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SPECIAL ISSUE

Countering Hybrid Warfare: The Best Uses of SOF in a Pre-Article V Scenario

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From the Editor

Welcome to the fourth special issue of the *Combating Terrorism Exchange*, “Countering Hybrid Warfare: The Best Uses of SOF in a Pre–Article V Scenario,” guest edited by Frank Steder of the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment and Leo Blanken of the US Naval Postgraduate School.

The subject of this issue is counterterrorism viewed from the angle of what is being called *hybrid warfare* or sometimes *hybrid operations*. These are the activities that an actor undertakes short of open warfare to undermine a target’s formal and informal political, economic, and social institutions. The goal may be to break the target apart by hammering at existing ethnic, political, and social fissures; to infiltrate and suborn institutions; or falling short of these larger goals, to undermine and cripple the target. Overt or covert armed aggression may be used at any point to complete the destruction, but it is not always required.

History is rife with examples of hybrid warfare, dating back to, well, the beginning of warfare. Economic, military, and social ties are common avenues that aggressors have used to infiltrate targets, create funnels for information, develop dependencies, and weaken prey. The British East India Company, a pioneer of this process, slowly assumed political as well as economic control of the Indian subcontinent over a period of 200 years, through trade and the placement of “advisors” in the palaces of regional rulers. By the time Britain formally took over India as a Crown colony in the mid-nineteenth century, it was largely a matter of receiving the keys; sovereignty had long been lost. In the late nineteenth century, a group of American-Hawai’ian plantation owners applied intense economic pressure on Hawai’i’s Queen Lili’uokalani to cede them control over trade and foreign relations before overthrowing her, with the inside help of cronies serving in the queen’s government and a contingent of US Marines.

Similar kinds of agricultural colonization in Latin America brought us the term “banana republic,” meaning a small ostensibly sovereign country under the de facto—sometimes de jure—control of multinational corporations. During the Cold War (1947–1991), the Soviet Union and the United States vied for influence across the globe, using every political and economic avenue available to them to cajole and/or force governments in Asia, Latin America, Africa, and Eastern Europe to accept the superpowers’ “friendship” and “protection.” And of course, during the Cold War, both superpowers spent enormous resources trying

to undermine the other through espionage, economic sabotage, and proxy warfare, while avoiding any direct conflict that might escalate to a nuclear exchange.

The twenty-first century is witnessing a form of hybrid warfare that is highly refined and difficult to counter because it disdains our comfortable Western assumptions about inter-state relations. The Russian Federation under Vladimir Putin's rule, according to several of the contributors in this issue, has mastered the art of hybrid warfare in Russia's near abroad to the point that it can pursue multiple strategies simultaneously and be ready to capitalize on any outcome, from a weakened target to a splintered one. This is what the contributors say happened in Ukraine over the dozen years leading up to the 2014 annexation of Crimea. Before Ukraine came Georgia and Abkhazia, where Putin tested and honed his methods for bringing recalcitrant former Soviet satellites back under Moscow's control. Russia's SOF, the *Spetsnaz*, which has gained a reputation for its skill at infiltrating and manipulating neighboring countries' ethnic Russian populations, has been one of his principal tools.

Frank Steder's introduction to this special issue lays out the structure and topics in detail, so I won't say more about them here. I will close, however, by saying that my early skepticism that this "Russian style" of hybrid warfare is something new and deserving of our attention evaporated as I studied the articles. There *is* something happening, and we all need to pay attention, including the new administration in Washington. The great Russian bear has learned to move like a snake, but NATO still scans the horizon for its familiar ursine bulk instead of looking nearby for twitching blades of grass and panicked prey. What might happen if Estonia, a NATO member and an obvious irritant to the Kremlin, is the next victim to be bitten? Does NATO wait until Estonia is prostrate before determining whether there's anything it should do to help? Or does it react at the first cry of alarm? As articles in this issue suggest, the future of the Alliance, and of many small countries in Russia's near abroad, may depend on the answer.

ELIZABETH SKINNER

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Major Kenneth Boesgaard has served in the Danish Land Special Operations Forces, also known as *Jegerkorps* (or the Hunter Corps) since 2006 as an operator, a platoon leader, and an operations officer. He has deployed three times to Afghanistan. MAJ Boesgaard received his officer's education at the Royal Danish Military Academy and is currently pursuing a master's degree in Special Operations and Irregular Warfare in the Defense Analysis department at NPS. Upon his return to Denmark, MAJ Boesgaard will serve in the newly created Danish Special Operations Command.

Espen Berg-Knutson is currently the director of the Special Operations Research and Development Program (SORP) at the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI). As a visiting research scientist in the Defense Analysis department at NPS from 2014 to 2015, he initiated and directed the NORSO 2025 study, together with Professor Nancy Roberts.

Dr. Leo Blanken is an associate professor in the Defense Analysis department at NPS and a guest editor of this special issue of CTX. He published a book on geopolitics entitled *Rational Empires: Institutional Incentives and Imperial Expansion* (University of Chicago Press, 2012) and co-edited the recent volume *Assessing War: The Challenge of Measuring Success and Failure* (Georgetown University Press, 2015). He has also written articles on a variety of international security topics. His current research focuses on the problems of military planning in the context of changing international norms and political constraints.

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Colonel Michael Richardson is the chair for Special Operations at NPS. Previous to this post, COL Richardson served as the chief of staff, NATO Special Operations Headquarters. He was commissioned into the Army Corps of Engineers in May 1990, and transferred to the Special Forces Regiment in 1996, where he served as an ODA and AOB commander and battalion operations officer in the 10th Special Forces Group. COL Richardson subsequently commanded Baker and Dog squadrons of the Asymmetric Warfare Group. He holds a BA in Political Science from Gettysburg College, an MS in Defense Analysis from NPS, and is a PhD candidate in US History at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Frank Brundtland Steder, guest editor for this special edition of *CTX*, is a principal scientist with FFI. He recently completed a year as a visiting researcher and director of the Norwegian Special Operations Research and Development program at NPS. Mr. Steder has been a project and program manager in the Analysis Division at FFI, overseeing several interdisciplinary subjects: operational research, human resource management, outsourcing and sourcing questions, system analysis, benchmarking studies (study director in NATO/RTO), long-term defense planning, efficiency studies, policy studies, and performance management, as well as a wide range of personnel and gender studies.

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COVER PHOTO

A US Marine watches a demonstration of an amphibious assault from the bridge of HMS Ocean (UK), as part of Exercise Baltops 16. Photographer unknown, NATO, via Flickr.

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Foreword

*Lt Gen Marshall B. Webb,
NATO Special Operations
Headquarters*

THE NATO SPECIAL OPERATIONS HEADQUARTERS (NSHQ) IS PROUD TO sponsor a US Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) Special Operations Forces-focused research project, “Countering Hybrid Warfare: The Best Uses of SOF in a Pre-Article V Scenario.” The NSHQ has a long-standing association with both academic and government research institutions inside and across NATO nations. The NSHQ values a “whole of government” approach to the difficult problems its members may face, and this research project is another step forward in the enduring tradition of mutual support between the military and academic communities. This special edition of the *Combating Terrorism Exchange* is a result of collaboration with Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI) researchers, NPS faculty, and SOF students in the NPS Defense Analysis department. NPS is a well-known NATO SOF supporter, and the vast majority of its alumni serve in NATO nations. The NSHQ has benefited from the service of both current and former NPS students.

A one-of-a-kind organization, the NSHQ is the primary point of development, coordination, and direction for all NATO SOF-related activities. The goals of NSHQ are to optimize the use of SOF’s unique capabilities and provide an operational command capability when directed by the Supreme Allied Commander Europe. The NSHQ was established in 2006 as the NATO Special Operations Coordination Center, with a mandate to develop policy, doctrine, and concepts for the use of SOF in support of the Alliance and its member states. Today, NSHQ personnel, who represent 29 Allied and partner nations, continue to provide cutting-edge concepts for how SOF can fulfill their unique and complementary roles in a range of pre-conflict and active conflict situations. This collection of essays, which explore the best ways to use SOF in conflicts short of full-scale war (the invocation of Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty), is another step toward fulfilling that mandate.¹

To initiate this study, I asked the research team to explore a single question: what courses of action can NATO, as an Alliance of 28 nations, take to counter or mitigate threats below the threshold of war, without requiring additional authorities beyond those currently approved by the North Atlantic Council, NATO’s governing body? The articles in this special issue of *CTX* are the results of the team’s studies. The first three articles frame the challenges facing the Alliance by analyzing the current operational environment leading up to, but not crossing, the Article V threshold—the point at which the Alliance invokes collective military-led self-defense. The rest of the articles describe some of the obstacles NATO faces as it adapts to this environment, and explore the unique capabilities that SOF can contribute, both to mitigating the threats before a crisis reaches the level of an Article V declaration and in defense of the Alliance following a declaration of war.

I believe readers will find value in this broad selection of writings on the ways that SOF can influence the security environment within the self-imposed

WHAT COURSES
OF ACTION
CAN NATO
TAKE TO
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OR MITIGATE
THREATS
BELOW THE
THRESHOLD
OF WAR?

“
**THE COLLECTIVE
 EXPERTISE OF
 THE “WHOLE OF
 GOVERNMENTS” IS ONE
 OF THE ALLIANCE’S
 CHIEF ADVANTAGES.**
 ”

limitations and restrictions of the NATO framework. Operations in the pre–Article V environment are a difficult problem with a complicated overlap of authorizations, planning processes, and legal rules. The supporting questions the authors ask and answer were chosen to explore these and related issues in detail. These authors are a unique group because they are not passive observers of the international security environment, but rather are experienced special operations officers who have been given the time, resources, and expert guidance of professional NPS and FFI researchers to thoroughly analyze the topic question.

This research project is highly pertinent for our times. The Alliance’s enemies and competitor nations continuously study our procedures, and systematically analyze how NATO escalates to war. By hovering under the threshold of activities that might trigger an Article V declaration, they seek advantage within the gray areas of our system. Conversely, we pursue the same knowledge, but from a different angle: what activities can NATO SOF perform that do not require an Article V announcement? Our enemies may conduct hybrid operations in an overt manner, but NATO does so as well, whether purposefully or not. The articles in this anthology offer new options, ideas, and courses of action to consider that are valuable to NATO and NATO SOE. New perspectives from outside entities such as research institutions and think tanks offer vital insight that might not be obvious to those of us closer to the fight. NSHQ benefits from the zeal and academic discipline that NPS students and faculty, along with their FFI colleagues, bring to bear on grand ideas and problem sets.

The collegial and cooperative relationship that exists between our institutions fosters long-term support for the solution of difficult problems that deserve a thoughtful and in-depth approach. The collective expertise of the “whole of governments” is one of the Alliance’s chief advantages for solving problems, because it enables us to reveal hidden perspectives, investigate new ideas, and discover intriguing solutions that might remain hidden from a purely military vantage point. We truly benefit from each other’s strengths. The NSHQ looks forward to future projects between NSHQ, NPS, and FFI. ♦

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lt Gen Marshall B. “Brad” Webb commanded NATO Special Operations Headquarters from August 2014 to July 2016.

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NOTES

- I Article V, known as the “collective defense clause,” reads: “The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

“Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.”

North Atlantic Treaty, 4 April 1949, art. 5, 63 Stat. 2241, 34 U.N.T.S. 243: http://www.NATO.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm

Introduction: The Theory, History, and Current State of Hybrid Warfare

Frank Brundtland Steder,
Norwegian Defence
Research Establishment

The greatest victory is that which requires no battle.
— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*¹

THE ARTICLES IN THIS SPECIAL EDITION OF THE *COMBATING TERRORISM Exchange (CTX)* discuss current and future uses of Special Operations Forces, particularly *the best use of SOF* in a pre–Article V scenario—that is, before invoking the “collective defense” clause that permits resort to armed force according to the stipulations of the original North Atlantic Treaty. The main impetus for suggesting greater use of SOF—in both traditional and non-traditional roles—is the escalation in the Russian Federation’s aggressive behavior towards Eastern European NATO and non-NATO countries in recent years.

The main purpose of this special issue is to enlighten international *CTX* readers about the similarities and differences between SOF counterterrorism methods and other SOF missions and tasks, and these methods’ relative utility in the emerging threat environment. It has become increasingly apparent, not only to academics but also to SOF professionals, that CT and other direct SOF approaches address only observable and immediate threats, not necessarily the long-term causes of those threats. As long as this is the case, terrorist organizations, criminal elements, and hostile state actors will most likely continue to grow and adapt for the future battlefield. Indirect SOF methods, like those described in more detail later in this issue, may provide a wider range of near-term options for NATO.

The project behind this special issue builds on the examination of hybrid warfare presented in the NORSOE 2025 study (see the article by Berg-Knutson in this issue).² That study, supported by the work of international SOF students at the US Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in Monterey, California, set out to answer the question “How should we design a SOF structure that will best serve the security interests of Norway in 2025?” The students carried out a “strategic design” process that included interviews with SOF leaders and subject matter experts from around the world. One finding is that “future warfare will move beyond the military domain into the civil domain, challenging traditional organizations and doctrines.” Furthermore, the students claim that “as a result of Russia’s strategic and political show of force in the last few years, the need to counter unconventional/hybrid warfare will likely increase in the future.” Hence, as a continuation of the NORSOE 2025 study, this special issue of *CTX* seeks to propose

“FUTURE
WARFARE WILL
MOVE BEYOND
THE MILITARY
DOMAIN INTO
THE CIVIL
DOMAIN.”



the best uses of national and international SOF when countering unconventional tactics and hybrid opponents in a typical pre–Article V scenario.

The authors of the nine articles included here are a mixture of academics and both active and retired military officers from six different countries, all of whom have a background in international SOF operations and SOF-related research. Most of the authors are current NPS students or graduates of the Department of Defense Analysis at NPS. They all share an interest in the potential value of indirect approaches in future conflicts.

Each of the articles addresses a different but complementary topic. Some of the articles explore the motivations for Russia’s renewed near-abroad strategy, others discuss how this strategy has been carried out and what to learn from it (in Ukraine, for example), and some suggest new concepts and ideas for the future use of national and international SOF to counter hybrid strategies. I outline each of the articles later in this introductory essay, but first I would like to clarify some important themes and topics that these articles have in common.

Hybrid Warfare: Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something ... Red?

HYBRID WARFARE
REMAINS A SOURCE
OF CONCERN
FOR OBSERVERS
OF CURRENT
RUSSIAN POLICY.

The term *hybrid warfare* has been widely debated within the international security community in the wake of Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, and remains a source of concern for observers of current Russian policy.³ It is useful to trace the evolution of the term over the last two decades, because a common understanding of the concept is crucial for our task of exploring possible NATO SOF countermeasures to hybrid warfare.

According to our research, the first time the term appeared in a publicly available text was in an NPS master’s thesis titled “SPEC FI: USMC and Special Operations,” written by US Marine Corps (USMC) Lieutenant Robert Walker in 1998.⁴ Walker discussed the expeditionary capability of the Marine Corps as being “a hybrid force for a hybrid war.” He continued, “Hybrid warfare is that which lies in the interstices between special and conventional warfare.”⁵ This early definition of hybrid warfare addresses an internal point of efficiency: the best use of scarce military resources is achieved through a combination of conventional and non-conventional forces.

In 2002, another NPS student, Major William Nemeth, USMC, used the term in his thesis to discuss means to counter hostile actions from what he calls “mixed and hybrid societies,” through a case study of the Chechen separatist movement.⁶ Nemeth explored not only linkages between military and civilian entities, but also how a mix of traditional and modern approaches, and of civil actions and warfare, creates an effective hybrid force. He postulated that hybrid warfare would become increasingly prevalent, and claimed that “the strengths of hybrid warfare lend themselves to the use of guerrilla tactics, which technologically advanced and highly bureaucratic forces have a difficult time countering.”⁷ In other words, when a modern army confronts a smaller hybrid force, the conventional force will be compelled to rethink its established doctrines and adapt its operational procedures so that it can identify and exploit the critical vulnerabilities of the hybrid enemy. This adaptation will enable modern conventional

forces to strike the center of gravity of the opponent and thus reduce its freedom of movement, capacity, and will to fight.

The popularity of the concept of hybrid warfare took off in a 2005 article by James Mattis and Frank Hoffman, published in the US Naval Institute *Proceedings*.⁸ The two authors drew attention to the fact that US conventional and technological military superiority could be challenged not only by other states, but also by non-state actors and adversaries, through the combined use of less advanced technologies. Countries with advanced conventional forces are likely to face more irregular procedures and tactics that represent an advantage: adversaries compensate for inferior capacity, techniques, and capabilities through the use of terrorism, insurgency, and guerrilla tactics. These threats will most likely be carried out by paramilitary formations organized according to ethnic background, by organized crime syndicates, and through cyber attacks against essential military and civilian infrastructure such as political, financial, and communications networks.

In his 2007 essay, “Conflicts in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars,” Hoffman used historical examples to explore the concept of hybrid warfare.⁹ In this popularized treatment, Hoffman defined hybrid warfare as a “range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including discriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder.” He then tested this definition against several historical cases, including the Irish insurgents of 1919–1920, the Afghan mujahedeen in the 1980s, Chechen rebels in the 1990s, and Hezbollah in its 2006 war with Israel. Hezbollah, Hoffman claimed, is the clearest example of a modern hybrid force because it relied on a combination of military and civilian means, and achieved its objective through organized strategic movements and with decentralized cells that used various adaptive tactics.

In the years following the publication of Hoffman’s essay, the US Department of Defense (DoD) and Government Accountability Office (GAO) evaluated the term *hybrid warfare* to better describe the methods used by adversaries against US and allied forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁰ In their opinion, published in a 2010 report, there was no need to officially define hybrid warfare as a unique subset of warfare terminology (as had been done with biological warfare, irregular warfare, or landmine warfare, for example), and the DoD and GAO urged officials and academics not to introduce this new sub-terminology for warfare.¹¹ This reluctance came to a quick end in 2014 with the Russian annexation of Crimea.

After Russia’s actions in Ukraine and Crimea emerged from their clandestine phase in early 2014, the term *hybrid warfare* became the latest buzzword among officials, academics, and practitioners to describe the West’s perception of Russian actions as something new.¹² It was later applied to the revitalized eastern flank of NATO as well, reflecting the perception that the security picture in Europe—and the West—was returning to a Cold War–like scenario.¹³ Russia, by contrast, did not use the

“GERASIMOV
CHARACTERIZED
HYBRID WARFARE AS
MODERN WARFARE.”

Chief of the General Staff General Valery Gerasimov



term *hybrid warfare* until 2016, when it was presented in a speech by Chief of the General Staff General Valery Gerasimov before the Russian Academy of Military Sciences.¹⁴ Based on the Russian threat assessment and especially in light of the extensive reformation of the Russian armed forces in 2008, Gerasimov characterized hybrid warfare as *modern* warfare and included the so-called “color revolutions,” which he claimed were used by the United States and its allies to “[blur] the lines between war and peace.”¹⁵ He went on to state that “non-military means of achieving military and strategic goals have grown and in many cases exceeded the power of weapons in their effectiveness.”¹⁶

Over the years, there have been many suggestions for how to counter non-state and state actors that appear to be hybrid forces. The principal question in future battle is whether to use the same strategy or tactics as one’s opponents, or to do something different and unexpected. There are researchers and officials who urge adaptation, new tactics, and upgraded procedures, but few offer specifics on how to actually counter future hybrid threats.¹⁷ According to General Petr Pavel, head of the NATO Military Committee, “The primary purpose is to create an influence that is strong enough, but below the threshold of [collective defense provision] Article 5, so they achieve the goals without provoking the enemy or opponent to initiate a defense response.”¹⁸ The articles you will read in this special edition of *CTX* intend to illuminate the best use of national and international SOF, aligned with the overall strategy of NATO, on the hybrid battlefield.

At the end of the day, it does not really matter whether hybrid warfare is a new or old concept. It is nevertheless tempting to remind readers of what Prussian strategist Carl von Clausewitz (1780–1831) and Chinese strategist Sun Tzu (5th century BCE) had to say in this regard: a hybrid approach is simply warfare that uses all means necessary to achieve victory.¹⁹ The term *hybrid operations* might be more precise for characterizing tactics that are short of war, that is, a pre-Article V scenario, given that the topic of this special issue is how NATO can improve its counteractions in a low-level conflict situation or, where possible, avoid war altogether. For simplicity and consistency, the authors use the term *hybrid warfare* throughout this special edition of *CTX*, well aware of its use, misuse, and controversial definition.²⁰ The overall question the authors are trying to answer, regardless of the definition, is how best to counter a hybrid force, or an opponent that is using all means necessary—conventional and non-conventional, legal and illegal, regular and irregular—to weaken a target across time, level, and place, before war is declared.

The Gerasimov Doctrine: Using All Means Necessary

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the successor Russian Federation indicated that it might be moving slowly toward internal liberal democratic and market economic reforms. Externally, the USSR’s Cold War policy of exporting influence turned toward protecting Russians in the near abroad, that is, in the newly independent states that once made up the USSR.²¹ This policy positioned Russia and gave it a platform from which to continue to project power and influence outside of its borders, and inevitably brought it into conflict with Western democratic principles. Once the Baltic states declared their independence in 1991, protecting the Russian diaspora located within their borders proved to be the winning rationale for intervention. In Lithuania, Russia exerted control over the Lithuanian Communist party and the *Yedinstvo* movement, which were fighting against Lithuanian independence with classic Soviet tactics such as propa-
ganda



Carl von Clausewitz



Sun Tzu

and organized workers' protests.²² The Russian military was eventually able to deploy into Lithuania under the pretense of keeping law and order for the new country's ethnic Russian citizens, who comprised a quarter of the population. Around the same time, Russia sent "volunteers" to assist Russian separatists in Moldova, and the Russian military provided support to those "volunteers." In the early 2000s, Latvia and Lithuania were caught up in scandals that involved Russian-funded political organizations, disinformation campaigns, and bribery—glimpses into Russia's determined projection of influence in its near abroad. The "color revolutions" in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan influenced and served as justification for Russia's assertiveness and determination to project its anti-Western narrative in the information realm of political warfare.²³

In recent history, Russia's use of military and non-military tactics has played out successfully in Georgia and Ukraine. After its UN-sanctioned insertion into Georgian politics through peacekeeping operations in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia (1992–2008), Russia was positioned militarily and diplomatically to sow dissent and solidify its influence over Georgia. It overtly began to assert its diplomatic leverage by placing ethnic Russians in key ministry positions in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.²⁴

Russia's cyber war tactics at the outbreak of military escalation "included various distributed denial of service (DDOS) attacks to deny/disrupt communications and information exfiltration activities conducted to accumulate military and political intelligence from Georgian networks."²⁵ After just five days of combat operations, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev ordered Russian troops to end all military operations in Georgia and accepted a peace plan that essentially allowed Russia to continue to assert its dominance over Georgia.²⁶

Influence over Ukraine, which has large valuable energy and industrial sectors, has been vital to Soviet and Russian national objectives since the 1917 revolution. The two countries share not just a long border but also interdependent economies, a military-industrial partnership, and large ethnic diasporas. Moscow has perpetuated Russia-friendly narratives and information campaigns within Ukraine's largely Russian-speaking south and east, and has used its extensive network of pro-Russian resources and personnel within Ukraine to exploit opportunities and sow dissent whenever it was useful.²⁷ These activities have disrupted internal Ukrainian politics in favor of Russian objectives and delegitimized the Ukrainian government as it pursues further ties with the West.²⁸ The variety and complexity of the actors Moscow employs reflect the intensity of its actions and tactics. These coordinated efforts include using NGOs to promote anti-Western, anti-NATO, and anti-democratic sentiment; raising doubts about Crimea's territorial status; using language and education as political instruments, including book and school burnings; publishing and distributing free anti-state newspapers; renaming streets, towns, and cultural centers; hanging Russian flags and plaques and scrawling Nazi graffiti on Ukrainian buildings; supporting separatist calls from Russian politicians; using religion as a political instrument and promoting the Russian Orthodox Church; and modifying shared common memory.²⁹ Russia's physical positioning in Crimea and its continued cultivation of economic relationships, pro-Russian movements, and interdependence with the Ukrainian government allowed Moscow to swiftly exploit the "Euromaidan" movement to protect Russian nationals, take over Crimea, and foment discord in eastern Ukraine. (Danylyuk explores this topic in detail in his article for this issue.)

RUSSIA SENT
"VOLUNTEERS" TO
ASSIST RUSSIAN
SEPARATISTS IN
MOLDOVA, AND THE
RUSSIAN MILITARY
PROVIDED SUPPORT.

In 2013, General Gerasimov published an article presenting a model that clearly describes Russian intent and phased actions to meet national interests, a model now known as the “Gerasimov Strategy.” Gerasimov described a world where “the role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and in many cases, they have exceeded the power of weapons in their effectiveness.”³⁰ Non-military means include the political, economic, information, humanitarian, and other sectors, in coordination with the “protest potential of the population.” Gerasimov clearly stated that the use of special operations and other military forces may be necessary, but they are often carried out under the guise of other missions to conceal the real purposes of subversion, coercion, and classic unconventional warfare tactics.³¹ The model in figure 1, from a translated version of his original article, clearly shows that the initial phases of hybrid mobilization focus on non-military methods, and highlights the phase that emphasizes civil society and the human domain.³²

As figure 1 illustrates, the formation of coalitions, unions, and political opposition groups and the application of political, economic, and diplomatic pressure are tools that can be leveraged by using all instruments of national power to influence the human domain (civil society). The official Russian military doctrine approved by the Russian Security Council and President Vladimir Putin in December 2014 further highlights how Russia sees conflict. According to this doctrine, modern conflicts require “the use of indirect and asymmetric modes of actions,” including “non-military measures implemented with the extensive use of the protest potential of the population” and externally funded “political forces and social movements.”³³

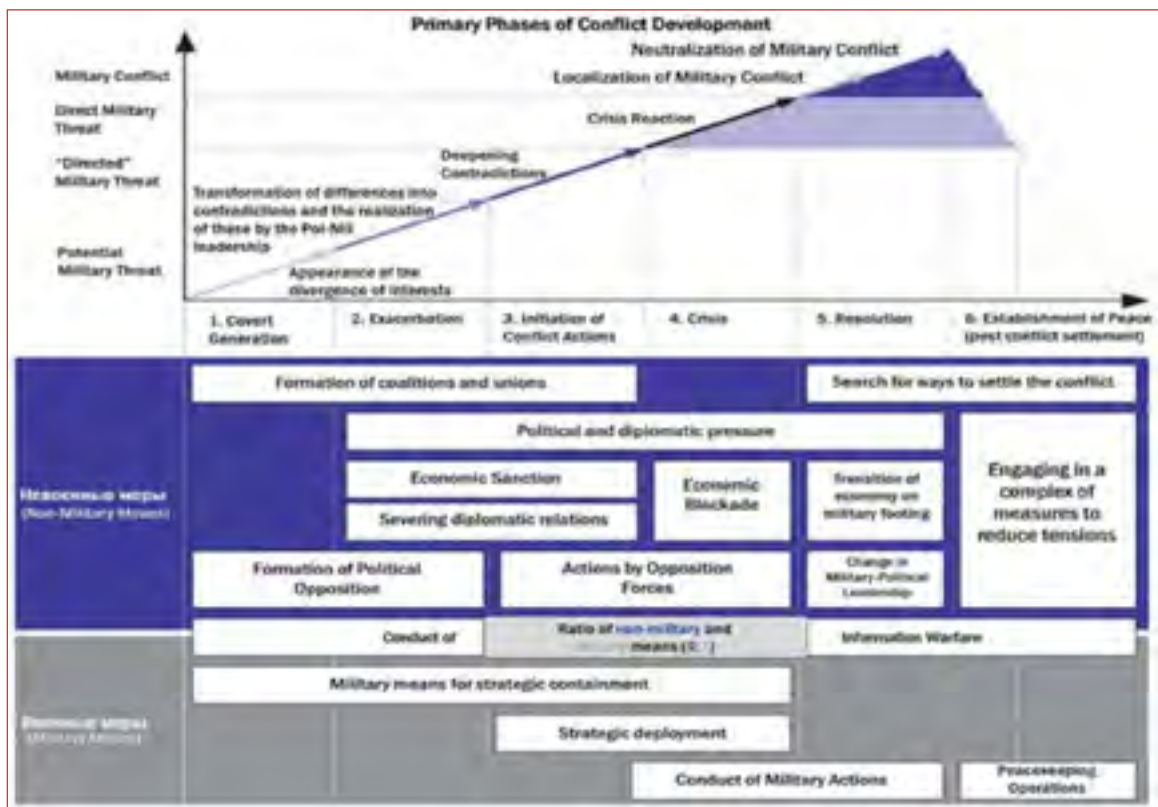


Figure 1: The Gerasimov Strategy: Role of Non-Military Methods in Resolving Inter-Governmental Conflicts

Special Operations Forces Are Necessary in Hybrid Warfare

There are many popular myths and misconceptions about special operations forces.³⁴ A commonly agreed-upon definition of SOF is given in NATO doctrine AJP-3.5.³⁵

Special operations are military activities conducted by specially designated, organized, trained, and equipped forces, manned with selected personnel, using unconventional tactics, techniques, and modes of employment. These activities may be conducted across the full range of military operations, independently or with conventional forces, to help achieve the desired end-state. Politico-military considerations may require clandestine or covert techniques and the acceptance of a degree of political or military risk not associated with operations by conventional forces. Special Operations deliver strategic or operational-level results or are executed where significant political risk exists.³⁶

Perhaps one of the most insightful statements regarding this NATO definition is that “special operations are a military instrument, which is highly suited for contributing to the holistic security approach.”³⁷ In the anthology *Force of Choice: Perspectives on Special Operations*, retired Admiral William McRaven explained the overall idea of how to utilize SOF as a national and international strategic instrument and made the point that SOF are best used in the tenuous space between diplomacy and conventional war.³⁸

Hence, in a pre–Article V scenario, the likely best national and international strategy and resource to counter hybrid forces is to use SOF *not by itself*, but in combination with diplomatic tools *and* conventional resources. One way to highlight this principle of cooperation in NORSO 2025’s suggested counter–hybrid warfare strategy is through the concept of a comprehensive or *whole-of-government* approach, with members from the SOF community in a central strategic and operative role. All of the articles in this special issue present SOF as one piece in a jigsaw puzzle: it needs to fit together with other forces, elements, entities, concepts, and resources—both domestic and international—to complete this grand strategy to counter any opponent—hybrid and non-hybrid. This role, as a unique and leading contributor in a joint operational setting, is one of the most critical SOF mission sets identified by NATO.³⁹

Despite some variations, all Western nations with SOF have a fairly similar mission set for their SOF forces. There are three general tasks in any given SOF structure: military assistance (MA), special reconnaissance (SR), and direct action (DA), in addition to special operations in a joint environment.⁴⁰ Military assistance encompasses training, educating, and supporting military allies, usually “on-site” or “in theater,” outside the provider’s national borders. The “classic” ambition in MA is to carry out specific sub-tasks in the mission until the allied military forces are capable of carrying them out themselves. The MA activity often generates added insight and new information/intelligence in and around the area of responsibility and leads to the formation of independent or joint SR and DA tasks in future operations.⁴¹

“SOF ARE BEST USED IN THE TENUOUS SPACE BETWEEN DIPLOMACY AND CONVENTIONAL WAR.”



The now-obsolete concept of *unconventional warfare* can be considered an earlier and more comprehensive version of MA, in which the main task was to support resistance movements in a country at war. This included “undermining the domestic and international legitimacy of the target authority,” as well as “neutralizing the target authority’s power and shifting that power to the resistance.”⁴² In addition to today’s common SOF mission sets (MA, SR, and DA), the concept of *irregular warfare* (which has replaced unconventional warfare), particularly stands out with regard to MA. Irregular warfare includes support for an insurgency operation and the “facilitation of political processes where SOF may support diplomacy, information operations, and economic measures.”⁴³

“DIRECT AND INDIRECT METHODS CAN BE CONSIDERED ‘THE YIN AND YANG OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS.’”

SR, by contrast, is all about actively collecting information through different means, across space and time, and is especially designed for areas or mission sets that are extremely dangerous, hostile, or politically sensitive. DA includes precise (strike) missions, limited in space and time, and clearly directed towards a defined strategic ambition that could result in a new paradigm in ongoing operations.⁴⁴

Given the different natures of these three unique mission sets, they are sometimes categorized as *direct* (SR and DA) and *indirect* (MA). These direct and indirect methods can be considered “the yin and yang of special operations.”⁴⁵ In the United States, slightly different terms are used to differentiate between the direct and indirect SOF approaches: *surgical strike* for SR and DA (also referred to as *hard power*), and *special warfare* for MA (also referred to as *soft power*). “As yin and yang imply, SOF is most effective when there is the proper balance between its capabilities, but that balance constantly shifts as conditions change.”⁴⁶ These properties, as well as the variance and balance in tasks and mission sets, make SOF a particularly good resource for countering hybrid warfare tactics.

Another popular term related to hybrid warfare—the *gray zone*—is often described as the conceptual space between war and peace.⁴⁷ Other terms, such as *small wars*, *low-intensity conflict*, and *military operations other than war* have also been used to describe conflicts within the gray zone. But if the gray zone is truly going to add to our understanding of conflict before a declaration of war, it should be viewed as an *environmental condition* for the best use of SOF, not as a strategy, just as Bill McRaven presented it when he postulated that irregular warfare is the military’s strategy to achieve the best results in the conceptual phase between diplomacy and war.⁴⁸



Content Summary: Background, Current Threats, and Suggestions for Best Use of SOF

In 2014, the world watched as Russia annexed Crimea with seeming ease, exploiting more refined techniques than those that Moscow used in Georgia a few years earlier. It did this in part by placing Russian agents in key positions within institutions such as Ukraine's SBU (the equivalent of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation).⁴⁹ When Russia determined that the time was right to initiate its takeover of Crimea, it launched a cyber attack against Ukraine similar to its operation against Georgia. This time, however, Russia supported the attack with electronic warfare, which prevented Crimean authorities from communicating with Kiev, thus undermining Kiev's ability to effectively provide command and control during the crisis.⁵⁰ When Russian forces entered Crimea, they wore no insignia and had a greater understanding of what was taking place than would be expected of ordinary Russian soldiers. The confusion this created among Crimea's residents was then exacerbated by Russian media and official channels, all of which called the invasion a local uprising. It must be noted that because of Russia's integration of conventional and irregular techniques, its ability to create confusion, and its swift action, it was able to seize Crimea with virtually no bloodshed.⁵¹ This fait accompli was then followed by the initiation of an almost completely unconventional warfare campaign in support of a separatist movement in eastern Ukraine.

Following the recommendations from the NORSOF 2025 report, the first section of this special issue presents the case study of Russian hybrid warfare in Ukraine in detail from three perspectives. First, Stephen Dayspring discusses the range of power available to an authoritarian regime like Russia, and the motivation behind Moscow's aggression towards its neighbors. Oleksandr Danylyuk then delves into the chronology of events in Ukraine between 2010 and 2014, and the Russian covert operations that guided them. Abdullah Atay follows with a description of the particular use of Russian SOF—the Spetsnaz—in the annexation of Crimea in March 2014.

The six articles in the second section discuss some critical principles of hybrid warfare for NATO to consider as it contemplates means to counter both state and non-state actors. Leo Blanken begins by asking a basic question: why have NATO allies found it so difficult to mount an effective response to the new forms of Russian aggression described by Dayspring, Danylyuk, and Atay in the first



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””

section? The answer, he suggests, may lie in inherited assumptions and ingrained habits of thinking left over from the Cold War. Moving from the “why” to the “how,” Espen Berg-Knutsen postulates that SOF could take a key role in small nations’ defense against hybrid aggression by forming the core of a multidisciplinary unit that coordinates national counter-hybrid efforts. Taking this line of thinking a step further, Sándor Fábíán suggests that in order to be effective against hybrid strategies and tactics, the Allied nations must consider reforming their militaries away from conventional warfare towards unconventional and irregular warfare. The best way to fight a hybrid force, Fábíán argues, is to become a hybrid force: a comprehensive whole-of-government effort that combines the police, military, and other parts of a society’s national security sector. Following this, Brian James argues, somewhat controversially, for a more proactive NATO, which can be achieved by establishing an adapted collective-defense version of the US Army’s targeting practices.

SOF as an effective deterrent mechanism is not necessarily what first comes to mind when most strategists are trying to counter state actors engaged in hybrid warfare. Norwegians Marius Kristiansen and Andreas Hedenstrøm, however, suggest using US Army SOF (ASOF) in this unusual role. They offer the example of a MA-style training and education mission with the Norwegian Home Guard on the Norwegian-Russian border. While the potential for multiple effects and signaling from ASOF support in a future mission is intriguing, the main objective would actually be deterrence, not education of the Home Guard.

Another exciting concept is suggested by the three Danish contributors, Kenneth Boesgaard, Anders Svendsen, and Jesper Andreassen, who take the definition of hybrid warfare “back home” to NPS. Building on Walker’s ideas, but “with a twist,” the authors depart from the original definition of hybrid force to suggest a better, more consistent combination of SOF and conventional forces over time to achieve sustainability in stabilization and reconstruction operations. This concept/strategy has the potential to work well in a national context in which all necessary scarce resources are utilized over time.

The nine articles in this special issue discuss emerging and future threats and suggest specific actions to meet them on the hybrid battlefield. All the authors have tried to ensure that their contributions are complementary and cover a broad range of issues within the overarching topic of how best to use SOF in a pre–Article V environment. For a summary of the contributors’ findings and suggestions about the way forward for NATO and NSHQ, we offer an afterword by Mike Richardson, formerly with NSHQ and now SOF chair in the Defense Analysis department at NPS. Happy reading! ◆

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Section One: Russian Hybrid Strategies and Tactics in Ukraine



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Countering Russian Hybrid Warfare: Acknowledging the Character of Modern Conflict

WESTERN
LEADERS SEEM
TO ASSUME
THAT
RELATIONS
WITH THE
KREMLIN CAN
BE RESET WITH
AN APOLOGY.

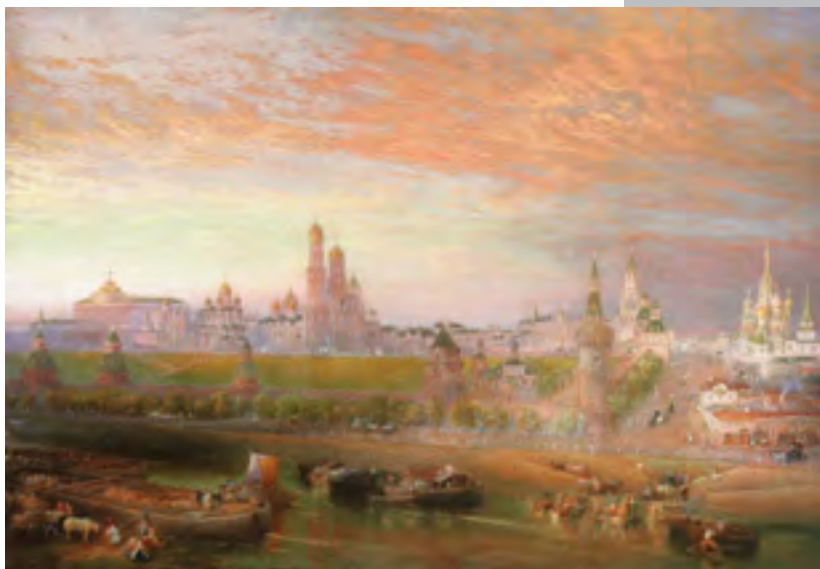
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IS AT WAR WITH THE WEST. PRETENDING this is not the case or obfuscating the character of the conflict with delicate semantic constructions does not make it any less so. Russia has established strategic objectives that violate the sovereignty of its neighbors and threaten the stability of the international system. It has selectively deployed tools from the full range of state power, including the overt and covert use of force, to achieve those objectives. Yet this simple realization eludes many in the West, particularly those who are far from the geographic points of physical contact. If they did acknowledge Russia's aggression, many Westerners would demand an immediate response. Instead, these observers question the existence of any war instigated by Moscow because they do not see a game played by Western rules or at a level of force commensurate with the worst expectations of Cold War-era thinking. Skeptics will point at the skylines of Washington, London, and Paris and insist that a state of conflict can be disproven by the unbroken vistas of the Western centers of power. Russia, the only state that poses an existential threat to the United States, could obliterate these capitals in a matter of minutes, and the fact that it has not done so means there is no war.¹ If there is no state of war between Russia and the West, these thinkers conclude, then there must be peace.

Some Westerners have envisioned a third possibility, a "gray zone" in which conflict can seethe below the threshold of open conventional warfare.² The war-or-peace polarity, nevertheless, is a Western idiosyncrasy that is not shared by Russia. Russian strategists have long held that the natural condition between states is a continuous struggle for relative advantage, albeit to varying degrees of intensity.³ Western efforts to admonish Russia for an action or policy are made with the preferred Western instruments of peace, diplomacy, and economic pressure, which are used in the same way they would be to enforce the rules of behavior among members of the generally cooperative liberal world order. Western leaders sometimes excuse negative Russian behavior as the result of misunderstandings or the insensitive actions of other Western states, and seem to assume that relations with the Kremlin can be reset with an apology and an affirmation of Russia's status in the world.⁴

These efforts have failed. Even worse, they have legitimized Russian leader Vladimir Putin's gains by failing to reverse them and have diverted attention from the rebirth of authoritarianism in Russia. Under the "sovereign democracy" and authoritarian "power vertical" principles that are the core of Putinism, the Putin regime is strengthening its grasp on domestic power, is increasingly willing to use force to maintain its dominance in the near abroad, and is applying pressure to the rifts between EU and NATO members to undermine and ultimately fracture its main geopolitical rivals.⁵ The uniqueness of the Russian approach—the weaponization of soft power, the masked sponsorship of violence, the use of propaganda to promote uncertainty among Westerners and excuse their inaction, and the calculated use of military force to preserve the initiative—is a result of its determined efforts to realize strategic objectives while avoiding a direct confrontation with Western military power.

Historical Precedence

Recent Russian actions against Georgia and Ukraine have confounded the West precisely because they embody this approach: the offensive pursuit of strategic objectives through the slow erosion of the target's national power, while deliberately avoiding direct engagement with NATO's military power. Russia could easily overpower small neighbors like Georgia and Ukraine if it committed to an all-out invasion. The lesson that offensive-realists like Putin took away from the 1991 Gulf War, however, was that when Iraqi President Saddam Hussein committed the state's military power to the annexation of Kuwait, his isolated force became vulnerable to a much stronger Western coalition. Once the military element of state power was outmatched and annihilated, Hussein was quickly challenged on multiple fronts, and his hold on power was threatened. Putin's quandary, in light of this example, was how to pursue Russia's offensive-realist goal of dominating its neighbors without jeopardizing one of the principal pillars of Russian national strength, its armed forces.



The Kremlin, Moscow, 1860, by John Cooke Bourne

The strategy of focusing the non-military elements of national power on degrading an adversary's ability or will to resist while preserving the military for the culminating blow is not a product of post-Soviet thinking. In 1920, Alexander Svechin specifically articulated such a theory of Soviet warfare in his appropriately titled thesis, *Strategy of Attrition*.⁶ Through a purely pragmatic application of mathematics, Svechin realized that the industrial capacity for destruction demonstrated in the First World War had far outpaced any nation's ability to generate and field forces. Calculations of national strength based on numbers of men-under-arms or the military-age population were unreliable once the means to kill off these troops by the thousands became readily available. To commit a state's armed force to an offensive action, he concluded, was to make that force (and therefore the state) vulnerable to annihilation. Attrition should, therefore, be executed primarily in the political space, through economics, diplomacy, and information, but its effects should remain focused on an enemy's ability and will to wage war. Svechin theorized that the military should be used to posture and threaten, and to support diplomacy or information activities, but it must be used offensively only to quickly consolidate an objective before reassuming a defensive position and deescalating any of its activities that might invite external intervention.



Alexander Svechin

As products of Soviet political-military education, Vladimir Putin and his *siloviki* (literally, "persons of force" or inner circle) were certainly familiar with Svechin's concept of conducting war in the absence of open hostilities.⁷ They have simply adapted the concept to fit the post-Communist realities of twenty-first-century Russia. Whether it is the result of centuries of invasion from all directions or some other reason, Russians see international relations through the prism of realism.⁸ They don't place their faith in the international order to ensure the defense of the Russian state; rather they assume that the only true guarantor of

Russian sovereignty is Russia itself, which they believe is constantly under threat.⁹ Because all non-Russians are potential enemies, furthermore, the security of the Russian state is promoted by advancing Russian leverage over the “buffer” states of the near abroad. Distrust of the international order does not, however, mean that Russian leaders are unaware of its importance to the idea of liberalism and that Russia is no match for the Western nations’ collective defense. Putin’s new strategy of attrition—the hybrid combination of political means and the application of violence short of acknowledged state-on-state warfare—seeks to exploit the vulnerabilities of this order. Putin will continue to pursue strategic objectives that violate neighbors’ sovereignty without risking the military pillar of Russian state security by directly challenging NATO’s conventional military power.

The West’s diplomatic and economic efforts have failed to change Russia’s increasingly belligerent trajectory because they are based on the flawed assumption that Russia shares the belief that it is at peace with the West. Like the West, Russia uses diplomatic, informational, and economic instruments, but to far different ends. They are a means to promote Russian national strength by preserving the current regime’s hold on power and undermining the state’s geopolitical rivals, the EU and NATO. Rather than a case of overreach in the arena of acceptable interstate competition, this is a calculated strategy aimed at fracturing and dissolving the bonds within these organizations to undermine any coherent response to Russian aggression.

By regularly promising a diplomatic resolution to the naïve West, liberally applying economic coercion against the target state(s), and sowing confusion among all parties by manipulating information, the Putin regime combines political warfare with various non-attributable instruments

of violence, such as troops out of uniform. The result is a synthesis of available means to achieve deliberate political ends while minimizing most of the risks associated with traditional war.¹⁰ The Russian Federation’s hybrid warfare extends far beyond the Soviet Union’s Cold War subversion, principally because it has not been countered in kind. The mechanisms and inclination to do so were shuttered or redirected in the West following the collapse of the ideological firewall that separated East and West before



Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin, 2008

the demise of the Communist empire. The Russian Federation has resurrected the subversion and deception that the Soviets practiced as “active measures” within the trappings of Russian nationalism and a philosophy of rising pan-Eurasian power that is destined to rival and defeat a morally bankrupt West.¹¹ Russia is at war with the West because Russian leaders believe it to be so, and they will maintain the initiative in this war until the West acknowledges the nature of the conflict and widens both the range and intensity of its response.

Divergent Perspectives on National Power: DIME

Whatever the momentary advantages either side may have achieved during the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the West ultimately reached a certain level of equilibrium across the DIME (diplomacy, information, military, and economics) spectrum of national power. Eventually, the massive economic advantages of the West bankrupted the Soviet Union’s ability to sustain itself, and almost overnight, the generations-old Western view of Communist Russia as the “evil empire” gave way to wishful thinking that the new Russian Federation would quickly internalize and adopt the shared values of a cooperative international order and begin to realize its full potential. Unfortunately,

Russians met the Western preference for mirror-imaging (assuming one's subject thinks the same way as oneself), and the belief that Russian actions and diplomatic engagements were meant in the same context and spirit as any other Western state, with mistrust and suspicion. Into this vacuum of ideological opposition, Russian *maskirovka* (literally, "masked," or calculated deception) was reborn and began to flourish.¹² As Russia slowly rebuilt its national power under Boris Yeltsin and his chosen successor, Vladimir Putin, its leaders learned to exploit the information networks and economic interdependencies emerging with globalization to pursue their offensive-realist objectives of dominating the near abroad and undermining cohesive resistance among those they perceived to be their principal threats.¹³

Diplomacy

Where mutual suspicion called for the rigorous verification and enforcement of any agreement during the Cold War, Western assumptions of good faith currently have given the Russians carte blanche to make and break compacts with few repercussions, granting Moscow the initiative in changing the political dynamic between itself and an adversary.¹⁴ Russia has used its veto in the UN Security Council to end any serious discussion of international penalties for its coercive actions against Georgia and Ukraine. The Kremlin offers to be the diplomatic broker for other conflicts (e.g., Iraq and Syria) and expects to be

PUTIN'S INFORMATION OPERATIONS ARE MORE INCLINED TO FABRICATE MULTIPLE REALITIES WITH LITTLE REGARD FOR OBJECTIVE FACT.

UN Security Council



consulted concerning crises that it caused (e.g., Ukraine and Azerbaijan) but claims no part in. The West worries about provoking Russia and accepts terms that are unenforceable and that afford Russia the time and space to improve its position for further aggression. Russia never negotiates in “good faith” and will abide by an agreement only to the extent that it serves Russian interests. Russia wraps all of its actions in claims of legitimacy; for example, Moscow frequently touts its status in Syria as an invited guest of President Bashar al-Assad as a means to shape discussions of the conflict around the legalisms of international intervention, while avoiding the topic of Russia’s complicity in intentional attacks on civilians. In a similar way, Moscow’s claim that it had a moral obligation to defend the human rights of ethnic Russians in Ukraine from (nonexistent) state persecution became the justification for the annexation of Crimea.¹⁵

Information

Using the widely connected and uncensored network of television and digital media at its disposal, Russia has vastly outstripped its rivals’ minor efforts to spin and influence small stories. It has flooded the information space with a deluge of propaganda, disinformation, and falsehoods that serve to both obscure the truth regarding its actions and bolster the positions of those who argue against resolute action on the part of the West. Where Soviet-era disinformation sought to build narratives around some grain of truth to promote credibility, Putin’s information operations are more inclined to fabricate multiple realities with little regard for objective fact.¹⁶ The Kremlin has demonstrated a significant level of control over the media (particularly internet and television) and has dominated the message, which is anti-US and anti-EU, but pro-anything that causes problems for either of those entities. The West has no coherent message to counter Putin’s crushing of opposition movements and his sponsorship of violence.

Military

While Western militaries have been increasingly frustrated in their efforts to prove theories of counterinsurgency and to wage battle against terrorist tactics, the Russians have invested in rebuilding conventional capabilities while simultaneously experimenting with a variety of surrogate options to facilitate deniability. Following troop reductions after the end of the Cold War, US land power in Europe has steadily declined to two combat brigades by 2015, while Russia still has hundreds of thousands of troops stationed a short train ride to the east.¹⁷ US and NATO military efforts are designed to “not provoke,” while Russian actions are calculated to coerce neighbors, test defensive measures, and provide options whenever Moscow senses an emerging potential to gain advantage. Russia uses

Victory Day Parade, Moscow 2015



land power to threaten and bully and to test Western reactions, and it can do so without sending any forces out of Russian territory.

Almost as important as the underlying military capability is the image of determination and confidence that power projects. Russia manages the image of its forces to create the impression that they have fully modernized, and that all of the troops are professionals fully equipped with the latest generation of rifles and night-vision equipment. In fact, Russia has a top-heavy officer corps and a token NCO corps, and it relies heavily on conscription to fill out its ranks. It advertises the invincibility of its new tanks while downplaying the humiliation of its latest generation of air-defense weapons, one of which caught fire in the middle of a 2015 Victory Day Parade.¹⁸ The result is that Russia creates a perception of military ability and strength of will that is sufficient to give the United States pause as it considers how to meet its NATO and bilateral defense obligations.

Economics

Targeted sanctions against Russian elites have not reversed Russian policies. For its part, Moscow subsidizes key foreign industries (such as Ukrainian heating oil) to keep prices low and foster dependency. It then raises prices at critical moments to influence elections or demand various concessions. Russia has quarantined goods from Georgia, Ukraine, the Baltic states, Finland, Turkey, and the United States to make a point during periods of tension. Unlike Western sanctions, which are meant to reinforce international norms of behavior, Russia uses economic coercion to undermine demonstrations of sovereignty, such as Ukraine's intention to join the EU. Russian embargoes are barely noticed in the United States, but their impact on smaller countries like Moldova and Azerbaijan can collapse governments.

Russia also puts very influential Westerners on the boards of important Russian companies.¹⁹ Paid extravagant "consulting" fees, these connected politicians and businessmen become advocates for Russian policies whenever their lucrative incomes are threatened. Western powers are reluctant to be too forceful with Moscow about playing by the rules because of the number of Western companies with strong economic interests in Russia.²⁰ The Western preference is to view Russia's elites as a collection of entrepreneurs who want to participate in the free market alongside their Western peers. In actuality, what has emerged in Russia in the last decade is anything but a free market—something more akin to a statewide organized crime syndicate. The central government controls the conditions for international trade and is in turn backed by those who profit from this arrangement. Those who dissent suddenly find themselves afoul of the "law" and imprisoned or killed, after which their assets are seized by the state.²¹ Low-level crime and corruption are allowed to flourish as long as the government is not targeted and as long as whatever services are required (criminal, cyber, paramilitary) are at the government's disposal when needed. The West maintains a significant economic advantage over Russia, so Putin has chosen to forego direct competition in this arena, opting instead for local bilateral arrangements that provide Moscow with economic leverage over certain neighbors. The Russian DIME no longer equals the Western DIME, and the Russians are using this fact to shape and consolidate political objectives with minimal risk to the state's armed forces.

“RUSSIA PUTS VERY INFLUENTIAL WESTERNERS ON THE BOARDS OF IMPORTANT RUSSIAN COMPANIES.”

Hybridizing Political Warfare with Violence

History almost always demonstrates that the objectives of war are shaped and prepared well before the introduction of forces. This is the essence of political warfare, to which Russia has added instruments of violence with which it continues to shape and consolidate objectives while remaining below the threshold of open war. The potential victim cannot determine the appropriate defensive measures until it correctly interprets the adversarial nature of Russia's actions in the political space. In such situations, it would behoove the defender to see the world as it is, and not as he wishes it to be. Failing to recognize Russia's low-intensity aggression as warfare is a conceptual problem for the West today. Russia is not the blossoming democracy that the world anticipated when the Iron Curtain fell—Putin's "sovereign democracy" is something very alien to Western principles of freedom and representative governance. In the economic arena, Russia is not simply going through the growing pains of an emerging free market in an unsteady global marketplace—its leaders are deliberately engineering market crises to control the state and exert political leverage abroad, and to strain relations between its former client states and the West.

“ THE KREMLIN FORMULATED A NARRATIVE TO COVER ITS COMPLICITY IN AL-ASSAD'S MASSACRES OF SYRIAN CIVILIANS. ”

Russia's 2008 military invasion of Georgia was not a knee-jerk response to Georgia's shelling of Russian "peacekeepers." It was a calculated insult to Georgia's sovereignty, a fact that Russia had revealed was its true goal four years earlier, when Moscow offered to help end the "Rose Revolution" in exchange for the right to appoint the Georgian ministers of the interior, defense, and security. Russia demanded this same concession for ending the Abkhazia-Georgia War in 1995.²² In the same vein, Russia's occupation of Crimea in 2014 was not to protect Russians in the near abroad from the imagined persecutions of fictional Ukrainian Nazis, nor even to exploit Ukraine's political chaos: it was a calculated move to grab strategically valuable real estate. The long-anticipated Crimean "opportunity" was a direct result of Moscow's gradual manipulation of crises in Ukraine, until the right moment presented itself and the prepared plan could be put in motion. Russia's intervention in Syria was not a determined blow against the spread of the Islamic State. Instead, by claiming to target the IS, the Kremlin formulated a narrative to cover its complicity in al-Assad's massacres of Syrian civilians. From its operations in Syria, Russia also learned the value of "weaponizing" human beings in the form of countless refugees who fled from Russian airstrikes into Turkey, Greece, and the rest of Europe. These "human swarms" have strained relations between EU members by taxing resources, testing border security, and calling into question open border policies.²³ Through simultaneously forcing the mass migration into Europe and promoting nationalist fears of cultural invasion, Russia directly influenced Britain's referendum to leave the EU.²⁴ In all of these cases, Russia has inserted itself at the center of diplomatic efforts to resolve conflicts, the promise of which has undermined any Western appetite for direct confrontation. Somehow, each new claim of sincerity in peace negotiations is given serious plausibility, despite Russia's active hand in initiating and exacerbating the violence.

Recommendations

The Russian Federation is at war with the West. It is a nasty, subversive campaign of deceit and manipulation, and Moscow uses every weakness of good faith in negotiation and open dialogue in a connected world to further its aims and

promote its position. It is time for the West to acknowledge that Russia's current regime is a hostile actor that poses an existential threat to the future of free societies. That giant stockpile of nuclear weapons will always put an upper ceiling on the potential for decisive actions against the Russian regime, but Western nations must fully examine the broad area beneath that mark to develop effective responses.

In Russia's view, only land power matches land power. While ships and aircraft and ballistic missiles are important ingredients in the general deterrent calculus, Russia estimates power based primarily on the number of troops on the ground and tanks in the field. During the Cold War, NATO and the United States expected that superior technology and training would overcome superior Soviet numbers in a conventional confrontation, but the backbone of resistance would still fall on the armored and infantry divisions of the allied armies. When Russia looks across the European plain today, it observes the lack of any real conventional strength standing between it and its expansionist objectives. The North Atlantic Alliance must fill this void with a capable and significant conventional land force if its members intend to reassert the expectation of deterrence.

Rebuilding significant land power capabilities will take time, and even if these forces were available tomorrow, they would not be enough to counter Russia's indirect strategy of political attrition, which is specifically meant to avoid a risky clash with Western military power. To meet this immediate need, the West must adopt practices that inflict a cost on Russia where Putin's current deterrent calculations anticipate none. This will require policy changes by certain Western governments to deny Russia access to international forums and markets and to undermine Russia's leverage over its neighbors. Anti-Russian movements in any non-Federation territory occupied by the Putin regime, such as the Crimean Tatars' resistance efforts, should be recognized as legitimate resistance and should be eligible for the full military and economic support of the West. The various Western state intelligence agencies and special operations units of Western forces should be directed to covertly target vulnerable nodes of Russian state power abroad, particularly those that support the Russian military, to levy a real price for Russian aggression. These targets should cover the range of Russian national power and should not be limited to actions that leave the initiative with Moscow. For example, Western operatives should seize Russian properties and assets; sabotage and sink naval vessels produced in foreign ports before they can be delivered to the Russian navy; and place bounties on Russian cyber operatives and thieves as a way to extend the rule of law into Russia's territorial "sanctuary". These kinds of actions could be conducted under layers of deniability commensurate with Russia's denial of involvement abroad, but the message of intention and reciprocity should be clear.

The final action that must be undertaken immediately is an all-out information blitz aimed at the Russian people themselves. It is not enough to try to counter individual instances of Kremlin misinformation. Instead, Western information resources should aim at isolating Putin from Russian popular support. It should be the stated goal of the West not to pursue regime change in Russia, but it is vital to specifically attribute Russia's increasing isolation and economic distress to the actions of its chosen leader. The Russian people's political alternatives are decreasing in number, and their options for democratic resolution

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are correspondingly few, but that is a reality they will have to contend with if they want to alter the current course of their nation.

To fight this Russian style of war, the West must acknowledge that it is taking place and then demonstrate that it is willing to use the full range of political tools, including violence, to shape and consolidate similar strategic objectives. The more vulnerable members of Eastern Europe and Central Asia must avoid the cost-cutting temptations of the liberal order, where expectations of collective defense and enforced stability have led some governments to forget their unilateral responsibilities for ensuring their country's sovereignty. These countries must examine any bilateral arrangement with Russia to make certain they do not cede a coercive advantage, and scrutinize all of Russia's actions and stated motives with suspicion. A targeted nation's intelligence agents must expend every effort to learn Russia's capabilities and intentions. In the absence of sound intelligence to the contrary, the prospective victim must assume malevolence behind any Russian activity directed its way. Vulnerable nations must enact clear laws that keep vital defense and other markets under domestic control and all sectors of the economy independent of Russian patronage. Their militaries must be equipped and trained to a point at which Moscow cannot be certain of swift military success. Their governments must prepare for a coordinated resistance and promise a resolute campaign of unconventional warfare in any territory Putin attempts to occupy, so that allies will have time to mount a response. Finally, when Moscow's hostile intentions are known, the defender must take deliberate, calculated asymmetric actions to inflict a physical cost on the elements of Russian power, particularly the military element whose preservation is the calculation that drives Russian hybrid warfare. ♦

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NOTES

- 1 Jacqueline Klimas, "Military Leaders Name Russia as Top Threat to US," *Washington Times*, 21 July 2015: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/jul/21/military-leaders-name-russia-top-threat-us/?page=all>
- 2 Some Westerners have described a third option: a "gray zone" in which conflict can seethe below the threshold of open conventional warfare. Conflict and violence in this space are not the preferred Western paradigms for military action and therefore few Western military systems or organizations are optimized to function in this environments. Philip Kapusta, *The Gray Zone*, USSOCOM White Paper (Carlisle, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, 9 September 2015):: <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB1303.pdf> . Nadia Schadlow calls the gray zone "the space between" politics and military action. See Nadia Schadlow, "Peace and War: The Space Between," *War on the Rocks* (commentary), 18 August 2014: <http://warontherocks.com/2014/08/peace-and-war-the-space-between/>
- 3 John J. Dziak, *Soviet Perceptions of Military Power: The Interaction of Theory and Practice* (New York: Crane, Russak, & Co., 1981), ix.
- 4 A fundamental principle of sovereignty is that nations are free to enter into arrangements and partnerships with other nations as they see fit. When the Republic of Georgia made clear that it intended to pursue NATO membership and seek further economic integration with the West, Russia dramatically increased military support (and leadership) for separatist movements in neighboring Abkhazia and the breakaway Georgian province of South Ossetia.

- Following the 2008 invasion of Georgia, many Westerners were quick to take up the Kremlin narrative that Russia was merely responding to threatening NATO expansion into areas where Russia had a “right” to assert itself. This narrative informed US foreign policy for the incoming Barack Obama Administration, which attempted to “reset” relations by cancelling the deployment of new missile defenses in Eastern Europe. Russia nevertheless was not deterred from pursuing offensive objectives in Ukraine. Such misjudgment of intentions can be attributed to the vastly different perspectives on the international order held by liberal Western states and the realist regime in Moscow.
- Simon Shuster, “US-Russia Relations: In Need of a New Reset,” *Time*, 16 March 2010: <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1971651,00.html>. See also John J. Mearsheimer, “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault,” *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2014): <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>
- 5 For a description of the characteristics of Putin’s “sovereign democracy” or “managed democracy,” see Andrew Jack, *Inside Putin’s Russia: Can There Be Reform without Democracy?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 328. See also Peter Baker and Susan Glasser, *Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin’s Russia and the End of Revolution* (Lincoln, Neb.: Potomac Books, 2007), 270, 300–301. For a description of Putin’s “power vertical,” see Alexander Dugin, *Putin vs Putin: Vladimir Putin Viewed from the Right* (London: Arktos Media, 2014), 103; and Marcel H. Van Herpen, *Putin’s Wars: The Rise of Russia’s New Imperialism* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 57. To the pillars of sovereign democracy and the power vertical, Van Herpen adds Russian Orthodoxy as the third element of Putin’s philosophy for the strength of the Russian state.
 - 6 Richard W. Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904–1940* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 129.
 - 7 Lilia F. Shevtsova, *Putin’s Russia* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), 86. *Siloviki*, or strongmen, is a pun used for Russian politicians and bureaucrats with backgrounds in the military or security services.
 - 8 Joseph S. Nye, *Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History*, 4th ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2003), 4–5. See also John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2001), 21.
 - 9 While all nations consider survival to be a paramount strategic principle, Putin’s conceptualization of his place at the center of state stability means that he views his unchallenged grip on domestic power as a matter of national survival. While crushing internal dissent, he simultaneously seeks to prevent the near abroad from being used as a springboard to introduce alien forms of democracy into the Russian conversation, and to undermine the distant Western regimes that foster and promote challenges to his power. See S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell, eds., *Putin’s Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and Its Discontents* (Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2014), 5–10: <https://www.silkroadstudies.org/resources/1409GrandStrategy.pdf>; and Stephen Blank, “The Intellectual Origins of the Eurasian Union Project,” in Starr and Cornell, *Putin’s Grand Strategy*, 18.
 - 10 Instruments of violence range from targeted assassinations, actions by criminal organizations, and the active support of proxies and surrogates under Russian commanders, to the deployment of disguised Russian soldiers and their equipment as “separatists” or “patriotic volunteers.” Many definitions of hybrid warfare involve various combinations of these means. In fact, military engagements have almost always included mixes of regulars and irregulars. What makes the Russian application unique is the absence of an acknowledged military conflict and the range of ways these actors are used to shape and consolidate objectives short of conventional war.
 - 11 Richard H. Shultz and Roy Godson, *Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy* (New York: Berkley Books, 1986), 193. “Active measures” was the Soviet term for overt and covert actions taken to influence, subvert, and coerce foreign governments through all manner of influence agents, propaganda, deception, paramilitary actions, and conventional military maneuvers.
 - 12 Lucy Ash, “How Russia Outfoxes Its Enemies,” *BBC News Magazine*, 28 January 2015: <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-31020283>
 - 13 Vladimir Putin, “Russia and the Changing World” [in Russian], *Moscow News*, 27 February 2012: <http://www.mn.ru/politics/20120227/312306749.html>. In this speech, Putin provides his perspective on the meaning of “soft power” by describing it as the instruments that a state can use to accomplish its objectives without the use of weapons. There is a very clear coercive tone to this description, wherein the non-military elements of state power are used to accomplish the military objectives of war.
 - 14 In his famous observation of the post-war Soviet system, George Kennan noted that Russia’s leaders knew that their form of autocratic rule was antiquated and vulnerable to more attractive forms of governing. Instead of reform, they had historically chosen isolation to prevent democratic ideas from spreading into Russia and undermining their hold on power. This fear had evolved into a belief that the security of the regime could only be ensured through a “patient but deadly struggle for total destruction of rival power, never in compacts or compromises with it.” See George F. Kennan, *The Charge in the Soviet Union (Kennan) to the Secretary of State* (telegram to George Marshall), 22 February 1946, part 2: <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm>
 - 15 Roy Allison, “Russian ‘Deniable’ Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules,” *International Affairs* 90, no. 6 (November 2014): 1263.
 - 16 Peter Pomerantsev and Michael Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture, and Money* (New York: Institute of Modern Russia, 22 November 2014), 9: <http://www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/PW-31.pdf>
 - 17 “2015 Index of U.S. Military Strength: Europe,” The Heritage Foundation, 2015: <http://index.heritage.org/military/2015/chapter/op-environment/europe/>
 - 18 Hayley Coyle, “Victory Day: Watch Russian Missile Tank Catch Fire during Putin’s Elaborate War Celebrations,” *Mirror*, 9 May 2015: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/victory-day-watch-russian-missile-5671253>
 - 19 One of the most prominent of these politicians-turned-Putin-advocates is former German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder (1988–2005). Schroeder actively championed a Russo-German pipeline while he was in office, and he was given a senior position on GAZPROM’s board after he left office. He continued in this position while GAZPROM used its pipeline monopoly to coerce Russia’s neighbors, and publicly declared that Putin’s actions in Ukraine had the same moral weight as NATO operations during the Kosovo crisis. Craig Whitlock and Peter Finn, “Schroeder Accepts Russian Pipeline Job,” *Washington Post*, 10 December 2005: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/12/09/AR2005120901755.html>; Tony Paterson, “Merkel Fury after Gerhard Schroeder Backs Putin on Ukraine,” *Telegraph*, 14 March 2014: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10697986/Merkel-fury-after-Gerhard-Schroeder-backs-Putin-on-Ukraine.html>.

- For a more detailed examination of Putin's use of corruption to promote state interests, see Karen Dawisha, *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).
- 20 Despite endemic corruption, cronyism, and currency manipulation, Russia was invited into the G8 economic forum in 1998. This invitation represented an effort to induce Russia to abide by international rules by overlooking Russia's actual practices. Russia was kicked out of the G8 in March 2014, following the occupation of Crimea, but this action did little to stop the Kremlin's instigation of violence in Eastern Ukraine or its support for al-Assad in Syria.
 - 21 Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a Russian oligarch who challenged Putin in 2003 and spent 10 years in prison, is the most famous example on a constantly growing list.
 - 22 Thornike Gordadze, "Georgian-Russian Relations in the 1990s," in *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, eds. Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 28–35.
 - 23 EU members do not agree on the permeability of borders between members or between the EU and affiliated non-members. For a brief overview of the Schengen Agreement and a list of signatories see "Schengen: Controversial EU Free Movement Deal Explained," *BBC News*, 24 April 2016: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-13194723>. For examples of the effects of the migration crisis on specific European countries, see "How Is the Migrant Crisis Dividing EU Countries?" BBC, 4 March 2016: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34278886>
 - 24 The UK's "Brexit" vote to leave the EU is widely attributed to the fear, deliberately inflamed by some politicians, that Britain was going to be overrun with Syrian and other refugees. "Immigration Fears Caused Brexit Vote, David Cameron Tells Brussels," *Daily Mail*, 28 June 2016: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-3663125/David-Cameron-face-EU-leaders-time-Brexit-vote.html>; "White Riot," *Vox*, 19 September 2016: <http://www.vox.com/2016/9/19/12933072/far-right-white-riot-trump-brexit>

Russian Aggression toward Ukraine: A Long-Term Example of Hybrid Warfare

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MANY PEOPLE ASSUME THAT RUSSIAN AGGRESSION TOWARD UKRAINE began early in 2014, when largely peaceful anti-government protests in Kiev turned violent, and Russian forces without insignia subsequently crossed into eastern Ukraine to support a separatist uprising there.¹

A close examination of the events that led up to that period shows, however, that Russia had been carrying out not only information operations, but also other clandestine and special operations against Ukraine for more than a decade. Russia was providing financial support to different subversive organizations in Ukraine as well, in a concerted effort to push Ukraine away from the European Union and toward Moscow. Thus, a range of what are now termed *hybrid operations*, or *hybrid warfare*, was in play for many years, across Ukraine's regions and all sectors of Ukrainian society and institutions, long before 2014.

Divide and Concur: A Common Approach in Russian Warfare

Ukraine is a multi-ethnic unitary state, in which ethnic Ukrainians constitute the majority in all regions except Crimea. In a 1991 referendum following the breakup of the Soviet Union, 90 percent of Ukraine's citizens voted for the country's independence from Russia, while only seven percent voted to remain part of the new Russian Federation (RF). Even in Crimea and its main city of Sevastopol, where the Russian Black Sea Fleet is berthed, more than half of voters opted for independence. In the Donbas region, which also has a large ethnic Russian population, only 12 to 13 percent opposed independence.

Many Westerners don't realize that Ukraine, with its rich farmland and abundant natural resources, was never a voluntary member of either the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union, and that Ukrainians have struggled persistently to retain or win back their right of self-determination throughout the territory's troubled history. Because of Ukraine's large population and the people's willingness to put up armed resistance, Russia has typically chosen methods of unconventional warfare as its main tool of influence in Ukraine.

It is difficult to say exactly when Russia developed a plan to break up Ukraine. Considering the Soviet national policy of controlling republics through infrastructure integration, the layout of major logistical infrastructure and strategic pipelines across Ukraine make it possible to believe that plans for such a contingency existed even before 1991. Active preparations for the plan's practical implementation, however, began only just before Ukraine's presidential elections in 2004. The population of Ukraine became the main tool of this plan. Two candidates, each of whom represented one ethnic constituency while being unacceptable to the other, became the leading candidates in the presidential race. Viktor Yanukovich, a native of Donetsk in the largely Russian-speaking Donbas region of southeastern Ukraine, stood for the pro-Russian part of society, while

I—The Workers' Paradise

In 1917, at the time of the Bolshevik revolution, Ukraine was an independent state. Following the revolution, the Bolshevik Party did not have sufficient support within Ukraine to come to power through elections, so its leaders established a parallel government, the so-called "Provisional Government of Workers and Peasants of Ukraine," in the Russian city of Kursk. This puppet structure served as a pretext for Soviet Russia's military invasion of Ukraine in December 1918. The fighting ended in 1922 with the final occupation and liquidation of the Ukrainian Republic and the creation of the Ukrainian SSR as a component of the USSR.

Viktor Yushchenko was the pro-Ukrainian candidate and a supporter of integration with the EU.² The choice between them meant that the election would inevitably polarize Ukrainian society and possibly instigate civil and regional conflicts.

Beginning some time before the elections, the population of Donbas was subjected to an information campaign apparently designed to inflame separatist sentiments and create a false sense of ethnic identity in Ukrainians of Russian background.³ Local TV stations actively promoted the idea of a “Donbas identity” and a sense of regional solidarity through the popularization of local history exclusively about the imperial and Soviet periods and famous figures from Donbas. Pro-Russian President Leonid Kuchma’s appointment of Yanukovich as prime minister of Ukraine in 2002 and the inclusion of a significant percentage of ministers from Donetsk in his government were presented as a great victory for the region. The first round of the presidential elections was scheduled for 31 October 2004.

Russian Influence during the Orange Revolution

Viktor Yushchenko, the pro-EU candidate, became seriously ill in September 2004 while campaigning for president and nearly died. His face was severely disfigured as a result, and several specialists believed he had been poisoned by dioxin.

2—Heorhij Gongadze and the Troika of Oligarchs

Modern Russian hybrid operations in Ukraine began in 2000 with the murder of Ukrainian opposition journalist Heorhij Gongadze, while he was investigating corruption among the close network around Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma.ⁱ Some reports claimed that Gongadze was killed by Russia’s secret service, the FSB,ⁱⁱ to discredit Kuchma in the eyes of the international community and the Ukrainian people, and to undermine his cooperation with representatives of Ukraine’s pro-Western democratic parties.ⁱⁱⁱ The murder instigated street protests, isolated Ukraine internationally, and initiated the collapse of Ukraine’s democratic pro-Western coalition while strengthening the pro-Kremlin faction. It also led to the appointment of Viktor Medvedchuk, an oligarch and close friend of Russian leaders Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev, as head of the Administration of the President of Ukraine.

Active efforts to bring Ukraine back under de facto Russian control continued for the next 14 years. The main tools of these efforts were oligarchs and businessmen who were granted privileged access to the corrupt process that privatized the Ukrainian economy and its strategic sectors following independence in 1991.^{iv} Over the next 10 years, these oligarchs not only monopolized Ukraine’s industrial sector, media, and infrastructure, but also acquired considerable influence over the country’s political processes, reportedly with political, financial, and organizational support from the Russian FSB and Russian criminal organizations.^v Three of these men, Dmitry Firtash, Rinat Akhmetov, and Igor Kolomoisky, became the most influential billionaires in Ukraine. Firtash is a partner in Russia’s state-run television company, while the Russian energy firm Gazprom is a co-owner of Firtash’s RosUkrEnergO.^{vi} Akhmetov, at one point the wealthiest man in Ukraine thanks to his control of the coal and oil industries, was in partnership with Firtash and Russian-born billionaire Vadim Novinsky (who became a Ukrainian citizen in 2012). Kolomoisky is a partner in the enterprises of Russian oligarchs Roman Abramovich and Alexander Zhukov.^{vii} These three Ukrainian oligarchs purchased strategic Ukrainian state assets in part through Russian state banks such as VTB (*ВТБ*), Sberbank (*СБЕРБАНК*), and VEB (*ВЭБ*).^{viii} They also control the most influential Ukrainian media, which gives them almost full control over who among Ukrainian politicians and public figures will become popular, or even simply become known. Firtash, Akhmetov, and Kolomoisky remain the primary sources of funding for any political activity in Ukraine, using their wealth among both pro-Russian and pro-Western parties to control seats in the parliament and local councils.

ⁱ “Outspoken Ukraine Journalist Missing,” BBC, 19 September 2000: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/world/monitoring/media_reports/932310.stm; “Ukraine’s ‘Censorship Killing,’” BBC, 14 February 2001.

ⁱⁱ Volodymyr Arieu, “Another Version of the Murder of Georgy Gongadze: Marchuk, Medvedchuk, and FSB” [in Ukrainian], *Ukrayinska Pravda*, 24 May 2005: <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/articles/2005/05/24/4388577/>; Alexander Ilchenko, “Gongadze Was Killed by KGB Agent ‘Soldatov’” [in Russian], *Segodnya*, 23 August 2011: <http://www.segodnya.ua/politics/power/honhadze-ubival-ahent-khb-coldatov.html>; “Was Pukach an Agent of the Security Services?” [in Russian], *Ukrayinska Pravda*, 23 August 2011: <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2011/08/23/6522091/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Vasył Tuhlyuk, “The Death of Gongadze: Ladder to Power?” [in Ukrainian], *Ukraina Moloda*, 19 April 2005: <http://tema.in.ua/article/110.html>

^{iv} “Kolomoisky Said That in 2004 Paid \$5 Million Bribe for the Monthly Management ‘Ukrnafta’” [in Ukrainian], ZN.ua, 5 March 2015: http://dt.ua/ECONOMICS/kolomoyskiy-rozpoviv-yak-u-2004-roci-plativ-5-mln-habara-schomisyacya-za-upravlinnya-ukrnaftoyu-167933_.html

^v Heorhij Semenets, “Rinat Akhmetov: The Myth” [in Russian], *Argument*, 5 May 2014: <http://argumentua.com/stati/rinat-akhmetov-mif>

^{vi} “Ukraine’s Fugitive Oligarch: Catch Me if You Can,” *Economist*, 3 May 2015: <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21650382-america-wants-prosecute-dmitry-firtash-austrian-court-refuses-extradite-him-catch-me-if>

^{vii} The information about these oligarchs is from before the Orange and Maidan Revolutions. The status of many of their assets has changed, for better or for worse, since the upheavals of 2014.

^{viii} Oleksandr Pashover, “Smell of Gecy: Akhmetov and Firtash Are the Main Buyers of Large Property in Ukraine” [in Ukrainian], *Korrespondent*, 2 December 2011: <http://kreston-ggc.com/ua/press/publications/energo.html>

3—Two Viktors: The People's Choice

Viktor Yanukovich is a native of the largely Russian-speaking industrial Donbas region. He was twice convicted of violent crimes in his youth, but later became an economist before turning to politics. The more liberal Europhile voters in Ukraine considered his candidacy to be offensive to their values.ⁱ

Rival candidate Viktor Yushchenko was a centrist politician who, although favoring ties with the EU, was quite loyal to the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine. Russian propaganda nevertheless portrayed him as a right-wing extremist—even a neo-Nazi. He was said to be a puppet of the United States who threatened not only to ban the Russian language in Ukraine, but also to persecute its native speakers.ⁱⁱ This image of Yushchenko was disseminated in part through the creation of both real and fake extreme-right organizations, which made outrageous public statements to misrepresent his views and held rowdy demonstrations in support of his candidacy.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ Peter Byrne, "From Prison to President," *Kyiv Post*, 11 February 2010: <http://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine/from-prison-to-president-59338.html>; "Profile: Ukraine's Ousted President Viktor Yanukovich," BBC, 28 February 2014: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25182830>

ⁱⁱ Malcolm Haslett, "Yushchenko's Auschwitz Connection," BBC, 28 January 2005: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4215101.stm>

ⁱⁱⁱ "Akhmetov: Whoever Won, Donbas Will Live, Work, and Prosper" [in Ukrainian], *Korrespondent*, 25 December 2004: <http://ua.korrespondent.net/ukraine/251713-ahmetov-hto-b-ne-zdobuv-peremogu-donbas-bude-zhiti-pracyuvati-i-procvitati>; "Provocateurs Failed to Walk with Torches" [in Ukrainian], *Ukrayinska Pravda*, 4 September 2004: <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2004/09/9/3002339/>

4—Visual Aids

As the elections approached, pro-Russian media distributed a map of Ukraine that depicted the country's population divided into three classes. Western Ukrainians were represented as being first-class, those in Central Ukraine as second-class, and Ukrainians in the Russian-speaking southeast as third-class citizens.ⁱ Millions of such maps were printed and distributed, mainly in the southeastern regions of Ukraine.

ⁱ Mykola Tomenko, "Ideologists of Division of Ukraine into Three Classes Should Bear Criminal Responsibility" [in Ukrainian], *Tomenko.ua*, 2 July 2014: <http://tomenko.ua/komentari/ideolohy-podilu-ukrajiny-na-try-sorty-mayut-ponesty-kryminalnu-vidpovidalnist/>

5—The Southeast Ukrainian Autonomous Republic

On 26 November 2004, a session of the Luhansk Regional Council approved a decision to establish a "Southeast Ukrainian Autonomous Republic."ⁱ Council deputies declared the closure of external borders and appealed to Russian President Vladimir Putin for support. On that same day, Viktor Yanukovich's supporters in the Odessa region, headed by Odessa city mayor Ruslan Bodelan, adopted a resolution demanding recognition of Odessa and the whole Odessa region as a self-governing territory they called *Novorossiyskij kraj* (the New Russia region).ⁱⁱ

The next day, an extraordinary session of the Kharkiv Regional Council concentrated all governing authority in the hands of Governor Yevhen Kushnaryov, established executive committees of regional and district councils, and assigned the powers of state authorities to these councils. The session further ordered the regional offices of the Ukrainian State Treasury and National Bank to suspend transfers to the state budget. The representative of the Kharkiv Executive Committee, Yevhen Kushnaryov, was entrusted to coordinate the new body's actions with the *Verkhovna Rada* (Supreme Council) of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the corresponding councils of the Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, Luhansk, Odessa, Kherson, and Mykolaiv regions, as well as with the Sevastopol City Council. Subject to further "aggravation of the situation," Kushnaryov was expected to coordinate his actions with these other regions to break away from Ukraine and create the Southeast Ukrainian Autonomous Republic. The Ministry of Justice declared the decision by the Luhansk Regional Council illegal, and Yushchenko urged the prosecutor general of Ukraine to jail "people who raised the flag of national separatism."ⁱⁱⁱ

On 28 November in Severodonetsk, Yanukovich's supporters held an "All-Ukrainian congress of people's deputies and deputies of local councils," which recognized the election of Viktor Yanukovich as president of Ukraine.^{iv} If Yushchenko should win the second run-off, this body intended to demand a referendum to change the administrative and territorial division of Ukraine. Some delegates called for the creation of self-defense units and to proclaim the region's independence, with its capital in Kharkiv.^v

ⁱ Luhansk Regional Council, "On the Institutional Strengthening of Local Authorities in the Luhansk Region (No. 16/1)" [in Russian], 26 November 2004: <http://oblrada.lg.ua/node/2159>

ⁱⁱ Peter Kalandyrets, "Odessa Mayor Ruslan Bodelan Threatens to Create a 'Novorossiysk Edge'" [in Ukrainian], *Radio Svoboda*, 26 November 2004: <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/content/article/923436.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ "Kushnarev's Lawyers Say the Security Service's Decision to Initiate a Case on Separatism was Falsified" [in Ukrainian], *Censor.net*, 28 February 2006: http://censor.net.ua/news/60700/advokaty_kushnareva_zayavlyayut_cho_postanovlenie_sbu_o_vozbuzhdenii_dela_pro_separatizm_sfalsifit

^{iv} "Yanukovich Will Not be Able to Hold Autonomous Referendum?" [in Ukrainian], *Ukrayinska Pravda*, 28 December 2004: <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2004/12/28/3005835/>

^v "25 Years of Donbas Separatism: Part Two" [in Russian], *Redaktor*, 27 March 2016: http://politkuhnya.info/stati-analitika/25-let-donbasskogo-separatizma_-chast-vtoraya/page1.print

This situation significantly increased the radical sentiments of the pro-Western part of the electorate.⁴ Yushchenko's death under such circumstances would inevitably have led to civil conflict. Fortunately for Ukraine, Yushchenko survived and mobilized his supporters to be non-violent participants in the elections and to help monitor the results. No candidate reached the required 50 percent vote threshold to win in the first round of voting on 31 October, so a runoff between Yushchenko and Yanukovich was held on 21 November. Yanukovich was declared the winner. Yushchenko's supporters and international observers denounced the balloting as fraudulent, and the Orange Revolution (orange being the color of Yushchenko's faction) began.⁵ It was a typical example of a non-violent "color revolution," using civil disobedience and peaceful mass demonstrations as its major tools to force a government response.

As Yushchenko's supporters organized to demand a new ballot, several Russian-speaking towns and regions of south and southeast Ukraine, including Odessa, Luhansk, Kharkiv, and Sevastopol, among others, began taking steps to secede from Ukraine if Yanukovich's election were nullified. President Leonid Kuchma publicly took a stand against these movements—a decision that turned out to be crucial for the future of Ukraine. He urged separatists "not to take the country to pieces. ... Ideas expressed by the heads of local administrations do not comply with either the Constitution or Ukrainian law."⁶ The parties reached a compromise. Parliament voted on several amendments to the Constitution, which transferred significant powers from the president's office to Parliament. The Orange Revolution succeeded when Ukraine's Supreme Court annulled the runoff results and called for a new round of balloting, which Yushchenko won by a comfortable margin.

Today, it is difficult to say why Russia abandoned its efforts to split Ukraine in 2004. The most probable cause seems to have been the position of President Kuchma, who had strongly opposed the division of the country and didn't allow the army and security forces to escalate the confrontation with Yushchenko's supporters.⁷ For one thing, such an escalation would have threatened the main transit route for Russian gas and oil exports to Europe through the territory of Ukraine. The most likely explanation is that, despite the attempts of Russian propaganda to portray the liberal-democratic Yushchenko as a neo-Nazi and a threat to the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine, only a small part of the citizenry actually believed it. After the Orange Revolution's success, however, Russia's influence in Ukraine's politics did not decrease. This may have been one of the conditions of the compromise.⁸ The changes to the

Constitution and the appointment of Viktor Yanukovich as prime minister of Ukraine only one year after the revolution may have been another one.

The Escalation of Russian Hybrid Operations after the 2004 Presidential Election

Following the Orange Revolution, Russia focused on correcting its mistakes of 2004 and largely succeeded. Viktor Yushchenko never convincingly filled the role his opponents assigned him of a neo-Nazi fascist, and his eventual election as president failed to motivate genuine support for separatism in the southeast of Ukraine. The Russian Federation's security services, therefore, looked for another Ukrainian who could not only lead a nationalist parliamentary movement but also make it into the second round of elections against Yanukovich in 2015. This candidate had to be someone who both inspired fear in the Russian-speaking population of southern and eastern Ukraine and was too unethical to be supported by Western politicians.

Oleh Tyahnybok and his Social-National Party of Ukraine were chosen for this role from among all the marginalized nationalist movements and parties in Ukraine at the time. Tyahnybok had become widely known for his anti-Semitic statements in support of Yushchenko during the 2004 campaign, and neither he nor his party enjoyed great popularity.⁹ Despite outside support and an effort at rebranding with the name *Svoboda* ("Freedom"), the party remained marginal in the 2006 parliamentary elections.

If Tyahnybok or someone like him had appeared on the ballot instead of Yushchenko in the second round of voting in 2004, Moscow would have been satisfied to lose the several western Ukrainian provinces that would have strongly supported Tyahnybok, while Russia and its proxies maintained control over a major part of the more populous central and eastern parts of Ukraine.¹⁰ The worst-case scenario, which had been the plan in 2004, would have split Ukraine from north to south along the Dnipro (Dnieper) River. Such a split would have allowed Russia to control the southern branch of the Ukrainian gas pipeline system, an ammonia pipeline, access to the Black and Azov Seas, and major strategic industries, especially parts of the legacy military-industrial complex.¹¹ Moscow envisioned transferring many major enterprises from Ukraine to Russia, thereby stimulating the relocation of millions of loyalist (to Moscow) Russians to the

6—The Freedom Party

In the elections of 1998, the far-right Social-National Party of Ukraine (SNPU) gained 0.17 percent of the votes—next to last among all parties.ⁱ The party's name and its symbol, which resembled a swastika, undoubtedly helped scare away most voters, not only in the Russophile south and east but also those in Western Ukraine. The SNPU began rebranding in 2004, changing its name to the All-Ukrainian Union Svoboda ("Freedom") and discarding the swastika-like cross for a trident-like hand.ⁱⁱ Svoboda's representatives also gained the same access to the national media as the seated parliamentary parties and began to figure in major news stories and on most popular political shows. Despite its lack of popular support, Svoboda had enough campaign money for full-scale television, radio, and print advertising for the parliamentary elections of 2006.ⁱⁱⁱ Nevertheless, the party remained in its marginal niche with only 0.36 percent of the votes, and did only slightly better (0.76 percent) in early elections in 2007. In the 2010 presidential election, Oleh Tyahnybok received 1.43 percent of the votes.^{iv} Since Yanukovich was elected president in 2010, however, the dynamics of Tyahnybok's support dramatically changed, and he had a real chance to become the main rival of Yanukovich in 2015.

ⁱ Central Election Commission, n.d.: <http://www.cvk.gov.ua/pls/vd2002/webproc0v?kodvib=1&rejim=0>

ⁱⁱ "Tyahnybok Party Changed Its Name and Symbols to Avoid Being Compared with a Swastika" [in Ukrainian], *Ukrayinska Pravda*, 17 February 2004: <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2004/02/17/2998106/>

ⁱⁱⁱ "Regional Admitted That Tyahnybok Took Money from Yanukovich" [in Ukrainian], *Texty*, 10 August 2012: http://texty.org.ua/pg/video/editorial_1/read/7596/Regional_ziznavsa_shho_Tagnybok_brav_groshi_u

^{iv} Central Election Commission, n.d.: <http://www.cvk.gov.ua/>

7—Pipeline Diplomacy

In 2006, Russian energy producers, led by Russia's Gazprom, met with several northern European countries to begin developing plans for an alternative gas pipeline—"Nord Stream"—that would bypass Ukrainian territory by sending Russian natural gas under the Baltic Sea directly to Germany and the EU. Experts have questioned the economic viability of building this pipeline, which cost the organizers US\$7.5 billion.ⁱ In the author's opinion, Russia was not guided by economic factors, but by political ones. As Moscow prepares for aggression against Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic States, it is both ensuring itself an alternative gas export corridor and increasing Europe's dependence on Russian gas supplies. A proposed Nord Stream 2 pipeline is now being debated in the European Parliament.ⁱⁱ Another alternative pipeline, the "South Stream," which Russia had planned to launch in 2015 but suddenly shelved, would have run under the Black Sea to Bulgaria.ⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ Marcin Sobczyk and Gordon Fairclough, "Nord Stream Waste of Money, but Irrelevant for Poland," *Wall Street Journal*, 10 November 2011: http://blogs.wsj.com/emergingEurope/2011/11/09/nord-stream-waste-of-money-but-irrelevant-for-poland/?mod=google_news_blog

ⁱⁱ Karel Beckman, "Can Nord Stream 2 Be Stopped?" *Energy Post*, 14 April 2016: <http://www.energypost.eu/can-nord-stream-2-stopped/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Stephen Blank, "Russia Remains Set on South Stream Pipeline Project," *Oilprice.com*, 24 March 2016: <http://oilprice.com/Latest-Energy-News/World-News/Russia-Remains-Set-On-South-Stream-Pipeline-Project.html>

so-called "priority development regions": sparsely populated areas of the north, Siberia, and the Russian Far East, as well as to the national republics.

The task of bringing Oleh Tyahnybok to the second round of voting in 2015, given his extremely low electoral support at the beginning of 2010, seemed impossible.¹² Circumstances, however, were changing (or possibly being changed) in Moscow's favor. Yanukovich's Party of Regions won the local elections of 2010—the most brutal and dirtiest in the history of independent Ukraine—not only in all regions of eastern Ukraine but also across the province of Western Ukraine. Unexpectedly, only the Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Ternopil regions supported Tyahnybok's Svoboda party.¹³ The prerequisite circumstances for fanning Western Ukrainian separatism, with support from local authorities, were thus created. This was the best scenario for Russia, which would effectively control the territory and government of Ukraine—the official legal entity recognized worldwide—while Western Ukraine would become an unrecognized rebel state. This thinking also explains the decision in 2004 to postpone the splitting of Ukraine between east and west: the declaration of a Southeast Ukrainian Autonomous Republic would also have resulted in the creation of an unrecognized rebel state, but on the "wrong" side.

In April 2010, in response to the threat of Ukraine's dismemberment, a group of Ukrainian conflict resolution specialists and social and political strategists created a center-left civil movement called *Spilna Sprava* ("Common Cause").¹⁴ In Ukrainian, as in English, the name had positive connotations and was intended to symbolize cooperation between the western and eastern factions of Ukraine. Even the group's symbols used national colors and a stylized national emblem with two locked hands, symbolizing the unity of Ukraine's east and west. The organization's main goal was to remove Viktor Yanukovich from power through social protest and political revolution by 2015, while preventing the Russian Federation from using the revolution to divide the country.¹⁵ Common Cause, therefore, adopted a strategy targeted

to different regions which avoided controversial topics—such as linguistic, cultural, and historical issues—during the planned anti-regime protests.

Fake Leaders and Misinformation

Creating fake leaders in the “grassroots” protest movement was not a problem for the Putin regime. Participants gathered mostly spontaneously, without knowing each other or the national or regional organizers of the movement. Anyone could be chosen and named a representative of the protesters. The decisive role was performed by the media, which were mostly controlled by the Russian Federation and the Yanukovich regime.¹⁶ These fake leaders were assigned to be the movement’s public commentators: they were regular participants on various political talk shows and made public statements on behalf of the protesters. The main task of these artificial leaders was to keep protests narrowly focused against a punitive new tax code, while avoiding any political demands.¹⁷ In this way, they were able to mislead people about the true nature of the protest. False leaders were also assigned to be the main negotiators with the government.¹⁸ During these negotiations, they shifted the protest demands to those that were approved by the regime.

Financial Support from Russia

In 2012, Russians in official positions in Ukraine began to create organizations aimed at supporting the future territorial division of Ukraine. The experience of 2004 showed that Russia could not rely on corrupt local elites, even those within Yanukovich’s Party of Regions, when it came to such sensitive matters. Most of the Party of Regions representatives were interested only in keeping power in Ukraine, albeit with Russia’s support.

One such project was Victor Medvedchuk’s *Ukrainskij Vybir* (“Ukrainian Choice”), which openly campaigned against Ukraine’s accession to the EU and in favor of joining Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus in the Eurasian Customs Union. The group also actively promoted the idea of “direct democracy,” which meant that all important decisions would be made

8—Russian Security

Beginning in 2010, agents of influence and even staff members in the Russian special services were appointed to leadership positions in Ukraine’s security agencies.ⁱ For example, Alexander Yakimenko, who was head of the Security Service, served in Crimea as a member of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation until 1998. Defense Minister Dmitry Salamatin, who moved to Ukraine and received Ukrainian citizenship only in early 2000, is a son-in-law of Oleg Soskovets, the former deputy prime minister of Russia. Even the personal security detail for Yanukovich was headed by Vyacheslav Zanevskiy, an officer of the Federal Protective Service of the Russian Federation and former chief security officer for the secretary of the Russian Federation’s Security Council, General Alexander Lebed. Ukraine’s Ministry of Internal Affairs was headed by Vitaliy Zakharchenko, who served in the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs in Riga until 1991.ⁱⁱ When he was serving as a Soviet officer, the head of Ukraine’s internal security forces, Svyatoslav Shuliak, was involved in the organization of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. Another former Russian soldier, Igor Sorkin, whose father Vyacheslav Sorkin is a senior official with Gazprom, was appointed as head of the National Bank of Ukraine. Deputy Prime Minister Borys Kolesnikov and his family moved to Moscow after the Orange Revolution, and he now flies to Kiev for work.

ⁱ Taras Kuzyo, “Who Betrayed Ukraine?” *Gazeta.ua*, 29 February 2016: http://gazeta.ua/articles/life/_hto-v-ukrayini-vchiniv-zradu/681864?mobile=true

ⁱⁱ “Yanukovich’s Advisor Was Putin’s Bodyguard” [in Russian], *VV*, 15 January 2013: <http://gazetavv.com/news/policy/77123-sovetnik-yanukovicha-byt-telohranitelem-putina.html>

9—Potyomkin Protests

The technique of inserting fake protest leaders into organizations required supplying certain resources as well, including people, funding, media, transportation, technology, and so on. One of the most popular forms of infiltration was to offer to provide protesters with free sound amplification equipment.ⁱ This powerful and expensive equipment was especially important to have during major actions, where simple loudspeakers didn’t work. Infiltrators in the guise of equipment managers could keep a close watch on the meetings’ moderators and speakers, while others posing as stage security brought in disguised security forces and thugs hired by the regime to control the crowds.

The most successful way to disrupt a protest was to create various pseudo-democratic councils and committees that brought together both real leaders and agents provocateurs. Such councils usually did not have a clear structure and could be manipulated into endless, ineffective daily discussions of actions and decisions. The agents provocateurs would use their position on such a council to make unauthorized statements on the group’s behalf, which would then be actively spread by the media and effectively mislead both protesters and the general audience.

ⁱ Petro Neck and Mykhailyna Skoryk, “Chronicle of Provocations: Euromaidan and Tax Maidan Were ‘Poured’ by the Same People” [in Ukrainian], *Ukrayinska Pravda*, 20 December 2013: <http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2013/12/20/7007758/>

by means of national and local referendums.¹⁹ One of the project's main public initiatives was to make Ukraine a federation, a change that would weaken the central government and make secession easier. In 2012, Ukrainian Choice announced the launch of the "Federal Ukraine" initiative by holding a series of roundtables and expert meetings, where pro-Russian participants discussed not only how to carry out the process of federalization, but also the terms of its implementation. Ukraine's federalization was actively supported by other pro-Russian political parties besides Ukrainian Choice, including Rodina ("Motherland"), the Communist Party of Ukraine, and the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine.²⁰

The activities of religious organizations deserve special attention with regard to Russia's influence in Ukraine. These include the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), which operates in Ukraine as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate (UOC MP), in parallel with the autonomous Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kiev Patriarchate; the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church; and the Vatican-aligned Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. The ROC in Ukraine has consistently endorsed an anti-NATO and anti-EU—and often even Ukraine-phobic—view; conducted propaganda work among its followers; and organized public events in opposition to supporters of Ukraine's integration with the West. After conflict between pro-Ukraine and pro-Russia partisans broke out in Crimea and Donbas in 2014, many UOC MP priests supported Russian aggression, collaborated with the occupiers, and inspired militants to perform acts of terror against Ukrainian nationalists.²¹

Russian Information Campaigns Target Ukrainian Security Sector Personnel

As part of its campaign against Ukraine, Russia focused considerable attention on information and psychological operations within Ukraine's armed forces, internal security forces, and personnel in the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Russian agents of influence were appointed as heads

10—Shattered Ukraine

Viktor Medvedchuk publicly stated that "the federalization of Ukraine is the only remedy against its potential division."ⁱ He has suggested creating an organizing committee to draft a legislative concept for a federal Ukraine. One Ukrainian Choice advertisement featured a map of a shattered Ukraine that reflected the concept of federalization that was being actively promoted by the Russian Institute of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The topic of Ukraine's federalization has been actively supported by other pro-Russian political parties as well, including Rodina ("Motherland"), the Communist Party of Ukraine, and the Progressive Socialist Party of Ukraine, among others.ⁱⁱ

i "Ukraine Is Spread Out in Installments" [in Russian], *Kommersant*, 16 July 2012: <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1981639>

ii Andriy Skumin, "Administrative Reform Can Result in Transmission of Sevastopol" [in Ukrainian], *Tyzhden*, 29 June 2013: <http://tyzhden.ua/News/83266>

11—From Russia, with Love

The Russians also intensified the preparation of a clandestine power structure, using Russophile veterans' organizations, sport and martial arts clubs, practical shooting and airsoft clubs, and Cossack organizations as cover. A striking example of such an organization was the *Oplot* ("Stronghold") mixed martial arts club in Kharkiv, which was founded in 2010 by a former employee of Ukraine's Ministry of Internal Affairs. In addition to promoting martial arts, this club looked after monuments to Soviet Army veterans and provided social aid to former ministry employees and military servicemen. During the Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014), *Oplot* members were active in the Antimaidan movement and assaulted Maidan activists. As unrest spread in Donbas in 2014, *Oplot* members helped take over the Donetsk Regional Administration.

One Russian veterans' organization, called Boevoe Bratstvo ("Battle Brotherhood"), was headed by Boris Gromov, a former Soviet and Russian Army general and commander of the Kiev Military District from 1989 to 1990, and Dmitry Sablin, a member of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation's Federal Assembly. Battle Brotherhood played an active role in finding and recruiting retired pro-Russian law enforcement veterans in Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries to take part in armed anti-Ukrainian activities. In January 2015, Sablin, together with movie actor Michael Porechenkov; Alexander Zaldostanov, leader of the *Nochnyye Volki* ("Night Wolves") motorbike club; and mixed martial arts world champion Yulia Berezikova, initiated the so-called "Antimaidan" movement, whose goal was to counteract attempts to "create a 'maidan' [a popular democratic uprising] in Russia."ⁱⁱ

i "Russian Right Forces Attempt to Destabilize Ukraine" [in Russian], ORD-UA, 23 April 2016: <https://ord-ua.com/2016/04/23/rps-rossijskie-pravyie-silyi-ili-popyitka-2-rasskachat-ukrainu/>

ii "Combat Brotherhood' and 'Night Wolves' Create 'Antimaidan' Movement in Russia" [in Russian], *Kommersant*, 15 January 2015: <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2646227>

of psychological operations departments that worked actively to spread the Russian worldview along with anti-European sentiments among soldiers and police officers.²² For example, Colonel Evgeny Rudenko, who fled to the Crimean Peninsula after its annexation by Russia, was appointed as head of the Ukrainian Internal Security Forces' personnel department,²³ while Alexey Selivanov, the head of the Armed Forces' personnel department, was the leader of the ROC-affiliated, strongly Russophile organization *Vernyi Kozaki* (the "Faithful Cossacks"). In July 2013, the annual "Slavic Commonwealth" military exercises held by Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus centered on conducting joint operations against Ukrainian insurgents.²⁴

In the summer of 2013, the rape and attempted murder of a young woman by police officers in Vradiyivka (Mykolaiv Oblast) was used by the pro-Russian faction to stir up an anti-police hate campaign and became a catalyst for confrontations between citizens and law enforcement personnel.²⁵ This led to anti-police protests across the country and included repeated attempts by protesters to seize some police stations. Meanwhile, unidentified persons disseminated information through various media—including professional internet forums—warning the police that future protests posed a danger to the lives of law enforcement officers and their families.

These actions laid the groundwork for increasing tension between the public and the police, which resulted in the Maidan bloodshed later that year. This process of deliberately fanning societal antagonism is a large topic that deserves a separate analysis, because it can serve as a kind of authoritarian "antidote" against the non-violent revolutions that sprang up in many countries of the Middle East

during the "Arab Spring" and that might break out in Russia as well.

Russian Political Pressure Leads to Protests and Riots in Ukraine

The signing of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU was scheduled for 28 November 2013. To disrupt the process, Russia intensified economic pressure against Ukraine, which, coming from Ukraine's main trade partner, had an immediate effect on the Ukrainian economy.

To increase the political pressure on Yanukovich's government to abandon the agreement, the Communist Party of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Choice party attempted to initiate a referendum on joining the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. Ukrainian politicians close to the Kremlin made public allegations that Moscow might support a candidate other than Viktor Yanukovich in the upcoming presidential election. As a result of this intensified pressure from Russia, the government of Ukraine rejected the Association Agreement and withdrew from negotiations with the EU. This outcome became the impetus for the Revolution of Dignity, also known as Euromaidan, which was at its height from 18 to 23 February 2014.²⁶

From the beginning of the protests that followed Ukraine's rejection of the Association Agreement, it was clear to observers that the Ukrainian and Russian governments had no interest in seeing this revolutionary movement develop further. The main task for both governments was to channel the protests along safer lines and postpone

12—"Gayropa"

A survey conducted by the Razumkov Centre in late April 2013 showed that Ukrainians were divided over accession to the EU.ⁱ Asked the question, "What direction should Ukraine take for economic integration?" 41.7 percent of respondents chose "EU accession"; a third (32.7 percent) chose the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan; 12.3 percent were against joining either the EU or the Customs Union; and 13.3 percent were undecided. Unlike the topic of NATO integration, however, EU accession was not sharply rejected by its opponents.

Russian propaganda against the EU highlighted Europeans' support for the human rights of sexual minorities, such as the organization of gay parades and the legalization of gay marriage, and insinuated equal tolerance towards such behaviors as bestiality and pedophilia.ⁱ Thus, Russian propaganda defined the "European values" embraced by EU supporters solely as an issue of LGBT rights and contrasted those with the traditional Orthodox values that Russia supposedly embodied. Pro-Russian activists and politicians even introduced a derogatory term, "Gayropa" instead of "Europe."

ⁱ Andrey Bulgarov, "The Russian Military Dressed in Berkut's Uniform on the Maidan in Kyiv" [in Russian], *Obozrevatel*, 3 September 2014: <http://obozrevatel.com/blogs/68913-rossijskie-voennye-zimoij-percodevalis-v-berkut-na-majdane-v-kieve.htm>

ⁱⁱ "Thugs from the 'Berkut', Killing People on the Maidan, Will Be Included in the Composition of the Russian Interior Ministry, Keeping Its Name" [in Russian], *Argument*, 24 March 2014: <http://argumentua.com/novosti/golovorezy-iz-berkuta-ubivavshie-lyudei-na-maidane-voidut-v-sostave-mvd-rossii-sokhraniv-svo>

Ukraine's split until the spring 2015 presidential elections. In the short term, the Yanukovich regime set up pseudo-leaders for the movement and seized control of the stage and audio equipment that had been set up on Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) in central Kiev. Calls for revolution and early presidential and parliamentary elections were subsequently censored, as were any other political demands except for calls to sign the Association Agreement with the EU.²⁷ The government also issued a ban on ultimatums that demanded that Yanukovich "sign the deal or get out." Images of these severely curtailed protests were what the media disseminated to their domestic and external audiences.

The number of protesters, nevertheless, increased steadily. The catalyst for revolution, however, was a brutal crackdown on a few hundred peaceful student-aged protesters by the notorious Berkut ("Golden Eagle") special police force in the early morning of 30 November 2013. The Berkut attacked the young protesters as they milled on the Maidan, beating many of them with truncheons and causing serious injuries.

After the crackdown, which was televised, the number of protesters grew to hundreds of thousands, and the revolutionary process became irreversible. This reversal of police strategy from pacification to confrontation and escalation reflects an internal conflict among the pro-Russian forces. Subsequent protests were fueled by provocateurs who used increasingly intense violence against participants. After beating the students on 30 November, these infiltrators (see sidebar 13) went on to burn cars and to beat, abduct, and torture Maidan activists. In the absence of any action plan proposed by the leaders of the parliamentary opposition, the protesters themselves gradually radicalized.

Instead of dividing Ukrainian society between supporters of the right-wing Tyahnybok and pro-Russian Yanukovich, the split between the Ukrainian nationalist Maidan movement and the pro-Russian Antimaidan countermovement became the major fault line that threatened Ukraine's integrity.²⁸ Maidan initially was more of a struggle for democracy and the independence of Ukraine, and a rejection of the corrupt incumbent regime and Russian colonization, than it was about EU accession. In time, however, Maidan became associated—allegedly with the help of Russian propaganda—with a right-wing radical element called Right Sector, which alarmed the Russophile population of southeastern Ukraine, and most importantly, discredited the revolution in the eyes of the Russian Federation's citizens.²⁹ It would have been much more difficult for Antimaidan supporters to demonize the Svoboda party, given its long history of conformist policies in Parliament. The baseless rumors that Right Sector was a widespread fascist organization with its own tanks and aircraft—rumors fostered by Russian propaganda—made the Right Sector useful as a threat to mobilize the populations of southern and eastern Ukraine, as well as the citizens of Russia.³⁰ Following the annexation of Crimea later in 2014, myths about a militant Right Sector movement and the rise of a so-called "fascist junta" to power in Ukraine became prime justifications for military aggression among Russian soldiers.

On 19 January 2014, after anti-government protesters had more or less peacefully occupied Kiev's main square for about two months, things came to a head when the government announced new anti-protest laws intended to disperse the crowds. A face-off between marchers and security forces on Hrushevskogo Street, near Maidan Nezalezhnosti, turned into a violent confrontation that lasted many days and left many on both sides dead.

On 22 January—ironically, Ukrainian Unity Day (*Den' Sobornosti*)—the violence increased to a new level after the government authorized the police to use deadly force against protesters. Five protesters were shot dead in clashes with security forces on Hrushevskogo Street, and the bodies of several protesters who had been abducted earlier were found on that same day.³¹ About 300 protesters had been wounded by the evening. Activist Dmytro Bulatov, who was kidnapped along with others but survived, said that the captured protesters were tortured and interrogated by individuals who, he said, had typical Russian accents.³² The interrogators wanted to obtain information about the revolution's sources of financing as well as the revolutionaries' presumed ties with secret services in the West. As these events took place on the streets, a

13—The Golden Eagles

Some observers have suggested that undercover Russian security forces participated in the dispersal of Maidan protesters alongside their Ukrainian counterparts.ⁱ This conclusion comes in part from the fact that certain riot-control tactics used by some special forces personnel were atypical for the internal security forces of the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs. Russian security forces could have been disguised as members of the Crimean Berkut ("Golden Eagle") unit, which used a different uniform from those of other internal security units. Almost all of Berkut's members, including the commander, later defected to the Russian Federation.ⁱⁱ

ⁱ "42% against 31%: Ukrainians Choosing between the EU and the Customs Union (Poll)" [in Ukrainian], UNIAN, 27 June 2014: <http://www.unian.ua/politics/804941-42-proti-31-ukrajintsi-vibirayut-mij-es-i-mitnim-soyuzom-opituvannya.html>

ⁱⁱ "'Ukrainian Choice' Picketed the EU Delegation to Ukraine" [in Russian], Vybor, 26 July 2013: http://vybor.ua/news/ukrainskiy_vybor_piketiroval_predstavitelstvo_es_v_ukraine.html

group of opposition MPs within Parliament announced the creation of a “People’s Council of Ukraine.” Although this People’s Council had no formal standing and was intended, according to its organizers, simply to oversee the constitutional reform process, Russian-controlled media in Russia and Ukraine presented this move as if it were the creation of an actual alternative government in Ukraine.³³

Over a period of several days, protesters began to occupy or blockade regional and local administrations, first in the western regions where Svoboda controlled the regional councils, and then in central and eastern Ukraine, as a wave of attempts to capture government buildings swept through the entire country. In Crimea and Donbas, anti-government protesters were met with strong—sometimes armed—resistance from law enforcement and government supporters. What began to occur, essentially, was the implementation of Russia’s original plan to create a separatist Western Ukrainian People’s Republic and to subsequently divide Ukraine. In response to these uprisings, the Yanukovich regime was forced to transfer a significant number of the police officers who were

currently concentrated in the capital out to suppress the regional protests in central and eastern Ukraine.³⁴

Taking advantage of this significant reduction in the regime’s forces in Kiev, on 24 January the Spilna Sprava civil movement began to implement its initial strategy of blockading the central government buildings.³⁵ Within days, anti-government forces occupied several strategic government institutions, including the Ministry of Agrarian Policy, the Ministry of Energy and Coal, and the Ministry of Justice. (For reasons of public safety, ministry workers were allowed access to their work places.) These actions demonstrated that the Yanukovich regime had finally lost control of the capital. The timing was well chosen: it was unlikely that Russia would be willing to engage in open aggression on the eve of the Sochi Olympic Games (7–23 February 2014), because any disruption of the Olympics would have a significant impact on the Kremlin’s image, both domestic and foreign.

To buy some time, the Yanukovich government, in close concert with Russia, made a show of engaging in peace talks that included amnesty and the release of jailed protesters in exchange for the release of administrative buildings and the removal of strategic fortifications on Maidan Nezalezhnosti.³⁶ Unfortunately for the opposition movement, the peace talks initiative was supported by the representatives of France, Germany, and Poland, as well as by members of the parliamentary opposition. The ensuing suspension of conflict was profitable only to

14—Common Cause

Two months of peaceful occupation of Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square, the main square in central Kiev) and the main squares of other Ukrainian cities did not relieve social unrest. The political status quo and the country’s worsening social and economic situation, including delayed payment of public-sector wages, gave Common Cause an opening to organize protests and labor strikes at state-owned and municipal enterprises. These activities were aimed specifically at the transport sector in Russian-speaking southern and eastern Ukraine.ⁱ The organization of these actions was carried out under the umbrella of an anonymous “All-Ukrainian Strike Committee” and was not directly associated with the revolution. The Yanukovich government faced the threat of a social explosion and possible further politicization of the protesters’ demands, while Russia’s ability to rely on the populations of the south and east as loyalists for Yanukovich and its own potential aggression was weakened.

ⁱ “Mutiny on the Ship: The Drivers of Trams and Trolleybuses Began Preparations for a Large-Scale Strike” [in Russian], Vgorode, 22 December 2013: http://kiev.vgorode.ua/news/transport_y_ynfrastruktura/204283-bunt-na-korable-vodytely-trolleibusov-y-tramvaev-nachaly-podhotovku-k-masshtabnoizabastovke; “Teachers at Metropolitan Universities to Join the All-Ukrainian Strike” [in Russian], *Obozrevatel*, 26 December 2013: <http://obozrevatel.com/politics/09183-prepodavatelistolichnyih-vuzov-gotovy-prisoedinitysya-k-vseukrainskoj-zabastovke.htm>; “New Year without Transport or Strike in Lutsk ‘From the Middle’” [in Russian], *Volynsky Novyny*, 27 December 2013: <http://www.volynnews.com/news/society/vid-holodu-vodiyi-trolleybusiv-vtrachaiut-svidomist-pratsivnyk-lpe/>

15—“I Will Not Leave!”

The vast majority of protesters were outraged by the suppression of revolutionary rhetoric, but previous experience had shown that a physical struggle for control of the stage could discredit the entire protest. To counter the effort to silence protestors, Common Cause launched a campaign to give everyone who supported the revolution a sticker bearing the inscription: “I will not leave the Maidan until Yanukovich resigns!” Over four million of these stickers were printed and distributed during the first month of the protests, and very soon almost every demonstrator was wearing one.ⁱ It was a clear marker of the protesters’ true intentions and made it impossible for observers or the media to misinterpret the protest’s demands. Protesters could not only declare their own point of view, but also see how many people shared it.ⁱⁱ

ⁱ “I Will Not Leave Maidan till the Resignation of Yanukovich: These Activists’ Notes Left on Parked Cars,” 032.ua, 1 December 2013. <http://www.032.ua/news/429461>

ⁱⁱ “The Sticker on Ruslana: ‘I Will Not Leave Maidan till Yanukovich’s Resignation!’” [in Russian], *Expres.ua*, 29 November 2013: <http://www.expres.ua/news/2013/11/29/97828-nakleyka-ruslani-ne-pidumaydanu-vidstavky-yanukovycha>

Russia, which utilized this time to deploy resources that were later used in violent anti-Ukrainian protests and separatist movements in the east and south of Ukraine. During this period, from mid-January to mid-February 2014, Russia also moved to establish a significant military presence in Crimea and along Ukraine's border.

18 February 2014 marked the beginning of the most dramatic part of the Revolution of Dignity. Protesters who took part in a peace march to the Parliament that day found themselves entrapped by pro-government forces and came under gunfire. Law enforcement officers also sustained casualties from bullets, which led some to believe that Russian agents were using firearms against both protesters and security forces to incite further violence.³⁷ Evidence later indicated that representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs handed over more than 500 automatic firearms to Antimaidan activists.³⁸ The Antimaidan groups included a significant number of Russian citizens, including men who later became leaders of the pro-Russian militants in Donbas. One of these was Arseny Pavlov, known as "Motorola," who commanded the Donetsk-based terrorist group "Somalia."

Despite the scores of protesters (along with several police officers) who were killed over the next few days, the protests continued.³⁹ The turning point came on 21 February 2014, with the formation of a new parliamentary majority consisting of the stalwart opposition MPs and 70 erstwhile Yanukovich supporters who defected from the ruling party. That day, President Yanukovich agreed to a peaceful settlement with the opposition that involved the formation of a new government and early presidential elections. Protesters rejected this compromise and stormed the presidential palace, demanding that Yanukovich be thrown out of office. Yanukovich disappeared, only to turn up in Moscow some time later.

Conclusion: Russian Hybrid Operations in Post-Revolution Ukraine

Since November 2013, the Russian Federation has carried out active psychological and organizational information operations in Ukraine aimed at creating a pro-Russian uprising, the core goal of which is to stymie Ukraine's western development vector and Kiev's independence from Russian political and economic control. Moscow's ultimate agenda may well be the restoration of some version of the Russian Empire or even the Soviet Union. Antimaidan organizations were formed for these purposes. In addition to the pro-Yanukovich rallies that took place in Kiev and in other regions, which were attended mostly by the employees of public institutions and enterprises, social networks provide another avenue for organizers. Groups that seek to spread Antimaidan propaganda, for instance, take advantage of social media: people who "like" relevant social network pages are consequently invited to participate in the meetings and activities of informal pro-Russian organizations.

From the perspective of this article, it is interesting to note that the Antimaidan/pro-Russian ideology is quite eclectic. A number of different, even mutually

16—Fanning the Flames

Since Russia was mainly interested in violent confrontation, its operatives worked to inflame radical sentiments.ⁱ There is evidence that the "flash-bang" light and noise grenades that the security forces used against protesters were taped with screws, which turned them essentially into fragmentation grenades. In response, protesters threw pavement blocks and Molotov cocktails. Evidence obtained later on indicated that some Russian Special Forces troops had dressed as Ukrainian law enforcement personnel and participated in the confrontation on Hrushevskogo Street.ⁱⁱ There is reason to believe that this same group of Russian troops operated on the other side as well, under the guise of protesters. Their task was to stoke the violence between protesters and police, inflaming it to the point of irreversibility.

ⁱ "BBC: In 2004, Putin Advised Kuchma Force to Disperse the Maidan" [in Russian], Censor.net, 27 January 2012: http://censor.net.ua/news/195362/v_2004_godu_putin_sovetoval_kuchme_siloyi_razognat_mayidan_bibisi

ⁱⁱ "GPU Gathered Evidences of FSB Involvement in the Shootings on the Maidan during Their Stay in Ukraine in 2013–2014 Winter" [in Russian], Channel 112, 29 October 2015: <http://112.ua/obshchestvo/v-gpu-sobirayut-dokazatelstva-prichastnosti-fsb-k-rasstrelam-na-maydane-vo-vremya-prebyvaniya-v-ukraine-zimoy-2013-2014-godov-268393.html>

17—Spot Fires

Anti-Yanukovich protesters occupied the premises of the Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Ternopil regional administrations (the three western regions of Ukraine whose regional councils were controlled by the Svoboda Party), without much resistance from the local police or interior security forces. Local councils in these regions started to adopt decisions supporting the People's Council of Ukraine's agenda, such as forbidding the use of the armed forces, Ministry of Internal Affairs police, and the internal security forces within those regions; banning the Communist Party of Ukraine and the Party of Regions; and so on.ⁱ

ⁱ "Lviv's People's Council Took Power into Their Own Hands" [in Ukrainian], *Ukrayinska Pravda*, 19 February 2014: <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/02/19/7014713/>

18—Denouement

On 22 February 2014, as the MPs were about to vote on the restoration of the 2004 Constitution of Ukraine, which limited the powers of the president, about 50 unidentified security officers bearing automatic weapons entered the Parliament building, but they were confronted and forced to leave by State Guard officers. It is believed that the gunmen were Russian servicemen tasked with disrupting the voting and shooting down the MPs. Ukraine would thus lose any legal path out of the crisis, and Yanukovich would remain as the only legitimate head of state.ⁱ Such a scenario seems plausible because a separatist rally in the eastern province of Kharkiv was scheduled for the next day. Pro-Russian members of Parliament (about 25 to 30 percent of the total) and the local councils, with President Yanukovich at their head, were planning to officially adopt the decision to divide Ukraine along the Dnipro (Dnieper) River, knowing this would lead to civil war. Yanukovich, however, had ultimately refused to participate in the rally. There are many possible reasons for his decision to stay away. Lack of support among Ukraine's deputies and high-level officials is one. Another is the fact that the population of southeast Ukraine either supported the revolution or remained passive as events unfolded.ⁱⁱ Despite everything, the majority of the country's internal security forces and the leaders of the armed forces did not support the country's division.

ⁱ "Chronicle of the Revolution: Yanukovich Makes Concessions, but Does Not Give Up" [in Ukrainian], Depo.ua, 21 February 2016: <http://www.depo.ua/ukr/life/hronika-revolutsiyi-gidnosti-yanukovich-ide-na-postupki-ale-21022016080000>

ⁱⁱ "Defense Ministry: 90% of the Crimean Military Remained Loyal to Ukraine" [in Ukrainian], Espresso-TV, 26 March 2014: http://espreso.tv/news/2014/03/26/minoborony_90_viyaskovykh_z_krymu_zalyshlysyra_virnymy_ukrayini

hostile, concepts of Russian imperialism, such as Russian nationalism, monarchism, neo-Nazism, neo-Stalinism, Soviet nationalism, Orthodox fundamentalism, paganism, and so on are in the mix. Pro-Russian organizations operating in the south and east of Ukraine represent the entire range of pro-Russian ideologies: from the neo-Nazi "Russian National Unity," Soviet-revanchist "The Essence of Time," right-monarchist "Russian Imperial Movement," neo-pagan "Svarog," and marginal National-Bolshevik party of Eduard Limonov, to the Kremlin-affiliated Nashi ("Our Guys"), to name only a few. The common platform for all these supporters of Russian intervention consists of the rejection of an independent Ukraine and the longing for Ukraine to unite in a single state with Russia.

The high level of coordination between a wide range of Russian-aligned groups active in Ukraine suggests they are subordinate to a single plan and concept. For example, in the period before the Maidan uprising, some members of these marginal organizations were selected for official military service in Russia's Special Forces units. Two well-known pro-Russian militia leaders, Anton Milchakov and Alexei Rajewskii—both of whom are members of Russian neo-Nazi organizations—were selected for this training. In doing so, Moscow solved two problems at once: it neutralized these potentially dangerous internal elements by redirecting them to fight the external enemy (Ukrainian nationalists), and thereby also turned them into its own unique, unconventional, and highly self-motivated tool for undermining Ukraine's sovereignty.

The Russian operation to split up Ukraine failed because it was not able to organize a real pro-Moscow uprising. The annexation of Crimea in March 2014, which was carried out by Russian military forces without insignia, succeeded only to the extent that the peninsula itself came under Russian control, but it did not inspire any wider internal threat against Ukraine's sovereignty. The clandestine invasion of Donbas by Russian armed forces in late July and early August 2014 was launched to prevent an offensive by the armed forces of Ukraine from liberating Donbas from the small number of pro-Russian militants and Russian Special Forces units that had seized control. Even this action failed to bring about the anticipated general uprising of Russian-speaking citizens in favor of union with Russia.

Despite the undeclared nature of the simmering Ukraine-Russia conflict, it is being conducted by regular Russian military units, according to reports in the international press.⁴⁰ Russia's main miscalculation was its incorrect assessment of the citizens in southern and eastern Ukraine, in particular their willingness to take part in a pro-Russian separatist struggle. Pro-Russian agitators did not find adequate support among the local population, either during the early stage of peaceful pro-Russian rallies or when it came to armed confrontation. Nor has Ukraine had any further problems with the population in the territories of Donbas that were liberated from separatist control.

What Can the EU, Eastern European Countries, and NATO Learn from the Ukraine-Russia Conflict?

Responding to aggression only when unconventional non-military tactics are beginning to be supplanted by military ones is already too late. This is the most important lesson that should be taken from the continuing struggle between Ukraine and Russia. The main indicators that unconventional aggression may

be imminent are the psychological and organizational information operations that help prepare the ground for further aggression. In most cases, especially in democracies, these kinds of preliminary operations are completely legal.

In order to understand the true intentions of the Russian Federation and anticipate its potential next steps, NATO's members should create a system of centers at the national, regional, and headquarters levels that are dedicated to monitoring and analyzing Russian information and psychological operations. If we compare a number of activities that the Russian Federation is currently pursuing in the European Union against Moscow's strategy in Ukraine, we can confidently assert that unconventional aggression by Russia against NATO member-countries is in its active phase. Such activities include information campaigns aimed at shaping public opinion, financial and other kinds of support for favorable political movements, and the creation of formal and informal organizations, including paramilitary groups, that will act in Russia's interests.

There are already clear signs of Russian informational and psychological operations in Europe. For example, Russia's support of right-wing and far-right organizations within the EU is not limited to financial assistance, but also includes military training under the guise of airsoft, practical shooting, martial arts, and historical reenactments. In Donbas, for example, EU citizens, mostly from ultra-right organizations, conducted warfare against Ukraine on Russia's behalf. Among the most famous examples were a citizen of Norway named Jan Petrovsky and three former members of the French military, Sergei Munier, Alexandre Nabiev, and Erwan Castel.⁴¹ Even the surge of refugees into Europe as a result, in part, of Russian operations in Syria, has not only served to destabilize

several EU countries, but has also increased the popularity of local right-wing parties, many of which do not hide their sympathy for Russian policy and Vladimir Putin.

NATO is actively preparing for a conventional confrontation with Russia, in which Russia has no chance. Moscow, however, is not planning a military invasion of Europe. Instead, the Kremlin has every intention of bringing its puppets to power, even in such countries as France and Germany. A look at the polling numbers for the Front National ("National Front") in France and Alternative für Deutschland ("Alternative for Germany") in Germany bears this out.

Russia is not preparing for war with the West; the war is already being actively conducted—on Russia's terms, below the threshold of NATO's mutual defense clause. And the West, which ignores the danger, unfortunately stands a high chance of losing this conflict. Putin's regime is a threat to Western civilization and mankind in general. The mistakes of World War II, including tolerance towards Hitler, must not be repeated. One cannot win a war while being on the defense. There is a need for a more offensive plan aimed at regime change in Russia and the subsequent stabilization of the country. ♦

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The Strategic Utility of the Russian Spetsnaz in Crimea

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THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S NEAR-BLOODLESS ANNEXATION OF THE Crimean Peninsula in 2014, for the second time in Russian history, was achieved mostly by means of operations carried out by Russia's special operations forces (*Voiska Spetsialnogo Naznacheniya*, or *Spetsnaz*). After undergoing a period of reforms following the transition from Communist to democratic rule, the Russian Spetsnaz proved to be a salient strategic asset for Russian political and military leaders and emerged as a credible threat for the countries of Russia's near abroad. Up to now, however, few, if any, researchers have published a comprehensive examination of the recent annexation of Crimea that focuses specifically on the role of the Spetsnaz as a strategic policy tool.

A Short History of the Crimean Peninsula

Crimea, roughly 27,000 square kilometers, juts from the southern edge of Ukraine and is almost entirely surrounded by the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. In 1783, after it had been under Ottoman rule for 300 years, Russian Empress Catherine II annexed the Crimean Peninsula for the first time under the pretext of protecting its citizens from Turkish political intrigue.¹ Following that victory, Crimea experienced a variety of political relationships with Russia, ranging from near autonomy to becoming a subservient *oblast* (province).² An alliance made up of France, the United Kingdom, the Ottoman Empire, and later Sardinia won the Crimean War in 1856, but ultimately, the victory did not suffice to break the region away from Russian control.³ Crimea remained a Russian territory for another century after the battle that had instigated "the destruction of the European order."⁴ In 1954, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev handed control of Crimea and its Black Sea ports over to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, but in practical terms, the region was under Moscow's control for as long as the Soviet Union lasted.⁵ Granted significant autonomy by Ukraine in the post-Soviet era, the Crimean Peninsula remained at least partly under the Russian Federation's authority until 2014.⁶

The Crimean port city of Sevastopol harbors the Russian Black Sea Fleet, which is the primary reason why the territory is of utmost strategic importance to Moscow and vital to Russian national security and national interests. In the two decades since its emergence, the Russian Federation has revitalized its power and through the constant application of synchronized political warfare, created the circumstances essential for an operation to take back Crimea.⁷ Once Russian president Vladimir Putin had offered to "guarantee Crimea's territory" in 2006, the only remaining requirement to legitimize an invasion was finding the right window of opportunity.⁸

With the help of external weaknesses—in particular, NATO's ponderous decision-making process and low probability of reacting, and the absence of a balancing regional power—and internal unity around its goals, Russia saw the window of opportunity open at last to fulfill its long-term dream of annexing

THIS SECOND
ANNEXATION
OF CRIMEA
EPITOMIZED
HOW TO
ATTAIN VICTORY
SHORT OF
AN ACTUAL
MILITARY FIGHT.



Charge of the Light Cavalry Brigade, 25th
Oct. 1854, under
Major General the Earl of Cardigan,
by William Simpson

Crimea following the 2014 Winter Olympics.⁹ On 21 March 2014, the Russian Federation officially annexed Crimea following “armed intervention by forces of the Russian Federation, a referendum, and a declaration of independence in Crimea.”¹⁰ This second annexation of Crimea epitomized how to attain victory short of an actual military fight and demonstrated to the world Putin’s will to accomplish Russia’s strategic aims by all available means. The Russian Spetsnaz played its role in the armed intervention portion of the annexation, which started on 20 February 2014—according to the date on the Russian campaign medals.¹¹

The Strategic Utility of Special Operations Forces

In this section, I use Colin Gray’s theory on the strategic utility of special operations forces to help illuminate why the Spetsnaz units were deployed, whether they were inserted at the right time and for the right place or purpose, and to what extent they achieved their objectives. Gray’s analysis has two parts: the strategic utility of special operations and the strategic utility of special operations forces. He suggests that the type of conflict and mission is the starting point from which to conduct such analyses and notes that “the term *strategic utility* as employed here means the contribution of a particular kind of military activity to the course and outcome of an entire conflict.”¹² Gray proposes two general “master” concepts and seven subordinate concepts to frame the special operations portion of the theory. The two master concepts are economy of force and expansion of choice; the seven subordinate concepts are innovation, morale, showcasing of competence, reassurance, humiliation of the enemy, control of escalation, and shaping the future. Together, these nine concepts (or categories) demonstrate Gray’s multifaceted notion of strategic utility and serve as the framework for my examination of Spetsnaz operations in Crimea.¹³

“ THE USE OF SOF AND INDIGENOUS OPPOSITION FORCES CREATES A PERMANENTLY ACTIVE FRONT THROUGHOUT THE TARGET STATE. ”

The second part of Gray's theory concerns the strategic utility of special operations forces. Gray argues that "the strategic value of special operations forces depends not just on how well or poorly they perform but also on how important for the war as a whole are their assigned missions."¹⁴ As he suggests, the following four questions can be helpful in assessing the strategic utility of special operations forces:

- What are the tasks that only SOF can do?
- What are the tasks that SOF can do well?
- What are the tasks that SOF tend to do poorly?
- What are the tasks that SOF cannot do at all?¹⁵

Because the Crimea campaign was unequivocally successful, this article is concerned only with the first two questions.

The Gerasimov Doctrine

To assess the strategic utility of special operations and special operations forces, we must understand the conditions that lead political and military leaders to choose covert operations. The portents of the special operations campaign in Crimea lie between the lines of what has come to be known as the Gerasimov Doctrine (see Steder's Introduction to this special issue for an explanation of the doctrine).¹⁶ Two of Gerasimov's points in particular reflect on special operations and the use of special operations forces in Crimea. First, SOF use covert actions, combined with active information and counter-information operations, to supplement non-military instruments of statecraft and achieve the state's political and strategic goals. Second, the use of SOF and indigenous opposition forces creates a permanently active front throughout the territory of the target state and establishes the means to carry out asymmetrical actions that nullify the target's advantages. In light of these ideas, all other strategic plans that refer to mass frontal confrontation belong to the past, and the need for new tactics for future operations highlights the evolving importance of special operations forces.

The Gerasimov model resuscitates Soviet-era political warfare in a modernized fashion—with nuances. It may signal an actual return to the Soviet era for Russian foreign policy and thus jeopardize small neighbors rooted in the Soviet soil. The model also discloses the Russian perception of the supportive tactics used by the West in the Georgian and Ukrainian color revolutions as an excuse to reinvigorate Russia's use of similar tactics and techniques to achieve its own political ends. Bluntly, Russia puts blame on the West for anything Russia did or may yet do in Crimea and Ukraine, and may also do in Moldova, Lithuania, Latvia, or Estonia.

The operation that took place in Crimea put Gerasimov's ideas into practice, and it was also a "test drive" of the military modernization plans he instigated.¹⁷ The Russian Spetsnaz and naval infantry carried out the operation in an obscure fashion, and the truth was unveiled only after the victory. Consequently, the *fait accompli* of the occupation paralyzed any mechanisms that would have reacted to overt aggression. Mark Galeotti explains the logic behind Russia's below-the-threshold actions as those of "a regional power able to overwhelm small neighbors—as it did with Georgia in 2008—but not a global one."¹⁸ Putin circumvents NATO's capabilities, which are to deter and counter a mass attack from Russia, and plays by a new rule book that emphasizes covert actions. NATO has yet to adapt.

WHAT TOOK PLACE IN
CRIMEA WAS A "TEST
DRIVE" OF THE MILITARY
MODERNIZATION
PLANS GERASIMOV
INSTIGATED.



Medal "For the Return of Crimea"

The Spetsnaz in Action

The starting date of 20 February 2014 on “the Russian campaign medals ‘For the Return of Crimea’”¹⁹ may indicate that the ostensibly popular protests, which later led to violent clashes and Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich’s escape from Kiev to Crimea, were deliberately fabricated. According to Russian military analyst Anton Lavrov, “the earliest date when the Russian operation is reliably known to have been in progress is February 22.” That same day, according to Galeotti and Lavrov, the 45th Independent Spetsnaz Regiment (*Otdelny polk spetsialnogo naznacheniya*, or opSn) of the Airborne Troops (*Vozdushno-desantnye voiska*, or VDV, Moscow) and the 3rd Spetsnaz Brigade (Tolyatti) were put on combat alert.²⁰ Two Special Battalions of the 16th Brigade Independent Special Forces Detachment (*Otdelny otryad spetsialnogo naznacheniya*, or ooSn [effectively, a Spetsnaz battalion], Tambov) left their base,²¹ and several other airborne units, including the 7th Airborne Assault Division, also received similar orders.²²

The Anapa airfield became the key logistics base of the operation in Crimea.²³ The airfield, located 50 kilometers northwest from Novorossiysk,²⁴ is where the 10th and 25th Spetsnaz brigades later boarded large landing ships and deployed into Sevastopol harbor, along with many other reinforcements.²⁵ As part of a large military “drill” that President Putin ordered on 26 February, “about 40 Il-76 military transports left the Ulyanovsk airbase on February 26 and 27.”²⁶ News feeds claimed that “more than 10 of [the airplanes] landed in Anapa, and on February 28, some aircraft were spotted in Crimea.”²⁷ The Ulyanovsk airbase is located on the Volga River, about 1,000 kilometers northeast of Anapa.

Meanwhile, self-defense militia groups started to form within Crimea, allegedly with Russian support or even instigation, “working through the marines of the 810th Independent Naval Infantry Brigade already based there.”²⁸ Unidentified armed groups blockaded Ukrainian bases and paralyzed any potential reaction to the imminent seizure of the Crimean parliament building, which took place on 27 February, when approximately 50 well-equipped men claiming to be the local militia and wearing a variety of civilian outfits seized the Crimean parliament building. In the absence of any opposition, they took down the Ukrainian flag and hoisted the Russian flag over the building. The group identified themselves to the press as the “Russian-speaking Crimean population’s self-defense force.”²⁹ However, as Galeotti describes them, “this well-armed and highly professional unit turned out to be the first deployment of operators from KSO [Russia’s new Special Operations Command: *Komanda spetsialnogo naznacheniya*], supported by the elements of the VDV’s 45th opSn.”³⁰ The operators turned the building into a fortress, and unarmed but well-organized pro-Russian protesters gathered outside to prevent local law enforcement forces from taking the building back. As the day went on, Russian troops continued to flow in by air, land, and sea. The logistics supply routines of the Black Sea Fleet made their infiltration from the sea easier. The Russian missile cruiser *Azov* carried about 300 operators, possibly from an old unit of the 810th Brigade, 382nd Independent Marines Battalion from Temryuk.³¹

After the first shock and awe, the Russians’ intentions became more vivid, even while their presence was still in question. The lack of identifiers, insignia, signs, and even license plates caused uncertainty about whether the invaders were

“ONE MONTH AFTER THE FIRST WAVE OF UNIDENTIFIED ARMED MEN TOOK TO THE STREETS, CRIMEA BECAME RUSSIAN ONCE AGAIN.”

themselves Russians or local groups armed by Russians. These heavily armed groups in their armored personnel carriers proceeded to take over the Ukrainian airfields and bases in Crimea one by one. Although the Ukrainian troops had initial relative superiority, the government in Kiev did not issue orders to resist because it did not trust its own military, a factor that played a crucial role in the Russian takeover.³²

According to Lavrov, the special units that had joined the 810th Brigade by 5 March were the “3rd, 10th, 16th, and 22nd Independent Spetsnaz Brigades, the 25th Independent Spetsnaz Regiment, the 45th Independent VDV Spetsnaz Regiment, part of the 31st Independent VDV Airborne Assault Brigade, and some small but very capable SOF units.”³³ All those units represented several thousand troops in aggregate. Even so, the high number of special operators can be considered an *economy of force* from the Russian perspective. With the reinforcement of conventional fire support units, the Spetsnaz paralyzed most Ukrainian units in their bases and prevented any resistance. A quick political referendum at the end of March to secede from Ukraine followed the victory. On 21 March 2014, one month after the first wave of unidentified armed men took to the streets, Crimea became Russian once again.

The Strategic Utility of Spetsnaz in Crimea

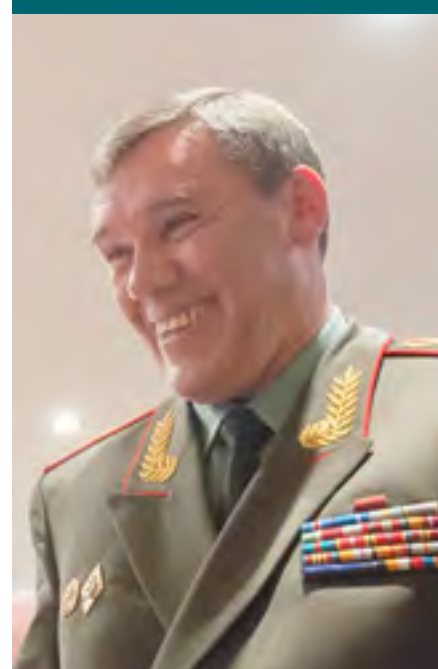
Russia’s operations in Crimea aimed to reinstate total Russian sovereignty over the territory after a 25-year post-Soviet hiatus. Whether the rest of the world is willing to acknowledge it or not, Russia succeeded in annexing Crimea for the second time in history. Although the contributions of various Russian intelligence organizations to the outcome remain unidentified, there clearly were sufficient human resources inside the territory, ready to act and make the invasion successful when Russian units infiltrated. The Spetsnaz proved adept in mobilizing local ethnic Russian groups to support their operations. The actual extent of Russia’s covert operations will unfortunately remain obscure until the archive of orders that were issued is revealed. Nevertheless, we can infer from this research that the Spetsnaz of the Main Intelligence Directorate (of the General Staff) (*Glavnoye razvedyvatelnoye upravleniye*, or GRU) and the newly formed KSO played a vital role in the process.

The use of nearly all types of Russian special units in Crimea indicates that these units are being evaluated for a transformation from a Soviet-style Spetsnaz formation into a more modern SOF, organizationally closer to its Western counterparts. The use of “ambiguous warfare,”³⁴ including self-defense groups, special units, and covert actions, may signal that Russia does not want a bigger actor, like NATO or the United States, to take notice and interfere.

Russian military reform, which was initiated by Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov after the conflict in Georgia in 2008, continued under his successor Sergei Shoigu, and later accelerated by General Gerasimov, became apparent in Crimea, especially in the equipment the special operators used during the Crimean conflict.³⁵ The “new look” of the Russian soldiers showed the world that they had undergone a renewal process.³⁶ Given that the Gerasimov Doctrine, which described the importance of special operations and special forces for achieving political ends short of open warfare, appeared a year prior to the operation in Crimea, the Crimean annexation can be regarded as an example of the doctrine and military reforms in practice.

“ THE SPETSNAZ PROVED ADEPT IN MOBILIZING LOCAL ETHNIC RUSSIAN GROUPS TO SUPPORT THEIR OPERATIONS. ”

General Gerasimov



The role the Spetsnaz played in Crimea helped to create a myth about the force's stealth and effectiveness, an image that can serve as a useful deterrent to opponents in future operations. This fearsome reputation is unlikely to fade away unless a compromised covert action degenerates and is exposed, or another conflict contradicts the epic stories from the Crimean operation in the near future. The Spetsnaz's skill at mobilizing local ethnic Russians to further the mission and make the uprising appear spontaneous is also a notable aspect of the force's Crimean activities.

Another significant strategic outcome of the Crimean operation is the messages it communicated to Russia's "targets of influence,"³⁷ which include all opponents of the Russian Federation. First, Russia showed off its splendid proficiency in paralyzing Western decision makers before they can react and prevent Moscow from accomplishing its strategic objectives. Second, Russia demonstrated both its will and the means it would use to back up that will should the West dare to poke any of its neighbors and try to weaken the strong political stance of the Russian Federation, the "rightful" successor of the Soviet Union. Put simply, the Russian Federation gets what it wants, before its opponents can acknowledge what is happening. The reluctance of the West to react, or the inadequacy of a reaction, could expand the threshold Putin is testing and could grant Russia a broader playground in the near future.

The lack of an actual clash of forces during the overall Crimean campaign obscured the real fighting capability of the Spetsnaz. The peaceful takeover of Crimea proves that there was an effective and protracted background political operation working to soften the ground and rally support in preparation for the campaign, yet it is hard to make any concrete observations about the special units' inclusion.

What Is the Takeaway from This Study?

The Russian Spetsnaz provides Russian decision makers with a capable means to achieve Russia's strategic goals while keeping potential escalation under control, and with limited expenditure. Even though force numbers

increased as the campaign accomplished its goals, the relative size of special forces to the conventional forces was still inconsiderable. Thus, the economy of force that Colin Gray specified for special operations was accomplished, although it was accomplished mostly due to the lack of resistance from Ukrainian forces.

Given close proximity to Russian territory and a considerable number of Russian-speaking and Russian-looking people, as was the case in Crimea, Spetsnaz operators would not have difficulty disguising themselves as the "local militia" in another country contiguous to Russia. The inference that such a victory could be achieved outside the Russian near-sphere, however, will need more solid evidence, especially given that there was no third party to physically interfere with Russian logistics routes in Crimea. The most important strategic outcome of the overall Crimean campaign is the myth that the Spetsnaz

“THE INFERENCE THAT SUCH A VICTORY AS CRIMEA COULD BE ACHIEVED OUTSIDE THE RUSSIAN NEAR-SPHERE WILL NEED MORE SOLID EVIDENCE.”

created for themselves: it is too late to react when unidentified men surface on the streets. This worrisome myth, which the perceivably flawless operation in Crimea bolstered, will persist until a defeat proves it wrong.

The final point to make is that, as Galeotti notes, Russia may be "punching above its weight" in its latest activities in Ukraine and Syria, due to the weakness of its economy and military compared to the West.³⁸ Nevertheless, the outcome of the annexation of Crimea

suggests that the modernization of the Russian army has paid off very well and has resulted in a modern, capable, and thriving SOF that Moscow can use as a strategic policy tool domestically and abroad. ♦

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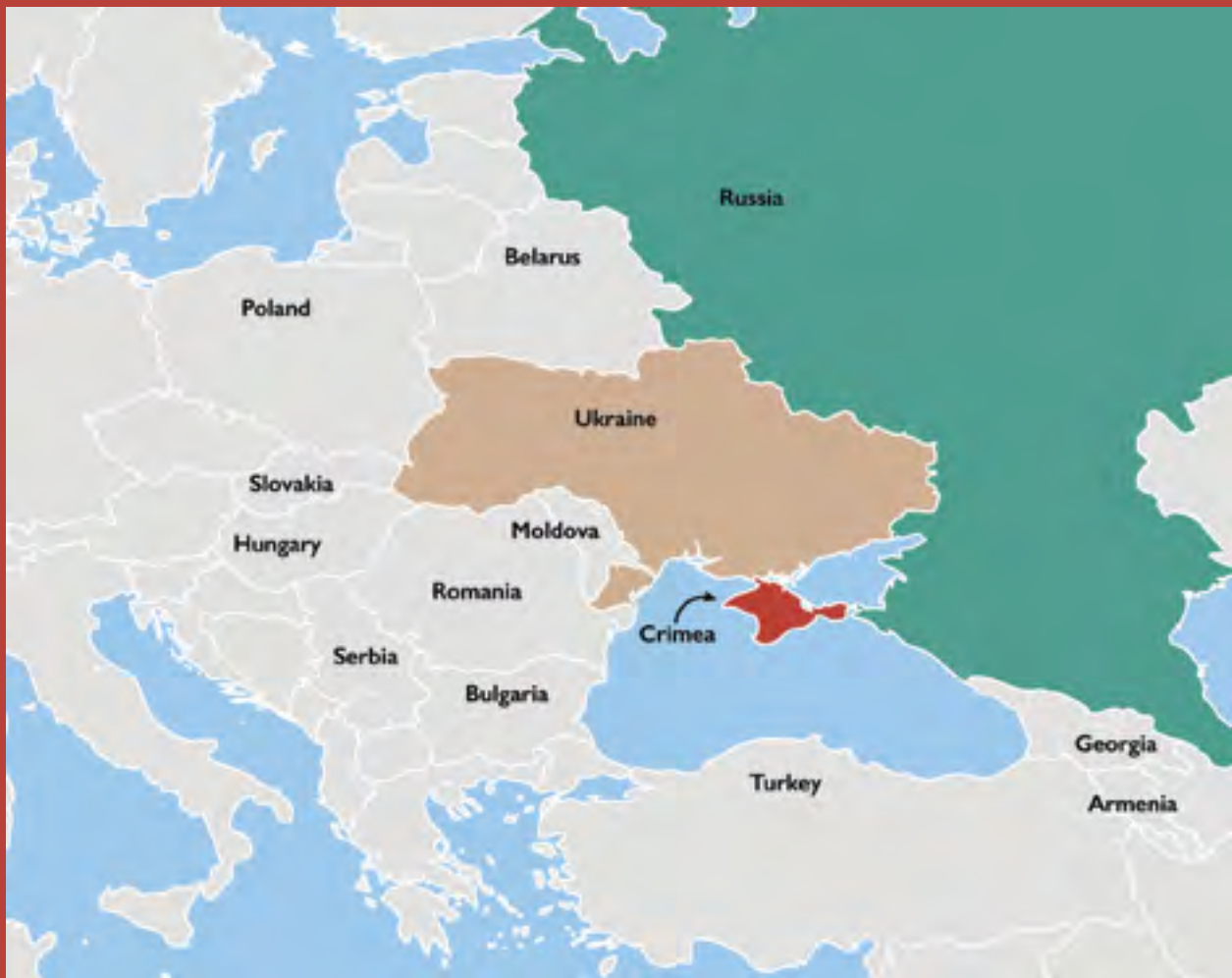
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Section Two: NATO Responses to Hybrid Strategies



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Is It All Just a Bad Habit? Explaining NATO's Difficulty in Deterring Russian Aggression

RECENT
RUSSIAN HYBRID
WARFARE
ACTIVITIES
LIE OUTSIDE
NATO'S
HABITUATED
WORLDVIEW.

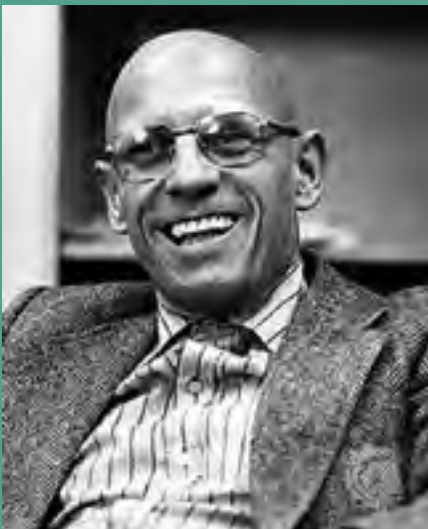
FROM THE SPLITTING OFF OF SOUTH OSSETIA AND PROVOCATIONS against Estonia to the annexation of Crimea, the Russian Federation is on the offensive (for more details on these events, see the articles by Dayspring, Danylyuk, and Atay in the first section of this issue). What hampers NATO from mounting an effective deterrent response to recent Russian aggression? I offer the following (partial) answer to this puzzle: the Russian threat falls outside of NATO's strategic "habit." In other words, legacy assumptions, norms, and behavior patterns drive NATO's inability to respond to the threats posed by Russian activity, and these legacies have been entrenched through decades of environmental conditioning and discourse. Such habituation constrains the ability of an organization and its individual members to plan or act outside of a given space. The problem goes deeper than tactics, technology, or operations. It reflects both a self-conceptualization and a set of assumptions about the functioning of the global system that inhibit effective response.

"Habit" as an Analytical Concept

As early as the 1960s, the French philosopher Michel Foucault developed the concept of uncovering the "archeology" of knowledge, wherein "systems of thought and knowledge ... are governed by rules ... that operate beneath the consciousness of individual subjects and define a system of conceptual possibilities that determines the boundaries of thought in a given domain and period."¹ Work such as this opened the door to critical studies of social structure that show how such emergent properties can constrain, if not entrap, their inhabitants.² More recently, political scientist Ted Hopf has offered a new approach for analyzing this issue within the context of international relations, based on the fourth (and most neglected) of Max Weber's logics of human action. In order, the four are: (1) instrumental rationality (cost-benefit analysis), (2) value rationality (appeal to norms or ethics), (3) affect (emotions), and (4) habit (unquestioned view-points).³ It is this fourth logic—*habit*—that is the point of concern here.

In his article for this special issue of *CTX*, Dayspring argues that "the Russian Federation is at war with the West. Pretending this is not the case ... does not make it any less so." Why would NATO be pretending? The logic of habit, rather, would suggest that NATO has, through intellectual inertia, arrived at an ontology of deterrence that cannot grapple with the strategies used by Russia. In Hopf's conceptualization,

habits both evoke and suppress actions. They imply actions by giving us ready-made responses to the world that we execute without thinking. ... So an infinitude of behaviors are effectively deleted from the available repertoire of possible actions. We do not apprehend what is out there, and then categorize it. Instead, what is perceived as reality is already pre-cooked in our heads.⁴



Michel Foucault

Hopf specifically warns that entities such as NATO are susceptible to the force of habit: “Institutionalized settings in general, whether international organizations ... or foreign policy bureaucracies, are likely sites for the operation of the logic of habit because of their associated routines, standard operating procedures, and relative isolation from competing ideological structures.”⁵ In other words, not only is NATO working with outdated physical assets such as force structure (see the article by Fábíán in this issue), but it is similarly battling outdated cognitive awareness regarding the threat environment.

This logic of habit is driven by the two major phases of NATO’s history. First, the Cold War (1945–1990) created the habit of seeing deterrent “bargaining” with Russia as having meaning only in reference to a potential nuclear apocalypse. Smaller, conventional military actions carried no intrinsic meaning other than the communication of intent regarding a larger potential war. Second, in the constabulary “Long War” (1990–present), NATO has battled terrorists and insurgents, enemies with whom deterrence was precluded by the assumption that such entities are not worthy of negotiated settlement—only annihilation. In other words, NATO has not encountered or developed effective theories regarding middling, militarized interstate disputes for 70 years. Recent Russian hybrid warfare activities, therefore, lie outside its habituated worldview.

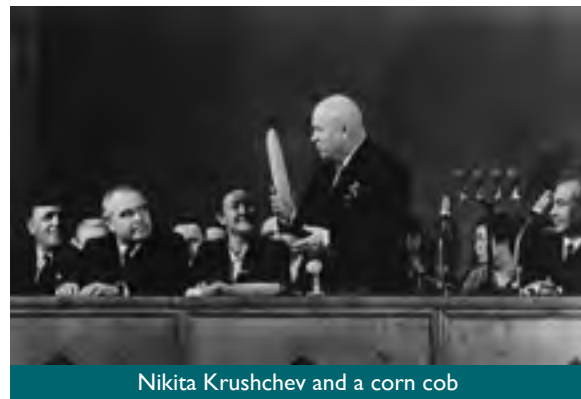
“WHAT IS PERCEIVED
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The Cold War: Bargaining in the Shadow of Armageddon

Because the Cold War emphasis on pre-war “bargaining” dominated thinking on how wars occur, the strategic environment of the Cold War shaped and entrenched aspects of thinking that remain coded within NATO’s institutional DNA. The conceptual effects of this narrow focus are threefold. First, pre-war and wartime periods can be crisply delineated. Second, low-level militarized activities serve little function without reference to a possible ensuing general war. In other words, these bargaining frameworks made it difficult to imagine that limited warfare activities could achieve a strategic end state by themselves—such activities would have meaning only as a preamble to a larger potential conflict. Third, and most obviously, this mindset toward conflict was tailor-made for strategic situations of “ex post punishment” deterrence, in which one deters potential attackers by communicating the capacity and resolve to retaliate in full. In the context of the Cold War, such punishment was ensured by both sides’ capacity to deliver a devastating nuclear “second strike” despite any damage caused by a sneak attack.

The strategic environment of the Cold War was relatively simple. It was characterized by a standoff between two relatively mirror-image entities: NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Each was an alliance of ideologically aligned states behind a leading superpower, each alliance fielded impressive conventional forces, and each alliance established a nuclear arsenal with a secure second-strike strategic capability.

The establishment of the nuclear standoff profoundly changed US (and hence NATO) strategic thinking, and therefore, the meaning of all lower levels of escalation. In 1946, the first doyen of nuclear strategic thinking, Bernard Brodie, established this relationship between minor conflict and how it might or might not culminate in nuclear exchange: “[I am] not ... concerned with who will *win*



Nikita Krushchev and a corn cob

the next war in which atomic bombs are used. Thus far the chief purpose of our military establishment has been to win wars. From now on its chief purpose must be to avert them. It can have almost no other useful purpose.”⁶ In Brodie’s view, states of peace and war were neatly delineated, and preventing the latter state became the sole focus of strategic thought.

Throughout the next few decades, this notion of keeping one’s eyes on the “big war” while disdaining the meaning of small conflicts continued and was more formally developed.⁷ It was Brodie’s contemporary, Thomas Schelling, who most fully developed the concept of pre-war bargaining as the key to understanding conflict.

Strategy thus reflected the judgment that ideas of complete victory could be anathema even in limited conflicts during the nuclear age, and that all parties thus had a common interest in stabilizing crises and conflicts before mutual disaster struck. This encouraged notions that the superpowers were engaged in processes of bargaining rather than battlefield contests for supremacy.⁸

The aspect of pre-conflict bargaining that Schelling’s writings most critically emphasized was the communication of resolve over disputed issues because, in the era of mutually assured destruction, the capabilities of actors were not at issue.⁹ Schelling’s thinking on conflict as the result of a breakdown in bargaining was, of course, based on his training as an economist. John Nash had published his seminal article, “The Bargaining Problem,” in 1950, unleashing a torrent of literature on the topic.¹⁰ In these models, actors offer each other divisions of a valued good, hoping to gain the largest portion of the good while avoiding the costs of conflict. This literature is noteworthy for two attributes. The first is the presumption that low levels of conflict are meant to be solely information-revealing—rather than being meaningful lines of effort in their own right—within the framework of the ultimate bargaining problem. The second is that even in models where infinite counter-offers are allowed, the first (optimal) offer is usually proposed and accepted in equilibrium.¹¹ In other words, the models emphasize conflict as informational and establish a clear distinction between peace (pre-conflict bargaining) and war (the breakdown of bargaining).

Even as the curtain was beginning to drop on the Cold War in 1988, Kenneth Waltz—perhaps the single most influential strategic thinker of his time—continued the pattern of dismissing the utility of lower-order uses of force and emphasizing the centrality of ex post punishment deterrence in modern strategy:

The accumulation of significant power through conquest, even if only conventional weapons are used, is no longer possible in the world of nuclear powers. ... Deterrence is more easily achieved than most military strategists would have us believe. In a conventional world, a country can sensibly attack if it believes that success is probable. In a nuclear world, a country cannot attack unless it believes that success is assured.¹²

In this framing, the superpowers of the nuclear age embraced a dichotomy by which actors could either roll the dice on a total military fait accompli or remain at peace. All lesser-included conflict could make sense only within this framework.

“IDEAS OF COMPLETE VICTORY COULD BE ANATHEMA EVEN IN LIMITED CONFLICTS DURING THE NUCLEAR AGE.”

As the Cold War closed, it even became popular to believe that war among “normal” states could become obsolete.¹³ With the demise of the Soviet Union, the seeming triumph of liberal democracy, and the emerging notion of “democratic peace,” many hoped war among “civilized” states would be a thing of the past.¹⁴ This evolution in academic thought paralleled the evolving strategic environment of the 1990s, a period in which liberal hegemony sought to eradicate the legacy of the remaining autocratic hold-outs and other “pests” that resisted its totality.

The Constabulary “Long War”: The Police Don’t Bargain with Criminals!

The end of the Cold War created an entirely novel strategic environment for the United States and its NATO allies. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and prior to the rise of China, the decade of the 1990s was characterized by a “Washington consensus” that proselytized free-market capitalism coupled with democratic institutions to all points of the globe.¹⁵ The strategic environment and academic thinking in this period moved from the Cold War’s emphasis on ex post punishment deterrent threats with nuclear weapons to preemptive/preventive policing (constabulary) actions against what were deemed illegitimate actors. Whereas Cold War thinking neglected low-level coercion in favor of “pre-war bargaining” models, the constabulary period focused solely on delegitimizing and removing any recalcitrant

entity from the liberal world order. This shift can be seen in the emerging concern with “(il)legitimacy” in international relations over the last 20 years, the emphasis on asymmetric applications of force against such illegitimate targets, and the implications of these trends for US-NATO strategic thought.

The end of the Cold War, with the concomitant US aspiration of establishing a globalized liberal-democratic world order, gave rise to a need for homogeneity in international relations. Actors that fell outside of this model became problematic irritations that needed to be eradicated, rather than accommodated or bargained with. Nearly a century ago, the German theorist Carl Schmitt prophesied the problems that would arise from a liberal hegemony, and developed the concept of *justus hostis*—an “equal and just enemy.” “Regarding an enemy as both a just and an equal partner meant that peace could be made with that enemy—his ultimate destruction was not sought, but conflict with him was possible and regulated.”¹⁶ The enemies of the post-Cold War global world order were no longer considered *justi hostes*, and therefore to act against them neither required justification for the initiation of conflict nor allowed for negotiated settlement to terminate a conflict. The primary targets of this type of “eradication” conflict were non-state actors (al Qaeda, for example), but included some “rogue” states that were categorized as outliers from the liberal order (Ba’athist Iraq, for example).¹⁷ Thus, labeling terrorist

NATO HQ



groups and rogue states as criminal enterprises again deemphasized the low-level uses of force among recognized entities. Rather, constabulary enterprises became the norm, which allowed for preemptive and preventive uses of force against illegitimate foes.

The analogy of “hegemonic policeman states” and “criminal others” in the liberal world order also appeared appropriate due to the vast military asymmetry between the United States and its allies and the global “irritants” who opposed this orderly vision of the world. Advances in sensors, precision-guided munitions, and computing seemed to embody something close to omnipotence in the minds of many planners in Washington. This “revolution in military affairs (RMA)” promised to entirely remove the Cold War reliance on deterrence, but would replace it with asymmetric hunting excursions:

If the potential costs of war appear to be extraordinarily low [due to these technologies], why not simply remove potential irritants before they become major problems? ... Indeed, the ideas embodied in the RMA appealed to ... [those] who dreamed of “full spectrum dominance” ... and neoconservative activists clamoring for a new *Pax Americana* built on US military supremacy.¹⁸

“
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These strategists then pursued their aspirations across the globe, from the 2003 invasion of Iraq to ongoing worldwide drone strikes outside of major theaters of operations.

This capability asymmetry, coupled with the perceived illegitimacy of terrorist groups and rogue states, codified conflict in the decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall as a matter of global policing operations. The concepts it builds on do not fall within the Westphalian tradition of international relations among legitimized entities, but rather smack of “pest control” within the liberal world order.¹⁹ Schmitt’s work recognized this problem, which he termed *bracketing*. By declaring actors to be illegitimate (bandits, criminals, terrorists, or rogues) from the start, the diplomacy required for beginning and ending a state of war was moot.²⁰ Instead, when illegitimate entities caused trouble, the United States and its allies (including NATO) would automatically mobilize to eradicate the troublemaker. Low-level military operations embedded within “normal” political discourse remained neglected. Similar to the Cold War era, the constabulary era poorly prepared the NATO countries to deal with lower-order acts of aggression among recognized players within the international system.

Conclusions

The question of why NATO is not effectively handling Russian aggression has many possible answers: the defensive nature of the NATO alliance, budget constraints, legacy weapons systems, political risk aversion, and many more. This essay simply tosses one more argument onto the pile: NATO’s ontological worldview and the epistemology of its strategic thought fitted within well-worn, but no less inappropriate, habitual grooves.

What can be done? Hopf argues that two mechanisms are often responsible for breaking the force of habit: “exogenous events” or “the margins of society.”²¹ By the first, he means a shock to the system that will cause purposeful, rational

decision making to reemerge. In the contemporary case of Russia, however, a thoughtful adversary is deliberately operating below well-established thresholds that would deliver such a “wake-up” shock (specifically the invocation of NATO’s Article V). By the “margins of society,” Hopf means members of the community or organization who are not stultified by conventions: “Those people least dominated by the prevailing social structure ... or who have lost concern about society’s opinion of them ... are the most fertile sources of ‘innovation’ and challenges to habitualized routines.”²² SOF forces have often played this role within broader military organizations. Specific recommendations from some of the other authors in this issue prove the point. James’s call for counter-hybrid targeting, and Andreassen, Boesgaard, and Svendsen’s argument for US training of Norwegian reserve forces are all evidence of such fresh thinking. Further, NSHQ itself can provide a hub for accumulating, vetting, synthesizing, and promulgating such innovative thinking to break pernicious habits sooner rather than later. ♦

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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From Tactical Champions to Grand Strategy Enablers: The Future of Small-Nation SOF in Counter-Hybrid Warfare

Espen Berg-Knutsen, Norwegian Defence Research Establishment

THE “LITTLE GREEN MEN” TOOK THE WORLD BY SURPRISE WHEN THEY appeared at a Crimea airport on 28 February 2014 and sparked renewed concerns about Russian foreign political ambitions. Who would be Russia’s next target, and what could small neighboring countries do to deter and counter the hybrid threat from the East? Special Operations Forces could play a key part in small nations’ counter-hybrid warfare in the future. Elaborating on the work of a recent US Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) study, I believe SOF should form the core of a new multidisciplinary unit acting as a grand strategy enabler for a small nation, guiding and coordinating its counter-hybrid warfare efforts.

In 2014, Professor Nancy Roberts and I directed a team of NPS officer students from six countries, which set out to answer the following question: “How might we design a special operations force to best serve Norway’s security interests in 2025?” The team’s findings were presented to the sponsor, the Norwegian Special Operations Command, in 2015. The Norwegian Special Operations Forces (NORSOF) 2025 study identified hybrid warfare as a key future challenge.¹ The intent of this paper is to develop the findings of the study, including previously unpublished notes from discussions with international subject matter experts, into generic recommendations for the potential role of small nations’ SOF in counter-hybrid warfare.²

Several recent studies have examined the future of special operations.³ The vast majority, however, take stock only of US SOF. Without denying the great importance of the US experience for the development of international SOF, there are obvious reasons why not all the findings of these studies are applicable—or even useful—for smaller nations. NORSOF, for instance, is dwarfed by the 69,000-strong US SOF community, which outnumbers the armed forces of most countries, has a worldwide presence, maintains specialized units for a wide range of purposes, and develops and operates its own equipment in all domains.⁴ In addition to this enormous gap in resources, the organization, roles, missions, and tasks of US SOF differ substantially from those of SOF in smaller European nations. For instance, while for decades the US SOF have built parallel distinct units within the military assistance (MA) and direct action domains, smaller nations have opted to include elements of MA in their predominantly commando-style strike units. It is, therefore, important to present a small-nation view of the future role of SOF in counter-hybrid warfare, which has largely been ignored in the academic literature up to now.

The Challenge: Another Kind of Warfare

What will the future of conflict look like? An abundance of over-the-horizon assessments by academic institutions and military intelligence communities paints a gloomy picture of governance deficits, complicated political landscapes, and intrastate and interstate conflicts: Asia will surpass North America and Europe

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in global economic power, and the resurgence of Russia's military capability will continue. The proliferation of new technologies will enable non-state actors and networks to attack Western interests in more harmful ways.⁵ The NORSO 2025 study predicts that "future warfare will move beyond the military domain into the civil domain, challenging traditional organizations and doctrines."⁶ *Hybrid war*, a hyped term with no agreed-upon definition (see Steder's discussion of this point in the Introduction to this special issue), describes the increasingly blurred distinctions between war and peace, the military and civilian sectors, and state and non-state actors. According to Frank Hoffman, hybrid wars can be conducted by states or political groups and can "incorporate a range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder."⁷

Initiated by the ousting of Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014 (see Danylyuk's article for details of this event), Russia's subsequent aggression against Ukraine came as a surprise to most of the world. Beyond the fact that Russia was willing to utilize military force to annex the Crimean Peninsula and support pro-Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine, almost equally disturbing was the Russian *modus operandi*. Unmarked uniformed soldiers with Russian military equipment—who came to be called "the little green men" as if they were Martian invaders—came to symbolize the hybrid warfare of the twenty-first century. In Ukraine, Russia has used the full range of military and non-military means to destabilize the country's new regime and support separatist movements. These include military kinetic operations such as artillery bombardments from Russian territory and the insertion of regular, unmarked troops in Eastern Ukraine; "gray zone" activities including the use of SOF and criminal networks against civilian targets; cyber attacks and propaganda campaigns; and political activities such as a trade boycott, increased gas prices, and diplomatic efforts. Oscar Jonsson and Robert Seely propose the definition "full-spectrum conflict" for the Russian way of warfare in Ukraine, where "several military and non-military means are under one central command and directed to the same political goal."⁸ They argue that the "conduct of Full-Spectrum Conflict is premised upon a centralized command and control that enables a high degree of coordination" and conclude that Russia's authoritarian regime has "a comparative advantage to the EU and NATO's cumbersome decision making."⁹

A SMALL NATION
HAS VERY LIMITED
STRATEGIC FREEDOM
OF ACTION IN A
CONFLICT WITH A
LARGE AGGRESSOR.

Not only large international organizations but also individual nations may find themselves struggling in the face of hybrid attacks from centrally-controlled autocracies. The sectoral structure of Western governments leads to an often-observed inability to collaborate, or even to coordinate efforts, between governmental agencies. "We're not adjusted to the new way of doing things," complained a senior international SOF officer interviewed for the NORSO 2025 study.¹⁰ He claimed, "There is no integration between big [governmental] organizations facing the same security problem." A European foreign ministry official concurred and argued for the need to share more information between departments and agencies.¹¹ Nevertheless, some nations have tackled the problem better than others. The United Kingdom stands out as a prominent example, where the Prime Minister's Cabinet Office both coordinates the government's response to crises and develops and implements the national security strategy.¹²

According to Hoffman, hybrid warfare's chief characteristics are convergence and combinations. Various methods and actions, spanning all sectors of society,

are combined and deployed simultaneously to present the opponent with a complex and overwhelming situation.¹³ They target the weak spots of many small Western nations: the gray zones between governmental sectors where limits imposed by national law often hamper cross-agency coordination and collaboration. Another challenge is the very limited strategic freedom of action a small nation has in a conflict with a large aggressor. A small NATO nation's rational course of action in a bilateral conflict with Russia would arguably be to de-escalate the situation unless and until a state of war is inevitable, from which point its rational course of action would be to escalate in order to trigger a declaration of Article V.¹⁴ This dilemma provides the aggressor with substantial leeway in the initial, pre-Article V phase of hostilities.

According to B.H. Liddell Hart's classic definition, "the role of grand strategy is to coordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, towards the attainment of the political object of the war."¹⁵ Thus, the ability to execute a grand strategy seems closely related to the ability to wage a successful hybrid war. Grand strategies are typically developed by large nations and most often executed by centrally-controlled autocracies.¹⁶ They are rarely observed, however, in small Western nations, most of which apparently lack the tradition, interest, and ability to develop such strategies. If an aggressor's hybrid warfare strategy is blurring the distinctions between war and peace and targeting the gray zones between governmental sectors, this lack of a unifying national strategy may seriously impede the small nation's counter-hybrid efforts. The ability to quickly understand and counter the aggressor's moves through a joint interagency effort is critical to success. John Boyd developed the OODA loop (Observe→Orient→Decide→Act) to describe the typical decision cycle and argued that one side in a conflict will gain an advantage by completing the cycle faster than the opponent, generating confusion and disorder on the opponent's side.¹⁷ Small Western nations may find themselves on the losing side of the hybrid battle unless they tackle this deficit.

The Solution, Part I: A New Mission for SOF

Make counter-hybrid warfare a primary task for small-nation SOF.

It takes a whole-of-government approach to fight full-spectrum aggression. Hoffman suggests that success in hybrid warfare will "require new interagency doctrine and new procedures for incorporating military and non-military programs and activities into a seamless whole."¹⁸ The NORSOE 2025 study recommends that SOF should play a pivotal part in the interagency coordination of counter-hybrid warfare. A senior European SOF commander interviewed for the study noted that "hybrid warfare demands more police-like forces, [and] SOF is a good tool for solving these problems."¹⁹ Another source claimed, "Putin is using political warfare actively in Eastern Europe, [and] SOF is the perfect tool to meet that threat."²⁰ The study makes the case that strengthening a government's ability to coordinate resources and counter hybrid aggression should be a future core activity of SOF. SOF leaders should establish a national interagency network, work with the international SOF network, and lead small joint interagency teams consisting of representatives from the intelligence services and relevant governmental offices.²¹ SOF could assist the national decision maker's planning and execution of a grand strategy by coordinating all diplomatic, economic, military, and informational resources, thereby offsetting the initial advantages of speed

“SOE SHOULD PLAY A PIVOTAL PART IN THE INTERAGENCY COORDINATION OF COUNTER-HYBRID WARFARE.”

and coordination in a centrally-controlled autocracy. Three properties make SOF suitable for this role: mission, mindset, and cost-efficiency.

Mission

Although cross-sectoral in nature, counter-hybrid warfare is principally a military task and may be viewed as an extension of SOF's existing roles and missions. Unconventional warfare (UW), defined as "activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area,"²² is at the core of hybrid warfare.²³ Countering UW/hybrid warfare may be defined as simply changing posture from the offensive to the defensive, working to reduce the nation's vulnerabilities, and attacking the opponent's weak spots. In low-intensity conflicts, like hybrid war, relational-maneuver armies have historically been successful.²⁴ Because they are by nature relational, SOF should be the supported organization in these conflicts.

FLEXIBILITY,
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Mindset

Flexibility, integration, and innovation are key features of the SOF mindset.²⁵ Counter-hybrid warfare should combine the resources of all governmental agencies, and SOF understand the value of integrated efforts better than most. Being small organizations, indoctrinated to work by, with, and through others, SOF operate jointly as a matter of course. Anna Simons describes SOF as a bridge between the military and other governmental agencies, an advantage waiting to be nurtured and used on a larger scale.²⁶ Furthermore, the varying and confusing composition of the hybrid campaign places a premium on the ability to quickly identify the threat and come up with an appropriate response. SOF's creativity and out-of-the-box thinking may prove to be highly valuable in hybrid warfare.

Cost-Efficiency

SOF are cost-efficient as well as cost-effective forces. As noted by Colin Gray, "SOF can solve sensitive political problems swiftly, precisely, and cheaply."²⁷ For a small nation, establishing a costly new organization to strengthen interagency coordination may not be feasible. Building the desired capability on the basis of a well-functioning SOF organization, however, is probably both quicker and more cost-efficient. Eirik Kristoffersen points out that SOF already have the capabilities required to play a role in a whole-of-government and interagency response to unpredictable threats.²⁸

The Solution, Part 2: A New Special Operator

Develop special operators tailored for counter-hybrid warfare.

David Gompert writes that "any force prepared to address hybrid threats would have to be built upon a solid professional military foundation, but it would also place a premium on cognitive skills to recognize or quickly adapt to the unknown."²⁹ The special operator of today has knowledge, skills, and innate abilities useful in counter-hybrid warfare. He or she is a well-educated, mature, flexible, resilient, multidisciplinary generalist trained and able to (co-)operate with everyone and under any conditions. The special operator is a champion of the tactical domain: a 25- to 35-year-old soldier with the exceptional physical

qualities and skills required for the execution of high-speed, high-precision, and high-risk tactical operations.

In the future, the nation will also rely on this special operator to conduct commando strikes, special reconnaissance, and counterterrorism operations. However, “tactical excellence in the conduct of special operations is no guarantee for strategic effectiveness.”³⁰ Hoffman claims that

defeating the hybrid adversary will require alterations in how military and national security organizations think about strategy and how leaders are educated. It will require commanders throughout the military that can work across organizational boundaries, with coalition members, international organizations, and non-military agencies of government.³¹

A NATO staff officer interviewed for the NORSO 2025 study insisted that the future SOF needs “jack-of-all-trades officers who understand the strategic context,”³² and a European defense ministry official suggested, “Military assistance skills will be the most sought after in the coming years.”³³ The study thus proposes that militaries develop another category of special operator, the “warrior-diplomat.” In addition to having the highest proficiency in military skills, the warrior-diplomat is defined as an operator with “excellent political and cultural understanding, highly developed social competencies, empathy, and communication skills which enable him to lead and work with others in an international and interagency environment.” He or she is “a well-educated enabler who thinks strategically and is able to creatively develop and integrate SOF capabilities into a comprehensive whole-of-government approach.”³⁴ The warrior-diplomat is not a completely different breed from today’s special operator. Rather, it is the same person with added experience, higher-level education, and training in strategic problem-solving. The warrior-diplomat exists within some SOF today, but in limited numbers because most operators who reach their forties are forced to start a new career elsewhere. Some of these “over-the-top door-kickers” should be retained within the SOF organization to become warrior-diplomats. The NORSO 2025 study proposes a dedicated career track for the production of such personnel in higher numbers than today.³⁵

Recognizing the complexity of hybrid warfare, the warrior-diplomats should be joined by a number of highly competent personnel with complementary skills, both military and civilian, to form a truly multidisciplinary team of grand strategy enablers within SOF. These would represent a highly capable resource in the government’s toolbox, and have the age, basic experience, and cognitive skills necessary to work with senior politicians, bureaucrats, and diplomats. They would exploit networks and pull strings to coordinate the whole-of-government effort in the counter-hybrid warfare campaign. A good training ground could be strategic MA missions in international operations. While contributing valuable, high-profile strategic effects, these operators would simultaneously develop skills that are highly relevant in national scenarios.

The Solution, Part 3: A New Organization

Establish a SOF unit dedicated to interagency coordination and counter-hybrid warfare.

“**THE FUTURE SOF NEEDS “JACK-OF-ALL-TRADES OFFICERS WHO UNDERSTAND THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT.”**”

In addition to a new mission and a new special operator, success in hybrid warfare also requires a radical reorganization of SOF. The NORSO 2025 study recommends that the SOF organization should have a short line to the ultimate decision maker, a mandate and organic ability to plan and execute joint inter-agency operations, and a flat and networked structure with elements dedicated to coordination, counter-hybrid warfare, and research and development.³⁶

Matching the speed of the decision-making cycle of the opponent's centralized command and control structure is imperative, and minimizing the distance of the reporting lines between SOF and the ultimate national decision maker will lay the grounds for timely and effective counter measures. As argued by David Tucker and Christopher Lamb, "insulating SOF from political authorities or filtering SOF control and command through a hierarchy of conventional-force commanders does not make sense when SOF are given the strategic lead for operations."³⁷ A direct and short chain of command enables SOF to quickly launch a comprehensive, integrated effort across governmental agencies while retaining a high level of secrecy.³⁸ Reducing the number of bureaucratic, hierarchical layers between the special operator and decision maker means quicker decisions, reduced risk of miscommunication, better control, and increased operational security in both the planning and execution phases. SOF should thus have a direct link to the national-level decision makers through a special operations command (SOCOM) with a mandate and the organic ability to plan and execute joint interagency operations.

SOF SHOULD HAVE
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Requirements for speed, security, and coordination also imply the need for a flat and flexible SOF organizational structure. Traditional hierarchies have slow decision cycles and ineffective interagency mechanisms, and experience difficulties fighting unconventional networks. John Arquilla states that "it takes networks to fight networks,"³⁹ while retired General Stanley McChrystal proposes "creating a team of teams to foster cross-silo collaboration," an idea inspired by his experiences as commander of the Joint Special Operations Task Force in Iraq.⁴⁰ As counter-hybrid warfare becomes a primary task of SOF, dedicated, networked teams for national interagency coordination and collaboration should be established. The NORSO 2025 study proposes a unit "conducting strategic liaison and inter-service, interdepartmental and international coordination" under the SOCOM.⁴¹ Personnel from this unit would lead small, joint interagency teams of grand strategy enablers to coordinate whole-of-government efforts. Additionally, SOF should organize small and decentralized units for tactical counter-hybrid warfare. NORSO 2025 proposes SOF reserve units for homeland defense to support local operations and provide situational awareness and rapid response. They would also train Home Guard units in guerilla warfare.⁴²

Innovation is a fundamental feature of special operations forces, and a crucial quality for staying ahead of adversaries on the battlefield.⁴³ As Arquilla argues,

While history provides some useful examples to stimulate strategic thought about such problems, coping with networks that can fight in so many different ways—sparking myriad, hybrid forms of conflict—is going to require some innovative thinking.⁴⁴

To keep up with the current pace of doctrinal, organizational, and technological developments, close interaction between the armed forces, research establishments, and think tanks is arguably more important than ever. The NORSO 2025

study thus proposes the establishment of a research and development unit within SOCOM as a driving force for developing and implementing new technology, doctrine, and organizations in SOF.⁴⁵

Conclusions

Hybrid warfare blurs the distinction between peacetime and war, and challenges traditional defense and security doctrines and organizations. Success in hybrid war requires the ability to quickly plan and execute coordinated whole-of-government countermeasures. SOF have the prerequisites to play a key role in the counter-hybrid warfare efforts of a small nation, working by, with, and through other agencies.

The SOF of a small nation should be given the mandate and organic ability to plan and execute joint interagency operations and have a direct link to the national-level decision makers. To accommodate hybrid warfare's requirements for speed, security, and coordination, the future SOF organization should operate dedicated, networked teams for interagency coordination and collaboration.

As the core competency for the counter-hybrid warfare task, SOF should increase the number of strategic-thinking operators through retention and academic training, and invite personnel with complementary skills into the organization to create highly competent and capable multidisciplinary teams. While developing the new grand strategy enablers, SOF should also maintain their tactical champions, providing a one-stop organization for all contingencies.

It is up to the policy makers to decide the future role and mission of SOF. When new challenges emerge, however, SOF should be proactive, not a slave of the status quo, as a senior international officer interviewed for the NORSOE 2025 study urged.⁴⁶ SOF should fill the current gap of the small nation's capabilities by quickly adjusting doctrine, technology, and organization to meet the challenges in the gray zones. Might these conclusions be relevant even to larger nations? ◆

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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To Change or Not to Change?

LTC Sándor Fábán, NATO
Special Operations Headquarters

Do not try to do today's job with yesterday's tools and yesterday's concepts.

— Marshall McLuhan¹

AFTER MORE THAN A DECADE OF EXPEDITIONARY OPERATIONS IN IRAQ and Afghanistan, the NATO alliance and many European nations in particular have recently started to refocus their defensive efforts back on their own national territories.² This is partially due to the reemergence of an aggressive Russia, with its “new” approach to warfare, and to the rise of ISIS, the violent and multifaceted terrorist organization that has conducted a number of spectacular attacks on European soil over the last two years.³ Although neither national governments nor NATO will ever admit it, this refocusing has led to the uncomfortable discovery that their Cold War–era, doctrinally rigid, conventionally focused defense capabilities have become obsolete and ineffective against the adversaries of the twenty-first century.⁴ In national capitals and at NATO headquarters, the last two years have been characterized by a desperate search for solutions, but it seems that neither individual countries nor the Alliance has been able to escape from the chains of convention and tradition.

Emily O. Goldman suggests that nations have two fundamental choices when designing their defense frameworks. One choice is *matching* with adversaries, which is essentially what the United States and the Soviet Union did during the Cold War. The second option is to invest in *offsetting* capabilities to disrupt and undermine the rival's competitive advantage.⁵ As recent events have shown, both state and non-state opponents have chosen to offset the conventional superiority of individual Western nations and the NATO alliance. How should individual countries and NATO adapt to this new environment? Should they stick to their conventional approaches, reform their military posture to match the opponents' strategies, or offset in some other fashion? Will it be enough to make only minor adjustments on the surface, or are fundamental changes necessary? This article addresses these questions with the intention to help nations and NATO better prepare for future conflicts.

The Fundamental Challenges

As Frank Steder outlined in this special issue's Introduction, individual nations and the NATO alliance face several dilemmas that arise directly from the new kinds of warfare that are emerging in the twenty-first century. First, since the end of the Cold War, the threat environment has dramatically changed from a bipolar peer-on-peer nuclear and conventional military rivalry to a complex form of violence and upheaval that threatens not only national security but also regional stability and global peace. Even if nations are saying “on paper” that they have grasped these changes and adapted to the new reality, their strategic approaches, military doctrine, and defense organizations are still primarily based on Cold War doctrine.⁶

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Second, because of shrinking defense budgets, most nations are years—if not decades—behind where they should be as they struggle to maintain their conventional military structures and hardware. Vehicles and weapon systems are, for the most part, old and in very bad shape; spare parts supplies are dwindling, and storage depots are emptying due to ongoing operational needs; and training hours have been severely reduced.⁷ What is more, due to this resource shortage, these nations have no chance of keeping up with current military technological research and development. The price tag of the most modern systems is so high that only a few very wealthy countries will be able to afford the new gadgets in the future.⁸ It can be argued that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan brought some valuable technological improvement—financed mainly by the United States—to participating military organizations, but these assets are focused narrowly on counterinsurgency operations in a very specific operational environment and hardly seem useful in a modern, wide-ranging defense scenario.⁹

Third, senior military leaders of smaller nations lack the knowledge and senior-level experience they need to be effective leaders during a modern crisis. This dilemma arises from three mutually reinforcing causes: the number of key leadership positions available in real, ongoing operations is limited (and assigned mostly to officers from the major nations such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany); the national and NATO exercise scenarios that the smaller nations’ officers usually participate in are still conventionally focused; and exercises that involve large units are very expensive to run and therefore infrequent. Taken together, these add up to inadequate opportunities for these nations’ senior officers to gain the experience the new environment requires.

The fourth dilemma facing Western nations is their complete misinterpretation of Russia’s “new” hybrid approach to conflict. Most Western strategists define *hybrid warfare* as an approach that simultaneously and adaptively uses conventional and non-conventional methods, including traditional and irregular forces, supported by political, economic, informational, and cyber mechanisms—all while sustaining plausible deniability.¹⁰ The reality, however, is just the opposite. Russian military forces act in support of all other elements of national power, which are the main lines of effort. Russia does not approach conflict from the West’s point of view anymore but rather

follows the Chinese concept of “unrestricted warfare,” which imagines the world on a “total war” footing where everything is acceptable.¹¹ The hybrid doctrine proposed by Russian Federation General Valery Gerasimov suggests that non-military methods should count for about two-thirds of the national offensive effort and military methods for only about one-third (see figure 1 in the Introduction, page 12).¹²

General Gerasimov stated that “the very rules of war have changed significantly. The use of non-military methods to achieve political and strategic objectives has, in most cases, proved far more effective than the use of military force.”¹³ Russia’s leaders have learned from history. They understand that Russia is not capable of physically occupying European territory, but it does not have to do that. By using an alternative approach, Russia can both secure long-lasting strategic results and achieve its political goals. What the world is witnessing from Russia is an old boxing trick: Holding the known and feared right hand (con-

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ventional military development, snap exercises, airspace violations) in front draws the opponent’s attention to it and convinces him that the blow will come from there. The real danger, however, is presented by the ignored and misunderstood left hand (non-military methods, other elements of national power). Russia is simply feeding the West’s wishful thinking about how wars are fought and keeping Western leaders in their military comfort zone.

NATO and many European nations are afraid that Russian armies are going to invade certain areas of Europe. This is what Russia wants NATO to believe, because until the Alliance changes its focus to what Russia is actually doing, Moscow can keep its real “forces” hidden and effective.

NATO’S Current Strategy to Counter Present and Future Threats

At the 2014 NATO summit in Wales, members held in-depth discussions on the topic of hybrid warfare and came up with ideas to effectively counter the hybrid threat. Individual member nations pledged to spend 2% of their GDPs on defense and approved the Readiness Action Plan, a policy document outlining measures intended primarily to shore up defenses in the member states that lie closest to Russia. They also adopted the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), as described in the “Statement of Foreign Ministers on the Readiness Action Plan”:

The Readiness Action Plan agreed by Heads of State and Government at the Wales Summit is a response to the changed and broader security environment in and near Europe. It responds to the challenges posed by Russia and their strategic implications. It also responds to the risks and threats emanating from our southern neighborhood, the Middle East and North Africa. Its implementation will significantly enhance NATO's readiness and responsiveness and will ... strengthen both NATO's collective defence and crisis management capability.¹⁴

The VJTF is envisioned as a "spearhead" force within the existing NATO Response Force, "able to deploy at very short notice, particularly at the periphery of NATO's territory. The VJTF should consist of a land component with appropriate air, maritime, and Special Operations Forces available."¹⁵ While these initiatives and countermeasures demonstrate some level of adaptation, however, they also share one common fallacy: they seek to counter Russian hybrid warfare against NATO and its members in Europe through existing defense structures, based on the traditional Western understanding of warfare. In other words, the Alliance is simply buying the Russian boxing bluff. Although many European nations increased defense spending and revitalized their defense strategies following the Ukrainian-Crimean crisis, they failed to recognize the nature of the beast. These countries are still trapped by conventional doctrine and derive their defense approaches from fear of a physical occupation. To effectively tackle the Russian strategy and prepare for any additional current and future challenges, nations must understand that whatever worked yesterday is not going to work today or tomorrow. They have to recognize the fact that, as Carl von Clausewitz wrote, "war is a chameleon, and it will change its aspects at each occurrence."¹⁶ Nations must be ready to change as well. They should abandon their conventional approaches and reexamine the definition of conflict at the most fundamental level.

An Alternative Approach

Thirty-five years ago, Kenneth Waltz argued that, in the competitive international environment of the Cold War, states "socialized" to similar strategies. He observed that "the fate of each state depends on its responses to what other states do. The possibility that conflict will be conducted by force leads to competition in the arts and the instruments of force. Competition produces a tendency toward the sameness of the competitors."¹⁷ As Goldman suggested, nations have two fundamental choices when designing their defense frameworks: either match their strategy with those of possible future adversaries or develop offsetting capabilities. By linking the strategies proposed by Waltz and Goldman together, national military leaders have a strong realist starting point from which to justify abandoning their conventional strategy and matching an opponent's hybrid approach.

If there has ever been a time in history that verified Frank Hoffman's statement that "the incentives for states to exploit non-traditional modes of war are on the rise,"¹⁸ then today is that time. Like their current state and non-state adversaries, nations will have to consider introducing an "unrestricted" or "total war" type of national defense strategy and accepting the fact that there is no longer any line separating peace and war. Governments will have to go beyond such meaningless and heavily theoretical ideas as "smart defense," "pooling and sharing,"¹⁹ and the "comprehensive approach,"²⁰ and will have to come up with a sustainable and future-based approach. What the world must witness is a fundamental shift from

“**WHATEVER WORKED
YESTERDAY IS NOT
GOING TO WORK
TODAY OR TOMORROW.**”

the current conventionally focused defensive approaches to much more unconventional national strategies. This should not mean simply polishing the surface of WWII-based doctrines and war machines by introducing some specialized forces and high-tech equipment, but rather it should entail a total restructuring of everything the West understands about national defense. This need is best described by retired United States Army Lieutenant General David Barno.

Our military today is in a sense operating without a concept of war and is searching desperately for the new “unified field theory” of conflict that will serve to organize and drive military doctrine and tactics, acquisition and research, training and organization, leader development and education, materiel and weaponry, and personnel and promotion policies in ways that could replace the legacy impact that Cold War structures still exert on all facets of the military.²¹

“THE INCENTIVES FOR STATES TO EXPLOIT NON-TRADITIONAL MODES OF WAR ARE ON THE RISE.”

Although some developments in several countries begin to address LTG Barno’s concerns, all of these efforts up to now have been characterized by cautious steps that do nothing to break down historical military traditions that date back hundreds of years. This must change, and the revolution in strategic thinking must start immediately. To effectively counter the Russian hybrid approach or an ISIS-like insurgent organization, nations must start harvesting from the edges of strategic thinking instead of blindly following conventionally rooted “mainstream” ideas.

Like the phalanx, heavy cavalry, and hussars of past centuries, and the doctrine and weapon systems associated with these formations, the current services, branches, formations, training structure, and military ranking systems should largely disappear as well. As Martin van Creveld suggested in 1991,

small-scale war will cause regular armed forces themselves to change form, shrink in size, and wither away ... [and] regular forces to degenerate into like forces or, in case the struggle lasts for very long, mere armed gangs. Over time, uniforms will probably be replaced by mere insignia in the shape of sashes, armbands, and the like.²²

The new defense establishments “will not amount to armies as we understand the term today.”²³ These new formations should be established according to the threat they are going to face, but also with consideration for the available resources. Different formations should be based on the organizational characteristics of a nation’s military, police, secret services, and intelligence services while also incorporating the useful elements of terrorist groups, partisans, and insurgent organizations. For instance, these future defensive formations should include members with engineering, medical, hacker, communications, media, and other such specialized skills. These new elements should also be ready to use completely unexpected techniques, tactics, and procedures such as swarming to be effective against both a conventional and an unconventional adversary.²⁴

When the time comes for stakeholders to look for an existing framework on which to start building these new kinds of formations, national special operations forces should come to the fore. Although SOF are as irrelevant in today’s operational environment as any other service, their unique characteristics—including interagency cooperation, flexibility, non-traditional thinking, and the ability to adapt to the changing environment—could still make them the

primary vehicle to implement such extensive fundamental changes in national security strategy and military organizational structure. The responsibility of national SOF will be to recognize the need for change and instead of trying to block the revolution, support it as much as possible. Of course, because the new approach will probably cause all of the other services in their present form to disappear, there will be profound changes in SOF culture and traditions as well. What will arise from the destruction, however, is a more sustainable and more relevant defensive capability than most countries possess today.

With their new strategy and new formations, nations should also move away from reflexively pursuing high-tech approaches and adopt a “right-tech” approach instead. Today’s most sophisticated and most powerful weapons, including fighter planes, tanks, and artillery pieces, are not only irrelevant in the current operational environment but also come with a prohibitive price tag.²⁵ Nations need to forget the idea of fighting the fight that fits their weapons and start building the weapons to fit the fight. It is imperative to reverse the process by which a revolution in weapons technology precedes a corresponding revolution in military affairs. Governments should admit that they cannot afford to buy and sustain the most advanced weapons, but they should also realize that they do not have to. They can finally free themselves from their slavery to technology. The world is at the point in technological development where a nation can choose its way of fighting first and then develop or procure the proper hardware to support the fight. Instead of trying to compete against a tank with a tank or against an airplane with an airplane, nations should focus on technologies that eliminate the modern systems’ advantages or make them irrelevant. Such technologies might include remote-controlled ground and aerial vehicles, electromagnetic pulse technologies, communication disruption tools, and “satellite killer” lasers.

Conclusion

If nations decide to go down the road proposed in this essay and elsewhere in this special issue, then NATO will be in for some serious changes as well. The Alliance has to be ready to loosen its standardization principles at every level, including in areas such as military formations, platform capabilities, and interoperability. Unfortunately, there is no one-size-fits-all solution for twenty-first-century conflicts. Instead of traditional, standardized

requirements, NATO’s leadership must embrace a variety of capabilities and simultaneously develop proper procedures to incorporate them into an effective system. This means that both military professionals and civil servants will have to accept radical changes outside of their comfort zone. As LTG Barno pointed out, while member nations undertake their strategic revolutions, NATO will also need a new concept of war and a new “unified field theory” of conflict. This process will lead to new organizations, doctrine, acquisition systems, training, and leader development, which will replace the legacy principles of the Cold War. If NATO is not willing to change alongside its individual member nations, then very soon it will be unable to win wars or even be a meaningful participant in conflicts.

The world stands at a historic turning point. Nations must learn from the past without being trapped in it. “Like a man who has been shot in the head but still manages to stagger forward a few paces,”²⁶ the traditional approaches to national defense are at their last gasp. Nations should realize that unconventional approaches need not be only for “rogue” states and non-state actors to use, but that innovation can be taken to another level as democratic countries’ grand strategy. The change is coming. As van Creveld noted, “In the future people will probably look back upon the twentieth century as a period of mighty empires, vast armies, and incredible fighting machines that have crumbled into dust.

... As the old war convention fades away, a new one will no doubt take its place.”²⁷ The only question is how prepared individual NATO nations and the Alliance will be for this new era. ♦

“**NATIONS MUST
START HARVESTING
FROM THE EDGES OF
STRATEGIC THINKING.**”

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- 1 This is a common paraphrase of McLuhan's original statement: "Our 'Age of Anxiety' is, in part, the result of trying to do today's job with yesterday's tools—with yesterday's concepts." See Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium Is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967).
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Sharpening the Spear of NATO SOF: Deterring Russian Hybrid Aggression through Network Targeting

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THE RUSSIAN MODEL OF HYBRID WARFARE HAS BEEN DESIGNED TO BLUR the lines between war and peace. Recent Russian hybrid campaigns in Georgia, Crimea, and eastern Ukraine have demonstrated to the world that Russia is highly adept at advancing its objectives through its own unique brand of hybrid warfare. To counter and deter the new Russian threat, NATO must reconfigure its own hybrid warfare approach toward a more proactive collective defense. NATO's currently reactive collective defense paradigm, characterized by routine conventional military exercises and the forward positioning of military equipment and rapid reaction forces throughout Europe, is simply no longer effective at deterring Russian aggression. NATO should move to a proactive defense approach with a robust irregular warfare component to complement conventional diplomatic, military, and economic deterrence efforts.

The organizational structure, targeting methodology, and menu of effects that NATO SOF have developed and optimized over 15 years of counterterrorism operations have great potential for success against Russian hybrid warfare.

The Russian Hybrid Threat

As Ukrainians struggled to rebuild a democratic government after the flight of then-president Viktor Yanukovich in the winter of 2013, Russian military personnel without insignia began showing up in eastern Ukraine.¹ In March 2014, Russia annexed Crimea through an illegal and falsified referendum, and the international community failed to respond.

Throughout that spring, Russian soldiers and intelligence operatives used the thin veil of a supposed Ukrainian separatist movement to rapidly seize government and public infrastructure in parts of eastern Ukraine and established the "Donetsk People's Republic." The president of this rebel government was a Russian political advisor from Moscow, and the defense minister was a known Russian Federal Security Service colonel, and yet the international community failed to produce an effective response to a de facto Russian invasion of Ukraine.² Russia had seized control of vital parts of the sovereign Ukrainian state with only minor repercussions. This outcome made many observers wonder whether the NATO collective defense clause (Article V) would hold up if Russia attempted similar incursions into NATO's Eastern European member states.

Since the invasion of Ukraine, Russia has only escalated its aggression. In September 2014, Russia conducted a military operation into Estonian territory to abduct an Estonian Internal Security Service officer whom Moscow accused of espionage, and Russian military aircraft continually and intentionally violate the airspace of the Baltic States.³ Also in September 2014, Russia announced it would prosecute Lithuanians who had dodged a Soviet-era military draft in the early 1990s, and the Russian prosecutor general's office has begun to review the

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legality of the 1991 agreement that granted the Baltic states (Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia) independence from the Soviet Union.⁴ All of the latent-stage indicators suggest that Russia is scheming to reestablish control of the Baltic states, and fear of a Russian invasion is high in these NATO nations.

Fully aware that challenging NATO in a conventional conflict would ultimately lead to defeat, Russia is deliberately utilizing hybrid warfare techniques that remain below the threshold of NATO’s Article V (see the Introduction to this issue for a more detailed explanation of the Article V mutual defense clause). Russian proficiency at such activities has been demonstrated in well-executed campaigns in both Georgia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014. While the specifics of Vladimir Putin’s endgame are not entirely clear, the reaffirmation of Russian dominance in the former Soviet near abroad and the reemergence of Russia as a global power seem to be his preeminent objectives. Hybrid warfare is the *way* in which Russia has chosen to coordinate its *means*—political, economic, and military—to achieve these objectives.⁵

In its previously successful hybrid warfare campaigns, Russia used political subversion, armed proxy groups, economic manipulation, and varying levels of violence for years—in some cases, decades—before ramping up military operations when its target appeared to be nearing a point of capitulation.⁶ These slow-burning tactics are already evident in the Baltic States. To coordinate and execute these efforts, however, Moscow must first build out its dark networks of intelligence and political agents, proxies, resistance movements, and cooperative, coerced, or corrupted local citizens. As these networks expand, they begin to look like the dark networks of international terrorist organizations that NATO has been at war with for the past 15 years. One of NATO’s relative strengths is its methodology for effectively mapping and disrupting these dark networks. To reorient its posture from reactive to proactive collective defense, however, NATO will have to change not only its existing legal framework but also its strategic policy. Adapting the US targeting process specifically for NATO represents just such a proactive approach to fighting a hybrid war using all means necessary.

“ ONE OF NATO’S RELATIVE STRENGTHS IS ITS METHODOLOGY FOR EFFECTIVELY MAPPING AND DISRUPTING DARK NETWORKS. ”

US Network Targeting Doctrine

In US joint doctrine, targeting, at its most basic, is the process of selecting and prioritizing targets and matching the appropriate response to them.⁷ Targets can be any entity (person, place, or thing) considered for engagement or action to alter or neutralize the function they perform for the adversary.⁸ The purpose of targeting is, first, to systematically analyze and prioritize potential targets, and then, to match the appropriate lethal or non-lethal actions to those targets to create specific desired effects that achieve stated objectives. This procedure must also take into account operational requirements, available capabilities, and the results of any previous assessments.⁹ The targeting cycle is conducted in a continuous six-step process (see figure 1): First, commanders communicate their objectives to their team. Staff then develop and prioritize targets from this guidance, allocate assets for the operations based on the desired effect

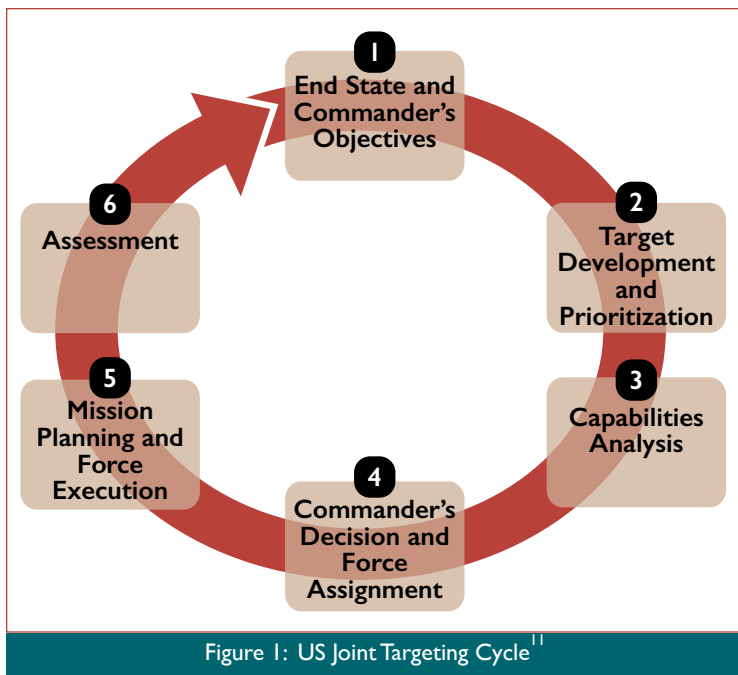


Figure 1: US Joint Targeting Cycle¹¹

and what assets are available, and either put the plans into action or assign them for further development. The final step is to assess the results of the actions before beginning the cycle again.¹⁰

US Special Operations Network Warfare in the War on Terror

Since the beginning of the wars in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), the targeting doctrine described above has primarily taken the form of kinetic person-level targeting and group-level targeting.¹² US joint and interagency operations have attempted—in rapid iterations—to dismantle large terrorist networks by finding, fixing, and finishing individuals and small groups of individuals believed to be of high value to the enemy network.

The concept of network warfare, or *netwar*, first emerged in the early 1990s as a number of strategy experts explored emerging forms of low-intensity conflict.¹³ John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt correctly predicted the rise of fighting networks and the doctrinal innovation of remaining relatively amorphous by organizing through linked cells that operate semi-autonomously but with a common vision.¹⁴ With the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the United States and NATO were propelled into a world where state actors were at war with non-state international terrorist networks.

The success and resiliency of these flat and networked terrorist organizations against conventional military goliaths has been impressive. While ultimately there may never be a winner in the internecine fight against terrorist networks, 15 years of conflict with these networks has forged the US joint and interagency community and their network targeting doctrine and methodology into an effective enterprise for disrupting dark networks.¹⁵

US SOF first encountered an elusive, highly-networked enemy in Afghanistan and Iraq following the 9/11 attacks and were forced to rapidly and drastically adapt in their efforts to gain an advantage.¹⁶ Their success is often measured in enemy body counts and amounts of equipment destroyed, because, compared to targeting national forces, it is relatively less difficult for US SOF commanders to receive the required authority and permission to destroy terrorist targets. As a result, most of the concern and controversy in open-source media over these operations revolves around the kinetic methods of destroying targets, such as drone strikes and special operations raids. There has, however, been ample success with non-kinetic and indirect methods to influence targets, such as the successful US special operations campaign against the Abu Sayyaf terrorist organization in the Philippines, which had its estimated strength cut by 70 percent as a result of non-lethal, indirect targeting.¹⁷

Even during the busiest periods for special operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, when dozens of raids and air strikes were taking place nightly, non-kinetic targeting played a significant role in increasing the enemy organization's costs and making its members psychologically uncomfortable. Robust psychological operations, information operations, and tracking and monitoring were key ingredients in the Joint Special Operations Task Force's ability to disrupt and degrade enemy dark networks, and US and allied SOF became highly proficient at methods that made enemies uncomfortable without always killing or capturing them.

“SOF BECAME PROFICIENT AT METHODS THAT MADE ENEMIES UNCOMFORTABLE WITHOUT ALWAYS KILLING THEM.”



The aftermath of an explosion at a night market in Davao City, Philippines, that killed over a dozen people, 2 September 2016.

With regard to the proxy or loosely-linked networks that state actors like Russia operate to destabilize or seize control of other sovereign states, the authority to carry out kinetic operations against them would obviously be much more difficult to obtain due to the elevated political sensitivity and danger of escalation.¹⁸ The non-lethal and indirect methods skillset and menu of options are therefore most useful when targeting Russian networks and their irregular operations outside of Russia. The implementation of a succinct and aggressive targeting effort against Russian agents and proxies should be led by NATO Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ) and all its allied SOF entities. With appropriate resourcing, this kind of targeting can illuminate the adversary's network for exploitation and can ultimately be an effective deterrent to Russian irregular warfare by increasing the inherent political risk, reducing deniability, and imposing associated costs for Russia.

Creating an Operational Command Structure to Target Russian Networks

NSHQ has already established a Special Operations Component Command (SOCC) as a worldwide deployable operational headquarters. This SOCC serves as the initial command and control element for NATO special operations forces that are deployed in a NATO Crisis Response Operation.¹⁹ If its command makes the psychological shift to acting as a wartime headquarters, NSHQ could task the SOCC as the initial operational headquarters for targeting Russian hybrid operations. Folding the Special Operations Intelligence Branch of the NATO Intelligence Fusion Center into the headquarters would provide NSHQ with robust intelligence collection and coordination capabilities. The staff and manning billets could be filled as needed by the NSHQ G2 and G3, similar to the Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTF) model used in forward-deployed US SOF headquarters.²⁰ This headquarters could operate a 24-hour Allied Joint Operations Center to coordinate situational awareness and effects and ensure a continuous effort.

Subordinate to the NSHQ SOCC, regional or country JSOTFs operated by NATO members' SOF would be able to feed information and intelligence to and coordinate operations up, down, and laterally across all NATO SOF partners. The NSHQ commander or designated SOCC commander would direct targeting and prioritization. The command staff and the subordinate task forces would develop and analyze targets and execute operations, or provide the appropriate national law enforcement authorities with intelligence that would enable them to conduct operations against Russian networks within their territory.

Given how difficult it is to share information among NATO allies, this proposed organizational structure could help break down some of those barriers. To effectively target Russian networks through a unified effort, a large number of military, intelligence, and other governmental organizations across the Alliance should be willing to provide input and coordinate their activities. If the effort proves effective for deterring or blunting the adversary's irregular warfare, then the momentum of success would build upon itself and NSHQ would have a critical ongoing role to play.

Once an operational headquarters is established and its intelligence section is capable of analyzing threat networks operating within NATO states, it will be time to develop an initial list of targets for non-kinetic operations. Person-level candidates for targeting could include agents of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, members of the *Spetsnaz* (Russia's SOF, aka "little green men"—see Atay's article in this issue on the Spetsnaz in Crimea), or individual citizens who are cooperating with or being coerced by Russian agents.²¹ Group-level targets for these kinds of operations might include Russian criminal syndicates and political elements seeking to exert influence in NATO states, larger formations of Russian special operators who have infiltrated to conduct military operations or stoke resistance, and vulnerable populations within NATO states such as ethnic Russian enclaves and extremist groups. NSHQ could also target network infrastructure such as safe houses, weapons caches, and communications and electronic warfare equipment. In the cyber domain, NSHQ could seek to counter Russian information operations and cyber attacks by drawing on existing assets, such as the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Center of Excellence in Estonia, to help develop situational awareness and capabilities within this sphere.

How Might Proactive Collective Defense Targeting against State Actors Take Form?

At the tactical and operational levels, NSHQ and subordinate headquarters have a wealth of options they could use to influence the network targets identified by the targeting process. Kinetic options would be available for other than human nodes within the network, such as weapons, equipment, finances, and cyber entities. To deal with the humans in the network, there are three plausible options, depending on the type of target and the desired effect: institution building, psychological operations, and tracking and monitoring.

Institution Building

This indirect approach can be used on friendly or "blue" targets when the network targeting process identifies adversaries that are working to de-legitimize or reduce the effectiveness of an Allied host nation. As the name suggests, institution building focuses on developing healthy host government institutions for governance, rule of law, and economic development.²² NATO already recognizes capacity building as a central part of its Strategic Concepts in Core Task C: cooperative security.²³ Refined intelligence through comprehensive targeting and a holistic view of the adversary's network would allow NSHQ to provide recommendations to NATO on where to emphasize institution building across the whole of government. On the military side, NSHQ could assist partner nations with the focused development of their military institutions and capacities (see Fábían's article in this issue on transforming NATO forces).

NSHQ COULD ASSIST PARTNER NATIONS WITH THE FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR MILITARY INSTITUTIONS AND CAPACITIES.

Institution building is most often thought of as an effort over time, but it can also be done in an acute, proactive, and targeted manner to blunt an adversary's actions or prop up a vulnerable partner institution. For a hypothetical example, assume that NSHQ's network targeting indicated that Russia's foreign intelligence units or their military counterparts were organizing protests within a country's Russian ethnic enclaves against a new government policy that required people born in Russia to pass a host-language test to receive citizenship.²⁴ With this foreknowledge, NSHQ might recommend that NATO's diplomatic arm and member states should rapidly deploy teams to assist the target government with crafting or adjusting its policy and thus defuse any legitimate grievance among its ethnic Russian population.

Simultaneously, and with the approval of national authorities, NSHQ could rapidly deploy SOF to provide riot control training to the target country's national law enforcement and military units, and advise or enable psychological and information operations aimed at quelling unrest. Unlike a generalized calendar of allied training exercises or scheduled capacity-building exchanges, this deployment could be tailored to a specific instance or vulnerability, and would therefore provide economy of effort and resources while simultaneously disrupting the adversary's network activities.

“ ONCE UNDER PRESSURE, INDIVIDUALS OR SMALL GROUPS TEND TO MAKE EXPLOITABLE MISTAKES.”

Psychological Operations

Psychological operations strategies use information and messaging to influence the emotions, perceptions, attitudes, and ultimately, the behavior of adversarial individuals, groups, organizations, and governments.²⁵ This tool for targeting terrorist networks has been highly successful over the last 15 years, and many of the methods developed in those fights could be useful for disrupting and degrading Russian state-backed entities operating in NATO countries. If Moscow has no reason to fear repercussion, its hybrid warfare activities will grow unabated, but if psychological operations could be leveraged, particularly at the individual level, the costs and risks for the aggressor would rise dramatically.

NSHQ could use its forces and knowledge of enemy networks to cause extreme discomfort for Russian elements operating in a foreign country. Its operators might use targeted messaging, threats, and other subtler techniques against members of Russian smuggling cartels, against Russian political agents who are attempting to spread influence or corrupt and coerce the target government's officials, or in the case of an actual incursion, against the “little green men.”

For all the advantages of operating in decentralized networks, the lack of guidance from a higher commander or supervisor can be a vulnerability when an individual in the network is squeezed into psychological discomfort. Once under pressure, these individuals or small groups tend to make exploitable mistakes. By targeting individuals and groups, even with non-kinetic psychological operations, NATO would communicate the larger message to Russia's leaders that their hybrid warfare strategy will not be ignored or tolerated. If Russia knew ahead of time that NATO is ready and able to deploy effective countermeasures, it would likely be deterred from taking such bold action.

Tracking and Monitoring

The targeting cycle depicted in figure 1 will usually identify and select only a handful of targets for action; the vast majority of targets require continued development and refinement, or simply tracking and monitoring. Arquilla discussed this process in his 2009 study, *Aspects of Netwar and the Conflict with al Qaeda*.²⁶ By tracking and monitoring nodes within the adversary's dark network, for example, the extended linkages of the larger network can gradually be developed to the point that the entire network is illuminated. Proactively tracking and monitoring these dark networks, even without executing special operations against them, would allow the Alliance to avoid or at least mitigate strategic surprises, and would provide it with a menu of effects to use against them as needed.

Conclusion

NATO should consider conducting proactive targeting of the Russian networks that are conducting varying levels of hybrid warfare against NATO states. Individual, group, and organizational nodes should at least be made psychologically uncomfortable and should be exploited when doing so benefits NATO. NSHQ and the collective NATO SOF have a myriad of tools and methods to conduct such operations, but if they are not used as part of a comprehensive effort, Russian aggression will continue unabated and at a low cost to Moscow. Failing to take action that imposes costs on Russia will only bolster its leaders' confidence and increase their audacity.

NSHQ should consider organizing and adequately resourcing an operational headquarters that is dedicated to executing proactive targeting against state and non-state networks. The Alliance should also consider establishing subordinate regional or country headquarters to oversee the execution of daily operations and intelligence efforts.

If the potential costs of attempts to violate NATO members' sovereignty could be made clear to state and non-state actors, they would be forced to think much more carefully about where and how to invest their instruments of power, for fear of international political embarrassment or military defeat. Across the large NATO alliance, members exhibit varying levels of political appetite for such activities, but there is a wide array of indirect and non-kinetic options for proactive network targeting that can be useful to deter aggression. The days of openly declared war appear to be gone, and NSHQ should lead NATO's efforts to adapt to the emerging model of aggression by developing its own new paradigm. ♦

“ A WIDE ARRAY OF INDIRECT AND NON-KINETIC OPTIONS CAN BE USEFUL TO DETER AGGRESSION. ”

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NATO Needs to Better Integrate Conventional and Special Operations Forces

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THE DAYS OF MAJOR COUNTERINSURGENCY INTERVENTIONS SUCH AS those that took place in Iraq and Afghanistan seem to be over.¹ The enormous military resources dedicated to these conflicts have produced only limited results, and the military strategy for future counterinsurgency or other stabilization efforts will likely be focused on leaving a light military footprint and finding local solutions to local problems.² These types of non-conventional counterinsurgency missions have traditionally been executed by special operations forces. With their flexible mindset, cultural awareness, and small unit size, SOF can operate independently in remote areas to help build up the capacity of indigenous forces, as well as facilitate the preconditions to establish or strengthen government institutions.

Such missions require a long-term commitment to be successful, however, and SOF are a scarce resource. Declining defense budgets, experienced by most NATO countries over the past decade, erode coherence between the ways, means, and ends of any strategy. Even with more resources, SOF cannot be mass produced because personnel require special selection and training.³ Therefore, NATO members must explore different solutions to this resource scarcity if they are to find sustainable responses to counterinsurgency in the future.

One solution could be to analyze existing mission sets and determine whether SOF are needed in all cases, or whether conventional forces could undertake or give greater support to some types of special operations missions. In the recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, there have already been changes in the mission sets conducted by conventional forces, but these changes do not appear to be the result of a structured collaboration between SOF and conventional forces. In an attempt to alleviate the problem of resource scarcity, this article argues that coordination between the forces can be accomplished better and more effectively in future conflicts. This proposal pertains not only to individual countries, but also to NATO as a whole. By integrating and synchronizing the efforts of SOF and conventional forces early in the response to a conflict, NATO will increase its capacity by using the same resources more efficiently.

Geographically, the main threats to NATO emanate from the Alliance's Eastern and Southern Flanks. The threat to NATO's Eastern Flank—the Baltic states and Poland—comes from Russia and must be met with both a strong and credible deterrence and a strategy to counter Russia's hybrid warfare methods. The threats to NATO's Southern Flank—the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa—come from fragile states and latent ethnic and religious conflicts that are breeding grounds for criminal activities and terrorist organizations. The solution to these threats includes stabilization and reconstruction activities, in which “the primary military contribution usually focuses on establishing a safe and secure environment for the host nation (HN) authorities, population, and other actors

**DECLINING
DEFENSE BUDGETS
ERODE COHER-
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to facilitate stabilization and reconstruction and lay the foundation for long-term stability.”⁴

Western nations are increasingly focused on the hybrid warfare that Russia has conducted against states in its near abroad. The Southern Flank, where conflicts are dominated by non-state actors, however, cannot be neglected. The economic and political environment in parts of Africa is characterized by high unemployment rates and weak, fragmented, and decentralized administrations. The erosion of government institutions in many African states, along with some governments’ inadequate control over their own territory, makes these states easy targets for violent non-state actors. Abundant cheap weapons make wars an option for a number of non-state actors such as warlords, private firms, terrorists, and mercenaries. The mechanisms of globalization and social media enhance non-state actors’ maneuverability and make them difficult to target in a conventional manner.⁵ African countries that are at risk of collapsing pose a complex and indirect threat to European stability by increasing refugee streams and creating potential safe havens for terrorist organizations.⁶ Thus for these countries, it is especially important that military assistance (MA)—a traditional SOF task—is offered to support local entities that are trying to create a safe and secure environment. Because this kind of task calls for a widespread and long-term commitment of SOF personnel, force scarcity becomes a problem.

“
SMALL-SCALE,
SMALL-FOOTPRINT
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”

SOF’s Role in Stabilization and Reconstruction

Small-scale, small-footprint operations that can enhance the capacity of local forces to provide security appear to be the future of international military activities. Having local forces create a safe and secure environment establishes the foundation for those non-military government and non-government actors, who are essential for long-term stability, to participate in state-building.⁷

SOF are well suited to conduct these types of missions; the principal task is MA, which can include training, advising, mentoring, and partnering with local forces.⁸ While it can be argued that conventional forces can carry out the same types of missions, some important characteristics distinguish SOF from conventional forces, such as the types of units each is fit to partner with and the operational environment in which each kind of force can conduct capacity-building missions, as shown in table 1.

Special Operations Forces (SOF)	Conventional Forces (CF)
Can partner with local SOF or CF	Can partner with local CF
Require limited logistical support	Require considerable logistical support
Suitable for politically high-risk missions	Suitable for politically low-risk missions
Deploy in small units	Deploy in larger units
Rapidly deployable	Require more mission-specific training
Can operate overtly/covertly/ clandestinely	Operate only overtly
Are a limited resource	Are available in larger numbers

Table 1: Characteristics of SOF and Conventional Forces for Local Force Capacity-Building Missions

SOF are more flexible and are a better fit for low-cost, small-footprint missions due to their smaller size and lesser dependence on outside logistical support. Capacity building in future conflicts will require a long-term commitment of personnel and resources to be successful—a commitment that is likely to overstretch scarce SOF units. In many potential conflict areas, a SOF presence could help local forces prevent latent hostilities from breaking out or contain them before they escalate beyond the point at which a small SOF unit could provide adequate assistance. This disconnect between the increasing need for SOF and nations' inability to produce high-quality forces in sufficient numbers presents an obstacle for the resolution of future conflicts. On the one hand, if a long-term commitment to a given conflict zone is the priority, then fewer SOF units will be available for other engagements, leaving some potential conflict areas without assistance. This raises the risk that intervention will come too late to prevent warfare.

On the other hand, if the available SOF units are dispersed across too many areas, it would be difficult to sustain these missions over a longer period of time. Some of the missions would be forced to end prematurely, before the local governments and their security forces were able to handle the conflicts on their own without outside support. Either case would affect the ability of non-military organizations to carry out their work of stabilizing the areas through institution building, economic growth initiatives, and so on. These organizations need a safe and secure environment for their projects to succeed and prosper. Without that safety and security, development projects might close down, further eroding the general stability of the area and adding fuel to potential conflicts. In other words, SOF must be used appropriately, and only when other assets are unsuitable for the mission.⁹

For a variety of reasons, SOF are sometimes deployed in other roles, such as elite infantry to support conventional forces' missions and objectives. One reason is that the military and political leadership may lack an adequate understanding of the SOF role. Another reason is that inter-service rivalry and fighting for resources can lead each branch of the armed services to try to optimize its own role instead of thinking in terms of a joint and holistic framework. But the special operations community is not without blame. When not occupied elsewhere, SOF leaders sometimes accept missions that put their forces into a conventional role instead of reserving them for

more appropriate missions. To free up more SOF capacity, SOF higher command must avoid these kinds of deployments in the future.

Since 9/11, the primary focus of the SOF community has been on conducting kinetic and unilateral actions against terrorists. Not to disparage the importance of these missions, but this is not a winning counterterrorism strategy. For every high-level terrorist leader who is eliminated, a new one moves up in the organization to replace him, and new fighters are recruited to fill the ranks of the organization. This direct approach to counterterrorism treats only the symptoms and leaves the root causes of the problem unaddressed. As long as this is the case, terrorist organizations and other criminal elements will have no problem attracting recruits. Therefore, strategy must give greater priority to the indirect approach of using SOF as a force multiplier and working by, with, and through indigenous forces to enhance local capabilities and find local solutions. By creating the preconditions for non-military

organizations to stabilize a region through institutional and economic development, it is possible to address the underlying causes that give rise to insurgents, criminals, and terrorists. This approach requires a shift in goals: from measuring success by the number of dead terrorists toward a more complicated and ambiguous method of measuring success in terms of political and economic stability. It is extremely

difficult to isolate the effect of the military component, and therefore hard to prove whether military forces are doing things right or even doing the right things.

SOF and Conventional Forces Integration in Military Assistance

Even when SOF are used only for appropriate missions in which MA takes priority over direct action and special reconnaissance, there is still an imbalance between the quantity of tasks and the SOF units available to resolve them. Conventional forces, which already provide the human capital for recruitment into the SOF, can help fill this gap. If just a fraction of the large number of personnel within the conventional forces assisted in parts of the MA missions conducted by SOF, the problem of sustaining numerous missions over the long term would be, if not resolved, then at least diminished. Three basic factors determine whether substituting regular forces for SOF is a feasible option for a particular mission: the mission task, the skill set of the conventional forces, and the

“
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APPROPRIATELY, AND
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FOR THE MISSION.
”

environment in which the forces are to operate. If all three factors are conducive to conventional force activities, then there is no reason for SOF to be involved in the mission. Although this is rarely the case and SOF therefore remain a vital component of most MA missions, there is still a place for conventional forces to support them.

Many individuals and conventional forces units from the NATO countries involved in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have picked up invaluable experience training, advising, and partnering with local forces. Although no two conflicts are alike, this experience can be useful for MA missions in other conflicts. Conventional forces will also benefit because the organizational lessons learned from military assistance will endure within the organization—valuable experience that could easily be lost due to the frequent personnel turnover within conventional forces. Furthermore, experience in MA missions will help keep the conventional forces relevant at a time when conventional state-on-state conflicts are less likely. But experience alone is not enough. If conventional forces are to deploy as part of a SOF-led task force, they must also receive adequate mission-specific training prior to deploying. The hostility of the environment, the degree of self-sufficiency required, and the nature of the task dictate the amount of training needed. Consequently, detailed and updated situational awareness is necessary to evaluate whether deploying conventional forces is a feasible option and to determine the kinds of pre-deployment training these forces will need. This information will also dictate the balance of SOF and conventional forces in the task force.

“ THERE IS AN IMBALANCE BETWEEN THE QUANTITY OF TASKS AND THE SOF UNITS AVAILABLE TO RESOLVE THEM. ”

The following is an example of the balance of forces within a small-scale MA mission focused on capacity building: A SOF unit deploys to a potential conflict area to establish situational awareness and to partner with and train local forces. As the unit’s situational awareness and the stability in the area improve, conventional forces gradually replace the SOF unit in certain functions and tasks. This frees up SOF to deploy elsewhere or to recover and rebuild strength before deploying again. If the situation later deteriorates and the area becomes unstable, however, it may be necessary to bring more SOF back in to replace the conventional forces.



Figure 1: Deployment in Military Assistance with Permanent Capacity-Building Unit

The conventional forces’ support to SOF can be organized in different ways. One method would be to use conventional forces to develop specific units that specialize in building capacity in indigenous forces (see figure 1).

These conventional units should be able to work closely with SOF and also be able to deploy independently when the environment and the task are suitable. By conducting joint training with SOF when not deployed, conventional units would be able to quickly integrate with their special operations counterparts if they needed to deploy rapidly.

One important advantage of such an arrangement is the ability to tailor the military force that is conducting capacity building *before* it is needed, and to deploy with a mixed configuration of conventional forces and SOF instead of deploying solely with SOF. Thus the scarce resource of SOF could be spared for other priority missions.

The personnel for these conventional force capacity-building units should be mature and experienced soldiers. The selection process should focus on the character traits needed for successful capacity building, such as cultural understanding, a flexible mindset, and good “people skills.” The units either could be organized within the conventional forces structure or could be integrated directly into the SOF organization. While the latter option would be preferable in terms of command and control and training opportunities, it seems highly unlikely that the conventional forces would be willing to give up some of their most experienced people to the SOF community. During a time of shrinking military budgets, creating new units would require existing units to give up both economic and personnel resources, an option that is equally likely to meet organizational resistance.

A more realistic solution would be for these conventional units or individuals to support SOF on a mission-by-mission basis. Higher command would identify qualified individuals and units within the conventional forces and assign them to the SOF unit they are to deploy with. This would require a much longer period of pre-deployment training, however, before these conventional forces could be integrated into the SOF unit that would conduct the MA mission. Such a requirement makes it functionally impossible to start with a mixed configuration of SOF and conventional forces; the first unit to deploy on a capacity-building mission would have to be a SOF unit (see figure 2).



Figure 2: Changes in Military Assistance Deployment Levels with Ad Hoc Unit

Although the conventional units would have to give up some individuals for a period of time, after pre-deployment training and deployment, these individuals would return to their original units with valuable experience and input.

The Role of NATO in the Allocation of SOF

Unifying the political and military goals and policies of 28 different member states, often with competing interests, is a huge challenge for NATO. A state’s view on the different threats to NATO is affected in large part by the state’s geographical location. Naturally, the Baltic States focus on Russia as their biggest threat, while countries around the Mediterranean may be more concerned with the spread of terrorist organizations in North Africa and the increasing number of refugees coming into southern Europe from Syria and North Africa. NATO does not have its own military forces but depends on voluntary military contributions from the member states. Because the NATO alliance is based on common accord and unanimity, every member state’s interests must be taken into account whenever action is being contemplated—obviously, it is easier to gain support from those countries that are directly affected by a specific threat. Countries on the Eastern Flank will be inclined to dedicate their troop contributions towards the Russian threat, while countries on the Southern Flank will want to direct their forces toward the Mediterranean region. From NATO’s perspective, this bifurcation of interests is not necessarily the best solution, however. A more holistic approach would make the best use of the Alliance’s military resources and better align with NATO’s concept of *Smart Defence*, which was introduced at the Chicago Summit in 2012.¹⁰ Because the threats to the Eastern and Southern

Flanks are of different natures, they require different solutions.

To utilize the members' various military capacities most efficiently against relevant threats, NATO's Allied Command Operations must have a free hand to deploy the troop contributions of member states where it makes the most sense for NATO as a whole. This would require national policy goals and caveats to be secondary to the overall goals of the Alliance. The only way this would work is if countries were able to enter into a quid pro quo agreement: a state that commits military resources to a mission that is not a national security priority for that particular state would need to get something else in return. For example, a state situated on the Eastern Flank could send SOF to participate in military capacity building in North Africa, despite the fact that the country's national security priorities are focused on the Russian threat. In return, another NATO state situated on the Southern Flank might post an armored unit—which would not be of much use for building up fragile states in North Africa—on the Eastern Flank to help deter Russia. NATO's role would be to assess and evaluate the overall threat to NATO and to coordinate and synchronize the deployment of military contingents where they would be most useful.

On a tactical level, NATO Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ) can play a role in disseminating the member countries' experiences with SOF and conventional force cooperation and integration. By sharing the lessons of failures as well as successes, NSHQ can identify best practices and help ensure that mistakes are not repeated.

Conclusion

The future battlefield will be characterized by a large number of non-state actors fighting an increasing number of intra-state wars. These wars will be fought in an environment of increasing complexity where globalization increases the mobility, outreach, and mobilization of non-state actors across borders. This scenario demands a more holistic approach from states, in which long-term military assistance is a key element for providing a secure environment and regional stability. Intra-state wars are particularly prevalent at NATO's Southern Flank, while NATO's Eastern Flank is dominated by Russian hybrid warfare. Despite large differences in the characteristics of

these conflicts, they cannot be treated as separate issues: NATO must address both simultaneously. If the chronic conflicts on the Southern Flank are ignored, the sum of threats and pressure from Africa, the Middle East, and Russia will endanger NATO's ability to safeguard many of its members. NATO's two flanks also differ in the types of forces they need. The Eastern Flank calls primarily for conventional deterrence against further Russian aggression, while the Southern Flank calls for SOF to carry out MA and stabilization missions.

If NATO is to conduct long-term stabilization operations in the future, its SOF resources will be in ever higher demand. But SOF remain a scarce resource, even for the largest NATO member states, which means the Alliance must explore new ways of conducting stabilization missions. First, NATO members must use scarce SOF appropriately: if another asset can complete the mission, SOF should not be deployed. Even in idle times, SOF leaders should not encourage decision makers to waste precious

SOF resources by using SOF for missions that are unsuitable for them. Second, countries must adopt a more holistic view of their armed services and think in terms of a joint framework. With declining defense budgets, the services and branches should move closer to one another in search of force-multiplying effects. Unfortunately, the opposite appears to be taking place.

Third, and most important, the special operations community should look to the conventional forces to help fill the gap between SOF resources and the large number of long-term MA commitments worldwide. Conventional forces have great potential to be effective in these missions and can be integrated with SOF in numerous ways. One thing is certain: SOF will continue to be a scarce resource, and NATO must explore new options to resolve the conflicts of the future. ♦

NATIONAL POLICY GOALS AND CAVEATS MUST BE SECONDARY TO THE OVERALL GOALS OF THE ALLIANCE.

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NATO SOF Military Assistance to Support Deterrence and Reassure Russia

THREATS ARISE
FROM A COMBI-
NATION OF
CAPABILITY AND
INTENTION.

NATO SPECIAL OPERATIONS HEADQUARTERS HAS DESCRIBED A requirement for more cost-effective military assistance (MA) operations directed at key strategic objectives.¹ SOF leadership can both contribute to NATO's security objectives and educate and encourage decision makers on the smart use of SOF. One way to do this is to "recommend operations in support of policy, and influence policy by identifying opportunities in sync with vital security interests," also called "policy by concept of operations."² The aim of this article is to develop MA concepts of operations in support of security policy objectives and propose feasible new concepts for future NATO SOF MA operations. This article explores several of these ideas through the lens of Norwegian security concerns on NATO's Northern Flank (Sweden, Finland, and Norway).³

Norway and Russia share a common border along the Kola Peninsula, which may be the Russian Federation's most strategically vulnerable region. From the Russian perspective, this vulnerability requires Moscow to maintain a strategic defensive depth beyond the peninsula's immediate border areas. Norwegian defense and security policy throughout the post-WWII period has been characterized by deterrence through membership in NATO and reassurance through cooperation with Russia whenever possible. Norway also observes a number of self-imposed restrictions, including basing and nuclear policies that limit Alliance operations on Norwegian territory close to the Kola Peninsula. This article explores four areas in which SOF can help Norway and other smaller NATO members develop and implement deterrence and reassurance strategies toward Russia:

- Use the global SOF network to enhance the capabilities of NATO SOF.
- Develop cost-effective countermeasures for hybrid warfare that have a small SOF MA footprint.
- Support the primary Norwegian security policy objective: a credible deterrence of Russia.
- Strengthen Norway's role as a partner in future policies aimed at reassuring Russia, a role that could become a strategic niche for Norway within NATO.

Part I: Military Assistance in Support of Deterrence

Stephen Dayspring sets the scene in his article for this special issue: "Russia has established strategic objectives that violate the sovereignty of its neighbors and threaten the stability of the international system. It has selectively deployed tools from the full range of state power, including the overt and covert use of force, to achieve those objectives." Russia has begun to reopen bases in the high north and to re-establish Arctic brigades and command structures. Threats arise from a combination of capability and intention, however, and although Russia is increasing its capability in the north, it is difficult to envision any rational basis for Russian military action against Norway in the short to medium term. Intentions, nevertheless, can change over time.⁴

For Norway, credible deterrence in the event of a severe crisis must build on Alliance engagement from the very outset. Escalation must be as seamless as possible, ensuring that the build-up of Norwegian forces and allied reinforcements takes place simultaneously and in an integrated manner.⁵ The Norwegian defense strategy may be described as a threshold defense, which serves to close the gap between crises that are, so to speak, too large for Norway, but too small for NATO. The 40,000-strong Norwegian Home Guard has important roles to play in the defense of Norway and may prove effective against elements of Russian hybrid warfare. These roles include making use of civilians in local networks to detect and report on abnormal activity, securing key infrastructure and working with allied reinforcements, and serving as a well-organized and well-equipped resistance movement if strategic areas of Norway become occupied by Russian forces.

A Proposed Course of Action

To deter future Russian aggression against Norwegian strategic interests, the credibility of the Norwegian threshold defense should be strengthened. To achieve this, Norway's SOF would use their current position and contacts in the global SOF network to facilitate US Army Special Forces' MA to the Norwegian Home Guard. This assistance would be directed toward Home Guard capabilities and districts that are determined to have priority.

Deterrence is about signaling. The development of Norwegian Home Guard capabilities by US Army SF sends a signal about the importance and credibility of the Home Guard. This signaling effect would not be as powerful if any force other than US Army SF conducted such training. The desired end state would be achieved when the ability of the Norwegian Home Guard to counter particular elements of Russian hybrid warfare is more credible and when Russia has weighed the costs and benefits of aggression toward Norway and been influenced in accordance with Norwegian interests.

Through their contacts in the global SOF network, which includes the Norwegian SOF liaison to the US Special Operations Command and NATO Special Operations Forces Headquarters (NSHQ), Norwegian SOF should investigate whether it is possible to train the Norwegian Home Guard to counter certain aspects of Russian full-spectrum warfare under the Green Beret Volckmann Program, or whether the training could be justified as a contingency plan in other US/NATO operations.⁶ The Home Guard Training Center might be one possible organizational hub for facilitating this training program. The Norwegian Ministry of Defence's Strategic Communication Unit would coordinate an information operations plan with the US embassy in Norway. The scope of such an MA operation like this should be "small footprint, long duration" for all involved parties: US Army SOF, the Norwegian Home Guard, and Norwegian SOF.

A number of beneficial secondary effects might emerge from this cooperative training program. First, US Army SOF would have the opportunity not only to train in unconventional warfare by conducting foreign internal defense exercises with civilian indigenous units in a permissive environment, but also to support a strategic purpose in a NATO flank country. US Army SOF regard "bridging the Unconventional Warfare gap" as an integral part of their capability development.⁷ Second, US Army SOF would be able to familiarize themselves with the geography of the NATO country with the longest border (sea and land) with Russia, while also building important networks with and through their

“ TO DETER FUTURE
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Norwegian counterparts. Third, by participating in the training of the Home Guard, Norwegian SOF would have a venue for developing their MA capabilities in Norway; the experience would also provide them with options for future basic MA training. Fourth, US Army SF, Norwegian SOF, and the Norwegian Home Guard would have the opportunity to develop greater coordination and cooperation, and strengthen the historic bonds between these organizations.

History of US-Norwegian SOF Cooperation and Value to NATO

Norwegian SOF carry on the traditions of the original Independent Company 1, also called the “Linge Company” after its first leader, Martin Linge. This was a British Special Operations Executive group formed in March 1941, which incorporated Norwegian special soldiers. The group performed raids, conducted sabotage, and trained indigenous units in Norway, and its members were crucial in the development of the Norwegian Home Guard after WWII.

William E. Colby, the former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, met the predecessors of the current Home Guard when he and his Office of Strategic Services Jedburgh team members jumped out of an airplane, together with soldiers of Norwegian descent, over Trondheim, Norway, in 1944 as part of Operation *Rype* (Grouse).⁸ He later praised the Norwegian Home Guard organization and emphasized its importance to

Norway’s defense; one of the Norwegian Home Guard units in Trondheim carries the name *Rype* to honor this operation.⁹

Since 1960, the Norwegian Home Guard and early Norwegian SOF units have trained in guerrilla warfare with US Army SF, first in the United States and later in Germany. From 1963 to the mid-1980s, US Army SF and the Norwegian Home Guard conducted joint training and exercises at the Home Guard Training Center as part of the US Military Assistance Program.¹⁰ Beginning in September 1970, US soldiers of the 10th Special Forces Group, who had recent experience fighting in Vietnam, contributed significantly to the courses taught at the Norwegian Home Guard Training Center at Dombaas. This activity was part of Exercise Flintlock, which continues with NATO SOF participation in a number of countries.¹¹

Cooperation between US and Norwegian SOF fits well with Commander, Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum General Hans-Lothar Domröse’s 2015 initiative for NATO SOF to develop innovative, low-cost, and small-footprint hybrid defense approaches to counter “gray zone/phase 0” threats in Europe.¹² Domröse particularly emphasized the importance of MA operations, led by SOF officers who were adept at working within both civilian and military structures.¹³

At NATO NSHQ’s hybrid warfare seminar in June 2015, Lieutenant General Brad Webb, the commander of NSHQ, described what he saw as the three primary objectives for NATO SOF:

- Understand: “Get out there and figure out what is happening.”
- Enhance: “Show that you are out there and use your network.”
- (En)counter: “Use force if necessary, but it *should not be necessary*.”

According to Webb, MA is a priority task for NATO SOF. He suggested that NATO SOF should embrace operational- and strategic-level MA activities through the conduct of long-term MA operations with a wide spectrum of partners. He further argued that such activities are most relevant and less difficult to approve within NATO *before*



Martin Linge, the first commander of Norwegian Independent Company 1

a conflict erupts, and that SOF are well-positioned to fill this role by taking advantage of opportunities within the global SOF network.¹⁴

Visualization 2025

The following is a visualization of the ripple effects this deterrent course of action may create a decade from now. Fasten your seatbelts, and project yourself into 2025:

In 2025, the US Army SF and Norwegian SOF programs for training and advising the Norwegian Home Guard have helped increase the strategic relevance of a networked Home Guard, which presents considerable deterrent obstacles for potential aggressors. Furthermore, Norway's defense strategists have finally abandoned their ambition to mirror the US AirLand Battle doctrine, which called for winning tactical victories against an initially superior aggressor by using small armored forces in mountainous terrain over vast distances, without any strategic movement capability. Like the Home Guard, the Norwegian Army and parts of the Navy have started to evolve into swarm-like networked structures. Norwegian strategy has shifted its focus away from tactical victories to one in which the defense forces avoid decisive battles while protracting the fight, as a means to achieve cumulative strategic effects over time (with NATO's support). US Army SF and Norwegian SOF lead the way in this doctrinal change through MA training with the Norwegian Home Guard and the Army, including small-unit guerilla tactics augmented by superior firepower—another SOF specialty. The essential purpose is to influence Russia's perception of the credibility of Norway/NATO's defense of Norway, and Russia calculates that this new strategy makes military aggression less likely to achieve Moscow's strategic goals. Thus, the deterrent effect has increased.

“ NATO SOF SHOULD EMBRACE OPERATIONAL- AND STRATEGIC-LEVEL MA ACTIVITIES. ”

Part 2: Military Assistance in Support of Reassurance

We must **think differently**, seek greater understanding of local, **regional**, and global contexts, and strengthen **trust** through interagency and **partner cooperation**. [emphasis added]
— Admiral William H. McRaven¹⁵

SOF represent **diplomacy conducted by other means**, and as such are usually subject to strict political or military control at the highest levels. [emphasis added]
— Maurice Tugwell and David Charters¹⁶

The previous section examined a proposal to enhance Norwegian and NATO deterrence through a NATO/US military assistance program in Norway. This section explores what might seem to be a diametrically opposed approach: reassuring Russia and mitigating incentives for aggression through MA programs.

Historical Background

Norwegian policy has been to engage Russia through cooperation whenever possible. The strategic objective is to ensure stability and predictability, especially in the High North region. Since the early 1990s, Norway and Russia have cooperated on the “safety side” of the security spectrum: managing non-military crises, conducting search and rescue in the North, responding to oil spills, and cooperating on border control.¹⁷ In 1998, the Norwegian Coast Guard and Russian border units developed a partnership through the annual bilateral exercise, Barents. Military cooperation between the two countries increased from 2000 on, and a major Nordic-Russian exercise, Barents Rescue, was initiated in 2001.¹⁸ There were also student exchanges between the Norwegian and Russian military academies.¹⁹ Norway began to participate in what was originally a US-Russian exercise, Northern Eagle, in 2008 and established a separate bilateral exercise with Russia in 2010. This exercise, called Pomor, included preparations for joint anti-terrorism and anti-piracy operations.²⁰ Significantly, despite all of these exercises and exchanges, Norwegian and Russian SOF have never participated. The only known joint exercise between Norwegian SOF and the Russian military occurred in 2008 in the Russian city of Pskov, when Norwegian SOF personnel parachuted together with the Russian 76th Air Assault Division as part of a program led by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to the Norwegian officers who participated, this visit seemed like a one-time event—a symbolic activity without any long-term strategic purpose.²¹

From the Norwegian perspective, military cooperation was a key factor in the normalization of relations between NATO and Russia after the Cold War. This period was not without bilateral challenges and incidents, yet progress was real. Perhaps the most important result of Norway’s cooperative policy was the settlement in 2010 of the 40-year-long border dispute between Russia and Norway in the Barents Sea, signed on the Russian side by Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev and Foreign Minister Sergei

Lavrov and for the Norwegians by Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg (now secretary general of NATO) and Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre (see figure 1).

As described earlier, Russia has recently established strategic objectives that violate the sovereignty of its neighbors and threaten the stability of the international system. Moscow has selectively used tools from the full range of state power—including the overt and covert use of force—to consolidate its objectives (see Dayspring’s article in this issue). Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Norway, together with other NATO countries, placed most of its bilateral cooperation efforts with Russia on hold. Norway has nevertheless maintained some con-



Norwegian foreign minister Jonas Gahr Støre and Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov at the signing of the maritime delimitation agreement. (Photo: Jonas Karlsbakk)

Figure 1: Norway and Russia sign maritime delimitation agreement.²²

tact in the northern areas between the Norwegian and Russian coast and border guards, and the Norwegian Joint Headquarters still maintains open channels with the Russian Northern Fleet to de-conflict military activity in the High North. In short, Russia is a geographic and geo-political fact and will remain the dominating factor in Norway’s security strategy for the foreseeable future. It is, therefore, worthwhile to consider a course of action that could help improve the currently tense political atmosphere between Norway/NATO and Russia, based on common security interests in the High North.

The Goal of the Proposed Course of Action

Like deterrence, reassurance is all about signaling. Few, if any, bilateral military activities signal trust or the credibility of intent more effectively than cooperation between countries’ special forces. To signal Norway’s desire to improve bilateral relations, Norwegian SOF could use their experience with maritime counterterrorism operations to conduct joint counterterrorism training and exercises with Russian SOF during future bilateral exercises like Pomor. Based on existing bilateral energy agreements, it is still possible that the two countries will exploit future transnational oil and gas fields in the Barents Sea as one large unit, perhaps with both Russian and Norwegian

personnel at the same installation.²³ Furthermore, Russia's proposed Northern Sea Route from the Kara Sea to the Bering Strait will likely become a vital route for global shipping and Arctic tourism in the future. There will probably be occasional hostage rescue operations at sea in which both Norwegian and Russian lives are at stake.

Norwegian cooperation with Russia could (and arguably should) be developed through a memorandum of understanding that enables joint actions against terrorism and sabotage on the Snøhvit (Snow White) and future Shtokman oilfields, and to protect petroleum transport and shipping in the Barents Sea.²⁴ Norwegian SOF have the experience, knowledge, and procedures to implement integrated operations with other countries' military forces, including countries with which Norway does not normally share all available intelligence and information.²⁵

The desired end state will be achieved when Norway's and Russia's mutual security concerns regarding future infrastructure can be jointly met without misunderstandings, when mutual trust is reestablished, and when Russia has weighed the costs and benefits of aggression towards Norway and has come to a conclusion that is positive for Norway and NATO.

While the strategic purpose of this cooperative course of action is to use Norwegian SOF as a strategic asset to help reestablish trust between Norway/NATO and Russia in the future, there are also some secondary effects that could arise from such a policy. First, countering terrorism is a policy objective shared by Norway/NATO and Russia. It is, therefore, possible that joint counterterrorism training would be viewed as less politically sensitive than other kinds of military activity. Both Norwegian and Russian SOF units have repeatedly fought Islamist terrorists who were willing to die for their cause, but each country's SOF uses different equipment, rules of engagement, and tactics. Russian SOF also have valuable experience from conducting counterinsurgency and MA operations.²⁶ Sharing such experiences might be tactically beneficial for both parties.

Second, Russia's apparent ambition is to assert itself as a regional actor, and possibly to reestablish itself as a global actor. Russian SOF are currently active in conflicts where NATO SOF are also present, although they operate from different strategic perspectives. We are seeing a growing level of complexity in the current conflict environment, and this condition is likely to continue. NATO SOF have recently had substantial difficulties trying to de-conflict activities with the Russians in a "shared" battlespace, most notably in Syria. Norway has operational experience with such de-confliction, primarily through routine communications between the Norwegian Joint Headquarters and the Russian Northern Fleet, a policy that has included personal visits between commanders. Over time, this course of action could help build similar person-based trust and knowledge between Norwegian and Russian SOF commanders. In future scenarios like Syria, Norwegian SOF personnel may contribute to de-confliction, and perhaps even to cooperation, between Russian and NATO SOF by expanding on such knowledge and trust. Building such levels of trust requires persistent engagement, however; it cannot be surged.²⁷

Third, former Russian Defense Minister Anatoliy Serdiukov was inspired by Western special operations command models to establish the new small and lean Russian Special Operations Command.²⁸ Although it sounds far-fetched today,



Norway should not exclude the eventual possibility of exchanging perspectives on the use of SOF at the doctrinal level with Russia. Russia has a well-deserved reputation for encouraging innovative military thinkers who develop efficient doctrines. It is likely that Western nations can learn from this model if the current geo-political environment changes. If it does, a readiness to discuss cooperation on doctrine might position Norway as a potential NATO partner for this kind of mutual exchange.

In short, future cooperation between Norwegian and Russian SOF is an investment in “diplomacy by other means,” which could help bridge the mistrust that currently exists between Russia and Norway/NATO.

NATO Justification

Of all of NATO’s partner relations, none holds greater potential than that between NATO and Russia. But today that potential is not being fully met.

— Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO Secretary General
(2009–2014)²⁹

“The basic problem, I think, is very simple. It is the lack of trust. It is the lack of trust on both sides.”

— Marek Menkiszak, Head, Russian Department, Centre for Eastern Studies³⁰

SOF-related training and operations issues similar to those described earlier have been discussed between NATO and Russia for years. The NATO-Russia Council provides a mechanism for consultation, consensus building, cooperation, joint decision making, and joint action. Russia should have a direct interest in maintaining such ties because it shares borders with several countries where terrorists are being mobilized and trained. According to former Norwegian Foreign Minister Støre, the NATO-Russia Council has benefited from Russia’s knowledge of Afghanistan in connection with the fight against illegal drugs, issues relating

Merlin Mk3 helicopter
in heavy snow in Norway



to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and terrorist activity, all of which are SOF-related concerns.³¹

Russia scholar James Sherr notes that Russia is a multinational state that is threatened by extremism and the growing sophistication of globally organized terrorist movements, and he emphasizes the importance of the work that NATO and Russia can do together.³² The radicalization of Muslims is another problem shared by NATO member countries and Russia. Terrorism expert Julie Wilhelmsen also notes that the radicalization of Russian Muslims, both in Chechnya and other areas, is the biggest internal security threat facing Russia. Russian researchers estimate that Russians fighting for ISIS number nearly 8,000, which is a substantial number by global standards.³³

One initiative NATO and Russia have unveiled is the STANDEX project, which aims to prevent terrorists from using explosives against commuters in mass transit systems.³⁴ Both the STANDEX project and the Cooperative Airspace Initiative are examples of successful NATO-Russian cooperation.³⁵ Both work well because of two important elements, which are also present in the reassurance actions proposed here: the two sides benefit equally, and neither project involves politically highly sensitive issues. Both of these projects are technical in character and address real concerns.³⁶ The course of action described here also addresses concrete, technical problems related to common security interests in the High North and should therefore be welcomed by both Russia and Norway/NATO.

General Robert Mood, Norway's senior military representative at NATO Headquarters, recently urged that the military dialogue with Russia be strengthened: "There is no reason why there should not be closer links both between Russia and NATO, and Russia and Norway. It is a dialogue that is required, not least in crisis."³⁷ Former Supreme Allied Commander Europe General Philip Breedlove explained why Norway's relationship with Russia occupies a vital strategic niche: "In NATO, we see Norway's leadership in the way it handles relations with Russia. Norway has a long history of working with Russia in the border areas. You [Norwegians] have experiences that we can learn from in NATO."³⁸

Visualization 2025

The following is a visualization of the ripple effects that such a course of action, based on reassurance and cooperation, might create a decade ahead. Buckle up once again, and project yourself into 2025:

Norway has made some progress in its efforts to reassure an economically weak and increasingly desperate Russia that both Russian elites and the Russian population will have their interests best served through increased cooperation with Norway and NATO. Norwegian SOF at the Norwegian Joint headquarters and Russian SOF representatives from the Western Military District have established personal contacts with one another. Based on common security interests in the High North, the first small unit exchange between Norwegian and Russian SOF is now being discussed at the highest political levels. Maritime counterterrorism provides a basis for possible future cooperation in the Barents Sea area. NATO headquarters is informed

“IN NATO, WE SEE
NORWAY'S LEADERSHIP
IN THE WAY IT
HANDLES RELATIONS
WITH RUSSIA.”

about the progress of these plans, and the issue gains support in the North Atlantic Council. Norway strengthens its niche role as a dialogue partner with Russia, and Russia's leaders are reassured that their country's security and economic interests in the High North are best taken care of through cooperation, not aggression.

Using the global SOF network for military assistance operations will enhance NATO capabilities, help develop cost-effective countermeasures for hybrid warfare, and support national security policy objectives. New and innovative uses for MA concepts could enhance both deterrence and reassurance measures aimed toward Russia. NATO SOF leadership have noted that these kinds of operations are much more likely to be approved *before* a conflict erupts, and they win approval more easily than other types of operations.³⁹ This is an aspect of MA that should be exploited, because there are likely to be several other national security objectives—or even international strategic security objectives—that MA operations can fulfill within the broad category of NATO special operations. It is to be hoped that NATO SOF leadership make it possible to exploit the full potential of Alliance MA capabilities before the level of conflict rises too far and the political landscape makes military assistance operations impossible. ♦

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COL Michael Richardson,
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Afterword

EDUCATION
AND TRAINING
PROGRAMS CAN
HELP BUILD
RELATIONSHIPS
OF TRUST AND
CONFIDENCE.

THIS SPECIAL ISSUE OF THE *COMBATING TERRORISM EXCHANGE* OFFERS a number of proposals for the best uses of NATO special operations forces in countering hybrid opponents and unconventional tactics. These are threats that remain in the “gray zone” of conflict, below the threshold at which an Alliance member state might resort to war and invoke the collective defense measures provided under Article V. Recent evidence of Russian government–directed interference in the 2016 US presidential election through cyber operations underscores the need for NATO nations to refine their means for identifying, characterizing, attributing, and defeating such unconventional threats to their national and collective stability. The articles collected here suggest that NATO should use a *whole-of-government* or *comprehensive* approach as the framework for countering the hybrid threats that abide in the gray zone. International law enforcement organizations such as INTERPOL and domestic law enforcement agencies, intelligence services, emergency response organizations, customs and immigration agencies, academic scholars, and civil organizations, in addition to national military forces, must develop routine proactive methods to share information. Working together, they must develop an accurate threat assessment mechanism to sustain situational awareness across the Alliance. As an important component of such a comprehensive approach, NATO SOF bring unique capabilities to bear.

Current NSHQ commander Vice Admiral Colin Kilrain sees NATO SOF operating throughout the spectrum of hybrid conflict, particularly in the gray zone—a concept advocated by former NSHQ commander Lieutenant General Brad Webb and explored by the contributors throughout this special issue. According to VADM Kilrain, preparing NATO to embrace this enabling role for SOF will require a stair-step approach, beginning with education and training programs that build a common base of knowledge, a shared lexicon, and a set of procedures throughout the Alliance. In addition to developing a shared understanding of these hybrid threats, the education and training programs can help build relationships of trust and confidence between NATO SOF and the government agencies that lead efforts to counter hybrid warfare. Education and training, coupled with strong relationships, will enable the development of civilian-led inter-agency, multi-national structures in NATO that will be responsible for identifying, characterizing, attributing, and directing the mitigation of hybrid threats.

NATO can build on the research presented in this special issue to develop a mechanism to implement a whole-of-government comprehensive approach, or if I may boldly suggest, a *whole-of-alliance comprehensive approach*. Creating a truly comprehensive approach to countering hybrid threats—whether civilian-led or military-led—is complicated, and additional research and analysis are needed. One proposal is to engage the academic research community in creating a NATO-based research branch dedicated to the study and analysis of hybrid warfare and the development of a comprehensive approach to mitigate those threats to

Alliance member and partner nations. This agency could be modeled after the Special Operations Research Office (SORO) established by the US Army to study revolutionary warfare in the 1950s and 1960s.

One unique characteristic of SORO was the dedicated relationship it established between the military branches, charged with countering revolutionary warfare threats to liberal democracies, and the interdisciplinary academic community that studied the complex security environment of the period. This precedent for military-academic cooperation may prove particularly valuable for developing nuanced threat assessments and new measures for countering the threats that now appear characteristic of conflict in the gray zone. Such a collaborative relationship may be vital to achieving the NSHQ commander's vision for a civilian-led, whole-of-Alliance approach to security. Only by bringing such diverse capabilities and assets to bear will NATO successfully counter the current dangers posed by Russian hybrid warfare, instability in the Middle East and North Africa, and other sources.

The priority line of research should be to assist NSHQ in developing an education and training program along the lines of the stair-step approach proposed by VADM Kilrain. The next most pressing line of research is to construct an Alliance-wide legal framework that facilitates the identification, characterization, attribution, and mitigation of both hybrid and conventional threats to the individual and collective member states. Further lines of research should define innovative indirect countermeasures that NATO can apply under this legally empowered whole-of-Alliance framework, according to the Alliance's principle of collective security, and should also explore the use of military assistance operations to build partner nations' law enforcement and military capabilities, because stable neighbors can create a buffer for the states that

border the Alliance. Another vital avenue of research is the use of SOF in roles that deter Russia and other adversaries from engaging in hybrid warfare.

As LTG Webb indicated in his Foreword, this special issue of *CTX* came out of a partnership between NSHQ, the US Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), and the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI). As former NSHQ chief of staff and now as the sitting NPS chair for Special Operations, I, too, believe in the value of collaboration between the operational forces and academia. I intend to promote this partnership as an enduring asset that will directly link to a future NATO research office. Both the military organization and the academic institution bring unique characteristics to the collective effort to effectively and efficiently identify and resolve emerging challenges to the security of NATO and its member states.

“ THIS PRECEDENT FOR MILITARY-ACADEMIC COOPERATION MAY PROVE PARTICULARLY VALUABLE FOR DEVELOPING NUANCED THREAT ASSESSMENTS. ”

Finally, I would like to thank those men and women responsible for the completion of this special issue of *CTX*, including the former and current officers who produced the bulk of the research, the faculty who advised the research, the former and current NSHQ command teams who inspired the research, and the *CTX* staff. Special thanks go to FFI and its director of research, Frank Brundtland Steder, who took a leading role in this project from beginning to end. ♦

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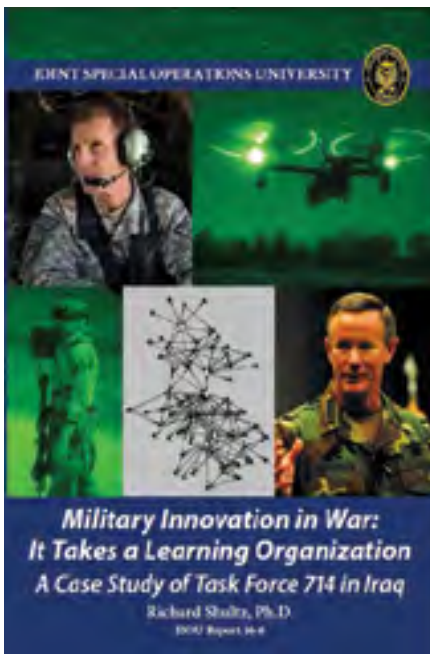
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Special Operations Research Topics 2017

Special Operations Research Topics 2017 presents a list of recommended SOF-related research topics for those who desire to provide insight and recommendations on issues and challenges facing the SOF enterprise. As with the past several years' topics publications, this list is tailored to address priority areas identified by USSOCOM. There are five SOF priorities: Ensure SOF Readiness, Help Our Nation Win, Continue to Build Relationships, Prepare for the Future, and Preservation of the Force and Family. This publication also includes the Key Strategic Issues List, which is another key document that identifies critical research topics. It is developed and maintained by the USSOCOM J5 Strategy, Plans, and Policy Directorate. Reflecting the consensus of the SOF experts who participated in the Research Topics Workshop, these topics are particularly worthwhile for addressing immediate SOF needs and for building future capacity to meet emerging challenges.



Military Innovation in War: It Takes a Learning Organization; A Case Study of Task Force 714 in Iraq

by Richard Shultz

In this monograph, Dr. Shultz provides key findings on how organizational change and innovation by Task Force 714 dismantled al Qaeda in Iraq's networked secret organization. Dr. Shultz utilizes sound methodology to show how TF 714 was able to achieve this incredible transformation. Drawing from memoirs and in-depth interviews with several TF 714 leaders, Dr. Shultz further analyzes these sources through the use of analytic tools drawn from leading business and management studies focused on organizational learning and innovation. This monograph provides critical insights and lessons learned for US Special Operations Forces and interagency partners who will establish, deploy, or support a special operations command and control organization. It is also a good historical case study and provides a foundation on how to adapt, innovate, and grow military structures into learning organizations to meet the future challenges of complex environments and our enemies.



The Asia Pivot: Implications for US Special Operations Forces by Russell D. Howard and John P. Duvall, Jr.

In this compelling new monograph by retired US Army Brigadier General Russ Howard and U.S. Marine Corps Major John Duvall, Jr., the authors leverage their vast experiences and knowledge of the region to explore the Obama Administration's Asia Pivot strategy, announced in 2011, and its impact on special operations. The authors begin by defining this vast region. They then look at US strategic goals, evaluate the threats, and provide an analysis of the progress from 2011 to where America is today, along with the importance to and impact on special operations. This monograph is the culmination of two years of analysis of the "pivot to Asia" by the authors. It provides a starting point for all SOF to gain a better understanding of this vast region and the future role SOF could play to counter the threats to our national interests.



Assessing Special Operations Forces Language, Region, and Culture Needs: Leveraging Digital and LRC Learning to Reroute the "Roadmap" from Human Terrain to Human Domain by Robert R. Greene Sands

For this essay, Dr. Greene Sands uses his vast experience and knowledge of this subject and draws from the existing Department of Defense's Language Transformation Roadmap, recent lessons learned, and historical beginnings to outline the importance to the US military, especially the SOF community. The past decade of counterinsurgency operations has challenged the ability of US military personnel to carry out a variety of missions involving culturally complex situations and interactions. Success in such operations often depends on difficult linguistic and interpersonal skill-based competencies and abilities. Dr. Sands emphasizes the utility of language skills, along with regional and cultural knowledge and cross-cultural competence, in engaging populations across sometimes uncompromising cultural divides. This monograph provides key lessons learned as US Special Operations Command determines the way ahead for LRC education and training to better prepare the future SOF operator to meet the challenges of operating in complex environments and meet the command's priority to continue to build relationships.



Sunset in Ukraine

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