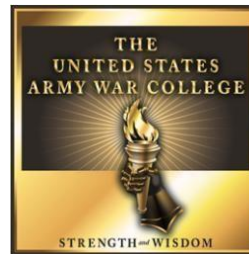


By Way of Deception: The Russian War on Ukraine 2013-2015

by

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Abstract

The Russian political elites view themselves as being in an existential struggle with the West. Russia is undertaking a policy of overturning the European security framework with the intent to break up the political cohesion of the transatlantic community in order to preserve itself. This is of strategic concern to the United States because Russia is the only nation-state that can pose an existential threat to the U.S. via its strategic nuclear weapons forces, and Russian efforts to pose an existential threat to the U.S. security order could escalate. This research project will examine the Russian coercive operations against Ukraine from November 2013 to April 2015 as a case study to analyze the change in Russian foreign policy from being a status quo power to an aggressive revisionist power. To frame the actual war, a short exposition on the Russian vision of warfare, called "hybrid warfare" in the West, or Next-Generation in Russia, will be examined.

By Way of Deception: The Russian War on Ukraine 2013-2015

The Russian political elites view themselves as being in an existential struggle with the West. U.S. Ambassador Stephen R. Covington, International Affairs Advisor to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) makes a compelling case that Russia is undertaking a policy of overturning the European security framework with the intent to break up the political cohesion of the transatlantic community¹ to preserve itself. This is of strategic concern to the United States because Russia is the only nation-state that can pose an existential threat to the U.S. via its strategic nuclear weapons forces, and Russian efforts to pose an existential threat to the U.S. security order could escalate. This research project will examine the Russian operations against Ukraine from November 2013 to April 2015 as a case study to analyze how Russia took advantage of an opportunity to attempt to coerce Ukraine to submit to its will and failed, and how this possibly could lead to its strategic defeat. A short history of the events leading up to the war will provide context and a short exposition on the Russian vision of warfare, called "hybrid warfare" in the West, or Next-Generation Warfare in Russia, will provide doctrinal structure to the conflict. A short explanation of *maskirovka*, or deception operations, will further explain the Russian hybrid-warfare framework to bring further clarity to all the Russian operations. Lastly, a short examination of the war will highlight important insights for the United States and its allies at the strategic level.

Currently, Russia is not competitive with the West in any strategically constructive sector, which places it at a position of long-term weakness.² The Russian elites fear strategic encirclement of Russia by the West and its allies; the overthrow of the Putin regime via a democratic, or "color" revolution; and the destruction of their

values by the subversion of their people by the attractiveness of Western culture.³ In order to regain its strategic position, Russia views international organizations led by itself, such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) or the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), as the means to arrest its diplomatic and economic decline. Military power is seen as the most available instrument of national power to deter foreign powers to stay out of its sphere of influence while coercing and dissuading former Soviet states from joining competing international organizations, such as the European Union (EU) or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The Russian political elite's fear that Western values of human rights, combined with economic and political freedom, is irresistible to the Russian people. These ideas could be facilitated by Western-oriented international organizations. The Russian elites need to maintain their authoritarian control of the Russian political and economic sectors without a color revolution deposing them and bringing them to the same end that Romanian leader Nicolai Ceausescu faced at the end of the Cold War, which ended in his execution.

Russian political and military leaders describe their current security environment as one of strategic encirclement. Putin's approach attempts to 'breakout' of the European security system, divide Europe, and establish new rules in order to preserve Russia's strategic freedom. This is a fundamental change in policy from the Yeltsin years. Russia's leadership wants a Europe without strategic alliances, without multinational organizations, and without a functional U.S.-Europe transatlantic link that offsets the national strengths Russia would hold over any one nation.⁴

Russia wants to change the rules of the European security system to sustain Russia's capability to compete with Europe and other regional powers. Putin's choices

reflect a view that Russia can only address its non-competitiveness by changing the world around Russia, especially the European security system. The rearmament of Russia and the change to Russia's defense concepts, combined with the adoption of continuous destabilization strategies against neighboring states,⁵ highlights the return to old policy formulas for internal and external security.⁶ The existence of the transatlantic security system supported by democratic and capitalistic values is the threat to the Russians.

In February 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin gave a speech at the 43rd Munich Security Conference, where he clearly rejected the U.S.-led world order, stated that the expansion of NATO is provocative, and that Western non-governmental organizations (NGO) are interfering in the internal affairs of other countries. Putin made clear that promotion of democracy and other cultural values is destabilizing to the political economy and culture of Russia. Putin asserted that Russia would carry out an independent foreign policy not constrained by the Western-led world order.⁷ Talcott Parsons and Edward Shills posit that thoughts lead to action,⁸ and shortly after this speech, Russia invaded Georgia in 2008 to assert its dominance by re-establishing a de facto buffer state. Putin's thoughts are contained in the 2014 Russian Military Doctrine (RMD)⁹ and 2015 Russian Security Strategy (RSS),¹⁰ which provides the strategic direction the Russian state will use to defend and advance its interests.

The 2014 Russian Military Doctrine¹¹ provides insights into Russian intentions and worldview from the military perspective. In the RMD, the main external military dangers to Russian interests is the power projection potential of NATO, the destabilization of countries and undermining regional and global stability, the buildup of

foreign forces in states bordering Russia, and the creation of strategic missile-defense systems. Internally, threats include activities aimed to destabilize and potentially violently change Russia's political system and the subversion of the Russian citizenry by eroding Russian culture. Russia considers it lawful to utilize force to repel aggression against it (or) its allies while ensuring the protection of its citizens living outside the Russian federation.¹² The main task of the Russian armed forces is to defeat perceived aggressors, forcing them to terminate conflicts in accordance with the interests of the Russian Federation.¹³ The implication is if Russia self-identifies a threat against it or its interests, it may use force without engaging the United Nations Security Council because Moscow has now broadly defined what legitimate self-defense could be. Expanding this line of thought, to include possible preventative war to break Russia's strategic encirclement by the United States and its allies through international organizations such as the EU and NATO, is profoundly concerning.

Russia has relatively few resources to protect these interests. However, the few they do have possess significant capacity. The Russians have strategic nuclear forces to place peer competitors at existential risk, a conventional military force that overmatches all the former Soviet states and powerful state security and intelligence apparatuses with excellent penetration of former Soviet clients. Additionally, Moscow utilizes a natural resource-driven economy that provides large opportunities for graft and bribery both in Russia and in the states receiving Russian energy supplies, and state control of the Russian mass media that provides a powerful platform to support Russian propaganda efforts. Russia is implementing its strategy while utilizing the principle of economy of force via "hybrid warfare"¹⁴ or "new-generation warfare."¹⁵

The Russian Strategic Environment, and New-Generation or "Hybrid" Warfare

Gen Valery Gerasimov, Chief of Staff of the Russian Federation, described the changing character of Russian war making in 2013, "Wars are no longer declared, and having begun, proceed according to an unfamiliar template."¹⁶ The Russian leadership views war not as an event that has a "defined period of time" but "now to one of a state of permanent war as the natural condition in national life."¹⁷ This new template is a whole-of nation process,¹⁸ with the object of war continuing to be the end of attaining a better peace¹⁹ for Russia to solve its strategic²⁰ and grand strategic problems.²¹ Russian doctrine indicates that the main battlespace is in the mind of both leaders and populations. As such, powerful information technologies are conducting distributed attacks to strike damaging blows at the country's social system with the purported aims of promoting democracy and respect for human rights.²² The Russian perspective is that these goals are a ruse, and that the domination of Russia and its culture is the end state. From this perspective, the defense of Russian culture requires the defeat of Western civilianization, its values, culture, political system, and ideology. The state of permanent cultural war is now the natural condition in national life.²³

This doctrine indicates that non-military methods are the ones that Russia intends to employ, in a 4:1 ratio over military methods. The main non-military methods have been the employment of "lawfare" and a vast information and cyber warfare campaign.²⁴ Existential threats are also part of this "battle for the mind." The Russian model of de-escalation - a strategy envisioning the threat of a limited nuclear strike that would force an opponent to return to the status quo ante to prevent defeat,²⁵ remains in place. Russia is on record that they reserve the right to use nuclear weapons first in order to conclude a conflict on terms favorable to Russia. The NATO policy on nuclear

weapons is that they are for deterrence and if necessary, defense.²⁶ However, the Russian innovation is that nuclear escalation could occur after Russia conducts offensive operations in what it considers its interest space.

Given the superiority of Western conventional forces, Russia has spent considerable effort to develop doctrine to use strategies to persuade or coerce an enemy to bend to their will while achieving objectives while avoiding conventional warfare as much as possible. These concepts have deep historical roots. The great Indian theoretician Kautilya posited that diplomacy, or foreign policy writ large, is actually "subtle war," in which a state is either gaining or losing its position of advantage.²⁷ When at peace, Kautilya advocated for states to pursue subversion of neighboring states to weaken them for future domination or control, and abiding by treaties only as long as it is to a state's advantage so that they may achieve their political ends. Frank Hoffman argues that modern "political warfare" captures the concept of using all the elements of national power to subvert or coerce an opponent.²⁸ The Chinese also have a rich history of pursuing warfare using conventional and irregular forces to dominate the states on its periphery.²⁹ Theoreticians such as Sun Tzu in ancient times, and recently, People's Liberation Army Colonels Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui proposed ways for countries that are military inferior to avoid facing a stronger power's conventional forces. COL Qiao Liang stated that "the first rule in unrestricted warfare is that there are no rules, with nothing forbidden...the strong countries make the rules while rising ones break them and exploit loopholes,"³⁰ thereby gaining advantage.

In the same vein, in 2013, COL S.G. Chekinov and LTG S.A. Bodanov wrote "The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War," in which they outlined their expected vision of future warfare. The "Active Measures" phase of New-Generation Warfare (hybrid warfare) first uses non-military asymmetric warfare to establish favorable political, economic, and military conditions in a target country. Second, active deception targets decision-making audiences into not responding to the threat and enhances the possibility of surprise by full-spectrum special operations. Next, government leaders are intimidated or bribed to make them fail to do their duties while controlled media broadcasts disseminates destabilizing propaganda to subvert the will of targeted population.³¹

Once Russian active measures have weakened the will of targeted population, the overt coercion phase of New-Generation Warfare begins. The target country will have no-fly zones and blockades imposed to isolate it from support. Russia will use private military companies, in close cooperation with armed irregulars, to support the coercion effort and to maintain plausible deniability of Russian control of the effort. When appropriate, overt offensive operations across all warfighting domains will begin in conjunction with large-scale reconnaissance and subversive missions. Breaking the will of the opponent and destroying their decision-making capacity is the end state of these operations. Finally, the full capabilities of Russian forces are unleashed, using a combination of reconnaissance-strike fire complexes with fast moving airborne and airmobile forces to destroy remaining opposition.³² The nature of New Generation Warfare is the same as other types of war, to achieve a better peace and protect the interests of Russia.

By Way of Deception - Maskirovka

One of the key elements of Russian New-Generation Warfare is the role that deception plays in Russian strategy. The "Active Measures" phase of New-Generation warfare has deception woven into all elements of the operations. *Maskirovka*, the Russian term for deception, is the process of concealment and deception to achieve surprise.³³ As such, a brief examination of deliberate deception operations is necessary. In *The Textbook of Political-Military Counterdeception*,³⁴ a *lie* is any statement made with the *intent* to deceive. *Deception* is any attempt - by words or actions - intended to distort another person's or groups perception of reality. The ideal deception makes the victim certain but wrong. *Self-deception* is any unintended self-induced misperception, and a subset of self-deception is *delusion*, which is misperception where we *refuse* to see the reality. *Surprise* is the sudden and startling perception that is something has happened contrary to expectation.

Bell & Whaley developed the "Matrix of Deception" to bring clarity to deception operations. Deception is the distortion of perceived reality based on two basic parts: *dissimulation* being the hiding of the real by *masking, repackaging, or dazzling*, and *simulation* is showing the false by *mimicking, inventing, or decoying*.³⁵ Both are always present in a deception operation and are complementary to each other. In Russian "hybrid warfare," deception is both willful and systematic³⁶ with the intent to attack an opponent's knowledge in order to delay or disrupt their decision-making capabilities.³⁷ Russian operations will always have a strong *maskirovka*, or deception, element to allow Russia to stay inside the target countries decision-making cycles.

Ukraine: A Case Study in Coercion

The conflict in Ukraine, which broke out in open warfare in 2014, occurs within the larger construct of the existing Russian fears of strategic encirclement, overthrow, and cultural subversion. Russia and Ukraine have a long and troubled past together, stretching back to the 9th century. After formally unifying in 1654, Ukraine remained part of Russia, and later the Soviet Union, until becoming independent on August 24, 1991. While Ukraine has been an independent, democratic state for the past twenty years, the Russian leadership has not been comfortable with that independence. From Russia's perspective, Ukraine was now the buffer state between the NATO and EU-led Europe and the Russian Federation. Starting in 2000, Russia began to assert itself against the newly independent Ukraine by reclaiming former territories containing ethnic Russian populations. Russia argued for the return of Russian-populated Crimea,³⁸ specifically because Sevastopol is the home of the most important Russian military command in the Black Sea. The Russian Black Sea Fleet has been stationed in the warm water port in Crimea since 1783. The signing of the Kharkiv Pact on April 21, 2010 extended the Russian lease on naval facilities in Crimea to 2042, but did little to relieve Russian strategic concerns.³⁹

Under Putin, Russia also began to utilize the Federal Security Service (FSB) to conduct intelligence and subversion operations against the sovereign states of the former Soviet Union to bring them back under Russian leadership, such as likely supporting the founding of the "Donetsk Republic" group in 2005 as a mechanism to subvert the Ukrainian government.⁴⁰ The "Donetsk Republic" became active again on social media after the Ukrainian Maidan uprising in November 2013,⁴¹ and provided a cadre of Ukrainian faces to provide a patina of legitimacy to Russian operations in the

Donbas in 2014. Of concern to NATO, similar social media sites were set up in January 2015, agitating for the establishment of a "Latgale People's Republic" in eastern Latvia⁴² and a "Vilnius People's Republic" in Lithuania,⁴³ potentially signaling future subversion activities.

The proximate cause of the open conflict in 2014 was Ukrainian acceptance of the Association Agreement with the European Union in 2013. The Association Agreement would have removed Ukraine from Russia's economic and political orbit and tie it much more closely to Europe. This association agreement directly threatened Russia's efforts to build its own exclusive EEU with Ukraine as a major member. Russian president Putin began overt and covert coercion efforts to convince Ukrainian president Viktor Yanokovich to reject the deal and join Russia's EEU instead. Known as a Putin ally, Yanokovich dutifully did so, giving rise to the Ukrainian EuroMaidan protests in November 2013. Demonstrations in Kyiv became progressively more massive and compelling until Yanokovich abandoned his post on February 21, 2014. The abdication by Yanokovich embarrassed and enraged Putin as he was preparing to close his triumphant hosting of the 2014 Sochi Olympics.⁴⁴ Putin met with the leaders of the Russian intelligence services and the defense ministry, and after conducting an all-night meeting on February 22-23, 2014,⁴⁵ ordered the deployment of Russian forces to take Crimea, "stand behind Crimea's self-defense forces,"⁴⁶ and to get Yanokovich out of Ukraine.⁴⁷ During the winter of 2013 and into early 2014, political planning in Moscow began to chart the political course for seizing Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. Moscow conceptualized first the political federalization of Ukraine, followed by independence of the most pro-Russian oblasts, and then absorbing the newly

independent entities. This would both halt Ukraine's drift toward Europe and give Moscow control over the strategically important industrial region of Eastern Ukraine.⁴⁸ The timing of Yanukovich's abdication likely moved the Russian plans out of the political sphere and into the realm of seizing the territories by force.

Strategic Surprise: The Seizure of Crimea

The Russians achieved surprise with unconventional and conventional operations by attacking immediately after the Olympic Games ended in Sochi, Russia. Russia exploited the new Ukrainian government's weakness and tenuous political control over the Crimean peninsula.⁴⁹ Russia used strategic communications to further the lifespan of their strategic surprise and create more time for operational maneuver before other countries like the US and EU could respond. The Russian leadership provided cover for the operation by claiming that it was a spontaneous uprising by the Crimean Russian population fearing for its safety as Kyiv was embroiled in political turmoil. In essence, Russia executed an anti-access strategy by politically excluding the U.S. or European powers from interfering in the seizure of Crimea. Russia had de facto nationalized all major elements of their national media in October 2013, empowering the Russian regime to direct its propaganda efforts to sow confusion in Europe as to the true nature of events in Crimea until Russia had established new facts on the ground.

Militarily, Russia used a combination of forces already stationed in Crimea to protect the Black Sea Fleet, combined with suborned Ukrainian security personnel,⁵⁰ Russian Cossacks,⁵¹ local Crimean Cossacks,⁵² and a variety of mobilized "patriotic" groups to begin operations. Russia augmented the takeover with the Russian 31st Airborne Brigade and 22nd Spetznaz Brigades redeploying from the Sochi Olympics on

February 25th⁵³, later reinforced by the 18th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade's "Vostok" battalion and rapid reaction elements of three airborne divisions. During the operation, all these forces seized critical infrastructure in brand new, insignia-less Russian uniforms—dubbed by Ukrainians as the “little green men,” thereby maintaining “deniability.”⁵⁴ Russia caught the Ukrainian defense forces by surprise so they could not mount an effective defense.⁵⁵ Some Ukrainian leaders, most notably the newly appointed head of the Ukrainian Navy,⁵⁶ and half the locally raised Ukrainian military units in Crimea,⁵⁷ defected to the Russians when it became clear that Russia was investing Crimea. Russia completely penetrated the Security Service of Ukraine,⁵⁸ (SBU) with the head of the service defecting to Russia at the beginning of the Crimea operation. Worse, Ukrainian traitors stole the files on over 22,000 Ukrainian intelligence and counterintelligence sources and likely turned them over to the Russians. Russia owned or had unfettered access to almost all of Ukraine's communications networks,⁵⁹ enabling the Russian intelligence services deep insights into the state of Ukraine's government and military while blinding the new government's sources of political and military intelligence. Overall, Russia successfully executed the seizure of Crimea with a minimum of violence, a modicum of claimed legitimacy, and an overwhelming use of force to dissuade both Ukraine and other powers from forcibly contesting the event. However, while Russia achieved its military objectives of securing the home of the Black Sea Fleet, the overall political objective of coercing Ukraine to not enter into the Association Agreement with the European Union was not achieved.

An Oblast Too Far: War in the Donbas

For Russia, the Crimean operation may have gone too well. In March 2014, occupied Crimea held a referendum to determine if Crimea would join Russia.⁶⁰ The

referendum passed with a non-credible number of 95.5% of voters, thereby removing Crimea from the Ukrainian polity and the opportunity to turn Crimea into a leverage point as Russia has done with other "frozen conflicts" with bordering nations. Russia immediately set in motion plans to control Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, humble Ukraine's government and demonstrate dominance, destroy the Ukrainian military threat to the breakaway regions, and lastly punish Ukraine for its turn toward a Western orientation. The 2014-2015 operations executed an operational plan that would establish the military conditions necessary to support the strategic objects, while keeping the fighting limited. The Russian planners focused on militarily investing the two oblasts, cutting/interdicting the Ukrainian LOCs, placing the Ukrainian capital at risk, and demonstrating that the international community would not be able to save Ukraine.

Beginning in March 2014, protests led by pro-Russian Ukrainians and supported by the Russian security agencies began in Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkiv. The Russian state narrative of support for the Novoroissiya (New Russia) project complemented these efforts. Novoroissiya is defined as the swath of land from Eastern Ukraine to Moldova, encompassing all the regions Putin wanted to attempt to break away from Ukraine. However, this campaign fell far short of generating the level of support pro-Russian agitators was able to create in Crimea. The goal of the campaign was to undermine the legitimacy of the new Kyiv government and to advocate for a federated Ukraine. The March 2014 protests and "agitprop" campaign failed to convince the Ukrainian people not to be positively inclined toward the EU. Putin raised the stakes by infiltrating Russian Spetznaz into Ukraine, leading or in support of locally raised or Russian-trained irregulars in order to attack Ukrainian government and mass

media targets throughout Donetsk, Kharkiv, and Luhansk Oblasts.⁶¹ The modus operandi was for Russian Spetznaz to spearhead the seizure of the buildings, and then immediately replaced by "local insurgents." to maintain deniability of the Russian operations. Russia began to conduct long range planning as well, establishing training camps in Russia and Crimea to train propaganda-mobilized Russians and local Ukrainians to staff the planned insurgency. Over 1200 Russian volunteers were trained for insertion in August 2014⁶² and thousands more with skills were recruited to begin to travel to fight in the Donbas.⁶³ However, training newly raised troops was not going to be sufficient to defeat the slowly awakening Ukrainian state. To support this operation, NATO identified a Russian force of over 40,000 troops⁶⁴ positioned along the Russia-Ukraine border. Russia also positioned two dozen BTGs along border to coerce the Kiev regime and destabilize the country.⁶⁵

The Russia-directed terror campaign to disrupt the May 25, 2014 Ukrainian presidential elections failed. Russian Spetznaz augmented by Ukrainian sympathizers and Russian Chechen irregular forces, employed violence and political intimidation throughout the depth of Ukrainian state, seizing buildings in Odessa, Dnepropetrovsk, and Eastern Ukraine; most notably the Donetsk International Airport. Provocateurs declared the "Donetsk People's Republic" (DPR) and "Luhansk People's Republic" (LPR) independent and established with a hybrid command infrastructure. It incorporated a rather motley group of leaders of Ukrainian and Russian origins, integrated with FSB associated-personnel that had experience in South Ossetia, Abkhazia, or Transnistria prominently featured in the new proxy governments. The Ukrainian government then began its Anti-Terrorism Operation (ATO) on April 16, 2014.

Russian-supported forces conducted strategic interdiction of Ukrainian government lines of communication to the Donbas with bridges and rail lines cut by saboteurs to prevent combat power from moving into the theater.

In response to the Ukrainian ATO, Russia began to send heavy weapons to the Ukrainian separatists and Russian proxy forces. Russia began to fly T-64 tanks⁶⁶ from the 2655th Central Base of Technical Reserves (CBRT)⁶⁷ tank depot from Krasnoyarsk, Siberia to Rostov Oblast in May 2014, while publically claiming that the separatists captured the T-64s.⁶⁸ The Ukrainian state continued to regain its footing following the successful election of pro-Western Petro Poroshenko, and the ATO began to retake areas held by GRU-supported insurrectionists. Evidence strongly suggests that Russia also provided BUK (SA-17) surface to air missile launchers to prevent the Ukrainian Air Force from continuing to provide close air support to their army. Evidence indicates that launcher Buk 3x2⁶⁹ from the Russian 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade shot down Malaysian Airlines Flight 17, killing all 298 people on-board.⁷⁰ A short-lived cease-fire was declared after the shoot-down.

Poroshenko restarted the ATO on 1 July 2015 after continued violations by the Russian-backed separatists.⁷¹ The Ukrainian intent was to restore the state border with Russia to interdict Russian support to the insurgents, to divide the insurgent territory into multiple parts, and then reduce or destroy them.⁷² Ukraine only had about 6,000 effective troops at this time, mostly made up of their airborne forces and limited numbers of troops from their tank and motor-rifle brigades.⁷³ One key element was the clearing of the Ukrainian ROE. The Ukrainian military was strongly hesitant to utilize heavy weapons to combat separatists if there was the possibility of prosecution for war

crimes after combat ended. Once the Ukrainian government established appropriate rules of engagement and criminal immunity, the actual military offensive operation could commence. The Ukrainian State Security service leads the ATO, with the Ukrainian military supporting civil authorities with their military operations.

After a slow start, the ATO supported by the Ukrainian military, began to develop rapidly.⁷⁴ The Ukrainians gained momentum as they began to destroy the less heavily armed separatist checkpoints and defensive positions with battalion-sized combined arms operations. By the middle of August 2014, the Ukrainian ATO was close to achieving its objective of enveloping Donetsk. The Russian effort to coerce the new Ukrainian government was failing, and the attempts to subvert the new government proved ineffective. Facing defeat, Russia had to commit its conventional forces positioned along the Ukrainian border to defeat the ATO offensive and rescue the Donetsk and Luhansk "Peoples Republics" from defeat. Russian conventional forces in the Donbas decisively defeated⁷⁵ the Ukrainian Army. This defeat led to the signing of the Minsk Protocol on September 4, 2014 to establish a cease-fire and separate the forces. In the interim, Russia poured in hundreds of tanks, armored personnel carriers, and artillery into the Donbas to build a proxy mechanized army. Public statements by NATO senior leaders⁷⁶ indicate that Russian heavy weapons of that level of magnitude had occurred by February 2015.⁷⁷ The cease-fire broke down rapidly due to the Russians, either directly or via their proxy forces, attempting to seize key terrain such as the Donetsk Airport and the transportation hub of Debaltseve.

The Minsk II accord, signed on February 11, 2015, was supposed to bring an end to the fighting. However, at Putin's direction, the largest battle of the war was fought at

Debaltseve. The Ukrainian army had to give up Debaltseve, but the Russian and Russian proxy forces took very high casualties to coerce the Ukrainians to do so.⁷⁸ During the war, the Russians committed a wide variety of units and reported increasing costs in reported casualties as the conflict progressed. This may indicate the Ukrainian army is gaining greater skill in defending itself against Russian attacks.

After the battle, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated, "Of course losing is always bad, and it's unfortunate for the losing side, especially if it's at the hands of a former truck-driver or farmer, but that's life, and life goes on."⁷⁹ Putin only admitted to limited Russian support in Crimea after the fall of Debaltseve.⁸⁰ Since the end of the Battle of Debaltseve on February 18, 2015, the Line of Contact has remained generally stable while Russia and Ukraine continue the battle of wills to see which country exhausts first.

Putin utilized landpower in all its forms to try to coerce the Ukrainian polity to submit to his will, and showed commitment to escalate absent voluntary compliance each time Ukraine failed submit.⁸¹ Russia has its frozen conflict with Ukraine. However, at each point of escalation, the Ukrainian people and its government became more entrenched in their desire to orient to the West. Ukraine signed the Association Agreement with the EU in June 2014, and the agreement went into effect provisionally on January 1, 2016.

Insights on the Russian War against Ukraine

Two major issue areas from this conflict are useful for Western analysis: information operations and the role of deception on decision-making.

Information Operations

In the New Generation Warfare model, the battlespace is in the minds of the leaders and the people. The generation of domestic support or the erosion of target audience support is crucial to sustain combat operations in democracies or autocracies. Russia's effort to first centralize mass media under control of the central government, then use mass media to sustain political support for the Ukraine project was crucial to operations in 2014-2015. Russia wanted to message that the new government in Ukraine was illegitimate, that the West should stay out of the conflict, and that Russian claims to Crimea and elsewhere were legitimate.

The Russian IO campaign was effective domestically but not abroad. The Russian government was very successful in convincing its domestic audiences of the legitimacy of the Novoroissiya project, as well as building domestic support for the seizure of Crimea. Russian mass media outlets, such as the cable television network Russia Today (RT), broadcast a steady stream of pro-Moscow and pro-Novoroissiya content, while alternately delegitimizing the new Ukrainian government and emphasizing the threats coming from NATO and the US.

However, the Russian IO campaign was not successful abroad at the strategic level. Western countries provided the critical elements of funding, political support, and the imposition of sanctions on Russia proved sufficient to stabilize the Ukrainian government and enable it to resist Russian coercion. Ukraine did lose Crimea and most of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, but it has been able to defend the rest of the country adequately. Worse for Russia, these were the three oblasts that the pro-Russia Party of Regions were based in. In the Ukrainian Parliament, Russia, in essence, removed the legislative counterweights it needed to sway the parliament to support its desires. Now,

it does not matter how much Russia tries to delegitimize the Kyiv government. It has lost its voice in the only body that can actually implement its policies via the democratic process. In many ways, removing the Party of Regions radicalized the Ukrainian government and made it more pro-European than it was before. This is an important insight for assistance to governance efforts in the future.

Deception and Decision Making

Russia utilized an extensive deception effort to mask its involvement in both the invasion of Crimea and the invasion of Eastern Ukraine. This hid Russian involvement from the Russian domestic audiences and slowed Western decision making to create new facts on the ground in Ukraine before the West could respond.

In order to do this, Russia employed a comprehensive *maskirovka* effort to hide the employment of its forces in Ukraine, mostly by repackaging Russian regular forces as separatist forces. Russian conventional forces often deployed as composite formations, making unit identification difficult and creating more ambiguity into the situation. In the beginning of the conflict, Russia was careful to introduce weapons systems into the conflict that were fielded by the Ukrainian Army, in order to mask where the weapons were coming from. In order to protect the cover story that the only Russian fighters in Ukraine were civilian volunteers, all Russians had false documents, pseudonyms, and signed FSB-enforceable non-disclosure statements prior to crossing over into the Donbas.⁸² The repackaging of the personnel as Ukrainian separatists also created additional ambiguity, ensuring that the Russian volunteers did not know their own end strength.

Russian deception operations are critical in hiding the number of casualties in Ukraine. As of February 2016, evidence suggests that the Russian military may have

suffered 4,976 killed in action and another 7,743 wounded,⁸³ with the number of Russian volunteers killed, and wounded potentially exceeding two to three times this figure. Putin declared that all military casualties in peacetime are state secrets, and will prosecute anyone that talks about it. In theater, Russia deployed mobile crematoriums from their emergency services directorates to destroy the remains of killed RFS/UKR soldiers. This was designed to prevent upset families in Russia demanding to know why their sons were dying from combat-related injuries when they were unaware they were going into combat.

Conclusion

The Ukraine conflict has shown weaknesses in the Kremlin's strategy. It appears that the Russians did not appreciate the full power of a democratic revolution, nor that Ukrainian landpower would be able to frustrate the Russian purposes. Russia's implementation of the technique of hybrid warfare in Ukraine aligns with the dictum that war is an act of violence to compel our opponent to submit to the aggressor's will.⁸⁴ Colin Grey makes the point that even with the changes in the character of war, "War is war and strategy is strategy" - forget qualifying adjectives. General theories of war, such as Clausewitz (and others) are theories with universal applicability."⁸⁵ As such, Clausewitz posits that as a general theory, "policy knows the instrument it will use"⁸⁶ and "if war is part of policy, then policy will determine its character."⁸⁷ The Russian policy of coercing the states bordering Russia, deterring the United States and NATO from intervening in its efforts, and attempting to break the cohesion of the Trans-Atlantic alliance logically determines the character of the conflict; that being political subversion and if necessary, military coercion.

Putin had his clash of wills with both Ukraine and the West and did not achieve his ends yet. Russia did not achieve either their political or military objectives in this campaign. Russia has not broken the European security order, nor has it marginalized NATO or the EU. Ukraine did not surrender, and the West provided enough support to ensure the Ukrainian Army did not disintegrate. Clausewitz's observation that "in war, the result is never final"⁸⁸ may be to Russia's strategic detriment, because Putin cannot control an impassioned Ukrainian popular democracy. Putin failed to employ enough landpower to compel the Ukrainian people to submit to his will. Perhaps worse, Russia's coercive policies and practices forced a state-making process in Ukraine, which pushed the Ukrainian populace away from Russia for a generation. The people of Ukraine had to decide if they were going to submit to this coercion and proved they would not. The Ukrainian military proved that they had the will to fight Russia, even when greatly overmatched by superior firepower and equipment. The effort to coerce Ukraine through the use of landpower continues to be contested in Eastern Ukraine by both Russia and Ukraine as they continue their fight to determine who will not only control the population in the Donbas, but the strategic direction of Ukraine and Eastern Europe as a whole.

Western analysts see the war as evidence of Russia's further departure from accepted norms of international behavior. War is war, and hybrid war is actually a very ancient method of coercing an opponent first through subterfuge, then through force. As the West looks to Russian efforts to achieve its interests through force or deceit, decision makers must not become paralyzed by a lack of exquisite intelligence information to support their decisions. In a post-Snowden environment, we must

recognize that Russia and other competitors know how we collect information, analyze, and act on it. We must now look to other types of analysis, including capabilities analysis and ask the question "what is my theory for what is occurring here," and then act on it. Delusion or indecision does not help when there is a country on the march to coerce or disassemble another country.

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