States and Europe. That creates the best foundation for a more constructive, more cooperative relationship with Russia."⁵⁷

56 Ria Novosti, September 16, 2014, http://en.ria.ru/military_news/20140916/192977784/Breedlove-Hybrid-Warfare-in-NATO-Nations-Opens-Door-to-Invoke.html.

57 Wictor Szary, "NATO chief says 'spearhead' plan doesn't breach treaty with Russia," October 6, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/06/us-ukraine-crisis-nato-poland-idUSKCN0HV0K220141006>.

8

Russia's Approach to Conflict: Implications for NATO's Deterrence and Defence

Dave Johnson

Introduction

NATO's traditional preparations for collective defence and its Article 5 commitments face a significant challenge in Russia's approach to conflict, which combines many well-known elements with modern concepts and capabilities in a holistic, multi-dimensional and flexible approach that targets perceived weaknesses of the Alliance. The Russian approach was initially labelled by some in the West after the start of the Ukraine crisis as "hybrid" warfare and treated as a new phenomenon.¹ However, it has gradually been recognised that the capabilities and methods used by Russia in its aggressive actions are not new or unique, although there are some innovations in their application.² One important innovation is exploitation of ambiguity, both of intent and attribution. The current Russian approach draws on longstanding Soviet and Russian practices – particularly *maskirovka* and deception to leverage perceived weaknesses – and historical military experience. Russian General Staff researchers

1 "Hybrid" originated as a term to describe non-linear actions by non-state actors against state actors and gained widespread usage, referencing Hezbollah approaches, after the 2006 Second Lebanon War. See, for example, I. Brun, While You Were Busy Making Other Plans – the Other RMA, *The Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 33, No 4, 535-565, August 2010, pp.535-565 and O. Tamminga, Hybride Kriegsführung: Zur Einordnung Einer Aktuellen Erscheinungsform des Krieges, SWP-Aktuell 27, March 2015, p.1.

2 See, for example, O. Tamminga, Hybride Kriegsführung; also Kristen Ven Bruusgaard, "Crimea and Russia's Strategic Overhaul," *Parameters* 44(3), Autumn 2014, pp.81-90; and H. Reisinger and A. Golts, "Russia's Hybrid Warfare: Waging War Below the Radar of Traditional Collective Defence," *Research Paper* 105, NATO Defense College, November 2014.

recently made this point, writing:

..it is mistaken to consider that the complex of such government-wide measures is something new or innovative; such actions have had their place in the entirety of the history of military art (interstate conflict), and naming them with terms such as “hybrid” and with prefixes such as “quasi”, “neo” and so forth only testifies to the pretensions of various authors to the role of leading researchers in military science.³

The Russian approach to conflict is based on a combination of: conclusions drawn from Moscow’s perception of the evolution of military technology since the 1970s and of conflict since the end of the Cold War; new or adapted concepts derived from those perceptions; advanced technologies that Russia is now able to field in quantity; Russia’s geostrategic position; and the unique circumstances of Russia’s autocratic regime and the highly centralised and rapid decision making that it enables. In combination, these result in a Russian approach to conflict that is of broad scope (encompassing coordinated operations in the diplomatic, informational, cyber, military and economic dimensions), strategic depth (operating on the adversary’s centres of gravity in all dimensions while defending its own), and of long duration (while operating on unpredictable extended or compressed timescales).

The Russian approach is geared toward achieving strategic aims without war (with a primary concern being to stay below NATO’s threshold for reaction). However, it is backed-up by an increasingly capable, full-spectrum military poised to act when non-military means fail, to deter potential reactions to Moscow’s border adventures, and to exploit opportunities for easy wins. Once the thin veneer of Russia’s “hybrid warfare” is peeled back, its reliance on at least the leveraging, and potential employment, of full-spectrum conventional, unconventional and nuclear military capabilities is revealed. At bottom, Russia’s reintroduction into Europe of power politics

3 V. B. Andrianov and V.V. Loiko, “Voprosy Primeneniia VS RF v Krizisnykh Situatsiakh Mirnovo Vremeni,” *Voennaya Mysl*’ No. 1, January 2015, p.68.

and great power competition enabled by military violence is its biggest innovation.⁴

Elements of Russia's Approach to Conflict

Two phenomena have been very prominent in shaping the current Russian approach to conflict. The first is the "revolution in military affairs" brought about by parallel and inter-related developments in computerization and in air and space power. The second is the phenomenon of "colour revolutions," referred to by Russian military experts as examples of "controlled chaos" warfare methods.

The Revolution in Military Affairs

Russian military leaders and theorists recognised as early as the mid-1970s the strategic implications of the potential combination of air and space power with emerging technologies such as precision guided munitions, drones and directed energy weapons, integrated with computer technologies. Then Chief of the General Staff Ogarkov and other experts saw these developments as a "revolution in military affairs" (RMA) leading to a future model of "air-space wars" conducted with reconnaissance-strike complexes (combining air and space power, computerised precision munitions, and automated command, control, communications and computer/intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems (C4ISR)).⁵ The emerging capabilities and related concepts were not adopted on an operationally significant scale due to the conservatism of the Soviet military

4 See Mike Winnerstig, Marta Carlsson, Jakob Hedenskog, Anna Sundberg and Carolina Vendil Pallin, "Security Policy and Strategic Consequences," in Niklas Granholm, Johannes Malminen, and Gudrun Persson, eds., *A Rude Awakening: Ramifications of Russian Aggression Towards Ukraine*, FOI-R-3892-SE (Stockholm: FOI, June 2014), p.63 who assess that "The major consequences of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and aggression in eastern Ukraine for the European security order can be summarised in the following way: geopolitical struggle has returned with a vengeance and will not go away. In a direct way, this presents a fundamental challenge to the permanent formation of a liberal, rules-based security order in Europe."

5 Mary C. Fitzgerald, "Marshal Ogarkov and the New Revolution in Soviet Military Affairs," *Defense Analysis* Vol. 6, No. 2, 1990, pp.167-191.

establishment, the stagnation of the Soviet economy and the limited high-tech capacities of the Soviet defence industry.⁶ Similar obstacles to their adoption by the post-Soviet Russian military persisted into the early 2000s.

The Soviet military leadership, its confidence already undermined by its failure in Afghanistan, was therefore shaken by its observations of U.S. employment against Iraq in the 1991 Operation *Desert Storm* of precisely the reconnaissance-strike complex that Marshall Ogarkov had foreseen. As significant, the U.S. methods enabled a 43-day air campaign to paralyse what was then the fourth-largest army in the world, mostly armed with Soviet weapons and operated according to Soviet doctrine, and to enable its destruction in a subsequent 100-hour land campaign. Soviet military analysts observed the depth, precision and lethality of conventional precision-guided munitions in that conflict and concluded that the line between conventional weapons and tactical nuclear weapons was being blurred, if not erased.⁷ These conclusions were reinforced for the post-Soviet Russian military leadership by the incipient global strike capabilities and “non-contact” military operations without land force employment demonstrated against Yugoslavia during Operation *Allied Force* in 1999.⁸ The Soviet and Russian military leadership saw as another outcome of the revolution in military affairs the looming obsolescence of large-sized land formations geared towards massive force-on-force engagements - the corollary requirement being to transition to more mobile formations possessing concentrated firepower, able to defend against “air-space attack” and fully integrated within the reconnaissance-strike complex that enables “non-contact” attrition and destruction of the adversary.⁹ Progress in fielding such capabilities became possible as Russia reaped the benefits of high oil prices and broke down institutional barriers to military reform

6 M. Gareev, *Esli Zavtra Voyna?* Moscow, VlaDar, 1995, p.87.

7 Yu. V. Lebedev, I. S. Liutov and V. A. Nazurenko, “Voina v Zone Persidskovo Zaliva: Uroki I Vyvody,” *Voennaya Mysl'* No. 11-12, November-December 1991, pp.109-117.

8 Sergey Sokut, “Malaia Triada Pentagona,” *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie* No. 14, April 16, 1999, p.6.

9 Mary C. Fitzgerald, “Advanced Conventional Munitions and Moscow's Defensive Force Posture,” *Defense Analysis* Vol. 6, No. 2, 1990, pp.171-178 and Yu. G. Sizov and A. L. Skokov, “Znachenie Vysokotokhnovo Oruzhiia v Sovremennoi Voine,” *Voennaya Mysl'* No. 12, December 1992, pp.37-42.

after the 2008 conflict in Georgia.

Full-Spectrum Military Capabilities

Russia has succeeded in transforming the neglected and dysfunctional armed forces it inherited from the Soviet Union into an effective fighting force through a combination of sustained political will and massive financial investment. Capability shortfalls remain and economic decline is raising potential obstacles to sustaining the pace of military modernisation but Russia's plans through 2020 remain on track, with additional gains in readiness, mobility and firepower anticipated. Russia's military is increasingly able to support a range of options, including in non-linear/hybrid scenarios, due to substantial ongoing progress in its military reform and modernisation plans. General Gerasimov has outlined priorities that include substantial modernisation of Russia's nuclear forces; continued development of high-readiness joint forces emphasising firepower and mobility; improved special forces capabilities; enhanced C3I; robotics; and layered air-space defence.¹⁰ Like President Putin, he has also confirmed Russia's intention to retain nuclear weapons under current and foreseeable circumstances even as the military pursues increased capability in long-range conventional precision strike.¹¹

Substantial institutional, systemic and economic obstacles persist – and will be exacerbated by Crimea-related sanctions – but Russian military capabilities can be expected to improve gradually over the current planning and acquisition period to 2020.¹² The results of the improvements to date, as well as the shortfalls, are evident in Russia's operations in and around the Ukraine conflict, in Russia's increasingly challenging annual strategic

10 V. Gerasimov, "Nachal'nik Rossiskovo Genshtaba – Ob Osnovnykh Zadachakh Razvitiia Armii," *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, September 12, 2014, <http://nvo.ng.ru/concepts/2014-09-12>.

11 V. Gerasimov, "Pervoye Glavanoye Ispytanie: Yadernyi Arsenal Ostaetsia Vazhneshei Garantiei Natsional'noi Bezopasnosti," *Voenna-Promyshlenni Kur'er*, August 29, 2014, <http://vpk-news.ru/print/articles/21648>.

12 On this, see for example Jakob Hedenskog and Carolina Vendil Palin, *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective – 2013*, FOI, December 2013.

exercises and the series of snap (surprise) exercises it has conducted since 2013. Of particular interest in the context of potential future crisis scenarios, Defence Minister Shoygu has said that the snap exercises are training to a benchmark for deployment of 65,000 troops over a distance of 3,000 kilometres within 72 hours.¹³

A Potential New Rung on the Escalation Ladder

Economic, technological and industrial factors permitting, conventional precision-guided munitions may play an increasing role, along with nuclear weapons, in Russia's deterrent strategies. The Soviet Military concluded in 1991, on the basis of what it observed in the Gulf War, that conventional precision guided munitions (PGMs) could have effects previously achievable only with nuclear weapons.¹⁴ However, it was decades before the Russian military could field significant numbers of precision weapons. Advocates for widespread adoption of conventionally armed long-range precision weapons, such as then Deputy Minister of Defence Kokoshin, argued that over-reliance on nuclear weapons was dangerous to Russia's security as it could limit its options in a crisis.

Because of their ability to achieve strategic effects with conventional munitions, Kokoshin believed the new weapons should be differentiated from traditional conventional weapons and so labelled them "non-nuclear" weapons. Also because of their potential strategic effects, Kokoshin saw PGMs' potential to augment nuclear deterrence at a point on the escalation ladder that he called "non-nuclear (pre-nuclear) deterrence."¹⁵ President Putin has validated this dual concept of long-range precision munitions providing for increased freedom of action in regional crises as well as augmenting strategic deterrence. He wrote in 2012 (just before

13 Novosti, Shoigu Dolozhil Putinu, "Skol'ko Voisk Mozhno Operativno Perebrosit' Na Rostoyaniye v Tri Tysiachi Kilometrov," July 2, 2014, <http://palm.newsru.com/russia/02jul2014/shoigu.html>.

14 Lebedev, *Voyna*, p.113.

15 A. A. Kokoshin, *Politiko-Voenniye I Voенno-Strategicheskiye Problemy Natsional'noi Bezopasnosti Rossii i Mezhdunarodnoi Bezopasnosti*, Vyshaia Shkola Ekonomiki, Moscow, 2013, pp.213-223.

his re-election to the presidency) that long-range conventional precision munitions (and eventually future weapons based on new physical principles) “are comparable to employment of nuclear weapons in results but more “acceptable” in political and military terms. In this manner, the role of the strategic balance of nuclear forces in deterring aggression will gradually decline.”¹⁶

Now that Russia has both the economic and technical means to field long-range conventional PGMs in substantial numbers, this long-standing concept, which may also include other elements related to a more western understanding of “conventional deterrence,” has been affirmed in the 2014 Military Doctrine.¹⁷ Whether Russia’s military industry will be able to support the concept technically under post-Crimea sanctions is an open question.¹⁸ In any case, Russia’s political and military leaders have indicated that strategic nuclear capability will remain the cornerstone of national security in the mid-to-long-term. Meanwhile, Russia’s propensity to field dual-capable systems in combination with its new thinking on the role of conventional precision-guided munitions in deterrence scenarios will contribute to ambiguity and uncertainty, particularly in crisis scenarios. Additionally, Russian perceptions that the U.S. enjoyed enhanced freedom of action in regional crises due to its dominance in this weapons category suggests the Russian military may see a particular role in regional scenarios for these weapons as their capabilities and fielded numbers increase.¹⁹

16 V. Putin, “Byt’ Sil’nymi: Garantii Natsional’noi Bezopasnosti Dlia Rossii,” *Rosiskaya Gazeta*, No. 5708 (35), February 20, 2012, <http://www.rg.ru/2012/02/20/putin-armiya.html>.

17 2014 Russian Military Doctrine, December 26, 2014, paragraphs 26 and 32, <http://Kremlin.ru/media/events/files/41d527556bec8deb3530.pdf>.

18 Sovet Bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii, O Strategii Natsional’noi Bezopasnosti SShA, March 25, 2015, <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/news/865.html>. In its assessment of the 2015 U.S. National Security Strategy, the Russian Security Council concluded that U.S.-led sanctions, including those preventing access to military arms markets, could complicate Russian production of high-technology systems.

19 V. Selivanov, I.P. Machneva and Yu. D. Il’in, “Dolgosrochnoe Prognozirovanie Napravlenii Razvitiia Vysokotochnykh Boyepripasov,” *Voennaya Mysl’*, No. 4, April 2014, p.15.

Key Enabler - Centralised Decision-Making and Modernised Command and Control

Russia's political and military leaders have placed priority on coordinated action across the government and military in support of national defence. This includes developing enhanced military command, control, communications, computer, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems (C4ISR) to enable centralised command and control within a military "unified information space" integrated into a larger government "unified information space." The important policy decision to empower the General Staff as the coordinating authority over other ministries and departments contributing to national defence (reportedly numbering around 50 but with the Federal Security Service, Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry for Emergency Situations at the top of the hierarchy along with MOD) entered into force along with other steps to enhance territorial defence in April 2013.²⁰ The National Centre for Direction of the Defence of the Russian Federation (NCDD), with subordinate centres in the military districts and administrative regions, is the General Staff's tool for implementing that mandate. The NCDD was built on an accelerated timetable after the General Staff was given its expanded responsibilities and began 24/7 combat watch on a test basis from 28 March 2014, upgrading to full operational capability on 1 December 2014.²¹

General Gerasimov has said that the NCDD comprises two main centres, the centre for combat command and a centre for day-to-day operational coordination among the armed forces and all elements of government

20 Federal'nyy Zakon Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 5 Aprelia 2013 g. N 55-F3, O Vnesenii Izmenenii v Otdel'niye Zakonodatel'niye Akty Rossiiskoi Federatsii, April 10, 2013, <http://www.rg.ru/printable/2013/04/10/aktidok.html>. S. I. Skokov, L. V. Grushka, "Vliianiye Kontseptsii Setetsentrizma na Evoliutsii i Funktsionirovaniye Sistemy Upravleniia Vooruzheniyami Cilami Rossiiskoi Federatsii," *Voennaya Mysl'* No. 12, December 2014, pp.33-41. The concept and mandate for MOD coordination authority is as important, if not more so, than the NCDD itself, which is located on Frunze Embankment in Moscow and likely has an analogous hardened back-up facility elsewhere.

21 Minister Oborony Rossii General Armii Sergei Shoigu Provel Ocherednoie Selektornoie Soveschaniie, March 31, 2014, http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=11913366@egNews and Na Boievoie Dezhurstvo Zastupila Operativnaia Dezhurnaia Smena Natsional'novo Tsentra Upravleniia Oborony Rossii, December 1, 2014, http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12002205@egNews.

contributing to national defence. The NCDD also includes “other centres for direction of special questions.” The NCDD’s commanding two-star general and its duty officers are responsible to maintain situational awareness, assess developments and make recommendations in order to enable quick decision-making on employment of the armed forces by the political-military leadership.²²

The establishment of the NCDD is part of Russia’s response to the demands of net-centric warfare, along with force-wide communications upgrades and heavy investment in C4ISR. It is an important enabler for Russia’s close coordination and integration of disparate tools at all levels of conflict.

Colour Revolutions/Controlled Chaos

Moscow views the so-called colour revolutions (such as the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia and the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine) as coups catalysed and orchestrated by the U.S. and the European Union in order to isolate Russia within a belt of hostile nations or area of instability. Russian experts see as the “technology of colour revolution” the long-term foreign cultivation and financing of an internal opposition and general divisions within society; creation or co-optation of an opposition elite; foreign NGOs and outside agents advocating “globalisation” and “westernisation” campaigns in support of democracy; and exploitation of elections. President Putin and other Russian leaders see these as the generic elements of foreign-orchestrated campaigns to create crises of legitimacy for Moscow-friendly regimes and to pave the way for their overthrow (“regime change”). Russian experts and leaders increasingly refer to this methodology as “controlled chaos” or as a “strategy of attrition and destruction.”²³ While

22 Nachal’nik Rossiskovo Genshtaba Raskazal Zhurnalistam o Zadachakh i Roli Natsional’novo Tsentra po Upravleniiu Oborony RF, November 1, 2014, http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=11998309@egNews.

23 Putin used the term “controlled chaos” in his published manifesto on future defence policy just prior to the 2012 presidential elections in V. Putin, *Byt’ Sil’nymi*. “Controlled chaos” is now in wide use among Russia’s military leadership and analysts as in A. N. Belskii and O. V. Klimenko, “Politicheskiiie Tekhnologii

the post-Soviet colour revolutions sparked this line of thinking, a growing number of Russian experts apply this concept retrospectively to the collapse of the Soviet Union - with a particular focus on the impact of the Helsinki Accords - bringing into focus the leadership's belief that Russia is now the target of a similar campaign.²⁴ This view was officially expressed in March 2015 when the Russian Security Council assessed, as one threat arising from the 2015 U.S. National Security Strategy, that there is a high probability that the U.S. will use the "technology of colour revolutions" against Russia.²⁵ In both the post-facto analyses of the colour revolutions and the assessments of the current threat to Russia, the mindset of the populace (spiritual values, patriotism, belief in heroic traditions, remembrance of fallen defenders of the Motherland, regard for national history, readiness for self-sacrifice, etc.), in particular of the nation's youth, is viewed as a main target of foreign influence and a key vulnerability to be defended.²⁶

In response, Russia pursues its defence and security on the basis of what could be described as a "whole of nation" approach. The three-pillar national security sphere unites government, military and nation (populace) and is enacted in the 2009 National Security Strategy and supporting strategic documents, including the updated 2014 Military Doctrine.²⁷ This concept,

"Tsvetnykh Revolutsii": Puti i Sredstva Protivodeistviia," *Voennaya Mysl'*, No. 9, September 2014, pp.3-11. An extended analysis of the related, and somewhat interchangeable term "strategy of attrition and destruction" is in V. I. Vorob'ev and V. A. Kitslev, "Strategii Sokrusheniia i Izmora v Novom Oblike," *Voennaya Mysl'* No. 3, March 2014, pp.45-57. While generally using these terms, Russian analysts recognise the western use of "hybrid" to identify similar phenomena. Russian experts tend to use "controlled chaos" and "technology of colour revolutions" to label actions directed against Russia or governments friendly to Russia, and refer to the same means and methods as part of "new forms of armed conflict" when discussing modifications to Russia's approach to conflict/war.

24 Vorob'ev and Kiselev, *Strategii*, also Oleg Vladykin, "Voina Upravliaemovo Khaosa: Uroki Dlia Rossii," *Nezavisimoye Voennoye Obozreniye*, October 24, 2014, <http://nov.ng.ru/concepts/2014-10-24>.

25 Sovet Bezopasnosti Rossiiskoi Federatsii, O Strategii Natsional'noi Bezopasnosti SShA, March 25, 2015, <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/news/865.html>. On the Soviet and later Russian view of the impact of the Helsinki Accords on the Soviet system, in particular with regard to the dissident movement and internal stability, see Jacques Andreani, *Le Piège: Helsinki et la chute du communisme*, Odile Jacob, Paris, 2005 and John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*, *The Penguin Press*, New York, 2005, pp.186-194.

26 See Belskii, pp.7-8, Vorob'ev, p.54 and the 2014 Military Doctrine, paragraphs 12, 13, 15 and 21.

27 S. I. Skokov, *Vliianiye Kontseptsii Setetsentrizma*, p.37. This notion reflects, to an extent, some western analyses of Clausewitz' "trinity of war" as interpreted in, for example, Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: a Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, New York, Dell, 1984.

which goes beyond the “whole of government” approach discussed in the West, is reflected in practice in the increasing centralisation of decision-making (and its physical manifestation in the establishment of the National Centre for Direction of Defence); the control of media and suppression of dissent; rhetorical and practical preparations to mobilise the government, economy, military and society for war; and the increasing militarisation of Russian society.²⁸

Iraq, Libya and Syria and the Synthesis of the RMA and Colour Revolutions/Controlled Chaos

Russian perceptions of the revolution in military affairs and of colour revolutions have converged on the basis of events in Libya and Syria, which were viewed as combining high-tech standoff approaches with covert means and political agitation. General Zarudnitskii, then Chief of the Main Operational Directorate of the General Staff, has said that colour revolutions, particularly as conducted in Libya and Syria, represent “camouflaged aggression using new technology for destruction of undesirable states and their banishment from the political arena.”²⁹ Chief of the General Staff Gerasimov has said that the colour revolutions in northern Africa and the Middle East demonstrate that even “a successful state can in a matter of months or even days become an arena of brutal armed conflict, a casualty of international intervention, fall into the abyss of chaos, humanitarian catastrophe and civil war.”³⁰

28 The successful formulation of an overarching strategy, apparent political-military elite consensus on the strategy and its effective communication by the leadership as an important underlying element of all of this is noted in Ven Bruusgaard, *Crimea and Russia's Strategic Overhaul*, pp.86-87.

29 Zarudnitskii's remarks during the 2014 Moscow International Security Conference, May 23, 2014, *Ministerstvo Oborony Rossiskoi Federatsii: Podrobnnee*, http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=11929774@egNews&c_print=true. See also Vorobyov and Kiselev, p.53 on and their assertion that “...Libya became the test range for conduct of the West's first real combat operation of the world information-network war against an undesirable regime.”

30 V. Gerasimov, “Tsennost' Nauki v Predvidenii,” *Voenna-Promyshlennyi Kur'er*, February 27, 2013, <http://VPK-news.ru/issues/14626> This report of General Gerasimov's presentation to the Russian Academy of Military Science in January 2013 (subsequently referred to by many experts as the “Gerasimov Doctrine”) previewed several elements of Russia's operations against Ukraine and described (in greater detail than the military doctrine itself) thinking reflected in the revision of the Russian Military Doctrine published in

General Gerasimov sees the Libya/Arab Spring model as possibly “the typical war of the 21st century” in which the accent is placed on non-military means to achieve political and strategic objectives. In view of the combination of political-strategic and technological developments, the Russian CHOD has noted a fundamental change in the character of armed conflict to achieve political aims in which political, diplomatic, economic and other non-military means are employed in unison with military forces with the ratio of non-military to military means as high as 4-to-1. (See Figure 8.1.) General Gerasimov envisions new forms and means of armed combat (combining the lessons of the RMA and the colour revolutions) with the aim of achieving political and strategic objectives under the cover of ambiguity. These include:

- the beginning of military actions by groups of forces during peacetime;
- warfare by high-manoeuvre non-contact operations by joint groups of forces;
- degradation of military-economic potential through quick destruction of critically important military and civilian infrastructure objectives;
- mass employment of precision weapons, special forces, robotics and weapons based on new physical principles, such as lasers and magnetic rail guns, and participation by paramilitary units;
- simultaneous action on enemy forces at all depths of the area of operations;
- armed conflict on all physical and informational space;
- employment of asymmetric and non-linear means; and
- direction of forces and means in a unified information space.³¹

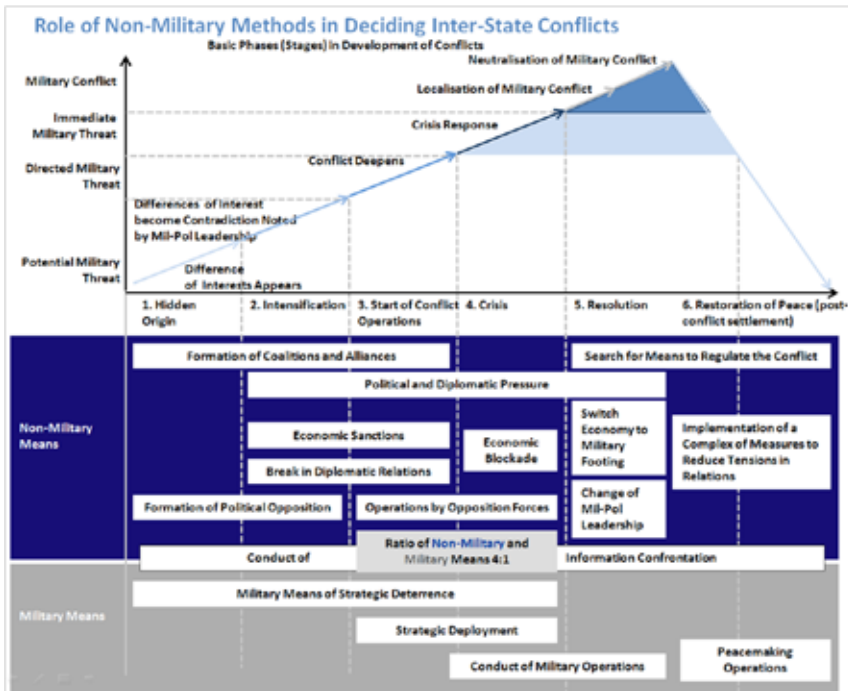


FIGURE 8.1. Illustration on Crisis/conflict phases accompanying General Gerasimov's remarks to the Russian Academy of Military Science.³²

Gerasimov's analysis suggests a Russian perception that, while the notion of combining all elements of power to achieve strategic objectives is nothing new (as concluded by Russian General Staff analysts (above)), a qualitatively new level of effectiveness is enabled through application of conceptually sophisticated modalities that increase the weight of political (non-military) elements by comparison with military, with effects in both dimensions magnified exponentially by new technologies. (See Figure 8.2.)³³

³² Translated by the author from V. Gerasimov. Source: "Tsenost' Nauki v Predvidenii," *Voenna-Promyshlennyi Kur'er*, February 27, 2013, <http://VPK-news.ru/issues/14626>.

³³ *Ibid.*



FIGURE 8.2. *Illustration on Characteristics of modern conflict accompanying General Gerasimov's remarks to the Russian Academy of Military Science.*³⁴

General Staff analysts subsequently elaborated a range of features of military actions, which appear to relate mostly to non-linear/hybrid means and are highly congruent with Russian approaches used in Ukraine, including:

- hidden, indirect character of the majority of conducted activities;
- decisive role of activities in the information space (namely the information campaign will have a leading significance, and in its

³⁴ Translated by the author from V. Gerasimov. Source: "Tsennost' Nauki v Predvidenii," *Voenna-Promyshlennyyi Kur'er*, 27 February 2013, <http://VPK-news.ru/issues/14626>.

- interest it is necessary to plan all other activities);
- *maskirovka* of the actual aims of the conducted activities (officially declared aims intended to hide actual aims);
 - increased role for inter-agency cooperation;
 - direction of actions of participants by a unified organ of direction, which should include representatives of government structures.³⁵

Application in Ukraine

Russia employed a tailored package of these elements in its military response to the collapse of the Yanukovych government in February 2014.³⁶ This response represented the end of Russia's prolonged campaign to re-orient Ukraine eastward through non-military means (diplomatic/political-informational-economic) without use of force. The appearance of the "little green men" in Crimea and simultaneous deployment of substantial Russian combat forces on Ukraine's eastern borders was the beginning of a significant and rapid escalation to (undeclared) armed combat against the new government in Kiev and perceived efforts by "the West" to pull Ukraine from Russia's sphere of influence. This undeclared armed combat was conducted in parallel with continued non-military measures.

The fact of Yanukovych's flight as the trigger for escalation (already apparent but now confirmed by Putin's recent interview revelations) is significant.³⁷ It provides the starting point for transition and escalation from the years-long non-military phase of Russia's hybrid campaign against Ukraine through a brief period of quasi-covert and non-attributable military action and, subsequently, to open (yet still undeclared) military action.

It took four days from the transition starting point (22-26 February 2014) for Russia to decide a course of action and start to mobilise substantial conventional combat forces. This mobilisation took place under the guise

³⁵ Andrianov and Loiko, *Voprosy Primeneniia*, p.69.

³⁶ BBC News Europe, "Putin Reveals Secrets of Russia's Crimea Takeover Plot," March 9, 2015, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-eruope-3179622>.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

of snap exercises in the Western and Central Military Districts.³⁸ One day after the start of mobilisation and with conventional military forces beginning to concentrate on Ukraine's eastern borders, the "little green men" began to appear in Crimea. Twenty four hours later, on 28 February, the green men had control of major government and military objectives in Crimea. This tactical-level military action enabled the strategic political operation of the rump sessions of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea to organise the subsequent referendum on becoming a Russian territory.

During the same period, conventional military forces continued to concentrate on the borders, likely with the intention to respond to any Ukrainian military actions against the Russian forces in Ukraine and to deter any potential reaction from outside Ukraine. This concentration of forces also subsequently provided the platform for the launching of the proxy war and separatist movement in eastern Ukraine and continues to menace Ukraine's border.³⁹ In addition to deploying substantial conventional combat forces in the Ukraine crisis, Russia appears to be leveraging its nuclear capability in order to deter outside military involvement.⁴⁰ President Putin highlighted Russia's nuclear capability in the context of the Ukraine crisis in August 2014 by saying that Russia's "partners" "...should understand that it is better not to mess with us...I want to remind that Russia is one of the strongest nuclear powers."⁴¹ He subsequently said that Russia had been prepared to take its nuclear forces to a state of alert over Crimea if

38 ITAR-TASS, "Putin Poruchil Minoborony Provesti Vnezapnuui Proverki Sil Zapadnovo I Tsentral'no Voennikh Okrugov," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 26, 2014, <http://www.ng.ru/news/458940.html>.

39 The size of the force on Ukraine's border has fluctuated but remained substantial with an estimated 50,000 in place in March 2015 (and a reinforced Russian military presence in Crimea estimated at 29,000 and estimated 12,000 Russian soldiers supporting separatists in eastern Ukraine). Reuters, "Some 12,000 Russian Soldiers in Ukraine Supporting Rebels: U.S. Commander," March 3, 2015, <http://article/2015/03/03/us-ukraine-soldiers-idUSKBNOLZ2FV20150303>.

40 A good précis of regional and global activity by Russian dual-capable aircraft in the context of the Ukraine crisis and the general downturn in relations with Russia can be found in Alexandre Sheldon-Duplaix, "Qui Menace Qui? Les Raisons d'une "Nouvelle Guerre Froide"," *Stratégie, Défense & Sécurité Internationale* No. 112, March 2015, pp.54-61.

41 Remarks by President Putin at the All-Russian Youth Forum, August 29, 2014, <http://news.kremlin.ru/news/46507>.

necessary.⁴² This confirmed impressions that had already formed among some observers that Russia was using its nuclear forces to send deterrent messages in relation to the crisis.⁴³ Even before Putin explicitly placed the Ukraine crisis in a nuclear context, Foreign Minister Lavrov had implied that Russia's nuclear deterrent umbrella now extends over Crimea as part of Russian territory.⁴⁴ Putin and Lavrov have both said that Russia may deploy nuclear-capable systems and nuclear weapons in Crimea.⁴⁵ Explicit nuclear-related messaging around the Ukraine crisis and potential reactions by the West to related regional instability have continued.⁴⁶

After Russian forces seized key installations in Crimea on 28 February, it took an additional sixteen days to organise and conduct the referendum on unification with Russia. Putin signed the law annexing Crimea twelve days later. In total, it took 28 days from the start of escalation to a military phase of the operation against Ukraine until the finish with the formalisation of new facts on the ground – occupied and illegally annexed Crimea and a nascent proxy war in eastern Ukraine.

The implication of the Russian decision to respond to Yanukovich's departure with military force is that Moscow's perception of failure of a non-military non-linear/hybrid campaign can, in combination with a sufficient level of strategic interest and perceived opportunity, trigger a rapid escalation from the non-military to a military phase. Events around the Ukraine crisis also suggest that Russia's approach to conflict includes preparedness

42 Jim Heintz, "Putin: Russia Prepared Raising Nuclear Readiness Over Crimea," *AP News*, March 15, 2015, <http://apnews.myway.com/article/20150315/eu-russia-crimea-2859701388.html>.

43 Thomas C. Moore, "The Role of Nuclear Weapons During the Crisis in Ukraine," *The Lugar Center*, July 2, 2014, www://the.lugarcenter.org/newsroom-tlcexperts-8html and Adrian Croft, "Insight – Russia's Nuclear Strategy Raises Concerns in NATO," *Reuters*, February 4, 2015, <http://uk.reuters.com/article:2015/02/04/uk-ukraine-crisis-russia-nuclear-insight-idUKKBNOL825A20150204>.

44 Bai Yang, Russia to "adequately respond" to aggression against Crimea: FM, Xinhua, July 7, 2014, <http://english.cntv.cn/2014/07/09/ARTI1404913903653838.shtml>.

45 Lavrov quoted in Sergei L. Loiko, "Russia says it has a right to put nuclear weapons in Crimea," *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 2014, <http://www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-russia-nuclear-crimea-20141215-story.html> and Bill Gertz, "Russia Deploying Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Crimea," *Washington Free Beacon*, October 10, 2014, <http://freebeacon.com/national-security/russia-deploying-tactical-nuclear-arms-in-crimea/>.

46 Ben Hoyle and Michael Evans, "Putin Threat of Nuclear Showdown Over Baltics," *The Times*, April 2, 2015, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/europe/article4399757.ece>.

to brandish its nuclear capability to shield aggressive conventional and unconventional military actions and to secure territorial gains acquired by aggression.

Implications

In light of all this, it is clear that Russia's military leadership conceptualises the conflict spectrum as encompassing operations using non-military means (political, diplomatic, economic and informational) in conjunction with military means (kinetic, non-kinetic, conventional forces, special operations forces, paramilitary forces, non-nuclear (conventional long-range precision-guided munitions) and nuclear means).

These means and methods (which adapt lessons learned from prior military experience, colour revolutions, past Soviet and Russian experience with partisan warfare and armed resistance movements, Cold War Special Forces operations and espionage, Soviet-era political and economic subversion, etc) can be applied sequentially or simultaneously and in any combination without clear delineation between states of peace, conflict and war. The relatively narrow band of means and methods labelled as "hybrid" in the early months of the Ukraine crisis is not the initial but a later stage of undeclared conflict and, as demonstrated in Ukraine, one that can escalate rapidly to involve overt use of conventional and unconventional forces under the cover of a nuclear deterrent umbrella. The non-military non-linear hybrid segment is embedded within Russia's more broadly conceived and fully integrated conflict spectrum and relies on the leveraging or actual employment of conventional, unconventional and nuclear forces. This concept is reflected in the full-spectrum capabilities that the Russian Armed Forces are building and the related strategies for their employment to achieve objectives.

This assessment offers one potential means to "de-mystify" the hybrid warfare threat that is part of the challenge facing NATO on its eastern flank. Russia's approach to conflict undeniably includes political, diplomatic,

economic, non-linear and hybrid means below the level of armed conflict which can be employed in a gradual campaign, exploiting ambiguity to achieve strategic objectives without military violence. However, the political, diplomatic and economic conflict tools do not operate in a vacuum and close examination shows that the credibility and effectiveness of the non-military phase of a non-linear or hybrid campaign rests to a large extent on credible military power and the potential use of military force.

Of equal significance, failure of the non-military phase of a non-linear or hybrid warfare campaign (as in Ukraine) can, under some circumstances, lead unexpectedly to rapid escalation into a military phase including unconventional, conventional and nuclear forces. It is significant that the most ambiguous and uncertain phase of Russia's military operations against Ukraine marked the end of the purely non-military campaign and the beginning of a rapid transition to undeclared armed conflict employing the full spectrum military forces, with conventional military forces and nuclear forces functioning as a coercive means of deterrence.

This observation does several things. First, it helps to delineate the segments of the hybrid problem so that nations and relevant international organisations can identify where the weight of effort may lie at particular phases in such a scenario. Second, it highlights that, at its root, Russia's approach to conflict, while undeniably including non-linear or "hybrid" elements, presents a recognisable defence and deterrence challenge consisting of a mix of unconventional, conventional and nuclear military forces. Third, in light of these preceding considerations, it enables a focus on the importance of identifying the potential triggers for escalation, the related need to recognise the critically important transition period from political and asymmetric conflict to undeclared armed conflict and the extremely short time available to react within the brief transition period. These three factors - trigger, transition, and time - merit further study. Related issues for consideration in connection with this include:

Instability and Unpredictability

In the context of Russia's disruption of the European security order, the resulting volatile conflict in Ukraine, and Moscow's perception that it is encircled and politically already in conflict with the West, NATO faces an unstable and unpredictable security environment that could pose a direct challenge on short notice. General Gerasimov has noted that "the time for reaction to the transition from political-diplomatic means to the employment of military forces has been maximally reduced" and Russia's re-posturing of governmental and military structures reflects this assessment.⁴⁷ Russia's ability to coordinate military and other action according to its broad-spectrum approach to conflict is enhanced by the combination of its autocratic system, increasingly centralised decision-making, and improved government and military command and control. As demonstrated in its Ukraine operations and a series of large-scale snap exercises, Russia can initiate and carry out large-scale military operations within short timelines, or well-coordinated, small-scale operations at its discretion. President Putin has, over the last two years, centralised and restructured decision-making, tightened coordination among defence-related government bodies, and streamlined command and control in a way reminiscent of the Soviet World War 2-era STAVKA.⁴⁸ In some respects, he has placed the Russian state, government and populace at or near a war footing. General Gerasimov implied as much when he said that establishment of the National Centre for Direction of Defence makes the notion of a "combat alert" order meaningless as the NCDD maintains on a constant basis many of the steps toward readiness that, in the past, would have been necessary to take after an alert order.⁴⁹

47 V. Gerasimov, "General'nyi Shtab I Oborona Strany," *Voenna-Promyshlennyyi Kur'er*, February 5, 2014, <http://vpk-news.ru/print/articles/18998>.

48 The STAVKA was the highest organ for strategic direction of Soviet Armed Forces during World War 2. See *Voenniy Entsikopedicheskiy Slovar*; Voennoye Izdatel'stvo, Moscow, 1986, p.703; S. M. Shtemenko, *General'niy Shtab v Godiy Voiniy*, Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, Moscow, 1968, p.29 and pp.34-35 and J. Erickson, *The Soviet High Command: A Military-Political History, 1918-1941*, Frank Cass, London, 2001, pp.602-603.

49 Nachal'nik Rossiskovo Genshtaba Raskazal Zhurnalistam o Zadachakh I Roli Natsional'novo Tsentra Po Upravleniyu Oboroniy RF, November 1, 2014, http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=11998309@egNews.

Ambiguity and the Blurring of the Line Between Peace, Conflict and War

General Gerasimov has described a blurring of the line between peace and war and the potential for a rapid outbreak of armed conflict. Based on what has been called the “Gerasimov Doctrine,” with its broad-spectrum approach to (often undeclared) conflict and war, the Russian leadership may already assess that Russia is in conflict with the West, and view itself as conducting operations at a stage something short of openly declared war. General Gerasimov himself has noted in particular the blurring of the line between states of war and peace.⁵⁰ From this perspective, the various diplomatic, economic, military and subversive measures that have been employed by Russia in the Baltic Region and increasingly in the Balkans, Black Sea and Mediterranean regions, could be interpreted as elements of a protracted campaign already underway.⁵¹

This would fit Russia’s priority aim - to achieve its strategic goals through actions, as the United Kingdom’s House of Commons Defence Committee has said, “designed to slip below NATO’s threshold for reaction.”⁵² Moscow may calculate that this could be achieved through its broad-spectrum approach, placing emphasis on non-military means and leveraging the threat of force or actually employing carefully calibrated and timed military means. In this light, Russia’s desired course in a potential conflict would be, as Thomas Schelling suggested, “competition in risk-taking, a military-diplomatic manoeuvre with or without military engagement but with the

50 V. Gerasimov, *Tsennost’ Nauki v Predvidenii*.

51 On this emerging view, see for example, “NATO Allies Brace for Russia’s “Hybrid Warfare,” *Agence France-Presse*, March 18, 2015, <http://defensenews.com/story/defense/international/europe/2015/03/18/nato-allies-brace-for-russias-hybrid-warfare/24979545> in which Lithuanian President Grybauskaitė is quoted as saying, “The first stage of confrontation is taking place – I mean informational war, propaganda and cyber attacks. So we are already under attack.” British Defence Secretary Fallon notes ongoing pressure on the Baltics and testing of NATO by Russia in Reuters, “British Defense Minister Says Russia’s Putin Poses “Danger” to Baltic States,” *The Moscow Times*, February 19, 2015, <http://themoscowtimes.com/article.php?id=516203> and on some key elements in the developing pattern of hybrid aggression in the Baltic region, Edward Lucas, “Putin Targets the Baltics to Discredit NATO,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 22, 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/new/articles/SB2060829732521918478450458015979007686450>.

52 House of Commons Defence Committee, *Towards the Next Defence and Security Review: Part Two – NATO*, 31 July 2014, p.17.

outcome determined more by the manipulation of risk than by an actual contest of force.”⁵³ However, as in the Ukraine crisis, Russia’s steadily improving full-spectrum conventional and nuclear capabilities could be poised to exercise other options as necessary, if the associated political and military risk is assessed as acceptable or manageable. It is this element of brinkmanship which makes the non-military elements of a hybrid campaign dependent on the threat of military violence.⁵⁴ As one expert assessment observed:

It might be entirely possible that the Putin regime evaluates costs and benefit in a way different from what the West assumes. If so, a violent Russian advance towards NATO territory could no longer be excluded for the sole reason that the costs would exceed the expected gain for Russia.⁵⁵

Strategic Ambiguity and Collective Defence

The strategic ambiguity created by the breadth of the Russian approach and the contradictory or unclear messages deliberately sent by Russia both within and among the various “fronts” of conflict can mask intentions, confuse adversaries, slow down their decision making and impede effective responses. Russia’s employment of non-linear and asymmetric means in conflict can compound strategic ambiguity by distorting operational timelines, making it difficult to discern patterns of aggression.

From this perspective, the various means applied against Ukraine by Russia in recent years - diplomatic, economic, and energy pressures; political subversion; cultivation of ethnic divisions - can be recognised post-facto as elements of a long-term campaign toward Moscow’s objective of reorienting Ukraine eastward with non-military means. The 48-hour

⁵³ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008, p.166.

⁵⁴ Thomas Frear, Lukasz Kulesa, and Ian Kearns, “Dangerous Brinkmanship: Close Military Encounters Between Russia and the West in 2014,” *European Leadership Network*, November 2014.

⁵⁵ Karl Heinz-Kamp, “Ten Strategic Consequences of the Ukrainian Crisis,” *European Security and Defence*, September 15, 2014.

long creeping encroachment of Russian military and security forces in the Crimean operation and rapid escalation of military operations in Ukraine's east were a crisis-induced action taken in a later crisis response phase of Russia's multi-dimensional campaign against Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. The key point is that the appearance of "little green men" or a similar phenomenon is not an early indicator but could mark the end of a non-military phase and beginning of rapid escalation. If the current state of play is evaluated through the "Gerasimov Doctrine" lense, the conclusion could be drawn that a state of non-military conflict already exists – providing a clearer view of emerging patterns and potential indicators of escalation.

Regional Considerations

Russia also integrates regional elements into its comprehensive approach to conflict. While pursuing its Euro-Atlantic region-specific goals, Russia will also opportunistically exploit instability or tensions in other regions to distract attention, strain solidarity and sap resources. Russia's military intervention in the Syrian crisis, in which Russia again achieved strategic effect with limited forces, is an example. This is another characteristic that sets Russia's comprehensive approach to conflict apart from other disparate and discrete hybrid challenges by non-state actors.

Conclusion

The pattern that has emerged over the last several years of Russian aggression on its borders requires that NATO take steps to ensure its own defence. The Wales Summit decisions to implement the Readiness Action Plan and the Defence Investment Pledge are vital steps in that direction. A focus on Moscow's clear doctrinal statements in the context of its overall pattern of behaviour will help the Alliance to focus those efforts effectively and to adapt further as necessary. A closer examination of the lessons of the transition of Russian operations in Ukraine from political to armed

conflict would be particularly useful in adapting NATO's deterrence and defence posture to meet new challenges. This could all be enhanced with studies of the rich archival and historical record of Russian and Soviet military practice as an instrument in achieving its security and foreign policy objectives. Without a full appreciation of the conceptual elements of the Russian approach to conflict, Allies could "be in danger of losing our edge, if not the competition, because we have been outflanked in the area of strategic and operational thinking."⁵⁶

In practical terms, it is important to recognise that, contrary to NATO's aspirations toward a constructive relationship, Russia almost certainly views itself as being in, and conducting, conflict with "the West" at a level short of openly declared war. Among the many serious implications of this state-of-play are: the requirement to build comprehensive situational awareness from the tactical to the decision-making level; to adapt and enhance NATO indications and warning capabilities; to re-focus and enhance intelligence efforts; to adapt practices and procedures to cope with fast-developing situations; and to establish close practical cooperation with the EU and other relevant organisations that may play complementary roles in responding to hybrid threats.

⁵⁶ John G. Hines and George F. Kraus, "Soviet Strategies for Military Competition," *Parameters* Vol. 16 (Autumn 1986), p.28.

CASE STUDIES

9

Hybrid Warfare: Iranian and Russian Versions of “Little Green Men” and Contemporary Conflict

Hall Gardner

Introduction

Iranian and Russian versions of “hybrid” or “non-linear” warfare in Iraq and eastern Ukraine have had much in common. After the U.S.-led military intervention in Iraq in 2003, Iran hoped to check the U.S. military presence in Iraq as a whole by gaining influence in the predominantly Shi’a regions of the country, in large part through irregular warfare. Somewhat similarly, Moscow’s strategy and tactics inside eastern Ukraine since 2014 appear designed to counter NATO and European Union influence in Ukraine as a whole—in large part through techniques of “non-linear” or “hybrid” warfare aimed against Ukrainian forces backed by Kiev. Both Iranian and Russian strategies can be characterized as acts of *preclusive imperialism intended to establish new spheres of influence and security*.

In comparing Iranian and Russian strategy and military actions, Russia is, of course, much more advanced in military-technological capabilities. At the same time, both states have begun to rely on the use of special forces, irregular militias and “little green men” in the context of “non-linear” or “hybrid” warfare—in which the July 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah (backed by Iran) is generally considered the textbook example.

The concern raised in this analysis is that the tactics of anti-state militias, as developed in large part by Iran, are increasingly being adopted by Russia as well. In addition to engaging in a number of provocative and

illicit activities outside eastern Ukraine, Moscow has threatened the use of tactical nuclear weaponry to assert its interests. This essay accordingly raises the question as to whether the covert and illicit nature of “non-linear” or “hybrid” warfare—as such warfare increasingly becomes more integrated into the general strategy and tactics of both major and regional powers—could actually inhibit the process of diplomatic compromise and make the possibilities of war between major powers more likely.

Concepts of Hybrid Warfare

The term “hybrid warfare” has begun to be adopted by many analysts, even if the construct does not appear to possess a precise meaning. The lack of a clear definition is largely due to the fact that the term represents an attempt to describe multiple dimensions of conflict for differing purposes, not only involving a plurality of possible adversaries (differing anti-state partisans, less powerful peripheral states, individuals, if not corporations, regional powers, and major powers), but also using a vast array of tactics (conventional, non-conventional and non-military). Tactics can include differing kinds of sanctions, social and political actions, as well as use of weapons with differing degrees of lethality that are often employed in innovative ways.¹ The use of military force or other actions can then be rationalized by propaganda distributed by the mass media and the Internet. Such propaganda can be formulated in popular terms or even incorporate sophisticated analytical and legal justifications, if deemed necessary, to promulgate the cause.

Lack of clarity in the concept is also due to hybrid warfare’s apparently chaotic and uncontrolled nature. Yet this form of combat nonetheless requires some degree of political-military co-ordination if such “warfare”—which can break out unexpectedly during ostensibly “peaceful” circumstances and in situations in which actors could suddenly shift alliances—is to “succeed” in obtaining its goals.

1 Frank G. Hoffman, “Hybrid Warfare and Challenges,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 52, 1st quarter 2009.

In the past, states engaged in “compound warfare” in which irregular forces and privateers generally fought separately from the conventional armies of their time. Due to their separate theatres of action, state leaders could plausibly deny that they were backing those irregular forces. But the innovation in hybrid warfare is that regular and irregular forces can fight simultaneously, with the active, manipulated, or forced involvement of the population. At the same time, both military and non-military measures, such as “regime change” and “democracy engineering,” combined with peacekeeping/peacemaking, can be used to achieve social and political goals.

In this regard, hybrid warfare often uses both legal and illicit tactics and both military and non-military actions, that directly impact and involve populations. Yet the adoption of illicit and non-conventional methods by legitimate state leaderships makes it generally more difficult for those leaderships to sustain plausible deniability. This raises deeper suspicions of intent, while concurrently undermining trust and the possibility of negotiated settlements.

Novel Techniques and Goals

Even if decrypting codes has historically represented a significant dimension of warfare, cyber-sabotage does appear to be a novel aspect of hybrid warfare that additionally generates greater distrust among rivals—as do “false flag” warfare, suicide missions, insider attacks, hijacking of commercial airliners as weapons of war, and the use of humanitarian assistance to smuggle supplies, arms and troops, and so on. Cyber militants can now steal valuable information from both the private and public sectors and disrupt communications or dislocate/deactivate vital infrastructure.²

As a form of cyber-sabotage, the Stuxnet malware was purportedly used by the United States and Israel against embargoed Siemens computer

2 Hall Gardner, “War and the New Media Paradox: a critique of Marshall McLuhan” in *Cyber-Conflict and Global Politics*, ed. Athina Karatzogianni, Routledge, 2008.

systems at Iran's Natanz nuclear facility, where Iran was suspected of enriching uranium for military purposes. The Stuxnet malware may have also been used against a Russian nuclear power plant. Acts of Russian cyber-sabotage accompanied both the August 2008 Georgia-Russia war and the 2014-15 Ukrainian conflict.

The key issue raised by the Stuxnet attacks is not so much that the computer virus could spread out of control, but that state and anti-state actors that possess the appropriate know-how can develop such malware, leading it to proliferate much more easily than nuclear weaponry— and with potentially devastating results.³ The fact that both Russian and Iranian officials denounced the use of the Stuxnet malware as “an act of war” indicates the real possibility that such attacks could spark wider conflicts. At the same time, the clandestine nature of cyber-sabotage raises uncertainties as to who is the attacker, and thus against whom to retaliate.⁴

New technologies have not only opened the door for ways to make weapons more accurate, as is the case for dual-use cruise missiles with ambivalent nuclear/conventional capabilities, but they can also make the “art” of war less expensive. Miniature drones can now be used as weapons both for spying and for warfare. Hezbollah purportedly used drones for spying in the July 2006 war and in 2012 against Israel. In May 2015, Ukrainian forces shot down advanced drones (purportedly “made in Russia”) over eastern Ukraine.⁵ This makes drones and other innovative technologies, such as the 3-D printing of guns, ideal for hybrid warfare.

3 “At this time, roughly 30 nations employ offensive cyber programs. [...] The] future is burdened by an irony: Stuxnet started as nuclear counter-proliferation and ended up to open the door to proliferation that is much more difficult to control: The proliferation of cyber weapon technology.” Ralph Langner, “To Kill a Centrifuge” (Arlington, Hamburg, Munich: The Langner Group, November 2013) at <http://www.langner.com/en/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/To-kill-a-centrifuge.pdf>.

4 It was not certain, for example, whether the Russian government was directly involved in the 2007 Estonian-Russian “cyber-riot” which involved Russophone populations. Gadi Evron, “Authoritatively, Who Was behind the Estonian Attacks?” *Dark Reading*, <http://www.darkreading.com/risk/authoritatively-who-was-behind-the-estonian-attacks/d/d-id/1130584>.

5 “Hezbollah admits launching drone over Israel,” *BBC*, October 11, 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-19914441>; “Ukrainian forces says two drones shot down over war zone are Russian,” *The Guardian*, May 21, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/21/ukraine-drones-shot-down-russian>.

The strategic goals of hybrid warfare by anti-state insurgents, such as Hezbollah against Israel in Lebanon, and other pro-Iranian militias in Iraq since 2003, have been to jack up the overall “costs” of the Israeli and American military interventions in terms of manpower, material and domestic political support, so that the adversary will ultimately give up the “occupation.” Similarly, in case of “autonomist” movements in eastern Ukraine, the purpose of such warfare is likewise to prevent Kiev from asserting centralized control over the region.

In the case of Iran and Russia, as state actors, the immediate purpose of hybrid warfare may be to harass, disorient and threaten the U.S. and NATO respectively just to the point of direct conflict, but then draw back in a new form of “brinksmanship.” The goal is to take advantage of gaps in the rivals’ defenses, in social, political, economic and military terms where possible, by using differing kinds of attacks or threats in succession, or even simultaneously. The ultimate purpose is to weaken U.S. and/or NATO resolve and attempt to undermine American global hegemony.

Yet what appears to make hybrid warfare more dangerous than traditional or more “overt” forms of warfare is that its covert and illicit actions often seek to provoke and purposely set off other extraneous conflicts. The latter conflicts could become virtually unmanageable due to the tendency of such warfare to undermine cooperative relationships within and between societies, resulting in the collapse of mutual trust. Hybrid warfare—as a new form of brinksmanship—accordingly risks direct conflict between major powers, if geostrategic and political-economic compromises cannot soon be obtained between rival socio-political groups and states and if trust cannot be restored.

Russian Perspectives

While the term “hybrid warfare” has generally entered into U.S. and European military analysis, Russian elites have tended to use the term

“non-linear” war.⁶ Russian concepts have largely developed in response to U.S.-led military interventions in Kosovo/Serbia (1999), Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011). Each of these interventions involved a mix of high-tech warfare and use of airpower and pinpoint cruise missile strikes, not to overlook the key role of special forces in the initial attacks, generally followed by the deployment of conventional forces. The next step after the defeat of the above regimes has been to alter their leadership and form of government. This stage, which often involves the implementation of destabilizing social and political reforms, has been backed by the deployments of UN, coalition, or NATO peacekeepers/peacemakers—in an attempt to stabilize and legitimize the new regime.

In January 2013, Russian Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov outlined Russian concepts of “non-linear” warfare, which involve regular and irregular forces and military and non-military measures, plus the manipulation of populations, in order to achieve political success:

The emphasis in methods of struggle is shifting toward widespread use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military measures, implemented through the involvement of the population. All this is supplemented by covert military means, including implementation of measures of informational struggle, and the actions of special forces. Overt use of force, often under the guise of peacekeeping and crisis management, occurs only at a certain stage, primarily to achieve definitive success in the conflict.⁷

The Russian version of non-linear warfare has also represented an effort to catch up, from a position of relative inferiority, to American military standards, which are now characterized by an emphasis on “real time” communications, night vision, speed, accuracy and stealth. Yet from the

6 Vladislav Surkov, cited in Peter Pomerantsev, “How Putin is Reinventing Warfare,” *Foreign Policy*, May 5, 2014.

7 Cited in Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, Washington, DC, Brookings, 2013, p.337. See also “The ‘Gerasimov Doctrine’ and Russian Non-Linear War,” *In Moscow’s Shadows*, February 27, 2013, <https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/>.

Russian perspective, U.S. political-military innovations also include the perceived socio-political-economic challenges posed by the NATO and EU enlargements, even if the latter were not coordinated. In addition to “regime change” by force in Iraq, these methods include non-military techniques of “democracy engineering.” Moscow has accordingly interpreted the democratic “colour revolutions” in Serbia/Kosovo, Ukraine, and Georgia, as well as Libya, Tunisia, Egypt and Syria during the Arab Spring⁸ as representing a new form of socio-political warfare that impacts Russian (if not Iranian) security, military and political-economic interests.⁹

In applying its own concept of “non-linear” warfare, Moscow has been looking for whatever cracks in defenses, and whatever political-economic disputes and social divisions, it can promote between NATO and EU members. Unlike the Cold War, Moscow does not recognize any clear dividing lines between Russia and European countries in the aftermath of the Warsaw Pact’s collapse and NATO’s “open enlargement” into former Soviet spheres of influence and security. The more traditional concept of an alliance as a tightly bound defense organization is not necessarily relevant: Moscow believes that NATO and EU members (and other states) can be potentially divided by promises of trade and benefits (such as energy and trade deals, financial subsidies, if not bribery) in addition to differing political-military pressures and threats. And much as Iran had tried to circumvent UN sanctions, Moscow has similarly looked to China, India, and NATO member Turkey, among other states, which have not fully supported U.S. and European sanctions against Russia after the latter’s annexation of Crimea, for ways to circumvent sanctions.

Contrary to neo-liberal thinking, which argues that the processes of globalization will lead to mutual trade benefits and less conflict, Russian concepts of non-linear warfare argue that global interconnectedness can be manipulated by states (and anti-state actors) to forcibly assert their own interests. This is because individual states (and even major powers) are

8 Gene Sharp’s non-violent manifesto, “From Dictatorship to Democracy,” Albert Einstein Inst, 2010, was popular during the Arab Spring: <http://www.aeinstein.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/FDTD.pdf>.

9 Hall Gardner, *NATO Expansion and U.S. Strategy in Asia*, New York, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013.

generally reluctant or incapable of using counterforce. In the contemporary Russian view, this appears true due to the fact that state-backed multinational corporations want to sustain positive trade, investment and financial relations with all countries.¹⁰

The fear that NATO and EU enlargement will isolate Russia in eastern Europe has led Moscow to press its interests through preclusive military and non-military actions, plus legalistic propaganda—even if the expansion of U.S., NATO and EU “democratic” influence has largely been uncoordinated. Here, for example, Moscow countered U.S. legal rationalizations for recognizing Kosovo’s independence from Serbia with its own legal rationalizations for recognizing South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence from Georgia after the 2008 Georgia-Russia war. Moscow had also provided legal justification for its annexation of Crimea (as did the Bush administration for the U.S.-led military intervention in Iraq in 2003).

In addition to providing military support for Syria and Iran, Moscow has been pressing for a Eurasian alliance with China and other Central Asian states—given joint Chinese-Russian military maneuvers since 2005, plus unprecedented joint naval maneuvers in May 2015 in the Mediterranean.¹¹ These steps have represented a means to obtain strategic leverage vis-a-vis both NATO and the U.S. alliance with Japan. All of the above represent differing geostrategic, political-economic, military-technological, socio-cultural-ideological, media and propagandistic dimensions of the Russian version of “non-linear” warfare.

Iranian “Green Men” in Iraq

In the aftermath of the U.S.-led military intervention in Iraq and overthrow of the Ba’athist regime in May 2003, Iran began to infiltrate government agents into the thousands of Iraqi refugees who were returning

10 Peter Pomerantsev, “How Putin is Reinventing Warfare,” *Foreign Policy*, May 5, 2014.

11 Hall Gardner, *NATO Expansion and U.S. Strategy in Asia*, New York, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013. Franz-Stefan Gady, “China and Russia Conclude Naval Drill in Mediterranean,” *The Diplomat*, May 22, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/05/china-and-russia-conclude-naval-drill-in-mediterranean/>.

to Iraq. In this way, it can be argued that Iran blazed the trail for Moscow in revealing how “little green men” could be used as effective political-military tools against their respective neighbors.

At the end of the war with Iraq in 2003, Tehran provided support for the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and its Badr Brigades as they returned to the country. The Badr Brigades were then reported to have secretly stored arms in Shi’a neighborhoods of Baghdad and other Shi’a cities in the south of Iraq.¹² Tehran likewise supported Muqtala al-Sadar’s militia, *Jaish al-Mahdi*, which engaged in the battle of Najaf in August 2004 against the coalition forces of the Allied “occupation.”¹³

These pro-Iranian partisan organizations, among others, hoped to pressure the new Shi’a-dominated Iraqi “federal” government into following pro-Iranian policies, but without causing total chaos or revolution. These groups also hoped to force Coalition forces out of Iraq altogether, by means of non-conventional warfare. By 2006-07, more than sixty percent of U.S. forces in Iraq were being killed or wounded by the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).¹⁴ At that time, the Hezbollah Brigades used improvised rocket-assisted mortar (IRAM), also called “flying IEDs,” as well as armor-piercing, explosively formed projectiles (EPF). These groups then videotaped their attacks for propaganda purposes.¹⁵

U.S.-Iraqi-Iranian relations began to even more seriously deteriorate during the rule of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad from 2005-2013. At that

12 Kenneth W. Estes, *U.S. Army Soldier: Baghdad 2003-04*, New York, NY, Osprey Publishing 2007. See also Kenneth M. Pollack, “Prospects for Increased Iranian Influence in Iraq Testimony,” November 15, 2011, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/testimony/2011/11/15-iran-iraq-pollack>.

U.S. “Order Number 2” in May 2003 formally dissolved the Iraqi 400,000 man army under Sunni leadership and helped open the door to Iranian infiltration. Anthony Cordesman and Sam Khazai, “Iraq in Crisis,” *CSIS*, May 2014, http://csis.org/files/publication/140513_Cordesman_IraqInCrisis_Web.pdf.

13 Bill Roggio, “Coalition forces capture Hezbollah Bridges operative in Baghdad,” *Long War Journal*, July 31, 2008, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/07/coalition_forces_cap.php.

14 “More Attacks, Mounting Casualties,” *Washington Post*, September 28, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/graphic/2007/09/28/GR2007092802161.html>; Clay Wilson, “Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) in Iraq: Effects and Countermeasures,” February 10, 2006, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, <http://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/i/improvised-explosive-devices-in-iraq-effects-and-countermeasures.html>.

15 Roggio, op. cit.

time, Badr Brigade members were able to take control over much of the security forces and domestic police.¹⁶ Iran then continued to infiltrate the predominantly pro-Shi'a governance of the Nouri Al-Maliki government from 2006-14, in part (from 2015 on) to counter the rise of the Sons of Iraq and other Sunni Awakening groups, which were seen as supported by the Arab Gulf states. Concurrently, U.S.-Iranian relations continued to deteriorate over Iran's nuclear enrichment program, involving threats of "nuclear high tension."¹⁷

The purpose of Iranian actions was to teach the Bush administration a "lesson" about the costs of "democratic" regime change; to pressure U.S. forces to leave the country; and to dissuade the Bush administration from potentially using Iraq as a base against Iran. Tehran may have also hoped to stifle anti-Iranian militias operating from Iraq, such as *Mujahedin-E-Khalq* (MEK), which were engaged in spying on Iranian nuclear and military sites. By December 2011, U.S. forces ultimately withdrew from Iraq under the 2008 U.S.–Iraq Status of Forces Agreement.

As a means to pressure U.S. and Israeli policy in the region, the Ahmadinejad government also provided clandestine support for Hezbollah, as well as Hamas, among others, in their struggle against Israel and in the effort to publicly expose the undeclared Israeli nuclear weapons capability. Iranian strategy was additionally intended to divide the "P-5 plus 1" Contact Group (the permanent members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany). The "P-5 plus 1" had been formed to persuade Tehran through diplomatic pressures and economic sanctions against developing a potential nuclear weapons enrichment capacity. In response, however, Tehran sought to break "P-5 plus 1" consensus on sanctions (UN Security

16 The Iranians now "go into every government of Iraq, pay money, install their own people, put their own—even establish police forces for them, arms and militias that are there and reinforce their presence in these areas. And they are being protected in doing this by the British and the American forces in the area... Now we are handing the whole country over to Iran without reason." Prince Saud Al-Faisal, "The Fight against Extremism and the Search for Peace," Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.cfr.org/radicalization-and-extremism/fight-against-extremism-search-peace-rush-transcript-federal-news-service-inc/p8908>. See also, Toby C. Jones, in *Iraq, its Neighbors and the United States*, eds. Henri J. Barkley, Scott B. Lasensky, Phobe Marr, Washington, DC, U.S. Institute for Peace, 2011, Chapter 4.

17 Hall Gardner, *Averting Global War*, New York, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010, Chapter 4.

Council Resolution 1737 December 23, 2006) by appealing to Russia and China, which both opposed strong sanctions, while also appealing to other states who hoped to profit from Iranian isolation.¹⁸

Given the uncertain process of diplomacy and apparent inability of UN sanctions to halt Iran's uranium enrichment program, the U.S. and Israel purportedly opted to engage cyber-attacks against the embargoed Siemens computer systems at Iran's Natanz nuclear facility during the Bush and Obama administrations. Yet it remains debatable as to what extent Iran's enrichment program was actually slowed down once the Stuxnet malware was uncovered by Tehran in 2010.¹⁹

Another factor leading to stronger UN sanctions on Iran was Tehran's support for Hezbollah during the latter's July 2006 war with Israel. In a textbook example of anti-state "hybrid warfare," Hezbollah, with a mix of regular and guerrilla forces, largely supported and trained by Iran, was able to stand up against the more traditional Israeli Defense Forces and proved capable of preventing Israel from seizing towns along the Lebanese border. This was accomplished by using hardened tunnels, combat maneuvers within Lebanese villages in civilian areas, effective anti-tank missiles, and at least one ground-to-ship cruise missile attack, while concurrently pummeling both military infrastructure and civilian targets in Israel (so as to terrorize the Israeli population) with thousands of inaccurate missiles.²⁰ Hezbollah also hacked into Israeli military communications and was purported to have flown a drone over Israeli airspace. In addition to Iranian financial support, Hezbollah military capabilities were purportedly financed by arms smuggling, money laundering, and by working with drug cartels.

It was only in 2014-15, after the U.S. force withdrawal from Iraq

18 Kenneth Katzman, "Iran Sanctions," Congressional Research Service, August 4, 2015, <http://www.fas.org/spp/crs/mideast/RS20871.pdf>.

19 David E. Sanger, "Obama Order Sped Up Wave of Cyberattacks Against Iran," *New York Times*, June 1, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/01/world/middleeast/obama-ordered-wave-of-cyberattacks-against-iran.html?_r=3&pagewanted=2&seid=auto&smid=tw-nytimespolitics&pagewanted=all/.

20 Michèle A. Flournoy and Shawn Brimley, "The Defense Inheritance: Challenges and Choices for the Next Pentagon Team," *The Washington Quarterly* 31, Autumn 2008, <http://www.twq.com/08autumn/index.cfm?id=315>. See also Hoffman, op.cit.

in 2011, and after the electoral defeat of President Ahmadinejad, that Washington, in working with the UN Security Council plus Germany, began to make progress in diplomatic talks with the ostensibly reformist Iranian government of Hassan Rouhani. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) nuclear accord with Iran was then signed in July 2015.

The Obama administration has argued that the JCPOA will limit the chances of a regional nuclear arms race, and limit the possibility that Iran will develop a covert weapons grade enrichment program.²¹ Yet the Israeli leadership of Benjamin Netanyahu immediately denounced the accord and continued to threaten a potential military strike against Iranian nuclear infrastructure.²² Washington has nevertheless hoped that the nuclear accord will eventually open the door to better U.S.-Iranian relations and toward a settlement of regional conflicts.

The JCPOA nuclear accord has accordingly been signed at a time in which there has been little progress toward a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, nor a resolution of regional disputes that involve a surrogate war between Iran and Saudi Arabia plus the other Arab Gulf states. In effect, Riyadh has opposed what it sees as Tehran's efforts to transform Iraq into a client state and to achieve regional hegemony by means of augmenting Iranian influence in Lebanon, Gaza, Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, Yemen and elsewhere in the "wider" Middle East.

In this geopolitical context, the Iranian regional presence has been countered by the rise of a number of pan-Sunni movements, including the Muslim Brotherhood, branches of Al-Qaeda, such as the Al-Nusra Front, and now Daesh (also known as the Islamic State). These essentially pan-Sunni organizations all oppose Al-Maliki in Iraq and Al-Assad in Syria, both of whose regimes are perceived to be repressive and pro-Iranian. In developing new techniques of hybrid warfare and, unlike Al Qaeda,

21 Richard Nephew, "How the Iran Deal Prevents a Covert Nuclear Weapons Program," *Arms Control Today* September 2, 2015; Martin Zonas, "Iran Nuclear Deal: There Is No Alternative," <http://www.economonitor.com/blog/2015/04/iran-nuclear-deal-there-is-no-alternative/>.

22 See, for example, Ben Caspit, "Al-Monitor," July 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/07/benjamin-netanyahu-iran-nuclear-deal-inspection-clauses.html#>.

expanding territorial control of large areas of Syria and Iraq, Daesh now appears to be the most powerful manifestation of pan-Sunni opposition toward perceived Iranian, American, Israeli, and other foreign influence throughout the region. Diplomatic efforts to establish a Contact Group and a coalition of military forces, involving the United States, Europeans, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other Arab Gulf states, against Daesh, have, however, proved difficult, to say the least. Both Moscow and Tehran fear that differing pan-Sunni movements could further destabilize the Russian-controlled northern Caucasus, Central Asia and other areas in the wider Middle East, and might be strengthened if Al-Assad loses control of most of Syria or falls from power. Moscow also fears losing its naval base at Tartus and its political economic influence in the region.

Russian “Green Men” in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine

Much as Tehran has opposed the re-emergence of a strong Iraq, Moscow has somewhat similarly hoped to prevent the eventual emergence of a stronger Ukraine, backed by NATO and the European Union, which it feared, rightly or wrongly, could potentially challenge Russian political-economic interests in eastern Ukraine (including the businesses of Russian oligarchs in the Ukrainian military-industrial complex), while likewise attempting to pressure Russian interests in the Sea of Azov in disputes over the Kerch Strait and in the delimitation of other borders. In annexing Crimea in February-March 2014, Moscow accordingly sought to weaken Ukraine as much as possible, by precluding Kiev from evicting the Russian Black Sea Fleet and preventing Ukraine and NATO from potentially using Crimea as a naval and air base against Russian interests.

Putin’s acts of *preclusive imperialism* were based, in part, on the fact that the Orange Revolution of Viktor Yushchenko (2005-10) had previously given Moscow a deadline on 2017 to vacate the Russian Black Sea Fleet from Sevastopol. Moscow had seen the 2004-05 “Orange Revolution” as a form of American-backed “democracy engineering” intended to overthrow Viktor Yanukovych, who was then Prime Minister (2002-04), and who was

regarded as Moscow's ally.

In 2010, however, the re-election of Yanukovich as Prime Minister appeared to dispel Moscow's fears once Kiev adopted a stance of "neutrality" in not wanting to join either NATO or the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Almost immediately upon his election, Yanukovich signed an accord with Putin in 2010 that extended the lease of the Russian Black Sea Fleet at Sevastopol until 2040-45.²³ Here, Moscow appeared to engage in "reverse democracy engineering," and a new form of ballot box political warfare, to assure Yanukovich's presidential victory given evident U.S. and EU political support for the rival candidate, Yulia Tymoshenko.

Yet Ukrainian-Russian energy, economic and Black Sea Fleet deals all collapsed after the 2013-14 Maidan protests. The protestors opposed the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet at Sevastopol and hoped that Ukraine would soon join the EU, if not NATO, or at least form closer cooperation agreements with both organizations. Moscow claimed that U.S. diplomatic support for anti-Russian opposition leaders, combined with so-called "fascist" elements that purportedly forced Yanukovich to leave the country, were behind the February 2014 "coup" that ousted Yanukovich—even though Yanukovich's own kleptocratic policies were not supported by a wide spectrum of Ukrainian society, including his own Party of Regions.²⁴

Nevertheless, while many western and central Ukrainians refer to the February 2014 Maidan movement as a "revolution of dignity," many in the eastern and southern regions saw these actions against the still legitimate Yanukovich government as a form of *coup d'état*, as did Moscow.²⁵ In this

23 Hall Gardner, *Crimea, Global Rivalry and the Vengeance of History*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

24 A majority of 328 lawmakers of the 450-seat parliament, including members of the Party of Regions, voted on February 22 to remove Yanukovich from power, but this number did not reach three-quarters of 450 (338) as required by the Constitution for impeachment. Even Yanukovich's Party of Regions denounced him: <http://partyofregions.ua/en/news/5309dfd9f620d2f70b000031>.

25 Nicolai Petro, "Bringing Ukraine Back Into Focus: How to End the New Cold War and Provide Effective Political Assistance to Ukraine," *Carnegie Council*, August 19, 2015, https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/articles_papers_reports/742.

respect, American and European support for “democracy engineering,” involving instant mass communications and social media (Facebook, Twitter), can be characterized as a novel form of generally non-violent “regime change” that seeks to undermine the control of authoritarian leaders through protest and civil disobedience.²⁶

But Moscow has also realized that it is possible to overthrow democratic or pro-Allied leaders through what can be called “reverse democracy engineering”–or “non-linear” warfare. From late February to March 2014, in the midst of the power vacuum that followed Yanukovych’s removal from power, masked “little green men” without insignias (what Putin called “polite men”) appeared in Crimea and took positions in key political, economic and strategic locations, including airports and military bases.²⁷ Ukrainian military forces then capitulated without significant violence.

On March 6, the Crimean parliament voted for independence, and engaged in a hastily arranged populist “referendum” in a form of “reverse democracy engineering” orchestrated with Moscow’s assistance. The referendum was to determine whether a majority of Crimeans wanted to return to the May 1992 Ukrainian Constitution, which had granted Crimea greater autonomy from Kiev than did Ukraine’s 1998 constitution, or else join the Russian Federation. The latter option was ostensibly chosen by the “majority” (97% out of 83% of potential voter turn-out), despite some elements of minority Tartar and ethnic Ukrainian opposition.

During this time, fighting broke out in eastern Ukraine: Kiev could not effectively command the police, army and intelligence services in that region. This permitted “autonomist” forces with Russian assistance to seize control of much of the Donbas region. These pro-Russian forces included: (1) Special forces (*Spetsnaz*), belonging to the Russian army intelligence

26 Democracy engineering represents a new form of *pronunciamento* or *coup d'état*. See Hall Gardner, “General Introduction,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to War: Origins and Prevention*, ed. Hall Gardner and Oleg Kobtzeff, Ashgate, 2012.

27 In 1979, the Soviet Union launched its invasion of Afghanistan with “little green men” (many of which were Soviet Moslems) wearing Afghan uniforms. They seized key military, media and government buildings, including President Amin’s palace. Nicu Popescu, “Hybrid tactics: neither new nor only Russian,” *EUISS Issue Alert* No. 4, 2015, http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Alert_4_hybrid_warfare.pdf.

service (GRU); (2) Russian militias, consisting of former soldiers under contract; (3) Cossack and anti-Islamist Chechen militias (these were also active in South Ossetia during the war with Georgia in 2008); and (4) local mercenaries who sympathized with Moscow.²⁸ Of these forces, the Donbas People's Militia and the Luhansk People's Militia are said to possess some 20,000 fighters.²⁹

These events also took place at a time that the Russian military was staging massive nuclear war drills, but which were purportedly planned months before the annexation of Crimea.³⁰ Concurrently, in March 2014, Moscow raised concerns about the treatment of Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia in claiming the "right to protect" ethnic Russians outside Russia itself (a Yeltsin administration doctrine). This led to Baltic state calls for a defense build-up throughout eastern Europe by raising speculation that Moscow might support another pro-Russian insurrection, backed by "little green men," in Narva, Estonia, for example, given the latter region's high concentration of Russophones. Then, in late March 2014, U.S. intelligence reported that Russian forces were preparing to establish a land link to Crimea through eastern Ukraine by force. Yet the tactical purpose of the Russian military build-up along the Ukrainian border may have been to dissuade Kiev (potentially backed by NATO member countries) from engaging in a counter-offensive.³¹

Despite Russian threats, Kiev's May-August 2014 counter-offensive helped to roll back Russophone "autonomist" gains. This attack forced eastern Ukrainian forces to engage in more traditional warfare. In addition to cutting off pensions and coal subsidies, among other sanctions on eastern Ukrainians, the fact that Kiev used heavy weaponry (in large part due to

28 Marcel van Herpen, "Ukraine: Who is Responsible for the Death of the Passengers of the MH17?" *Cicero Paper* No. 14/02, July 2014, http://www.cicerofoundation.org/lectures/Marcel_H_Van_Herpen_The_Ukraine_Plane_Crash.pdf.

29 Cameron Gordon Judge-Becker, "Meet pro-Kiev and pro-Russian battalions fighting in Ukraine," *Russia Direct*, Aug 18, 2015, <http://www.russia-direct.org/analysis/meet-pro-ukraine-and-pro-russian-battalions-fighting-ukraine#explanation-5>.

30 "Russia Launches Nuclear-War Drill, Saying It Was Long Scheduled," *NTI*, March 28, 2014.

31 Barbara Starr, "U.S. intel assessment: greater likelihood Russia will enter eastern Ukraine," *CNN*, March 26, 2014.

poor military training) to shell autonomist areas caused a large number of civilian casualties and further alienated eastern Ukrainians from Kiev's policies, while also eroding Kiev's international support.³²

Here, in its own version of hybrid warfare, Kiev, like Moscow, also engaged irregular forces on its side, with the extreme nationalist paramilitary Right Sector (which is not under strict government control) overseeing anti-Russian Islamist militias (which are primarily Chechens, but also include Tatars, Uzbeks and Balkars). There are at least 50 pro-Kiev militias.³³

As part of its strategy, Kiev has hoped to further divide and then defeat the "autonomist" Russophone forces which have generally split between those seeking independence (the self-proclaimed, yet unrecognized, "republics" of Donetsk and Lugansk) and those seeking greater autonomy from Kiev's centralized controls, but who are not necessarily pro-Putin. Moscow has not supported the secession of eastern Ukrainian regions from Kiev, but has proposed a "federation" or "special status" solution.³⁴ Kiev, by contrast, has supported greater "local control," but has opposed greater "autonomy" or "federation," in the fear that greater autonomy for the Donbas could eventually lead to political secession and independence.

Greater "decentralization" by means of a reform of Ukraine's Constitution had been urged by the February 2015 Minsk II agreement that involved compromises between Germany, France, Ukraine, and Russia, under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).³⁵ Mid-July 2015, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko

32 Nicu Popescu, "Hybrid tactics: neither new nor only Russian," *EUISS Issue Alert* No. 4, 2015, http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Alert_4_hybrid_warfare.pdf.

33 Cameron Gordon Judge-Becker, "Meet pro-Kiev and pro-Russian battalions fighting in Ukraine," *Russia Direct*, August 18, 2015, <http://www.russia-direct.org/analysis/meet-pro-kiev-and-pro-russian-battalions-fighting-ukraine#explanation-6>; Andrew W. Kramer, "Islamic Battalions, Stocked With Chechens, Aid Ukraine in War With Rebels," *New York Times*, July 7, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/08/world/europe/islamic-battalions-stocked-with-chechens-aid-ukraine-in-war-with-rebels.html>.

34 This Russian "federalist" proposal for eastern Ukraine can ironically be compared and contrasted with the Bush administration plans in 2003 for a "federal" Iraq with differing Sunni, Shi'a and Kurdish communities represented.

35 "Minsk Agreement," *UNIAN*, February 12, 2015, <http://www.unian.info/politics/1043394-minsk-agreement-full-text-in-english.html>.

introduced a bill to the parliament that would ostensibly devolve powers to localities. Poroshenko insisted that these Constitutional changes would not turn Ukraine into a federation, but would nevertheless grant local authorities more power throughout the country.³⁶

Yet the fact that these Constitutional reforms might not meet the full demands of eastern Ukrainian autonomists (whose leaders had not yet engaged in *direct* negotiations with Kiev) has continued to exacerbate tensions, as has the proposed strengthening of presidential control over local self-governments by means of “centrally assigned ‘prefects’ with broad powers.”³⁷ At the same time, Kiev’s decentralist legislation has also been violently opposed by right-wing centralists. Kiev’s efforts to find an in-between position that will somehow satisfy both centralists and “autonomists” could fail.

According to the UN, from mid-April 2014 until 15 August 2015, at least 7,883 people (Ukrainian armed forces, civilians and members of the armed groups) were killed, and 17,610 injured in the eastern Ukraine conflict zone.³⁸ More than 980,000 people have been internally displaced and over 600,000 Ukrainians have fled the country. If the Minsk II accords

36 Associated Press, “Ukraine Moves Toward Constitutional Reform,” *New York Times*, July 16, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2015/07/16/world/europe/ap-eu-ukraine-constitutional-reform.html>.

37 “Poroshenko’s proposal is not approved by the separatists, nor by the Kremlin. It does not really give any “special status” to separatist areas, and any specific details on autonomous rule in Donbass may later be revised by a simple majority vote in Ukrainian parliament. Moreover, the so-called “decentralisation” is accompanied by a strengthening of the presidential control over local self-government via centrally assigned “prefects” with broad powers.” Volodymyr Ishchenko, “Ukraine’s government bears more responsibility for ongoing conflict than the far-right,” September 4, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/04/ukraine-government-svoboda-clashes-conflict>.

38 As of mid-August 2015, the eastern Ukrainian conflict had been accompanied by: “allegations of killings, abductions, torture and ill-treatment, sexual violence, forced labour, ransom demands and extortion of money on the territories controlled by the ‘Donetsk people’s republic’ and ‘Luhansk people’s republic.’” In addition, “(t)he withdrawal of heavy weapons from the contact line stipulated by the Minsk Agreements (has) remained partial with the armed groups and the Ukrainian military continuing to use mortars, canons, howitzers, tanks and multiple launch rocket systems. They routinely did not comply with the international humanitarian law principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions, with numerous incidents of indiscriminate shelling of residential areas causing civilian casualties observed. Explosive remnants of war (ERW) 18 and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) continued to claim numerous civilian lives in Government-controlled areas and in territories controlled by the armed groups.” See Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine,” 16 May to 15 August 2015, <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/UA/11thOHCHRreportUkraine.pdf>.

and Ukrainian Constitutional reforms are not soon implemented, then the battle could continue to rage with regional, if not global, repercussions.

Iranian and Russian Tactics and Strategy Contrasted

Moscow's tactics of "non-linear" warfare relative to eastern Ukraine appear to parallel Iran's strategy relative to Shi'a regions of Iraq.³⁹ This appears true except for the fact that Russia represents a nuclear power with global influence, while Iran represents an essentially semi-peripheral regional power that has *threatened* to acquire a nuclear weapons capability.

From a geo-economic perspective, Iran represents an essentially landlocked semi-peripheral state, with outlets to the enclosed Caspian Sea in the north, and to the Arab-Persian Gulf in the south. The latter is checked at the chokepoint formed by the Strait of Hormuz. Somewhat similarly, Russia, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, is essentially landlocked in Europe, checked in the Baltic Sea, but has been trying to open up Arctic sea trade routes. And much like Iran with respect to the Strait of Hormuz, Moscow finds its main sea lines of communication in the Black Sea checked by the chokepoint at the Turkish Straits.

In tactical terms, much as Iran developed swarming techniques involving hundreds of armed speedboats to harass U.S. warships from differing directions in the Straits of Hormuz and to test reaction times,⁴⁰ Moscow has flown its aging fighter jets into NATO airspace (often turning off transponders) so as to test defenses and force higher defense expenditure. From March 2014 to August 2015, there were at least 66 "close military encounters" between Russian and NATO military forces, and between Russia and EU members, Sweden and Finland, which appear to be

39 One can almost substitute Russia's goals to keep Ukraine subservient, but not in total chaos, with Pollack's outline of Iran's goals in Iraq: See Kenneth M. Pollack, "Prospects for Increased Iranian Influence in Iraq Testimony," *Brookings*, November 15, 2011, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/testimony/2011/11/15-iran-iraq-pollack>.

40 For swarming tactics, see Fariborz Haghshenas, "Iran's Doctrine of Asymmetric Naval Warfare," *Washington Institute*, December 21, 2006, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/irans-doctrine-of-asymmetric-naval-warfare>.

considering NATO membership.⁴¹ Moscow justifies these “encounters” on the basis that the number of fighter jets in the NATO Baltic air-policing mission has increased since March 2014.⁴²

In July 2015, the Russian Ministry of Defense announced plans to deploy a squadron of Tu-22M3 long-range bombers in Crimea. This could give Moscow a tactical advantage in the region and could lead NATO to deploy air defense systems and fighter aircraft in Romania, Bulgaria and other Black Sea countries.⁴³ In addition, Russia is likely to increase pressure in the Caucasus region, particularly on Georgia. In July 2015, Moscow erected new “border” markings in the disputed South Ossetia region. This “creeping annexation” effectively “seized” part of a British Petroleum-operated oil pipeline in the process. The possibility that the “frozen conflicts” in the Caucasus may begin to “unfreeze” has subsequently been raised.⁴⁴

Since the 2014 Ukrainian crisis, Moscow has repeated its threat to deploy tactical nuclear weapons in Kaliningrad and has augmented the number of military maneuvers that involve the use so-called “limited” nuclear strikes. Moscow has also threatened the use of nuclear weaponry in opposition to Kiev’s pledges to eventually regain Crimea.⁴⁵ In August 2015, the conflict focused on territories near the port of Mariupol and the city of Donetsk.

The socio-political situation is further aggravated by the fact that both Russian and Iranian elites have propagated revanchist ideologies that could eventually generate even wider expansionist actions. Iranian elites have attempted to justify their political influence in Iraq, based on the historical

41 “Avoiding War in Europe: The Task Force on Cooperation in Greater Europe,” European Leadership Network, August 2015, <http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/medialibrary/2015/08/18/2f868dfd/Task%20Force%20Position%20Paper%20II%20July%202015%20-%20English.pdf>.

42 Alexander Yermakov, “Cold Peace in European Skies,” *RLAC*, December 15, 2014, http://russiacouncil.ru/en/inner/?id_4=4963#top. This dispute would suggest the need for joint NATO-Russian air patrols.

43 Artem Kureev, “Russia’s military overtures in Crimea provoke a NATO response,” *Russia Direct*, July 28, 2015, <http://www.russia-direct.org/opinion/russias-military-overtures-crimea-provoke-nato-response>.

44 Pavel Koshkin, “What are the Kremlin’s new red lines in the post-Soviet space?” *Russia Direct*, August 19, 2015, <http://www.russia-direct.org/what-are-kremlins-new-red-lines-post-soviet-space>.

45 Zachary Keck, “Russia Threatens Nuclear Strikes over Crimea,” *The Diplomat*, July 11, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/07/russia-threatens-nuclear-strikes-over-crimea/>. Ukrainian Defense Minister Valeriy Heletey pledged to retake Crimea: *Ukraine’s New Defence Minister Promises Crimea Victory*, Kiev Ukraine News Blog, July 4, 2014, <http://news.kievukraine.info/2014/07/ukraines-new-defence-minister-promises.html>.

fact that both the Parthian and Sasanian empires (prior to the Arab Muslim conquest of Persia) had placed their capital at Ctesiphon, which is close to contemporary Baghdad. In addition, the Iranian Islamist government covets the Shi'a holy sites in Najaf, Iraq. Up until 2014, Tehran generally sought to prevent widespread conflict within Iraq that could potentially drag Iran itself into a regional war and overstretch Iranian resources.

The present dilemma is that there are presently at least a dozen Shi'a "Islamic Renaissance" militias, which are now battling, in alliance with the Kurdish *peshmerga*, and indirectly, with Coalition forces, against Daesh (Islamic State). Although Tehran may hope to play these groups against each other to prevent anyone from gaining ascendancy, it is dubious they will disband, even if Daesh is defeated. This could lead to a situation in which Iranian surrogates, perhaps not fully under Tehran's control, could occupy significant swathes of Iraqi territory, while the Shi'a presence in Iraq could fuel Daesh and pan-Sunni propaganda.

In intervening in Ukraine, Moscow has claimed to be supporting the interests of Russophones in the name of larger "civilizational" goals. Moscow's propaganda sees the roots of the Russian state and society in Kievan Rus, calling Kiev "the mother of all Russian cities" –a characterization that, at least in part, distorts history in order to justify contemporary geopolitical interests. Here, both Belarus and Ukraine also derive their identity from Kievan Rus, but point to the differences between their socio-cultural development and that of Muscovy.

President Putin initially played up the concept of *Novorossiya*, which was once an imperial province of Russia in what is now Ukraine, and, in such a way, threatened to back the secession of eastern Ukraine up to Odessa. An independent southern and eastern Ukraine could then forge ties with Russian-held Transnistria. But by May 2015, the plan of a union of the Donbas region with other southern Ukrainian regions had been largely dropped.⁴⁶ Not only was such an option opposed by France and Germany

⁴⁶ The self-proclaimed Union was established in May 2014. Yet the 'Novorossiya' movement was not officially recognized internationally, even by Russia, and was labeled as a 'terrorist organization' by Kiev.

in the Minsk II accords, but the costs of such a venture, plus the probable need for long-term Russian occupation forces, plus the costs of Russian political-economic isolation from the United States and Europe, coupled with the collapse of global energy prices, have thus far appeared to put a damper on any such imperialist plans.

The fact that Moscow has thus far been unwilling to admit to its own population the role of Russian special forces in Ukraine appears to indicate that Moscow does not want to take over the burden and responsibility for the entire region, as has been the case in Crimea. Much like Tehran in Iraq, Moscow prefers to support surrogates rather than to intervene directly in eastern Ukraine.

Dangers of Hybrid Warfare

In 2011, then Russian general chief of staff, Nikolai Makarov, had warned that “the possibility of local armed conflicts virtually along the entire perimeter of the border has grown dramatically. I cannot rule out that, in certain circumstances, local and regional armed conflicts could grow into a large-scale war, possibly even with nuclear weapons.”⁴⁷ It was just after Makarov stepped down in November 2012, that Moscow began to more officially formalize its own concepts of “non-linear” warfare in the period 2013-14.⁴⁸

Contemporary U.S. military strategy has become deeply concerned with the prospects of “non-linear” or “hybrid” warfare as used by non-state actors, such as Al Qaeda and Daesh, as well as by Russia and Iran, and for its potential use by China, North Korea, and other regional powers. All these states are purportedly engaging in cyber-sabotage, among other covert actions. At present, U.S. national security strategy downplays the

Ukraine Today, May 20, 2015, <http://uatoday.tv/politics/russian-backed-novorossiya-breakaway-movement-collapses-428372.html>.

47 Interfax, “Russian General Sees Growing Threat of Nuclear War, Global Security Newswire,” *NTI*, November 18, 2011, <http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/russian-general-sees-growing-threat-nuclear-war/>.

48 Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, Washington, DC, Brookings, 2013, p.337.

possibility of a war breaking out among major powers, but admits that the possibility is growing, while conflict with anti-state organizations (many of which are being financed by regional and even major powers) does pose an immediate threat.⁴⁹

Former U.S. Army Chief of Staff General Raymond Odierno has warned that “only a third of U.S. brigades are capable of operating at the level of the hybrid warfare Russia is undertaking ... (in eastern Ukraine).”⁵⁰ The new U.S. Army Chief of Staff, General Mark Milley, warned that Russia represented an “existential” threat due to its nuclear capabilities. Milley likewise stated that China, North Korea, the Islamic State, and Iran, “Each in their own different way represents ... security threats, to the United States.”⁵¹

The diplomatic dilemma is that while Russia does represent a potential existential threat, as observed by General Milley, Moscow is also the key player that can assist the geopolitical settlement of many of the disputes involving Ukraine, Iran, Syria, Daesh, North Korea and China, among others, that impact both U.S. and European interests. This is assuming Washington and the Europeans can eventually engage with Moscow in seeking to resolve these conflicts.

49 “Today, the probability of U.S. involvement in interstate war with a major power is assessed to be low but growing. Should one occur, however, the consequences would be immense. VEOs (Violent Extremist Organizations), in contrast, pose an immediate threat to transregional security by coupling readily available technologies with extremist ideologies. Overlapping state and non-state violence, there exists an area of conflict where actors blend techniques, capabilities, and resources to achieve their objectives. Such “hybrid” conflicts may consist of military forces assuming a non-state identity, as Russia did in the Crimea, or involve a VEO fielding rudimentary combined arms capabilities, as ISIL has demonstrated in Iraq and Syria. Hybrid conflicts also may be comprised of state and non-state actors working together toward shared objectives, employing a wide range of weapons such as we have witnessed in eastern Ukraine. Hybrid conflicts serve to increase ambiguity, complicate decision-making, and slow the coordination of effective responses. Due to these advantages to the aggressor, it is likely that this form of conflict will persist well into the future.” Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United State of America*, http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015_National_Military_Strategy.pdf.

50 “Top Army leader: Russia is “most dangerous” threat facing U.S.” *CNN*, August 13, 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/08/12/politics/russia-army-leader-dangerous-odierno/index.html>.

51 “Milley Cites Russian Threat at Confirmation Hearing,” *Defense News*, July 21, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/policy-budget/congress/2015/07/21/milley-confirmation-hearing-sequestration/304526771>.

Proposals to Avert Major Power War

The above discussion also implies another analogy, in that the strategies of Ahmadinejad and Putin appear to possess more similarities than differences. Ahmadinejad was replaced by an ostensibly “reformist” government. But will the successor to Putin necessarily be a reformer? Or will it prove necessary for the west to engage in *realpolitik* with Putin much as the U.S. began to do with the Ahmadinejad government—or with a possibly even tougher Russian leader at a later date?

The answer to this question may well depend upon whether or not the United States and Europe can soon engage in close discussions with Russia to address their serious differences. One proposal for Ukraine is a socio-political approach that involves power sharing between east and west and that respects Ukraine’s bicultural identity.⁵² At the same time, such an approach will not be fully successful without additional steps toward a general settlement of U.S., European and Russian disputes, given the fact that Moscow’s geo-economic and security interests are interwoven with those of Ukraine. Given ongoing NATO, European and Russian rivalries, a mutual recognition of Ukrainian “neutrality” may represent a step toward a general geopolitical settlement.⁵³

In August 2015, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov hinted at the possibility of re-initiating U.S.-Russian talks, yet stated that Moscow would not “beg” for better ties.⁵⁴ Here, the United States, Europe, and Russia all possess a common interest in forging a contact group and military coalition against Daesh that brings Iran into at least limited cooperation with Saudi Arabia, as well as with Turkey and the other Arab Gulf states. Yet U.S.-European-Russian disputes over Ukraine, in addition to significant political differences

52 Nicolai Petro, *op. cit.*

53 Hall Gardner, *Crimea, Global Rivalry and the Vengeance of History*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; See also Hall Gardner, “The Reset Was Never Reset,” *NATO Watch*, 49, April 3, 2014, http://www.natowatch.org/sites/default/files/briefing_paper_no_49_-_ukraine_russia_crimea.pdf.

54 “Russia’s Lavrov says U.S. signals it wants to mend ties,” *Reuters*, August 28, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/08/24/us-russia-usa-idUSKCN0QT1L820150824>; “Russia tells Washington: talk to us over Syria or risk ‘unintended incidents’,” *Reuters*, September 12, 2015, <http://news.yahoo.com/russia-says-seeks-coordination-over-syria-avoid-incidents-100728012--business.html>.

with respect to the role of the Syrian leadership and Iran in such a proposed grouping, make such a coalition even more difficult to achieve.

Even if the United States, Europe, and Russia cannot reach a deeper general accord at this time, NATO and Russia should at least agree to some common rules to handle unexpected military “encounters” in order to reduce the real risk of inadvertently sparking a major power conflict.⁵⁵ Such an approach—which would help reestablish trust between the United States, Europe, and Russia—could then represent a first step toward a general settlement of the larger issues that appear to be increasingly dividing the United States and Europe from Russia and that have been further antagonized by the strategy and tactics of “non-linear” or “hybrid” warfare.

55 The Task Force on Cooperation in Greater Europe, *op.cit.* Molly O’Toole, “U.S. and Russian Forces in Syria Aren’t Talking to Each Other,” *Defense One*, September 12, 2015, <http://www.defenseone.com/threats/2015/09/us-and-russian-forces-syria/120860/>.

10

Energy as a Tool of Hybrid Warfare

Michael Rühle and Julijus Grubliauskas¹

Introduction: Energy Security Lessons

The Ukraine crisis offers some important energy security lessons: when it comes to energy, geography is still destiny. Pipelines still mean both economic and political power. The struggle between Moscow and Kiev over the price of gas is more instructive in this regard than a thousand economy textbooks. The Ukraine crisis was also a reminder that energy security is an integral part of national security; that dependence on Russia can be a strategic liability; and that interdependence between the producer and the consumer will not encourage stability if the producer can go longer without revenue than the consumer can go without gas. But there is more. To destabilize Ukraine, Russia applied a combination of military, semi-military and strategic communication tools. But it also managed to integrate energy (via the expropriation of Ukrainian energy assets and pressure on gas prices) into this strategy. Hence, if NATO wants to be serious about countering “hybrid threats,” it must include energy in the equation. This will require NATO to enhance discussions on the security implications of energy issues, and step up Allied political dialogue and strategic analysis in line with the emerging environment.

The Hybrid War Challenge

The events surrounding Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea have given

¹ This paper is a substantially expanded version of an essay published in January 2015 on www.energlobe.eu. The authors would like to thank Diego Cordano for his invaluable assistance.

prominence to a term that was previously known only in specialist circles: hybrid warfare. By overtly and covertly employing military and paramilitary forces, supplying separatist groups, staging cyber attacks and waging a massive propaganda campaign, Russia provided a textbook example of how non-traditional (or: non-linear) warfare can be effectively employed to achieve political objectives. Against this background, the references in Russia's new military doctrine to the "integrated use" of military and non-military measures are more than a mere description of the characteristics of modern warfare: they accurately describe Russia's actions. Predictably, the discussion focused on the most outrageous aspects of Russia's hybrid approach, such as the appearance of "little green men," i.e. soldiers without national insignia, as well as Russian troops allegedly "vacationing" in Eastern Ukraine. By contrast, energy was not seen as part of the hybrid warfare narrative. While the struggle between Kiev and Moscow over gas prices became a matter of international concern, it seemed just another chapter in the never-ending story of Russian-Ukrainian energy disputes.

A closer look, however, reveals that energy was – and continues to be – a far more important factor in hybrid warfare than is commonly acknowledged. Russia occupied Ukraine's gas fields, in and around Crimea, by traditional military means. It exerted economic pressure on Ukraine, including by gas cut-offs, while trying to deter other European countries from assisting Ukraine with reverse gas supply. Russia also pushed a narrative about her irreplaceable role in Europe's energy security, and about the risks Europe was creating for itself should it support Ukraine. Each of these steps deserves closer examination.

Military Action: Occupation of Crimea's Gas Fields and War in Donbass

Before its annexation by Russia, Crimea received almost all of its energy from mainland Ukraine. In order to establish effective political control of the region, Russia "nationalized" the Ukrainian company operating in Crimea – Chornomornaftogaz – together with all its energy assets, both

onshore and offshore. Given the vast asymmetry in the military forces of both countries, Ukraine stood no chance of preventing this. The move allowed Russia not only to ensure a stable supply of energy to the region, but also to make it independent from mainland Ukraine, which is critical for effective control of the territory.

Since some of these offshore gas installations – four natural gas fields, with drilling rigs – extend from the Crimean coast all the way to the maritime border with Romania, their nationalization by Russia also significantly extended that country's geographical dominance in the Black Sea area off the Western coast of Crimea (See Map 10.1.). Hence, in addition to previously Ukraine-owned energy infrastructure and the Chornomornaftogaz company, estimated to be worth around USD 1.2 billion, and over two billion cubic metres of natural gas storage in Crimea, Russia has acquired a massively extended maritime zone with the claim to underwater resources potentially worth trillions of dollars.² Russian interlocutors have pointed out that Russia's enormous energy reserves make its newly acquired options around Crimea not especially relevant. For Ukraine, however, the loss of its opportunities to exploit what may amount to the best deep oil and gas reserves in the Black Sea is a massive setback to its future economic prospects and its hopes of achieving energy independence.

² See William J. Broad, "In Taking Crimea, Putin Gains a Sea of Fuel Reserves," *New York Times*, May 17, 2014 (http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/18/world/europe/in-taking-crimea-putin-gains-a-sea-of-fuel-reserves.html?_r=0).



MAP 10.1. Eastern Ukraine's energy infrastructure map.³

With regard to the Donbass region, energy plays an even more important role. The region is rich in energy resources and infrastructure: it produces 90 percent of Ukraine's coal, has both conventional and unconventional gas fields (including the massive "Yuzivska" shale gas deposit area), several underground gas storage sites, and transit pipelines. As a result, by losing control over this region, Kiev became even more dependent on imported energy. In addition, some of the energy infrastructure located in the Donbass region is of particular strategic importance to Russia. Gas pipeline

³ Source: Compiled by Diego Cordano using "Petroleum Economist", "East European Gas Analysis" geographic data, and open source information.

branches to Luhansk and Donetsk connect the Russian gas pipeline system with the Ukrainian system and enable the provision of Russian gas to these cities independently from Kiev.

When it comes to territorial control, energy infrastructure is both a key requirement and an enabler. For Moscow, it was impossible to organize an operation to illegally occupy Crimea without ensuring the independent energy supply of the region (the main requirement of which would be hundreds of diesel-powered generators). Moreover, the control of offshore gas sites enabled the expansion of the Russian zone of dominance off the coast of Crimea. Likewise, the control of energy infrastructure in the Donbass area, especially around Luhansk and Donetsk, is critical for wresting authority in the region away from Kiev.

Economic Pressure and Deterrence: No More Energy for Ukraine and Reduced Gas Supplies to Europe

Ukraine's high energy inefficiency and dependence on Russian gas imports have made energy a tempting tool for Russia to exert pressure. The Ukraine crisis, however, brought this pressure to a new level. Since the illegal annexation of Crimea also "returned" the important Sevastopol naval base to Russia, Moscow no longer felt obliged to grant Ukraine lower gas prices or to pay Kiev over \$600 million annually for use of the base and the right to use Ukrainian waters. As a result, Ukraine was faced with a loss of revenue coupled with increased energy costs. When Ukraine refused to pay the increased price, Russia turned off the gas. Even with respect to coal, where Ukraine used to be self-sufficient, the crisis provided Russia with additional leverage. The fighting in Eastern Ukraine affected both the coal mines in that region and the railway lines needed to transport coal to the power plants. In late November 2014 Ukraine, which used coal to generate about 40 percent of its electricity, had to declare a state of emergency in its electricity market.⁴ Russian pressure on Ukraine was accompanied by

⁴ See Andy Tully, *State Of Emergency In Ukraine As Russia Cuts Off Coal*, Oilprice.com, November 27, 2014,

attempts to deter other European countries from supporting Ukraine. Several countries in Central and Eastern Europe were warned not to allow the reverse flow of Russian gas to Ukraine. The reduced pressure in certain pipelines, which led to a reduction of supplies, was also widely believed to constitute a warning to some of Russia's customers not to interfere with Moscow's Ukraine policy.⁵

Strategic Communication: The Russian Narrative about the West Shooting Itself in the Foot, and "Gas Aid" to Donbass

Propaganda is a key ingredient of the hybrid approach. From the beginning of the Ukraine crisis, Moscow made a tremendous effort to promulgate its own version of ongoing events. The clumsiness of Russia's attempts to persuade Western public opinion often backfired: many of the stories carried by media outlets such as *Russia Today* were far too outrageous to be convincing. As far as the energy dimension was concerned, however, Moscow's narrative stood on firmer ground. By focusing on the objective consideration that Russia plays an indispensable role as an energy supplier for Europe, this narrative implied that the European countries, pressurized by the United States into supporting Ukraine, were acting against their own long-term interests.

While Russia took great care not to undermine its image as a reliable supplier vis-à-vis some European customers, its message of the West shooting itself in the foot by helping Ukraine came across: many European observers repeated the message, thus reinforcing its credibility. Finally, Russia also used its gas deal with China to demonstrate to the West that it now had an alternative customer, while Europe remained dependent on Russian gas. As one *Russia Today* op-ed pointed out, "Russia's pivot to the growing markets of the east is in full swing. The West may yet rue the day

<http://oilprice.com/Latest-Energy-News/World-News/State-Of-Emergency-In-Ukraine-As-Russia-Cuts-Off-Coal.html>.

5 "Poland resumes gas supplies to Ukraine," *Reuters*, September 12, 2014, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/09/12/ukraine-crisis-gas-idUKL5N0RD1MT20140912>.

it sent its politicians to address the crowds of the Maidan.”⁶

Propaganda is also used by Russia to justify its support to the separatists in the Donbass area. In February 2015, Kiev reportedly stopped the gas supply to Donbass due to damaged gas infrastructure. Although Naftogaz stated that the supply disruption was temporary and that Gazprom had supplied less gas than agreed, Moscow used this incident to launch a massive information campaign against Kiev. The Chairman of the Russian State Duma blamed Kiev for an economic blockade against Donbass, while President Putin commented that the stopping of the gas supply to Donbass “smells of genocide.”⁷ As a result, Russia’s subsequent decision to provide gas to the Donbass area directly from Russia through the metering stations that are not controlled by Kiev was presented by Moscow as “aid to these regions in the form of natural gas supplies.”⁸

As later events unfolded, the Russian natural gas “aid” began to take on the shape of a Trojan horse. First, Gazprom explained that Naftogaz would need to pay for the gas supplied to Donbass. Second, though Naftogaz was later able to repair the damaged infrastructure, Gazprom did not allow Naftogaz to keep gas supplies to Donbass at previous levels. Instead, the supply to the metering stations controlled by Naftogaz was cut, while the supply through the separatist-controlled metering points was increased.⁹ Third, Moscow threatened to cut the gas supply to Ukraine if Naftogaz did not pay its “Donbass” bill. As a result, Kiev was trapped: it could not pay for the gas supplied by Gazprom to Donbass beyond Naftogaz’s control, while the debt to Gazprom would keep mounting, since Moscow claimed that,

6 Patrick L. Young, “Russia-China deal: Even energy pivots East,” *Russia Today* (online), May 21, 2014, <http://rt.com/op-edge/160212-russia-china-gas-deal-east>. For a rebuttal of the Russian narrative see Michael Rühle and Julijus Grubliauskas, “Russia’s ‘energy pivot’ to China: Myth or reality?” *Asia Times* (online), July 22, 2015, <http://atimes.com/2015/07/russias-energy-pivot-to-china-myth-or-reality/>.

7 Keith Walker, “Kyiv’s suspension of gas flow to eastern Ukraine ‘smells of genocide’ says Putin,” *Euronews*, February 25, 2015, <http://www.euronews.com/2015/02/25/kyiv-s-suspension-of-gas-flow-to-eastern-ukraine-smells-of-genocide-says-putin/>.

8 “PM Medvedev orders commencement of gas deliveries to embattled Donbass,” *RT Question More*, February 19, 2015, <http://rt.com/politics/233743-russia-ukraine-heating-medvedev/>.

9 Chi-Kong Chyong, “Ukraine’s Gas ‘Federalisation’,” *European Council on Foreign Affairs*, March 2, 2015, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_ukraines_gas_federalisation311253.

as long as Kiev considered Donbass as part of Ukraine's territory, Naftogaz had to pay for the region's gas.

Those who follow Russia's gas disputes with its neighbours will notice similarities to the dispute between Russia and the Republic of Moldova regarding the gas bill of the Transnistria region. Since Tiraspol refuses to pay for Russian gas, Gazprom sends all the bills to Chisinau. Over the years, Moldova's "Transnistria gas debt" has accumulated to over \$4 billion, around half of the country's GDP. If this scenario repeats itself in Ukraine, it will be a textbook example of how energy supply chains can be manipulated to exert economic pressure and territorial influence.

Six Lessons for NATO

NATO is not an energy institution, nor is Ukraine a NATO member. Nevertheless, NATO must confront the challenge of hybrid warfare, including its energy dimension. While this type of warfare can succeed only against states that are internally fragile and divided, it could introduce sufficient ambiguity to make NATO's strategic assessment and decision-making difficult, while at the same time marginalizing elements of the full spectrum of NATO's defensive capabilities. Six areas of adaptation appear most obvious:

First, intelligence sharing and strategic analysis: By bringing together over 60 intelligence services from 28 nations, NATO provides a unique forum for exchanging information relating to hybrid threats. To further enhance situational awareness, NATO Headquarters and the Strategic Commands have significantly increased their in-house analysis capacities in recent years. This anticipatory approach needs to be further developed by adapting NATO's political decision-taking processes to ambiguous warning situations, for example by pre-delegating the authority to initiate certain crisis response measures to SACEUR. There must also be a constant evaluation of how the political process and the information gathered through intelligence-sharing are aligned, and how eventual disconnects can be overcome.

Second, political dialogue on energy developments: In recent years, Allies have demonstrated a greater willingness to regularly discuss non-military subjects such as global energy developments, acknowledging that these can have major security implications. However, some Allies still approach such discussions only hesitantly, worrying that any such debate might be viewed as being only the precursor to military engagement. The danger of provoking such misperceptions must be taken seriously, all the more so as they could affect the nervous energy markets. However, curtailing NATO's agenda for fear of sending the wrong signals would condemn the Alliance to an entirely reactive approach. In order not to miss the essence of hybrid threats, Allies must discuss energy issues with a view to enhancing anticipation, prevention and resilience.

Third, training and exercises: The growing importance of energy considerations in the international political debate is making energy security a permanent fixture in NATO's education and training programmes. Diplomats and military leaders alike must be given the opportunity to develop a better understanding of energy and related issues, such as resource competition and climate change, as drivers of future security developments. In addition, energy supply disruptions and critical energy infrastructure failures could affect not only the normal functioning of the economy, but also a country's ability to effectively organize defence. Energy is therefore a tempting target in hybrid warfare, and preparedness for energy-related incidents through training and exercises is key for a comprehensive defence. To this end, new energy security courses are being set up at NATO's training facilities as well as the NATO Energy Security Centre of Excellence in Lithuania, and existing courses and exercises are augmented with appropriate energy-related elements.

Fourth, strategic communications: As an alliance of 28 sovereign democracies, NATO does not engage in propaganda campaigns, nor can it react as rapidly to Russian propaganda as one may wish. However, in the Ukraine crisis NATO has been able to react quickly to rebut false Russian claims, for example by SACEUR releasing photos of Russian military equipment on Ukrainian territory. Even on energy issues, which – unlike

soldiers or tanks – do not lend themselves to a “visual” narrative, NATO must at least be able to counter the Russian version of events with accurate facts and figures and the assertion of its own energy interests. What matters most is the willingness to “name and shame” the perpetrator – and to do so rapidly enough to establish an image of NATO as an institution that reliably provides accurate information. Given the increasing need to address the challenges in the information space, the establishment of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Latvia could not have been timelier.

Fifth, reaching out to the private sector and energy institutions: As in the case of cyber, the private sector owns most of the energy infrastructure that could be affected by hybrid war. At the same time, most of the relevant energy data is being collected and analysed by specific institutions, notably the International Energy Agency (IEA). As a military organization, NATO cannot afford the analytical resources the IEA has in the area of energy. However, NATO also cannot afford to miss important energy elements in assessing the wider security picture. In order to stay up to date in the rapidly changing security environment, NATO will need to deepen interaction with these players, both through regular dialogue and by shared participation in certain exercises. This will contribute to a consistent evaluation of energy risks, including those with a hybrid dimension. Enhanced situational awareness will benefit all actors alike.

Sixth, closer relations between NATO and the European Union: The Ukraine crisis demonstrated the EU’s growing effectiveness as an energy actor. The Union’s role in brokering a deal about the price of Russian gas for Ukraine, as well as its success in organizing the reverse flow of Russian gas to Ukraine via Poland and Slovakia, were impressive examples of an emerging European energy solidarity, in this case even for the benefit of a non-EU neighbour. Against this background, NATO-EU discussions on hybrid threats, staff-to-staff collaboration, and the search for greater synergies in training and education efforts appear both urgent and feasible. While Norway and Turkey remain outside the EU for the time being, their respective roles as an energy producer and energy hub for Europe would

suggest that a NATO-EU dialogue is fully in line with their own security and economic interests.

Conclusion

In sum, the Russia-Ukraine crisis demonstrated the effectiveness of hybrid war, including in its energy dimension. While Ukraine's unique geographical position as well as its energy dependence allowed Russia a degree of influence that it may not enjoy vis-à-vis many other countries, there are nevertheless reasons for Western concern: as a single state and "managed democracy," Russia controls the whole array of available tools (economic, military, strategic communications, etc.) to achieve its goals. By contrast, the West has to negotiate a common position not only among many states but also among different institutions. This asymmetry will always work to the initial advantage of the aggressor. Whether it will still work in the longer run is less clear, however. In the end, the West was deterred neither from assisting Ukraine nor from imposing sanctions on Russia. Moreover, currently low oil prices have emerged as a major challenge for Russia's economy, while the crisis has given Europe an additional incentive to diversify its energy sources and distribution networks.¹⁰ In short, while hybrid war can achieve a lot, it cannot overcome what Clausewitz aptly labelled "the fog of war": in other words, once the first move has been made, events tend to evolve in unforeseen ways.

10 See the interactive map in Georg Zachmann, *Can Europe survive without Russian gas?* Bruegel blog, March 21, 2014, <http://www.bruegel.org/nc/blog/detail/article/1283-can-europe-survive-without-russian-gas/>.

The Transnistrian Conflict in the Context of the Ukrainian Crisis

Inessa Baban

Until recently, relatively little was known about the Transnistrian conflict that has been undermining the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The waves of enlargement towards the East of NATO and the European Union drew attention to Transnistria, which has been seen as one of the “frozen conflict zones” in the post-Soviet area alongside Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh. However, the Transnistrian issue has not been perceived as a serious threat to Euro-Atlantic security because no outbreaks of large-scale hostilities or human casualties have been reported in the region since the 1990s. Beyond a few small incidents in the demilitarized zone, the 1992 ceasefire has been respected for more than two decades. This confirms that the Transnistrian issue is the only real “frozen conflict” among the territorial disputes that emerged in the post-soviet space in the 1990s.

The Euro-Atlantic community had hoped that a peaceful settlement of the Transnistrian conflict would finally be reached because it was the shortest and least violent of the separatist conflicts in the post-soviet area. Nevertheless, the Russian-Georgian war and the Ukrainian crisis have dramatically changed Western perspectives on post-Soviet separatist conflicts, including the dispute over Transnistria: the August 2008 war in Georgia showed that a dangerous thaw in the “frozen conflicts” was underway, while the 2014 Ukrainian crisis indicated that a new period of tension risks engulfing other areas in the post-Soviet space. These events

have provided ample grounds for raising the Transnistrian question as a source of serious concern for the Euro-Atlantic community. In the wake of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and the eruption of military hostilities in Eastern Ukraine, NATO officials expressed their concerns about the security risks in the breakaway region of Transnistria.¹

Located at the eastern border of the European Union and NATO, in the vicinity of the Ukrainian seaport of Odessa, the Transnistrian conflict resembles a time bomb ticking away, whose explosion might have serious effects on the stability of NATO's Eastern flank. At the same time, there are serious worries that the ongoing crisis in Ukraine will result in a Transnistria-like scenario since there are noteworthy similarities between the Moldovan and Ukrainian cases.

This chapter responds to the critical need to understand the Transnistrian question in the context of the recent turbulence in Ukraine. The research provides an analysis of the unsettled conflict in Transnistria from a geopolitical perspective. To this end, it explores the role that external actors play in the Transnistrian issue and, more specifically, the involvement of Russia. The paper argues that the Transnistrian conflict is not a matter of ethnicity associated with Moldovan domestic politics, but rather a question of regional geopolitics. Russia's involvement in the Transnistrian issue is driven by geostrategic calculations consisting in preventing Moldova's "Europeanization," if not "Euro-Atlantization," preserving its influence on the Western flank of the former soviet space and blocking any further Eastern enlargements of the EU and NATO.

1 General Philip Breedlove, "Concern about Transnistria - NATO Commander: We are concerned about risk of Russian intervention," *Televadio Moldova*, March 23, 2015, available at: <http://www.trm.md/en/politic/ingrijorare-privind-transnistria-comandant-nato-suntem-preocupati-de-riscul-unei-interventii-ruse>.



MAP 11.1. *The Republic of Moldova's Transnistrian region.*²

Transnistria, A *de facto* State that Officially does not Exist

Transnistria, the *land beyond the Nistru River*,³ is a strip of land located in the Eastern part of the Republic of Moldova which borders Ukraine for 405 km. The territory of Transnistria covers an area of 4,163 km²,

² Source: Stratfor, "In Moldova, Transnistria strands its grounds," July 29, 2013.

³ Romanian/Moldovan place names are used in this paper. The Nistru River and Transnistria are preferred to Russian and Latin-Slavic hybrid terms such as Dnestr/Dniestr or Pridnestrovie/Transdnistria.

representing 12% of Moldova's total territory. The region is inhabited by half a million people, comprising just under 15% of the Moldovan Republic's population. Subdivided into five regions and eight cities, Transnistria includes the second and fourth largest cities of the Republic of Moldova, Tiraspol and Bender.⁴

According to the Moldovan constitution, Transnistria is part of the territory of the Republic of Moldova. The reality is, however, that Moldovan authorities have no control over the region which has been functioning as a *de facto* state since the early 1990s. The loss of control over this region occurred in the context of the collapse of the Soviet Union when a complex conflict emerged between the left and right banks of the Nistru River. Although the conflict in Transnistria had some ethnic and linguistic origins, it was not essentially rooted in these cleavages. Transnistria used to be home to a mixed Latin and Slavic population mostly committed to Orthodox Christianity. In 1989, the population of Transnistria was comprised of three major ethnic groups including 39.3% Moldovans, 28.3% Ukrainians and 25.5% Russians. At the same time, the overall ethnic composition of Moldova consisted of 64.5% Moldovans, 13.8% Ukrainians, 13% Russians, 3.5% Gagauz and 5.1% others.⁵

The conflict was the expression of fundamental disagreement between local authorities in Transnistria and central government in Chişinău (the capital of Moldova) on the post-Soviet future of the Republic of Moldova. Russian-speaking and Russified elites in Transnistria disagreed with the steps taken by Chişinău who strived for the restoration of Romanian identity and closer cooperation, if not reunification with Romania. Unlike the Transnistrian region, the Western bank of the Nistru River used to have strong historical, political and cultural links with Romania. This territory, also known as Bessarabia (*Basarabia* in Romanian), was part of Greater

4 Also known as Tighina, the city is located on the right bank of the Nistru River in the buffer zone established at the end of the 1992 war in Transnistria. It is not part of the territorial unit of Transnistria as defined by the Moldovan central authorities, but the Transnistrian regime has *de facto* administrative control over the city.

5 Charles King, *The Moldovans – Romania, Russia and the Politics of Culture*, Stanford, California, Hoover International Press, 2000, p.185.

Romania (*România Mare* in Romanian) prior to its Sovietization in 1940.⁶ On the eve of the Soviet collapse, Moldovan elites in Chişinău sought to restore the Romanian identity of Moldovans by proclaiming Romanian as the official state language and by replacing Cyrillic script with the Latin alphabet. These measures aimed to put an end to the Russification policy driven by Moscow during the Soviet period, which consisted in the spreading of the Russian language across Moldova's territory and replacing the Latin alphabet with the Cyrillic script.

Local elites in Transnistria opposed Chişinău's initiatives, because they sought to maintain their union with Moscow in order to preserve their dominant position in Moldova's politics. During the Soviet period, Transnistria had become more urban, industrialized and "russified" than the rest of the country and a local Russian-speaking and Russified elite soon dominated in the state and communist party structures.⁷ They had the support of the local Slavic population, who feared for the loss of their language and cultural rights in a strictly Moldovan/Romanian nationalist state, despite the fact that Russian was accorded the status of "language of interethnic communication."⁸ The real fear was, however, the loss of the high professional and social status that Russian ethnics had during the Soviet period when Russian dominated in all social spheres and served as the common administrative and judicial language. The convergence of interests between Transnistria's Russian-speaking population and local elites led to the region's secession from the Republic of Moldova and the declaration of its independence in 1990.

Moldovan authorities lost complete control over the Transnistrian

6 The Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic was created on August 2, 1940 as the result of the conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Treaty between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany on August 23, 1939. The treaty included a secret protocol that divided territories in Romania, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, and Finland into German and Soviet spheres of influence anticipating the political and territorial rearrangements of these countries.

7 NATO Parliamentary Assembly, "Visit to Moldova by the Sub-Committee on Democratic Governance," March 2004, <http://www.nato-pa.int/Default.asp?CAT2=462&CAT1=19&CAT0=2&COM=484&MOD=0&SMD=0&SSMD=0&STA=&ID=0&PAR=0&LNG=1>.

8 "Lege nr. 3465 cu privire la funcţionarea limbilor vorbite pe teritoriul RSS Moldoveneşti," September 1, 1989, available at: <http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&cid=312813>.

region in 1992, when political disagreement between the two banks of the Nistru River was translated into a brief military conflict. The armed conflict erupted when local clashes between central Moldovan forces and Transnistrian separatist forces escalated into a civil war on 2 March 1992, the day of the Republic of Moldova's formal recognition as an independent state at the United Nations.⁹ With the support of the former 14th Soviet Army stationed in Moldova, the Transnistrian forces defeated the weak and embryonic Moldovan Army. The ceasefire reached by the parties on 21st July 1992 in Moscow put an end to the conflict, which had resulted in several hundred casualties and about 100,000 internally displaced persons and refugees.

Transnistria's separatist regime rejected Chişinău's post-war proposals offering the region a special status within Moldova and the right to secede if Moldova changed its statehood (i.e. if it united with Romania). Instead, Transnistria managed to get all the attributes of its own statehood such as a constitution; presidential, legislative, executive, and judicial organs; military and security apparatus; a postal system; currency, and so on. Since then, Tiraspol (the capital of the self-declared Transnistrian republic) has sought to build a "Transnistrian nation" by means of various tools and symbols dating from the Soviet period, to create the perception of a different identity on the left bank of the Nistru River. Russian, Ukrainian and Moldovan were declared as official languages in the self-declared Transnistrian republic. In reality, Russian was preserved as the main language of public service with Cyrillic script for the Moldovan/Romanian language, in contrast with Moldova proper, which has switched back to the Latin script.

In spite of these elements of statehood, the self-declared Transnistrian republic does not officially exist in the eyes of the international community. It is not recognized by any United Nations member state. Thus, Transnistria is missing a key prerequisite for statehood: international recognition. The only entities that have recognized the independence of Transnistria are

9 Armed clashes broke out on a limited scale between the Transdnistrian separatist forces and the Moldovan police as early as November 1990 at Dubăsari, on the left bank of the Nistru River.

Georgia's and Azerbaijan's breakaway regions, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh. However, these are political entities with limited or no international recognition.¹⁰

Russia's Role in the Survival of Transnistrian Statehood

The Transnistrian *de facto* state would not have any existence without Russia's strong endorsement. According to a European Court for Human Rights document issued in 2004, "Russia provided military, political and economic support to the separatist regime, thus enabling it to survive by strengthening itself and by acquiring a certain amount of autonomy vis-à-vis Moldova."¹¹

Transnistria is a landlocked region with a low demographic potential and a lack of raw materials. The financial assistance received from Russia is fundamental for Transnistria's economy, that would be sustainable only for two to three months without Russian economic aid.¹² Moscow officially refers to the assistance it provides to Transnistria as "humanitarian aid." It essentially consists of a substantial financial contribution to the monthly pensions and salaries of Transnistria's inhabitants. In addition, Moscow subsidizes Transnistria's law enforcement agencies, notably the army and the Ministry of State Security (or KGB as it is known). Russia also fuels the local economy through significant gas subsidies. Transnistria pays nothing at all for the gas consumed, because Gazprom has a single contract with the Republic of Moldova.¹³ Finally, Moscow indirectly supports the

10 Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence in the aftermath of the 2008 Russian-Georgian war. Internationally, only Russia's Latin-American allies, Venezuela and Nicaragua have recognized South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence, apart from a few Pacific island states. No UN member state has recognized the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh.

11 European Court of Human Rights, "Case of Ilascu and others versus Moldova and Russia," Judgement issued on July 8, 2004, available at: <http://www.echr.coe.int/eng/press/2004/July/GrandChamberjudgmentIlascuandOthersvMoldovaandRussia.htm>.

12 Center for Strategic Studies and Reforms (CISR), "Moldova's and Transnistria's Economies: From Conflict to Prospects of Peaceful Development. Foreign Trade: The Source of Growth and Contradictions," 2007, available at: [http://www.cisr-md.org/pdf/2007 Transnistria Report rus 2en.pdf](http://www.cisr-md.org/pdf/2007%20Transnistria%20Report%20rus%20en.pdf).

13 The Republic of Moldova consumes on average some 3 to 3.5 bcm of gas per year. While the territory under Chişinău's control consumes only about 1 bcm per year, Transnistria uses at least two thirds of Gazprom's

Transnistrian economy through cash remittances from expatriate workers and Russian investments. Up to 80% of total cash remittances sent to Transnistria come from Russia, and Russian companies invest in local industrial plants inherited from the Soviet period.

Russia plays the role of a defensive shield vis-à-vis the regime in Tiraspol by protecting Transnistrian statehood politically and diplomatically. Russia, as the key member of the “5+2” negotiating format (also including Republic of Moldova, Transnistria, Ukraine, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, United States and European Union as observers), seeks to ensure that Tiraspol’s interests are well represented within the talks on the conflict. Moscow is also active when measures taken by Moldovan or Ukrainian governments appear to be detrimental to the interests of Transnistrian statehood, consequently undermining its fragile existence. Russian officials constantly criticize Moldovan and Ukrainian initiatives regarding the strength of controls at “the borders” with Transnistria, which has been known as the “black hole of Europe.”¹⁴ While Chişinău and Kiev consider these measures as necessary for impeding arms smuggling and other trafficking in the region, Russia sees them as a “blockade” against Transnistria and an attempt to change the format of the peace settlement process.

Russia also provides Transnistria with a “security umbrella” through its significant military presence in the region, which consists of the Operational Group of Russian Forces and so-called Russian “peacekeepers.” The Operational Group of Russian forces (*Operativnaya Grupa Rossiyskikh Voysk* in Russian) was established as the successor to the former 14th Army which was stationed in Moldova during the Soviet period. Russian

annual deliveries to Moldova as a whole. Transnistria owes a debt approaching \$4 billion to Gazprom for past deliveries of gas. Currently Moldova owes a debt approaching \$5, 2 billion to Gazprom of which 89% is owed by Transnistria.

14 In 2002, the European Parliament’s delegation to Moldova designed Transnistria as a “black hole in Europe in which illegal trade in arms, the trafficking in human beings and the laundering of criminal finance was carried on.” European Parliament, “Ad hoc delegation to Moldova,” June 5-6, 2002, available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/euro/pcc/ubm/pcc_meeting/reports/2002_06_06_adhoc_moldova_en.pdf.

“peacekeepers” are part of a Russian-Moldovan-Transnistrian tripartite peacekeeping force overseeing the implementation of the 1992 ceasefire agreement. It is stationed in the demilitarized zone along the Nistru River under the authority of a Joint Control Commission (JCC). Russia’s troops theoretically ensure two distinct but practically overlapping missions in Transnistria: “peacekeeping” and guarding vast ammunition stockpiles left over from the Soviet era. When the Republic of Moldova proclaimed independence in 1991 about 45,951 tons of ammunitions were stockpiled in Transnistria, which was considered as one of the largest storage areas of armaments in Europe.¹⁵ According to current official data, Russia’s military presence in Transnistria consists of some 1,500 troops of the Operational Group of Russian Forces, which are augmented by over 400 Russian peacekeeping forces.¹⁶ However, Moldovan sources claim that the force is much more considerable in size and could easily reach 10,000–12,000 if it were to add that number to the Transnistrian military and security forces.¹⁷

Officially Russia’s support to Transnistria is related to the protection of Russians living in the breakaway region of Moldova. According to current estimates, 30.4% of Transnistria’s population are ethnic Russians and about 150,000–200,000 residents hold Russian passports. Russia has been employing this argument since the 1990s, when Moscow first used it for justifying its implication in the Transnistrian conflict and unofficially backing the separatist forces against Chişinău. At that time, Russia’s narrative consisted of the necessity to stop “the civil war” in Moldova and to “protect Russian population” in Transnistria. During the 1992 Transnistria war, Aleksandr Lebed, the commander of the former soviet 14th Army, accused Moldova of being a “fascist state” and denounced Moldovan authorities as

15 Ceslav Ciobanu, “Frozen and forgotten states: Genesis, Political Economy and Prospects for Solution,” Virginia State University/U.S. Institute of Peace, 2008.

16 Regnum, “Glavy MID Rossiyi i Moldaviyi obsudili situatziu naUkraine i blokadu Pridnestroviya,” April 7, 2014, available at: <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1787931.html>.

17 Dumitru Manzarari, “Crimea Crisis Exposes Severe Deficiencies in Transnistria Negotiations Format,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol.11, issue 67, April 9, 2014, available at: http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/txt_tnews%5Btt_news%5D=42205&cHash=4c7b7a7d678fcdf15b51ffecc093a58#.VXAgjk3GOUk.

“war criminals.”¹⁸

The reality is, however, much more complex and the situation on the ground differs from that depicted by Russia’s official statements. Currently, Transnistria’s mixed population also comprises 31.9% of Moldovans and 28.8% of Ukrainians, and the inhabitants are believed to have multiple citizenship, including Moldovan, Ukrainian, Bulgarian and even Romanian. In fact, the involvement of Russia in the Transnistrian issue goes beyond the protection of Russians living in the region. Moscow’s support to the breakaway region is also related to Russia’s geostrategic and geopolitical interests vis-à-vis Moldova, Ukraine and the Euro-Atlantic community.

Transnistria as Russia’s Lever of Influence vis-à-vis Moldova and Ukraine

Unlike Georgia’s two breakaway republics, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia has not recognized the independence of Transnistria so far. Further, Moscow remained cautious in the wake of the 2014 Crimea referendum, which coincidentally had the same percentage of pro-Russia votes as the 2006 Transnistria referendum that supported independence from Moldova and free association with Russia. In the aftermath of the Crimea referendum leading to Russia’s annexation of Ukraine’s region of Crimea, Tiraspol appealed to Russia to initiate the process of state recognition for Transnistria.¹⁹ However, Russia remains deaf to the requests of Transnistrian authorities, emphasizing its full support to the peaceful settlement of the conflict within the territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova.

The reality is that Russia is not willing to recognize the independence of Transnistria because of geography and, notably geopolitics. If Transnistria shared a border with Russia, it would have taken the path of Georgia’s secessionist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Unlike these territories,

18 Anatolie Muntean and Nicolae Ciubotaru, “Războiul de pe Nistru,” Bucharest, Ager – Economistul, 2004, p.119.

19 Rosbalt, “Pridnestroviye vsled za Krym xochet voyti v sostav Rossiyi,” March 18, 2014, available at: <http://www.rosbalt.ru/exusrr/2014/03/18/1245241.html>.

Russia cannot get to Transnistria without first going through Ukrainian territory or the Western bank of the Nistru River controlled by Chişinău, capital of an independent state that does not align with Russia's interests. While Russia's short and medium-term goals are to keep the status-quo in the conflict, Moscow's long term and final goal is the reintegration of Transnistria into the Republic of Moldova on a federal basis under its political and military guarantees. To this end, Moscow proposed several conflict settlement plans consisting of Moldova's federalization with Transnistria. One of the most recent and elaborate of Russia's proposals was the 2003 "Kozak Memorandum" which was drafted by Dmitri Kozak, the Russian president's representative.

The essence of the document, officially entitled "Russian Draft Memorandum on the Basic Principles of the State Structure of a United State in Moldova," was the transformation of Moldova into an "asymmetric federation" with Transnistria. The Transnistrian region would have extensive autonomy over its own affairs, as well as the power of veto over constitutional amendments and the ratification of international treaties that might limit its autonomy. It provided that the new federal Moldovan state would be neutral and demilitarized. Yet, Moscow indicated that it would maintain a military presence in the region for twenty years to guarantee the agreement's implementation. If signed, this document would have transformed the Republic of Moldova into a larger Transnistria under Russian political influence.

For Russia, Transnistria primarily has an instrumental function since it enables Moscow to keep a lever of influence over the domestic and more importantly, foreign policy of Moldova. Transnistria is the Republic of Moldova's Achilles heel; it prevents it from moving closer to the West. The Republic of Moldova will not get membership in the EU as long as the conflict over Transnistria continues without a political solution. As a signatory country of the Association agreement with the EU, the Republic of Moldova strives for the acquisition of European Union membership. Instead, Transnistria could be helpful in bringing the Republic of Moldova back into the Russian sphere of influence. Moscow's first political objective

is to install a Russian-friendly political regime in Chişinău. The end-goal is to engage Moldova in Russian led integrationist structures such as the Eurasian Union, which is nothing more than the restoration of ancient forms of integration in the post-Soviet area under Russia's authority. In this sense, it is not by chance that Moscow appointed Russia's deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin as special representative on Transnistria. A former ambassador to NATO, Mr Rogozin has been known as a Russian nationalist who strongly supports the idea of a Eurasian union/empire.

In addition, Transnistria plays a significant role in Russia's current policy towards Ukraine. One will notice that Transnistria is closely related to Ukraine both geographically and historically. Located in the vicinity of the south-western part of Ukraine, Transnistria was a component of the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic that the Soviets created within the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1924. With the creation of the Moldavian ASSR, the Soviets hoped that the new republic would spread communist ideas into neighbouring Moldova/Bessarabia in order to "get it back" from Romania.

Today the geographic position of Moldova's breakaway region shows Transnistria as a thorn in Ukraine's side, which can be used by Russia in destabilizing Ukraine and reshaping Ukrainian statehood in its own interests. The implication of Transnistrian elements in the 2014 Ukrainian crisis asserts Transnistria as a serious challenge to the territorial integrity of Ukraine. For instance, the Transnistrian "siloviki" (military-security establishment representatives) played an important role in the Russian annexation of Crimea, the eruption of military hostilities in Eastern Ukraine and the creation of the separatist Donetsk People's Republic. The involvement of many Transnistrian figures in recent Ukrainian events gives reason to believe that Ukraine is at risk of ending up with a Transnistria-type scenario. In addition, Transnistria can be used as a platform for pursuing separatist actions into other Ukrainian areas such as the south-western region of Odessa. Located 80 km away from Transnistria, Ukraine's last remaining and crucial seaport of Odessa has already been the target of several attempts at destabilization since the eruption of military hostilities

in Eastern Ukraine. According to Ukrainian sources, Transnistrian elements were involved in the clashes that erupted between pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian forces in Odessa during the 2014 May incidents. This led to suspicion that Russia may have tried to destabilize, if not gain control over the Ukrainian seaport of Odessa, an operation in which Transnistria would have played a significant role.

Transnistria, a Russian Bridgehead in Eastern Europe

Transnistria plays a critical role in defending Russia's geopolitical interests in several European sub-regions. First, Transnistria provides Russia with a tool of influence over the South-Western flank of the former Soviet space, which includes Moldova and Ukraine. The Moldovan breakaway region denies accession of these countries to the Euro-Atlantic community, preventing any further enlargement of NATO and the EU to the East. Second, Transnistria is a component part of Russia's long-term strategy towards the wider Black sea region. According to some NATO member states leaders, the strategy aims to transform the Black sea into a "Russian lake."²⁰ Russian military presence in Transnistria follows the logic of encirclement of the Black sea region. Third, Transnistria is one of Russia's three European bridgeheads alongside Kaliningrad to the North and Crimea to the South that are located in vicinity of the Euro-Atlantic community. In this way, Russia holds three exclaves along the Black Sea - Baltic isthmus that allows Moscow to keep an eye on European regional and extra-regional issues.

These considerations explain Russia's refusal to withdraw its troops from Transnistria as well as the weapons stored in the region, despite the repeated requests made by Moldovan authorities and the international community. At the 1999 Istanbul OSCE Summit, Russia underwrote an obligation to withdraw its forces and ammunition from Transnistria by the end of

20 Traian Băsescu, former Romanian president, Liliana Ruse, "Marea Neagră-lac rusec," *9 AM News*, September 17, 2005, available at: <http://www.9am.ro/stiri-revista-presei/Politica/18651/Marea-Neagra-lac-rusec.html>.

2002. Although Russia removed small quantities of ammunition from Transnistria, over 20,000 tons of ammunitions remain stored in the depots there.²¹ Russia refuses to withdraw its troops from Transnistria, linking the military withdrawal to the political settlement of the conflict. Moscow is using delaying tactics in the hope that Chisinau will accept the legalization of Russian military presence on the Republic of Moldova's territory. This became clear in the "Kozak Memorandum," which, if it had been signed, would have sanctioned the presence of Russian troops on Moldova's territory until 2020.²²

Since the U.S. announcement that an interceptor missile system would be deployed in Romania, Transnistria has acquired new geostrategic significance for Russia. Russian officials warned of the deployment of a radar system of the "Voronesh" type in Transnistria, which may be based in Tiraspol. There have also been unverified claims that Moscow might put Iskander missiles in Transnistria, but this could be just a Russian tactic in order to dissuade the United States from proceeding with the deployment of the missile system in Eastern Europe. Moscow has already used this ploy, when it tried to dissuade the United States from deploying the missile system in Central Europe and notably in Poland and the Czech Republic. At that time, Russia threatened to deploy Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad, the Russian exclave between Poland and Lithuania.²³

21 According to the OSCE Mission to Moldova, of a total of 42,000 tons of ammunitions stored in Transnistria, 1,153 tons (3%) were transported back to Russia in 2001, 2,405 tons (6%) in 2002 and 16,573 tons (39%) in 2003.

22 Mihai Gribincea, Moldovan diplomat (Moldova's current Ambassador to Belgium and NATO), "Russian troops in Transnistria - a threat to the national security of the Republic of Moldova," *Moldova.org*, December 5, 2006, available at: <http://www.moldova.org/russian-troops-in-transnistria-a-threat-to-the-security-of-the-republic-of-moldova-20998-eng>.

23 Vladimir Socor, "Russia warns of missile forward-deployment in Kaliningrad region," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol.4, Issue 131, July 6, 2007, available at: http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=32850&no_cache=1.

Conclusion, Scenarios and Recommendations

The Transnistrian issue is not a purely intra-state conflict, since it has a significant external dimension. Russia as a third player has been highly involved in the Transnistrian question since the emergence of the conflict in the 1990s. Russia's involvement has been driven by geostrategic calculations which consist of restoring its sphere of influence on the Western flank of the former Soviet Union and preventing the expansion of the Euro-Atlantic community to the East.

The preservation of former Soviet republics in the Russian orbit has been Moscow's obsession since the collapse of the Soviet Union, that Russian leaders consider the "greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century."²⁴ This explains Russia's support to the separatist movements in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's implosion and its direct or indirect involvement in the military hostilities in the breakaway regions of Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan in the 1990s. Coincidentally or not, the armed conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh erupted in the same period of time and within the very countries that refused to join Russia's new 'integrationist' structures, preferring rapprochement with the West.

Russia has been playing the "ethnic card" in the post-Soviet republics in order to keep control over the main foreign policy choices of central governments and prevent them from making "unfriendly" decisions that might alter Moscow's interests. The closer the former Soviet republics get to the Euro-Atlantic community, the harder Russia plays this card. The preservation of "frozen conflicts" inside these countries allows Russia to undermine the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the newly independent states; to harm their political, social and economic development; and to maintain a source of tension inside their societies and their environments.

These considerations explain the difficulty in solving the unsettled

24 Vladimir Putin, Russia's president, Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, April 25, 2005.

conflict in Transnistria. Within this context, the following scenarios may be drawn regarding the future of Transnistria's breakaway region and those of the Republic of Moldova itself.

The most unlikely scenario is the recognition of Transnistria's independence by Russia. An independent Transnistria is not in keeping with Russia's geostrategic interests. Moreover, it would be difficult to handle the independence of Transnistria seeing that the Moldovan region doesn't share a common border with Russia. However, this scenario may happen only if Russia succeeds in getting control over the southern regions of Ukraine, and notably the port of Odessa in order to implement new secessionist projects in the region, such as "Novorossiia" (literally, New Russia).²⁵

The most likely scenario is the preservation of the status-quo in the Republic of Moldova, which seems to be the most convenient outcome for Russia and Western actors as well. Keeping the current situation unaltered is the least of the worst-case scenarios for Russia, which seeks to prevent the Republic of Moldova from getting closer to the European Union and the Euro-Atlantic community. At the same time, this looks like being the most realistic option for Western actors whose primary interests are to prevent the return of Moldova to Russia's sphere of influence.

The best scenario for Russia consists of the "transnistriazation" of the Republic of Moldova. This process means the federalization of the Republic of Moldova with Transnistria under Russian terms. This may happen in two different ways. The peaceful route to Moldova's transnistriazation could take place if a pro-Russian government is reelected in Chişinău. The leftist political forces have always been favourable to Russia's plans for Moldova's federalization. The violent way of Moldova's "transnistriazation" is the destabilization of the country by Russia, through a sort of hybrid strategy involving the pursuit of provocative actions coming from the left bank of

25 On 17 April 2014 Russia's president Vladimir Putin stated that the Ukrainian territories of Kharkiv, Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Mykolayiv and Odessa were historically part of Novorossiia. Adrian S. Basora, Alexander Fisher, "Putin's "Greater Novorossiia" - The Dismemberment of Ukraine," *FPRI*, May 2015, available at: <http://www.fpri.org/articles/2014/05/putins-greater-novorossiia-dismemberment-ukraine>.

the Nistru River: an economic blockade, gas shortages and the use of the “ethnic card” in other areas of Moldova.

The best scenario for the West is the Europeanization of the Republic of Moldova. This doesn't mean EU membership for the Republic of Moldova, because that would be unrealistic at the moment. Instead, Chişinău could strengthen its partnership with the EU in order to pursue the democratic path and economic development of the right bank of the Nistru River in order to become more attractive vis-à-vis Transnistria's population. A poor Moldovan society and corrupt governance will never be attractive for its inhabitants. Finally the gradual reintegration of the Republic of Moldova could open the door to the country's institutional accession to the European Union and even to the Euro-Atlantic community.

Recommendations for NATO

Currently, NATO plays no role in the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict which has been challenging the security and the stability of Eastern Europe since the 1990s. It would be difficult to envisage direct participation of NATO at the “5+2” format negotiations on the conflict in Transnistria, because of the sensitivities of Transnistrian and Russian authorities. However, NATO cannot ignore the existence of the “frozen conflict” in Transnistria, which acquires new meaning in the context of the Ukrainian crisis and risks challenging the stability of the Alliance's Eastern flank. In this regard, it would be necessary to constitute a “Transnistria Contact Group” inside NATO to regularly bring together Moldovan and Ukrainian representatives as well as U.S. and EU participants at the negotiations on the settlement of the conflict. The main mission of this group would consist of sharing and discussing accurate information in order to regularly evaluate the situation in the Transnistrian region. NATO could also contribute to the organization of joint Moldovan and Ukrainian military training, in order to increase Moldovan-Ukrainian interoperability and build confidence between the two sides. A strong Ukrainian-Moldovan dialogue based on trust, cooperation and friendship is crucial for finding

possible solutions to the Transnistrian issue.

At the same time, NATO has to continue its efforts in assisting and supporting Moldovan authorities in reforming the defence, security and intelligence sectors of the country. The organization of joint training and the delivery of high quality military education to Moldovan officers is crucial to strengthening the defence and security capabilities of the Republic of Moldova. However, NATO should not ignore the Moldovan population whose majority still feels a certain reluctance vis-a-vis the Alliance. The reserved attitude of the majority of Moldovans towards NATO is inherited from the Cold War era and it is still influenced by Soviet-era stereotypes. The perception of NATO from the Moldovan society's perspective has changed little since the collapse of the Soviet Union, due to a lack of public debate and accurate information on the Euro-Atlantic Community. With rare exceptions, the political parties have avoided publicly supporting a stronger partnership between Moldova and NATO, and have avoided initiating debates on this subject too. This attitude can be attributed to the fear of provoking Russia, which has clearly expressed its negative vision about NATO's waves of enlargement eastwards. The Republic of Moldova does not pursue the accession to NATO, because of its state of neutrality; but Russia is also against the question about deepening cooperation with the Alliance. To conclude, many Moldovans do not understand the benefits of the Moldova-NATO enhanced cooperation because most of them lack the proper knowledge on NATO. By consequence, it is recommended to increase NATO's public diplomacy and strategic communication efforts in order to gain the hearts and the minds of the Moldovans. NATO's core message should be based on the idea that the Alliance is not only a military organization but also a support to the cause of peace, stability and development of its member states and partner countries.

12

Hybrid or Not: Deterring and Defeating Russia's Ways of Warfare in the Baltics - The Case of Estonia

Henrik Praks

The European security architecture and the North Atlantic Alliance as its key pillar are facing a stern test. Today's Russian Federation under the leadership of President Putin is a revisionist power seeking to change the international order. In Europe, its ultimate aim is to extend its influence and control westward and to re-define the post-Cold War security architecture. Russia may objectively be a declining power but it is asserting itself in an increasingly confident manner and working on exploiting Western weaknesses. War with Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Eastern parts of Ukraine in 2014, involvement in the Syrian conflict in direct opposition to Western interests – these are only the most obvious and blatant examples of Russia's actions.

So far Russia has refrained from directly challenging the territorial integrity and sovereignty of a NATO member nation, but it would be a mistake to think that the regime in the Kremlin would not be ready to attempt this. The series of strategic surprises initiated by Russia tells us not to rule something out just because it seems implausible in our eyes. Russia has repeatedly shown that it is ready to use military force to achieve its political aims and has brought the prospect of "old-fashioned" territorial conquest back to the 21st century European landscape.

In its neighbourhood Russia is seeking revenge for perceived geopolitical

injustice¹ and wants to re-establish domination over neighbouring countries. There is widespread nostalgia for its imperial past and many in Moscow still refuse to acknowledge the Baltic states as genuinely sovereign countries,² considering them, instead, as legitimate targets for Russian expansionism. Besides the geopolitical angle, Russian foreign policy conveniently uses an ethno-nationalist dimension. As part of its concept of *Russkij Mir* (Russian World), the leadership in Moscow sees its mission as the protection of all Russians or Russian speakers.³ Russia has openly proclaimed its right not only to protect its citizens, but also so-called “compatriots” abroad.⁴ The presence of large numbers of ethnic Russians on their territory makes the Baltic states, especially Estonia and Latvia where they make up more than quarter of the population,⁵ tempting targets. It is reasonable to assume that this self-declared need to protect the rights of Russian compatriots and citizens would be used as a convenient justification to both domestic and international audiences for any direct Russian intervention in the Baltics.

But there is also another argument which could dictate the Kremlin’s motivation to try something aggressive in the Baltics. Russia may not be so much interested in the Baltic states themselves, but might use them as a convenient place to try to demonstrate the uselessness of NATO. Humiliating the United States, and by extension NATO as a perceived

1 In 2005 President Putin characterised the collapse of the Soviet Union as “the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century.” See “Putin deplores collapse of USSR,” *BBC News*, April 25, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4480745.stm>.

2 In an absurd move in summer 2015, the Russian Prosecutors’ Office, upon the request of two MPs from the Russian State Duma who belong to the ruling United Russia party, launched an investigation into the legality of the Soviet Union’s 1991 recognition of the Baltic states’ independence. See “Russia examines 1991 recognition of Baltic states independence,” *BBC News*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33325842>.

3 Andrei Piontkovsky, “Putin’s concept of the Russian World threatens all territories with a Russian population,” *Hudson Institute*, March 24, 2015, <http://www.hudson.org/research/11165-andrei-piontkovsky-putin-s-concept-of-the-russian-world-threatens-all-territories-with-a-russian-population->

4 “Moscow to Continue Protecting Rights of Compatriots Abroad – Putin,” *RIA Novosti*, July 1, 2014, <http://en.ria.ru/russia/20140701/190775132/Moscow-to-Continue-Protecting-Rights-of-Compatriots-Abroad.html>.

5 According to the results of the population censuses in 2011, ethnic Russians made up 25.2% of the inhabitants in Estonia and 26.9% in Latvia. The number of Russians in Lithuania is significantly lower and constitutes 5.8% of the population. For the results see “2011 Population and Housing Censuses in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania” June 11, 2015, <http://www.csb.gov.lv/en/dati/e-publikacijas/2011-population-and-housing-censuses-estonia-latvia-and-lithuania-42875.html>.

tool of American foreign policy, is a major strategic aim for the Kremlin. Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that Russia would look for opportunities to test NATO and its Article 5 commitments, and, if attainable, eventually undermine and break the Alliance.

Besides having in its possession a wide range of military and other capabilities and tools that could be used to intimidate and attack neighbouring countries, Russia has also shown an ability to make decisions and act very quickly. It has been able repeatedly to surprise the international community by brazen and creative moves. The experience has shown that Moscow is prepared to take very large risks, relying on brinkmanship and escalation.⁶

In general, President Putin could be described as an opportunist who will look at ways to target Western weaknesses and exploit vulnerabilities. If he senses a window of opportunity he may try to exploit it. The risk is that Russian leadership with its distorted world view will indeed believe that the West is weak, and that NATO is dysfunctional and unable to protect its members. Therefore, Moscow may decide at some point that it can take action in the Baltics.⁷

To impose its will on others Russia has been employing a strategy which combines all elements of its power. While the term “hybrid warfare” may not be the best description of Russia’s approach to conflicts and is not used by Russians themselves,⁸ it has been widely adopted internationally, including by NATO. Hybrid warfare is used to describe the employment of,

6 In fact, one can go back to the Russian operation in 1999 to seize the Pristina airport in Kosovo as an example of such moves. While in the end not bringing to Russia any strategic gain the operation for a while threatened to cause a conflict between NATO and the Russian armed forces.

7 For example former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has stated that “there is a high probability that he will intervene in the Baltics to test NATO’s Article 5.” See Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, “Putin could attack Baltic states warns former NATO chief,” *Daily Telegraph*, February 5, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/11393707/Putin-could-attack-Baltic-states-warns-former-Nato-chief.html>.

8 Instead, the Russians have been referring to “new generation warfare” or “non-linear warfare.” Janiz Berziņš, “Russian New Generation Warfare is not Hybrid Warfare,” in Artis Pabriks and Andis Kudors (ed.), *The War in Ukraine: Lessons for Europe*, University of Latvia Press, 2015. Also available on http://eng.appc.lv/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/War_in_Ukraine.pdf.

in a co-ordinated way, a mixture of military and non-military components to achieve political ends. Alongside traditional and modern tools of warfare and subversion it can also include coercive instruments such as economic acts, political and diplomatic pressure, information operations, and so on.

In light of this, this chapter explores the nature of the Russian challenge in the Baltic region as the most exposed area of the NATO Alliance. It will use Estonia as a case study, but similar issues would also apply in the case of its Baltic neighbours Latvia and Lithuania. It will also compare the experiences the conflict in Ukraine has provided and compare them with the current situation in Estonia. The chapter also elaborates on steps Estonia, other Allies, and NATO as a whole should take to respond.

Exploring Russia's Leverages and Estonia's Vulnerabilities

Since regaining its independence in 1991, Estonia has regularly experienced various forms of political, economic, and military pressure from its Eastern neighbour. These have been accompanied by intensified information warfare, intelligence activities and, more recently, cyber-attacks. These measures are aimed at forcing the Estonian government to change its policies in a way considered favourable to Russia.

As Russian-style hybrid warfare – where Moscow is able to select the place, time, and means – plays to Russia's strengths, and targets perceived weaknesses of the opponent(s), it is necessary first to identify Russia's strengths and Estonia's weaknesses and vulnerabilities.

Political and Economic Tools

Russia would probably prefer to achieve its strategic aims in Estonia by establishing hegemony over a country through diplomatic and economic pressure. Existence of an obedient government which would enable Russia to exercise political domination would presumably suit Moscow well. While there are pro-Russian political forces in Estonia, the general political

consensus among Estonia's political elite and society as a whole has been steadfastly unfavourable to Russian aims. A policy of political, military and economic integration with the West has been pursued by all Estonian governments and it is extremely unlikely that this would change.

A tool which Russia has been actively using in Europe to gain influence, and to divide and rule, has been its economic leverage, including through the exploitation of energy dependence. In Estonia, Russia has been attempting to apply economic pressure through steps like selective trade embargoes and cut-offs of Russia's transit trade. However, the usefulness of these means has been limited. Trade with Russia, while being undoubtedly important for the Estonian economy, constitutes less than 10% of Estonia's foreign trade.⁹ Also, while almost all of the natural gas used in Estonia presently comes from Russia,¹⁰ gas itself accounts for only about 10% of the country's energy supply.¹¹ Therefore, while economic leverage to pressure Estonia undoubtedly exists, the economic factor alone will not enable Russia to achieve its goals.

The Potential Role of Local Russian-Speaking Populations and the Possible Employment of Hybrid Models

The weaknesses of the Ukrainian state in the spring of 2014 could be in general identified as: 1) the existence of areas where the population had grievances towards central government and sympathies towards Russia; 2) corrupt and partly disloyal local administrations and internal security structures; 3) militarily Ukraine was significantly weaker than Russia and its armed forces were unprepared for this kind of conflict.¹² Both in Crimea

9 "Statistical Yearbook of Estonia 2015," *Statistics Estonia*, <http://www.stat.ee/90733>.

10 Since 2014, Estonia can also receive gas through the LNG terminal opened in Lithuania, but until additional LNG terminals are built in the region the overall dependency on supplies from Gazprom will remain.

11 "Baltics can keep lights on if Russia turns off the gas," *Reuters*, May 7, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/07/us-ukraine-crisis-baltics-analysis-idUSBREA460JN20140507>.

12 For an analysis of Russia's actions and Ukrainian weaknesses see Andras Racz, "Russia's Hybrid War: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist," *Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, 2015.

and initially in Donbass, the Ukrainian authorities remained mostly passive, allowing opponents to take the initiative and thus enabling the “separatists” to gain ground.¹³ Also, as the Ukrainian state is not part of any alliance, it was therefore mostly left without any external assistance to deal with the situation.

In Crimea the conditions were particularly ideal for Russia as they also already included the on-site presence of Russian military assets, something which cannot be replicated in Estonia. Of more relevance could be the use of tactics similar to those used in the beginning in South-East Ukraine. There, initially, a hybrid rulebook was followed, with Russian regular and irregular forces operating covertly together with local activists, thereby attempting to present itself as an entirely spontaneous and local rebellion. In Estonia, Russia could conceivably attempt a similar kind of subversive campaign in order to form a seemingly local “spontaneous” resistance movement for creating some kind of hybrid and low-intensity conflict situation which it hopes would lead to major destabilization of the country. It would then aim to portray the issue as an internal conflict and hope this would remain sufficiently in the “grey zone” so that Allies would not have the stomach to intervene, thereby undermining Alliance solidarity with Estonia. This should then allow Russia to hope to dictate its terms to Estonia.

There has been wide speculation as to whether the region of North-East Estonia with its largely Russian-speaking population, and especially the town of Narva which lies immediately on the border with Russia and where 95% of inhabitants are Russian-speaking, could be the next target of such Russian hybrid warfare.¹⁴ According to different indicators the area is

13 An important exemption was the second biggest Ukrainian town Kharkiv, where the response of the Ukrainian side to the initial occupation of the town’s administrative building in early April 2014 was swift and thereby probably avoided the escalation of the situation there to a Donbass scenario. See “How separatism was tamed in Kharkiv,” *Euromaidan press*, May 15, 2014, <http://euromaidanpress.com/2014/05/15/how-separatism-was-tamed-in-kharkiv/>.

14 “Is Narva next?” has been often asked in international media. See for example Gordon F.Sander, “Could Estonia be the next target of Russian annexation?” *Christian Science Monitor*, April 3, 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2014/0403/Could-Estonia-be-the-next-target-of-Russian-annexation>; Chris Morris, “Nervous Estonians look to the West as Russia fears grow,” *BBC News*, September 3, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-29054128>.

significantly less integrated to Estonian society¹⁵ and it is also economically in a poorer state than the Estonian average.

The ethnic factor itself is certainly a vulnerability for Estonia. Russia treats ethnicity as a powerful weapon and it has instrumentalised its “compatriots” policy as a means to hamper the integration of Russian-speakers into Estonian society and keep them segregated instead.¹⁶ To this end, it has been financing organisations and elements in Estonia who defend and advance its policies.¹⁷ Surveys have shown that among Estonia’s Russian-speaking inhabitants, the levels of identification with the country and the trust in state institutions are significantly lower compared to that of ethnic Estonians. Also, there are fundamental differences in evaluating the activities of Russian leadership.¹⁸

At the same time, although it would probably be fair to say that the Russians in Estonia are confused and have mixed feelings, this does not necessarily translate into willingness to change their status and become subjects of the Russian Federation. Economic welfare and social security in Estonia, even in its poorest areas, is clearly of a higher standard than in Russia. This is a fundamental difference compared to the situation in Ukraine.¹⁹ The inhabitants of North-East Estonia, for example, can see the differences for themselves every day if they visit the areas on the other side of the border.²⁰ In Estonia, there are also no organized groups of any kind

15 “Estonian Society Monitoring 2015,” http://www.kul.ee/sites/default/files/kokkuvoteim_2015_en.pdf.

16 For a study of the Russian compatriots policy and other influence tools see Mike Winnerstig (ed), “Tools of Destabilization: Russian Soft-Power” and “Non-military Influence in the Baltic States,” *Swedish Defence Research Agency*, December 2014.

17 “Kremlin’s millions: How Russia funds NGOs in Baltics,” September 4, 2015, <http://en.delfi.lt/nordic-baltic/kremlins-millions-how-russia-funds-ngos-in-baltics.d?id=68908408>.

18 “Estonian Society Monitoring 2015;” “Public Opinion and National Defence,” April 2015, http://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article_files/public_opinion_and_national_defence_2015_march_0.pdf.

19 Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves has pointed out: “The average Russian miner in Donetsk gets 200 euros a month. The average Russian miner in Estonia gets 2,000 euros a month.” See Lally Weymouth, “*The West Has Been in a State of Shock*,” *Slate Magazine*, September 29, 2014, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2014/09/estonian_president_ilves_interview_the_relationship_between_nato_and_russia.html.

20 For a more extensive discussion see Andres Kasekamp, “Why Narva is not next,” *Estonian Foreign Policy Institute Paper Series*, http://www.evi.ee/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/EVI-mottepaber21_mai15.pdf.

who would advocate separatism. The violence and destruction witnessed in Ukraine has also shown what may happen when you invite conflict to your doorstep; this has also helped to cool heads.

However, the danger of manipulation by Russia cannot be dismissed and, although in smaller numbers than in Ukraine, elements susceptible to trouble exist in Estonia. A major problem is that a significant part of local Russians live in a separate information space dominated by the Russian government-controlled media which is engaged in massive and sophisticated hostile information activities. In 2007, during the so-called Bronze Soldier crisis, Russian propaganda played an important role in skilfully instigating an emotional outburst leading to rioting.²¹

Russia's extremely intensive and prominent use of media as a propaganda and disinformation tool has been widely noted.²² A renowned Kremlin propagandist, Dmitri Kiseljov, has declared that "information war is now the main type of war."²³ With regard to Estonia, Russia's information warfare has been in full swing for many years. It has been targeted at Estonian society, both Estonians and non-Estonians, but is also used internationally to bring pressure on Estonia from its NATO and EU allies. The main messages Russia has been promoting are alleged discrimination against Russian-speaking people and support of nazism, but also, increasingly, a message of Estonia as a kind of failed country with no prospects.²⁴ The aim is to create distrust and dissent vis-à-vis Estonian authorities, to depress the society and weaken its morale.

At the moment, no immediate cause which could lead to the creation of

21 In spring 2007, the Estonian authorities' decision to relocate a Soviet-era World War II monument from central Tallinn to a military cemetery caused a protest which turned into confrontation with the police and looting.

22 It has been characterised as "weaponisation of information." See Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss "The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money," *The Interpreter*, November 22, 2014, <http://www.interpretermag.com/the-menace-of-unreality-how-the-kremlin-weaponizes-information-culture-and-money/>.

23 Peter Pomerantsev, "Inside Putin's Information War," *Politico*, January 4, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/01/putin-russia-tv-113960>.

24 "Estonian Internal Service, Annual Review 2014," https://www.kapo.ee/cms-data/_text/138/124/files/kapo-aastaraamat-2014-en.pdf.

social and political unrest is visible. However, by instigating provocations and using mass propaganda it is conceivable to picture the emergence of a heated situation whereby a number of local Russians would go to the streets and ask for the support of Moscow. Provocations have always been one of the tools in the arsenal of Soviet and Russian special services. Also, in reality, Russia would not necessarily need massive local support for its propaganda purposes, but only the illusion of it. In South-East Ukraine, while the majority of the population remained passive, a small minority of activists was able to present a picture of popular rebellion. Moreover, like in Ukraine, to make trouble Russia could try to insert “Putin’s tourists” masquerading as locals.

An important difference between the situation in Ukraine in spring 2014 and the present one in Estonia is the determination and capabilities of the Estonian state to resist such scenarios. In Estonia the state controls the whole territory of the country. It would be difficult to envision Russian operatives deployed undercover to Estonia in significant numbers without being noticed by Estonia’s security services. There is also no reason to believe that in case of internal disturbances local police would be disloyal or have low morale. In Ukraine the military was, from the outset, not ready to fight against the Russians, but Estonian Defence Forces have always prepared exactly for that. It should also be noted that as the Estonian military does not use Soviet/Russian arms or equipment, the other side could not claim that the arsenal used by the “insurgents” comes from captured governmental stocks, a claim Russia blatantly tried to use in Ukraine.

But wars never repeat themselves. While the possibility of covert warfare employing unconventional methods should not be excluded and needs to be planned for, in Estonia’s case Russia could easily aim to exploit a different vulnerability.

For example, it may well be related to the field of cyber security. Estonia is one of the most wired countries in the world and the functioning of the state is dependent on computer networks. After the infamous 2007 cyber-attacks against the Estonian government, media and banking websites,

which were presumably undertaken by Russian state-sponsored hacker groups, there have been no large-scale cyber crises in Estonia. However, cyber threats are becoming more numerous and sophisticated and in 2014 the Estonian Information Security Authority reported a considerable increase in the severity of the incidents.²⁵ With Russia investing heavily into offensive cyber capabilities Russian cyber espionage in particular has grown to become a very significant danger.²⁶ While the overall Estonian capacity for handling cyber risks can be considered satisfactory, a future determined and co-ordinated cyber assault against its critical information infrastructure would be a complex challenge. If successful, cyber-attacks could cause real damage through the interruption of critical services, thereby disrupting and destabilizing society.

Russian Military Power and the Opportunities it Provides for Moscow

Hard power has always played an important role in Soviet and Russian thinking. After the mixed experiences from war with Georgia in 2008 Russia launched massive military reform and modernization programmes focused on qualitative improvements of its forces. Russia has been working to raise the combat readiness and reaction speed of its armed forces and on forming a pool of rapid intervention forces. These could exploit opportunities for easy wins and rapidly take control of territory before the other side could undertake a serious response. As a result Russia has increased confidence in its own military potential.

In Ukraine also, its military power has played a central role as the constant threat of an overwhelming conventional attack has been one of the main leverages Russia has had there. In spring 2014, under the disguise of “exercises,” Russia massed large concentrations of its armed forces to the east of the Ukrainian border, thereby preventing Ukraine from making more

25 “Estonian Information Services Agency, 2014 Annual Report,” https://www.ria.ee/public/Kuberturvalisus/RIA-Kyberturbe-aruanne-2014_ENG.pdf.

26 For issues relating to Russian cyber espionage see Patrik Maldre, “The Many Variants of Russian Cyber Espionage,” *ICDS blog*, <http://www.icds.ee/blog/article/the-many-variants-of-russian-cyber-espionage-1/>.

forceful attempts to regain lost territory.²⁷ The initial hybrid experiment in Donbass did not bring about the anticipated success, so Russia had to intervene in summer 2014 with regular troops to prevent its proxies from being militarily overwhelmed.

As part of its flexing of muscles Russia is displaying its military strength at the borders of neighbouring countries' airspaces and maritime zones. In the case of Estonia, in 2014 Russian aircraft violated Estonian airspace seven times.²⁸ The overall number of intercepts made by NATO Baltic Air Policing Mission in 2014 was more than 130, three times the number of the previous year.²⁹ These activities can also be characterized as testing borders and NATO's reactions. A continuation of this type of coercive pressure and intimidation and testing of Baltic states and their allies' resolve, should be expected.

Russia's recent practice of regularly organizing "snap exercises" contributes to intimidating its neighbours. By regularly conducting such exercises Russia tries to get other nations used to them thereby creating a "new normality." But they can also be used to hide intent and mask preparations for a real attack, and the manoeuvres themselves could be used to transition quickly to military operations. This threat of strategic surprise means that the warning times of a potential military attack are drastically reduced.

In the Baltic region Russia enjoys a clear local military superiority as it is overwhelmingly stronger than local nations and retains this advantage also compared to the present overall NATO force posture in the region. In recent years Russia has expanded its military presence in the Baltic Sea region. New units and bases have been opened and new equipment received. This has included the deployment of the most advanced weapon systems – Iskander-M ballistic missiles, the S-400 long-range air defence

27 Heidi Reisinger and Alexander Golts, "Russia's Hybrid Warfare: Waging War below the Radar of Traditional Collective Defence," *Research Paper* No. 105, NATO Defense College, November 2014.

28 "Russian jets have violated Estonian airspace seven times in 2014," *ERR News*, December 19, 2014, http://news.err.ee/v/main_news/d9073ae6-b932-415c-b3a6-ed893a20d06a.

29 Mark Kramer, "The New Russian Chill in the Baltic," *Current History*, March 2015.

system – which in the event of a conflict would present a serious anti-access/area denial challenge to NATO and thus complicate the arrival of Allied reinforcements to the region. From an Estonian perspective a particular concern is also the 76th Guards Air Assault Division in Pskov, one of Russia's most elite units, less than 100 kilometres from the Estonian border.³⁰ Moreover, Russia's recent large-scale military manoeuvres, like Zapad 2009 and 2013, and numerous snap exercises have practiced massive deployments of forces over strategic distances.

In addition, geography makes the Baltic states vulnerable. They are exposed to attacks from Russian territory and with only a thin strip of land connecting them with Poland the three states could be cut off from the rest of the Alliance.³¹ Two neighbouring countries whose geographical location makes them vital to the defence of the Baltic countries – Sweden and Finland – are not Alliance members and the use of their territory for the defence of the Baltics cannot be taken for granted.

In response to Russia's moves the Allies have chosen to implement in the Baltic region a posture which involves persistent rotational deployment of rather symbolic company-sized trip-wire contingents from the United States, which will be backed by deployments from some European Allies. This is complemented by the presence of fighter aircraft from the Baltic Air Policing mission and periodic deployments of additional land, air and naval assets for exercises and training. In addition, the United States has announced plans to preposition heavy weaponry.³² Other measures agreed in the framework of NATO's Readiness Action Plan have included enhanced planning and the establishment of the NATO Force Integration Units.

30 Kaarel Kaas, "Russian Armed Forces in the Baltic Sea Region," *Diplomaatia*, June/July 2014, <http://www.diplomaatia.ee/en/article/russian-armed-forces-in-the-baltic-sea-region/>. Also see "Everything You Wanted to Know About Russian Troop Locations (But Were Afraid to Ask)," *ERR News*, March 25, 2014, <http://news.err.ee/v/politics/9d430df6-c262-4d7e-88e8-4f3f791eb71e>, which quotes the same author.

31 A term "Suwalki Gap" (on the basis of the major town in the area) has been invented to refer to the strategic importance of the area. See Paul McLeary, "Meet the New Fulda Gap," *Foreign Policy*, September 29, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/29/fulda-gap-nato-russia-putin-us-army/>.

32 "U.S. to pre-position tanks, artillery in Baltics, eastern Europe," *Reuters*, June 23, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/06/23/us-usa-europe-defense-idUSKBN0P315620150623>.

Due to its present very light military footprint in the Baltic theatre the current NATO approach on responding to an emerging crisis relies on rapid response forces like the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) and the rest of the NATO Response Force (NRF) which, at the onset of the crisis, could be deployed to the territory of exposed Allies. However, while Russia as a centralized authoritarian state can take decisions quickly, the corresponding capacity of NATO as an alliance of 28 democracies is in doubt. Besides political decision-making issues, the speed of NATO military reaction would be a factor by itself. Even with VJTF it will take at least several days until the force arrives in theatre.

Based on the above it would be reasonable to assume that the exploitation of Moscow's conventional military superiority and its speedy application would remain central to Russia's strategy. Instead of instigating a slowly boiling conflict which would provide Estonia and its Allies plenty of time to react, Russian tactics could be built on a quick decisive military strike relying on speed, surprise and mass to seize and control territory. It would be designed to enable Russia to achieve its initial aims in time, before Estonia itself was able to react properly and the Allies muster forces to come to its assistance.

The Russian use of open military force against Estonia could take various forms. It could range from a very limited strike in terms of time, space and forces, to a major operation aiming at conquering the whole of Estonia or even all three Baltic states.

Russia could for example, execute a strike which results in it taking an area in northeastern Estonia. By quickly seizing a geographically limited territory it would aim to test how far it can go. Even being able to grab and hold a small piece of NATO territory could be seen as success by Putin. In parallel, Russia would gather a large contingent of forces with sophisticated air defence and fire support assets on its side of the border to provide cover for the troops on Estonian territory and present a threat of escalation. In the end Russia may believe that the crisis will end with another "frozen conflict" which would enable Russia to exert further pressure on Estonia.

In case NATO were to react strongly Russia could also decide that the test had not been successful and could pull its troops back over the border and claim that the crisis was over.

For Estonia, due to its small size, even a geographically very limited incursion would cause huge problems. Unlike Ukraine, the country does not have strategic depth. A conflict of the type seen in Ukraine, where one relatively small part of the country is a warzone, but most of the rest of the country continues its peaceful life, would not be possible in Estonia. The country's small size would also not allow it to trade space for time in the context of a large-scale military invasion.

Russia could easily muster the required military assets for performing a large-scale traditional invasion. It has simulated rapid offensive operations against NATO during its military exercises, which have involved full-scale military operations against a conventional hypothetical enemy in the Baltic operational theatre, cutting off the Baltic states from the rest of NATO countries. In the case of the Zapad 2013 exercise various estimates put the number of Russian troops involved at over 70,000.³³ Open source references to war games testing such scenarios indicate that American experts believe that Russia could probably overwhelm the forces currently available on the territory of the Baltic states in the matter of a few days.³⁴

Whatever the extent of the invasion, the aim of the whole adventure would be to present NATO with a *fait accompli* on the ground. Assuming that Russia achieves its military objectives quickly, the Alliance would be faced with a dilemma of how to respond and the NATO intervention could become very difficult and costly. Russia's capable anti-access/area denial systems in the Kaliningrad area would provide a major military challenge by hampering the entry of Allied reinforcements. That would

33 Pauli Järvenpää, "Zapad-2013: A View from Helsinki," *The Jamestown Foundation*, August 2014, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42762&cHash=117f8e9cf8f81cf90434084f6187a88e#.VDHMcl1cRdg.

34 Terence Kelly, "Stop Putin's Next Invasion Before it Starts," *Rand blog*, March 20, 2015, <http://www.rand.org/blog/2015/03/stop-putins-next-invasion-before-it-starts.html>; Julia Ioffe, "The Pentagon is Preparing New War Plans for a Baltic Battle Against Russia," *Foreign Policy*, September 18, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/09/18/exclusive-the-pentagon-is-preparing-new-war-plans-for-a-baltic-battle-against-russia/>.

put NATO in a very difficult position because strikes on Russian territory would become necessary.

Moreover, Russia could brandish its nuclear capability by openly threatening a limited nuclear strike to force the Alliance to withdraw from a further conflict and force negotiations. This would be in accordance with the Russian concept of using nuclear escalation to de-escalate a conflict.³⁵ Russia could believe that NATO would not dare to fight back when faced with the explicit threat of nuclear escalation. In this case, NATO would have a difficult choice between the options of open warfare with Russia for the re-conquest of lost Allied territory and the accompanying risk of escalating the conflict to nuclear level, or inaction which would deal a devastating blow to the credibility of Alliance.

Responding to Russia's Hybrid and Conventional Military Options *The Role and Possibilities of the Estonian State*

Countering Russian hybrid threats is first and foremost a task for sovereign nations. The Estonian state and society as a whole should be strong enough to withstand the pressure and avoid presenting internal weaknesses that can be exploited by a skilful opponent. Good governance will decrease vulnerabilities and effectively working internal security structures are crucial to reacting quickly and decisively against attempts to exploit weaknesses. Here, the European Union, through its various policy instruments, should strengthen its activities in supporting member states' corresponding efforts.

An important element raising resilience will have to include strengthening of internal societal cohesion. In order to engage its Russian-speaking inhabitants more Estonia launched, in September 2015, a separate Russian-language public TV-channel.³⁶ Whether it will manage to break

35 Nikolai Sokov, "Why Russia calls a limited nuclear strike "de-escalation"," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 13, 2014, <http://thebulletin.org/why-russia-calls-limited-nuclear-strike-de-escalation>.

36 "Estonia launches its first Russian-language TV-channel," *ERR News*, <http://news.err.ee/v/Culture/>

the preference for Russian channels among local Russian speakers remains to be seen. The channel will face an uphill battle in the information space dominated by Russian information tools with their budgets and means.

A key lesson Estonia has learned from events in Ukraine is that the attacked country needs to fight back immediately. The Commander of the Estonian Defence Forces, LtGen Riho Terras, has declared that when the first Little Green Men appear they will be shot at.³⁷ Any armed men without insignia would be considered as terrorists and dealt with as such. Estonia has reviewed its legislation to get rid of legal loopholes and enable swift reaction in case of scenarios involving an “attack from within” situations. It has been working on increasing unity of effort by establishing clear responsibilities and lines of command between internal security forces and the military.

Estonia’s national security and defence documents have established integrated defence and comprehensive security as fundamental principles upon which to base the nation’s response to crises. For example, in spring 2015 a whole-of-government exercise tested responses to scenarios ranging from attempts to turn a humanitarian emergency caused by an environmental accident into a security crisis, cyber-attacks, attempts to disrupt electricity supplies, to mass riots and a sudden outside military attack against key targets.³⁸ As establishing a working comprehensive and integrated approach combining various civilian and military efforts and resources is a difficult task, this is an area which needs constant prioritization.

One of the key problems for Estonia as a small state will always be limited human resources. If events get out of control internal security resources could become strained. In this case a key component of Estonia’s response would be the voluntary defence organization *Kaitseliit* (Defence

entertainment/ba7558c7-7b24-4e02-9af5-ff5270acea40/estonia-launches-its-first-russian-language-tv-channel.

37 Sam Jones, “Estonia Ready to Deal with Russia’s ‘Little Green Men,’” *Financial Times*, May 13, 2015, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/03c5ebde-f95a-11e4-ae65-00144feab7de.html#axzz3nhEuUeA0>.

38 Mikk Salu, “Pool aastat enne Eesti sõda Aslaaviaga (Half a year before Estonia’s war with Aslavia),” *Eesti Ekspress*, June 22, 2015, <http://ekspress.delfi.ee/news/paevauudised/pool-aastat-enne-estli-soda-aslaaviaga?id=71746723>.

League). Many of the members of *Kaitseliit* are also assistant police officers and trained to handle internal security tasks. The Ukrainian experience has also shown the decisive role volunteers can have in protecting public and constitutional order.

In the military sphere, Estonia, as a frontline state, needs to further develop robust initial self-defence capabilities capable of inflicting substantial casualties on an aggressor. The state has already taken the need to invest into its national defence seriously. It is one of the few Allied nations which devotes at least 2% of its GDP to national defence needs. The defence budget for 2016 is expected to grow by a further 9% and reach 2,1% of GDP.³⁹

Estonia has, at least since the Russia-Georgia war, been focusing on developing capabilities and acquiring armaments which are meant for the defence of its national territory. Therefore the war in Ukraine did not force much change in its capability development plans.⁴⁰ Among the priorities are further developments of anti-tank, anti-air and fire support capabilities. Also, from 2016, Estonia will start to introduce an armoured manoeuvre capability based on CV 90 infantry fighting vehicles bought from the Netherlands, as part of the country's largest ever defence procurement project.

Estonia's national defence model is based on reserve forces who receive their training during conscription. In May 2015, the country held its largest ever mobilization and field training exercise, Siil 2015, to test procedures and control combat readiness. The bulk of more than 13,000 participating troops consisted of Estonian reservists. After successful mobilisation, Estonia would be able to have a main force of around 21,000 troops, although with limited amounts of heavy firepower.

39 Craig Caffrey, "Estonia to increase defence spending to 2,1% of GDP," *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, September 30, 2015, <http://www.janes.com/article/54924/estonia-to-increase-defence-spending-to-2-1-of-gdp>.

40 Andres Vosman, "Learning the Right Lessons from Ukraine" in *European Defence Planning and the Ukrainian Crisis: two contrasting views*, Ifri Security Studies Center, June 2015, http://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/fs58petersson_vosman.pdf.

However, a defence system based on mobilization of reservists will in initial stages always be a disadvantage compared to an enemy who can draw on regular troops in high readiness mode. The Estonian defence planners have realized the need to increase the availability of quickly useable forces and capabilities. Here the end of the ISAF mission has been beneficial because for the first time its single battalion-size combat unit consisting of regular soldiers – the Scouts Battalion – is now almost fully stationed on home territory and ready for national defence duties. Likewise, the *Kaitseliit* organization would provide a key part of the rapid response capability.

In sum, Estonian security and military forces should be well-positioned to handle hybrid scenarios which involve protesters backed up by small numbers of armed people. If Russia were to start inserting organized armed formations – be they “volunteers” or members of the Russian military and security structures – over the border to support troublemakers inside Estonia, this would constitute a clear armed incursion. Considering that this would be a repeat of a, by now familiar, picture seen in Ukraine, it should not be that difficult for Estonia to prove Russia’s direct involvement to other Allies and request NATO’s assistance to deal with the intruders. Using the same tactics employed in Ukraine would deprive Russia from the element of surprise and, as this kind of *maskirovka* would be too obvious, the attempt to maintain deniability would not succeed.

At the same time, in case of the threat of open military intervention neither Estonia nor the other Baltic states would have the military capability to deter Russia themselves. This is due to the basic asymmetry in size between the states. Hence, the question regarding the right Alliance defence and deterrence posture in the Baltic Sea region to deter possible Russian aggression and help exposed Allies, like Estonia.

NATO’s Deterrence and Defence Posture in the Baltic Region

The Allies have repeatedly sent messages to Moscow of their determination to uphold the obligations of Article 5 security guarantees

to Baltic states.⁴¹ But to be credible, signalling needs to be backed up by capability. Red lines which are not backed up by hard power may invite the adversary to test them.

The Alliance will never embrace the full spectrum of challenges embodied in hybrid warfare and instead must remain focused on military issues. At the same time, in some areas NATO could surely support national authorities in tackling hybrid threats. For example, NATO has a role in establishing situational awareness to understand what is happening, identify hybrid tactics, recognize the threat and quickly identify who is behind it. Other areas where the Alliance has relevance within its mandate are the cyber domain and strategic communications.

An essential element of the response when it comes to many types of hybrid scenarios are Special Operations Forces, which are exactly designed, trained and equipped to address that part of the conflict spectrum. SOF personnel from other Allied nations are already actively training with their Baltic colleagues. Allied SOF can support resiliency and the resistance potential of the country, and can also be directly involved in scenarios which remain below the level of direct conventional military action.

For more conventional military scenarios, however, the present Alliance force posture in the Baltic theatre is not sufficient. While clearly the present reassurance measures are steps forward in diminishing Alliance vulnerabilities and providing a very important message of Alliance solidarity, they cannot be seen as sufficiently credible in removing the temptation for the Russian leadership to try to test the Alliance in the Baltics. Russian aggression would most likely be built on speed and mass as Moscow would aim to avoid a drawn-out conventional military campaign against NATO forces. Therefore, there may be an extremely short time available for NATO to react before Russia achieves its initial objectives and hopes that the logic of de-escalation can start to restrain the Alliance's options.

41 The most public commitment was made during a visit to Tallinn on September 3, 2014 by U.S. President Barack Obama, "Remarks by President Obama to the People of Estonia," <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/03/remarks-president-obama-people-estonia>.

Therefore, the focus of NATO's strategy in the Baltic region would need to be on minimizing the risk of Russian forces gaining significant territory, which later could be enormously difficult and costly to reverse. Following from this, the Alliance needs to consider what policies and force structures would prove most effective in defending against, and thereby deterring, Russian military aggression.

The presence of conventional Allied military forces able, if necessary, to inflict significant costs to the Russian military should be the key deterrent message. Only by removing the overwhelming local military advantage from the opponent, will NATO convincingly be able to take away the very incentive for the Russian leadership to strike. It would be much more credible than a promise to retaliate, which would involve overcoming the Russian A2/AD challenge, and would also diminish the threat of ending up in a situation where the Alliance would face Russia's coercive threat of nuclear use.⁴²

Moreover, a strong Allied conventional military posture in the Baltics would be important not only in closing off easy conventional military opportunities for Russia, but also in countering the employment of hybrid tactics. As seen in Ukraine, the credibility and effectiveness of Russia's unconventional methods rests to a large extent on the potential threat of use of conventional military force. Therefore a strong Allied military presence would deny Russia an opportunity to use military blackmail to support its hybrid methods.

Based on that, the following steps should be taken:

1. As a start, the whole Alliance effort in support of frontline Allies should be framed as deterrence instead of reassurance. Its focus has to be on countering the potential threat, rather than merely on the insecurities of exposed Allies. NATO needs to fundamentally re-evaluate its defence strategy and posture and restore deterrence as

42 For an excellent discussion on the merits of having sufficient forces on the ground see Jakub Grygel and Wess Mitchell, "Limited War is Back," *The National Interest*, August 28, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/limited-war-back-11128>.

the central element of Alliance strategy.

2. Forward positioning of capable Allied forces on the ground in the Baltic states and Poland would be a compelling way to communicate the determination to confront aggression and raise the cost for the attackers. If Russia realises that due to the presence of forces capable of fighting it cannot rapidly achieve its objectives, it would refrain from launching aggression as it would have nothing to gain from it. Therefore, this is the best guarantee against the danger of Putin miscalculating.
3. The exact parameters of deployed forces would need to be determined by military planners on the basis of their deterrent value. Even more important than troop size would be that their presence would address the capability gaps facing local Baltic forces. For example, the present NATO Baltic Air Policing Mission should be enhanced to become a Baltic Air Defence Mission. Besides air assets it should involve medium-range air defence, a capability which at the moment is totally lacking in the region.
4. For the implementation of this deterrence posture, U.S. political leadership and strong American presence on the ground is essential. It would avoid any perception of disengagement and the impression that U.S. interests in Baltic security are secondary to other global interests. Further, the Russian political and military leadership undoubtedly takes American military power very seriously.
5. U.S. troops should be accompanied by deployments of force components from major Western European Allies – France, Germany and the United Kingdom. This would signal the commitment of the most capable European Allies to deterrence and wider transatlantic burden-sharing. The importance of deployments from France and the United Kingdom would also include the fact that these two nations are nuclear powers.
6. The Allies should also support the strengthening of defence

capacities in the Baltic states by, for example, donating surplus, but still capable armament and equipment to the Baltic armed forces. This kind of military assistance would enable the exposed Allies to increase their self-defence capabilities and thereby contribute to the overall Alliance defence and deterrence posture.

7. In addition to the forces deployed in the territories of exposed Allies and the ones assigned to the VJTF and NRE, the Alliance will need to identify and prepare sufficient numbers of follow-on forces to enable NATO to surge its military forces as needed and conduct sustained operations. This is tied to the need for overall improvement of the readiness and responsiveness of NATO forces.

This will not be cheap, but to believe that Russia can be deterred without costs would be naïve. Also these costs would be nothing compared to the potential strategic consequences of a successful Russian attack. Deterrence is far easier and cheaper than compelling the aggressor to reverse a move which has already been made. On the other hand, nothing would do more to invite Russian aggression than signalling NATO's lack of resolve and unwillingness to bear costs. In the context of messages like the one provided by the results of the 2015 poll by the Pew Research Center, which showed the general reluctance of European populations to use military force to defend a NATO ally attacked by Russia, giving such an impression would be especially dangerous.⁴³

Conclusion

The Alliance and its members need to be ready for long-term confrontation on NATO's exposed Eastern flank which will involve military, unconventional, information and other dimensions. Russia has proven that it has a habit of making surprises and that it can pose a direct

43 "NATO Publics Blame Russia for Ukrainian Crisis, but Reluctant to Provide Military Aid," Pew Research Center, June 10, 2015, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/06/10/nato-publics-blame-russia-for-ukrainian-crisis-but-reluctant-to-provide-military-aid/>.

threat to its neighbours on short notice. As limited armed conflicts along NATO's Eastern flank have become a possibility worth considering, the Baltic area will be the Alliance's most exposed region.

In the case of Estonia, the country has to prepare for different scenarios and make itself as inconvenient an opponent as possible. It needs to work to further increase its resilience against unconventional warfare, all kinds of diversionary acts and provocations, and massive foreign propaganda. This will all contribute to deterrence and diminish the chances of being the next victim of Russian aggression.

While it may be tempting to draw direct parallels between some areas in Ukraine and in Estonia, this would be misleading. The Estonian state is also much less vulnerable than Ukraine was. Still, in Estonia the ethnic factor will remain a concern as it could be conveniently used by Moscow to provide a cause and justification for the intervention. While further strengthening of internal societal cohesion is something for Estonia to deal with, this itself is a vulnerability which objectively could only be diminished, but never completely eliminated.

While considering threats emanating from Russia, an emphasis focusing mostly on hybrid threats would be wrong. Russia's fixation with hard power and the military advantages it enjoys in the Baltic region mean that military power could be the tool which Russia prefers to use. Russia may see the Baltic theatre as the place to try to test and eventually break NATO.

Ensuring the effectiveness of deterrence in the Baltic region has to be a central feature of the new policy of containment which should guide Western thinking about the handling of the Russian challenge. NATO's present conventional vulnerability in the region itself can cause strategic instability and should therefore be addressed. Deterrence worked during the Cold War and there is no reason to believe that it could not be adapted to present circumstances. Restoring the credibility of NATO's deterrence and defence posture should, therefore, be the central part of the Alliance's strategic adaptation.

13

An End-of-Time Utopia: Understanding the Narrative of the Islamic State

Jean-Loup Samaan

In February 2015 the U.S. government convened an international conference on the ways to fight violent extremism. The core challenge driving the debates was the definition of a strategy to counter the propaganda of the so-called Islamic State (IS). Over the last two years, the countless videos documenting the slaying of minorities and the beheading of Westerners, crafted to almost Hollywoodian standards, make the communication of groups like al-Qaeda seem positively primitive. Therefore, beyond the military fight looms a battle of ideas that may be equally difficult. But when the media and the experts speak today of an Islamic “State” or glibly use the term “caliphate,” they are committing two fundamental errors: not only are they giving credence to the narrative developed by IS, but they are giving a distorted picture of the group’s territorial reach. This means that the challenge for the United States and its transatlantic allies engaged in the fight against IS is to accurately apprehend the logic of the group’s rhetoric, so as to articulate a sound communication strategy.

Unfortunately the decade-long experience from the fight against al-Qaeda does not really serve that purpose. The media aura acquired by IS finds its rationale in considerations which are in clear contrast with those pertaining to al-Qaeda: by controlling certain regions in Iraq and Syria, and laying claim to the creation of a Caliphate which is ultimately supposed to cover the entire Muslim world, IS intends to be seen not as a complex web or network, but as a group representing a holy struggle. The Islamic “State” (*al Dawlat al Islamiyah*) in question is a self-contrived Utopia, based

on an eschatological vision. While the reality of the project can be cast in doubt, however, its rise is based not only on territorial conquests, but also on efficient use of a geopolitical imaginary which gives the movement its impetus.

In this perspective, the present paper specifies the narrative of IS. To do so, it sets out to deconstruct the geopolitical imaginary of IS, referring to the speeches and statements of its leadership as well as its various propaganda documents (for example maps and pictures, as seen in Image 13.1.). Understanding this imaginary is not only bound up with grasping the movement's interpretation of the sources it quotes, but is also the key to better understanding its eschatological agenda and its seductive appeal for the young people prepared to join the jihad – as well as, ultimately, providing the necessary basis on which a counter-narrative can be built.



IMAGE 13.1. *Imaginary view of the final battle, according to Islamic State.¹*

¹ Source: Twitter.

From Iraqi Beginnings to Propagation in Syria

While al-Qaeda in the 1990s spread through the Arab world before establishing its presence elsewhere, this was not the case with IS. Its roots can be traced back to Iraq in the 2000s, with the emergence of jihadist movements such as *Ansar al Islam* and Abu Mussab al-Zarqawi's *Jamaat Al Tawhid wa al Jihad*. Al-Zarqawi officially swore allegiance (*bay'a*) to al-Qaeda in September 2004, and the group was renamed *Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn* (literally "Organization base of jihad/Mesopotamia"). Yet the organization was no mere appendage of al-Qaeda, having its own agenda and strategy. In particular, al-Zarqawi made the religious war between Sunni and Shia the cornerstone of his terrorist strategy, leading to gradual divergences of opinion with Ayman Zawahiri and Osama Bin Laden². After al-Zarqawi's death in the summer of 2006, al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia became closely involved with the Mujahideen Shura Council of Iraq, an alliance of six relatively unimportant movements. Together, they decided in the autumn of that year to found *Dawlat al Iraq al Islamiyah*, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). This new organization can probably be seen as the first embryo of IS as we know it today.

With the U.S. military's "surge" in 2007 and the *Sahwa* movement receiving the support of Sunni tribal leaders, ISI's influence decreased considerably but did not disappear. In 2010, Abou Bakr al-Baghdadi became the leader of ISI; a year later, as U.S. forces started to wind down their presence in Iraq, the movement unleashed repeated attacks on the major cities, particularly Baghdad.

The next few months saw Syria sink into a bloody civil war. ISI leadership quickly seized the opportunity created by the rise of groups declaring allegiance to the same Islamist agenda. In June 2013, al-Baghdadi announced a merger between ISI and Jabhat al Nusra, a group formed in early 2012 by Abou Mohammad al Julani. This resulted in the creation of *Al Dawlat Al Islamiyat fil Iraq wa ash Sham* (giving the Arabic

² See the analysis of al-Zarqawi's texts: Jean-Pierre Milelli, "Abou Moussab al-Zarqawi, le jihad en 'Mésopotamie'" in: Gilles Kepel (Ed.), *Al-Qaida dans le texte*, Paris, PUF, 2005.

acronym *Daesh*), loosely translated as Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). There was, however, a degree of confusion regarding al-Baghdadi's announcement: Al Julani, the Jabhat al Nusra leader, denied the merger the very next day, and stated that his movement continued to have a separate existence. Nevertheless, ISIL was now a fact of life.

English or French translations of the name are misleading, since they omit the Arabic word *Sham*. This introduces a distortion which fails to convey the geopolitical imaginary of Daesh. The term "Levant" comes from medieval French and, in the Western tradition, was essentially associated with the nineteenth century Orientalism popularized by poets and writers setting out to explore the Middle Eastern regions of the Ottoman Empire. In the 20th century, the term came to be used more restrictively, in reference to the French Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon. The Arab word *Sham* refers to a totally different story – that of the Caliphate (*bilad ash Sham*), meaning Syria in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. The term is so deeply rooted in Arab and Muslim culture that people in the Middle East refer to Damascus not as *Dimashq* (its literal translation), but simply as *Sham*.

This linguistic nuance allows us to better understand the symbolic meaning of the video widely circulated by ISIL in June 2014, entitled "The end of Sykes-Picot". The mistranslation "Levant" fails to convey how, from the moment of its inception, ISIL has been creating an alternative narrative which rejects modern historiography and reinstates the historical tradition of the Muslim Caliphate. The video thus enables us to walk, side by side with a jihadist, along the Syrian-Iraqi border. In front of the camera, the jihadist constantly declares that the abolition of this border marks the death of the Anglo-French Sykes-Picot Agreement, drawn up in 1916 to divide the Ottoman Middle East into French and British spheres of influence and control.

The symbolic value of "Sykes-Picot" extends beyond the jihadist narrative and draws in the whole of the Arab world. Sykes-Picot has entered into the collective imaginary in the Middle East, as a byword for the imperialist agendas of the European powers. The fact that the agreement was quickly

challenged by international events at that time³ is less relevant here than its presence in the school textbooks assimilated by generations of young Syrians, Lebanese and Iraqis, so that leveraging this reference is a strategic choice to give ISIL's message a seductive appeal for the Arab populations it targets.

The Caliphate, or the Staging of a Geopolitical Fiction

After extending its battle to Syria, ISIL became far more ambitious and, on 29 June 2014, announced the creation of the Caliphate. This was no longer to be called *Al Dawlat Al Islamiyat fil Iraq wa ash Sham*, but simply *Al Dawlat Al Islamiyah*, or Islamic State. It was an unprecedented move for a terrorist group. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who had until then been the Emir, thus attained the status of Caliph. There is also a biography, said to be official, which circulates among Islamist groups and presents him as a knowledgeable theologian. He allegedly holds a PhD from the Islamic University of Baghdad and is a member of the Qureshi tribe (the tribe of the prophet).⁴

Not only has al-Qaeda never claimed to control a territory, but Bin Laden never set out to recreate the Caliphate. By and large, the declared aspirations of extremist Islamic groups until last year had been limited to creating an Emirate (the Taliban in Afghanistan), or an Islamic State – or, more precisely, Republic (Iran, Pakistan, Mauritania). In Daesh's message of June 2014, spokesperson Abu Muhammad Al Adnani declared that “it is incumbent upon all Muslims to pledge allegiance to the khalifah Ibrahim [al-Baghdadi] and support him (may Allah preserve him). The legality of all emirates, groups, states, and organizations, becomes null by the expansion of the khilafah's authority and arrival of its troops to their areas.”⁵ The

3 James Barr, *A Line in the Sand: Britain, France and the Struggle that Shaped the Middle East*, London, Simon & Schuster, 2012.

4 “A Biography of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi,” *SITE*, August 12, 2014. Downloadable at: <http://news.siteintelgroup.com/blog/index.php/entry/226-the-story-behind-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi>.

5 Translation of the speech available at: <https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/isis-spokesman-declares-caliphate-rebrands-group-as-islamic-state.html>.

announcement might meet with the approval of illiterate masses, but is obviously rejected by most Muslim clerics. When asked for his opinion on the subject, the influential Egyptian preacher Yusuf Al Qaradawi publicly stated that this declaration was a violation of the Sharia.⁶ The term “caliphate” presupposes the unity of the Muslim world, and its undivided allegiance to the authority of a single figure. In other words, IS, which controls a strip of land between Syria and Iraq (with a population which runs at most into tens of millions), is now claiming to have authority over 1.5 billion Muslims worldwide. In recent months, this spectacular use of propaganda has nevertheless brought a number of organizations, based much further afield than Syria and Iraq, to identify themselves with IS.

Conquests far from the “Caliphate”

In the summer of 2014, the seizure of a number of regions in Syria and Iraq by IS rapidly elevated it to the leading ranks of Islamic terrorist groups. From September 2014, “franchises” sprang up among organizations often far removed from the Syrian and Iraqi theatre. In Algeria, a faction led by Abdelmalek Gouri broke away from al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, announcing its allegiance to IS on 14 September. The breakaway group styled itself *Jund al Khilafah*, the soldiers of the Caliphate. A week later, they kidnapped and murdered the French tourist Hervé Gourdel. *Jund al Khilafah* became IS’s first offshoot in Africa. Its leader Abdelmalek was killed in late December, in an operation by the Algerian army. His successor is said to be Abu Abdallah al Asimi.

A month after the appearance of the Algerian “branch,” another franchise was created in Libya: this time, the Council of Islamic Youth in Derna (the hometown of the Battar Brigade, created in 2012 by Libyan fighters in Syria) declared allegiance to IS. This group was subsequently responsible for the attack on the Hotel Corinthia, on 27 January 2015. On 15 February, a video posted on Internet showed its members beheading 21

⁶ Al Arabiya News, “Qaradawi says ‘jihadist caliphate’ violates sharia,” July 5, 2014.

“organizations” (*tanzimaat*), branches of Daesh are referred to as *wilayaat* (the historic name for the provinces of the original Caliphate). Thus, Cyrenaica becomes *wilayat Barqa*. In Egypt, *Ansar Beit al Maqdis* has the franchise for *wilayat Sinai*. Algeria becomes *wilayat al Jazair*. Sometimes, a few public declarations by local jihadists are enough for a group to annex other territories: in Saudi Arabia, *wilayat al Haramayn* (literally, “province of the two holy places”) was created in this way, while Yemen has the area referred to as *wilayat al Yemen*. Finally, the movement was joined by Pakistani Taliban, with the creation of *wilayat Khorasan*. While al-Qaeda saw its franchises as local footholds for operations against the Western presence in Muslim lands, the *wilayaat* are part of IS’s geopolitical aim of re-establishing the full geographical extension of the Caliphate. In most cases, however, the fighters concerned have little if any effective control over the regions to which they lay claim. In this respect, IS is a project which could be defined as a Utopia.

Rome and the Battle of Dabiq

Finally, the geopolitical agenda of IS gives great importance to “Rome”, with many references to it in the group’s propaganda and in the speeches of its leaders. Al-Baghdadi has, on several occasions, mentioned the conquest of “Rome” as one of the group’s objectives. His spokesperson Abu Mohammad al Adnani proclaims, “We will conquer your Rome, break your crosses, and enslave your women.”⁷

7 “What ISIS Really Wants,” *The Atlantic*, March 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2015/02/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>.

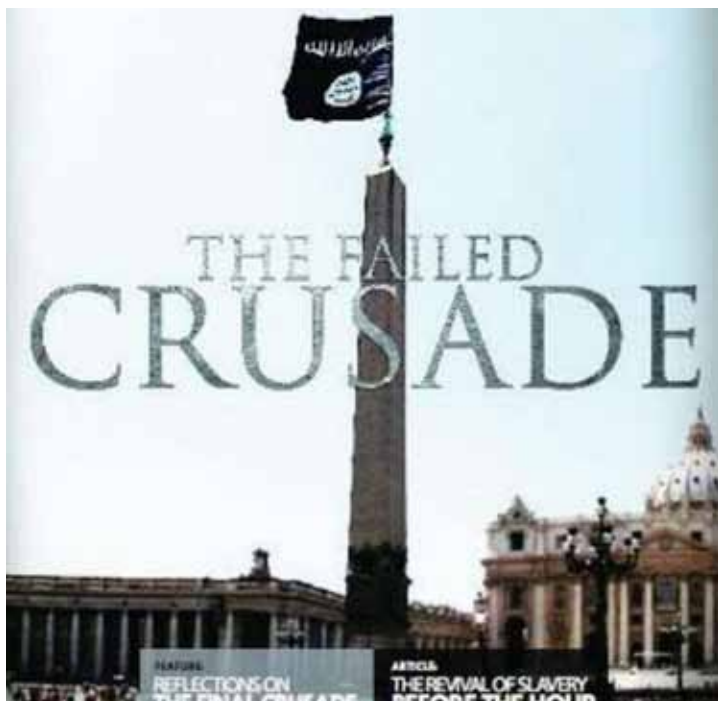


IMAGE 13.2. Cover of the Islamic State propaganda magazine, *Dabiq*

“Rome,” in this context, is not literally a reference to the Italian capital, but a synecdoche for the Christian West as a whole. In this respect, naming the magazine after the Syrian town of Dabiq is not a chance, trivial reference. At first sight, it might seem strange that a small town of 3,000 inhabitants, situated close to the Syrian-Turkish border, should be so much in the limelight. However, Dabiq has a special place in Islamic symbolism. The town is mentioned, in a hadith of the Koran, as the site of one of the battles which would mark the end of time (*malahim*, in Koranic terminology). The original text states the prophet’s words as follows:

“The Last Hour would not come until the Romans would land atal-A’maq or in Dabiq. An army consisting of the best (soldiers) of the people of the earth at that time will come from Medina (to counteract them).

When they will arrange themselves in ranks, the Romans would say: ‘Do not stand between us and those (Muslims) who took prisoners from amongst us. Let us fight with them;’ and the Muslims would say: ‘Nay, by Allah, we would never get aside from you and from our brethren that you may fight them.’ They will then fight.”⁸

This is a fundamental aspect of IS ideology: its eschatology. Al-Qaeda’s agenda, from the outset, was clearly political: to target Western enemies and their allies in the Arab world. To do so, al-Qaeda carried out spectacular terrorist attacks which were intended to trigger regional revolutions. However, Bin Laden’s vision was never messianic in scale and involved no apocalyptic battles. This is the register in which IS wishes to express itself. Its messianism is not to be underestimated: it explains much of the movement’s attraction for young Arabs or Europeans, in search of adventure and imbued with little if any religiosity. For these budding fighters, the violent battles between IS and the U.S.-led coalition in northern Syria are no chance occurrence: they mark the start of the final struggle between Muslims and their enemies, the armies of “Rome.”

This is one of the reasons why the Western debate on the “statehood” of IS misses the point. The concept of the state (*dawla*), in the usage of Islamic State, has very little to do with the concept we refer to within the modern Westphalian system. IS leaders do not aim to create a state which would become part of the international community, but one which would mark the end of history.

Conclusion

Far from being a simply irrational and delirious transcription, the geopolitical discourse of IS has its own inner coherence. From a literal reading of the Koran and Muslim historiography, the group adopts

8 <http://www.theonlyquran.com/hadith/Sahih-Muslim/?volume=41&chapter=9>.

carefully chosen rhetoric and terminology. We could simply retort that this is an archaic and aberrant reading of Islam, but that would not really concern the target addresses of IS's propaganda – its potential recruits. IS's claims and prophecies are, certainly, in no way consistent with its actual territorial extension, but this geopolitical imaginary and messianism must nevertheless be taken seriously. In other words, the real power of IS derives from the geopolitical narrative of the struggle for the Caliphate it crafted, rather than the reality of its territorial claims. Beyond the conflict in the air and on the ground, the decisive battle may well be over this narrative. For NATO countries engaged in the ongoing fight, monitoring the means by which IS conveys its propaganda (Twitter and other social networks) will not be enough. They will eventually need to elaborate a counter-narrative that addresses IS's core message, so as to show it in a less attractive light and stop the increasing flow of foreign fighters joining the movement.

NATO's ADAPTATION TO HYBRID WARFARE

14

NATO's Hybrid Flanks:
Handling Unconventional Warfare
in the South and the East
Andreas Jacobs and Guillaume Lasconjarias

Introduction

Since the start of the Ukrainian conflict, a new buzzword has dominated the international security debate: “hybrid warfare.” But in spite of the recent hype about this topic, the idea of using unconventional means and actors in conflict is not new. In fact, it is in many ways as old as warfare itself. In a recent speech, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg reiterated that “... the first hybrid warfare we know of might be the Trojan Horse, so we have seen it before.”¹ But what we may not have seen before in warfare is the scale of use and exploitation of old tools in new ways. According to NATO's Supreme Allied Commander (SACEUR) Philip M. Breedlove, “... new things are how these tools that we have recognized from before are now put together and used in new ways to bring new kinds of pressure ...”²

Not only has NATO recognized these new ways of applying pressure, but the Alliance has already taken up the gauntlet and started the process of adapting its strategy and structures to the new security environment. However, this strategic adjustment still faces a lot of difficulties and shows

1 NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, “Zero-sum? Russia, Power Politics, and the Post-Cold War Era,” *Brussels Forum*, March 20, 2015.

2 Philip M. Breedlove, quoted by http://www.dedefensa.org/article-le_g_n_ral_breedlove_et_the_hybrid_war_24_03_2015.html (accessed 30 March 2015).

substantial shortcomings. So far, there have only been a few ideas and some initial operational considerations within NATO that systematically address hybrid threats.³ Moreover, there is no common understanding on the use, relevance, or practical benefit of the hybrid warfare concept for the Alliance, particularly when considering NATO's eastern and southern flanks at the same time.

This chapter argues that the concept of hybrid warfare provides a useful, holistic understanding of the security challenges from both the East and the South, helping NATO to remain "... a strong, ready, robust, and responsive Alliance capable of meeting current and future challenges from wherever they may arise."⁴ It therefore conceptualizes the different understandings and perspectives of hybrid warfare and suggests a comprehensive working definition. Based on this, several case studies of hybrid warfare on NATO's eastern and southern flanks are analysed. Finally, the chapter examines NATO's responses to new hybrid threats coming from the East and the South, and identifies further needs for collective action. It argues that the concept of hybrid warfare has the potential to help NATO's strategic planners and decision-makers to draft a strategy against hybrid threats, enabling NATO to deal comprehensively with such challenges.

Conceptualizing Hybrid Warfare

Defining hybrid warfare is more difficult than it appears. The very term "hybrid" refers to something heterogeneous in origin or composition (a mixture or a blend), or something that has "two different types of components performing the same function."⁵ The concept of hybrid warfare itself dates back to the early 2000s, and was popularized by Frank G. Hoffmann in a series of articles and books. Hoffmann defines a "hybrid

3 Nadia Schadlow, "The Problem with Hybrid Warfare," *War on the Rocks*, April 2015, quoted from <http://warontherocks.com/2015/04/the-problem-with-hybrid-warfare/> (accessed 10 April 2015).

4 NATO, Wales Summit Declaration, September 5, 2014, paragraph 5.

5 Merriam Webster Online Dictionary quoted by <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hybrid> (accessed 12 April 2015).

threat” as any “... adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism, and criminal behaviors in a battle space to obtain their political objectives.”⁶

Despite this definition, the term hybrid warfare is used arbitrarily and without any clear conceptualization. In current usage, the term usually implies a blurring of the distinction between military and civilian.⁷ Consequently, when discussing hybrid warfare, most analysts refer primarily to a mix of diverse instruments across a broad spectrum – e.g., use of military force, technology, criminality, terrorism, economic pressure, humanitarian and religious means, intelligence, sabotage, disinformation. All “traditional, irregular or catastrophic forms of warfare”⁸ are “melted into”⁹ an unholy combination with disruptive capacity, and are “invariably executed in concert as part of a flexible strategy”¹⁰ that can take the form of a “stealth invasion.”¹¹

The second main element of the hybrid warfare concept relates to the type of actors or warring parties. There seems to be a common understanding that hybrid warfare most often involves non-state actors such as militias, transnational criminal groups, or terrorist networks. These non-state actors are in many cases backed by one or several states, in a kind of sponsor-client or proxy relationship. In other cases, states can also intentionally “play hybrid” when they want to blur the lines between covert and overt operations. Of particular interest in this context are irregular forces in uniforms with no national identification tags. These irregular actors, “hybrid actors” or “techno-guerillas,”¹² often possess hardware and

6 Frank G. Hoffman, “Hybrid vs. compound war. The Janus choice: Defining today’s multifaceted conflict,” *Armed Forces Journal*, October 2009, p.15.

7 Rob de Wijk, “Hybrid Conflict and the Changing Nature of Actors,” in Julian Lindley-French and Yves Boyer (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of War*, Cambridge 2012, p.358.

8 The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America, Washington DC, March 2005, p.4.

9 Peter R. Mansoor, “Hybrid Warfare in History,” in Williamson Murray and Peter R. Mansoor (eds.), *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*, Cambridge 2012.

10 Sam Jones, “Ukraine: Russia’s New Art of War,” *The Financial Times*, August 29, 2014.

11 Andrew Kramer and Michael Gordon, “Ukraine Reports Russian Invasion on a New Front,” *The New York Times*, August 27, 2014.

12 Joseph Henrotin, “Techno-Guérilla et Guerre Hybride. Le pire des deux mondes,” Paris 2014.

technologies usually reserved for the militaries of nation-states, allowing them to resist organized military assaults in force-on-force engagements.¹³

A third aspect often mentioned in definitions or conceptualizations of hybrid warfare is space. Unlike most forms of conventional warfare, hybrid warfare is not limited to the physical battlefield. Hybrid actors seize every opportunity to use both traditional and modern media instruments so as to develop new narratives based on their interests, means and aims. The main intention in the strategy for political subversion is to isolate and weaken an opponent, by eroding his legitimacy in multiple fields. “Under this model, war takes place in a variety of operating environments, has synchronous effects across multiple battlefields, and is marked by asymmetric tactics and techniques.”¹⁴

With respect to the three dimensions of the discussion regarding hybrid warfare, the following – very generic – definition seems plausible: the term “hybrid war” describes a form of violent conflict that simultaneously involves state and non-state actors, with the use of conventional and unconventional means of warfare that are not limited to the battlefield or a particular physical territory.

Case Studies

The concept of hybrid war does not describe or foresee a theoretical scenario. It is based on empirical observations of the evolution of warfare – in particular since the end of the Cold War. In order to better understand the analytical relevance of the concept, it is beneficial to have a closer look at recent empirical examples of hybrid warfare. The most prominent of these examples are the war between Hezbollah and Israel in 2006, the conflict

13 Paul Scharre, “Spectrum of What?” *Military Review*, November-December 2012, p.76. Hassan Nasrallah, leader of the Hezbollah, when asked, answered: “The resistance withstood the attack and fought back. It did not wage a guerrilla war either (...). It was not a regular army, but it was not a guerrilla in the traditional sense either (...). It was something in between. This is the new model.” in Matt Matthews, “We Were Caught Unprepared,” *The 2006 Hezbollah-Israeli War*, U.S. Army War Combined Arms Center, OP 26, 2008, p.22.

14 Alex Deep, “Hybrid War: Old Concept, New Techniques,” *Small Wars Journal*, March 2, 2015.

in Iraq and Syria since 2013, the current situation in Libya, and – most importantly – the Russian aggression against Ukraine since 2014.

The 2006 Israel-Hezbollah War

The war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006 is usually referred to as one of recent history's prototypes of hybrid warfare. In the 34-day military conflict during the summer of 2006, the Shiite militia shocked the Israeli public and surprised the international community with the effectiveness of its fight against the Israeli Defense Force.¹⁵ In this conflict, Hezbollah displayed all the elements of hybrid warfare: "... the simultaneous use of a conventional arsenal, irregular forces and guerrilla tactics, psychological warfare, terrorism and even criminal activities, with support from a multi-dimensional organization and capable of integrating very different sub-units, groups or cells into one united, large force."¹⁶ Additionally, Hezbollah had the direct support of Iran, particularly the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. This "full coordination"¹⁷ between Hezbollah and Iran was particularly important with regard to training, equipping and financially supporting Hezbollah (estimated at \$50-100 million USD annually).¹⁸

Backed by Iran, Hezbollah combat groups engaged as a hybrid between a guerrilla force and a regular army. Similar to the Iraqi insurgents in the Battle of Fallujah in 2004, Hezbollah forces exploited urban terrain to create ambushes and evade capture by remaining in close proximity to noncombatants.¹⁹ Additionally, the Shiite militia used an impressive conventional arsenal that included light artillery, anti-tank rocket launchers and anti-tank guided missiles. Additionally, they were supported by unmanned aerial vehicles and anti-ship guided missiles. The use of this

15 Marcin Andrzej Piotrowski, "Hezbollah: The Model of a Hybrid Threat," *PISM Bulletin* No. 24, March 2015.

16 *Ibid.*

17 David Siman-Tov and Yoram Schweitzer, "Israel against Hizbollah: Between Overt and Covert Warfare," *INSS Insight* No. 668, March 2015.

18 Piotrowski, "Hezbollah: The Model of a Hybrid Threat."

19 Frank G. Hoffman, "Hybrid Warfare and Challenges," *Joint Force Quarterly*, issue 52, No.1/2009. Ralph Peters, "Lessons from Lebanon: The New Model Terrorist Army," *Armed Forces Journal International*, October 2006.

conventional arsenal forced Israel to mobilize around 30,000 troops, costing the lives of 119 Israeli soldiers and 42 civilians, wounding more than 1200, and damaging around 50 Israeli tanks. Despite the limited military effect of Hezbollah's conventional strikes, the consequences for Israel were substantial. Hezbollah's attacks "...terrorized the north of Israel, paralysed the country's economy and forced over a million civilians to temporarily evacuate. The psychological effect ... was enormous and became the impulse for Israel to build its ... *Iron Dome* counter-rocket and missile-defence systems ..."²⁰

But Hezbollah did not fight only on the physical battlefield. It also challenged Israel with a broad propaganda campaign. With its TV and radio stations, it temporarily managed to depict Hezbollah and its leader, Hassan Nasrallah, in many Arab and Muslim societies as the new spearhead of resistance against Israel. This led to an overwhelming (and incorrect) perception within the Arab world, and in parts of the international community, that Israel – the strongest military power in the region – had been defeated at the hands of Hezbollah, a non-state militia.²¹

Although Israel did not lose the war on the conventional battlefield, it learned its lesson from the 2006 debacle. Israel diversified its counter-strategy against Hezbollah by combining conventional military measures with counter-terrorist means. This "hybrid" strategy combined the advantages of covert activities, such as deniability, with the effectiveness and the deterrent effect of the use of military force.²² Obviously, this has helped to contain the conflict. At least momentarily, it appears that none of the actors (Israel, Hezbollah, or Iran) has an interest in military escalation.²³ Iran and Hezbollah are afraid that any direct Israeli involvement in the Syrian civil war could further weaken the Assad regime and therefore undermine Shiite influence in Lebanon. Israel, on the other hand, has no interest in a war against Hezbollah and further destabilization of the region.

20 Piotrowski, "*Hezbollah: The Model of a Hybrid Threat.*"

21 Deep, "*Hybrid War: Old Concept, New Techniques.*"

22 Siman-Tov/Schweitzer.

23 *Ibid.*

Consequently, both sides try to keep the conflict 'hybrid' (i.e., below the threshold of conventional war).²⁴ The example of the 2006 Hezbollah-Israel conflict not only exemplifies the characteristics of hybrid warfare in the Middle East, it also underlines the possibility – and need – to develop and implement a counter-hybrid strategy.

ISIL in Iraq and Syria since 2013

The current military campaign by the terrorist militia known as the “Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant” (ISIL),²⁵ in Syria, Iraq and – through proxy actors – in other places in the region and in the West, shows many characteristics of the hybrid warfare concept.²⁶ The terminology used by U.S. President Barack Obama reflected this in September 2014, when he referred to the group as a “... sort of a hybrid of not just the terrorist network, but one with territorial ambitions, and some of the strategy and tactics of an army.”²⁷

Founded as a jihadist terrorist organization in early 2000, ISIL was later reinforced by former officers from Saddam Hussain's dissolved army, local Sunni tribes, Chechen fighters with experience in irregular warfare, and foreign jihadists from all over the world.²⁸ ISIL is estimated to have up to 30,000 core and associated fighters under its command. In its military operations, ISIL employs bombings, artillery and mortar shelling, suicide attacks, aerial reconnaissance, and even chemical attacks. Most operations are conducted by small, highly mobile units on U.S. Humvees or pick-up trucks that are equipped with heavy machine guns. Apart from the well-

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ In this paper the acronym ISIL is used to identify the so called “Islamic State (in Syria and the Levant),” Alternative acronyms are IS, ISIS or the Arabic “daee’sh.”

²⁶ See Scott Jasper and Scott Moreland, “The Islamic State is a Hybrid Threat: Why Does that Matter?” *Small Wars Journal*, December 2, 2014.

²⁷ “President Obama. What makes us America,” script of a CBS interview with U.S. President Barack Obama, aired on Sept. 24, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/president-obama-60-minutes/> (accessed 12 April 2015).

²⁸ For hybrid warfare in Chechnya see Bill Nemeth, “Future War and Chechnya: A Case for Hybrid Warfare,” Thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, 2002.

known “shock and awe tactics,” ISIL shows remarkable combat capabilities and a high level of intelligence and reconnaissance skills, based on a network of local supporters and informants.²⁹ Additionally, it conducts a modern and sophisticated propaganda operation to garner international volunteers and financial support.³⁰ This propaganda operation is based on the narrative of the “caliphate,” which is used as a religious source of legitimacy and as a tool to undermine the Muslim identity of its opponents.³¹ To finance its activities, ISIL does not rely on donations alone. It has generated significant income through criminal activities such as smuggling, the sale of oil, the looting of antiquities, kidnapping for ransom, blackmailing, and the “taxation” of local populations living under ISIL control. Taking all of this into account, it is apparent that ISIL is mixing conventional military operations with terrorism, organized crime, social media campaigning and elements of cyber warfare.³²

ISIL has also shown itself to be highly adaptable, reacting to both opportunities and pressures. It started as a terrorist organization in the early 2000s, gradually becoming a hybrid actor involved in the Iraqi and Syrian civil wars. In capturing and holding more Iraqi and Syrian territory in 2013, ISIL has increasingly taken on characteristics similar to those of a conventional state. However, since it is under attack from both international coalition airstrikes and Iraqi ground forces, ISIL is currently regressing back into its status as a hybrid actor.

It should be noted, though, that ISIL’s different opponents also use elements of hybrid warfare. Iran, just as it did during the conflict in Lebanon in 2006, is again contributing to the practice of hybrid war in Syria and Iraq, supporting the Assad regime and Iraqi government troops with logistics, supplies and military planning. In addition, the international coalition against ISIL is implementing flexible and unconventional instruments

29 Jasper/Moreland, “*The Islamic State is a Hybrid Threat: Why Does that Matter?*”

30 *The Military Balance 2015*, London 2015, p.305.

31 This finds its (secular) equivalent in the Russian narrative of “Novorossiya.” See Heidi Reisinger and Aleksandr Golts, “Russia’s Hybrid Warfare - Waging War below the Radar of Traditional Collective Defense,” *Research Paper No. 105*, NATO Defense College, November 2014, p.7.

32 The most recent example was the cyber-attack on the French media station *TV5Monde* in April 2015.

against the terrorist organization through a combination of traditional air power, weapons supplies to Kurdish Peshmergas, the deployment of advisors to Iraqi government troops and sectarian militias, and training activities for Syrian opposition forces.³³ Regionally led military counter-offensives, border controls, the disruption of financing mechanisms, the protection of minorities, the coordination of counter-ideology efforts by Muslim authorities, and the prevention of mass media exploitation for recruiting and training are the main components of this strategy. Above all, the formation of a broad and resolute international response to ISIL, including from the Arab states, has been the most effective element in the counterstrategy against the hybrid threat posed by ISIL.³⁴

The Next Hybrid War Scenario: Libya

Since early 2015, Libya has been mutating into a failed state, with tribes, jihadist groups and militias fighting each other. For the moment, the two main political poles in the complex Libyan theatre are the internationally recognized government in the eastern part of the country, and the Islamist government in the Tripoli-Misurata area in the west. Both political poles have consolidated sufficient military power and external allies to sustain and escalate their fight for control of the country.³⁵ Given the explosive situation and political circumstances in the region, a hybrid war scenario in Libya is more than likely.

The Islamist groups controlling the western part of the country have increasingly come under pressure from global and regional jihadist movements such as Al-Qaida and ISIL, which want to use Libya as a new jihadist hub. Local jihadists operating under ISIL's banner already control a sizeable amount of support in Derna, Sirte and Nofaliya. It now seems that

33 Deep, "Hybrid War: Old Concept, New Techniques."

34 For NATO's role in building a coalition against ISIL see Andreas Jacobs and Jean-Loup Samaan, "Player at the sidelines - NATO and the fight against ISIL," *Research Paper* No.107, NATO Defense College, December 2014.

35 Yossef Bodansky, "Libya Now Assuming a Central Place in Islamic Caliphate Thrust Against Egypt, Maghrebi States, and Africa," *ISPSW Strategy Series* No. 327, March 2015.

these groups are more closely aligned with ISIL's central command than was previously understood. Obviously, ISIL applies the same strategic mix of slow infiltration and propaganda that it successfully implemented in Iraq. Several video statements and online essays linked to ISIL, or ISIL-affiliated groups and individuals, have recently built up the narrative of Libya as one of the most important frontlines of the "caliphate."³⁶ According to these propaganda sources, Libya is important not only because it houses the greatest weapons stockpile in the world, but also for its geographical proximity to Europe and the possible exploitation of human trafficking rings, making Libya an unparalleled strategic foothold for attacking Europe and neighbouring Arab and African states. In ISIL's apocalyptic narrative, Libya also plays a prominent role as the launching pad for the final battle against the infidel Western civilization, usually referred to as "Rome."³⁷

Given the jihadist infiltration and ISIL's claim on Libya, the Tobruk-based government, under Abdullah Al-Thinni, is now forcefully seeking external support not only in Egypt and other Arab countries, but also in the West and in Russia. In spite of political reservations towards the intentions and legitimacy of the Thinni government and towards the newly appointed commander-in-chief of the Libyan armed forces, "Field Marshal" Khalifa Haftar, some NATO member states are already calling for closer coordination and further efforts to counter the jihadist advance in Libya. Italian politicians, in particular, have repeatedly demanded that NATO put Libya on top of its agenda.³⁸

The situation in Libya is not yet one of hybrid war, according to the definition given above. However, it bears many characteristics of a hybrid threat: the presence of transnational terrorist organizations, external sponsorship, the involvement of foreign powers, the desire by many of the actors to keep the confrontation under the threshold of a larger conventional

36 Charlie Winter, *Libya: The Strategic Gateway for the Islamic State. Translation and Analysis of IS Recruitment Propaganda for Libya*, Quilliam Foundation, London 2015, p.4.

37 Jean-Loup Samaan, "An End-of-Time Utopia: Understanding the Narrative of the Islamic State," *Research Report* 04/05, NATO Defense College, April 2015.

38 "Libia: Renzi, è priorità per Italia e NATO," *Corriere della Sera*, February 25, 2015.

military confrontation, the criminal activities such as human trafficking and smuggling, and a strong ideology-based propaganda narrative. Given this volatile mix, NATO should prepare for Libya, a state in Europe's backyard, to become the next hybrid battlefield

Russia and Ukraine since 2014

The most prominent empirical case study – and the culminating point of the hybrid war discussion – is Ukraine, with Russia's aggressive actions there since 2014.³⁹ The methodology behind these actions has a history. In the mid-1990s, during the first war in Chechnya, Russia faced a type of war for which it was not well prepared. The Chechens were blending conventional capabilities, irregular tactics, information operations, and deliberate terrorism, waging war not only in the territory of Chechnya, but also deep in Russian territory with high-visibility terrorist attacks and notorious incidents of mass hostage-taking. This series of blows led Moscow, at that time under President Boris Yeltsin, to withdraw its forces and sue for peace. When Vladimir Putin was put in the driver's seat years later, things changed: "As a former KGB operative, he fused together intelligence and military measures. In Chechnya he relentlessly pursued the rebels, often using undercover operations that adopted terrorist tactics, until one Chechen leader switched sides and helped him defeat the rebels."⁴⁰ Additionally, the war in Georgia during 2008 provided many components that would be rediscovered in Crimea in 2014. In Georgia, "... Russia was able to execute a combined political-military strategy that isolated Georgia from its western partners while setting the conditions for military success."⁴¹ Based on these experiences, the Kremlin fine-tuned its approach,

39 For a deeper discussion of Russia's hybrid warfare against Ukraine see Reisinger/Gotz (quoted) and Dave Johnson, "Russia's Approach to Conflict - Implications for NATO's Deterrence and Defense," *Research Paper* No. 111, NATO Defense College, April 2015.

40 Roman Olearchyk and Neil Buckley, "Ukraine's security chief accuses Russia of waging 'hybrid war'," *Financial Times*, May 28, 2014, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/789b7110-e67b-11e3-9a20-00144feabdc0.html> (accessed 13 April 2015).

41 Ariel Cohen and Robert E. Hamilton, "The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications," Carlisle, Strategic Studies Institute, June 2011, p.7. See also p.17 for the military tasks, which

modernized its forces and exploited the lessons learnt.⁴²

In Ukraine, Putin has been supporting the insurgents, not the government, and backing a rebellion in a neighbouring country. “Putin is to Kiev what the mujahedeen and the Chechens were to Kabul and Moscow, respectively.”⁴³ The result is a strategy of ambiguity. Russia has developed the ability to employ non-linear and asymmetric tactics, in place of – or alongside – conventional means of warfare.⁴⁴ It used a variety of military and non-military tools, reaching its desired end-state not only through force, but through the combination of all available means.⁴⁵

Between 2010 and 2014, Russian doctrine also evolved, giving birth to the “Gerasimov doctrine” (named after the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia). This doctrine focuses particularly on “the integrated utilization of military force and forces and resources of a non-military character,” that is to say, the role devoted to interagency forces and components. In addition, the document assesses the crucial role of information warfare “in order to achieve political objectives without the utilization of military force and, subsequently, in the interest of shaping a favourable response from the world community to the utilization of military force.”⁴⁶ In short, it is about using every possible means, kinetic

shape the environment and are of a dual nature.

42 Keir Giles, “Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part Two – NATO,” *House of Common Defence Committee*, Third Session 2014-2015, HC 358, July 22, 2014, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmdfence/358/358.pdf> (accessed 12 April 2014).

43 Roman Olearchyk and Neil Buckley, “Ukraine’s security chief accuses Russia of waging ‘hybrid war,’” *Financial Times*, May 28, 2014.

44 Giles, pp.13-14.

45 Mark Galeotti, “The ‘Gerasimov Doctrine’ and Russian Non-Linear War,” *In Moscow’s Shadows Blog*, July 6, 2014, <https://inmoscowshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/> (accessed 29 March 2015).

46 Even if a new military doctrine was signed and published by the Kremlin on 26 December 2014, most of the specifics were already included in the previous version of 2010 and re-emphasized. Thus, we quote the initial document of 2010 which already gave the pattern and framework. See “The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, approved by Russian Federation presidential edict on 5 February 2010,” translation by the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/2010russia_military_doctrine.pdf (accessed 31 March 2015). According to Olga Olyker (“Russia’s New Military Doctrine: Same as the Old Doctrine, Mostly,” *The RAND Blog*, January 15, 2015 (<http://www.rand.org/blog/2015/01/russias-new-military-doctrine-same-as-the-old-doctrine.html>, accessed 31 March 2015), Russia perceives a broad range of threats that will look familiar to Western readers as they discuss “hybrid warfare:” the danger of unnamed

and/or non-kinetic, in a blended way to confuse, surprise, immobilize, and eventually defeat an opponent – the most notorious successes even being accomplished without openly committing regular forces.⁴⁷

In the meantime, massive disinformation campaigns are carried out both at home and abroad, (mis)using historical narratives to discredit the Kyiv government as “fascist” and using every possible channel to undermine Ukraine’s democracy.⁴⁸ In Crimea, the take-over was facilitated by the presence of Russian regulars according to the agreements between the countries (even though other Russian troops infiltrated, to increase the volume of forces and weaken any potential response from the Ukrainians). The use of special operations units – the so-called “green men,” in unmarked uniforms, supposed to be “local security forces” – added to the confusion and prevented effective countermeasures.⁴⁹ However, when moving deeper into Ukraine, the situation required some changes: beyond the narrative of rebels backed by Russian “volunteers,” separatists received equipment – including heavy gear – while the direct intervention of Russian forces became a reality.⁵⁰

What defines Russia’s new doctrine and courses of action in Ukraine is the systematic use of means that, all together, can undermine and seriously weaken their adversary without crossing established thresholds that would trigger a military response.⁵¹ Put simply, the Russian hybrid forces use “conventional warfare capabilities to win symmetric battles at decisive points in a conflict and then quickly dissolve into the population to continue a

actors using information warfare and political subversion, as well as force, to destabilize and overthrow regimes, as well as the use of “special forces and foreign organizations.”

47 Dave Johnson, “Russia’s Approach to conflict – Implications for NATO’s Deterrence and Defence,” *Research Paper* No. 111, NATO Defense College, April 2015.

48 Simon Shuster, “Russians Rewrite History to Slur Ukraine Over War,” *Time Online*, October 29, 2014, <http://time.com/3545855/russia-ukraine-war-history/> (accessed 5 March 2015).

49 F. Stephen Larrabee, Peter A. Wilson and John Gordon IV, “The Ukrainian Crisis and European Security. Implications for the United States and U.S. Army,” *RAND Report*, 2015, p.6.

50 Michael R. Gordon and Andrew E. Kramer, “Russia Continues to Train and Equip Ukrainian Rebels, NATO Official Says,” *The New York Times*, November 4, 2014 and Keir Giles, “Ukraine crisis: Russia tests new weapons,” *BBC News*, February 6, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31146595> (accessed 31 March 2015).

51 Larrabee, Wilson and Gordon, p.6.

protracted campaign of asymmetric tactics for steady state operations.”⁵²

NATO's Responses to Hybrid Threats

The abovementioned case studies indicate why the concept of hybrid warfare is useful and important (disregarding the issue of whether or not the tactics are new). The very aim of hybrid warfare is to keep war “below the radar of traditional collective defense,” meaning below the threshold of a reaction from traditional defence institutions and organizations such as NATO.⁵³ Consequently, NATO has difficulty in reacting to hybrid warfare with the traditional instruments of collective defence, which are not designed for dealing with insidious and ambiguous threats. Because of this, a new concept of defence against hybrid threats, able to react flexibly to hybrid challenges, is needed. NATO and its member states have already taken some first steps in order to develop and implement such a concept. However, this has to be made more effective and be fully amalgamated into its doctrine and military thinking.

Unsurprisingly, the United States took the lead in those efforts. Prompted by the Iraq War, the 2005 U.S. National Defense Strategy and the 2006 and 2010 Quadrennial Defense Reviews dealt with the use of U.S. military forces in non-permissive environments and the question of how forces would support “the political, informational and economic projections of national power, in addition to conventional military force, to achieve political objectives.”⁵⁴ Allied Command Transformation (ACT), in 2009-2010, already started developing an overarching Concept for the NATO Military Contribution to counter hybrid threats, highlighting not only the challenges posed by current or future threats, but also the need to adapt the Alliance's strategy, structure and capabilities.⁵⁵

52 John R. Davis, “Defeating Hybrid Threats,” *Military Review*, September-October 2013, p.24.

53 For this aspect see Reisinger/Golts.

54 Margaret Bond, *Hybrid War A New Paradigm for Stability Operations in Failing States*, Strategy Research Project, U.S. Army War College, March 30, 2007, p.3.

55 Michael Miklaucic, “*NATO Countering the Hybrid Threat*,” September 23, 2011, <http://www.act.nato.int/nato-countering-the-hybrid-threat> (accessed 12 April 2015).

But it was the crisis in Ukraine that was a true wake-up call, deeply changing the perception of the security environment in Europe. The NATO Summit in Wales in September 2014 was initially planned to be a transitional summit, marking the end of the decade-long ISAF operation.⁵⁶ However, with the Russian action in Ukraine, the Allies recognized the need for a response that would not just be a mere adaptation to, but would encompass every dimension of, the ongoing crisis. The outcome was the “Readiness Action Plan,” a political measure providing a renewed “Reassurance Policy” in the form of help and assistance to any member state that came under attack. This measure “... provides a coherent and comprehensive package of necessary measures to respond to the changes in the security environment on NATO’s borders and further afield that are of concern to Allies.”⁵⁷ NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg reaffirmed recently that one of the Alliance’s “greatest strengths is (the) ability to adapt.”⁵⁸ This adaptation of NATO’s strategy focusses on three keywords: comprehensive, responsive, and rapid.

The Readiness Action Plan showed that the development of NATO’s strategy against hybrid threats did not start from nothing. First, if hybrid threats are a blend of means used by different actors in a variety of fields (such as those defined earlier in this paper), they can be seen as “the dark reflection” of NATO’s Comprehensive Approach.⁵⁹ This is not to imply that NATO had the solution before even examining the problem. But NATO can build on extensive lessons learnt from the implementation of the Comprehensive Approach, while modifying the context and increasing interaction with other actors.⁶⁰ With this in mind, SHAPE established the Comprehensive Crisis and Operations Management Centre (CCOMC), inaugurated in 2012.

56 For an assessment of the Wales Summit see Jeffrey A.Larsen, “The Wales Summit and NATO’s Deterrence Capabilities - An Assessment,” *Research Report*, NATO Defense College, November 2014.

57 NATO, *Wales Summit Declaration*, September 5, 2014, paragraph 5.

58 NATO Secretary General, Remarks at the ACT Transformation Seminar, Washington DC, March 25, 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_118430.htm (accessed 1 April 2015).

59 NATO Secretary General, Remarks at the ACT Seminar.

60 Michael Aaronson, Sverre Diessen, Yves de Kermabon, Mary Beth Long, and Michael Miklaucic, “NATO Countering the Hybrid Threat,” *PRISM* No. 4, 2011, pp.111-124.

Second, NATO also has a set of forces at its disposal. The NATO Response Force (NRF) was introduced in 2002, initially designed to be the “iron fist” of the Alliance, capable of carrying out any type of mission. Unfortunately, the NRF almost fell into disarray.⁶¹ However, after years of debate on its size and true responsiveness, a breakthrough is now expected. NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg recently spoke about doubling its current size to over 30,000 troops, centred on a spearhead element able to move within 48 hours.⁶² This spearhead element, the “Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF),” is a brigade-size land component with enablers (air, maritime and Special Forces) capable of being deployed anywhere – South and East – to both reassure Allies and deter potential adversaries.⁶³

In conjunction with the deployment of command and control elements in countries bordering with Russia, this is a first step. Since the fall, the Alliance has been working on shaping and designing these forces – and will continue to do so in the time leading up to the Warsaw Summit of 2016. Additionally, a series of exercises will take place during 2015, acting as a test for identifying shortfalls, adjusting doctrine, and potentially reorganizing the structure.⁶⁴ In the first few days of April 2015, the alert procedures for the VJTF were tested with over 1,500 personnel from eleven Allied nations taking part, while high-readiness units from the Netherlands and the Czech Republic were physically deployed. These series of complex manoeuvres and trials mirror what is also practiced with similar success by the U.S. Army in Europe in the ongoing Operation *Atlantic Resolve*. Additionally, they demonstrate the enduring commitment of U.S. troops to collective security, enhanced multinational training and security cooperation across

61 Guillaume Lasconjarias, “The NRF: from a Key Driver of Transformation to a Laboratory of the Connected Forces Initiative,” *Research Paper* No. 88, NATO Defense College, November 2012.

62 NATO Secretary General, Remarks at the ACT Seminar.

63 For an assessment of the VJTF see Jan Abts, “NATO’s Very High Readiness Joint Task Force - Can the VJTF give new élan to the NATO Response Force?” *Research Paper* No. 109, NATO Defense College, February 2015.

64 The reasons for which the NRF suffered difficulties can be traced in Guillaume Lasconjarias, “The NRF: from a Key Driver of Transformation to a Laboratory of the Connected Forces Initiative,” pp.3-5. In addition, see General Sir Richard Shirreff remarks in House of Common Defence Committee, “Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part Two – NATO,” pp.22 sqq.

several countries – from the Baltic states to Bulgaria and Romania – and improved responsiveness.⁶⁵ In October and November 2015, the *Trident Juncture* exercise in Italy, Spain, and Portugal tested the VJTF structure on NATO’s southern flank.

It is most likely that these exercises will show that comprehensive and rapid NATO action on its eastern and southern flank requires an increase of deployable forces, modern equipment, and the availability of ships, aircraft and troops. Some suggest that the pre-deployment and pre-positioning of NATO forces where common threats could be identified could be an efficient preemptive measure in places such as the Baltic states.⁶⁶ In the case of Russia, this approach could work if “... conventional military threats ... against NATO members [were] plausible and need to be stopped, preferably beyond NATO territory and sooner rather than later.”⁶⁷ However, such an approach is still considered to be insufficient to address the hybrid issue, and it neglects the increasing security challenges on NATO’s southern flank.

Recommendations

The previous paragraph showed that NATO has started to adapt to the hybrid challenge – particularly in reaction to Russia’s hybrid war in Ukraine. But the Alliance is still far from a comprehensive strategy against hybrid threats, with particular regard to those emerging in the South. In order to develop such a comprehensive strategy, NATO needs to balance the course it is following to the East and South, as well as further develop its instruments, resources and approaches.

With regard to instruments, NATO forces need to be ready to shift

65 Interview by the authors with a high-ranking officer, U.S. Army in Europe, April 11, 2015.

66 Terence Kelly, “Stop Putin’s Next Invasion Before It Starts,” *The RAND Blog*, March 20, 2015, <http://www.rand.org/blog/2015/03/stop-putins-next-invasion-before-it-starts.html> (accessed 21 March 2015).

67 Olga Oliker, Michael J. McNerney, and Lynn E. Davis, “NATO Needs a Comprehensive Strategy for Russia,” *RAND Perspective*, 2015, p.4, <http://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE143.html> (accessed 29 March 2015).

operations “... sometimes suddenly and unexpectedly, along the spectrum as adversaries seek the mode of conflict most advantageous to their aims.”⁶⁸ This requires highly flexible and adaptive response units, be they the NRF or the coming VJTF, which would encompass every dimension of a counter-hybrid force. At a certain point, particularly when it comes to deployment hubs in the South, these efforts should include NATO partners. Structurally, the respective forces should be organized around Special Forces, assuming that these would better understand and better mirror the adversary’s deployment.

Furthermore, additional resources could be fielded for such anti-hybrid missions – particularly for possible missions on NATO’s southern flank. Military police and law enforcement units could train and monitor friendly forces and deal with criminal elements and armed militias. Cyber-defence teams could protect and secure NATO communication networks and deter cyber-attacks. ‘Psyops’ teams could counter the adversary’s propaganda. Civil-military capabilities could provide support to the local population. All of these elements should be backed by accurate intelligence and situational awareness. Finally, NATO should become better prepared to counter (untrue) narratives and challenge propaganda and disinformation. With the Communication Centre of Excellence in Riga, Latvia, NATO has already established such a counter-narrative tool.

This approach requires more diversified scenarios, more complex exercises and a better integration of NATO’s partnership infrastructure into its different strategic planning and crisis management efforts. With regard to security challenges from the Middle East and North Africa, a comprehensive approach that might include NATO’s partner countries in the Mediterranean and the Gulf might be useful. This would require a completely new set of rules of engagement that needs to be integrated into NATO’s strategic planning. From this perspective, complementing and adapting NATO’s documents seems to be inevitable.⁶⁹

68 Scharre, p.73.

69 U.S. Special Operations Command, “Counter-Unconventional Warfare White Paper,” September 26, 2014, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/USASOC-CounterUnconventionalWarfare.pdf> (accessed 1 April 2015).

Based on a renewed understanding of NATO's Comprehensive Approach, the Alliance should also apply a holistic view to security. The security situation in the East and in the West is very different in nature, and might even require separate NATO strategies at a certain point. However, some concepts, tools and tactics that work in the East might also work in the South and vice versa. Therefore, it is necessary to better cross-connect NATO's own internal discussions and planning processes. Politically, this also requires an intensification of dialogue with other actors, such as NGOs, governments and international organizations. For instance, the EU is the only organization able to effectively apply economic sanctions against Russia. It is therefore NATO's key partner for better coordinating economic measures with military posture. In the fight against ISIL, NATO's Arab partners are of the utmost importance to the success of the international coalition. While NATO is not institutionally involved there, it could be a model for closer cooperation between Arab and NATO security efforts in the region.⁷⁰

Conclusion

The concept of hybrid war is neither new, nor does it change – or even challenge – NATO's understanding of warfare and defence. Because of this, criticism is widespread. Some observers view the concept as "... merely another mechanism by which the West can avoid decisive action against Russia."⁷¹ Others argue that the concept does not provide new insights because it is included in the already existing concepts.⁷² While the concept of hybrid warfare might have its shortcomings, it is nevertheless useful in providing perspectives on the rising complexity of NATO's security challenge. Additionally, it is one of the few concepts that allows

70 Peter Pindjak, "Deterring hybrid warfare: a chance for NATO and the EU to work together?" in *NATO Review Magazine 2014*, <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2014/Also-in-2014/Deterring-hybrid-warfare/IT/index.htm> (accessed 12 April 2015).

71 Schadlow 2015.

72 United States Government Accountability Office, "Hybrid Warfare," Washington, D.C., September 2010, pp.2-3.

for differentiated views on the security challenges emanating from NATO's South and NATO's East at the same time. Here lies the main beauty of the hybrid warfare concept: it provides tools for a comparative strategic perspective of NATO's southern and eastern flanks, while allowing for a differentiated response.

15

Player at the Sidelines:
NATO and the Fight against ISIL
Andreas Jacobs and Jean-Loup Samaan

On December 3rd 2014, NATO hosted the first meeting between the foreign ministers from the countries forming the U.S.-led coalition against the so-called “Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant” (ISIL).¹ Although all NATO members are officially part of the coalition and the Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, attended – as an observer – participants said to the media that NATO would “*only provide the building*.”² Despite this word of caution, the event marked a new step in NATO’s indirect involvement in the fight against ISIL. The ad-hoc coalition did materialize on the margins of NATO’s Wales Summit in September 2014. The question now is: will NATO merely play a role of a forum where coalition members meet, or could this lead to further participation?

The sweeping advance of ISIL in Syria and Iraq took the international community by surprise. Along with the huge territorial gains of ISIL, the group openly displayed brutality against their opponents and religious minorities, and the despicable beheadings of Western journalists and NGO-workers have convinced Western leaders to take action. In August 2014 several NATO member states decided on a series of unilateral measures

1 The group is also known as “Islamic State in Iraq and Syria” (ISIS), the “Islamic State” (IS) or under its Arabic Acronym Dae’esh that stands for *Dawlat Islamiyya lil Iraq wa ach-Cham*. On 14 May 2014, the U.S. Department of State announced its decision to use “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” (ISIL) as the group’s primary name making it the most commonly used name in security politics. Therefore, in this paper the name ISIL is used.

2 Adrian Croft, “Ministers from coalition against Islamic State to meet December 3,” *Reuters*, November 26, 2014.

against ISIL. The United States, France and the United Kingdom and other nations conducted a number of air raids against camps and positions of the terrorist organization, allowing Kurdish and Iraqi forces to partially regain ground; other countries gave military equipment and humanitarian assistance to the Iraqis and Kurds and/or sent military advisers. At its summit at the Welsh city of Newport in the United Kingdom on 5 September 2014, NATO found common ground in collectively condemning the jihadi terrorist organization. However, in Wales NATO neither came up with a *collective* strategy against ISIL nor did it define a clear idea of NATO's contribution to the international efforts to degrade and destroy it. Asked in November, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, said, "there has been no question, no request for a NATO role in Syria [...] I think that underlines that NATO is often [...] the answer to many crises. But NATO is not always the only answer."³ Given the diversity of perceptions and interests among NATO member states and the general intervention fatigue, it is already clear that NATO stands at the sidelines in the fight against ISIL. Nevertheless, standing at the sidelines should not equal fence-sitting. With military and humanitarian action unfolding, there should be a lively debate on what NATO can and should do to support the fight. In that perspective, this paper provides an analysis of the on-going efforts of the coalition against ISIL. It then specifies the current domains in which NATO plays a role and explores three scenarios that allow us to see under which circumstances NATO may change its position.

The Global Coalition against ISIL

NATO is neither a member of the international coalition against ISIL nor does it have a mandate to play a coordinating or facilitating role in the fight. However, the various activities of the anti-ISIL coalition directly or indirectly affect NATO institutions, NATO interests and also some ongoing or expired NATO missions.

3 "NATO: A unique Alliance with a Clear Course," Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the German Marshall Fund, Brussels, November 13, 2014.

The Wales Summit and the Making of the Coalition

Although the latest NATO Summit at Newport was dominated by the crisis in Ukraine, the situation unfolding in Iraq and Syria and the challenges posed by ISIL played an important role. This could not be taken for granted at the time. When it became obvious that U.S. president Barack Obama planned to use the summit as a forum to establish a coalition against ISIL, some participants allegedly raised objections against such a step. In response, Obama and other Heads of State initiated a diplomatic initiative to dispel these reservations prior to the summit. A day before the meeting, Obama and the British Premier David Cameron published a joint opinion piece in *The Times of London* noting that, “Developments [...] in Iraq and Syria, threaten our security at home. And NATO is not just an alliance of friends who come to the aid of each other in times of need. It is also an alliance based on national self-interest. Whether it is regional aggression going unchecked or the prospect that foreign fighters could return from Iraq and Syria to pose a threat in our countries, the problems we face today threaten the security of [...] the wider world.”⁴

Regardless of this appeal the support for Obama’s plan for an international coalition remained limited at first. In the Wales Summit Declaration⁵ NATO Heads of State only referred to the threat ISIL posed, declared their solidarity with the people in the region, and made clear that a “coordinated international approach is required.”⁶ By not explicitly elaborating the role and contribution of NATO to such an international approach, NATO members emphasized that the Alliance should neither be the primary actor nor the main coordinating body for the anti-ISIL strategy. In fact, they agreed in Newport that the United States should provide a framework through which other countries can contribute, leaving room for the Alliance

4 Barack Obama and David Cameron, “We will not be cowed by barbaric killers,” *The Times*, September 4, 2014.

5 Wales Summit Declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales from 4 to 5 September 2014, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.

6 *Ibid.*

to assist upon request. In the summit declaration, NATO member states also pointed out that they regard an active request by the Iraqi government as a main requirement for any NATO involvement.

Consequently, the summit document renewed the Alliance commitment to the NATO-Iraq partnership and re-committed security assistance to the Iraqi armed forces.⁷ NATO also called upon the new Prime Minister of Iraq, Haydar al-Abadi, to form an “inclusive Iraqi government with cross-sectarian representation” in order to appeal to disenfranchised Sunnis. With a new Iraqi government in power, the coalition anticipated that Iraq would formally invite Western military forces into the country to combat ISIL. Altogether, the Wales Summit did not develop a comprehensive NATO-strategy against ISIL. Rather, it made clear that most NATO states have little intention of intervening directly in Iraq or Syria. However, all NATO partners acknowledged the necessity to contain and ultimately defeat ISIL. Additionally, the Wales summit left the main responsibility for the fight to the United States.

Therefore, the United States took the lead in forming and guiding an international coalition against ISIL after Wales. By the end of November 2014, 60 states had joined the coalition by providing military, financial, technical, logistical or ideological support to the fight, among them many Arab countries.⁸ All NATO allies officially committed to the coalition efforts.⁹ The unfolding strategy against ISIL is based on several military and non-military measures. These measures range from air strikes, training activities for Iraqi, Kurdish and some (moderate opposition) Syrian ground forces, intelligence cooperation, and the fight against financing of terrorism to humanitarian support of the victims of ISIL and the development of religious counter-narratives to ISIL ideology.

7 Wales Summit Declaration, *op. cit.*, paragraph 34.

8 Kenneth Katzman, Christopher Blanchard, Carla Humud, Rhoda Margesson, Alex Tiersky, Matthew Weed, “The “Islamic State” Crisis and U.S. Policy, Washington, Congressional Research Service, November 12, 2014, p.14.

9 Justine Drennan, “Who Has Contributed What in the Coalition Against the Islamic State?” *Foreign Policy*, November 12, 2014.

The Air Campaign Against ISIL

Airstrikes have been the main and probably until now the most effective tool of the anti-ISIL strategy.¹⁰ Between the end of August and the end of November 2014 almost 1000 raids against bases and terrorist-camps in Iraq and Syria were conducted. Their purpose was to kill ISIL leaders, destroy ISIL infrastructure and financial resources, and to support Iraqi and Kurdish ground forces. First successes are already visible. Supported by coalition airpower, Iraqi and Kurdish ground forces were able to retake crucial infrastructure, such as the dam in Mosul, from ISIL. The defense of the Kurdish town of Kobane by Kurdish forces was also at least partly based on air support.

But airstrikes alone will not defeat ISIL. The U.S. government decided in November 2014 to increase the number of non-combatting troops in Iraq to identify targets, guide planes and coordinate with local military.¹¹ And this is not the only problem the air campaign is facing. The fight is complicated by the ongoing civil war in Syria. Here, the Alliance faces the dilemma that the fight against ISIL would reinforce the position of Syrian President Bashar al Assad.¹² Consequently, the Assad regime uses the ISIL crisis as leverage to present itself as the “lesser evil” and regain international legitimacy and credibility. Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem elucidated this interest on 26 August 2014 when he called for international cooperation with the Syrian authorities to fight ISIL and Jabhat al-Nusra. According to anonymous Syrian sources, some Western officials expressed interest in cooperating with the Syrian military to confront ISIL, but are reluctant to deal with Syrian President Bashar al-

10 According to Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the U.S.-Joint Chiefs of Staff, airstrikes have disrupted ISIL's infrastructure, its command and control and logistic abilities, *Al Arabiya News*, December 1, 2014, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/09/26/U-S-led-strikes-target-ISIS-oil-refineries-in-Syria-.html>.

11 The 1 500 additional troops will join the 1,600 military advisers to Iraq since the start of the IS offensive in June.

12 This discussion has been reinforced by the recent airstrikes of the Syrian regime against Raqqa, the unofficial capital of ISIL, Hugh Naylor, “Syria, U.S. attack same Syrian city, than trade barbs,” *The Washington Post*, November 28, 2014.

Assad.¹³ In Damascus, one rumour says that Iraqi officials are channelling American communications to Assad's circle.¹⁴ For an increasing share of observers and practitioners, a unity government encompassing the Syrian military and the moderate opposition forces seems to be the only tangible way out of the Syrian dilemma. However, there is little traction on this front in Damascus as Western powers continue to insist that any change in the Syrian government should include the departure of Assad.

For now, the only chosen course of action of the U.S. and its allies remains to enhance support for the moderate Syrian opposition. President Obama suggested that NATO partners could enlist "moderate" rebel forces in Syria to join the fight against ISIL. Western aid to Syrian rebel groups has been limited until now due to fears that weapons could fall into the hands of ISIL linked factions. While NATO agreed in Wales that the goal to "destroy" ISIL would eventually require action in Syria,¹⁵ it is still unclear how this would play out. Activities such as disrupting the recruiting and financial networks of the Islamic State are in some cases only feasible if a tacit agreement with the Assad regime is in place, as is the case for airstrikes in Syria or in the vicinity of its borders. The coalition faces the dilemma that it could either be exposed to the surface-to-air missiles of the Assad regime or in-effect act as Assad's air force.¹⁶ To further complicate things, Russia and Iran pointed out that military action in Syria without a UN Security Council mandate would be considered as an act of aggression.¹⁷

Given the complexity of the Syrian theater, the ambition of airstrikes against ISIL in Syria is limited as they are hardly part of a combined effort between airpower and ground forces as they do in Iraq. Although it has been stated by President Obama and others that the international coalition

13 Antoun Issa, "Syria, West explore cooperation to fight Islamic State," *Al-Monitor*, September 4, 2014, www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/09/syria-us-islamic-state-cooperation-terror-assad-italy.html.

14 Private conversations with Syrian sources based in Damascus, November 2014.

15 Craig Whitlock, Griff Witte, "West to reach out to Syrian rebels to fight Islamic State," *The Washington Post*, September 5, 2014.

16 Sabrina Siddiqui, "Striking ISIS In Syria May Require Coordination With Assad Regime," *The Huffington Post*, September 4, 2014.

17 Adrian Croft, "Action against Islamic State would prevent genocide-NATO," *Reuters*, September 15, 2014.

fighters ISIL in Iraq and Syria, it is obvious that the operational priorities are in Iraq. This has also been made clear by U.S.-Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Martin Dempsey: “This is an Iraq-first strategy.”¹⁸

Support for Anti-ISIL Forces on the Ground

In addition to the air campaign, the United States and its allies have been enhancing the level of financial and military support to the anti-ISIL forces on the ground. These include the Iraqi armed forces, some vetted Syrian rebel groups, and Kurdish fighters. The support can take several forms such as the permission for the use of national airspace. For instance, Albania is a takeoff point for Australian aircraft delivering arms to Kurdish fighters in Iraq. It also refers more specifically to the military support to the Kurdish fighters that include small arms ammunition, artillery shells and hand grenades. Noticeably, Germany sent equipment including anti-tank rockets, thousands of assault rifles, mine-clearing equipment, and night-vision goggles.¹⁹ France pledged the provision of military advisors to train the Kurds. Italy sent \$ 2.5 million worth of weaponry. The United Kingdom also shipped a package to the Kurdish fighters valued at approximately \$2.6 million.²⁰

Countering Networks and Finance of ISIL

Efforts to stop the flow of money to the terrorist group by cracking down on oil smuggling and curtailing contributions from private donors is an important element of the anti-ISIL strategy. Additionally, U.S. officials

18 Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, “Fight the Islamic State in Iraq? Sure. In Syria? Not So Much,” *Defense One*, September 16, 2014.

19 Communiqué from the Bundeswehr, “Nach dem MG – jetzt Einweisung an Panzerfaust 3 und Unimog,” October 22, 2014, available at: http://www.einsatz.bundeswehr.de/portal/a/einsatzbw!/ut/p/c4/LYvRCoJAEEX_aMeNouxNkaDHeil7kVUHGDjZGWcTpI9vF7oXDlwOF14Qy-5Dg1Py7EZ4Qt3RuV1Nu_bYIPHidlszskIsGIC3wEND4t7wSO8eTecZNVGRISIHcerFzF50TCaIRGOohzqzVWmP--wf-81vh_xS2N2pupZ3mKep-AF0h_Eg/.

20 “Britain to send machine guns and ammunition to Iraqi army, Kurds,” *Reuters*, September 9, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/09/09/us-iraq-crisis-britain-guns-idUSKBN0H41HA20140909>.

are pressing other NATO members to share intelligence about the Islamic State - which has drawn thousands of foreign fighters from Europe, North Africa, the United States and elsewhere. The Obama administration is paying close attention to Turkey, a NATO member, which is affected by the spillover of thousands of refugees from Syria.

Turkey has come under criticism for allowing foreign fighters from Europe to cross its borders to join the Islamic State. In response to accusations, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the president of Turkey, stated before the Wales-summit, "We have no tolerance regarding the crossings into Syria."²¹ Turkish officials also responded to criticism and reminded NATO allies of their own responsibility. Turkey, to their understanding, is the one who should complain about the jihadist problem because their efforts to crack down on foreign jihadists seem insignificant in the absence of security measurements by its European allies.²² Since the summit in Wales, NATO officials and heads of state are determined to overcome scapegoating. When Obama met Erdogan in Newport, he told reporters: "I want to express my appreciation for the cooperation between U.S. and Turkish both military and intelligence services in dealing with the issue of foreign fighters, an area where we still have more work to do."²³ Then, on the 2nd of October, the Turkish parliament approved the use of Turkish territory to launch military operations in Syria and Iraq. However Turkish long-term security interests may conflict with short-term expectations from the U.S.-led coalition. This was epitomized in the protracted battle against ISIL in the Kurdish city of Kobane. To defeat ISIL forces meant helping Syrian Kurdish forces such as the Democratic Union Party which is not only close to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) but has also been siding with Assad forces against the rebels in past battles.²⁴ Beyond the fight against ISIL this leaves the future of Turkish security uncertain.

21 Craig Whitlock, Griff Witte, *op. cit.*

22 Mehmet Akif Madenoğlu, "Turkey dismisses claims of being a 'Jihadist Highway'," *Daily Sabah*, September 6, 2014.

23 Reuters, "Turkey may play quiet role in U.S. coalition against Islamic State," September 5, 2014.

24 Jean-Loup Samaan, "The New Logic of the Syrian Conflict and its Meaning for NATO," *Research Paper* No. 86, NATO Defense College, December 2012, p.4.

NATO's Involvement in the Fight against ISIL

In the fight against ISIL, NATO has been, to this day, a dependent variable. The international coalition against ISIL was pulled together and led by the United States. NATO was needed as a mobilisation platform that only partly succeeded. At the Wales Summit, allied support for U.S. plans was initially a cautious one: acknowledging the critical demands of the Syria-Iraq theater but without committing NATO itself to the fight. This restrained posture of the Atlantic Alliance reflects the general aversion of NATO to intervene militarily in Iraq and/or in Syria. However this does not mean NATO is completely absent from the debate. It does already play a significant role in four domains: air defense in Turkey, military training and education programs with Iraqi forces, the monitoring of foreign fighters and the ongoing strengthening of its Middle Eastern partnerships.

The Defense of NATO Territory

In the Wales Summit Declaration NATO member states renewed their commitment to the collective defense “against any potential threat” against Turkey.²⁵ Back in November 2012, Turkey requested the deployment of six Patriot batteries following multiple incidents at its borders with Syria, such as the shelling by Syrian forces of Turkish town of Akcakale that led to the death of five civilians and retaliation by Turkish artillery. As a result, NATO's North Atlantic Council held consultations which resulted in the decision by Germany, Netherlands and the United States to contribute to Turkey's defense by providing two Patriot batteries each that are under NATO command. The deployment was made effective in early 2013.

In October 2014, during a visit to Turkey, NATO's Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, told troops operating the Patriot missiles there, “your mission is more important than ever.”²⁶ In January 2015, the Dutch units were replaced by Spanish Patriot batteries. Until now, the Patriot

25 Wales Summit Declaration, *op. cit.*, paragraph 35.

26 Robin Wright, “The Vortex: A Turkish city on the frontier of Syria's War,” *The New Yorker*, December 8, 2014.

mission has been clearly defensive. For the last three years, NATO officials emphasized that this build-up was not to be read as an initial step toward the implementation of a no-fly-zone. During a visit to Turkey, German Defense Minister Thomas de Maizière reiterated: “The position and range of the Patriots makes it impossible to enforce a no-fly-zone or attack Syria.”²⁷ An extension of the mandate remains subject to speculation.

The Conduct of Training Missions

NATO’s latest Strategic Concept, adopted at Lisbon in November 2010, emphasized the added value of a capabilities-building approach with partners and local forces in crisis zones. Even before the Lisbon Summit, NATO had such experience in Iraq.

In June 2004, Iraq’s Prime Minister Ilyad Allawi sent a letter to then NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, requesting NATO support through training.²⁸ Due to the deep diplomatic crisis that the 2003 invasion of Iraq had engendered between transatlantic allies – namely between the United States, France and Germany – it would take about four years to see the initiative implemented. Between 2008 and 2011 the NATO Training Mission in Iraq (NTM-I) trained nearly 9, 000 Iraqi Federal Police, 2 500 Iraqi officers, 200 Senior Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCOs) and sent over 1800 members of Iraq’s Security Forces on out-of country training courses.²⁹ Following the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in December 2011, NTM-I officially came to a conclusion and was replaced by a much more modest NATO Transition Cell that channeled diplomatic and military exchanges between Iraqi Authorities and the Alliance. Although the training dimension was put aside, NATO maintained a limited, but still significant, role in the field of military education with several courses delivered by the NATO Defense College (NDC) in Iraq and with officials from Iraq’s

27 Jean-Loup Samaan, “The Coming Unknown For NATO’s Policy on Syria,” *Al Monitor*, February 26, 2013.

28 For a detailed assessment of NTM-I, see Florence Gaub, “Building a new military? The NATO Training Mission-Iraq,” *Research Paper* n.67, NATO Defense College, April 2011.

29 NATO’s Assistance to Iraq, http://www.jfcnaples.nato.int/training_mission_iraq/page55563220.aspx.

National Security Council attending NDC's Regional Cooperation Courses in Rome. For instance, in January 2014, representatives of NDC travelled to Iraq to give lectures and conduct a crisis management exercises with officials from Iraqi National Security Council and National Defense University. Organized as part of NATO Defense Education Enhancement Program with Iraq, this visit was to be the first of several others. However, following the fall of Mosul in June 2014, NATO paused all major cooperation activities with Iraq.

NTM-I faced some criticism against the backdrop of the poor performance of the Iraqi army during the events of 2014. For instance, the establishment of a very hierarchical top-level decision-making structure with no empowerment downwards along with a flawed Western presumption of local loyalty to the state might have contributed to the marginalization of the Sunni minority in the military. Additionally, the tendency to impose Western organizational structures and operating practices led to useless and unused structures that might have concealed the real (i.e. Shiite dominated) decision-making and command structures in the country. An assessment of NTM-I shows that local cultural understanding and knowledge are absolutely critical to an effective military capacity building.³⁰

Despite these shortcomings, NATO has acquired a military know-how and sustained cooperation with Iraqi authorities that could be easily reactivated. This was the message conveyed by the Wales Summit Declaration in which Heads of State declared: "We re-affirm NATO's continued commitment to the NATO-Iraq partnership, through which we will revitalise our effort to help Iraq build more effective security forces [...] Should the Iraqi government request it, NATO will stand ready to consider measures in the framework of NATO's Defence and Related Security Capacity Building Initiative with an eye to launching such an effort in the near term."³¹

30 Stephanie Blair, "Assisting Host Country Militaries. Assessing Lessons from NATO, EU, and Member State Experience," Report of the cosponsored workshop of the NATO Defense College and Wilton Park, December 2013.

31 Wales Summit Declaration, *op. cit.*, paragraph 34.

This was complemented a few days later by comments delivered by James Appathurai, NATO's deputy assistant secretary general for political affairs and security policy. Addressing European parliamentarians, Appathurai said that NATO "could consider a capacity-building mission in Iraq." Such a mission would of course require an official request from the Iraqi government.³² NATO Secretary General Rasmussen stressed at the same time that "Should the new government in Baghdad request our assistance, NATO as an alliance stands ready to consider a defense-building mission to strengthen the ability of Iraq security forces to defend their own country."³³

In any case, a new NTM-I would have not only to learn the lessons from past experiences, but moreover, it would only be conceivable as part of a broader political-military platform to strengthen the new Iraqi state.³⁴

The Fight against Foreign Fighters

Awareness in Western public opinion on the presence of American and European citizens among ISIL forces grew in earnest in late 2014. Already in August, the Supreme Allied Commander for Europe, General Philip Breedlove, was declaring in an interview for the German daily *Die Welt* that NATO had to get prepared for the infiltration of violent foreign fighters into NATO territory. To that aim, he suggested a closer coordination between NATO members in the field of police and intelligence.³⁵ Again, this is an issue that was acknowledged by the Wales Summit Declaration: "Allies will seek to enhance their cooperation in exchanging information on returning foreign fighters."³⁶ Intelligence cooperation including domestic agencies would be a new field of security cooperation for NATO. Already, the Alliance has some instruments and a modest infrastructure that deals with

32 Julian Hale, "NATO Weighs Training Mission to Iraq," *Defense News*, September 12, 2014.

33 Anders Fogh Rasmussen, "The Dual Threat to Western Values," *op. cit.*

34 General John R. Allen, Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, underlined the relevance of training missions and military education through his visit at the NATO Defense College in Rome in November 2014.

35 Stefanie Bolzen, "Die Nato muss auf grüne Männchen vorbereitet sein," *Die Welt*, August 17, 2014.

36 Wales Summit Declaration, *op. cit.*, paragraph 34.

violent extremism. First, the Science and Technology Organization (STO) of the Alliance already started to explore the consequences of radicalization and engaged Mediterranean Dialogue and other NATO-partner countries in an exchange of information and expertise. Additionally, the Center for Excellence for Defense Against Terrorism might provide another mechanism for engagement in NATO's fight against radicalization, if it expands its scope of research on the field of counter-radicalization.³⁷

The Strengthening of Partnerships

Finally, the ISIL crisis underlined the importance of cooperative security on NATO's agenda. NATO partners in the region play a substantial role in degrading and defeating ISIS.

Saudi-Arabia, Iraq, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, UAE, Oman and Qatar are not only members of the anti-ISIL coalition, they also have long term diplomatic and military contacts with NATO through the Mediterranean dialogue (MD), the Istanbul cooperation initiative (ICI) and the Partners Across the Globe framework. Increased interest in NATO's partnership initiatives is evident. The Alliance is now going through a process of reinforcement of these ties, both bilaterally and multilaterally. First, NATO is now promoting a "deepening dialogue and practical cooperation as part of the enhanced opportunities within the Partnership Interoperability Initiative" with five partner countries, including Jordan.³⁸ Second, the development of relations with regional organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab League is a new priority. Reinvigorating NATO partnerships, more particularly in the Arab world, paves the way for better cooperation in front of the ISIL challenge.

All in all, NATO does already play a role, yet indirectly, in the ongoing developments. This means that if the Alliance was later to get involved,

37 See Jaqueline Page, "The Home Game: Countering violent extremism and preventing terrorist attacks within Alliance territory," *Research Paper* No. 104, NATO Defense College, September 2014.

38 The four other countries are Australia, Finland, Georgia, and Sweden.

preexisting diplomatic and military frameworks and instruments could be quickly activated. Still, this does not explain the specific missions that NATO could or should undertake in the future to confront ISIL.

Scenarios for NATO's Involvement in the Fight against ISIL

As the current political debate excludes a change in the Alliance's absence in the fight, one needs to explore the ways this position would be challenged. In other words, the relevant drivers for change have to be identified. Forecasting the evolution of the Syria-Iraq battleground may be a daunting exercise, especially when one looks in retrospect at the pace with which a group like ISIL went from the fringes of the rebellion against Bashar al Assad to being the biggest threat in the region. However, three key factors appear to be relevant for any scenario on the fight against ISIL:

1. Military effectiveness of the ongoing campaign (do the air strikes degrade ISIL power? do they lead to a decisive breakthrough?);
2. Cohesion of the international coalition (do the United States sustain the momentum gained by the creation of the coalition? do its allies remain committed to the mission?);
3. Strength of local partners (do Kurdish and Iraqi Forces make a difference on the ground? does the Iraqi government reconcile its society?).

Based on these three key factors three distinct scenarios can be identified and detailed.

The Revolution Scenario: NATO Keeps Low Profile

After several months, air strikes conducted by the international coalition start making a difference on the ground, in both Syria and Iraq. In Northern Syria, after a long war of attrition, the Kurdish forces assisted by Western arms supplies finally retake the control of key posts and the ISIL jihadists are forced to retreat. Likewise, in Iraq, ISIL suffers major setbacks and the killing of its key commanders in several raids disrupts its order of

battle. Additionally, ISIL increasingly suffers from financial problems due to targeted attacks on its different sources of capital by the international coalition. This then paves the way to a counterattack from the Iraqi armed forces to regain territories previously left to ISIL. Subsequently, the Iraqi government of Haydar Al-Abadi announces a process of reconciliation between Sunni and Shia communities that relies on a more inclusive government and security apparatus. As a result, the authorities in Baghdad distance themselves from the Iranian regime. Meanwhile, in Syria, the demise of ISIL triggers a call for unity among the various rebel factions under the command of the Free Syrian Army. Galvanized by the victory in the north, the rebels find new momentum to launch a new, this time decisive, attack against the regime of Bashar al Assad and finally force him out of office.

In this scenario, NATO posture vis-à-vis the conflict is unlikely to change as the *ad hoc* coalition and its partners on the ground remain the primary actors to defeat IS. However, in the middle term, as the situation in Iraq improves, NATO could become a key player to support the Baghdad government, particularly in the field of military training and education. In due time, the relaunch of a training mission targeting non-commissioned officers and the reopening to Iraq of various partnership activities at diplomatic levels would help normalize relations with the country.

The Muddle Through Scenario: NATO Reconsiders Involvement

Air strikes conducted by the U.S. Air Force and its allies lead to some substantial gains but no breakthrough is in sight. Lack of intelligence on the ground hinders the accuracy of the targeting while the fighting forces against ISIL remain weak. The battle of Kobane has led to a protracted stalemate in the North-East region of Syria. Each side launches one counterattack after another without being able to clear and hold territory. In the meantime, on the Iraqi battlefield, the countries from the coalition face delusions as, contrary to their expectations, ISIL proves resilient in spite of major strikes that decapitated its leadership. Despite the increasing

support of the U.S. military, Iraqi forces prove unable to defeat the jihadists and to stabilize the lost regions. The financial cost of the air operations, combined with the military training and advising mission, is skyrocketing for the United States, and after months of inconclusive results, the White House starts facing tremendous criticism from the Congress. In the midst of a general sentiment of war fatigue, the coalition strategy is reassessed with talks of containing the Syria-Iraq crisis rather than solving it.

In that scenario, the 28 Allies would very likely make sure NATO does not get caught in the protracted conflict. In the name of caution, NATO-Iraq partnership would remain on pause and any discussion of an intervention on the ground would be overruled. The only matter of relevance would be the sustainment and the expansion of NATO mission to defend Turkey through the stationing of Patriot batteries in the south to contain any spill over. Discussions about a no-fly zone in Northern Syria imposed by NATO could receive new impetus with a direct support of (moderate) Syrian opposition forces by NATO member states. Syrian opposition forces have little means to prevent the barrel bombs, ballistic missiles, and heavy artillery that the Syrian regime uses against civilian targets. Only an Iraqi-style no-fly zone imposed by NATO and the extension of its Patriot mandate in Turkey could prevent missiles from within regime territory attacking opposition population centers. However, the political costs of such an involvement, the extension of the Patriot mandate, or the declaration of a no-fly zone in parts of Syria would completely change the equation for NATO.³⁹

The Escalation Scenario: NATO Leads the Fight

The coalition forces stumble on the unexpected resistance of ISIL fighters. In Northern Syria, fierce fighting engenders huge casualties for Kurdish and other forces. Inside Iraq, the situation worsens as the Iraqi military proves

³⁹ See Khaled Yacoub Oweis, "Struggling to Build an Alternative to Assad," *SWP Comments* No. 35, July 2014, p.8.

unable to deliver. But more preoccupying, the Iraqi government is said to rely more and more on Shia militias such as the Badr organization rather than on the regular army. One air strike conducted by Western countries hits accidentally a densely populated area in the Mosul region. Rumours start spreading that the Iraqi government purposely provided distorted intelligence to proceed to ethnic cleansing. Despite denials from all sides, the accident triggers major awe in the Arab world and countries such as Gulf monarchies and Jordan decide to leave the international coalition. Meanwhile in retaliation to the last strikes, the fighting intensifies and ISIL threatens to target U.S. and NATO bases in the region. Intelligence agencies report that ISIL may have acquired short-range ballistic missiles loaded with chemical weapons.

As any worst case scenario, this narrative has a low degree of likelihood but would have very high consequences. Relations between Western countries and Iraq would suffer significantly from an increasing and openly sectarian tone in Baghdad's policies and NATO's position would reasonably be one of suspension of diplomatic relations. But the most challenging factor would be the combination of a weakening coalition with a rising threat to the Alliance's territories. At first, the potential for an ISIL aggression against Turkey would call for a revamping of the NATO defense mission to one of its members.⁴⁰ NATO's containment approach of the Syrian conflict relied on the Patriot missiles as means of stabilization at Turkey's borders with Syria. They imposed explicit red lines that seem to be well understood by Bashar al-Assad, de-escalating the brewing conflict between Turkey and Syria. However, the rise of ISIL, a non-state actor whose rationality may differ from Assad's, challenges the NATO calculus. Furthermore, it would eventually lead to critical talks at the level of the North Atlantic Council regarding the relevance of a proper NATO intervention to degrade the military power of ISIL and prevent chemical attacks.

The first step would be through the use of NATO military infrastructures.

40 NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has repeatedly emphasized that the protection of Turkey is NATO's main responsibility in the conflict. "NATO will protect Turkey, says Secretary General," *Euronews*, October 6, 2014.

There has already been some discussion for NATO to provide C2 and air asset-management services, presumably via its fleet of AWACS aircraft, to the anti-ISIL coalition. In some ways, this would look similar to NATO's involvement in the Libyan crisis back in 2011 with Operation Unified Protector.

Although the escalation scenario is an unlikely evolution of the conflict, policy and military officers should work at the level of contingency planning on a detailed assessment of its ramifications and the demands that would put on the shoulders of the Alliance.

Conclusion

As conceived, the first two scenarios (a combination of the two) are the most likely to occur and the outcome will only vary depending on the evolving battle on the ground. In both cases one can already say that NATO would remain on the sidelines of the conflict. It is only in the case of an emerging post-conflict environment that the Alliance would start playing a significant role. Though we evoke a distant horizon, this role would by no means be a benign one. ISIL is only a symptom of fundamentally unsolved issues in the region that will remain in any scenario. As underlined before, the demise of ISIL would not settle the security concerns of Turkey or those of NATO's partners bordering the Syria-Iraq theatre. Furthermore, the foreign fighter issue is unlikely to disappear soon.

For all these reasons, the long term challenge remains the one of the regional security architecture. To address it, the Alliance's partnership policy could play a significant role to reintegrate Iraq to the regional system with regards to other key partners such as Jordan and Gulf Cooperation Council members. This is why, in the future Levant, the involvement of NATO as a political-military platform would surely make a difference.

16

NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force: Can the VJTF give new *élan* to the NATO Response Force?

Jan Abts

Introduction

As ethnic Russian separatists, backed by disguised Russian troops, occupied the Crimean Peninsula in the last days of February 2014 and Russia subsequently annexed a part of Ukraine against the international rule of law, NATO witnessed further proof of a more assertive Russian foreign policy. In the following months, this policy led to numerous other breaches of international law. Almost overnight, NATO's agenda changed drastically, including its plans for the Wales Summit. NATO needed a new focus on collective defence and one question overshadowed all the other themes in Newport: how to react to Russia's aggression and hybrid warfare model?¹ The new geopolitical circumstances stirred some cynical reactions by political scientists: "It gives the aging alliance something to do."² Others urged the Alliance "not to squander the opportunity the crisis provides to address some fundamental problems."³

1 Hybrid warfare doesn't have a universally accepted definition. The term has been used to describe the type of warfare "which encompasses a simultaneous mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal behaviour in the same time and theatre of operations," according to the NDC's academic portal. The Russian policies "are aimed at pulling countries or parts of it in their sphere of authoritarian institutions, governance, judiciary and police" and "they use political, civilian and military instruments to achieve their aims," according to KRUIT, Peter, *Hybrid Warfare: How the Russians used Western Methods*, dated September 3, 2014 (see warbits.wordpress.com/2014/09/03/hybrid-warfare-how-the-russians-used-western-methods.htm).

2 Stephen M. Walt, "NATO Owes Putin a Big Thank-You," *Foreign Policy*, September 4, 2014, p.1.

3 John R. Deni, "What NATO Needs to Do in the Wake of the Ukraine Crisis," *Defense One*, July 22, 2014.

To counter the hybrid warfare model, planning teams at NATO Headquarters, at Allied Command Operations (ACO) and at Allied Command Transformation (ACT) developed the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), consisting of assurance and adaptation measures. The RAP was approved at the Wales Summit on 5 September 2014: “In order to ensure that our Alliance is ready to respond swiftly and firmly to the new security challenges, today we have approved the NATO Readiness Action Plan. It provides a coherent and comprehensive package of necessary measures to respond to the changes in the security environment on NATO’s borders and further afield that are of concern to Allies. It responds to the challenges posed by Russia and their strategic implications.”⁴

The RAP addresses both readiness and responsiveness. It is aimed at a rapid adaptation of NATO’s strategic military posture, but also fits into the NATO Forces 2020 project.⁵ An essential part of it is the creation of a new Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), which will be part of the decade-old NATO Response Force (NRF). Creating another stand-by force, even as part of an existing one, may seem surprising. The experience with other stand-by forces, like the NRF and the European Union Battle Groups (EUBGs), hasn’t been entirely positive. So there is room for some scepticism about the idea of the VJTF.

It must be stressed that creating the VJTF is a work in progress. The concept has not been finalized yet, although important decisions have been taken since the Wales Summit. Well-informed sources have said that the discussions haven’t gone smoothly and – hardly surprising – that not all nations have been singing from the same sheet of music, even to the extent that the initial deadline for approval could have been missed.⁶ One year

4 “Wales Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales, 05 Sep. 2014,” *Press Release* (2014) 120, para. 5, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.

5 At the 2012 Chicago Summit, Allied leaders set the goal of “NATO Forces 2020.” According to NATO’s website, this concept is “designed to be a coherent set of deployable, interoperable and sustainable forces equipped, trained, exercised and commanded so as to be able to meet NATO’s level of ambition and able to operate together and with partners in any environment.” See www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_98527.htm for more information on the related “Connected Forces Initiative.”

6 The aim was to obtain the approval of the Defence Ministers in February 2015, so as to have the VJTF

after the Wales Summit, many details still have to be worked out and the unclassified nature of this paper does not allow for discussion on these pages of the different proposals and the draft concept. However, it is not the intention here to answer all the open questions. To do so would be premature, as subsequent developments would in any case quickly consign any account of current attitudes to the history books.

Rather, the goal of this report is to look at some “flaws” in existing stand-by forces and, based on this analysis, to make some recommendations, in order to ensure that mistakes from the past are not repeated. The thesis of this paper is that the new VJTF will only be successful when some basic conditions and needs are met – e.g., an overhaul of the current funding rules for NATO’s stand-by forces, an adequate activation mechanism and robust command and control system, and broad political support for the concept.

The NATO Response Force: A Mixed Success

The NATO Response Force (NRF) came into being as a result of the Prague Summit in November 2002. The proposal, which came from the U.S. Delegation, was consistent with the ambition of the political leaders of the Alliance to adapt to the needs of the 21st century and to equip NATO with more expeditionary forces. The events in the Balkans in the 1990s, the attacks of 9/11, and the start of the war in Afghanistan in the fall of 2001 had shown that the future relevance of NATO would be linked to its potential to react rapidly, efficiently and in a flexible way to emerging crisis situations. The NRF was intended to provide the Alliance with a quickly deployable, highly capable reaction force of some 25,000 troops, consisting of land, air, maritime and special forces components, with specific enablers and logistic support. The force had to be able to be engaged anywhere in the world within 5 to 30 days following a political decision to deploy it. After a national and international training period from 6 to 18 months,

each NRF rotation would be on stand-by for six months.

The creation of the NRF fit the post-Cold War transformation process.⁷ The spiritual fathers of the NRF, Hans Binnendijk and Richard Kugler,⁸ wanted to create a vehicle for rapid modernization of the European pillar within NATO and improve interoperability. Stephen Mariano and Brendan Wilson described the purpose of the new forces as follows: “This force [...] is intended not only to have fairly sharp teeth but also to be the vehicle that brings other Alliance forces and concepts further out of the Cold War and into the 21st century.”⁹

From the beginning, however, the NRF suffered from important shortfalls in the required manning (called the Combined Joint Statement of Requirements, or CJSOR).¹⁰ Even NRF 8 – the rotation that was declared fully operational (FOC) at the Riga Summit in 2006 – was filled only to 81% of the scheduled capacity.¹¹ At a time of high operational tempo in Iraq and Afghanistan, the prolonged unavailability for other tasks of troops committed to the NRF, due to the extensive train-up, stand-by and stand-down periods,¹² was certainly the major factor in the poor reception of the concept. The “strategic overstretch” of the Alliance and its largest member state reduced commitments to the NRF to an average of 47% between 2004 and 2008.¹³ Stanley Sloan pointed to another reason for the limited success of the NRF: “The absence of serious U.S. participation in the force

7 Michael Mihalka, “NATO Response Force: Rapid? Responsive? A Force?” *The Quarterly Journal*, Summer 2005, p.67.

8 See Hans Binnendijk and Richard Kugler, “Transforming European Forces,” *Survival*, Autumn 2002, p.117-132.

9 Stephen Mariano and Brendan Wilson, “NATO Response Force,” *Militaire Spectator*, Jaargang 173, Nr. 1, p.34.

10 Combined Joint Statement of Requirements.

11 This percentage was reached thanks to a last minute agreement between General James L. Jones, then SACEUR, and then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Earlier the CHODs of all the member states had subscribed to the intention of SACEUR not to declare the NRF FOC unless the CJSOR was completely filled.

12 A stand-by force of 25,000 troops requires the availability of 75,000 soldiers in order to take into account the train-up and stand-down periods, and even more when considering that the training and certification take more time than the stand-by period.

13 Letter from SACEUR, General John Craddock, to the North Atlantic Council and the Military Committee, dated 25 July 2007.

was a major factor limiting its credibility and effectiveness.”¹⁴

Did the NRF improve interoperability between national armed forces? It is clear that the extensive certification process and the numerous exercises had a very positive impact on it. The NRF helped establish qualitative standards for training, as most units and headquarters today have gone through the certification procedure.¹⁵ Some argue, however, that the development of this interoperability has benefited more from the combined participation in NATO’s ISAF operation.¹⁶

More critical in judging the success of the concept is the absence of deployments for operations. Apart from some duties for the Olympic Games in Athens in 2004 and for humanitarian relief after Hurricane Katrina and the Pakistan earthquake in 2005, the NRF has never been used “as such.” Different lecturers at the NATO Defense College have attributed this to the “absence of political will.” Some argue that the U.S. idea of such a force, proposed by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, received a cool reception from some European Allies from the very outset. This argument can be countered by the fact that the much smaller EUBGs have struggled with a similar lack of troops and resources.¹⁷ But there were also differing opinions with respect to the tasks and the possible scenarios in which the NRF – and the EUBGs – could be engaged. Some argued that the NRF was not suitable for stabilization and reconstruction missions. The issue was never clarified at the political level and was one of the reasons for the inability to reach consensus among allies whenever the possibility of a deployment was discussed.¹⁸

14 Stanley R. Sloan, “A Successful NATO Summit? Proof will be in the Pudding,” *War on the Rocks*, September 10, 2014.

15 Guillaume Lasconjarias, “The NRF: from a Key Driver of Transformation to a Laboratory of the Connected Forces Initiative,” *Research Paper* No. 88, NATO Defense College, January 2013, p.2.

16 This was also the idea of the former chief of staff of Joint Forces Command-Brunssum, the late LTG Jean-Pierre Bovy.

17 The EU’s ambition is to have two Battle Groups ready for engagement every six months. One EUBG consists on average of some 2,500 troops.

18 Countries like France opposed the idea of using the NRF as a strategic reserve force for ongoing operations, while Germany was of the opinion that the NRF was to be used only for operations at the lower end of the spectrum.

Transforming the NRF

The lack of troops pledged by the nations proved to be the Achilles heel of the concept and led to the revocation of the NRF's FOC status by General John Craddock, then SACEUR, just eight months after the Riga Summit declaration. Force generation remained low in the following years.¹⁹ In 2008-2009 there was even speculation about possibly disbanding the NRF, but this was not seriously discussed. In an attempt to adapt the concept to hard reality, changes were approved in 2008. Further changes followed in 2010, creating a core of deployable forces – the Immediate Response Force (IRF) – and a Response Forces Pool (RFP). The force requirements for the IRF were reduced to some 13,000 troops, with a Land Component roughly the size of a brigade. The stand-by period was extended to 12 months, in order to limit the financial burden linked to training and certification of the participating units. It was important, however, that neither the missions nor the philosophy of the NRF changed.²⁰

Despite the changes described above, force generation for the NRF remained a challenge, as the initial successes in this respect did not prove sustainable. For example, in NRF 16, – the rotation undergoing training for stand-by in 2016 - the CJSOR had been filled to roughly 70% of its scheduled capacity at the beginning of 2015. This may lead to the conclusion that the size of a new stand-by force should not be too ambitious and that other factors, like funding, activation, and command and control are also important in determining its success.

Funding Stand-By Forces

For many years, NATO has been functioning in an environment

¹⁹ For NRF 13, the Land Component was filled to only 27% of the target. For other examples, see Lasconjarias, p.4.

²⁰ Lasconjarias, p.5. Increasing the stand-by period means NATO can reduce the number of units and headquarters that must go through the expensive national and international training for the NRF. A longer stand-by period is therefore more cost-effective.

characterized by growing fiscal austerity and declining defence budgets.²¹ In this environment, the appetite of some nations to spend money on the readiness and deployment of stand-by forces has been severely affected.

Some nations have been reluctant to commit troops to the NRF. The question of whether this has been caused by the basic funding principle within the Alliance (“costs lie where they fall”) has never been thoroughly researched. Some argue that funding has played only a limited role in the lack of force generation success for the NRF – and the EUBGs. They claim, for instance, that the expansion of common funding has not made critical capabilities available for NATO operations, like ISAF.²² Furthermore, nations like Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Belgium are reluctant to expand common funding, and some even use the term “force generation myth.”²³ Nations like France, Italy, and Greece, on the other hand, are of the opinion that the expansion of common funding may increase the success of force generation.

The former Chief of Defence of Luxembourg, General Gaston Reinig, has also stressed financial reasons for some nations opposing the deployment of stand-by forces, once they have committed troops to it.²⁴ In 2006, Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer described this funding problem as follows: “Right now, participation in the NRF is something like a reverse lottery: If your numbers come up, you actually lose money. If the NRF deploys while you happen to be in the rotation, you pay the full cost of the deployment of your forces. [...] Most Alliance members, particularly the

21 John Gordon, Stuart Johnson, Stephen Larrabee and Peter Wilson, “NATO and the Challenge of Austerity,” *Survival*, Vol. 54, No. 4, August-September 2012, pp.121-142.

22 Common funding allows NATO authorities to identify the requirements and set the priorities in line with overarching Alliance objectives and priorities. All member states participate in the costs and the budget includes the NATO Civil and Military Budgets and the NATO Security Investment Programme (NSIP). With respect to operations, common funding is used to cover expenses that are truly common (e.g. linked to the NCS) and requirements which are “over and above those which could reasonably be expected to be made available from national resources.” Direct contributions are made by members in accordance with an agreed cost-sharing formula based on Gross National Income. They represent a very small percentage of each member’s total defense budget. For more details, see www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_67655.htm

23 Leon Symoens, “Het Athena-mechanisme,” in *Belgisch Militair Tijdschrift* No. 5, Jaargang 2012, p.100.

24 Discussion with General Reinig, Military Advisor to the Luxembourg Ambassador to the UN, dated November 4, 2014.

larger ones, believe the system is not only unfair and inefficient but makes nonsense of any notion of solidarity by allowing some countries to ride in the slipstream of the others.”²⁵

Funding rules are probably not the only reason to explain the lack of success of stand-by forces. Strategic overstretch also plays a role, and financial considerations are only one aspect in the national decision-making processes, as pointed out by the J8 of the Belgian Defence Staff.²⁶ There are also questions of political interest, availability of capabilities, risk sharing, and a balance of commitments with respect to other international organizations.

It seems logical, however, that the financial burden for a political decision made by 28 nations should not be shouldered only by those nations which actually commit troops or assets in the period concerned.²⁷ Opposition to expansion of common funding is sometimes based on purely national, political motives.²⁸ Although the basic rule that “costs lie where they fall” should not be changed, an expansion of common funding to those aspects of activation and deployment covered by the Athena Mechanism of the EU²⁹ should be taken into consideration for future deployments of the VJTF and the NRF. Further extension should also be discussed to cover costs

25 Speech of Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer at the Munich Security Conference, dated February 4, 2006.

26 The J8 is the staff officer in charge of financial resources in the Staff Department Operations and Training.

27 The prime example is the airlift of humanitarian goods after the earthquake in Pakistan in October 2005. The bill had to be picked up by Spain. See Jens Ringsmose, “Taking Stock of NATO’s Response Force,” *Research Paper* No. 54, NATO Defense College, January 2010, p.5.

28 As one Belgian defence official stated: “*we don’t want to transfer competences to a level without any budgetary responsibility*” and “*an expansion of common funding will have a cost that will have to be covered by the national defense budget.*” Interview with author.

29 Operational expenses eligible for common funding are divided into four categories: fixed administrative expenses, always eligible; expenses linked to the preparation of an operation, like for Fact Finding Missions and reconnaissance missions, always eligible; expenses made during the execution of an operation, like the cost of the deployment of the OHQ and FHQ, critical infrastructure, medical installations on an APOD, satellite imagery, expenses for the transportation of the force, expenses for lodging facilities, etc.; expenses made during the winding-up phase of an operation. The use of common funding for some of the expenses during the execution phase sometimes requires a specific approval of the ‘Council’ or of the ‘Special Committee’. See Act of the EU Special Committee 12-0392 (*nature and scope of the incremental costs eligible for common funding incurred during a Battle Group deployment*), dated 29 May 2012.

for redeployment, in-theatre functioning, and international exercises. This seems to be – at least partially – the case: according to well-informed sources, the Alliance currently reviews and discusses the role of common funding. Expanded common funding in the framework of the Readiness Action Plan could include arrangements to resource the NATO Force Integration Units; to finance the enhanced exercise programme and transportation for the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force; and to enhance NATO's ability to re-inforce aerial ports of debarkation, sea ports of debarkation, rail ports of debarkation, pre-positioned storage, fuel supplies and pipelines, communications, air defence.³⁰ Common funding only represents 0.3% of all the defence budgets within the Alliance. A small increase could make a huge difference to the readiness and credibility of NATO and its stand-by forces. Unwillingness to acknowledge this, on the other hand, could have major consequences: "If nations object to maintaining or expanding common funding as a matter of principle, they unwittingly forgo access to core enabling capabilities and contribute to military fragmentation."³¹

Activation Mechanism and Command and Control

In order to be of real value and suitably credible in the case of an erupting crisis, the new VJTF should be able to be activated and deployed quickly. The Secretary-General of the Alliance mentioned a reaction time of 48 hours for the lead elements to start deploying.³² This may be an enormous challenge, as the decision to activate the NRF requires a consensus decision amongst 28 nations in the North Atlantic Council (NAC). Furthermore, the ultimate decision to engage troops lies with the national political authorities. The mechanism is different from country to country, as in some nations the competence lies with the executive body,³³ while in

30 Lecture at NDC, October 2015.

31 Alexander Mattelaer, "Preparing NATO for the Next Defence-Planning Cycle," *RUSI Journal*, June/July 2014, p.34.

32 Press conference of Jens Stoltenberg at NATO Headquarters in Brussels on 8 October 2015.

33 Examples are Belgium, France and the United States.

others a decision by the legislative body is required.³⁴ How to reconcile the (by definition) lengthy process of parliamentary approval with a reaction time of a few days remains a problematic issue, as seen in the experience of the NRF and the EUBGs. An experienced planner in Brussels mentioned that activation of the NRF during exercises sometimes took 14 days.³⁵ It is for this reason that, during the Cold War, NATO's member states devolved command authority to SACEUR in order to allow him to react quickly to Soviet aggression, without the need to go through a lengthy process of political approval.

Linked to this point is another financial hurdle, adding a further dimension to the funding discussion in the previous paragraph: to keep a major force in a state of very high readiness requires considerable financial resources. The larger the force, the more resources will be needed to train it and to keep it ready. This may be another argument for ensuring that the new VJTF is kept to an affordable size and a realistic level of ambition.

A further point of discussion is command and control, and more specifically the competences of SACEUR to train, certify and deploy the new stand-by force. The Wales Summit declaration stated the importance of adequate command and control arrangements to deal with the emerging threats in the East: "We will ensure that the current NATO Command Structure remains robust, agile, and able to undertake all elements of effective command and control for simultaneous challenges."³⁶ The NATO Command Structure (NCS) is in the process of being transformed after the decisions made at the Lisbon Summit in 2010, involving a reduction of manpower from 13,000 to 8,800. It remains to be seen whether NATO Allies will be ready to review some of the earlier decisions in light of their commitment to keep a robust, agile, and able NCS. This may also require an effort from the Allies to fill all allocated posts, another challenge to the ambitious Wales Summit statements of intent in times of continued austerity.

³⁴ Examples are the Netherlands and Germany.

³⁵ Presentation during NDC Senior Course visit to Brussels, October 2014.

³⁶ Wales Summit Declaration, para. 99 (emphasis in original).

Dr John Deni of the U.S. Army War College has stressed the need for more robust command and control. In an op-ed a few weeks before the Wales Summit, Deni stated that “NATO should either disband the NRF or give SACEUR greater peacetime operational control and authority over its use.”³⁷ An arrangement that reconciles the need for more robust C2 and flexible activation with continued political oversight and respect for national prerogatives is highly recommended. NATO leaders can achieve this by granting SACEUR extended authority to train (e.g. the authority to activate the VJTF for “snap exercises”), but also to *deploy*. The decision to *employ* the VJTF would remain a prerogative of the NAC and the national authorities. At their meeting in Brussels in June 2015, NATO Defence Ministers granted SACEUR the authority to “prepare troops for action as soon as a political decision is made.”³⁸ It is unclear what the real effects of this measure will be, but the decision, taken at the same moment, to change the way to conduct advance planning, is definitely a step in the right direction to further speed up the decision-making process and decrease the reaction time of the NRF and the VJTF. There is no consensus in the Alliance, however, to return to the Cold War arrangement to devolve command authority to SACEUR. Some academics consider such an arrangement essential to the effective deterrence by the new “Spearhead Force.”³⁹

“Use It or Lose It” – The Issue of Political Will

The shocking finding that the NRF “as such” has never been used for real operations, despite the abundance of crises in the world over the last ten years, can be related to the financial burden and to disagreements over the philosophy of the concept, as pointed out earlier. As one analyst has written, “The NRF was conceived as a response to growing threats in a non-permissive environment, that is to say, a highly improbable commitment, as nations may always be reluctant to commit their forces on potential killing

37 John R. Deni, “What NATO Needs to Do in the Wake of the Ukraine Crisis,” *Defense One*, July 22, 2014.

38 Defence Ministers decide to bolster the NATO Response Force, reinforce collective defence, NATO, June 24, 2015, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_120993.htm.

39 Lecture of Prof Julian Lindley-French at the NATO Defence College on 28 October 2015

grounds.”⁴⁰ The same is also true for the EUBG. Asked about the reasons for the reluctance to use this asset, a lecturer at the NDC with experience at decision-making levels in the EU first voiced his disappointment and frustration, and then pointed to “a lack of political will” on the part of some EU member states.⁴¹

It is likely, however, that the VJTF may overcome some of this reluctance, as the strategic environment is now different from that of 2004. The threats have become more imminent and are now located in NATO’s neighbourhood. There is also a strong commitment to the concept from the Heads of State and Government. A senior NATO official, who called himself the “father of the RAP,” stressed these changed circumstances to underline his confidence in the future of the VJTF concept.⁴²

Conclusion

NATO leaders have made some important decisions at the Summit in Wales. Different lecturers at the NDC even stated that this Summit was “historic” and a “turning point for the Alliance.” The guidance that NATO leaders have given to planners with respect to the VJTF is clear: the new force will be part of the NRF; it will be a joint force, and it will have to be able to deploy rapidly.⁴³ Also important is the fact that the new force may be committed on the periphery of NATO’s territory. This should be interpreted as a compromise, in order to obtain the support of those Allies on the southern flank who are more concerned with threats like the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) than Russian aggression.

The greater emphasis on collective defence post-Wales could give a second chance to the stand-by forces, as some arguments of the past against employment (for example “not fit for stabilization and reconstruction

40 Lasconjarias, p.7.

41 Lecture at NDC, September 2014.

42 Presentation to NDC senior course during visit to NATO HQ, November 2014.

43 Wales Summit Declaration, Par. 8, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.

missions”) are thus no longer relevant.⁴⁴ The strategic environment may also favour increased funding for defence and security in most of the Alliance’s capitals, which would reduce the weight of the financial arguments.

In order to ensure that this quick reaction force does not suffer the same fate as the NRF and the EUBGs, it is recommended that the following points be implemented:

- a review of funding arrangements to create incentives for commitments, even if this includes an expansion of common funding;
- a flexible but realistic activation mechanism that respects national prerogatives but also reinforces the credibility of the high readiness force;
- robust command and control mechanisms, that may include increased authority for SACEUR;
- broad support for the concept prior to declaring the force Initial Operational Capability in order to ensure that the political will to fund and to use the VJTF if necessary is present from the very beginning.

“The key to NATO’s success over more than six decades was its ability to adapt to changed circumstances,” Karl-Heinz Kamp wrote two months prior to the Summit.⁴⁵ The proof of the pudding is really in the eating, and this is particularly true for the creation of the VJTF. According to the Alliance, the creation of the VJTF is on track. An October 2015 NATO fact sheet about the Readiness Action Plan claims that “the ‘Spearhead Force’ is now up and running.”⁴⁶ It states that the VJTF deployed for the first time

44 This kind of criticism is echoed in articles advocating for the creation of a specific NATO force for stabilization and reconstruction. See <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/en/publications/reports/alliance-reborn-an-atlantic-compact-for-the-21st-century> and Hans Binnendijk, “Postwar planning: A new, but necessary, job for NATO,” *International Herald Tribune*, April 9, 2004.

45 Karl-Heinz Kamp, “Five Long-Term Challenges for NATO beyond the Ukraine Crisis,” *Research Report*, NATO Defense College, July 2014, p.5.

46 http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_10/20151007_1510-factsheet_rap_en.pdf.

during exercise *Noble Jump* in Poland in June 2015. Furthermore, the new force was tested again during Exercise *Trident Juncture* this fall and should be fully operational capable in 2016. That would be a success, as the initial planning for the stadium of fully operational capability mentioned 2017. But whether or not the VJTF can reassure Allies in the region will depend on the commitment of sufficient, capable, and ready forces.⁴⁷ It remains to be seen whether the nations will make sufficient forces available for the VJTF once the sense of urgency has disappeared. If the Alliance fails, the consequences will be more far-reaching than the fate of just another stand-by force.

⁴⁷ Stanley Sloan, "A Successful NATO Summit? Proof will be in the Pudding," *War on the Rocks*, September 10, 2014.

17

Nuclear Implications of the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict

Karl-Heinz Kamp

Russia's aggression against Ukraine is not only a threat to the European post-Cold-War order, but also once again puts the issue of nuclear deterrence on the Euro-Atlantic agenda. What should we make of Moscow's threatening nuclear gestures? What are the potential consequences for U.S. nuclear weapons stationed in Europe? What are the implications for NATO's nuclear strategy?

It is becoming increasingly clear that the Ukraine crisis is not just a bad weather period but a long-term climate change fundamentally affecting Euro-Atlantic security. The issue of nuclear deterrence, which had been on the sidelines for the past two decades, is now being pushed to the fore once more. The year 2008, in which Russia's military revealed major deficiencies in the Georgia war, marked the beginning not only of a modernisation of its conventional armed forces. Russia's arsenal of nuclear weapons has also been steadily increased and improved since then. New ballistic missile systems have been introduced and equipped with greater numbers of warheads. Modern submarines have replaced older models that dated from the Cold War. Long-range cruise missiles have been tested, which in the eyes of the United States constitutes a grave breach of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) of 1987.¹

Greater cause for concern, however, is the fact that for the last few years

1 Paul N. Schwartz, "Russian INF Treaty Violations: Assessment and Response," Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Washington DC, October 16, 2014, <http://csis.org/publication/russian-inf-treaty-violations-assessment-and-response>.

Moscow has been including its nuclear weapons in military scenarios. In 2008 Anatoliy Nogovitsyn, the Deputy Chief of General Staff of the Russian armed forces, announced that Warsaw would be the target of Russian nuclear weapons if – as was the plan at the time – parts of the U.S. missile defence system were to be stationed in Poland.² A year later, in the course of the exercise Zapad-99, nuclear attacks against Poland were simulated. Since the Ukraine crisis began, Russia has been carrying out military exercises involving nuclear-capable weapons systems on an almost monthly basis.

The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), already dented by Iran's nuclear activities, has also been damaged further. Ukraine had joined the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon state in 1994, after returning all Soviet nuclear weapons that had been stationed there back to Russia. In return, the United States, Russia and the United Kingdom signed the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances on 5 December 1994, agreeing to respect Ukrainian territorial integrity.³ In annexing Crimea, Russia has breached this agreement – an act that has so far remained without consequence. As a result, no other nuclear state that is not yet a part to the NPT (Pakistan, India, Israel, North Korea) will likely ever agree to a similar treaty.

In December 2014 Russia terminated the Nunn-Lugar Act, a pillar of U.S.-Russian nuclear cooperation. In 1991, U.S. Senators Sam Nunn and Richard Lugar had cosponsored an initiative to secure and dismantle the large nuclear arsenal of the former Soviet Union. Since then, the United States has invested more than twenty billion dollars to assist Russia in dismantling decommissioned nuclear weapons and nuclear submarines, and to pay the salaries of Russian nuclear scientists in order to keep them from migrating to crisis regions in other parts of the world.⁴

2 “Moscow warns it could strike Poland over U.S. missile shield,” *The Guardian*, August 15, 2008, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/aug/15/russia.poland.nuclear.missiles.threat>.

3 The text of the memorandum has been published by the Council on Foreign Relations, <http://www.cfr.org/nonproliferation-arms-control-and-disarmament/budapest-memorandums-security-assurances-1994/p32484>.

4 The U.S. budget for this program was about \$1 billion per year for more than 20 years. In addition, the

With regard to nuclear dangers, the deep conflict with Russia is thus doubly explosive. Firstly, Moscow is feared to have lowered its inhibitions about using nuclear threats against neighbouring states and NATO. Nuclear weapons could thus regain some of the political relevance they last had during the Cold War. Secondly, concern about a possible use of these weapons is growing, justifiably or not, especially among the Eastern European members of NATO. Both these developments raise the question of whether – and how – NATO should adapt its nuclear strategy and its potential for nuclear deterrence.

Russian Nuclear Thinking

Open, or veiled, nuclear threats have been part of the repertoire of Russian political practice for many years. Whether it was about the Baltic States' membership in NATO or the establishment of a U.S. missile defence system, Russian political and military officials would time and again threaten to move nuclear weapons to NATO borders or even use them. This is not only politically imprudent, but an indicator of a fundamental difference in thinking about nuclear weapons. To the Western nuclear powers, i.e. the United States, UK, and France, nuclear weapons have lost a great deal of value as a "power currency" in international politics since the end of the Cold War. As far as they are concerned, nuclear weapons are of little help in dealing with today's security challenges and the status of being a nuclear weapons state barely translates into political clout. The strategic importance of nuclear weapons has thus greatly decreased. What is more, the Western nuclear powers distinguish between "usable" conventional weapons and essentially "unusable" nuclear weapons that serve the political purpose of deterrence. Nuclear escalation is possible but not actually given any real consideration, as the damage would be unimaginable.⁵ This

G-7 states also provided significant funds for the security of Russian weapons of mass destruction.

5 Some argue that even a "nuclear taboo" of almost seven decades of nuclear non-use after Hiroshima and Nagasaki exists. The longer this taboo is kept up, the argument goes, the less likely it is that these weapons will ever be employed. See Nina Tannenwald, "The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-Use," *International Organization* No. 3/1999, pp.433 – 468.

thinking, however, is not entirely coherent, as nuclear weapons must be operational and the possibility of their use must be credible in order to act as a deterrent. If there were absolutely no possibility of their ever being used, nuclear weapons would no longer serve any purpose at all. This paradox of nuclear weapons, i.e. that they must be usable so that they will never be used, is hard to accept and one of the main reasons for the public criticism of the very idea of nuclear deterrence.

Russia, on the other hand, sees nuclear weapons as an integral part of its military power and, especially, as a way to make up for its relative lack of conventional forces compared to NATO. The importance of nuclear weapons has thus steadily grown in the eyes of Moscow, especially since several former parties to the Warsaw Pact have joined the Alliance.

Since its Military Doctrine of 2000, Russia's official position on nuclear weapons has been that they are a possible means of de-escalation.⁶ This logic, which from a Western perspective seems bizarre, is rooted in the perception of NATO as a conventionally superior alliance. In the event of a large-scale NATO attack, which is evidently perceived as a real danger, limited and targeted use of nuclear weapons would inflict "tailored damage" on the enemy and end the destructive attack – hence "de-escalation."

Furthermore, Moscow still sees nuclear weaponry as an essential factor of state power, presumably because it is one of the last elements to remain of the former Soviet claim to superpower status. In recent months, President Putin has repeatedly reminded the West of Russia's status as a nuclear power.

Both the highlighting of this status and the demonstration of potential nuclear weapons, for example in flying nuclear-capable Bear bombers over the English Channel, are deliberate signals to NATO and to Russia's neighbours. To NATO, this sophisticated way of "nuclear messaging" is meant to indicate that Russia is well aware of the military power of the Alliance and is willing to counter it with nuclear weapons. To Russia's

⁶ Nikolai N. Sokov, *Why Russia Calls a Limited Nuclear Strike 'De-Escalation,'* Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, March 13, 2014. <http://thebulletin.org/why-russia-calls-limited-nuclear-strike-de-escalation>.

neighbour states – be they NATO members or not – Moscow presents a scenario of intimidation in which the threat of nuclear weapons should be regarded as real.

The Nuclear Debate in NATO

As far as NATO is concerned, these different nuclear philosophies have long been irrelevant. NATO doubtlessly is a nuclear Alliance, in which nuclear weapons states have given nuclear commitments to their non-nuclear allies; after the end of the Cold War, however, nuclear deterrence was no longer directed at any particular enemy. Therefore, Russia's Soviet-style understanding of nuclear weapons as a militarily usable instrument of state power did not raise too many concerns.

This is arguably one of the reasons why the small number of U.S. nuclear weapons stationed on the territory of a few European NATO member states rarely played a role in public perception.⁷ The last time these weapons made headlines was in 2009, when the newly appointed German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, in an initiative that had not been agreed with NATO, called for the removal of U.S. nuclear weapons from Germany. Westerwelle rightly pointed out that the B61 nuclear bombs were relics from the Cold War that had once been destined for targets in the territory of what are now NATO member states in Eastern Europe. Given the challenges of the 21st century, with nuclear threats looming mostly in Eastern Asia and the Middle East (Russia was still seen as a partner at the time), nuclear weapons that had to be transported to their targets by fighter-aircraft seemed rather illogical.

What Westerwelle had failed to take into account, however, was the political relevance of these weapons as symbols of the credibility of the U.S. nuclear defence shield in Europe. That is why his initiative was not well received with NATO nuclear powers and especially with the Eastern

⁷ They are often falsely described as "NATO nuclear weapons." although they are under the complete control of the United States. NATO nations just provide the aircraft for the delivery.

European allies that, for historic reasons, had always had their reservations regarding Moscow. NATO solved the dilemma in a two-step approach. First, in 2012 all 28 member states agreed to a Deterrence and Defence Posture Review (DDPR) – a new policy document which declared nuclear weapons to be a “core element” of NATO’s overall capabilities for deterrence. They also clearly decided that American nuclear weapons stationed in Europe continued to meet the criteria for deterrence. With that, the debate about the purpose of these weapons was off the table for the time being. Second, NATO decided to establish a new arms control committee to engage in dialogue with Russia on tactical nuclear weapons stationed in Western and Eastern Europe, i.e. U.S. nuclear weapons and their Russian equivalents. This committee, having been able to begin its work after some delay, can nevertheless have only a sort of advisory role, as the United States and Russia only engage in bilateral negotiations on nuclear weapons.⁸

Moscow’s aggression against Ukraine occurred at the time of the committee’s initial sessions, and fundamentally changed the international security landscape as well as the nuclear debate.

The Renaissance of Nuclear Deterrence

With Russia’s aggression against its neighbours, the classic role of NATO as an instrument of self-defence in accordance with Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty is once again gaining increasing relevance. This also brings deterrence as a means of preventing war back to the fore. Deterrence influences the cost-benefit analysis of a potential aggressor. It ensures that the cost of an attack will exceed any potential benefit an aggressor might hope for. Such a potential aggressor, if rational, would thus not take up arms against another state.

⁸ The Committee, initially called “Weapons of Mass Destruction Control and Disarmament Committee,” was burdened with disagreement over its mandate and its lifespan (permanent or limited) right from its inauguration. Its portfolio is subject to different interpretations within the Alliance.

Given the developments in Ukraine and the fears of other Eastern European NATO members, it is understandable that NATO's first step was to increase its conventional forces in order to send such a signal of deterrence. Core measures of the Readiness Action Plan will be in place by the next NATO Summit in Warsaw, in 2016. But the question remains how nuclear deterrence will be credibly ensured in future. When, in the DDPR, NATO unanimously declared the discussion on nuclear weapons to be over, Russia was still seen as a partner. The Alliance was also primarily concerned with crisis management in Afghanistan, the establishment of a missile defence system and the effects of the financial crisis. Faced with today's Russia, which still has more than 5,000 nuclear warheads at its disposal, which positions itself as anti-Western, and which defines NATO as a concrete threat, nuclear strategy must be discussed and substantiated once again.

U.S. Nuclear Weapons in Europe

The U.S. B61 bombs stationed in Europe are currently undergoing a technical refurbishment and some of their components are being upgraded to meet current technological safety and security standards. It has been debated whether this modernisation is a mere overhaul, or whether the weapons will be equipped with entirely new capabilities – which Russia might interpret as a sign of aggression. There was also speculation that, in light of ubiquitous budget cuts, the United States might not be willing to bear the substantial cost of this modernisation and would eventually withdraw its nuclear weapons from Europe.⁹ In view of recent developments, neither of these aspects is likely to play much of a role any more. If anything, the symbolic value of these weapons has grown in light of fears in Eastern Europe, pushing into the background questions of whether they are conceptually useful. What is more, the potential for deterring Russia does not stem from these American bombs alone but from

⁹ Adam Mount, 'The Fiscal Threat to Nuclear Strategy', *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, May 3, 2015, <http://thebulletin.org/fiscal-threat-nuclear-strategy8080>.

the entire nuclear arsenal plus (within limits) the nuclear weapons of France and the United Kingdom.

In the long term, the question must be answered as to how NATO should respond to a deepening of the antagonism with Russia, for example if America's accusations of a breach of the INF Treaty prove to be true. The U.S. administration has confirmed that possible countermeasures – including military – are currently under review. The stationing of additional U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe is, however, unlikely in the near future. It would be impossible to enforce politically or justify from a military perspective, as the United States already has a sufficiently broad spectrum of nuclear weapons. There is also not yet a nuclear strategic framework for the new security situation post-2014 which would justify additional weapons. This is why suggestions of announcing a new “Dual Track Decision” to Russia, i.e. to threaten the deployment of new intermediate range nuclear forces if Moscow further breaches the INF treaty, are not very realistic.¹⁰ This, however, means that NATO must once again focus on nuclear questions in order to reconcile deterrence needs with strategy and weapons systems.

Delivery Systems

In the past, critics of American nuclear weapons in Europe had speculated that these weapons would stop serving a purpose, in part because the aircraft used for their delivery to the target (Tornado, F-15, F-16) would reach the end of their service lives. The follow-on to the Tornado, the Eurofighter, is not certified for nuclear missions, and the nuclear-capable F-35 aircraft was regarded by some countries like Germany as being too expensive to be procured (and they already had the Eurofighter). Without delivery aircraft, the bombs would be worthless and would have to be withdrawn.

¹⁰ Even if senior representatives of the U.S. administration currently air this option, it is unimaginable that any of the West European allies want to go through another painful public debate on new nuclear weapons in Europe, as in the early 1980s.

The matter of delivery aircraft, however, was always more technical than political. Technically, an aircraft does not have to retire from service after a certain time – but the costs of maintaining it increase immensely. The U.S. long-range B-52 nuclear bomber was fielded more than 60 years ago and is still in service today. The Tornado can also continue to be used for nuclear missions if supported by political will and industry, which would have to produce service parts beyond the intended “lifespan” of the aircraft. High-ranking U.S. military officials also pointed out some time ago that U.S. jets could deliver these weapons in Europe, should Alliance partners be unwilling to provide their own aircraft.¹¹

In practice, this is not an issue that is likely to arise. The cohesion of NATO (and the EU) in response to the Russian crisis has shown that the Allies fully understand the seriousness of the situation. Even when faced with increased costs of maintenance, the countries that host U.S. nuclear weapons are unlikely to reject their responsibilities within the Alliance and cease to maintain attack aircraft.

Nuclear Arms Control

The United States had always offered to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in Europe in conjunction with Russian steps towards disarmament. Such parallel approaches to arms control, however, always failed when, as a prerequisite to bilateral disarmament, Moscow demanded that Washington first withdraw its own nuclear weapons to U.S. territory, since Russia’s nuclear weapons were all stationed on Russian territory.

Given the current confrontational conditions, a joint reduction of nuclear weapons in Europe is even harder to imagine. Russia is gradually withdrawing from U.S.-Russian discussions and fora. In November 2014, Russia announced that it would no longer participate in the annual U.S.-

¹¹ The statements even insinuate that other nuclear stationing countries could pick up the delivery missions from those who were lacking the aircraft. See Oswald, Rachel, “U.S. Tactical Nuclear Arms Mission Could Shift Among NATO Jets,” *Global Security Newswire*, March 26, 2014. <http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/aircraft-could-be-given-nato-tactical-nuclear-arms-mission/>.

Russian nuclear security summit. What is more, Moscow apparently fears not only a U.S.-led initiative to overthrow the Putin government (as bizarre as this may sound) but also, in the long term, military aggression from NATO against Russia.¹² Among other things, Moscow banks on strong nuclear forces to protect Russia from both.

Eastern European NATO members, on the other hand, are now less likely than ever to support a reduction in the number of U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe. Presumably, Poland or the Baltic states could also agree to station nuclear weapons on their territory, but this option was ruled out in the NATO-Russia Founding Act in 1997.¹³ Nevertheless, a greater number of non-nuclear NATO member states would participate in support of any planned nuclear operations. It is also unlikely that at this time any of the NATO member states that host U.S. nuclear weapons will call for their withdrawal.

With this, nuclear arms control is not ruled out – it remains a core element of Western security policy. But it is definitely secondary to the objectives of preventive security. The primary purpose of nuclear arms is not to be disarmed. The purpose of a nuclear weapon – just like any other weapon – is to contribute to security and defence. If it is incapable of that or no longer required, it may be retired. But before that can happen, security must be ensured without this weapon. This idea must also play a role in future debates, if there is to be a nuclear strategy that is acceptable to all 28 NATO member states.

12 Ahmari, Sohrab, “The View From NATO’s Russian Front,” *The Wall Street Journal*, February 6, 2015. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/weekend-interview-gen-frederick-hodges-on-natos-russian-front-1423266333>.

13 In this document, NATO stated that it has “no intention, no plan and no reason to deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of new members”. Some NATO members point out that this self-commitment was made under the conditions prevailing at that time and could be subject to change in light of today’s Russian aggressiveness. However, even if the wording “in the current and foreseeable security environment” is in the treaty, this qualification appears to be linked to the permanent stationing of conventional forces rather than to deployment of nuclear weapons. https://www.armscontrol.org/act/1997_05/found.

Conclusion

After the fierce debates on the future of U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe in 2009, NATO was remarkably quick to take the issue off the agenda. The DDPR proved to be a compromise all sides could live with, even if it did not answer key questions with regard to the strategic logic of B61 bombs deployed in several European countries. The “nuclear dog” that had been briefly awoken was put back to sleep.

Russia’s expansionist policies in Eastern Europe have not only profoundly changed the international security landscape, but are also likely to wake up the nuclear dog again. Hence, NATO will have to restart the debate in order to reassess the role of nuclear weapons in its deterrence posture. However, these deliberations cannot be limited to the pros and cons of U.S. nuclear weapons on European soil. Instead, a comprehensive consensus needs to be forged which includes nuclear forces (in Europe and in the United States), NATO’s conventional capabilities, its missile defence capacities and a coherent nuclear strategy. Even if this seems a strenuous effort, kicking the can down the road will not be an option.

Conclusion: Is Hybrid Warfare Really New? *Keir Giles*

Definitions

In their introduction to this volume, editors Guillaume Lasconjarias and Jeffrey Larsen immediately introduced a fundamental problem involved in using “hybrid threats” to describe contemporary warfare. While noting the consensus that hybrid wars are not new, they added that the topic is nevertheless “something of a novelty that makes it worth studying.” That basic contradiction – that the hybrid approach to warfare has many precedents throughout history, in spite of the phrase now being routinely used to suggest that something new is happening in war – underpins several of the individual chapters.

Diego Ruiz Palmer in particular has noted that conflicts over the last two decades have “nearly universally” exhibited features which are now described as “hybrid,” with specific reference to “complex combinations of actors, narratives, tactics and technologies.” But the current spate of proliferation in definitions has resulted from the NATO discourse having stretched this notion of hybrid threats in all directions, to try to accommodate both Russian campaigning and entirely different challenges to NATO from the South. Alternatives like the UK’s preferred term, “ambiguous warfare,” lost out as “hybrid” gained momentum within NATO and eventually became accepted as the shorthand for the Russian offensive campaign in particular. As put by U.S. Air Force General Frank Gorenc, introducing a presentation in late 2014: “I made these slides before the [September 2014] summit in Wales. The verbiage now is hybrid warfare. But ambiguous warfare was used to describe what

I thought the Ukraine crisis represented.”¹

This promiscuous attitude to both applying and defining the term is demonstrated by the sheer number of different definitions presented in this single volume, with the Introduction offering yet another. This reflects the observation made by Guillaume Lasconjarias and Andreas Jacobs in their chapter that “there is no common understanding on the use, relevance, or practical benefit of the hybrid warfare concept for the Alliance, particularly when considering NATO’s eastern and southern flanks at the same time.” However, unlike other authors, they suggest that this ambiguity is an advantage – “while the concept of hybrid warfare might have its shortcomings, it is nevertheless useful in providing perspectives on the rising complexity of NATO’s security challenge. Additionally, it is one of the few concepts that allows for differentiated views on the security challenges emanating from NATO’s South and NATO’s East at the same time. Here lies the main beauty of the hybrid warfare concept: it provides tools for a comparative strategic perspective of NATO’s southern and eastern flanks, while allowing for a differentiated response.” Perhaps the failure to arrive at a commonly agreed definition in a NATO context should not come as any surprise: as put by one senior NATO official, “if 32 meetings of the Senior Political Committee over 16 months tried and failed to define the Comprehensive Approach,” perhaps attempts to define hybridity should not expect any better success.

Case Studies and East vs. South

This collection of studies was written before Russian intervention in Syria – but the nature of that intervention confirms and underscores a number of the authors’ conclusions. Despite the wide variety of backgrounds and affiliations represented by the authors, in addition

1 Gen Frank Gorenc, “USAFE-AFAFRICA Update”, AFA - Air & Space Conference and Technology Exposition, 15 September 2014, <http://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/aF%20events/Speeches/15SEP2014-GenFrankGorenc-USAFE-AFAFRICA%20Update%20at%20AFA.pdf>.

to the difficulty of applying hybrid terminology to current threats, a number of other common themes emerge. The selection of case studies and accompanying discussion illustrates another conceptual problem facing NATO when grappling with the hybrid challenge. National sensitivities within the Alliance dictate that threats from the East and the South receive equal priority and attention, both in public statements and in the way countries deal with these issues. It has been suggested publicly that intelligence briefings on hybrid challenges provided by the NATO Intelligence Fusion Centre must be divided exactly equally in length between the eastern and southern threats – which if true, provides a classic case study of process distracting from addressing the problem.

At the time of writing, the security concerns of Latvia are radically different from, say, those of Italy. The consequent contradiction and confusion between the relative weight of threats and priorities is noted in the chapter by Heidi Reisinger and Alexander Golts, pointing in particular to supplies of military equipment by NATO members to relatively remote Iraqi Kurds but not to the Alliance's immediate neighbour, Ukraine. As noted in the Introduction, "Hybrid wars are complex, because they don't conform to a one-size-fits-all pattern." Hybrid is a catch-all euphemism – but to understand either the Russia problem, or the ISIL problem, in their real depth and complexity requires specificity and an individual approach. Fortunately, individual chapters by the expert authors in this volume provide that granularity.

Russia

Dr Stéfanie Babst, Head of the Strategic Analysis Capability section in NATO Headquarters, has addressed one of the key questions routinely asked of Russia-watchers: whether the Euro-Atlantic community has a Putin problem, or a Russia problem. Her assessment of the Putin regime reflects a consensus view among academics – not generally held by more policy-focused researchers – that the election protests in Russia in 2011-2012, together with economic challenges, represented the possibility of

a real challenge to the durability of Putin's leadership. But at the same time, she notes that no member of the Putin inner circle has a realistic chance of mounting a challenge to his rule; and furthermore that, despite continuing groundless optimism outside Russia, the new "middle class" should not be considered as a force for political change.

Dr Babst highlights a key problem facing analysis of Russia – the notion that President Putin has become "unpredictable." Meanwhile, however, she also notes the promotion of writers and philosophers from previous periods of Russian history who emphasise "Russia's messianic role in world history, the preservation and restoration of Russia's historical borders," and other historical imperatives which are recognisable as drivers for current Russian foreign policy. Given that many of these notions, as well as the Russian response to its perceived security challenges, are incompatible with the Western view of international relations, it can be assumed that the challenge from Russia will continue for the foreseeable future.

This long-term view provides the context for the other sections in this collection which deal with Russia. The chapter by Roger McDermott, Heidi Reisinger and Brooke Smith-Windsor, "Cold War Déjà Vu," was written in the immediate aftermath of Russia's intervention in Crimea. But although the policy recommendations have been superseded by events, other conclusions still hold good 18 months later and have been borne out by longer-term Russian behaviour. Key lessons from this chapter include the nature of Russian attitudes to international relations, and to the use and utility of nuclear weapons – explored in greater depth in other chapters.

Back to the Future?

Similarly, Diego Ruiz Palmer's "Back to the Future?" analysis of what is new in Russia's approach to conflict benefits critically from Ruiz Palmer's own depth of historical knowledge and experience tracking the

Soviet, and then Russian, military problem. By drawing key distinctions between “hybrid warfare” in its previous definitions on the one hand, and the current Russian approach on the other, he has generated a penetrating analysis of the Russian approach to war, the preparations that Russia has already undertaken, and the implications of both of these for NATO. This analysis deserves to be widely read and studied in order to understand the scale and depth of NATO’s current challenge from the East.

In particular, the call for “identifying applicable insights for the future from a bygone era, as a means to decipher Russia’s thinking, anticipate potential hybrid situations, and craft a suitably calibrated NATO strategy, while avoiding the pitfalls of subscribing to the appeal of historical analogies that can turn-out to be deceptive or deficient” echoes many calls in other expert assessments for making proper use of historical lessons and defying the trend for direct comparisons with the Cold War, or indeed with a wide range of other periods from Russian and Soviet history.²

An important lesson from Ruiz Palmer’s contribution is that Russia’s current activities represent “a smartly updated version of a well-documented tool box.” It follows that there are lessons available for NATO from responses to this toolbox in former years. This is particularly the case in assessing scenarios and vulnerabilities. NATO previously had available well-developed plans for pre-empting a range of complex operations by Warsaw Pact forces and assets that would now be classified as hybrid threats. Planners of the time would find unimaginable the current situation where NATO is not planning for defence against Russia, because making a plan constitutes a political decision.

This analysis also emphasises the vital lesson of not being distracted by hybrid capabilities, and remaining conscious of the vital role of strong conventional forces, a point emphasized in particular in Henrik Praks’

2 As in the case of Andrew Monaghan, “A ‘New Cold War’? Abusing History, Misunderstanding Russia,” Chatham House, May 2015, available at https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20150522ColdWarRussiaMonaghan.pdf.

chapter. These remain essential in the context of other Russian responses to perceived security challenges which are asymmetric in the broad sense – in particular the emphasis on anti-access and area denial (A2AD) capabilities in the “strategic outposts” of the Kola Region, Kaliningrad and Crimea. The driving force for these Russian deployments may indeed be defensive considerations, but this becomes a purely academic point when Kaliningrad as an A2AD “outpost” sits squarely between NATO’s Western Allies and the front-line member states which it would seek to protect and reinforce in a crisis.

Dave Johnson, of the NATO International Staff Defence Policy and Planning Division, has complemented Ruiz Palmer’s review of developments in Russian military thought. In his chapter on “Russia’s Approach to Conflict” he shows how the influence of technological advances from the revolution in military affairs onwards, combined with the perception of threat from regime change instigated by the West and study of the techniques supposedly used to achieve it, were synthesised into the approach employed in Crimea and Ukraine.

Both of these analyses remind us forcefully that when applying hybrid terminology to Russian activities, it is essential to remember that “hybrid” is a Western, not a Russian term. Hybrid, as a catch-all euphemism, is now being described in Russian writing on warfare, translated literally as *gibridnaya voyna*. But it is significant that the context in which the phrase appears is the same as another direct translation, *kibervoyna* for cyber war: both phrases only appear when referring to Western thinking, rather than Russian approaches. The translation is essential as there is no original Russian phrase to describe either of these ideas, which simply do not fit within a Russian conceptual framework. When asked in September 2015 to comment on a discussion of operations presented by the West as “hybrid threats” from Russia, a senior officer trained and educated in the Soviet system shrugged dismissively and said: “That’s just special operations (*spetsoperatsii*).”³

3 Interview with the author.

And in fact, Johnson highlights in his chapter the sarcastic, indeed scathing, response by writers in Russia's *Military Thought* journal to the suggestion that elements of current campaigning represent something new in warfare.

Russian Doctrine and Nuclear Weapons

The chapter by Polina Sinovets and Bettina Renz on Russia's 2014 Military Doctrine also reflects this continuity. Their deconstruction of the new edition of the keystone document for Russian military policy has rightly highlighted that little is new – other than the emphasis on information warfare, and on how developments in neighbouring states will be interpreted as a direct threat to Russia.

Similar to the so-called “Gerasimov Doctrine,” this reflects Russian internalising of lessons from what Moscow perceives as hostile intervention by the West with the aim of regime change, with the familiar roll-call of Kosovo, Iraq, Ukraine, Libya and others as the targets. As illustrated by Hall Gardner in his later chapter, the Gerasimov article and presentation have been widely misconstrued as describing “Russian concepts of ‘non-linear warfare.’” At an earlier stage in the hybrid debate, “non-linear war” appeared as an alternative terminology for Russian campaigning, inspired by an influential review of work by senior Kremlin official Vladislav Surkov. But the result is to emphasise the importance to Moscow of strategic depth and a buffer zone under Russian domination or control – and also to send a message to the West that Russia is willing to defend this zone.

Another key conclusion is that many of the provisions which seemed merely aspirational in previous iterations of Russia's military doctrine are now far more realistic, thanks to unprecedented investment in rearmament and new capabilities. The intensive programme for regenerating Russia's military power means that the assumption that Russia's conventional capabilities are deficient is no longer valid. This has

obvious and uncomfortable implications for NATO when considering means of containing assertive action by Russia.

The importance of nuclear weapons, and their distinctive role in Russian thinking, also fall into this category. In Western militaries, the use of nuclear weapons is divorced from the spectrum of conventional military measures, but in Russia it is fully integrated. Officers in post-Soviet militaries who have trained at a senior level in Russian military academies, when considering operational challenges, instinctively include options for the employment of “nuclear weapons, submarines and strategic bombers” in their planning – whether or not their own country possesses them. Similarly, the threat of use of nuclear weapons plays a role in Russian foreign policy which is entirely alien to the Western nuclear powers. As Karl-Heinz Kamp points out in his chapter, “Nuclear Implications of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict,” “Russia’s Soviet-style understanding of nuclear weapons as a militarily usable instrument of state power” translates directly into nuclear rhetoric and posturing as an element of intimidation and coercion, and hence “open, or veiled, nuclear threats have been part of the repertoire of Russian political practice for many years.”

The fact that nuclear posturing is included in a volume on hybrid threats indicates the huge range of the challenges now being included within the hybrid bracket. Kamp’s recommended response is that “a comprehensive consensus needs to be forged which includes nuclear forces (in Europe and in the United States), NATO’s conventional capabilities, its missile defence capacities and a coherent nuclear strategy.” While this is surely an optimistic aim, detailed study of new Russian nuclear attitudes and doctrine is an essential and urgent first step which should not be beyond the reach of the analysis and assessment communities in NATO nations.

Russia vs. NATO

Heidi Reisinger and Alexander Golts’s chapter, on “Waging War

Below the Radar of Traditional Collective Defense,” is the first in this collection to highlight the specific challenge that hybrid – or ambiguous – approaches to conflict pose for an organisation whose responses are constrained by the need for consensus.

They have highlighted five specific ingredients of the Russian approach as demonstrated in Ukraine: legitimisation, threatening military posturing, ambiguity and denials, exploiting local proxy forces, and the accompanying information campaign. Each of these presents a distinctive challenge to NATO when considering an appropriate response, as each has the potential to undermine Alliance unity – which pivots on the need for representatives of 28 member states to agree there is a problem. As SACEUR has repeatedly emphasised, in order for NATO to take action, foolproof attribution to a specific aggressor is essential. This in itself presents a specific vulnerability which an adversary can exploit through hybrid tactics, as already demonstrated in the early stage of the Ukraine campaign.

Nevertheless, and perhaps counter-intuitively, Reisinger and Golts reach the conclusion that Russia’s reinvigorated armed forces, in particular their units slated for rapid deployment, “would still not pose a new direct military threat to the countries of the Alliance.”

A New Type of Warfare?

As noted by the editors, the title of Section B, “A New Type of Warfare,” is knowingly provocative. And Élie Tenenbaum, coordinator of the Defence Research Laboratory (Laboratoire de Recherche sur la Défense, LRD) at IFRI in Paris, points out in his opening chapter that instead it is conventional warfare that – despite its name – is the historical novelty.

In a detailed retrospective of the genealogy of hybrid terminology, Tenenbaum has emphasised its nature as “an originally sound concept whose meaning has been diluted to the point of absurdity.” This echoes

private complaints by senior NATO officials well placed to follow the internal debate that the hybrid concept “took on a life of its own within NATO,” and as a result “we tried hard to make it fit – we couldn’t, but we had to try.” But unlike the other authors, Tenenbaum has ascribed political motivations to definition proliferation: “Each member state, sub-agency or center of excellence understood it its own way, so that they could use it to push their own agenda.”

Israel’s Hezbollah war is routinely cited as the conflict that crystallised Western theories of hybrid warfare in their earlier, original incarnation. Tenenbaum has deftly translated this conflict into a case study as part of weighing the utility of hybrid warfare constructs across the “strategic spectrum” – in the strategic, operational and tactical planes.

Critically, he observes, the concept of “front and rear” is a relatively recent innovation despite remaining central to popular conceptions of what constitutes warfare. Hybrid threats challenge this construct. But societies have yet to understand that for some aspects of hybrid warfare, especially information and subversion campaigns exploiting the ubiquitous hyperconnectivity of the internet, remaining behind the lines does not give immunity. ISIL targets disaffected Moslem youth in provincial towns in Western Europe, leveraging an appeal explained by Jean-Loup Samaan in his chapter on “The Narrative of the Islamic State.” Russian information warfare tools target entire sectors of society with the aim of polluting policymaking and shaping it to a Russian agenda. In this information confrontation, there are no rear areas.

Threats from the South

Despite NATO’s best efforts at according hybrid threats equal value whether they come from the East or the South, the balance of emphasis in this collection is weighted towards the East. This is in part inevitable, because of explicit rejection of a NATO role in dealing with a current primary generator of problems from the South.

In their chapter “NATO and ISIL: Player at the Sidelines,” Andreas Jacobs and Jean-Loup Samaan have sought to explain the limited involvement of NATO in combating ISIL. As they note, following the Wales Summit decision that NATO as an organisation would not be taking part in countering ISIL, the “current political debate excludes a change in the Alliance’s absence in the fight.” Consequently, those chapters in this collection which deal with ISIL are primarily descriptive of current activities, and largely not an explanation of those activities as hybrid problems for NATO.

Nevertheless, in his chapter on “Iranian and Russian Versions of ‘Little Green Men,’” Hall Gardner has made an important contribution to demonstrating the applicability of hybrid terminology to conflicts in the Middle East, by examining commonality between the approaches demonstrated by Russia in Ukraine in 2014 and those used by Iran in Shi’a regions of Iraq after 2003. He argues that specific features such as covert infiltration and supplies of weapons and support, and deniability – plausible or otherwise – suggest that “more widespread integration of hybrid warfare into the general strategy of both major and regional powers could increase the likelihood of major war.”

Gardner arrives at sound and important conclusions, despite some misconceptions resulting from heavy reliance on non-Russian-language secondary sources, and on Russian state-backed media in English designed for Western audiences. In this context it is perhaps not surprising that his policy recommendations “to Avert Major Power War” – recognition of Russian interests in Ukraine and “power sharing between east and west there,” and a military coalition with Russia against the Islamic State – are precisely those proposed by Russia.

Scenarios

The number of locations and scenarios which have been put forward as likely candidates for the next implementation of hybrid warfare in

Europe is high and consistently rising; so a volume of this sort would not be able to cover them all, nor should it attempt to. Instead, the scenarios and concerns that have been included are those which are commonly neglected or insufficiently understood.

Transnistria, for example, does feature in these lists of likely flashpoints, but rarely with a thorough exploration of the issues and drivers that make the situation there suitable for exploitation by Russia. Inessa Baban addresses this in her chapter, “The Transnistrian Conflict in the Context of Ukraine,” by both introducing the fundamentals of politics in the region, and exploring Russian involvement and interests and ways in which both of these could be used against Ukraine, Moldova, or the West more generally.

One recurring feature of the new definitions of hybrid warfare is the integration of a wide range of tools of state power for effect. And yet relatively little has been written on the economic warfare dimensions of hybrid challenges. In their chapter “Energy as a Tool of Hybrid Warfare,” Michael Rühle and Julijus Grubliauskas of the Emerging Security Challenges Division, NATO Headquarters, have started to address this deficit by examining the integration of energy strategy into hostile approaches, including by means of a retrospective focus on the often-overlooked energy aspects of the seizure of Crimea.

As they point out, “NATO is not an energy institution,” and previous internal debates have firmly established the boundaries of NATO’s role in energy security. But recognising energy infrastructure as “both a key requirement and an enabler” for intervention means that NATO must remain mindful of the defence implications of energy security for the West. This chapter assists in this aim by addressing the energy elements of vulnerabilities of member states, and how they can be leveraged in hybrid warfare scenarios – including their secondary uses for exploitation in propaganda offensives and disinformation.

These scenarios come in addition to the range of case studies considered by Guillaume Lasconjarias and Andreas Jacobs in their chapter on

“NATO’s Hybrid Flanks,” where they warn in particular that “NATO should prepare for Libya, a state in Europe’s backyard, to become the next hybrid battlefield.” In doing so, they have made specific recommendations for “flexible and adaptive response units . . . which would encompass every dimension of a ‘counter-hybrid force’” – and suggest that NATO’s Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) could constitute such a force.

NATO Responses

But this optimism is at odds with the conclusions drawn by Jan Abts in his chapter on NATO rapid reaction forces. Written at an early stage in deliberations on the establishment of the VJTF, this chapter too has made good use of historical experience to predict likely outcomes – in this case, enduring scepticism as to the efficacy of the VJTF, and in particular the speed with which the decision to deploy it could be reached and implemented.

Despite the fact that one of Russia’s most striking achievements in the course of aggressive action against Ukraine has been to give NATO a new sense of purpose and stimulate Alliance unity, Abts warns that as a practical manifestation of this purpose and unity “the new VJTF will only be successful when some basic conditions and needs are met – e.g., an overhaul of the current funding rules for NATO’s stand-by forces, an adequate activation mechanism and robust command and control system, and broad political support for the concept.” In other words, it must avoid all the problems that dogged the NATO Response Force (NRF) from its creation, in particular the “inability to reach consensus among allies whenever the possibility of a deployment was discussed.”

Abts makes specific policy recommendations for avoiding the fate of the NRF which also deserve a wide readership within NATO. Perhaps the most important among these refers to the authority to activate and deploy the VJTF. In common with many other informed observers, he urges for this authority to be returned to SACEUR – specifically “granting

SACEUR extended authority to train (e.g. the authority to activate the VJTF for ‘snap exercises’), but also to deploy” in order to prevent the force becoming a political hostage in time of crisis.

This necessity reflects the recognition that despite Russian doctrinal references to indirect and asymmetric methods, hybridity does not define the totality of the new Russian way of war. The role of conventional and asymmetric tools and capabilities in Russian military thinking and doctrine has to be placed in the context of Russia’s perceived overall strategic challenges – in which major conventional and nuclear conflict are primary considerations. It follows that hybrid threats are complementary to, not a replacement for, conventional defence challenges. As noted in 2009 by Michele Flournoy, then US Under-Secretary of Defense for Policy, “We can expect to see more hybrid conflicts in which the enemy combines regular warfare tactics with irregular and asymmetric forms of warfare” – but, within this framework, the United States must remain prepared to deal with high-end threats, in particular sophisticated anti-air capabilities and anti-ship weapon systems to deny access to critical regions.⁴

Johnson also emphasises this point in his chapter, in particular explaining how, in the Russian context, “hybrid” is underpinned by “reliance on ... potential employment of full-spectrum conventional, unconventional and nuclear military capabilities.” The result is a vital need for “readiness for challenges at short notice and rapid escalation from non-military to direct military aspects of confrontation.” Instead, however, public critiques from defence officials and commentators in the front-line states express concern that a fixation with hybrid threats provides other NATO members with an excuse to focus on countering low-intensity problems, and not to re-invest in more expensive high-end warfighting capabilities. But it is these costly defences which are essential to deter Russia as a conventional adversary.

4 “‘Hybrid War’ to Pull US Military in Two Directions, Flournoy Says,” Defence Talk, May 6, 2009, accessed at <http://www.defencetalk.com/hybrid-war-to-pull-us-military-18521/>.

The distinctive aspects of multimodal, ambiguous, whole-of-government threats should not be neglected. But it has to be recognised that many aspects of threats, whether described as “hybrid” or not, do not fall within NATO’s competencies. As Golts and Reisinger point out, there is a requirement for “cooperation with other international organizations such as the EU and the OSCE [since] main components of the Russian model are non-military and need to be addressed with ... campaigns which NATO does not and should not control.”

In other words, responses to hybrid threats require resilience as well as troops. But the dividing lines of competencies are problematic. Jacobs and Samaan take the example of the suggestion by SACEUR of closer coordination between NATO members in the field of police and intelligence, and note that as this is not a traditional NATO role, significant innovation would be required: “Intelligence cooperation including domestic agencies would be a new field of security cooperation for NATO.”

But there is a further inconvenient but inescapable conclusion from the analysis in this collection. And that is that whatever else NATO, or the nations, or the United States or the EU may do to protect Alliance members, there is just no substitute for forward presence of substantial, credible conventional forces at the Alliance’s most vulnerable points – including Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

While NATO presents the VJTF, Readiness Action Plan and exercises such as *Trident Juncture* 2015 as substantive measures, the limited and tentative nature of the actual reinforcement and pre-positioning undertaken directly within the front-line states does indeed send a message to Moscow, but not the one intended. It says that the Western Allies are not fully and without question committed to honouring their treaty obligations. This, in itself, rather than deterring Moscow from acting, may encourage it toward the conclusion that it can do so in some areas without risking serious consequences. It is incomprehensible to an outsider, for example, why NATO is still binding itself to a strict interpretation of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, when it has long been made invalid by Russian aggressive

actions in Europe. The Founding Act specifically refers to the security situation of the late 1990s, not that of today.

Strong NATO forces do need to be visible in the frontline states, and to be provided with appropriate rules of engagement, and with freedom of movement across internal NATO borders. Ideally, these should be forces from NATO's nuclear allies, in order to mitigate the palpable effects of Russia's nuclear posturing described by Kamp. Because if those forces are in place, they not only deny Russia easy conventional military opportunities, but also a whole range of other measures which are currently filed under the "hybrid" bracket but which rely on there being no robust response from the target nation or from NATO.

Conclusion

The idea that the introduction of hybrid concepts "marks the end of an almost decade-old debate about 'new' forms of warfare that was initiated in the early 2000s," as suggested by the editors of this collection, is attractive but optimistic. Argument about new forms of warfare is another phenomenon that has been with us since war began.

Hybrid terminology may well suffer the fate of a previous operational concept from a decade before, which, while briefly fashionable, suffered from being applied to a huge range of problems: effects-based operations (EBO). Here too, proliferation of definitions was the inevitable result, and the eventual second-order effect was doctrinal chaos, as well as confusion between NATO and national interpretations. As Gen. James Mattis wrote when finally suppressing the term, he was "convinced that the various interpretations of EBO have caused confusion throughout the joint force and among our multinational partners that we must correct. It is my view that EBO has been misapplied and overextended to the point that it actually hinders rather than helps joint operations."⁵

5 James N. Mattis, "USJFCOM Commander's Guidance for Effects-based Operations," Parameters, Autumn 2008, pp.18-25.

As the authors in this collection demonstrate, “hybrid” is already following this trend. But Tenenbaum adds an essential caveat: “As long as there is no precise definition of the term or specific level of policy to which it can be related, the concept of hybrid warfare will unfortunately suffer from having to be understood in too broad a perspective. *The various phenomena it points at are, however, very real.*”

It is the reality of these phenomena that render it essential that NATO forces – and, crucially, the political structures that currently decide when and where they should be employed – are training and exercising for the right threats and decision-making challenges. In the meantime, the notion of “hybridity” may not be a permanent addition to the argument on the nature of warfare, but at least for the near term it will continue to exercise both academics and practitioners.

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