

# Russian Military Deception Post-Soviet Union

A Monograph

by

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## Abstract

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Deception has long been practiced by military leaders. The ability to disguise and deceive has been a vital portion of a campaign plan from the Trojan War to modern times with the use of technology. This monograph focuses on the Russian military deception theory called *maskirovka* and how the Russian Federation actioned this technique against the countries of Georgia and Ukraine. The United States and its allies are currently at a crossroads against this Russian capability. Russia has the training environment, technology overmatch, and determination to remain relevant as the world continuously becomes more complex. Reviewing Russian doctrine, theory, and actions in Georgia and Ukraine, a scenario emerges of how Russia might utilize this timeless tactic again.

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## Abbreviations

ASVAB	Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
DOSAAF	Volunteer Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and Navy [Добровольное Общество Содействия Армии, Авиации и Флоту]
EU	European Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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## Introduction

Though fraud in other activities may be detestable, in the management of war it is laudable and glorious, and he who overcomes the enemy by fraud is as much to be praised as he who does by force.

—Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Art of War*

On December 26, 1991, the world stood still as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) dissolved when the Supreme Soviet voted to abolish the union between the fifteen independent republics. As the post-Soviet world approaches the thirtieth anniversary of the fall, through the ashes a more modern federation has risen in its wake. During these years, Russia has modernized its military forces to re-emerge as a near-peer threat to the United States. The Russian Federation has upgraded its tank corps, air forces, and air defense assets that, in some cases, outperform the US equivalent. On February 20, 2014, Russian forces conducted joint military exercises in vicinity of the Crimean Peninsula of Ukraine, resulting in the annexation of this vital piece of terrain, and invaded the eastern portion of the country. The speed, tempo, and results shocked the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Western powers into wondering how the Russian military was able to pull off such a military operation so discretely and deceptively.

Thirty years of rebuilding and reconfiguring the Russian armed services has postured Russia once again, as a peer equivalent with the United States. The reemergence of the timeless practice of *maskirovka* has projected Russian influence in the region by exerting its diplomatic, economic, and informational dominance on neighboring countries. This monograph seeks to answer the question: "Since the fall of the USSR, how has Russia used deception as incorporated in their theory of *maskirovka*, and how can the United States counter this use of deception?"

Russia has used *maskirovka* for hundreds of years. The most recent examples were in 2008 and in 2014, where Georgia and Ukraine were deceived into thinking Russia was conducting military exercises and succumbed to the deception. Russia geographically is the

largest nation on earth. This fact allows the ground, air, and naval forces of the Federation to conduct Corps and higher exercises with little to no interference regarding terrain. This ability to train at that level gives a huge advantage to those forces involved in the exercise. It allows for commanders to better employ current doctrine and rehearse for future conflicts. The United States and NATO can counter Russian deception by building the proper force in Europe by implementing a multi-domain defense plan, intelligence sharing, and cyber operations.

With the understanding of history, theory, and doctrine, research focuses on *maskirovka* from a historical and theoretical perspective in order to assess how the United States can counter Russian deception. Using access to military journals, first-hand accounts from Ukrainian and Georgian soldiers, how Russia conducts training, and their ability to deceive again, this monograph can help planners understand the indicators of the Russian military deception operations.

Chapter One leads off with the history of *maskirovka* and how the Russians have leveraged this tactic in the past. Chapter One ends with understanding that *maskirovka* runs deep within the Russian tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war. Many Russian officials in multiple high-ranking positions across the Russian government leverage the theory. The military does not solely use this tactic; it is practiced and utilized in foreign policy decisions on the geopolitical level. Additionally, the chapter looks closely at how the Russian Armed Services revamped their forces and how they practice *maskirovka* inside the formations.

Chapter Two looks at the Russo-Georgian War of 2008. The history of the conflict dates back centuries and continues to be an extremely sensitive and hostile area to this day. The Russian military and diplomatic efforts in the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions utilized deceptive tactics for the first time in decades and resulted in Russia ultimately seizing control of the two regions. These regions are geographically strategic due to the main economic routes that run north and south through the Caucasus.

Chapter Three presents the second case study, the Russo-Ukrainian War of 2014. Like the previous chapter, the study investigates the history of the conflict and how the Russians implemented *maskirovka*. The results of conflict were not at all surprising, however the conduct of the war was telling on how Russia can deceive other countries in all aspects of national power (diplomatic, information, military, economic). The unique approach to the conflict in which Russia maneuvered its ground forces, controlled the narrative, and established highly contested elections with such speed and precision are alarming.

Chapter Four presents a scenario that deep dives into how Russia would utilize its ground forces, sea assets, and capitalize on an already unstable Ukraine. In the end, utilizing *maskirovka* Russia would seize the Southern coast of Ukraine and control much of the Northern portion of the Black Sea. During the scenario, the United States and NATO would enact a joint multi-domain defense plan, intelligence sharing, and utilize cyber operations, to counter Russian deception operations.

The conclusion emphasizes the importance of evolving NATO and EU with modern multi-domain plans, intelligence sharing, and the utilization of cyber. Expanding on these three aspects of the alliances will assist in deterring and identifying when Russia is utilizing *maskirovka*. Understanding the identity of *maskirovka* will assist planners in assessing the current Russian threat and how to properly implement a response.

Based upon history, theory, and doctrine, Russian use of deception is an extremely complex problem. The unique problem set that Russia presents itself to the West cannot be fixed with just military power alone. It requires all four instruments of national power: diplomacy, information, military, and economics of not just the United States but all NATO allies and aspiring partners in peace. With all of NATO and its allies working in unison utilizing all four instruments of national power, Russian expansionism can be deterred, and the next humanitarian crisis potentially prevented.

## Chapter 1: Russian Military Deception Theory of Maskirovka

It is difficult to find another nation in the late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century that has transformed its military might as much as the Russians have. From 1991 to present, just about every aspect of the Russian military was studied and reformed to better suit the Russian way of war. Many aspects of the Ministry of Defense appear unrecognizable to its Western counterparts.<sup>1</sup>

With a massive post-1991 military overhaul, the Russians have doubled down on their age-old military deception techniques and upgraded their military to match the United States. Russian doctrine calls this *maskirovka*. The word most closely translates to the English word, "disguise or conceal," and technically applies to everything including camouflage, but the West's use of the label does not truly get to the meaning or understanding of the usage of the word. As for Russia, this concept is much more than just a warfare tactic; it is an ideology utilized in every aspect of its government.<sup>2</sup> *Maskirovka* is used to conceal true intentions from opponents whether it be in foreign policy, military operations, and even domestic policy, and to influence other countries' foreign and domestic policy to spread propaganda and promote Russian ideology or simply to create doubt and distrust of a country's intentions.<sup>3</sup>

The Soviet Union practiced *maskirovka* extensively throughout the Cold War. An example was the so-called "bomber gap." The Russians made numerous efforts to create the appearance they had built up a massive number of nuclear capable bombers. At a Soviet air show in 1955, Russia flew a few of its Bison bombers overhead. The same bombers quickly flew out of sight, looped around, and flew back over again, creating the appearance of dozens more bombers

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<sup>1</sup> Tanner Holland, "Maskirovka and Predicting Kremlin Actions in the 21st Century," *The World Mind*, October 13, 2016, accessed October 12, 2020, <https://edspace.american.edu/theworldmind/2016/10/13/maskirovka-and-predicting-kremlin-actions-in-the-21st-century/>.

<sup>2</sup> Holland, "Maskirovka and Predicting Kremlin Actions."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

than they had.<sup>4</sup> The Russians also packed all their Bison bombers in an airbase they knew the Americans would photograph, again giving the appearance of having many more bombers than they operated. Eventually NATO air reconnaissance showed the bomber gap was nonexistent, but not before the United States spent massive amounts of money building up its own bomber fleet of over two thousand aircraft.<sup>5</sup>

In 1983, the KGB conducted Operation Infection. The purpose of this campaign was to spread false information claiming that the United States had invented HIV and AIDS in a lab. Pro-Soviet newspapers and media outlets across eighty different countries published that claim.<sup>6</sup>

During the Vietnam War, the Soviets spent more than one billion dollars on peace movements across the world with the goal of removing public support for the war. The KGB reportedly helped fund most antiwar movements during the Cold War.<sup>7</sup> At the height of the USSR, because the KGB used deception so extensively, the Soviet Union reportedly investigated itself to see if they were behind President Kennedy's assassination.<sup>8</sup>

Russia used *maskirovka* more recently in Ukraine in 2014. Soldiers in green uniforms with no insignias or badges began showing up in the Crimea.<sup>9</sup> The first reports from President

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<sup>4</sup> "The Bomber Gap," Global Security, accessed January 2, 2021, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/russia/bomber-gap.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> David Grimes, "Russian Fake News Is Not New: Soviet Aids Propaganda Cost Countless Lives," *The Guardian*, June 14, 2017, accessed September 11, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2017/jun/14/russian-fake-news-is-not-new-soviet-aids-propaganda-cost-countless-lives>.

<sup>7</sup> John Vinocur, "K.G.B. Officers Try to Infiltrate Antiwar Groups," *New York Times*, July 26, 1983, accessed January 13, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/1983/07/26/world/kgb-officers-try-to-infiltrate-antiwar-groups.html>.

<sup>8</sup> J. Edgar Hoover to Marvin Watson, John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection, record no. 178-10003-10131, December 1, 1963 (Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, November 23, 2017), accessed January 14, 2021, <https://www.archives.gov/files/research/jfk/releases/docid-32204484.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Volodymyr Havrylov, "How Putin's Attempts at Deception Failed in Ukraine," *The Cipher Brief*, November 15, 2017, accessed November 10, 2020, [https://www.thecipherbrief.com/column\\_article/putins-attempts-deception-failed-ukraine](https://www.thecipherbrief.com/column_article/putins-attempts-deception-failed-ukraine).

Putin denied Russian soldiers were involved in the Crimean crisis, but later admitted that the troops were in fact Russian special forces.<sup>10</sup> Simultaneously, troops without insignias began showing up in Eastern Ukraine and again the Russian government claimed that they were not their troops. Ukrainian forces captured several soldiers who were revealed to be Russian soldiers. The Russian government explained that these men were acting by themselves and not on behalf of Russia.<sup>11</sup>

While many of Russia's deceptions have been successful, others have not. Russia made several claims when Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 was shot down, including that it was shot down by Ukrainian surface to air missile site and then later asserted a Ukrainian aircraft shot it down, even releasing a doctored satellite image of the alleged event.<sup>12</sup> This action highlighted what was taking place in the region and quickly drew focused reporting by media and political outlets on Russian atrocities.

Every nation has practiced some form of deception at some level, but the Russians have taken it to a higher level and have mastered the use of deception to conceal their true intentions. Russia applied *maskirovka* at every level of policies, even down to the unit and tactical levels of war. In order to accomplish *maskirovka* in the twenty-first century, Russia needed to completely upgrade its armed services. The *2008 New Look Reforms* ensured that the Russian military could compete with the United States if a conflict between the two countries occurred.

In order to achieve *maskirovka* in the new millennium, Russian leaders created the *2008 New Look Reforms*. The reforms targeted key aspects of the Russian military and how the military conducts warfare. The first change was geared towards how Russia maintains its personnel. The Soviet and post-Soviet eras relied upon a mandatory two-year service obligation to fill their

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<sup>10</sup> Havrylov, "How Putin's Attempts."

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

ranks, after which the conscript returns back to civilian life. The state could always call that theoretically already trained individual back for further military service if required. The two-year service obligation has since changed to a one-year obligation with emphasis on one specific technical field expertise.<sup>13</sup>

The Russian officer is the backbone of their military, unlike most Western militaries. However, similarities exist between militaries with emphasis on experience, training, qualifications, and testing. The Russian officer is tested holistically and then placed on a path of being a commander or staff for the remainder of their career. The current Chief of the General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov completed his platoon, company, and battalion commander time in his first eight years of service.<sup>14</sup>

Russia has many systems in place of recruiting and maintaining qualified soldiers and officers. The Volunteer Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and Fleet (DOSAAF) is unlike anything the United States has in place for assessing young military candidates.<sup>15</sup> This program teaches young Russian youth different military skills, such as outdoor survival, proper training on military style vehicles, sports, and fitness. These life skills allow the recruit to be well versed in their specific set of skills upon entering their mandatory service.<sup>16</sup>

Communication between Russian three letter agencies and all branches of their military is vital in the selection and distribution process of the soldier. If the soldier shows great prowess in a certain field, communication between entities then assigns the soldier his or her military occupational service. The United States tests volunteers with the Armed Services Vocational

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<sup>13</sup> Lester W. Grau and Charles K. Bartles, *The Russian Way of War: Force Structure, Tactics, and Modernization of the Russian Ground Forces* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2016), 6.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 6–9.

Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) to determine their military aptitude and qualifications. The Russian means of distributing talent is far more extensive.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout its long history, Russia has always needed its military for not only foreign wars, but also domestic unrest. This approach to training requires an extraordinarily strong, large-scale combat operational-based military in addition to a quick strike force. Traditionally, troops in the Ministry of Defense are foreign focused, while troops of Ministry of Interior are domestic focused.<sup>18</sup>

The leadership of Russia in 2007 began making changes and later named the military overhaul the *2008 New Look Reforms*. The Federation went from ghost units with only a few assigned officers to a far more modern and combat ready force. This reform stemmed from Russia witnessing US engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>19</sup> The use of small unit tactics was extraordinarily successful and indicated the way to fight future wars.

The Russian Ministry of Defense went as far as completely reconfiguring their military districts. During Soviet times, Russia had sixteen military districts. Then in 2010, the Federation dissolved many of them and created four primary military districts. The four commands are Western, Southern, Central, and Eastern Strategic Commands.<sup>20</sup> Then in 2014, the Arctic Strategic Command was added in part to the list but does not receive much in terms of ground forces.

The reforms did not really redesignate the distribution of the armies. The armies are still generally located along the borders with other nations, with most of the highly regarded and equipped armies in the Southern and Western Operational Commands. These commands border

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 6–9.

<sup>18</sup> Grau and Bartles, *The Russian Way of War*, 6–9.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 27–28.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 28.

NATO countries and the Caucasus regions. The commanders of these districts have complete operational control of their respective districts, minus nuclear capabilities.<sup>21</sup>

The reform still carried the idea of heavy wheeled and tracked forces. Russia still carries roughly twenty thousand tanks in its active and reserve force, while the United States has 5,800.<sup>22</sup> This has always been a major difference in military tactics between Russia and the United States. In Russia, all aspects of the military support the armor's ability to maneuver around the battle space. On the contrary, in the United States, all aspects of the military support the infantry and their ability to shoot, move, and communicate.<sup>23</sup>

An example of how *maskirovka* can be implemented at the tactical level is how Russia has integrated fires. The Russian Army, having studied US success with artillery in Iraq and Afghanistan, has invested and renewed their field artillery units. Without precision guided technology, the Russians went with the approach of destroying large squares of enemy controlled territory with massed fires. The United States and its allies would have an exceedingly difficult time utilizing this tactic, however after the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, Russia appears to have mastered the approach.<sup>24</sup>

At multiple levels of the Russian Army, fires can be attached and utilized in a multitude of mission sets. The artillery can be displaced for deep fires, masking fires, and is now known that the commanders are not afraid to move the fires into any compromising position if that position gives them a decisive advantage. The Southern Military District Command moved

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>22</sup> Grau and Bartles, *The Russian Way of War*, 28–35.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 29–34.

<sup>24</sup> Alan Yuhas and Jalabi, Raya, "Ukraine's Revolution and Russia's Occupation of Crimea: How We Got Here," *The Guardian*, March 5, 2014, accessed July 21, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/05/ukraine-russia-explainer>.

dozens of artillery pieces to the front line, on par with the infantry, during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War.<sup>25</sup>

It is common for a Brigade Tactical Group to have up to four artillery battalions inside their control. The breakdown is two standard battalions of artillery, one battalion of a highly robust air defense artillery, and the fourth is an antitank battalion that supports defensive posturing and engineers.<sup>26</sup>

In the decades after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation transformed its entire attack capability with the priority given to fires, protection, followed by armor then infantry. The Russian reconnaissance elements begin shaping the battlefield to find and destroy enemy positions. The fire then shifted to destroy the enemy mid echelon fighting positions as the main body of the Russian motorized units began moving forward. Artillery will shift fire to the assault lines and then proceed with that rate of fire throughout the battle space. It is likely that the military will use indiscriminate fires and precision guided fires resulting in a wall of fire in front of the attacking armor. The infantry will then maneuver behind the attacking armor forces and secure any missed threats. The entire attack is continuously supported by indirect fires that shape the deep, middle, and short-range targets. All these fires allow Russian forces to indiscriminately as well as precisely attack targets of interest.<sup>27</sup>

Russia did use this new and unique way of indirect fires during the 2008 Russo Georgian War. The fires masked the units maneuvering on the ground, allowing the Russian commanders the ability to close with and destroy the Georgian army. Russians used the theory between the

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Kofman, "Russian Performance in the Russo-Georgian War Revisited," War on the Rocks, September 4, 2018, accessed September 25, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/09/russian-performance-in-the-russo-georgian-war-revisited/>.

<sup>26</sup> Grau and Bartles, *The Russian Way of War*, 102–107.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 102–107.

2008 and the 2014 conflicts to master the tactic, which was then implemented in 2014 in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Eastern Ukraine.<sup>28</sup>

The *New Look Reforms* have emboldened the Russian military and facilitated the use of *maskirovka*, giving Russia vast overmatch compared to its surrounding neighbors. Of those neighbors, many are NATO aligned or remarkably close partners with the EU, leaving few possibilities for the Russians to put into action their newly organized armed forces. The few possibilities emerged on Russia's southwest border with Georgia and Ukraine.

## Chapter 2: Russo-Georgian War 2008



Figure 1. Russo-Georgian War Map. "Russo-Georgian War," Wikipedia, August 26, 2008, accessed April 4, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russo-Georgian\\_War#/media/File:2008\\_South\\_Ossetia\\_war\\_en.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russo-Georgian_War#/media/File:2008_South_Ossetia_war_en.svg).

On August 7, 2008, Russian military forces advanced across the international border into Georgia which ignited the first European conflict of the twenty-first century.<sup>29</sup> The conflict began

<sup>28</sup> Yuhas and Raya, "Ukraine's Revolution."

<sup>29</sup> Sarah Pruitt, "How a Five-Day War with Georgia Allowed Russia to Reassert Its Military Might," History.com, last modified September 4, 2018, accessed September 15, 2020, <https://www.history.com/news/russia-georgia-war-military-nato>.

with the breakaway of the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in a place called Transcaucasia, located within the sovereign nation of Georgia. The conflict formally lasted for six days resulting in a ceasefire; however, 850 lives were lost, 35,000 civilians were displaced, and Georgia lost hundreds of tanks, aircraft, and sustainment capabilities.<sup>30</sup> The results were devastating to the local population and left South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Russian military control. The Russians demonstrated new and modern armed forces, exercising joint capabilities with new and improved tactics from the *2008 New Look Reforms*. The conflict, like most conflicts, did not arise from a recent transgression. The Russo-Georgian conflict began decades prior to 2008.

The country of Georgia is geographically located in the South Caucasus, which has a long history of different kingdoms, principalities, and empires. Empires, such as the Huns, Persians, and Ottomans, influenced the country. Russian influence was not introduced until the nineteenth-century when Georgia became a part of the Russian Empire. During the height of World War I, the Russian Revolution began and, once again, Georgia became its own country in 1918.<sup>31</sup>

It was during this time the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia were influenced by Bolshevism and revolted against the neighboring regions inside Georgia.<sup>32</sup> In 1921, the Red Army maneuvered into the region and annexed both sections. The regions became South Ossetia Oblast and the Abkhazian Oblast. For the next seventy years of Soviet rule, the region experienced massive modernization regarding manufacturing and urbanization.<sup>33</sup>

In the 1980s, under Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, the USSR implemented many emancipating reforms. Georgia would be the first country in the Caucasus to begin moving away

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> "About Georgia, Government of Georgia – History," ITDC, Government of Georgia.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

from the collapsing union. President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Georgia's first post-Soviet leader, stood on a platform of nationalism and Georgian independence from any other nation.<sup>34</sup> A part of the president's national independence was the reunification with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The president never got the chance at reunification because like most satellite states around the Soviet Union, Georgia fell into disarray when the USSR collapsed.<sup>35</sup> The president was then exiled and left Georgia in a state of civil war.

The regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia rebelled against Tbilisi and sought to become independent nations of their own. Under the control of the previous communist leader, Eduard Shevardnadze, Georgia maneuvered its military in both regions to regain power. Georgia succeeded in bringing Ossetia back to the negotiating table; however, mass human atrocities occurred in Abkhazia.<sup>36</sup> In September of 1993, pro-Russian separatists within Abkhazia defeated the Georgian military and pushed them out of the region. During this time, Georgian loyalists and citizens were rounded up and executed as enemies of Abkhazia.<sup>37</sup>

During the Georgian Civil War, Russia created the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and President Shevardnadze quickly joined. With the alliance in place and backing from Russia, political rivals to Shevardnadze were captured and killed along with exiled President Gamsakhurdia.<sup>38</sup> Over the next ten years, President Shevardnadze ruled with an iron fist until he was removed during the Rose Revolution in 2003.

The new leader of Georgia, President Mikhail Saakashvili, drastically changed the country's foreign policies. He went against the Russian-backed CIS and allowed pro-West

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> "About Georgia, Government of Georgia – History," ITDC, Government of Georgia.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

businesses and foreign dignitaries into the country.<sup>39</sup> In a matter of three years, Georgia aspired to be a part of European economic alliances and NATO. The largest economic project during this time was the completion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline in 2006.<sup>40</sup> This massive project stretched from the Caspian Sea westward into Turkey, completely bypassing Russia.

In 2006, Georgia formally withdrew from the CIS, and Russian troops stationed within Georgia retrograded into South Ossetia and Abkhazia. For two years, Russian troops remained in place to deter construction of Western military bases inside Georgia, further jeopardizing the traditionally Russian-controlled Caucasus region.<sup>41</sup> In May 2008, Russia began making its move to control the regions.

Hundreds of Russian soldiers and construction companies moved into the Abkhazian region under the pretense they were there as humanitarians and peacekeepers, attempting to fix key infrastructure that supported both country's economic priorities. Georgia responded by maneuvering its military forces towards the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia while Russian forces continued to mass for combat.<sup>42</sup> Both countries remained in their own controlled areas, however, tensions were escalating.

President Dmitry Medvedev succeeded President Vladimir Putin in the 2008 presidential election. In one of his first major acts as president, Medvedev immediately mobilized Russia's Southern Military District forces in response to the growing number of Georgian troops along the border of the disputed regions.<sup>43</sup> On August 7, while most of the world prepared for the opening

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Kofman, "Russian Performance."

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Pruitt, "How a Five-Day War."

of the Olympic Games in Beijing, Russia was loading and fueling up its Southern Military District armies preparing for an invasion.<sup>44</sup>

During the night of August 7, Russian bombers attacked targets across South Ossetia. As the overwhelming Russian forces advanced on August 8, there was little Georgian forces could do to stop the attack. Russian forces quickly secured the key towns of Java and Tskhinvali that were Russia's main objectives of the South Ossetia region.<sup>45</sup> By the end of August 10, Russian forces attacked further south and secured the town of Gori. Gori was a key town due to the large oil pipeline that runs through the city westward towards the Black Sea.<sup>46</sup> The Georgians attempted multiple counterattacks in the region but had little to no success.

Further west in the Abkhazian region, under the direction of the Black Sea Fleet, Russian naval forces began bombarding the sea towns of Gagra, Gudauta, and Sukhumi.<sup>47</sup> The Georgian navy could not intervene until August 9 and was decisively defeated and then returned to the ports of Poti, only to abandon what was left of their vessels.<sup>48</sup> Russian ground forces debarked the ships, maneuvered northeast, and secured the Georgian-backed region of Kodori. Southern ground forces in the Abkhazian region surpassed their desired end state and were able to secure the key port city of Poti.<sup>49</sup>

By August 12, the bulk of the remaining Georgian forces had established a minor defensive line in Zestaponi and a stronger defensive line northwest of Tbilisi. With Russian

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Pruitt, "How a Five-Day War."

<sup>47</sup> Kofman, "Russian Performance."

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Kofman, "Russian Performance."

victory imminent, Russian superior naval and airpower, and massively depleted Georgian forces, a ceasefire was finally called by both sides.<sup>50</sup>

The immediate aftermath was a world condemnation of Russia's aggression in the two regions. International organizations erected fence lines along the disputed territories in hopes of deterring further Russian interference in Georgia, but most importantly to establish some form of boundaries to protect the Georgian pipelines.<sup>51</sup> The pipelines were paramount to the economic survival of the country.

Russia's 2008 military engagement resulted in control of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions. These limited gains gave Russia added access to the Black Sea and a major road network through the Caucasus into Georgia.<sup>52</sup> Both conquests caused an international response, but Russia stopped just before an international military intervention, rendering only a limited victory for the Russian Federation.

To the public, the five-day Russo-Georgian War of 2008 was very minor. However, on a much larger scale, this war meant something much greater. Russia had undisputedly reestablished its military dominance in the region. The implementation of *maskirovka* was apparent during multiple operations inside the campaign. The implementation of arraying ground forces under the false pretense that they are construction workers and engineers there to fix key infrastructure. Additionally, the operation began while the world watched the opening of the Olympic Games. There was little that NATO or the United Nations could do because of ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which required additional surges during that year. The Russian timing of the incursion was immaculate and precise. President Medvedev understood that a timely war would be costly and deadly.<sup>53</sup> The war proved the *2008 New Look Reforms* and *maskirovka*

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<sup>50</sup> Pruitt, "How a Five-Day War."

<sup>51</sup> Kofman, "Russian Performance."

<sup>52</sup> Pruitt, "How a Five-Day War."

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

complimented one another well. After the 2008 success against Georgia, Russia turned its attention to another very profitable region across the Black Sea, Crimea.

### Chapter 3: Russo-Ukrainian War 2014



Figure 2. Map of Ukraine. "Ukraine," NBC News, September 2014, accessed April 4, 2021, [https://media2.s-nbcnews.com/j/newscms/2014\\_09/215816/140227-map-crimea-1250\\_5f00f6012cf34480d5b588e14677df11.fit-760w.jpg](https://media2.s-nbcnews.com/j/newscms/2014_09/215816/140227-map-crimea-1250_5f00f6012cf34480d5b588e14677df11.fit-760w.jpg).

The six-year time lapse between 2008-2014, allowed Russia to go back to the training and doctrine process and conduct and in-depth after-action review of the 2008 conflict. During the interwar period, the Russian military and diplomatic forces refined their *maskirovka* tactics and strategy that was conducted during the war. The emerging strategies and tactics from the conflict were the Russians' ability to mask tactical, operational, and strategic objectives utilizing *maskirovka*.

The geographic location of Ukraine is particularly important to Western European allies and to Russia. If Ukraine leans more towards the West, that places European and NATO influence directly on Russia's border. However, if Ukraine aligns with Russia, Moscow intensifies its influence along European territory and threatens NATO. Since the 2014 crisis, Ukraine seems to be set on strengthening ties with Europe and joining the deep and comprehensive free trade

areas. Except for Crimea, which the European Union (EU) considers illegally annexed, Ukraine has access to parts of the EU's single market, allowing goods and people to travel freely and making it less dependent on Russia since 2016.<sup>54</sup>

Ukraine is a historically divided nation that directly borders Russia and the Black Sea. The geographic division has traditionally been the Dnieper River that runs north and south, which coincidentally divides the nation in half. Naturally, the western section of the country is more West European influenced, while the eastern portion is Russian influenced.<sup>55</sup> The western portion of Ukraine speaks Ukrainian rather than Russian. Many people who live in the region would like to see the country move away from Russian influence and adapt to more of the Western style in economics, alliances, and treaties.<sup>56</sup>

The eastern part of the country is vastly different with few similarities. The East aligns with Russia and most of the East is ethnically Russian and speaks Russian. The Eastern region has a difficult time rallying around the idea of Ukrainian nationalism since they rarely speak Ukrainian and have a contrasting culture.<sup>57</sup> This does not imply that the East would like to be a part of Russia, but it represents the cultural divide in the nation that cannot be ignored when attempting to understand the vastness of the Russo-Ukrainian Conflict of 2014.

Prior to the collapse of the USSR, there was rarely a time when Ukraine was truly independent since the 1600s. Ukraine gained its independence in 1918 during the period of World War I when the Russian Empire collapsed and the Russian or Bolshevik Revolution began.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> John Cunningham, s.v. "Ukraine-History," Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., accessed December 22, 2020, accessed October 22, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/History>.

<sup>55</sup> Cunningham, "Ukraine-History."

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

However, for nearly four hundred years, Ukraine was controlled and ruled by either the Czars or Soviet Premiers.

In the 1700s, Catherine the Great initiated the idea of "Russifying," Ukraine.<sup>59</sup> Russian influencers migrated to eastern Ukraine and capitalized on this historically Russian region. Hundreds of thousands of people and money poured into the region to maximize its fertile land, copper, coal mines, and its ports along the north and northwestern sections of the Black Sea.<sup>60</sup> These economic advantages only occurred in the eastern portion of the country, leaving the west less industrialized.

During the interwar period, Josef Stalin ordered the displacement of many Ukrainians from their homes and forced to work in these fields, mines, and ports under excruciating work conditions.<sup>61</sup> The Soviets went as far as paying and offering ethnic Russians more money and land to move to eastern Ukraine. During this time, Stalin outlawed the use of the Ukrainian language. Schools were established to indoctrinate Ukrainian children from an early age, utilizing education as a weapon.<sup>62</sup> Stalin even went as far as exporting the regions grain supply, resulting in mass starvation of the population.<sup>63</sup>

This tactic was successful in the east, due to the prosperity it brought to the region. In the west, it generated and fueled much hatred and animosity towards Russia and added to the divide in the nation. The people of the east began to identify more as Russians than Ukrainians, leaving their western brethren to fend for themselves. Over the next twenty years after World War Two, the crumbling Ukrainian economy and infrastructure exacerbated the divide. As the west attempted to become more industrial and agricultural, corruption in Kiev by Russian-backed

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<sup>59</sup> Cunningham, "Ukraine-History."

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

separatists denied the western half of Ukraine its chance at industrializing. These factors limited any chance of a truly unified Ukraine as the western portion of the country requested help from Western European powers and Russia continued to meddle in eastern Ukraine affairs. The combination of far-right Ukrainian militias' alienation of ethnic Russians, the highly controversial shooting down of the Malaysian Airline MH-17, Russia's obsession with the Crimean Peninsula, and the information warfare waged on both sides of the country all contributed to a complex problem.<sup>64</sup>

In February 2014, Ukraine experienced violent anti-government protests in Kiev that ousted President Victor Yanukovich, who was previously the governor of the Donetsk Oblast region of Eastern Ukraine.<sup>65</sup> Under a highly contested election in 2010, the president was elected to his fourth term. Within the four-year time lapse, the president denied aid from the EU, but accepted loan bailouts from Moscow.<sup>66</sup> On February 23, 2014, President Vladimir Putin held a meeting with the Security Service Chiefs with the topic of removing President Yanukovich and annexing the Crimean Peninsula.<sup>67</sup> During the next seventy-two hours, pro-Russian demonstrations began across the peninsula in the key cities of Sevastopol, Simferopol, Bahkchysaray, and Kerch. These demonstrations quickly turned into riots and personnel engaged in military-like tactics to secure key infrastructure, crossroads, and ports.<sup>68</sup> It is likely that Russia installed highly trained personnel into the region to exacerbate the ongoing situation. *Maskirovka* was being orchestrated by the Kremlin to cause civil unrest allowing Moscow plausible deniability.

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<sup>64</sup> Havrylov, "How Putin's Attempts."

<sup>65</sup> "Ukraine Crisis: Timeline," British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), November 13, 2014, accessed December 14, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26248275>

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

By March 1, the Crimean Peninsula installed a new pro-Russian Prime Minister, Sergei Aksenov. One of Aksenov's first acts as Prime Minister was to request support from Moscow to assist in keeping law and order. Immediately following the request, he surrendered the Ukrainian armed forces on the peninsula, thus denying any chance of a Ukrainian military defense.<sup>69</sup>

Moscow continued to deny that the rioters were civilian-dressed Russian military forces and disavowed any future possibilities of annexing Crimea.<sup>70</sup> A formal declaration from the United States, European Union, and Ukrainian parliament condemned any assistance from Russia on the peninsula. While being condemned by the West, Russia began massive military exercises on the eastern border of Ukraine.<sup>71</sup>

On March 16, officials reported that 95.5 percent of Crimean voters supported joining Russia in the referendum, but many residents abstained. With no international observation of the vote allowed, the Crimean parliament officially joined the Russian Federation.<sup>72</sup> In response to the crisis, the G8 voted to oust Russia over the unconstitutional referendum, and it became the G7.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, one hundred countries supported the UN resolution, calling the March 16 referendum illegal. President Vladimir Putin admitted that despite originally denying any involvement in the invasion, the annexation of Crimea was planned all along.<sup>74</sup> In the months that followed, several hard-hitting sanctions have been imposed on Russia by the United States and their international allies have begun to cripple the Russian economy. Despite widespread condemnation, President Putin made no concessions regarding Crimea.

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<sup>69</sup> "Ukraine Crisis: Timeline," BBC.

<sup>70</sup> Kimberly Amadeo, "Ukraine Crisis Summary and Explanation," The Balance, August 21, 2020, accessed December 14, 2020, <https://www.thebalance.com/ukraine-crisis-summary-and-explanation-3970462>.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> "Ukraine crisis: Timeline," BBC.

<sup>74</sup> Havrylov, "How Putin's Attempts."

On the eastern border with Russia, rebellions were fueled by pro-Russian separatists. In other parts of eastern Ukraine, rebels took control of government buildings in several eastern cities.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile Ukrainian defense forces lost control and at least one thousand people died between mid-April and mid-July because of the conflict.<sup>76</sup> Many of them civilians and 298 more people died when Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was apparently mistakenly shot down by rebels.<sup>77</sup> This triggered more EU sanctions on Russia. Russia, for its part, repeatedly denied sending troops and weapons over the border despite Ukraine's claims. However, NATO photos and video footage proved Ukrainian claims.<sup>78</sup>

Simultaneously during the two-front conflict, President Vladimir Putin ordered joint military exercises along the border of Ukraine. The military exercises consisted of over 150,000 troops from the Russian Southern Military District and the majority of the Black Sea Fleet. President Putin claims that the military exercises were planned, however they have been used as previously as a deterrent against Western expansionism.<sup>79</sup>

In February 2015, both sides settled on a peace agreement called Minsk Two. The deal detailed conditions for a ceasefire and security zone where heavy artillery, tanks, and mortars were banned. Foreign militaries, meaning Russia, had to leave Ukraine. It also recognized the two separatist areas, the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic, and outlined how they could be fully reunified back into Ukraine. But despite the agreement, none of that has happened.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> "Ukraine crisis: Timeline," BBC.

<sup>76</sup> Yuhas and Raya, "Ukraine's Revolution."

<sup>77</sup> Havrylov, "How Putin's Attempts."

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> "Ukraine Crisis: Timeline," BBC.

President Putin was able to destabilize Ukraine and stop it from developing a stronger relationship with Western Europe. Russia continues to fuel the fighting by supporting the separatists and keeps its own military at the ready. Meanwhile Ukraine's government is forced to devote resources to its defense. Both sides have ignored the ceasefire so far and a closer look at the front lines reveals just how unstable the region is.<sup>81</sup>

Separatist rebels in the LPR and DPR have funding, weapons, and the assurance that the Southern Military District of Russia is behind them.<sup>82</sup> They are responsible for most of the ceasefire violations on the Ukrainian side. The forces are a mix of Ukrainian soldiers and volunteer militias from around the globe.<sup>83</sup> Ukrainian oligarchs and members of parliament with far-right views funded these militias and have ridiculed government officials in Kiev for not taking more decisive action. Despite a ceasefire, which could have ended the conflict, there is an active war on the ground where heavy artillery indiscriminately targets civilian and the remainder of the Ukrainian military forces in the region.<sup>84</sup>

The Russian military's tactic of sterilizing their uniforms prior to the engagement is profound. In the United States' doctrine and allied training programs, it is difficult to see the West ever deploying similar tactics against an adversary. The Ukrainian case study showed Russia not only will mask small units but mastered the capability for larger units as well.<sup>85</sup> This tactic makes it extremely difficult to decipher friend from foe or who is whom in an extremely complex and complicated battlefield.

The 2014 Russo-Ukrainian War was arguably very profitable for Russia. The result of that engagement granted Russia the economically rich Crimean Peninsula. With that piece of

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<sup>81</sup> Havrylov, "How Putin's Attempts."

<sup>82</sup> Yuhas and Raya, "Ukraine's Revolution."

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Holland, "Maskirovka and Predicting Kremlin Actions."

terrain alone, Russia now controls access to the Sea of Azov with the land bridge at Kerch, the ports of Yalta and Sevastopol, along with a large portion of the Ukrainian military equipment that was abandoned in the ports and on the Peninsula. Over the course of time, those pieces of military equipment are of little value to the Russian Federation. However, Ukraine was rendered more vulnerable to attack without this equipment.

In the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, military factions are still engaging one another well after the official ceasefire that ended the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis. This civil unrest goes in favor of the Russians because it provides additional opportunities for Russian military intervention in the region and proves the Ukrainian government cannot protect its citizens.

The Russians maximized *maskirovka* in multiple instances during the campaign. Historically, the Russians capitalized on the eastern region of Ukraine's demographics of pro-Russian sentiment. The military and diplomatic efforts appeared to be in sync and in unison during the multi front conflict. What the military was doing and what the Kremlin was saying never truly matched up. That was the emphasis of the *maskirovka* efforts in Ukraine. The government made false statements publicly while coordinating behind closed doors with the military, the use of unmarked soldiers who seized key terrain, and the massive military training exercise being conducted along the border created to many problems for Ukraine to try and solve. The deception created confusion amongst international actors as well, resulting in mixed reporting that clouded what was really occurring in the region.

## Chapter 4: Anticipating Future Russian Expansion

The previous two chapters covered the Russo-Georgian and the Russo-Ukrainian Wars. The two conflicts offered a historical perspective on how Russia has implemented *maskirovka* in the twenty-first century. This chapter offers a scenario where Russia, having utilized *maskirovka*, might conduct military operations in the Odessa region of Ukraine. Understanding how the

Russians implemented *maskirovka* and the *2008 New Look Reform* can assist in planning for future Russian attempts to annex, invade, or cause civil unrest.

Utilizing history, theory, and doctrine as indicators, one can suppose for purposes of analysis that the next Russian incursion will again occur in Ukraine. Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and continued unrest in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, the Russians will likely perpetuate the same circumstances as in 2008 with the annexation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions and in 2014.<sup>86</sup>

This future military action, like the 2008 and 2014 wars, would be a joint operation to repeat previous successes in civil unrest, perverting democratic elections, and promoting a pro-Russian candidate. The event would involve a highly contested election, resulting in a breakaway state, such as a Republic Donetsk and Luhansk, eventually bringing those regions into the Russian Federation itself.

In this specific scenario of future expansionism, the likelihood of Russian hostilities describes how the Federation could consume more of Ukraine. The Black Sea fleet could conduct military exercises in conjunction with the Southern Military District armies for a multitude of years. As seen in the past, massive Russian formations conducting military training exercises could eventually generate a sense of normalcy within NATO and Western Europe countries, facilitating intervention.<sup>87</sup>

As NATO and Ukraine become desensitized to the Russian military exercises, Russia would formally begin its incursion into the southern regions of Ukraine. Under the guise of joint military action, the Black Sea fleet would sail from Sevastopol and begin a blockade against the ports of Odessa, Bilhorod, and the mouth of the Dnieper River. These are the last remaining ports Ukrainians can operate from to stop or harass the Russian Black Sea fleet. Utilizing this blockade,

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<sup>86</sup> "Ukraine Crisis: Timeline," BBC.

<sup>87</sup> Trude Pettersen, "Russia Plans Air Force Drills in Karelia," *Barents Observer*, March 16, 2016, accessed December 14, 2020, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/ru/node/587>.

Russian forces would conduct information warfare, military deception operations, *maskirovka*, and cyber-attacks all along the southern coast. These actions would cut off the coast's ability to communicate with much of the rest of Ukraine.

Simultaneously, Russian Special Purpose and Spetsnaz forces, unmarked by any Russian insignia, would gather with pro-Russian separatists in the region and begin civil unrest. These actions could include the control of key infrastructure, such as port access, port security, local police and fire emergency services, hospitals, schools, and all government buildings. These tactics of *maskirovka* mirror how operations took place in 2014.<sup>88</sup> This futuristic scenario could take place in less than a week based upon the speed at which Russians moved in 2008 and in 2014.

Russian media outlets could flood Western media using information warfare and counter narrative with propaganda that Russia is merely providing humanitarian aid. The Black Sea Fleet's naval vessels could be carrying aid that doubles as military sustainment; however, the Russian President will continue to issue statements that Russia is currently not involved with any ground-based forces. During these Russian deception tactics, the Ukrainian military will attempt to mobilize and begin its counteroffensive into the southern Odessa, Mykolaiv, and Kherson regions to end civil unrest.

As the Ukrainian military attempts a counter-offensive, continued Russian information warfare could be broadcasted from the Russian Federation claiming mass atrocities against civilian populations. The false information narrative campaign could cause mass confusion to not only those ground commanders, but international partners as well. This *maskirovka* technique was practiced during the Ukrainian war, which resulted in confusion and misunderstanding of what was happening in time and space. The results of the confusion could be that nobody understands who exactly is conducting these atrocities against the civilian population. The atrocities could be

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<sup>88</sup> Amadeo, "Ukraine Crisis Summary."

to lack of food, lack of sanitation, lack of health care, and even death. This crisis will appear that Russia is donating the aid out of good faith but have more sinister intentions in disguise.

With the previous conditions met, the Russian Federation could begin its mirrored process of annexation at a rapid pace as it did in Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk.<sup>89</sup> In a matter of days, the people in southern Odessa and the other regions will understand that Ukraine cannot defend them, resulting in elected officials resigning and being replaced by pro-Russian proxies in a highly contested election.

Immediately following the election, Russian-backed officials would be willing to break away from Ukraine and promote the idea of creating the Republics of Southern Odessa, Mykolaiv, and Kherson. With these three regions, Russia could dominate the northern part of the Black Sea and Ukraine will no longer have access to the sea.

Understanding that the conflict is escalating beyond a fast and timely conclusion, Russia could influence civil unrest in the region of Zaporizhia. This region is located on the coast of the Sea of Azov. If pro-Russian backed separatists can successfully conduct operations, Ukraine would be without access to any body of water.

As in 2014, video footage, real time interviews of Ukrainian citizens, and military personnel will quickly prove that Russia is lying about its involvement in the hostilities.<sup>90</sup> Ignoring the evidence, Russia could continue to flood Western media outlets with highly conflicting information that goes against what is actually happening on the ground. It would be expected that Russian military equipment will be offloaded by the Black Sea fleet and illegally smuggled through black market avenues into the region to be used against Ukrainian law enforcement, first responders, and the military.

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<sup>89</sup> Amadeo, "Ukraine Crisis Summary."

<sup>90</sup> Holland, "Maskirovka and Predicting Kremlin Actions."

As civil unrest continues in Ukraine, the Black Sea fleet and the Southern Military District could conduct a joint exercise with 150,000 ground forces along the eastern border of Russia. Unfortunately, as this hypothetical situation takes place, there would be little that Ukraine could do to stop this Russian-backed military incursion and the annexation of multiple districts and municipalities. In these regions, the Ukrainian armed forces are not equipped with proper anti-tank armor, indirect fire weapons systems, intelligence, or air cover to match the Russian backed forces.<sup>91</sup>

If Ukraine could maneuver what remained of its military forces to the south to stop the civil unrest in the region, it is plausible that the separatists would use the smuggled equipment from the Russian Black Sea fleet to destroy the remainder of Ukrainian armor. This could render the country far less capable of defending itself. If the separatist movement were to go any further north, then Kiev and other major cities on the western side of the Dnieper River would be in jeopardy.

These military actions could take place in a matter of weeks or months, just as the Russian Federation has previously done. The Russian military has vast overmatch as well as its previously established historical connections towards the region. NATO, the United States, and the European Union would be challenged unlike ever before.

These potential actions by the Russian Federation match what the Soviet Union and the Russian Empire have previously tried to do -- that is to cause multiple dilemmas, complex problems, and discredit Western Europe.<sup>92</sup> The study of 2008 and 2014 incursions into Georgia

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<sup>91</sup> Igor Sutyagin and Michael Clarke, *Ukraine Military Dispositions: The Military Ticks Up While the Clock Ticks Down* (Kingston, Ontario, Canada: Royal United Studies Institute, April 2014), 10, accessed December 15, 2020, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download;jsessionid=824E34890BBB277D2BDA482D7088F287?doi=10.1.1.692.2158&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

<sup>92</sup> Lucy Ash, "How Russia Outfoxes Its Enemies," British Broadcasting Corporation, January 29, 2015, accessed December 15, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-31020283>.

and Ukraine shows that Russia can capture, annex, and cause damage and then cease operations just prior to any major international intervention.

The other aspect of this scenario is the geography. Utilizing *maskirovka*, the Russian Federation will be in full control of the North Black Sea, threatening pro-West Romania and Moldova. Studying the Russian Federation's geography in 2021 and looking at the countries that it borders, another attack on Ukraine is the most likely. To the north of Ukraine is the Russian ally of Belarus. Further north are NATO and EU members Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Continuing north is the EU member Finland. This pro-Western wall does not give Russia the military advantage nor political motivation to directly attack a NATO and or EU member nation.

The Russian Far East and the Central Military District border along North Korea, China, Mongolia, and Kazakhstan are currently either loosely allied or do not pose a viable threat to the Russian Federation at this time. The regions along the western border and the Southern Military District or the Caucasus region do not generate viable options for Russia as they seek expansion opportunities that are limited, attainable, and risk less international involvement.

As Russia conducts this attack, what could be the response from NATO and Western powers? The United States and NATO, though not specifically attacked, would feel pressured to respond to do something other than sanction specific oligarchs, businessmen, and businesses of the Russian Federation. At the end of this action, the Russians would have secured roughly seventy-five percent of everything east of the Dnieper River as well as the entire coast of Southern Ukraine, allowing the Federation multiple seaports that threaten the western coast of the Black Sea.

When dealing with a nation that is willing and able to conduct limited military incursions, the West must realize where and how Russia could make its next move. It is highly debated that actions by NATO and its allies after 2008 and 2014—or lack thereof—have emboldened

Russia.<sup>93</sup> The United States and its allies have since taken multiple steps to reprimand Russia by way of sanctions on critical businesses and individuals, providing military equipment to Ukraine, and freezing economic assets of key Russian oligarchs.<sup>94</sup> Diplomats, scholars, and economists have debated whether this is sufficient to contain or deter Russia, was it too little, or is it justified despite the possibility of escalating the crisis further. Whichever direction the debate leans, Russia has not conducted similar attacks since 2014, which implies that the sanctions are working as a deterrent.

According to Juha Rainne's article regarding the topic, many economists believe these sanctions on businesses and key personnel within Putin's inner circle are highly effective and should continue.<sup>95</sup> The continuation of joint economic sanctions on Russia is vital in keeping the Russian economy below average. This strikes at the heart of Russia's number one export, which is oil, and keeping natural resource revenue flow in check.<sup>96</sup> The article emphasizes that one of the most beneficial sanctions has been a psychological one. The sanctions deter foreign and domestic direct investment for fear of losing the investment if NATO and EU implement additional sanctions.<sup>97</sup>

Since 2014, NATO has conducted growing numbers of military exercises with regional partners such as Romania, Moldova, and Ukraine in hopes a show of force will deter Russia from its next engagement. Militarily, the West and its allies can continue to provide equipment to Ukraine to defend themselves to ensure Western allies that all are looking at Russia through the

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<sup>93</sup> Juha Rainne, "Russia Sanctions Bite and Remind Us of the Value of Transatlantic Unity," *New Atlanticist* (blog), *Atlantic Council*, October 29, 2020, accessed December 15, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russia-sanctions-bite-and-remind-us-of-the-value-of-transatlantic-unity/>.

<sup>94</sup> Rainne, "Russia Sanctions Bite."

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

same lens. The continuation of joint military exercises on land, in the air, and on at sea are vital to contain the Russian threat.<sup>98</sup>

Along with economic sanctions, NATO and EU could enact three new approaches. The first is an international multi-domain defense plan; the second is more robust intelligence sharing with regional partners; the third approach is an emphasis on cyber operations. These approaches could assist in preventing future Russian *maskirovka* operations in Ukraine.

The first approach is a multi-domain defense plan regarding Ukraine. No one can predict how an incident or what appears to be a localized conflict might drive a far greater crisis. The Ukraine defense plan should include the possibility of responding to hybrid actions that might escalate into a significant conflict. Russia has shown the capacity through the *2008 New Look Reform*, *maskirovka*, Georgia, and Ukraine to operate against NATO and the EU. A multi-domain defense plan would demonstrate a readiness to meet any such future contingencies will maximize the effectiveness of NATO and EU ability to deter Russia.<sup>99</sup>

NATO headquarters in Belgium should create the defense plan. This location provides a multinational input behind the thought process and implementation of the plan. The plan should have hard deterrent efforts made against Russian future expansionism. This specific multi-domain approach should have both a classified and unclassified version and highly broadcasted to the enemies of NATO and EU. The deterrence plan should additionally include Ukrainian sovereignty and allied partners in the region who are not currently included in NATO and EU.

A critical requirement for defending Ukraine is effective intelligence. NATO should create a specific Ukrainian intelligence center that has sharing capabilities with Ukrainian

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<sup>98</sup> "NATO Exercise Dynamic Mariner Brings Together 7 NATO Nations," Allied Maritime Command, September 25, 2020, accessed December 15, 2020, <https://mc.nato.int/media-centre/news/2020/nato-exercise-dynamic-mariner-brings-together-7-nato-nations>.

<sup>99</sup> Franklin D. Kramer and Hans Binnendijk, *Meeting the Russian Conventional Challenge: Effective Deterrence by Prompt Reinforcement* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2018), 16.

political and military officials. This intelligence fusion center could focus on all aspects of the Russian Southern Military District and provide an early warning system to the Ukrainians if the Russians begin hybrid operations masked by *maskirovka*. This center could go beyond focusing on the Russian military, and could support NATO on understanding Russian economics, civilian, and informational happenings in the region.<sup>100</sup>

According to Kramer and Binnendijk, the creation of the assistant secretary general for intelligence and security was the founding step in creating a better apparatus for intelligence sharing.<sup>101</sup> NATO and EU should take additional steps to create this new office to enable the establishment of country teams where experts in the assigned country or region can communicate directly with similar teams. It is likely that these teams exist, however, when dealing with intelligence, national caveats can be complicated. The intelligence community must ensure that the intelligence that is gathered can be directly sent to the Ukrainian recipient as early warning and action. This ability to directly share information with Ukrainians will counter the Russian information warfare dominance. NATO and EU can get information directly from the contested area instead of waiting on reports that cannot be verified.

The third approach is an emphasis on integrating US national level cyber capabilities into NATO's deterrence plans. The current focus of cyber is inherently defense and this will not change. The countries with highly capable cyber operations should work with those nations with diminished capabilities.<sup>102</sup> The future is likely cyber dominant and this evolving means is vital for a nation to protect its citizens and infrastructure.

Ukraine should request a full cyber defense assessment from NATO and EU to determine how vulnerable Ukraine is to adversarial cyber-attacks. The assessment should be completed, and

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<sup>100</sup> Kramer and Binnendijk, *Meeting the Russian*, 11.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

the results shared with Ukrainian officials. Upon completion of the assessment, highly capable cyber countries should communicate and determine a defense plan for Ukraine. Ukrainian cyber personnel should attend NATO cyber schools and educational ways to better understand this emerging threat.<sup>103</sup>

NATO forces, if called upon to defeat Russian forces, must continuously be reevaluated. Western planners must study and understand evolving Russian capabilities to combat the latest threats that Russia poses. Combining these three approaches will not guarantee deterrence, but it will help with improving NATO and EU defenses in countering future Russian *maskirovka* techniques that could be used.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This monograph set out to answer the question, "Since the fall of the USSR, how has Russia used deception as incorporated in their theory of *maskirovka*, and how can the United States counter this use of deception?" The analysis utilized an understanding of the theory and doctrine of *maskirovka*, the Russo-Georgian War, the Russo-Ukrainian War, and a possible future scenario with plausible NATO responses to answer the research question.

This monograph's study of the Russian approach to *maskirovka*, the two conflicts, and the scenario has only scratched the surface of the topic. Additional research can expand upon research into *maskirovka* during the Soviet era or even the use of *maskirovka* during the Romanov Dynasty. Diving deeply into each part of *maskirovka* historically could broaden NATO's approach to counter Russia's military deception theory.

Understanding Russian *maskirovka* and its historical use is important for several reasons; one is geographic. The Russian Federation has a distinct advantage over the United States and NATO because of its capability to conduct military exercises at the highest echelons and carry

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<sup>103</sup> Kramer and Binnendijk, *Meeting the Russian*, 15.

out joint live fire exercises. Due to land constraints and environmental concerns, NATO and its allies lack the capability to train on such a scale. For example, the Russian Federation in 2018 successfully carried out a massive military training exercise with multiple countries during which they tested advanced weaponry as well as conduct maneuvers with over 150,000 personnel.<sup>104</sup> Planners can use this information to understand Russian *maskirovka* and its importance to Russian offensive operations.

With these case studies, the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and the 2014 Russo-Ukrainian War gives the West an idea of how Russia sees and will conduct future warfare in the twenty-first century. In 2008, Russia introduced a different style of hybrid warfare masked by military deception operations from the highest form of the Russian government. In 2014, a similar synchronization between the Kremlin and ground units took place. Two incursions in a span of six years gave Western planners a lot to understand and incorporate in current NATO strategies.

The monograph provides an approach to assist NATO and EU to deter and identify Russian *maskirovka* in three areas. The first is a multi-domain defense plan that shows an in-depth, all-encompassing plan on how to deter Russia from future expansionism. The second approach is a more robust intelligence sharing process. The lack of the Ukrainian early warning capability can be mitigated by Western intelligence sharing. The third and final approach is Ukrainian assistance with cyber. Cyber is becoming more common in Russian information warfare and can be countered if properly monitored and tracked.

Constant reflection and evaluation from NATO and EU along with studying emerging tactics from Russia can be beneficial to the future of Western Europe. Upon completion of this reflection and evaluation, the alliances must evolve to remain dominant in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>104</sup> Dave Johnson, "VOSTOK 2018: Ten years of Russian strategic exercises and warfare preparation," NATO Review, December 20, 2018, accessed December 15, 2020, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2018/12/20vostok-2018-ten-years-of-russian-strategic-exercises-and-warfare-preparation/index.html>.

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