

# The Logic of Hybrid Warfare: How the Concepts of Depth and Vulnerability Still Shape Russian Operational Approaches

A Monograph

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## Abstract

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This work challenges recent discourse regarding Russian military actions in the “near abroad.” It offers that the metaphor of “Deep Operations” based upon adversarial vulnerability assessments provides greater explanatory power for varied Russian actions than that of “hybrid warfare” or a continuous cycle of “Russian Revolutions in Military Affairs.” Case studies of Ukraine and Moldova, in the form of vulnerability assessments, demonstrate that specific sociopolitical vulnerabilities in those two countries allowed Russia to couple a multi-faceted information campaign with an asymmetric ground-game to enable conventional military operations. Thus, specific vulnerabilities within the “depth” of Ukraine and Moldova allowed “hybrid warfare” to function effectively. This work concludes with specific recommendations for identifying and rectifying such vulnerabilities while cautioning against preparation for “hybrid warfare” in at-risk countries with vulnerability sets conducive to alternate Russian operational approaches.

# Contents

Acknowledgement.....	v
Acronyms.....	vi
Illustratio.....	vii
Introduction:.....	1
Methodology.....	5
The Historic Deep Operation, Contemporary Approach, and Russian View of the Whole.....	6
Ukraine 2013-2014.....	11
Vulnerability Assessment.....	11
Historical Wedge Issues and Ethnolinguistic Outgroups..	11
Resurgance of Ukrainian Nationalism ..	16
Propaganda Origins, Target Audience, and Content..	19
Ideological Documents of the NRU and DPR .....	21
Overview of Routine Propaganda.....	24
Moldova 1990-1992.....	27
Vulnerability Assessment.....	27
Moldovan Nationalism.....	29
Examination of Propaganda.....	31
Comparison and Analysis.....	38
Vulnerabilities in Ukraine and Moldova.....	38
Conclusion.....	43

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## Acronyms

CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
DPR	Donetsk People's Republic
FBIS	Foreign Broadcast Information Service
FSB	Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation
GRU	Glavnoye Razvedyvatel'noye Upravleniye (Main Intelligence Directorate)
IO	Information Operations
KGB	Committee of State Security (USSR)
LPR	Luhansk People's Republic
MASSR	Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic
MH17	Malaysian Airlines Flight 17
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NRU	Novorossiya (New Russia) Union
OUN	Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists
RMA	Revolution in Military Affairs
RT	Russia Today
SS	Schutzstaffel (German)
TASS	Russian News Agency TASS
USAIOP	United States Army Information Operations Proponent
USASOC	United States Army Special Operations Command
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

## Illustrations

1	Exploitation of Ethnolinguistic Wedge Issues.....	39
2	Vulnerability Aligned Propaganda .....	41
3	Destabilization and Penetration in Depth .....	42

## Introduction

A modern deep breakthrough essentially requires two operational assault echelons: an attack echelon for breaching the front tactically; and a breakthrough echelon for inflicting a depth-to-depth blow to shatter and crush the enemy resistance throughout the entire operational depth.

-Georgii Isserson, *The Evolution of Operational Art*, 1936.

This work is a post-mortem of Ukrainian and Moldovan sovereignty from the viewpoint of the Russians who violated it. How did Russia wrestle territory away from two young nation-states when the inhabitants of the contested space supported independence from the USSR not so long ago? Was there a ticking time bomb embedded in the sociopolitical conditions of both countries or was Russia simply too strong to resist? Perhaps there was an interaction between conditions in those countries and Russian methods of warfare. If so, are other countries vulnerable and what are the implications for NATO member-states?

This paper engages the above questions and proposes that Russia's operational employment of asymmetric warfare and information operations (IO) were particularly well matched against sociopolitical vulnerabilities in Ukraine and Moldova. With the benefit of hindsight, the discussion throughout assumes that Russian planners understood Moldovan and Ukrainian vulnerabilities prior to the application of force. Thus, it investigates what kind of information indicated exploitable vulnerabilities and how that information shaped Russian courses of action. The examination continues with objective analysis of Russian actions during the Moldovan and Ukrainian conflicts. Together, the following chapters seek to unpack a mental model underpinning the contemporary "Russian conceptualization" of warfare.

It is important to distinguish between an undergirding mental model and the variety of operational approaches that can result from its application in differing operating environments. The Russian approach in the Chechen and Georgian conflicts, for example, manifested differently than

in Moldova and Ukraine despite the fact that Russia had limited aims in all four conflicts. Further, the Moldovan and Ukrainian conflicts book-ended those in Chechnya and Georgia – begging the question of whether Russian conceptualizations of warfare evolved at all. This paper argues that the Russian mental model of warfare has remained consistently tied to the metaphor of “deep operations” and the exploitation of vulnerabilities beyond the front line. In practical terms, this thought process includes linking adversarial vulnerability assessments with the selection of military means (conventional or otherwise.) However, much recent writing implies that Russia’s recent action in Ukraine indicates a brand new operational approach for future operations. This work cautions against such a view.

Given this context, why might one be interested in a Soviet military thinker like Georgii Isserson, who wrote in a strategic and operational context so different from that of 2017? With few caveats, Isserson’s historical deep operation and holistic view of warfare provide a useful mental model or contextual frame through which we can better grasp how Russian planners assess problems and develop solutions. Such a frame is important because understanding the way Russian planners visualize warfare is critical in grasping how they select and employ means. In this vein, contemporary Russian military writers provide direct evidence that “deep operations” serve as a mental model for shaping operational approaches and the employment of military means. General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the Russian General Staff, said as much in a 2013 article titled “The Value of Science Is in the Foresight.” Gerasimov discusses the use of conventional, unconventional, and informational warfare as an integrated whole to attack an enemy’s vulnerabilities in depth.<sup>1</sup> There is no wall to separate each line of effort. Friendly capabilities and adversarial vulnerabilities are holistic systems acting against each other in entirety. Gerasimov

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<sup>1</sup> Valery Gerasimov, “The Value of Science is in the Foresight, New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations,” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kurrier* (October 2013) republished in *Military Review* (January-February 2016): 28.

references Isserson, an early advocate of the holistic view of warfare, as a “prophet of the fatherland.” He chides that his forbearers “paid in great quantities of blood for not listening to the conclusions of this professor of the General Staff Academy.”<sup>2</sup>

Gerasimov advises his readers to analyze the enemy holistically and employ a tailored systematic solution to achieve Russian strategic aims. He writes that “each war is a unique case, demanding *the establishment of a particular logic* and not the application of some template.” He borrows the quote from Alekandr Svechin, another proponent of the deep operation and holistic view. The depth metaphor, as explained by Gerasimov, entails matching capabilities against a system of vulnerabilities presumed to exist throughout the depth of the enemy’s state structure. This has real explanatory power for understanding why Russia might initially employ “hybrid warfare” against Ukraine and conventional warfare against Georgia. Proposals of a “new operational approach” or a Russian revolution in military affairs (RMA) simply do not account for the difference.

Thus, the next section will clarify the depth metaphor to establish the framework between Russian vulnerability assessments and employment of force. The following sections will take the form of vulnerability assessments of Ukraine and Moldova to understand why Russia likely employed the IO / asymmetric warfare heavy approach known as “hybrid warfare.” These particular case studies are important because the Russian approach used in each might subvert NATO Article 5 triggers if implemented against a member state. However, all states might not be equally susceptible.

The research question under investigation is: *Can an analysis of pre-conflict conditions in Moldova and Ukraine suggest a set of socio-political risk factors that make some states more vulnerable to “hybrid” type destabilization than others?*

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<sup>2</sup> Gerasimov, 29.

Based upon initial research, this work hypothesizes that that *ethnolinguistically diverse former-Soviet countries engaged in nationalist discourse are at particularly high risk for “hybrid” destabilization methods*. The driving assumption between this hypotheses is the belief that Russian information campaigns create, reinforce, and target the security concerns of ethnolinguistic out-groups.

This hypothesis and underlying assumption originate from a review of open-source material and news reporting on Russian actions in Ukraine. The initial research suggested that wedge issues like language and cultural affiliation held the potential to aggravate regional rifts and force Ukrainian operational planners to divert resources away from conventional military threats.<sup>3</sup> Further, such actions took place amidst the backdrop of widespread pro-European sentiment among many Ukrainians, as evidenced by the 2013 Maidan Square protests.<sup>4</sup> However, Western media accounts of one particular conflict are insufficient for proving, disproving, or generalizing the above hypothesis. The following sections seek to rectify such issues.

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<sup>3</sup> Tanya Zaharchenko, “Polyphonic Dichotomies: Memory and Identity in Today’s Ukraine,” *Demokratizatsiya* 21, no. 2 (2013): 242-250; Oleksandr Taranenko, “Ukrainian and Russian in Contact: Attraction and Estrangement,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 183 (2007): 134; US Army Special Operations Command, 27-30.

<sup>4</sup> Bronislaw M. J. Kaminski, “Reflections on the Ukrainian Maidan, Ukrainian Memory and Identity,” *The Sarmatian Review* (September 2014): 1855-1859.

## Methodology

This work will employ two case studies. The first case study examines potential sociopolitical vulnerabilities in Ukraine prior to the 2014 Russian incursions. Next, it explores whether Russian IO and asymmetric warfare seem specifically tailored toward those vulnerabilities. For brevity, this case study focuses primarily on the conflict in the Donbas region. The second case study examines Russian actions in the Trans-Dniester (Transnistria) region Moldova (1991-1992) in the same context. To describe and define the nature of Russian interaction with Ukrainian and Moldovan populations, both case studies will deconstruct the political climate of conflict in terms of the following: *pre-existing or historical wedge issues between groups within the population; rhetorical and legal evidence of nationalism; the type and content of the Russian information campaign; and a subjective assessment of the information campaign's effectiveness.* The criteria above focus heavily on information campaign because the associated propaganda provides a written record of Russia's desired perceptions. Results from the two case studies will be compared to determine whether generalizable conditions existed to facilitate the use of asymmetric and informational warfare to destabilize in depth.

The metaphor employed throughout this work, like Gerasimov's article, visualized vulnerability assessments and selection of military means as a deep operation. Chapter one briefly traces the development and describes the concept of the historical deep operation. It also ties historic Russian thought concepts to Gerasimov's "depth" metaphor to demonstrate that his thought pattern is a continuation of past Russian traditions. The following two chapters will examine the Ukrainian and Moldovan conflicts as described above. The fourth and fifth chapters will provide case study comparison and conclusions.

## The Deep Operation, Contemporary Approach, and View of the “Whole”

The purpose of this chapter is to frame the mindset behind the contemporary Russian operational approach. Unpacking this mindset is critical to understanding the metaphor employed by Russian strategic and operational thinkers as they envision the military defeat of their adversaries. A holistic view of depth captures the lens through which Russian planners assess the vulnerabilities of their adversaries. This is also the lens through which they select military means to exploit such vulnerabilities. The vulnerability assessments of Ukraine and Moldova presented later follow this script.

Literature on the Russian self-concept and world-view is extensive and complex. However, there are some consistent elements that repeatedly cut across specific historic and current ideological, political, and military discourse. For example, the literature of Russian Pan-Slavists, Eurasianists, Marxist-Leninists, and United Russia Party have widely varying objectives but find consistency on the concepts of messianism, autocracy, east-west dialectics, and a holistic world view.<sup>5</sup> Each concept can help understand the Russian strategic approach. However, the holistic world view and East-West tension are most important for understanding the linkage between Russian thought, deep operations, and current operational approaches.

Russian thinkers historically compared their society with that of Western Europe and found it wanting in terms of social, economic and technological development.<sup>6</sup> As a reaction, Russian culture consistently experienced a dialectic between attempts at westernization and conservative backlash. Accordingly, Russian thinkers often describe their world-view in terms of what it is not

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<sup>5</sup> Walter Laquer, “After the Fall, Russia in Search of a New Ideology,” *World Affairs* (March-April, 2014): 71-74; Richard Sakwa, “Russian Political Culture through the Eyes of Vladislav Surkov,” *Russian Politics and Law*, vol. 46, no.5 (September-October 2008): 6; Lyudmila Igumnova, “Russia’s Strategic Culture between American and European Worldviews,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, no. 24 (2011): 256-258, 268-269.

<sup>6</sup> Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism, an Ideology of Empire* (Washington, DC: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 18.

(vis-à-vis the West) rather than what it is. This is the case with the idea of the “organic whole” or “holism.” Put simply, the holistic view understands a complex entity not as a system of discreet sub-components, such as in the analytic western view. Rather, the essence of an entity is found in the relationship between all of its parts, as well as the physical and spiritual components of its environment. A 19<sup>th</sup> century quote by Russian philosopher Prince Evgeniy Trubetskoi provides a perfect case in point: “More characteristic of the Russians is the knowledge of the world through religious intuition as an organic whole, in contrast to the west, where philosophers have penetrated the mysteries of the world by breaking it down rationally into components for analysis.”<sup>7</sup>

Leaders like Vladimir Putin, Vladislav Surkov, and Yevgeny Primakov employ the organic whole in a more purposive context to describe the linkages between their actions and political objectives. Surkov, in 2008, succinctly wrote, “Russian culture is the contemplation of the whole,” when advocating a more aggressive foreign policy and the integration of neighboring countries into the Russian Federation.<sup>8</sup> More to the point, the organic whole plays a clear role in the historical and contemporary military concepts of Isserson, Svechin, and Gerasimov.

Isserson’s interwar writings and criticism of Western military operational approaches were not only an indictment of static trench warfare, they were a criticism of the analytic Western world-view. For example, he writes: “Modern operational echelonment of efforts in depth does not mean engagements of these efforts either piecemeal or in operational packets... [It] is the sequential and continuous increase of operational effects aimed at breaking enemy resistance through its whole depth.”<sup>9</sup> Here, he invokes the East-West dialectic to reject a Western operational approach and advocate a more holistic view of an enemy force. According to Isserson, the stalemates of the

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<sup>7</sup> Vladislav Surkov, “Russian Political Culture, The View from Utopia,” *Russian Social Science Review*, vol. 49, no. 6 (November-December 2008): 82.

<sup>8</sup> Surkov, 82.

<sup>9</sup> Isserson, 66.

western front were a result of a mechanistic approach where military actions are not in harmony with one another to adequately destroy the enemy environmentally, psychologically, and militarily. If belligerent forces are to be viewed as a whole, the friendly force must be arrayed to destroy an enemy as a whole. The whole of an enemy is defeated by the simultaneous destruction of his fighting forces and supporting systems. This is the essence of the depth metaphor. Isserson attributes this mode of thought as unique to a Marxist-Leninist form of war.<sup>10</sup> In reality, *Isserson infused the traditional Russian holistic understanding of an enemy with a Marxist bent that viewed enemy social structures as the ultimate deep objective.* This is a conceptual shift away from previous linear tactical formulations of depth. Isserson's convictions "sprang from the inherently aggressive Marxist approach to solving social problems through revolution, which in turn, was expected to provoke an equally violent reaction on the part of the bourgeoisie."<sup>11</sup> In this view, social upheaval disrupts the informational, economic, political, and infrastructural sinews that allow the adversarial military to function.

Isserson understood interwar theories of airpower, armored formations, and long range indirect fire munitions. More importantly, he envisioned how each theory's attributes fit together and harnessed new technology to holistically attack an adversary. Like Isserson, Gerasimov urges the Russian General Staff to develop tailored operational approaches that harnesses new technology, information, and asymmetric advantages to holistically defeat adversaries. Gerasimov's article "The Value of Science is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations" gives guidance on how to think about integrating specific emergent technologies rather than a prescription for "hybrid warfare." Gerasimov's own words inform the reader that "the application of high precision weaponry is taking on a mass

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<sup>10</sup> Isserson, 4, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Richard W. Harrison, *Architect of Soviet Victory in World War II: The Life and Theories of GS Isserson* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2010), 105.

character... weapons based on new physical principles and automated systems are being actively incorporated... [And] asymmetrical actions have come into widespread use, enabling the nullification of an enemy's advantages in armed conflict."<sup>12</sup> What makes Gerasimov's article a valuable source of insight is his emphasis on the asymmetric effort in terms of depth. In fact, Gerasimov writes that "the defeat of an enemy's objects [objectives] is conducted throughout the entire depth of his territory."<sup>13</sup> What technologies and tactical innovations then, does Gerasimov see as useful to develop for disruption in depth? He notes "the role of mobile, mixed-type groups of forces, acting in a single intelligence-information space" enabled by "the new possibilities of command and control systems."<sup>14</sup> He also asserts that "new technologies have enabled significant reductions in the spatial, temporal, and information gaps between forces and control organs."<sup>15</sup> Understanding that the Chief of the Russian General Staff is focused on integrating emergent information-related technologies allows the reader to direct his or her telescope on specific parts of his guidance on employment in depth. Gerasimov directs "the use of special operations forces and internal opposition to *create a permanently operating front through the entire territory of the enemy state, as well as information actions, devices, and means* [emphasis added] that are being constantly perfected."<sup>16</sup>

To recap thus far, Gerasimov faces a similar adaptation challenge as his predecessors. He maintains a holistic view of Russian adversaries, employing a deep operational framework. The nature of the adversary will determine the type of emergent technology used to disrupt in depth. Further, based upon Gerasimov's assessment of the contemporary operating environment,

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<sup>12</sup> Gerasimov, 25.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 25.

information-related technologies employed asymmetrically will be the most relevant avenue for destabilizing in depth and creating multiple dilemmas for enemy forces. Just as the deep operation and holistic view guide the Russian General Staff's attempts to develop an operational approach, they will guide analysis of the following case studies. This work hypothesizes that that *ethnolinguistically diverse former-Soviet countries engaged in nationalist discourse are at particularly high risk "hybrid" destabilization methods*. If supported, this hypothesis implies that one should not assume Russia will always apply information operations to destabilize in depth. Recent actions in Syria and Georgia stand opposed to examples in Ukraine to show that Russia has the capability and is willing to initiate conventional operations in an enemy's depth with a much more modest asymmetric and informational effort. However, the task here is to identify what factors lead to asymmetric and information-related destabilization of the kind that is most likely to circumvent NATO treaty obligations.

## Ukraine 2013-2014

### Vulnerability Assessment

This chapter examines sociopolitical conditions in Ukraine to understand (a) why Russia selected a particular operational approach and (b) how that approach functioned. The hypothesis of this paper depends on evidence of the following: that social divisions resulted in ethnolinguistic outgroups; that nationalist sentiment could have made ostensible wedge issues important within Ukrainian society; that Russia employed an information campaign exploiting the wedge issues; and that Russia initiated asymmetric warfare by collectively organizing the target audience of its information campaign. The following sections discuss each precondition in turn.

### Historical Wedge Issues and Ethnolinguistic Outgroups

A vulnerability assessment of Ukraine begins with a brief overview of Ukrainian history and its resultant social divides. Ukrainian history is a tricky subject because multiple versions have been written by historians with particular social and political agendas.<sup>17</sup> Particularly in the last 100 years, Soviet, Western Ukrainian, and Russo-centric historiographers have portrayed Ukraine and Ukrainian culture very differently with respect to their status as a unique nation and relationship vis-à-vis Europe and Russia.<sup>18</sup> Although there are many facts upon which most histories agree, the following paragraphs inevitably focus on difference.

It is not a simple cliché to deduce that there are “two Ukraines” with different conceptions of their role as part of the Western European and Russian spheres of influence. For example, an analysis of the state allegiance of the Western Ukrainian city of L’viv versus the Eastern city of Donetsk over the past four centuries shows a nearly constant pattern of European influence in L’viv

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<sup>17</sup> Karina V. Korostelina, “Mapping National Identity Narratives in Ukraine,” *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 41, no. 2 (February, 2013): 312-313.

<sup>18</sup> Stephan Shulman, “The Cultural Foundations of Ukrainian National Identity,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 22, no. 6 (November, 1999), 1031.

and Russian domination in Donetsk. A 1999 study of Ukrainian elite opinion in the cities of L'viv and Donetsk, each considered to be at the cultural extremes of Ukrainian society, showed that elites in Donetsk perceived themselves to be more culturally similar to ethnic Russians living in Russia than to their Ukrainian compatriots living in L'viv. The same study goes on to discuss inherent dangers in such cultural heterogeneity, especially when one group holds political power.<sup>19</sup>

Such differences are based upon differing historical experiences among the Ukrainian population. The Western Ukrainian provinces of Galicia / Volhnia were historically subservient to larger European powers such as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Germany, and Poland. General Petro Grigorenko, a Ukrainian dissident of the Soviet period describes how “the Austrians set out to Germanize the Ukrainians and the Russians to Russify them... Mass terror campaigns were carried out against the Ukrainian population together with a cruel system of serf exploitation...”<sup>20</sup> At the end of the Second World War, L'viv fell to the Soviets until Ukraine achieved independence in 1991. Thus, its social and political fabric totals less than a half century of Russian dominance. Donetsk, on the other hand, existed as part of the Russian Empire until it became part of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Less than a generation separates the average resident of Donetsk from nearly five centuries of Russian affiliation. Thus, its people, who still self-identify as Ukrainian, have a substantially greater affinity with Russian culture and systems of governance than their western brethren.<sup>21</sup>

Evidence of this divide becomes most immediately apparent when examining the distribution of Ukrainian versus Russian language throughout the country. Ukrainian scholar Oleksandr Taranenko, writing several years before the 2013-2014 conflict, described the basic

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<sup>19</sup> Shulman, 1015.

<sup>20</sup> W. Raymond Duncan and G. Paul Holman, *Ethnic and Regional Conflict: The Former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1994), 82.

<sup>21</sup> Korostelina, 300.

breakdown and implications. He writes “from a regional perspective, Ukraine is divided into West, Center, and Southeast, with mainly monolingual Ukrainian regions in the West (Galicia, and to a lesser degree Volhnia and Bukovyna) and mainly monolingual Russian regions in the Southeast (Crimea, urbanized Donbas)...”<sup>22</sup> In central Ukraine, the picture becomes more complicated with some preponderance of Ukrainian, Russian, or bilingualism depending on city or geographic location. The 2001 Ukrainian census paints a more detailed picture of the breakdown. In Western Ukrainian provinces, approximately 95% of respondents described Ukrainian as their primary language. In Crimea and Eastern provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk, seventy to ninety percent of respondents selected Russian as their primary language.<sup>23</sup> It’s worth noting that the geographic divide between predominantly Ukrainian and Russian speakers is rather sharp, with the three provinces mentioned above averaging a twenty to forty percent increase over neighboring provinces to speak Russian.

The language divide carries the potential to be highly politicized. Soviet repression of Ukrainian language bears heavily on the collective memory of many Ukrainian citizens. Pro-Ukrainian language segments of the population maintain a strong political appetite for the restoration of Ukrainian language throughout all areas within Ukraine’s borders. Further, residents of historically Russian-speaking areas view the post-Soviet language restoration efforts as an impractical political imposition, no better than the original repression of Ukrainian speakers.

Despite the differences described above, linguistic difference has not proved to be important enough to keep residents of Ukraine from identifying as “Ukrainian.” Many Ukrainians speak both languages, preventing the either-or dynamic common among linguistic disputes elsewhere. Statistically speaking, a resident of L’viv and a resident of Donetsk, selected at random,

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<sup>22</sup> Oleksandr Taranenکو, “Ukrainian and Russian in Contact: Attraction and Estrangement,” *International Journal of Sociology and Language*, vol. 183 (2007), 124.

<sup>23</sup> Taranenکو, 129.

would identify with each other as members of the same nation. The same two randomly selected residents of Ukraine's cultural poles would be able to converse without any trouble. A 2010 study published in the *International Journal of Sociology and Language* noted that "it is assumed that an individual may have mixed or overlapping linguistic identifications, which may or may not coincide with ethnic identification."<sup>24</sup> The study's assumption was born out by data showing that only 3.9% of eastern Ukrainians formed an identity based exclusively on language. Thus, a language and experiential difference existed in Ukraine well prior to 2013. However, it remained somewhat unimportant unless politicized. Unfortunately, this dynamic appears to be changing as language becomes a salient issue for identity politics in contemporary Ukraine.

Differing Ukrainian historical understandings of the period from 1932-1945 provided another dormant area of potential division. Soviet collectivization and war between Soviet and Nazi totalitarianism ravaged Ukraine. Dr. G. Paul Holman described how "the true extent of Ukrainian suffering under Lenin and Stalin is beyond reckoning. Two to four million died in the great famine of 1932-33 alone...little wonder, then, that Ukrainian nationalists took up arms again in 1941 when the Germans returned."<sup>25</sup> As a matter of record, Ukrainians divided among themselves with some fighting in German units, others as partisans against one or both antagonists, while still others fought in the Red Army. Such issues do not play a role in the daily lives of Ukrainians. However, affiliations from the Soviet-German war and characterizations of the Great Famine generally coincide in strength and polarity with areas of strong language preference.<sup>26</sup> As will be discussed, historical differences underpin propaganda used to frame Western Ukrainians as fascists.

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<sup>24</sup> Anna Wylegała, "Minority Language as Identity Factor: Case Study of Young Russian Speakers in Lviv," *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 2010, no. 201 (2010): 35.

<sup>25</sup> Duncan and Holman, 84.

<sup>26</sup> Katchanovski, Ivan, "The politics of Soviet and Nazi genocides in Orange Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, no. 6 (2010): 973-975.

Politics represents a final rift for exploitation. Language and historical cleavages happen to coincide with oppositional political affiliations. Thus, in an adversarial atmosphere, the political power of a political party can appear to represent the power of one group over the other. The dynamics of this division will be discussed in greater detail later. For now, the important point is that Ukrainian society has ethnolinguistic groups that are opposed in historical understanding, language, and politics.

From 1991 to 2013, no single issue or division was important enough to destroy Ukrainian nationhood. However, each issue held latent potential, if bundled with the others in the right political context, to create opposing identity constructs. Such was the context when Ukrainians rejected President Yanukovich's proposed entry into the Russian Eurasian Customs Union. At this juncture, Russian leaders seemed to understand that highlighting threat regarding one issue (e.g. language), could potentially polarize groups into opposing camps with entirely different identity constructs. The following paragraphs describe how such polarization occurs.

Literature regarding ethnic conflict treats identity as an aggregate of shared physical, symbolic, linguistic, cultural, and practical behaviors that cause individuals to co-identify as members of the same group. In describing ethnic conflict, political scientist VP Gagnon argues "that violent conflict along ethnic cleavages is provoked... in order to create a domestic political context in which ethnicity is the only politically relevant identity..."<sup>27</sup> He further describes how political actors can manipulate ethnic groups by constructing individual interest "in terms of threat to the group."<sup>28</sup> A constructivist theory of ethnic conflict, as described by Stuart J. Kaufman, suggests such manipulation occurs by highlighting a specific aspects of group identity "when the

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<sup>27</sup> Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds, The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

situation is favorable” for a specific actor.<sup>29</sup> In this context of this vulnerability assessment, there is a rich target audience of Eastern Ukrainians who might be persuaded to reject allegiance to the Ukrainian government if a perceived threat is strong enough to make political, historical, and linguistic difference more salient than areas of Ukrainian commonality.

### Resurgence of Ukrainian Nationalism

The resurgence of nationalism is important in identifying countries at risk of hybrid warfare. This is not to suggest that nationalism is inherently bad. Rather, the discourse of nationalism in multi-ethnic or multi-lingual states opens a window for exploitation by outside groups seeking to divide the resident population. This section demonstrates the presence of nationalist discourse in Ukraine leading up to conflict with Russia.

In 2004, two diametrically opposed candidates ran for the presidency of Ukraine. Victor Yushenko represented a Eurocentric coalition known as “Our Ukraine” while Victor Yanukovich ran for the Russo centric “Party of Regions.” The election resulted in a runoff with Yanukovich claiming victory. However, widespread perceptions of vote rigging and election impropriety led to a 90 day period of mass protests known as the “Orange Revolution.” As a result of the protests, Ukrainian authorities organized a second runoff supervised by international authorities. Yushenko emerged victorious with a perceived mandate to enact wide ranging social projects. Among Yushenko’s most significant projects were the recognition of the famine of 1932-33 as a genocide of Ukrainians, the rehabilitation of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), the establishment of Ukrainian language in all primary schools.<sup>30</sup> The rehabilitation of Ukrainian nationalist and anti-Russian symbolic leaders sent a clear political message to Russians and Eastern Ukrainians as to the nature of Ukrainian identity under Yushenko. Scholar Ivan Katchanovski

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>30</sup> Alexander J. Motyl, “Can Ukraine have a History?” *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 57, no. 3 (2010), 55-59.

notes that the Russo-centric Party of Regions as well as the Communist Party of Ukraine (leading opposition parties in 2005), objected to characterization of the 1932-33 famine as a genocide without equal recognition of Nazi crimes and OUN activities.<sup>31</sup>

By no means is this a complete and two-sided view of Ukrainian nationalism. Rather, it is an attempt to highlight some of the relevant historical links between the fractured Ukrainian experience from the period of 1932-45, events of the Orange revolution, and the resultant perceptions of Ukrainian nationalism by Yushenko's political opposition. This re-visitation is important because Yushenko's opposition, particularly the Party of Regions, finds its support among the Russian speaking population of Eastern Ukraine and Crimea.<sup>32</sup> The ebb and flow of politics in Ukraine brought Yanukovich and the Party of Regions to the presidency in 2010. Thus, the Maidan protests of 2013 and 2014 ouster of Yanukovich could be viewed by the Party of Regions constituency as a forceful rejection of their historical experience and aggressive implementation of the social agenda of Eurocentric Ukrainians. At worst, such events might be manipulated to create the perception of Western-backed attempts to empower an OUN-like junta in Kiev with a narrow vision of Ukrainian identity. Thus, it comes as no surprise to find a disproportionate amount of Russian propaganda using the symbology of the "Great Patriotic War" and characterizing their opposition as "Nazis."

#### Creating Separatists: Irregular Forces and Setting Conditions for the Information Campaign

Gerasimov describes asymmetric operations as a key enabling feature of military operations to "nullify the enemy's advantages in armed conflict."<sup>33</sup> Specifically, he writes, "the use of special operations forces and internal opposition to create a permanently operating front through the entire

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<sup>31</sup> Korostelina, 299-301.

<sup>32</sup> Taras Kuzio, "Regime type and Politics in Ukraine under Kuchma," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 38, no. 2 (2005): 170-171.

<sup>33</sup> Gerasimov, 25.

territory of the enemy state, as well as informational actions, devices, and means that are being constantly perfected.”<sup>34</sup> Gerasimov links the concept of depth, information, and asymmetric activity to keep his opposition’s armed forces permanently off balance. In hindsight, one easily recognizes Gerasimov’s “internal opposition” in the form of separatist organizations like the Donetsk Peoples Republic (DPR), Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR), and Novorossiia Union (NRU). To create these front organizations, Russia simply needed a ground-game to balance coercion and information around specific vulnerabilities.

Russia seems to have followed a stepwise process as follows: (1) understand Ukrainian vulnerabilities; (2) place irregular actors in critically important areas of Ukrainian depth; and (3) implement an information campaign to create destabilization.

In this sense, the level of effort placed on Russian IO planning and propaganda is comparable to US military examination of host-nation infrastructure prior to forced entry and establishment of a lodgment. Russian planners “look to gain [employ] assets in an area with the sole purpose of observing the area and identifying core ethnic groups. This would then lead to an understanding of what groups have issues / concerns ripe for exploitation.”<sup>35</sup> Information from on-site assets shapes assessments of what messages and approaches would best segment and destabilize the area of operations. The author’s research suggests that outputs of such collection efforts shape an operational approach carried out by Russian agents or “crisis managers” who specialize in “community organizing” and disruption.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> COL Chip Bircher, discussion on December 5, 2016, Fort Leavenworth, KS. COL Bircher, Director of the US Army Information Operations Proponent (USIOP) offered his thoughts on Russian use of information operations pertaining to a forthcoming study he is contributing to.

<sup>36</sup> Harriet Salem, “Who’s Who in the Donetsk People’s Republic,” *Vice News*, accessed October 30, 2016, <https://news.vice.com/article/whos-who-in-the-donetsk-peoples-republic>

Who then are the “crisis managers” that run the ground game? A US Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) unclassified primer on the 2013-2014 conflict describes organizations like the DPR simply as “Russian-backed proxy organizations.”<sup>37</sup> The same source describes members of the separatist governments and fighting units alternately as “Russian nationalists,” “former [Russian] soldiers or SPETSNAZ,” and “current or former FSB or GRU.”<sup>38</sup> USASOC links initial organizers like Igor Girkin, Alexander Borodai, Igor Besler, and Dennis Pushilian with Russian intelligence and criminal organizations. Girkin, former head of the DPR, has a particularly sordid history of combining murder with “grass roots” separatism in Crimea, Bosnia, and Chechnya before entering Eastern Ukraine. However, Russian proxy groups needed a vehicle to mask their origin and gain at least some semblance of support from among the population. This is where the vulnerability assessment meets the information campaign.

#### Propaganda Origins, Target Audience, and Content

This work rests on two assumptions. First, Russian information campaigns are deliberately planned affairs based on vulnerability assessments. Second, Russian permeation of the information environment is a comprehensive multi-level game that addresses audiences inside and outside the operating environment for varying purposes. This section focuses specifically on the first assumption by examining the process and content behind propaganda geared toward Donbass Ukrainians within the depth of the Ukrainian Operating environment. Earlier sections described exploitable wedges within Ukrainian society. Thus, one would expect to see evidence of such divides in the themes of Russian propaganda.

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<sup>37</sup> USASOC, 43.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 43-45.

The following paragraphs examine the Russian propaganda in more detail. Since Russia does not place a watermark on their information efforts, this work uses information put forth by Russian proxy separatist organizations in Donbas. Information described here was taken directly from Russian language websites of the DPR and NRU. In total, this section draws upon 888 documents gathered by the author from the open source websites of these organizations between April and August 2014. The DPR website has since become defunct. However, the NRU (formed during a merger of the DPR and LPR in May 2014) still maintains a website at <http://novorossia.today/>.

In general, the documents on the DPR and NRU can be broken down into ideological documents (e.g. manifestos, public statements, and declarations of independence) and news updates that double as separatist propaganda. This work subjectively classifies forty-five documents as ideological statements of purpose because they attempt to characterize the nature of Russian backed separatism and the Ukrainian government as a whole. The remaining 843 documents were parts of “daily news updates” used to frame the military or political actions of particular fighting units or separatist leaders with respect to a specific event (e.g. a daily battle update during the battle of Slavyansk or denial that Igor Girkin was responsible for the July 2014 shoot down of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17). In general, as will be seen below, the ideological documents focus very heavily on socially divisive themes. Daily updates, however, employ a wider array of topics presumed to be of interest for the target audience.

## Ideological Documents of the DPR and NRU

This section focuses on several key ideological documents, including the foundational document of the DPR (published in April 2014), the NRU political party platform (May 2014), as well as several “open letters” to key groups in the Donbas region like metal workers, miners, Berkut police, and general calls for support to separatist militias.<sup>39</sup>

A May 2014 call for support to militias is a good start point for breaking down propaganda content because its apparent purpose was to influence the general population in Donbass to commit violence against the Ukrainian military. The actions outlined within represent a link between the information campaign and disruption in depth of the Ukrainian military. The document begins by stating that for “the first time since the Great Patriotic War... events occurred that not only resemble, but directly coincide with the actions of the Nazi occupiers. The difference today is that we are dealing with a new manifestation of this ideology... Ukrainian fascism.”<sup>40</sup> The document, although only one page in length, refers to the Ukrainian government and armed forces as fascist gangs, Nazi SS heirs, SS death squads, and Nazi occupiers. Further, it sows the seeds of fear by suggesting that the Ukrainian armed forces will “burn [local citizens] alive in their furnaces.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The following is a cross section of Novorossiia ideological documents referenced above. The website [www.novorossiayatoday.ru](http://www.novorossiayatoday.ru) has replaced the original website and all content prior to November 2014 has been removed. The author maintained digital and paper copies all of the documents referenced throughout this section for a separate project.

Author Unlisted, “Union of Donetsk and Lugansk,” May 13, 2014, accessed May 13, 2014, website no longer available; Pavel Gubarev, “DNI does not intent to negotiate with Kiev,” May 19, 2014, accessed May 21, 2014. Website no longer available; Author Unlisted, “Novorossiia Party Platform.” May 24, 2014. Accessed May 24, 2014, website no longer available; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of Donetsk and Novorossiia, “On the Military conflict between the Government of Novorossiia and Kiev, and the so-called Presidential Elections in Ukraine,” May 25, 2014, accessed May 25, 2014, website no longer available; Vladimir Makeenko, “An Open Letter to Rinat Akhmetov,” May 25, 2014, accessed May 25, 2014, website no longer available; Pavel Gubarev, “Address to the Miners and Metallurgists of Donbass,” July 3, 2014, accessed July 23, 2014, website no longer available; Author Unlisted, “Address to the Officers and Soldiers of Berkut,” July 3, 2014, accessed July 3, 2014, website no longer available; Igor Strelkov, “The Defeat of the Militia in Donbass Will Result in the Defeat of Russian People and Russia,” July 7, 2014, accessed July 7, 2014, website no longer available.

<sup>40</sup> Novorossiia Party Platform, 1.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

These rhetorical flourishes might seem over the top to a Western observer. However, the political cleavages of 2004 /2013 regarding the Western versus Russian orientation of Ukrainian nationhood are clearly being framed as the latest installment of Nazi collaboration versus Great Patriotic War loyalty. In this version of events, the Ukrainian military takes the place of the Nazi's themselves and directly threatens the existence of "loyal" Ukrainians.

On 26 May 2014, The NRU published a declaration titled "The Party of New Russia." In it, the authors assert a protective role over Donbass Ukrainians through the creation of a "New Russian State" through "the withdrawal of all Russian southeastern lands of Ukraine... [for the] liberation from the yoke of the fascist junta..."<sup>42</sup> The declaration makes language an important issue where "Russian, which is the most obvious and common expression of a particular self-identity... serves as the unifying factor between "Greater Russia" and "halo territories inhabited by Russian and other peoples in solidarity with the Russian civilization over the centuries."<sup>43</sup> In case the desire to highlight the "Russian-ness" of the new state was in question, the document directs the "state" language to be Russian, religion to be Russian Orthodox, and a Eurasian vector of development." Observers might note that with the exception of the NRU's directive and separatist nature, their platform is markedly similar to Yanukovich's Party of Regions agenda.

Across the range of ideological documents, each similar framing device paints the same picture: The Russian affiliated Ukrainian existence is threatened with the fascist policies and violent acts of the Nazi-like machine in Kiev. In order to survive, Donbass Ukrainians must band together with their Russian brothers to form their own state under the protective umbrella of greater Russia. This last portion is particularly important for several reasons. First, it spawns a new line of propaganda wherein Donbass Ukrainians (speaking through Proxies like the NRU leadership)

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<sup>42</sup> Novorossiia Union, "Sociopolitical Movement – The Party of New Russia," May 26, 2014, accessed May 26, 2014, website no longer available, 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

request Russian military and humanitarian assistance. Second, it seeks to legitimize Russian incursion. Third, it provides Russia with a cover to use non-military avenues to smuggle weaponry to irregular and proxy fighters. In this sense, the propagandists are using the Donbas Ukrainians as props to link a destabilization in depth with conventional use of military force. The following quote, posted by the DPR in April 2014, is lengthy but provides the overall theme for several such documents.

“All these months, we the residents of Donbass, in the person of the militia, all available democratic procedures are trying to express his peoples protest against the policy, which implements the Kievskaya junta... [Which] lead us to war and destruction. We don't want to do this and we are ready to fight for our future and the future of our children. Now works against us the whole state apparatus. Our land is already amassing military forces of the Ukrainian army, which put the order to act against its own people... appeal to you Vladimir Vladimirovich [Putin] as a last hope... for our children's future. In Russia we are seeing the sole defender of our culture... only the Russian army will be able to give a convincing signal to the junta... without Russia's support we will not be easy to stand up against one of the junta and its neo-Nazi system...”<sup>44</sup>

From this quote, one can see most themes of DPR and NRU ideological propaganda as well as the link to its purpose; the cultural divide and historical threat are linked to an existential threat, the existential threat requires Donbas Ukrainians to defend themselves, and only Russian intervention can make such defense successful.

The ideological documents of the NRU and DPR conspicuously lack economic arguments, nostalgic appeals to Soviet prosperity, or a political framework for cooperation with Ukraine or Russia. This evidence suggests that Russia is using the Great Patriotic War as a “bridging device.”<sup>45</sup> The “bridging device” is a concept borrowed from the literature of social psychology and collective action. In short, it is a descriptive frame applied to a current event meant to illicit a particular

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<sup>44</sup> People's Committee of Donbass, “Letter to Vladimir Putin on the treatment of the people of Donetsk,” April 7, 2014, accessed April 7, 2014. website no longer available.

<sup>45</sup>David A Snow, E. Burke Rochford Jr, Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford, "Frame Alignment Processes, Micro-mobilization, and Movement Participation," *American Sociological Review* (1986): 467-468.

behavior by connecting the event with specific components of the target audience's identity. In this case, the NRU propaganda frames the current conflict in terms of the German Soviet War because the divisive identity components above generally coincided with opposing sides in that conflict. Donbass Ukrainians are being asked to reassume their past role and identity. Conversely, the bridging device implies that Western Ukrainians have reassumed their past roles as well. Earlier, this paper discussed how the potentially divisive elements of Ukrainian identity might be bundled together to become salient if the element of threat is made apparent. Ideological propaganda clearly calls upon those very divisive elements while introducing the ingredient of threat. These conditions indicate that the ideological propaganda is engineered along the fault lines of specific identity constructs in order to illicit an Eastern identity hostile to the government in Kiev. Further, the hostile identity serves as the bridge to motivate the hostile actions needed to destabilize in depth.

#### Overview of Routine Propaganda

This section briefly discusses the use of day-to-day propaganda linked with asymmetric warfare in Eastern Ukraine. It uses the 833 "news updates" as a primary source that comprise a daily "drum beat" of characterizations nested with the ideological statements of the NRU and DRP. These documents should be seen as part of a multi-faceted information campaign that includes Russian media (e.g. *Pravda*, *Russia Today*) and government communication. However, because those other mediums have several potential target audiences and objectives, it focuses on documents posted directly to the Russian language websites of "Ukrainian" separatist organizations.

The "news" posted by the NRU and DPR ensures that local citizens interpret events in a specific way. If the ideological documents characterize the Ukrainian military as "SS Death squads," the daily updates provide examples and pictures to back up that claim. The content of the news updates is generally short, usually half a page in length, and accompanied by imagery that this author has found to be inauthentic. Generally, the main headline of the news section incorporates a

story about the Ukrainian military killing civilians, as well as a story boasting about a local militia victory. The language used in the stories is similar to the ideological documents in its World War II frame. Ukrainian military forces are “Nazis,” while separatists are “patriots” depicted wearing the historical Russian military Saint George ribbon. Imagery is regularly altered, recycled, and mischaracterized. For example, imagery of a Ukrainian tank, taken from stock imagery, might have a swastika added. Images claiming to show carnage caused by the Ukrainian military are generally used several times, claiming to show evidence of different atrocities.

Other imagery and stories claim a Western conspiracy to destabilize the region. The author found one story claiming to have “proof” of US Special Forces involvement in Ukraine accompanied with a picture of a fighter wearing a US Army patch. Coincidentally, the patch was of the 1-145<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment, the holding company battalion for flight students at Fort Rucker, Alabama. Regardless of its poor quality, the daily updates still seem to have the same target audience and purpose of the ideological documents. Taken as a whole, they continue the idea that Donbas Ukrainians are under siege from a combined Ukrainian / Western fascist threat and that Russia stands as a bulwark against an international cabal. If the ideological documents are meant to sway the target audience opinion toward action, the “news” updates seem intended to bombard the target audience with information that maintains that opinion. Although of poor quality, the propaganda does, in retrospect, line up correctly with military actions and indicates a link between the Russian proxy organizations, fighters, and information campaign.

The unique aspect of the routine propaganda is its specific calls to action. Many of the documents specifically requested the assistance of metal workers, miners, and policemen for tactical engagements. The ideological documents discussed earlier are abstract and static. They serve to redefine identity and create division. However, the routine propaganda provides details and forums for action. It directs existing sympathizers regarding how and when to make use of their frustration. In this sense, it mirrors the use of social media in the Arab Spring and Maidan crises.

The target audience of routing on-line propaganda is telling. Donbas is an industrial heartland where control of the mining and metal working population can pay dividends for Russia and severely hamper Ukraine.<sup>46</sup> It is possible that such calls to action serve the dual purpose of signaling identification with these key audiences as well as generating support for military operations. Identification with miners and metalworkers would be key to disrupting Ukraine's depth by using identification to halt Ukrainian industry (e.g. through strikes and the like). What remains certain, however, is that the routine propaganda is written for a carefully selected target audience and based upon a vulnerability assessment of that group and Ukraine writ large.

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<sup>46</sup> Ararat and Alexander Osipian, "Why Donbass Votes for Yanukovych: Confronting the Ukrainian Orange Revolution," *Demokratizatsiya* 14, no. 4 (Fall, 2006): 497. This article describes the evolution of the political character and self-image of the Donbass region. The article argues that depictions of Donbass Ukrainians as "Communists" or as an apathetic pro-Russian voting block are inaccurate. Rather, the industrial growth and patterns of migration have led Donbass Ukrainians to develop a unique self-image and culture as "Donbass Ukrainians." Part of this self image is that Donbass is the industrial heartland of Ukraine. As such, Kiev and other regions benefit from the work of Donbass laborers. Without the fruits of their labor, in this view, the industrially underdeveloped and overly aggressive Western Oblasts would collapse. However, due to underrepresentation in government, Donbass Ukrainians do not receive an adequate share of benefits. This self image combines with a proclivity to vote only for candidates from Donbass. Victor Yanukovych is the prototypical Donbass candidate. Thus, his presidency was seen (within Donbass) as a nod to industry and to Donbass itself. The article also describes how Donbass candidates, particularly Yanukovych, tended to demonize Western Ukrainian candidates for their own political gain. Normally, this demonization harkens back to World War II with the implication that Westerners pose an aggressive fascist threat. Of note, such political jockeying might have help set conditions for Russian propaganda to the same effect.

## Moldova 1990-1992

The conflict between the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Moldova in the early 1990's provides an interesting case study for comparison with Ukraine and for evaluation of this paper's hypotheses. At face value, it has common elements with the recent conflict in Ukraine: a Russian-speaking minority in a contested region; a border between the contested region and Russia; access to industry and the black sea by the owner of the contested territory; a nationalist backlash against the USSR that ostensibly threatened the Russian speaking minority; and cooperation between the USSR and separatist organizations. However, the Moldovan conflict allows analysis of events without becoming overly infatuated with new communication technologies, the bias of current events, or use of contemporary buzzwords like "multi-vector hybrid warfare."<sup>47</sup> As with Ukraine, this chapter briefly visits the relevant history behind the conflict, attempt to identify exploitable rifts within Moldovan society, discusses evidence of Moldovan nationalism, and examines the USSR's propaganda.

### Vulnerability Assessment

Ukraine and Moldova have much in common if considering the tug-of-war between Russian and Western domination over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The western section of Moldova, historically called Bessarabia, lies between the Dniester and Prut Rivers. The term Bessarabia is a loaded term but will be used here to differentiate between contemporary Moldova and the historic homeland of ethnic Moldovans – not to include the Transnistria region.<sup>48</sup> Transnistria refers to the area east of the Dneister River except when called "Dniester" or "Trans-Dniester" in media reports. Bessarabia escaped from over a century of Russian domination to

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<sup>47</sup> Andreas Umland, "Putin's Aggressive Putsch," *Newsweek*, February 26, 2016, accessed December 5, 2016, <http://www.newsweek.com/putins-passive-aggressive-putsch-430451>.

<sup>48</sup> Pål Kolsto, Andrei Edemsky, and Natalya Kalashnikova, "The Dniester Conflict: Between Irredentism and Separatism," *Europe-Asia Studies* 45, no. 6 (1993): 976-979.

become part of Romania in 1918. However, after more than twenty years of ineffectual Romanian rule, the Soviet Union briefly reconquered the territory, united it with Transnistria, and created the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR). The MASSR was dissolved in 1941 when German and Romanian troops reentered the region and reunited it with Romania under the Fascist “Iron Guard” regime. However, the Soviet Union reconquered the area in 1944 and reestablished the MASSR by truncating the northern and southern portions of Bessarabia and adding Transnistria. The inclusion of Transnistria into the MASSR held potential to be socio-politically problematic. As in Donbass, historical Russification changed the nature of that region to make it politically and linguistically distinguishable from the rest of the MASSR.<sup>49</sup> Thus, when the Soviet Union began to lift restrictions on nationalist discourse under Perestroika, Transnistria was linguistically Russian with an ethnic composition of heavily Russified Ukrainians, Russians, Moldovans, Bulgarians, and Orthodox Turks.<sup>50</sup> As the MASSR entered into a nationalist discourse, its constituents faced a similar challenge as their Ukrainians. Certain Moldovans identified as part of the Romanian nation. Others recognized historical kinship with Romanians but asserted their own ethnic identity. Members of both groups view their language and culture to be intrinsically linked with those of Romania.<sup>51</sup> A large segment of the population in Transnistria, however, consisted of the Russified groups mentioned above with a linguistic and political proclivity toward the USSR.

The history of Moldovan participation in World War II carries some of the same divisive baggage examined in the Ukrainian case study. Moldovans divided between supporters of the German-backed Romanian regime and supporters of the Red Army.<sup>52</sup> As in Ukraine, this divide

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<sup>49</sup> Claus Neukirch, "National Minorities in the Republic of Moldova-Some Lessons Learned, Some Not?" *South-East Europe Review: Journal for Labour and Social Affairs in Eastern Europe* 2, no. 3 (1999): 46-47.

<sup>50</sup> Kaufman, 130; Neukirch, 45.

<sup>51</sup> Kaufman, 133, 137; Natalia Cojocaru, "Nationalism and Identity in Transnistria," *Innovation* 19, no. 3-4 (2006): 264-274.

<sup>52</sup> Cojocaru, 263.

generally aligns with the opposing sides in the 1990-1992 conflict.<sup>53</sup> In retrospect, one can clearly identify an ethnolinguistic minority with potentially pro-Russian political sentiment. Further, this group was separated by a physical and historical barrier (the Dniester River) from their more Romanian oriented brethren. Thus, there are divisive identity constructs that could potentially be bundled together to create an adversarial population under the right conditions. However, as Kaufman notes, prior to the conflict, “although ethnic fears were strong, ethnic hostility was not. Moldovans and Russians did not hate each other; they only feared governments dominated by the other.”<sup>54</sup>

### Moldovan Nationalism

Nationalism plays a key role in information campaigns because it can provide a rallying cry for an irredentist majority and add an element of fear to those outside the majority. Thus, this section discusses Moldovan nationalism and the fear it seems to have created with Russified populations living in Transnistria.

The Soviet Union unwittingly played a role in the nationalist sentiment that, in some ways led to its own destruction. This was particularly true in the case of Moldovans living in Bessarabia and Transnistria. In order to maintain the integrity of the subordinate Soviet Socialist Republics, early Soviets often highlighted the unique ethnolinguistic aspects of groups living within those republics.<sup>55</sup> Later Soviet leadership sought to Russify parts of each republic or install Russified individuals into positions of power within the party apparatus.<sup>56</sup> In a study of Moldovan identity, Natalia Cojocararu notes that “Soviet propaganda [in Bessarabia] propagated the idea of a Moldovan

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>54</sup> Kaufman, 129.

<sup>55</sup> Cojocararu, 263-264; Charles King, "Eurasia Letter: Moldova with a Russian Face," *Foreign Policy* 97 (1994): 108.

<sup>56</sup> Kolsto, 978.

people with a Moldovan language and culture, distinct from the Romanian one.”<sup>57</sup> She also describes the divisive tone of Soviet messaging in Transnistria well before 1990. Transnistrians “learned” that “Bessarabians were capitalists, indolent people who speak a different language.” The Soviet system exacerbated ready-made identity conflicts by privileging Russian language and Slavic party members with higher paying management positions in business and more powerful positions in government.<sup>58</sup> The conditions were set for post-Soviet Moldovan nationalism as well as its backlash – Transnistrian nationalism.

Pal Kolsto et al. describe conditions in 1989 where “two parallel ideas captured the attention of the Moldovan public: the idea of creating an independent state and the idea of uniting with Romania... the Moldovan popular Front led the struggle for political independence from Moscow.”<sup>59</sup> However, the Popular Front soon became a banner for Bessarabian-Moldovan national identity, Moldovan language, and unity with Romania.<sup>60</sup> If carried out, the platform of the Popular Front threatened to make the Russian-speaking Slavs in Transnistria into a national minority. Further, a number of language laws passed by the Moldovan Parliament (under pressure from the Popular Front) defined Moldovan as the official state language, mandated a transition from Cyrillic to Latin alphabet, and eliminated Russian from the stratum of business and government. Although the laws accounted for the concerns of minority groups, Soviet elites in Transnistria framed them as a threat to the welfare of their constituents.<sup>61</sup> A detailed listing of Moldovan legislation and discourse indicating nationalistic tendencies is extensive. Suffice it to say, nationalist sentiment permeated Moldovan society in various forms with some Moldovans assuming the aggressive

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<sup>57</sup> Cojocaru, 268

<sup>58</sup> Cojocaru, 264; King, 108-110.

<sup>59</sup> Kolsto, 979

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 980.

<sup>61</sup> Kaufman, 146-148.

mantle of Romanian unification, some promoting a more modest program of Moldovan sovereignty and language restoration, and minority groups participating in their own nationalist backlash. What is important here is that nationalism was present in force, and that an ethnolinguistic out-group of Russified Moldovans perceived a threat. The next sections examine the role of the Soviet (Russian) information campaign in stoking such fears and the resultant violent destabilization within Moldova.

### Examination of the Propaganda

This section examines the information content available to the Russian-speaking Transnistrian population. Firsthand examples of on-the-ground propaganda, such as that used in the Ukraine case study, are much more difficult to find in the quantities needed to draw general conclusions about their content. Although the conflict occurred in the early 1990's, there is no primary source trail on the internet. However, other research avenues provide a window into pro-Russian themes Transnistrians were exposed to throughout the period prior to and during the 1991-1992 conflict. Stuart Kaufman notes that Transnistrian media, the sole source of outside information for the Russophone population, served as an echo chamber for Moscow based Russian media organizations. Citing the pro-separatist sentiment in Russian media, he writes, "The bias of the Moscow press was significant because it reinforced the biased messaging reaching the residents of Transnistria from their own local press. As a result, they had little access to sources of information that might have moderated their perceptions."<sup>62</sup> Further, a 1993 analysis of conditions leading up to the war noted that "Moldovan language newspapers on the left bank had been suppressed, and as the PMR [had] taken over the Tiraspol radio transmitter... Chisinau radio [was] in practice being jammed... [Contributing] to the Russification of PMR society."<sup>63</sup> Thus, one might

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<sup>62</sup> Kaufman, 154.

<sup>63</sup> Kolsto, 983

gain a relatively accurate view of propaganda reaching the local population by analyzing the Moscow press bias regarding the conflict. To be clear, this section is *inferring* themes Transnistrians would have been exposed to, based on trends of bias evidenced in Moscow-based media services. The following analysis draws upon daily media translations issued by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) in the 90-day period from October 1990 to January 1991. FBIS, a forerunner of the Open Source Center, maintained over twenty international media monitoring stations for the US government and issued daily paper and microfiche reports from 1941-1996.

During the 90-day period of escalation to conflict, FBIS recorded 157 Russian-based print, radio, and television pieces specifically covering the crisis in Moldova.<sup>64</sup> Media content from the period, however, is not entirely propaganda. Many pieces merely track the legislative process in the Moldovan parliament, describe conditions on the ground, and highlight efforts at cooperation between the CPSU and MASSR. However, clear trends of bias and propaganda do emerge. First, seemingly neutral coverage of cooperation efforts tends to highlight economic benefits of Russian / Moldovan Union. Second, discussion of the Moldovan nationalist discourse usually highlights fears of Moldovan unification with Romania. Third, discussion of conditions on the ground highlight conditions of lawlessness and ethnic conflict. Most of the articles reflect a bias in favor of Moldovan unity with Russia or sympathy for Russian speakers following passage of the 1989 language laws. However, to refer to them as propaganda of the sort used by Ukrainian separatists is a stretch. The intended message is much more subtle than those employed in Ukraine. Most outlets mixed non-partisan coverage of more benign issues with inflammatory stories regarding the buildup to conflict.

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<sup>64</sup> Russian based media captured in FBIS for the period under analysis included (in order of appearance) Komosolomskaya Pravda, Krashaya Zvezda, Moscow Pravda, Moscow Television Service, Communist Party of the Soviet Union Press Releases, Moscow TASS, Moscow Domestic Service, Moscow Izvestiya, Sovetskaya Moldova, Moscow Sovetskaya Rossiya, and Moscow Trud.

Many of the Russian media stories paint Moldovan President Mircea Snegur as a pragmatic head of state working toward a fair resolution within the communist system.<sup>65</sup> On November 5<sup>th</sup>, the Moscow News Service quoted Snegur as giving a “clear account of his position: Moldova should remain undivided; a moratorium should be imposed on all decisions of the legislature which infringe on the interests of the population of the left bank of the Dneister...”<sup>66</sup> Assuming the Moscow-based media spoke for the CPSU, it seems that the Soviet Union’s initial goal was a reunification treaty with the MASSR. That failing, media bias trended in favor of Transnistrian separatism. Positive coverage of Moldovan conciliation efforts became much less common, while characterizations of Moldovan leaders bowing to the Popular Front’s pro-Romanian agenda became routine. This turning point is apparent in the media coverage between November 8<sup>th</sup> and November 20<sup>th</sup> 1990. The tone and content of the broadcast and print media illustrate a progression from themes of hope and cooperation to themes of lawlessness and Moldovan intransigence. In November 8<sup>th</sup>, Moscow TASS and *Moscow Kresnaya Zvezda*, printed hopeful stories titled “Gorbachev Invited to Visit,” and “Russian Envoy Hopes Moldova Compromise Viable,” respectively. By the 19<sup>th</sup>, the CPSU clearly lost hope of a Unification treaty. The three Moscow TASS headlines (“State of Emergency Rejected,” “Pogroms Reported,” and “Capital Remains Tense”) show that TASS and other outlets faithfully served as an echo chamber for the CPSU’s desire to portray Moldova as chaotic and violent.<sup>67</sup> These stories mark a critical turning point in Russian media coverage of the Moldovan crisis.

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<sup>65</sup> FBIS, “Snegur Briefs Legislature on Talks,” *Moscow TASS*, November 4, 1990; FBIS, “Gorbachev Meets with Snegur,” *Moscow Pravda in Russian, Second Edition*, November 4, 1990; FBIS, “Myths Fueling Tension Cited,” *Moscow Izvestiya*, October 30, 1990.

<sup>66</sup> FBIS, “Gorbachev Meets with Snegur,” *Moscow Pravda in Russian, Second Edition*, November 4, 1990;

<sup>67</sup> FBIS, “State of Emergency Rejected,” *Moscow TASS*, November 19, 1990; FBIS, “Pogroms Reported,” *Moscow TASS*, November 19, 1990; FBIS, “Capital Remains Tense,” *Moscow TASS*, November 17, 1990; FBIS, “Situation Remains Complex,” *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, November 19, 1990; FBIS, “Army Officer Blames Deserters,” *Moscow Domestic Service in Russian*, November 18, 1990.

Following this shift, many Moscow based articles and news stories seem intent on undermining Moldovan sovereignty and stoking fears among the residence of Transnistria.<sup>68</sup> The articles captured in FBIS daily reports indicate that Kauffman's assertion of media bias is correct. A clear narrative consisting of several themes and characterizations emerges in news pieces. The emergent narrative, based upon approximately 100 stories in the FBIS reports, is as follows: *The Popular Front is espousing dangerous rhetoric (theme 1) that is driving the Moldovan Government to enact exclusive policies (theme 2). Such inflammatory rhetoric and policies are rightfully stoking fears of minorities and spurring organized ethnic violence (theme 3). Moldova is unable to control the resultant lawlessness (theme 4) and minorities are calling for a USSR intervention (theme 5).* Few of the articles tie the narrative together as a whole. However, most contain more than one associated theme and a continuous reading of the news pieces demonstrates repetition of the above narrative among the Moscow-based outlets. As relations between Moldovans in Bessarabia and Transnistria deteriorated beyond the ability to compromise within the communist system, the individual themes become more repetitive and coherently linked.

A piece published by *Krasnaya Zvezda* provides an example of several themes within the narrative. The author describes a statement by the chairman of the People's Front Executive Committee as responsible for "whipping up the situation even more [theme 1]. The people picketing units at the Kishinev Garrison now have a new slogan – 'We will put down all of the insubordinate[s] in blood [theme 3].'"<sup>69</sup> As the conflict spread toward conventional conflict, media outlets repetitively tied the themes into a coherent narrative supporting Soviet military intervention.

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<sup>68</sup> FBIS, "Moldovan Deputies Review 15 NOV Ethnic Clashes – Express Great Alarm," *Moscow Pravda in Russian, Second Edition*, November 17, 1990; FBIS, "Attacks on Deputies Described," *Moscow Izvestiya*, November 17, 1990; FBIS, "Moldova's Kostash Accused of Slurring Military," *Moscow Krasnaya Zvezda*, November 17, 1990; FBIS, "Election Progress in Dnestr Resion Reported," *Moscow TASS*, November 23, 1990; FBIS, "Anti-Army Hysteria Described in Kishinev," *Moscow Krasnaya Zvezda*, November 26, 1990.

<sup>69</sup> FBIS, "Force to Resolve Issues Continues," *Moscow Krasnaya Zvezda*, November 3, 1990.

Moscow TASS provided some early linkage between themes to call for intervention in Transnistria. A story from November 1990 opined “The situation in eastern Moldavia, where a state of emergency has been declared, remains tense... The population of those areas has asked the Soviet leadership to send interior ministry troops there [theme 5]...”<sup>70</sup> Again, this narrative and associated themes provide a window on – but not necessarily direct evidence of – the propaganda Transnistrians were exposed to. The keys to the narrative lie in the following: providing “concrete” examples of nationalistic ethnic violence; and convincing Transnistrians that “everyone else” feels the threat.

An example of the first key, from a November 1990 edition of *Krasnaya Zvezda* describes the situation in Moldova from the perspective of a “Russian soldier.” The correspondent describes the situation in the capital as “complex and unpredictable,” citing an example where “a group of lauts appeared, headed by two people in people’s volunteer uniforms [*uniforma volonterov*] and began to beat everyone up...” The soldier details aggressive Moldovans picketing a military barracks with signs saying “Down with imperialist Army!” and “Occupiers – Get Back to Russia.” To close the story out, the soldier describes being assaulted for asking a Moldovan for a cigarette in Russian.

Apocryphal stories like this appear throughout the FBIS daily reports. The pattern is strikingly similar each time. An unnamed observer describes ethnic Moldovans, usually wearing military uniforms or militia insignia, assaulting innocent bystanders for speaking Russian. The inclusion of insignia within the mobs of “hooligans” is important because it implies that the attacks are organized and nationalist in nature. In one story by *Moscow TASS*, a speaker identified as a KGB agent, states that “the actions of the hooligans are far from spontaneous... this is an organized, well-orchestrated action... the attackers wore white arm bands.” Such stories, repeatedly

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<sup>70</sup> FBIS, “Situation Remains Tense,” *Moscow TASS*, November 3, 1990.

employed by *Moscow TASS* and *Pravda* correspond with the few examples of ground-level propaganda available to the author. *Moscow Izvestiya*, one of the more balanced Soviet media sources, reported that separatists in Tiraspol used a public address system to broadcast the following call to arms: “Attention! Attention! The republic is in danger! With the blessing of the president of Moldova, hordes of volunteers are moving to Bendery and Dubossary... all men who wish to help are asked to assemble.”<sup>71</sup> The presence of uniforms and government backing appear to be key descriptors of the threat.

*Moscow TASS* led the way in the second key – normalizing a state of fear. One story, following elections in Transnistria, highlights the role of Moldovan laws in stoking fear by “making Moldavian language the state language of the republic... [and] uncertainty about their [Transnistrian] future and the fear of waking up in another state in the morning (theme 2/3).”<sup>72</sup> The story stokes fears of Moldovan unification with Romania by citing the Moldovan People’s Front decree “for renaming Moldavia the Romanian Republic of Moldavia...” and laments that “Dniester residents look for ways to restore civil peace and accord on Moldavian soil.”<sup>73</sup> Aside from demonizing the Moldovan government, accusations of incompetence create a perception of lawlessness requiring USSR intervention. Most stories in the FBIS reports characterize the Moldovan Parliament as incapable of resolving ethnic disputes. Of course, the logical solution is military intervention and a union treaty with the Supreme Soviet.

The Moldovan case clearly illustrates that Soviet government used mainstream media as a conduit of propaganda for the purpose of influencing public opinion in Transnistria. Major news outlets and publications painted a threatening picture for ethnic minorities in Transnistria following

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<sup>71</sup> FBIS, “Paper Views Intransigent Attitudes,” *Moscow Izvestiya – Union Edition*, November 14, 1990.

<sup>72</sup> FBIS, “Legislative Elections End in Dniester Republic,” *Moscow TASS*, November 27, 1990

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

the failure of the MASSR to ratify a reunification treaty and passage of the language laws. Thematic analysis of the actual news stories available to Moldovans in Transnistria shows that Kaufman is correct in asserting that the Moscow-based media served as an echo-chamber for Russian interest in Moldova. Further, the media-based information campaign was tailored to exploit the vulnerabilities of an ethnolinguistic minority on the fringes of a nationalist majority. One can see similarity between the forces at work in Ukraine and Moldova. That is, a Russian information campaign related to the above conditions worked to facilitate separatism, and that separatism facilitated conventional military operations. The next section compares and analyzes the results of the preceding case studies to pinpoint the vulnerability associated with common conditions in Ukraine and Moldova while continuing to employ the metaphor of depth.

## Comparison and Analysis

Considering the metaphor of depth and analogy of vulnerability assessments, the meat of analysis lies in two areas: the identification of a common vulnerability(s) in Ukraine and Moldova; and the relationship between those vulnerabilities and Russian actions.

### Vulnerabilities in Ukraine and Moldova

Previous sections showed that Ukraine and Moldova were quite similar with regard to hypothesized conditions of ethnolinguistic diversity and nationalist discourse. However, the presence of ethnolinguistic diversity and nationalist discourse do not explain how Ukrainian and Moldovan vulnerabilities function. This section cuts to the heart of how Ukrainian and Moldovan vulnerabilities function, and how Russian information campaigns exploited them.

A synthesis of conditional similarities in Ukraine and Moldova shows that both countries do have a similar vulnerability rooted in their geopolitical histories and resultant identity constructs. Both countries have disparate groups with overlapping identity constructs. Under normal conditions, there is enough overlap between group identities such that conflict does not occur. For example, the Transnistrian would have had enough in common with other Moldovans to allow for common ground on many issues. Indeed, research on Ukraine and Moldova shows that there is typically little animosity between Russian speaking minorities and their respective Ukrainian or Moldovan majorities. However, when fear is introduced into the equation, minority groups are susceptible to placing more weight on identity constructs that do not overlap with the majority population. More specifically, such groups are vulnerable to manipulation when messages of fear are tailored to resonate with identity constructs not in common with the majority. When such identity constructs are threatened, they may become defining factors of overall identity. To complicate matters, identity constructs like linguistic preference might closely tie with other constructs (e.g. Soviet nostalgia or political alignment) to create a Russo-centric bundle of identity

constructs. Normally, an individual's set of Moldovan / Ukrainian identity constructs might coexist with a Russo-centric set. However, when facing an ostensible threat to the existence of one identity construct (e.g. language), a minority group might be goaded into prioritizing the identity constructs that do not overlap with the majority in their host country. Figure 3 (below) demonstrates how the introduction of fear into an identity related wedge issue might galvanize a minority population to assume a separatist identity.

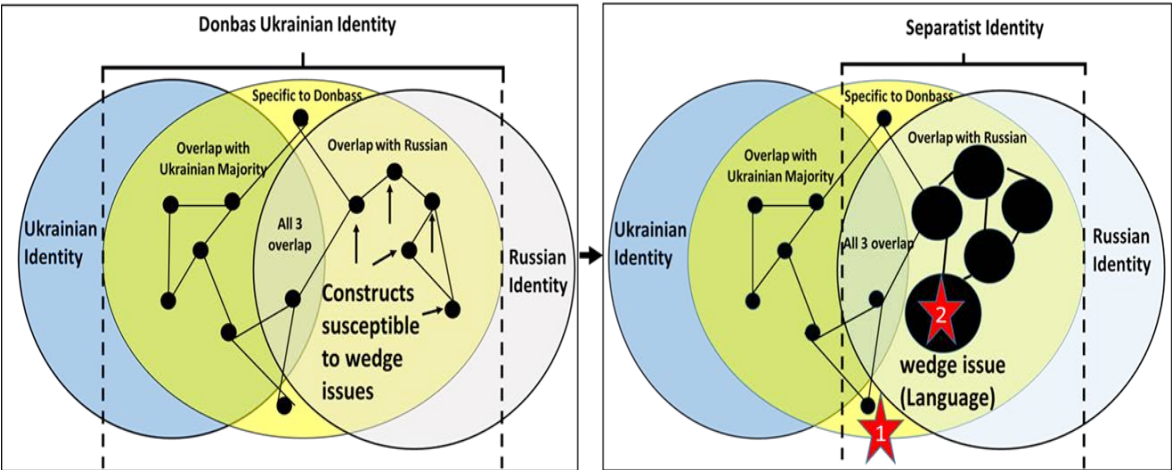


Figure 1. Exploitation of Ethnolinguistic Wedge Issues to Create Separatism  
 Left: Example of an individual's system of identity constructs. The Donbas identity contains overlapping elements of Ukrainian, Russian, and Donbass specific constructs.  
 Right: Example of how a regionally specific construct (1) (e.g. centered on Donbas mining concerns) can provide an inroads with a target audience employed in the Donbas mines. Exploitation of a sensitive identity construct (2) (e.g. language) can strengthen the salience of and relationship between similar Russo-centric constructs to illicit a separatist identity.<sup>74</sup>

This type of analysis might lead down an unsavory road where one concludes that the presence of a minority population represents an inherent vulnerability (e.g. fifth column). Such misplaced thinking has been at the root of destructive policy throughout history. As the previous sections discussed, Moldovans and Ukrainians did not envision such a problem anyhow. Ethnolinguistic difference did not lead to animosity in either country without extra help. In fact,

<sup>74</sup> The diagrams are the work of the author. However, the base idea applied here is based upon Benford et al.'s 1986 concept of frame bridging and alignment to illicit collective action.; Benford et al., 464-481.

business and political relationships regularly transcended individual identity constructs. Thus, the vulnerability is more specific, and can be minimized with some effort. *Ukrainian and Moldovan vulnerability lies in the specific wedge issues related to the reinstatement of Soviet suppressed identity constructs.* For example, the Soviet regime marginalized and Russified Moldovan and Ukrainian language. Thus, majority populations viewed the reinstatement of native language as part of the normalizing process without animus toward minority populations. However, it seems to have been quite easy for Russian information campaigns to reframe nationalistic or identity-related language in terms that could be perceived as threatening to heavily Russified minorities. This type of vulnerability plays directly into Russian hands as Moldovans and Ukrainians pursue a Western vector of development because the process and language driving reassertion of identity and Westernization are intertwined. Therefore, it is important that both governments measure their language on such issues carefully and engage with minority groups because anti-Russian language can easily be twisted to present a threat. However, this is a two-sided dialogue and care must be taken not to minimize the concern of the majority. The vulnerability exists precisely because the concerns of the majority are related to a real historical event. Laws and language related to language resurgence are a rejection of Russian orientation, not a rejection of a minority population.

Russian information and asymmetric campaigns in Ukraine and Moldova specifically targeted the inherent vulnerability presented by the language of resurgent identity discourse. Propaganda geared toward minority populations in Moldova and Ukraine injected the element of fear surrounding the language issue in order to solidify a separatist identity consisting of pro-Russian identity constructs. In the Moldovan case, Moscow-based media provides a window into the information ground-game where a narrative of lawlessness and attacks on Russian language speakers dominates the information space. In the Ukrainian case, falsified information regarding Ukrainian government and military activities creates an imagined existential threat and closer alignment with Russia. In both cases, the information campaign reframed resurgent nationalist

discourse and legislation to reinstitute old divisions. Evidence of this lies in the use of Nazi imagery in Ukraine and Romanian “Iron Guard” terminology in Moldova. In both cases, the propaganda products of the Russian information campaign are the end-result of a vulnerability assessment.

Figure 2 (below) shows how a Russian vulnerability assessment can result in an information product made to exploit nationalist discourse to promote separatism.



Figure 2. 2016 Russian propaganda map reflecting desired perceptions of Ukraine for a pro-Russian target audience. Note the “Novorossiya” flag encompassing Donetsk /Luhansk, the Russian flag over Crimea, and the Nazi flag over Western Ukraine. Geographic placement of flags aligns with demographic differences discussed in previous sections. Translation done by author. *Source:* “Political Map,” accessed December 16, 2016, <http://sevkrimrus.narod.ru/image/politkart.jpg>

Russian actions in Ukraine and Moldova did not seek to create separatism for its own sake. Further, the map above does not show demographic conditions or political beliefs as they exist in Ukraine. Rather, it illustrates a set of desired perceptions engineered by proponents of a Russian

information campaign. This is a picture of a destabilized and fragmented Ukraine where Kiev is isolated from the Euro-centric vector of Western Ukrainians, unable to access or influence the industries of Donbass, and blocked from commerce and power projection associated with Black Sea ports. This emasculated version of Ukraine, depicted by the area overlaid by the Ukrainian flag, is entirely dependent on a Russian vector of development and surrounded by destabilized areas that allow easy penetration by Russian conventional forces. Figure 3 (below) employs the depth metaphor to illustrate how attempted destabilization within Ukrainian might enable future Russian conventional operations against Kiev.

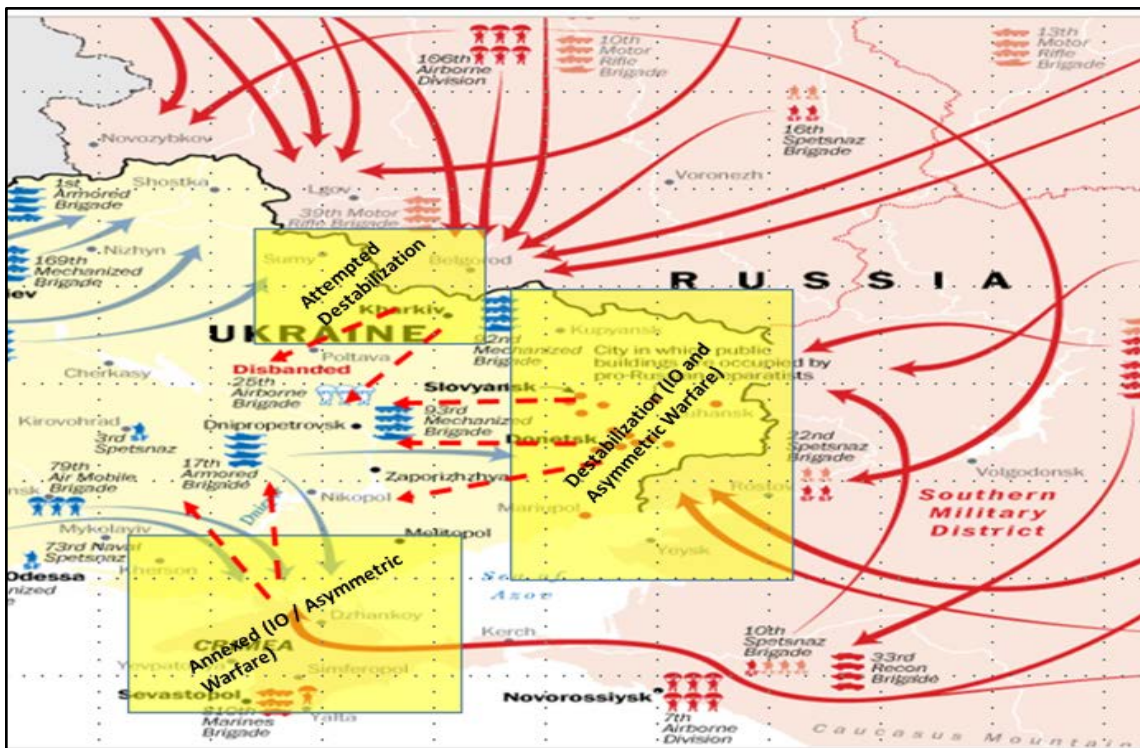


Figure 3. Destabilization and Penetration in Depth. This illustration demonstrates the depth metaphor. Yellow boxes overlay areas of attempted destabilization using “hybrid warfare.” Red arrows show movement of Russian conventional forces. Dotted arrows suggest how destabilization might allow further penetration in depth. The depth metaphor suggests areas for further attempted destabilization should Russia decide to attack to the west.

Source: Adam Taylor and Gene Thorpe, “How Ukraine and Russia are moving toward War,” *The Washington Post*, accessed December 13, 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/05/02/map-how-ukraine-and-russia-are-moving-toward-war/?utm\\_term=.effcd75cdc6b](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/05/02/map-how-ukraine-and-russia-are-moving-toward-war/?utm_term=.effcd75cdc6b). Destabilization overlays and dotted arrows added by the author.

## Conclusion

This work began as a post-mortem of Ukrainian and Moldovan sovereignty because Russian actions, regardless of whether the hypotheses put forth here is correct, resulted in the annexation and strategic isolation of Ukrainian and Moldovan territory and populations. Transnistria, Donbass, and Crimea remain “frozen” in an internationally unrecognized autonomous condition. From a practical standpoint, the passage of time legitimizes the status quo in Russian favor. Naturally, a casual observer would wonder “how did this happen?” and “what can we do to prevent it from happening again?” The answer to such questions requires a thoughtful analysis of Russian techniques and the thought process underpinning them.

This paper also suggested that “hybrid warfare” is not the correct lens for viewing the Russian operational approach. Instead, it offers the metaphor of “depth”, whereby Russian planners visualize an adversary as a systematic whole and select varied means to conduct a multi-faceted approach that combines conventional, asymmetric, and informational warfare. The weight placed on each type of engagement would be commensurate with the adversary’s systematic vulnerabilities. Following this logic, the previous sections undertook a vulnerability assessment of Ukraine and Moldova to find out if similar vulnerabilities existed such that the ratio of asymmetric and informational warfare mirrored those of “hybrid warfare.” Individual case studies of Ukraine and Moldova examined conditions in each country for evidence of ethnolinguistic out-groups, majority nationalist sentiment, and Russian propaganda intended to isolate the outgroup. In each case, research showed evidence of all three conditions. However, the conditions did not adequately explain the key vulnerability allowing Russian exploitation. The discourse surrounding previously suppressed identity constructs in Moldova and Ukraine seem to be the active ingredient that allowed for an asymmetric campaign of destabilization to take hold in minority areas. As depicted in the previous section, the areas where resurgent nationalist discourse resonates with a Russified

minority coincides with areas of Russian strategic interest. This work does not claim to identify what those strategic interests are. However, the map of destabilization paints a picture where Russia can politically neuter its adversaries by holding critical territory in “frozen” conflict, or provide an operational avenue to threaten future conventional actions.

There are several lessons that former Soviet states and their allies (e.g. NATO), can take away from this interpretation of events in Ukraine and Moldova. First, the presence of nationalist discourse and a Russified minority in former Soviet states should be cause for an internal vulnerability assessment, especially if the majority element seeks a Western vector of development. Specifically, vulnerable states and their allies should scrutinize political discourse of Westernization and post-Soviet national resurgence to determine if it holds potential to be propagandized as “anti-minority.” Additionally, vulnerable states should examine the physical location of Russified minority groups to determine whether Russia could use identity-based propaganda as a pretext to mobilize geographically proximate minorities for the purpose of annexing territory.

If vulnerable states and their allies determine that the above conditions exist, they should collaborate to enact a deliberate information campaign aimed at minimizing the possibility of Russian propaganda gaining a foothold. As a critical component of this campaign, political dialogue must assuage the fears of a Russified minority while heeding the historical experience of a previously suppressed majority identity. Second, at-risk former Soviet states should examine ways to strengthen the ties that bind identity constructs between majority and minority populations. Minority populations with strong social, military, and economic ties to the rest of the state might be much less susceptible to manipulation of a single identity construct. Finally, at-risk states should recognize when “hybrid warfare” of the type described here, is not a likely possibility. Much recent discourse might lead NATO and allied former Soviet states to prepare for the wrong kind of war.

The metaphor of depth and the analogy of vulnerability assessments employed in this paper provide analysts with greater explanatory power for different Russian approaches than visions of repeating “Russian RMA’s” and “a future of hybrid warfare” because they account for the fact that Russia will not develop identical operational approaches for every conflict. Gerasimov’s 2013 article uses the depth metaphor to illustrate this lesson to the Russian General Staff as he demands “the establishment of a particular logic and not the application of some template.”<sup>75</sup> However, as he notes, that logic consistently calls for “a permanently operating front through the entire territory of the enemy state...”<sup>76</sup> Thus, analysis should focus on the likely means of destabilization in depth given the specific vulnerabilities of at-risk states.

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<sup>75</sup> Gerasimov, 24.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 25.

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