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HOW THE WEAK WIN WARS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE RUSSO-UKRAINE WAR

by

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December 2023

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**HOW THE WEAK WIN WARS: AN EXAMINATION
OF THE RUSSO-UKRAINE WAR**

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ABSTRACT

While the success in Ukraine has resulted from broader U.S. government (USG) assistance with funding, weapons supply, and diplomatic efforts, this thesis examines the critical role of U.S. Special Operations Forces (USSOF) and partner nation support in the years prior to Russia's invasion, providing significant insight to USSOF's role in deterrence and defense. As U.S. national security challenges have pivoted from the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) to Great Power Competition (GPC), military thinkers and planners have grappled with the role of USSOF against the threats of Russia and China. The Ukraine scenario, and the significant role that USSOF and our partner forces have played, highlights a critical new set of mission areas in GPC. The Ukraine conflict highlights the importance of proactive and persistent engagement with partner nations to inform USG planning efforts to assist countries in enhancing their deterrence and defense networks. This study aims to illustrate how USSOF can most effectively engage with partner nations to thwart potential great power incursions, an especially salient question given Russian revanchism and Chinese aggressive rhetoric for the reunification of Taiwan.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

C2	command and control
CA	Civil Affairs
CGS	Chief of the General Staff
CI	counterintelligence
CINC	Commander in Chief
COTS	commercial off-the-shelf
DOTMLPF-P	doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy
GIROA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
GPC	great power competition
GWOT	global war on terrorism
HUMINT	human intelligence
IO	information operations
MANPAD	man portable air defense
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	non-commissioned officer
PSYOP	psychological operations
SF	Special Forces
SOF	Special Operations Forces
TDF	Territorial Defense Force
UAF	Ukrainian Armed Forces
USG	United States Government
USSOF	United States Special Operations Forces

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While the success in Ukraine has resulted from broader U.S. Government (USG) assistance with funding, weapons supply, and diplomatic efforts, more emphasis on the role of U.S. Special Operations Forces (USSOF) and partner nation support in the years prior to Russia's invasion provides significant insight to USSOF's role in deterrence and defense. As U.S. national security challenges have pivoted from the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) to Great Power Competition (GPC), military thinkers and planners have grappled with the role of USSOF against the threats of Russia and China. The Ukraine scenario, and the significant role that USSOF and partner forces have played, highlights a critical new set of mission areas in GPC. The Ukraine conflict highlights the importance of proactive and persistent engagement with partner nations to inform USG planning efforts to assist countries in enhancing their deterrence and defense networks. This study aims to illustrate how USSOF can most effectively engage with partner nations to thwart potential great power incursions. This research holds significance because it addresses the current geo-political dynamics marked by Russian revanchism and assertive Chinese rhetoric advocating for the reunification of Taiwan.

This study builds upon existing literature that has addressed the challenges weaker states face in conflicts of asymmetry with stronger opponents and forms the basis for the present study. Scholars and strategists have long studied how weaker states have prevailed in conflicts against stronger adversaries. This study explores the dynamics that underlie the success of weaker states in warfare characterized by significant disparities in force, economic power, or technological capabilities. The defense of sovereignty hinges on the extent of a state's preparation to develop a credible deterrent, which dissuades potential aggressors.¹ However, when deterrence fails, the success of weaker states in warfare depends on several key factors: leadership—playing a predominant role—strategy, influence/information operations, and external support. The synchronization of these factors serves as the benchmark for success in weaker states' achievement of

¹ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms & Influence*, The Henry L. Stimson Lectures Series (Yale University Press, 2008), 35.

victory. This qualitative study reviews prominent literature and will examine historical vignettes to develop a framework that encompasses four key factors: leadership, strategy, information operations (IO), and external support. The framework is applied to examine Russia's incursion into Ukraine, employing real-time analysis of an ongoing conflict to build on the current understandings of how weaker states can win wars in a modern context.

Ukrainian leadership has demonstrated a unified commitment to safeguarding Ukraine's sovereignty and national security, providing a sense of purpose and resilience to the Ukrainian populace. Ukraine's approach on the modern battlefield showcases the necessity of weaker states to implement a whole-of-society defense, the ability to militarize the populace in defense of the nation. At the core of this strategy is strong leadership, which extends from political figures to military commanders. Ukraine's strategy combines conventional military tactics, guerrilla warfare, and defensive operations, allowing them to respond effectively to the evolving dynamics of the conflict. This approach emphasizes both proactive and reactive measures, reflecting the complex and shifting nature of the battlefield.

Ukraine's influence and information operations have been instrumental in shaping the narrative of the conflict, actively countering disinformation campaigns from Russia and presenting their struggle as a fight for national independence and territorial integrity. Ukraine is utilizing various communication channels, including social media, to rally both domestic and international audiences while attempting to undermine Russian domestic support. Additionally, external support, particularly from the United States and the European Union, has fortified Ukraine's position. This assistance, spanning diplomacy, financial aid, and military support, bolsters Ukraine's military capabilities and strengthens its resolve, underscoring the significance of international alliances in navigating the challenges of the modern battlefield.

In sum, Ukraine's adaptable leadership, flexible strategy, adept information operations, and external backing collectively illustrate their resilience and determination in confronting the multifaceted demands of modern warfare. This Thesis concludes with a robust set of recommendations for USSOF to gain greater influence by persistent

engagements at the institutional level through doctrine, organizational, training, and leadership development rather than one-off training engagements. The development of Special Operations Assessment and Selection and Qualification courses by USSOF is a sustainable model to produce competent SOF in the target country. Institutional building and reorganization play a crucial role in developing critical Special Operations Forces (SOF) capabilities to effectively conduct special operations and work with irregular units. First, by institutionalizing the integration of irregular warfare capabilities within the broader military framework, the organization creates a sustainable and enduring structure. This ensures that expertise and knowledge are embedded within the institutional fabric and are not solely reliant on individual operators that can attrit over time, losing capability.

Secondly, institutional building fosters the development of specialized training programs tailored to irregular warfare, including an understanding of the cultural, political, and social dynamics unique to irregular conflicts. This will require pivoting from USSOF lessons learned on combating insurgencies, learned through two decades of fighting GWOT, to training partner nations on how to effectively wage insurgencies. By establishing dedicated institutions and training modules, SOF can enhance their adaptability and responsiveness when working with and through irregular units, who often operate in complex, asymmetric environments.

Furthermore, optimization of resources and personnel should happen early on and not in a time of crisis. Strategically positioning and adequately equipping SOF units allow for rapid response to emerging irregular threats. This targeted approach improves the overall efficiency and effectiveness of SOF capabilities, maximizing their impact in irregular warfare scenarios. Additionally, institutional building promotes collaboration and interoperability among different branches of the military and partner nations. By integrating irregular warfare capabilities into existing military structures, SOF can seamlessly coordinate with conventional forces, intelligence agencies, and other stakeholders. This collaborative approach enhances the overall effectiveness of irregular warfare operations, leveraging the strengths of various units and ensuring a unified

response to dynamic and unpredictable situations, but can only happen from early proactive engagement before the onset of a crisis.

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I. INTRODUCTION: HOW THE WEAK WIN WARS

Scholars and strategists have long studied how weaker states have prevailed in conflicts against stronger adversaries. This study explores the dynamics that underlie the success of weaker states in warfare characterized by significant disparities in force, economic power, or technological capabilities. While the stronger state initiates aggression against the weaker state, the latter, often at a numerical disadvantage, weaker states have often demonstrated the ability to undermine the strengths and exploit the vulnerabilities of their aggressors.¹ By employing an indirect approach, the sustainment and maintenance of the conflict becomes untenable for the stronger state, especially for more protracted endeavors.² The goal is to erode the will of the aggressor to the point where they choose to withdraw.³ The defense of sovereignty hinges on the extent of a state's preparation to develop a credible deterrent, which dissuades potential aggressors.⁴ However, when deterrence fails, the success of weaker states in warfare depends on several key factors: leadership—playing a predominant role—strategy, influence/information operations, and external support. The synchronization of these factors serves as the benchmark for success in weaker states' achievement of victory.

A. THE RESEARCH QUESTION: EXAMINING UKRAINE'S SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE AGAINST RUSSIAN AGGRESSION

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine offers invaluable insights into the effectiveness of a comprehensive defense strategy that involves all sectors of society, highlighting the need for adaptable leadership, a flexible strategy, proficient information operations, and robust external backing. Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, Ukraine has been diligently preparing for an anticipated invasion by Russian forces. The Russian incursion

¹ Zedong Mao, *On the Protracted War*, Graphyco editions (Place of publication not identified: Independently published, 2020, 2020), 29–31.

² Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Praeger, 1967), 377.

³ Andrew Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," *World Politics* 27, no. 2 (1975): 179, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009880>.

⁴ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms & Influence*, The Henry L. Stimson Lectures Series (Yale University Press, 2008), 35.

into Ukraine on February 24, 2022, has reignited concerns about Russian expansionism, particularly in the Baltic states. This study contends that Ukraine's defense efforts can serve as a blueprint to guide weaker states, particularly given concerns about the violation of sovereignty, in deterring and defending against great power aggression through a whole-of-society comprehensive defense approach.

Despite numerous studies on the Ukrainian conflict, few have undertaken the task of comprehensively compiling and examining Ukraine's preparations since the annexation of Crimea and their subsequent adaptations to the evolving operational environment. This study aims to bridge the gap by synthesizing both the preparatory and execution phases of Ukraine's defense, thereby constructing a theoretical framework that can inform weaker states how to deter great power aggression effectively. This framework accentuates the nuanced aspects of defense efforts when confronting asymmetric threats, with a particular focus on the pivotal role of civil-government-military relations.

Beyond shedding light on the sequence of events leading to Ukraine's defense, this study contributes to a broader understanding of how weaker states can emerge victorious in conflicts, a matter of paramount importance in an era marked by resurgent Russian territorial ambitions and China's assertive stance on Taiwan's "reunification."

Consider this study as an initial stride towards perceiving defense strategy as a distinct framework for contemplating and analyzing military and security matters. The study extends beyond a narrow concentration on defensive strategy to delve into the broader domain of deterrence and its correlation with cost imposition, focusing instead on qualitative examination of theory to establish best practices. The key for weaker states to succeed lies in avoiding defeat, disrupting the opponent's swift and decisive moves, and prolonging the conflict. By prioritizing these objectives, weaker states can create conditions that favor their resilience and increase the likelihood of achieving their strategic goals. Weaker state's defense endeavor must be credible and effectively signaled to the adversary, indicating that the adversary will incur massive costs for meager gains. The credibility of the threat to impose costs is the deterrent value. Therefore, the deterrence value lies in the ability to alter the adversary's calculations to

discourage aggression or afford additional time for preparing defenses as the adversary reassesses their approach.

Key Research Question: Examining the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, can a framework for how weaker states achieve victory in an asymmetric war inform future campaigns?

B. THE APPROACH AND SCOPE

This study will delve into the ongoing Ukraine conflict to examine best practices and develop a framework to interpret how weaker states can achieve success in warfare. This study, qualitative in nature, will review prominent theories explaining why weaker states prevail and stronger states falter. Drawing on a diverse body of existing literature on how the weak win wars, the framework will encompass four key factors: leadership, strategy, information operations (IO), and external support.⁵ The study will examine the interplay between the factors, understand how the factors converge to shape the outcome of a conflict, and how to strategically manipulate the factors to inform defense efforts. The approach will provide the basis in which to derive lessons learned from the Ukraine conflict.

Obtaining classified government information in the current Russian-Ukraine war is increasingly challenging due to strict security measures. Consequently, this study will draw upon open sources, primarily secondary, and information gleaned from social media to ensure both the safety of ongoing operations and the potential for wider dissemination and impact of this thesis. The study will focus on two operational phases: preparation and execution, limiting the scope of research to the Ukrainian perspective and the direct military aspects of these phases.

The preparation phase, encompassing the period from the annexation of Crimea in 2014 to the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, will be analyzed with an emphasis on Ukrainian military reforms and the whole-of-society approach, with a focus

⁵ Jeffrey Record, “Why the Strong Lose,” *Parameters (Carlisle, Pa.)* 35, no. 4 (2005): 16–31, <https://doi.org/10.55540/0031-1723.2281>; Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars”; Ivan Arreguín-Toft, “How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict,” *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001): 93–128, <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228801753212868>.

on enhancing civil-military relations. The execution phase, spanning from post-invasion to the completion of the first year of the war, will highlight key events such as the defense of Kyiv, the counter-offensive in Eastern and Southern Ukraine, and the stalemate in the Eastern Donbas region. Comparing these phases will enable a nuanced examination of Ukraine's preparations and performance during this ongoing conflict. The analysis of the Ukraine war delves into how Ukraine effectively leveraged external support and the strategic importance of Western coalitions. It particularly examines the role of U.S. and partner Special Operations Forces (SOF) commands in enhancing Ukrainian resilience and defense capabilities throughout the preparation and execution phases.

Information gathered will be categorized and binned into the three dimensions of warfare: physical, human, and information. The three dimensions are defined as such: the physical dimension encompasses tactics, weapons, technology, and terrain, essential for sustaining military operations over time; the human dimension delves into the psychological, social, and ethical aspects of warfare, involving both soldiers and civilians on the battlefield; finally, the information dimension concerns communication and the use of information for offensive and defensive purposes, including cyber warfare, shaping perceptions, and behavior. Assessing Ukraine's defense through these dimensions will facilitate the organization of information gathered throughout the study of this ongoing conflict.

C. SIGNIFICANCE

This research holds significance by offering near-real-time analysis of an ongoing and dynamic conflict. The utilization of literature based on the successes and failures of weak and strong states in asymmetric wars as a predictive measure to the outcome of the conflict in Ukraine will either speak to their utility in future applications or disprove their usefulness to inform defensive strategies. This study will first explore the theoretical frameworks elucidating how weaker states win wars in the literature review. Subsequently, the study analyzes historical vignettes where the application of the theories achieved success. Through this investigation, the study aims to provide a framework of

the factors leveraged by weaker states to achieve victory in wars against more powerful adversaries that could apply to future conflicts in modern warfare.

The next chapter examines Ukraine's valiant efforts to resist Russia's incursion, with the goal of building on the literature review and historical vignettes to provide lessons learned on how weaker states can deter and/or defeat stronger adversaries in a modern context. Finally, the last chapter draws lessons from the Ukraine Conflict and establishes best practices to provide guidelines that would help U.S. allies deter or defeat stronger adversaries in future conflicts. The significance of the study focuses more specifically on the role of U.S. Special Operations Forces (USSOF) and partner nation support in the years prior to Russia's invasion. As U.S. national security challenges have pivoted from the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) to Great Power Competition (GPC), military thinkers and planners have grappled with the role of USSOF against Russia and China. The Ukraine scenario, and the significant role that USSOF and partner forces have played, highlights a critical new set of mission areas in GPC.

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II. LITERATURE ON HOW THE WEAK WIN WARS

This chapter reviews existing literature that has addressed the critical factors that have enabled weaker states to successfully resist stronger opponents using asymmetric strategies, with the goal of providing a framework for examining the Ukraine Case. The review of literature is as follows: first, an exploration of the theoretical frameworks elucidating how weaker states win wars. Subsequently, the review analyzes historical vignettes where the application of the theories achieved success, providing a framework of the factors leveraged by weaker states to achieve victory in wars against more powerful adversaries that could apply to future conflicts in modern warfare. The literature contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding asymmetric conflicts, illuminating leadership, strategy, information operations, and external support as the underlying factors that empower weaker states to achieve their military and political objectives.

A. LEADERSHIP IS DECISIVE IN DETERMINING THE OUTCOME OF WAR

In times of war, leadership often serves as the linchpin for the success of weak states. Visionary leaders can chart a clear and compelling course of action, inspiring their military forces and civilian populations to unite behind a common objective and sustain their commitment in the defense of their nation. This strategic vision is instrumental in guiding the course of warfare. It is this strategic vision that people will rally behind which will allow leaders to force generate.⁶ The most justifiable cause for engaging in warfare is the defense of sovereignty and preserving one's core ideals against the threat of tyranny.⁷ Critical attributes of effective leadership in such circumstances include the ability to provide clear direction, maintain disciplined execution of plans, and possess the interpersonal skills necessary to inspire and guide others.⁸ In addition to these

⁶ Christopher Donahue, personal communication, April 7, 2023.

⁷ Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 4th ed. (New York: BasicBooks, 2006), 31.

⁸ Steven I. Davis, *Leadership in Conflict: The Lessons of History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 146.

fundamental qualities, leaders must exhibit bold decisiveness, a deep understanding of the enemy's behavior, a creative and adaptable mindset, courage in adversity, and tactical proficiency.⁹ Ultimately, leadership is a means to an end, and a leader's contribution should address the genuine needs of their followers, uphold their values, or advance society's overall well-being during a given era.¹⁰

B. DETERRENCE BY PUNISHMENT: PROTRACTED WAR AS A CREDIBLE THREAT WHEN DEVELOPING A DEFENSIVE STRATEGY BY WEAKER STATES

Weaker states can use the threat of protracted war as a credible deterrent, signaling the capabilities to impose significant economic and human costs on the adversary through attrition and endurance. The primary purpose of this defensive strategy is to align and guide all available resources and efforts towards achieving the desired political objective, with deterrence being the fundamental policy goal. Defensive strategy, within this context, represents the art of efficiently deploying a nation's resources to fulfill the broader policy objective of deterrence by punishment through protracted conflict. The strategy involves not only the positioning and movement of armed forces but also emphasizes the utilization of the civilian populace to augment defense forces. The credibility of a weaker state's defense strategy depends on several key requirements. These include building resilience in the population, leveraging the population to create defense in depth, promote collaboration between the government and industry to enhance the defense industrial base, and employ asymmetric methods to overcome technological disadvantages.

1. Resilience as the Foundation for Resistance Strategy amongst the Civilian Populace

The fundamental role of population resilience in a weaker state's defensive strategy is preventing collaboration with the enemy and fomenting resistance between the

⁹ Davis, 146.

¹⁰ Davis, 153–54.

native population and the occupying force.¹¹ The objective is to foster a climate where the population can either accommodate the occupier, engage in passive resistance, or actively resist the invader.¹² The concept of accommodation involves a nuanced process of gradual compliance with the occupier's directives, thus creating 'noise' within the environment that serves as a cover for active and passive resistance activities.¹³ This, in turn, subverts the occupier's efforts to pacify the local populace. The crux of dissuading collaboration with the occupier lies in governments ability to cultivate psychological and physical resilience within the population. Psychological resiliency equips individuals with the mindset and determination to withstand the pressures of war, while physical resiliency ensures that the population's practical needs are met. Together, psychological and physical resilience build the foundation for weaker states to foment resistance against an occupier amongst the civilian populace.

a. Psychological Resiliency of the Population: How the Weak Force Generate and Counter Adversary Influence

Psychological resilience within the population is cultivated by fostering a strong national identity and amplifying the perception that the occupier represents a genuine existential threat to the people's survival. Psychological resilience functions as a force multiplier, aiding in both the populations willingness to resist and fight and the ability to counter an adversary's information operations, which often involve spreading disinformation and sowing divisions within the social fabric of a nation.¹⁴ Psychological preparation of a population is anchored in the cultivation of a robust national identity, a process that evolves across generations through the education and indoctrination of the

¹¹ Marek Chodakiewicz, "Accommodation and Resistance: A Polish County during the Second World War and Its Aftermath (1939–1947) – ProQuest," 2, accessed October 13, 2023, <https://www.proquest.com/openview/a15d122a52904e1989d34c209bdbf8bb/1?cbl=18750&diss=y&parentSessionId=mnHu0b%2BnHWOMSfddSNhPO0eH3OVPDmNAILBxkQc8orU%3D&pq-origsite=gscholar&accountid=12702>.

¹² Chodakiewicz, 2.

¹³ Chodakiewicz, 2.

¹⁴ "NATO Special Operations Headquarters. NATO Comprehensive Defense Handbook. A. Vol. 1. 2 Vols. Shape, Belgium: Quartier General, 2020.," n.d., 26.

youth.¹⁵ This educational indoctrination is instrumental in nurturing a profound sense of national pride, which, in turn, serves as the primary motivator for individuals to resist external pressures and threats. Psychological preparedness equips and empowers individuals with the tools needed to confront the challenges that come with occupation.¹⁶

In the context of conflict, ambiguity and confusion exacerbate fear, making unprepared individuals more prone to collaboration as a survival strategy, rather than engaging in resistance.¹⁷ However, when communities and individuals understand the government's preplanned objectives and actively participate in the preparation process of the defensive strategy, it fosters a sense of unity and instills hope.¹⁸ The free-flow of information between the government and its populace assumes a pivotal role in countering adversary influence, as a well-informed and confident population tends to trust its national authorities and collectively opposes occupiers.¹⁹ Ultimately, the overarching goal is to enhance social cohesion within the populace and the government when defending against external threats. Psychological resiliency, or the ability to withstand the psychological pressures of an invasion, is intimately linked with the physical resiliency required to address the practical and essential needs of the population amidst conflict.²⁰

b. Physical Resiliency Against Occupation: Redundancies in Vital Services and Sustaining Morale

Physical resilience—with government playing the crucial role—supports the psychological efforts by ensuring the fulfillment of basic needs and the provision of

¹⁵ Otto C. Fiala, *Resistance Operating Concept (ROC)* (MacDill Air Force Base, Florida: The Joint Special Operations University Press, 2020), 8.

¹⁶ Fiala, 7.

¹⁷ Chodakiewicz, "Accommodation and Resistance," 8.

¹⁸ "NATO Special Operations Headquarters. NATO Comprehensive Defense Handbook. A. Vol. 1. 2 Vols. Shape, Belgium: Quartier General, 2020.," 80.

¹⁹ "NATO Special Operations Headquarters. NATO Comprehensive Defense Handbook. A. Vol. 1. 2 Vols. Shape, Belgium: Quartier General, 2020.," 105.

²⁰ A. H. Maslow, "A Dynamic Theory of Human Motivation," in *Understanding Human Motivation* (Cleveland, OH, US: Howard Allen Publishers, 1958), 26–47, <https://doi.org/10.1037/11305-004>.

essential services are provided to the populace.²¹ These measures collectively sustain the fighting spirit of the population, rendering them less susceptible to collaboration with the invader and more inclined towards resistance. Physical resiliency involves creating redundant systems to guarantee the uninterrupted delivery of vital services and the preservation of communication networks for the general population. Redundancies in critical systems and services for essential needs like food, water, and healthcare ensure that the population's basic requirements are met, even in the face of disruptions caused by an invasion.²² Maintaining communication pathways between the government and the populace is vital for the coordination of the war effort and the dissemination of information.²³ States must invest in resilient and redundant communication systems to ensure that citizens can stay connected, share vital information, and coordinate their activities effectively.

2. Whole-of-Society Defense: Leveraging the Population to Create Defense in Depth

Achieving defense in depth involves leveraging the resistance potential of the entire population, which constitutes the remaining populace beyond the active military, depending on the degree of involvement each individual can offer.²⁴ This includes both passive and active resistance, traditional defense mechanisms, regional protection, local defense units, and clandestine resistance networks. In this approach, every resident is viewed as a potential defender, each city acts as a fortified stronghold, and local governments and local organizations play essential roles within a larger defense structure or a clandestine resistance network..²⁵ A 'whole-of-society' defense necessitates the ability of all segments of society to seamlessly integrate into a unified, multi-layered

²¹ Maslow.

²² Pamela Aall and Chester A. Crocker, "Building Resilience and Social Cohesion in Conflict," *Global Policy* 10, no. S2 (2019): 72, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12681>.

²³ Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), *Building Resilience for the Future – Lessons from Ukraine* (Karlstad, Sweden: MSB, 2023), 10.

²⁴ "NATO Special Operations Headquarters. NATO Comprehensive Defense Handbook. A. Vol. 1. 2 Vols. Shape, Belgium: Quartier General, 2020.," 15.

²⁵ Võ Nguyên Giáp, *People's War; People's Army* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1962), 97.

defense system.²⁶ A ‘whole-of-society’ defense dictates the clear delineation of objectives and the establishment of a defined code of conduct.²⁷ This clarity helps eliminate doubt in the minds of citizens, outlining their roles and how they can actively contribute to the war effort. The aim is to foster and develop social cohesion among the populace during times of defense. Citizens need to understand their roles and responsibilities, as well as the ethical and legal framework that governs their actions during wartime. Clarity in these matters can reduce confusion and promote unity.

‘Whole-of-society’ defense emphasizes the imperative of a dedicated force to train, arm, and actively incorporate citizens into overarching defense plans. The comprehensive approach to defense recognizes citizens as integral contributors to national security, fostering a decentralized resilience within communities. By providing training and arming citizens, nations can establish a swift and flexible response system, enabling citizens to act as force multipliers during crises. ‘Whole-of-society’ defense not only enhances situational awareness through the development of intelligence networks, but also creates a sense of community cohesion and shared responsibility, strengthening the social fabric. Moreover, incorporating citizens into defense plans proves to be a cost-effective approach, leveraging existing resources within the population. The deterrence effect is significant, as a well-trained and armed citizenry acts as a deterrent to potential aggressors. Civil-military integration is a natural outcome, breaking down barriers between the military and civilian sectors and fostering cooperation.

Definitive laws regulating the concept of ‘whole-of-society’ defense, which encompass issues such as funding, operational authority, legal standing of personnel, and various other concerns, should be established well in advance of the actual need for conducting defense against an adversary.²⁸ This proactive step is crucial for providing the highest level of legal protection and, consequently, legitimacy to those individuals engaged in resistance activities and their operations. It is imperative that resisters are

²⁶ “NATO Special Operations Headquarters. NATO Comprehensive Defense Handbook. A. Vol. 1. 2 Vols. Shape, Belgium: Quartier General, 2020.” 34.

²⁷ Fiala, *Resistance Operating Concept (ROC)*, 85.

²⁸ Fiala, 85.

fully aware that their actions are not only legitimate but also in accordance with their national government's authorization, ensuring that they will not face prosecution for their deeds. Conforming to internationally recognized human rights standards is a fundamental aspect of gaining legitimacy and achieving success in any defense endeavor. The defenders of the weak state must take every measure to ensure that none of its members commit human rights violations. This commitment is instrumental in preserving its legitimacy among the population it aims to restore to power, as well as among its supporters, both at the national and international levels, including states and non-state entities. Failure to uphold human rights standards could jeopardize the support the state receives, be it in the form of financial aid, training, equipment, active involvement, planned conventional military assistance from allies and partners, or other forms of external assistance. Conforming to internationally recognized human rights standards is necessary for a weak state to gain legitimacy and achieve success.

3. Employing Asymmetric Methods to Overcome Technological Disadvantages: Defensive Strategy of Exploiting Terrain and Guerilla Tactics

In the face of technological disparities, weaker states can strategically transform its perceived vulnerability into a formidable advantage by skillfully utilizing terrain exploitation and guerrilla tactics. The combination of terrain exploitation and guerrilla tactics effectively turns the adversary's strengths into weaknesses, allowing the weaker state to overcome significant technological disparities through tactical ingenuity and asymmetrical warfare.

a. Exploiting Terrain for a Strategic Defensive Advantage

Terrain exploitation is a fundamental aspect of a weaker state's military strategy and involves maximizing the benefits provided by the landscape and minimizing its potential drawbacks.²⁹ The exploitation of terrain refers to the strategic and tactical use of natural geographic features and characteristics to gain a defensive advantage when

²⁹ Patrick O'Sullivan, *Terrain and Tactics*, Contributions in Military Studies, No. 115 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 110.

defending one's nation.³⁰ The exploitation of terrain involves understanding the unique characteristics of the landscape and using them to create defensive advantages. It's about strategically positioning forces, creating obstacles, and maximizing cover and concealment to make it as challenging as possible for an adversary to advance and engage effectively.³¹ Terrain exploitation plays a pivotal role in this approach. By understanding and maximizing the unique characteristics of the landscape, such as rugged terrain and urban environments, defenders gain a distinct advantage. These natural features offer cover and concealment while impeding the adversary's technologically advanced capabilities. The landscape itself becomes a weapon, turning the adversary's high-tech advantages into liabilities.

b. Maneuver and Guerilla Tactics: Disrupting Technologically Superior Adversaries

Weaker states utilize tactics that often involve the use of hit-and-run attacks, ambushes, and decentralized command structures—which allow forces to operate in small, highly mobile units—turning the force disadvantage into a strength.³² Maneuver and guerilla tactics underscore the necessity for forces to recognize and exploit available cover and concealment options, such as natural terrain features and artificial obstacles, reducing their exposure to the adversary's surveillance and firepower.³³ The study of military tactics of weaker states encompasses a multifaceted approach, integrating insights from scholars who have explored the intricacies of warfare. One key facet revolves around the importance of minimizing vulnerabilities and maximizing protection on the battlefield. Within the realm of tactics, the emphasis on combined arms operations highlights the significance of synergy among diverse military components, such as infantry, artillery, and armor, but for weaker states also need to include the use of regular and irregular force (partisans, clandestine resistance networks, and civilians). This integration fosters flexibility and adaptability, enabling both regular and irregular forces

³⁰ O'Sullivan, 106.

³¹ O'Sullivan, 110.

³² Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle*, 3.

³³ Biddle, 3.

to effectively respond to the fluid and multifaceted nature of the modern battlefield and present multiple dilemmas for the occupying force.

Complementing the notion of guerilla tactics, the concept of the “indirect approach” promotes the avoidance of direct confrontations with the enemy, instead advocating striking at their vulnerabilities.³⁴ This strategy aligns with the emphasis on maneuver and infiltration, encompassing swift and unanticipated movements to outflank or bypass formidable enemy positions, generating opportunities for surprise and disruption.³⁵ The indirect approach aligns with tactics that emphasize leveraging unconventional routes, networks, and strategies. It underscores the significance of mobility, surprise, and adaptability in combat. This approach involves employing hit-and-run attacks, sabotage, and the disruption of enemy supply lines.³⁶ In contemporary warfare, the amalgamation of the concepts of guerilla tactics and the concept of the ‘indirect approach’ results in a multifaceted tactical approach vital for the execution of a protracted conflict.

C. KEY FACTOR OF INFLUENCE OPERATIONS/INFORMATION OPERATIONS: COGNITIVE WARFARE AND SHAPING THE NARRATIVE

Information operations (IO) are a key factor for weak states in modern warfare, enabling weak states to extend their influence beyond the physical battlefield and into the cognitive realm, engaging in what can be called cognitive warfare. Cognitive warfare involves the strategic use of mass and social media to control the flow of information, shaping narratives with a variety of intended effects. Domestically, these narratives serve to boost morale and the perseverance of the civilian populace and military forces to keep fighting. On the international front, weak states aim to garner support for the weaker state’s cause. Simultaneously, these narratives are directed towards the adversary to sow discord within their ranks, highlighting the perceived injustice of the conflict and seeking

³⁴ Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 395.

³⁵ Mao, *On the Protracted War*, 61–72.

³⁶ Mao, 43–47; Giáp, *People’s War; People’s Army*, 173–74.

international condemnation of the adversary's actions, thereby tarnishing their international legitimacy.

Embodied in the SMCR Model (Source, Message, Channel, Receiver), is a structured framework for comprehending the dynamics of communication in Information Operations.³⁷ This framework has evolved significantly with the advent of mass media and the transformative impact of social media. The "Source" encompasses a wide array of entities, including traditional journalists and social media influencers, who use both mass media and social media platforms to disseminate messages to broad and diverse audiences.³⁸ The "Message" has expanded to include various formats, from text and images to interactive content, reflecting the impact of the digital age and the rise of social media, which offers more personalized and interactive communication.³⁹ The "Channel" has also evolved, encompassing traditional mass media outlets alongside social media platforms, which enable direct engagement, user-generated content, and viral dissemination. The "Receiver" has shifted from passive recipients to active participants, with audiences now co-creating content and engaging in instantaneous, dynamic feedback loops.⁴⁰

In this context, influence through IO becomes pertinent when engaging in cognitive warfare with narratives that can reach international audiences near instantaneously. Robert Cialdini's principles of influence, including reciprocity, commitment, social proof, authority, liking, and scarcity, provide a framework for understanding how individuals can be influenced in their decision-making and behavior.⁴¹ These principles can be harnessed and manipulated to affect the "Receiver" in the context of mass and social media communication. For example, the principle of social proof can be used to create the perception of widespread agreement or support for

³⁷ Michael John Baker, *Marketing: Critical Perspectives on Business and Management* (Taylor & Francis, 2001), 358.

³⁸ Baker, 360.

³⁹ Baker, 361.

⁴⁰ Baker, 363.

⁴¹ Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, Revised edition., First Collins business essentials edition., Collins Business Essentials (New York: Collins Business, 2007), viii.

a message, influencing the receiver's beliefs. Similarly, the principle of authority can be leveraged to present a source as an expert, thereby enhancing the persuasiveness of the message. Understanding and applying Cialdini's principles in the realm of mass and social media allows communicators to craft messages that exploit these psychological triggers, shaping the receiver's response and behavior. This in and of itself is the very nature of cognitive warfare and is imperative that weaker states dominate the information domain with their narratives over the adversary.

D. EXTERNAL SUPPORT

While a weaker state may possess a superior will and strategy, the pivotal factor in converting these advantages into victory lies in the imperative need for significant external support.⁴² This assistance, whether direct or indirect, can change the power dynamics between the weaker and stronger sides, potentially blurring the distinction between them, even leveling the playing field in some aspects. It is crucial to note that no amount of outside help can rescue a weak-willed and strategically incompetent force; rather, it's the synergy between these elements that ultimately leads to victory. This synergy can disrupt the enemy's swift and decisive actions, protract the conflict, and erode the aggressor's determination. In essence, the weaker side can defeat the stronger one when they bring to the test of war a stronger will and superior strategy, both fortified by external support significantly increasing the risks and costs associated with an adversary's aggressive action.

It becomes evident that foreign assistance plays an instrumental role in determining the outcome of conflicts, particularly when examining the dynamics between stronger and weaker sides. The possession of superior will and strategy by the weaker side, while a critical foundation, does not inherently guarantee success in warfare.⁴³ Instead, it is the synchronization between this intrinsic advantage and external support that proves to be the linchpin of victory. The nature of foreign assistance required is multifaceted, combining both direct and indirect aid.

⁴² Record, "Why the Strong Lose," 30.

⁴³ Record, 30.

Direct military support often includes the supply of advanced weaponry, equipment, and training to enhance the combat capabilities of the weaker side. Direct support is complemented by indirect support such as financial aid, crucial for sustaining military operations over an extended period. The provision of funds for troop recruitment, supply procurement, and infrastructure maintenance ensures that the weaker side can endure a protracted conflict. Furthermore, the receipt of intelligence and information sharing can significantly impact decision-making and battlefield effectiveness. Diplomatic support from foreign allies adds a political dimension, validating the weaker side's cause on the international stage and potentially garnering political and moral support. Simultaneously, humanitarian aid not only alleviates the suffering of affected civilians but also builds goodwill with the local population. Lastly, logistical and infrastructure support contributes to the sustainability of military operations, ensuring that supply lines and essential infrastructure remain intact. Thus, it is the strategic combination of these various forms of foreign assistance, meticulously synchronized with the weaker side's intrinsic strength of will and strategy, that ultimately defines the potential for victory in a conflict.

E. CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE LITERATURE FOR HOW THE WEAK WIN WARS

Preparations are undertaken with the primary aim of countering the strategies and tactics employed by the opposing force, making their actions a crucial determinant of the ultimate outcome. The success of weaker states in warfare against stronger adversaries is a multifaceted dynamic conflict that hinges on the synchronization between several critical factors. Leadership, exemplified by visionary and effective leaders, provides a clear direction, and inspires unity among military forces and the civilian population. Strategy, guided by the policy of deterrence, aligns and directs all available resources toward the political objectives of the conflict. Influence and information operations leverage mass and social media to shape public perception, fostering resilience and resistance. External support, through direct and indirect foreign assistance, reinforces the weaker side's capacity to deter, withstand, and ultimately triumph over aggressors. In this multifaceted approach to defense, the synchronization of these factors serves as the

benchmark for success in weaker states' achievement of victory, and it provides a framework applicable to modern warfare and future conflicts. These factors will be elucidated through the examination of the following historical vignettes: the Vietnam War (1955–1975), South Lebanon (1995–2000), and Afghanistan (2001–2021).

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III. HISTORICAL VIGNETTES

Having outlined the key factors contributing to the success of weaker states, the subsequent phase of this analysis involves an examination of historical vignettes that effectively applied the theoretical principles. Previously, the point was to highlight the ability of weaker states to deter great power adversaries through the development of a credible threat of protracted war, whereas in the forthcoming empirical cases, a combination of state and non-state examples follows. This comparative approach is germane to the discussion of the how the weak win wars, providing valuable insights into how less powerful actors can attain victory in modern conflict scenarios. The cases under scrutiny share a common feature: they are protracted conflicts spanning decades, where the weaker entity ultimately emerged victorious over a superior adversary. By analyzing the factors of leadership, strategy, information operations (IO), and external support within the Vietnam War (1955–1975), South Lebanon (1995–2000), and Afghanistan (2001–2021), this analysis aims to underscore the broader applicability of asymmetric methodologies in how weaker states defeat stronger states.

A. **LEADERSHIP: THE ABILITY TO FORCE GENERATE AND SUSTAIN THE FIGHT, ORGANIZE TO MAXIMIZE PROTECTION, AND COUNTER THE ENEMY’S EFFORTS TO PACIFY THE POPULACE**

The following vignettes exemplify how leadership played a crucial role in sustaining momentum and garnering support for a cause, even in the face of considerable sacrifices. They illuminate how leaders employed strategic vision to navigate the course of warfare, showcasing the pivotal role of leadership in both rallying support and mobilizing the populace to both accommodate and resist an occupying force. The vignettes also highlight a common thread of leadership understanding their adversary’s tactics and organizing units to operate in a decentralized manner.

1. **Vietnam**

The North Vietnamese leadership utilized a political approach to generate forces by persuading and inspiring the Vietnamese population through ideology and nationalism

to endure a protracted conflict that lasted over thirty years; twenty years having direct U.S. involvement. The war resulted in the death of 2 million North and South Vietnamese civilians, 1.1 million North Vietnamese and Viet Cong fighters, and only 250,000 South Vietnamese fighters and 508,220 U.S. soldiers.⁴⁴

The U.S. was fighting for a military victory, but the North Vietnamese were fighting for the ‘hearts and minds’ of the Vietnamese population. Ho Chi Minh’s visionary leadership served as a source of inspiration for the Vietnamese population, both in the northern and southern regions, motivating them to rally behind the cause of achieving national unity and independence. The North Vietnamese leadership, including military strategist Nguyen Giap, held a deep-seated commitment to the objective of reunifying Vietnam under communist governance.

In light of the understanding to maintain popular support during the conflict, General Giap adapted his strategy to exploit the inherent limitations and vulnerabilities of U.S. tactics and techniques—effectively making the U.S. strategy and tactics self-defeating—by shaping the conditions on the battlefield to capitalize on every action or inaction the adversary took, highlighting the injustices to the people over the twenty year period.⁴⁵ General Giap possessed a significant advantage in his profound understanding of the strategic framework employed by the United States, along with the self-imposed limitations and constraints guiding American military operations. Giap recognized that the U.S. heavily relied on strategic bombing and attrition-based warfare, which were conventional tactics often associated with large-scale conflicts, and would instigate events that would lead U.S. tactics to strengthen the will of the people to resist.

Hanoi served as the central hub for North Vietnamese leadership, enabling them to maintain a tightly controlled structure for making both military and political decisions. This facilitated a coherent and well-coordinated protracted strategy allowing regular and

⁴⁴ “How Many People Died in the Vietnam War? | Britannica,” accessed November 3, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/question/How-many-people-died-in-the-Vietnam-War>; “Vietnam War U.S. Military Fatal Casualty Statistics,” National Archives, August 15, 2016, <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/vietnam-war/casualty-statistics>.

⁴⁵ Peter G. Macdonald, *Giáp: The Victor in Vietnam* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), 105.

irregular formations to operate in a decentralized manner towards a common goal.⁴⁶ Operating in the decentralized manner—and only massing when necessary—offered the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong maximum protection, avoiding annihilation from U.S. superior firepower and dictating the operational tempo of the conflict.⁴⁷

2. South Lebanon

In contrast to the North Vietnamese, Hezbollah's leadership were able to leverage ideology and religion—which was a predominant cause—to generate forces and inspire the South Lebanese populace to fight against Israeli occupation for fifteen years.⁴⁸ Hezbollah had firmly established roots within the Shiite Muslim community in Lebanon, and the leadership skillfully harnessed this network to generate broad-based support. This support base yielded a substantial and committed pool of manpower for Hezbollah's activities directed against the occupying Israeli Defense Forces (IDF).

The charisma and influence of the Hezbollah religious leaders galvanized both supporters and combatants towards the organization's objectives allowing Hezbollah to operate like a clandestine organization. Operating in a decentralized manner amongst the populace in dense urban terrain, affording the fighters protection from IDF firepower and clearing operations.⁴⁹ Hezbollah implemented a decentralized command structure, affording them operational adaptability and flexibility, which allowed them to engage in asymmetric warfare and maintain operational secrecy.⁵⁰ Hezbollah was organized like a militia, so fighters often had regular civilian employment, which blurred the lines

⁴⁶ Macdonald, 204.

⁴⁷ Edward C. O'Dowd, "Ho Chi Minh and the Origins of the Vietnamese Doctrine of Guerrilla Tactics," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 24, no. 3 (July 1, 2013): 561–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2013.802606>.

⁴⁸ Ron Schleifer, "Psychological Operations: A New Variation on an Age Old Art: Hezbollah versus Israel," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 1 (January 2006): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100500351185>.

⁴⁹ "What Is Hezbollah?," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed November 1, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-hezbollah>.

⁵⁰ Anthony H Cordesman, "Preliminary 'Lessons' of the Israeli-Hezbollah War," Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 12, 2008, 38, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/lessons-israel-hezbollah-war>.

between civilian and combatant—creating multiple dilemmas for the occupying force—which Hezbollah would exploit through information operations.⁵¹

Hezbollah, like the North Vietnamese government, understood how to capitalize on the occupying force’s every action or inaction. They exploited every response by the occupying force to target-audiences through information operations, to galvanize support both domestically and internationally, effectively countering any efforts of the IDF to pacify the populace.

3. Afghanistan

Similar to Hezbollah, the Taliban leadership were able to leverage ideology and religion to generate forces and inspire the Afghan populace to fight against foreign invaders, but like Vietnam, the Taliban way of war is turning the populace against the political weakness of the Kabul regime.⁵² Taliban leaders often possessed charismatic qualities, leveraging their religious authority and a potent anti-foreign occupation narrative to effectively mobilize both fighters and supporters for twenty years of fighting the U.S., resulting in 70,000 Afghan civilian deaths and 51,191 Taliban deaths compared to the 66,000 GIROA armed forces deaths, 2,448 U.S. forces deaths, and 3,846 U.S. contractor deaths.⁵³

The Taliban’s leadership approach was marked by a decentralized command structure which afforded them the adaptability to operate like a clandestine organization, allowing local leaders a degree of autonomy, maximizing the protection against constant U.S. operations aimed at dismantling the organization. The Taliban demonstrated a remarkable degree of stability and resilience within their leadership structure during the

⁵¹ “Understanding the Rise of the Lebanese Hezbollah: The 1985–2000 South Lebanon Security Zone Conflict.” Masarat: A Report on Recent Developments in the Middle East and the Muslim World. King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, July 2016. <https://www.kfcris.com/pdf/419768fb702cb9b7c2e8a6230de78e8957cdeea154ca3.pdf>.

⁵² Thomas Johnson, “Taliban Adaptations and Innovations, Small Wars & Insurgencies, 2013, Vol. 24, No. 1, 3–27,” 5, accessed October 15, 2023, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/09592318.2013.740228?needAccess=true>.

⁵³ Johnson, 20; “Afghan Civilians | Costs of War,” The Costs of War, accessed November 3, 2023, <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/human/civilians/afghan>; “Costs of the Afghanistan War, in Lives and Dollars,” AP News, August 17, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-business-afghanistan-43d8f53b35e80ec18c130cd683e1a38f>.

course of their insurgency, enduring constant U.S. targeting of the command structure. Consequently, the autonomy amongst the leadership allowed Taliban to swiftly respond to evolving circumstances and capitalize on opportunities at regional and district levels.⁵⁴

To continue to highlight the political weakness of the Kabul regime to the populace, the Taliban leadership understood the need to systematically and successfully infiltrate Afghan security forces, and conduct insider attacks that capitalized on the coalition's trust in their Afghan partners, thereby sowing discord and undermining morale.⁵⁵ The Taliban consistently highlighted Kabul's political ineptitude to the Afghan populace by capitalizing on the perceived heavy-handed clearing operations conducted by U.S. and Afghan Security Forces. In doing so, they continually emphasized Kabul's political weakness and unjust actions.

B. STRATEGY: HARASS AND CONFOUND THE ENEMY WITH GUERILLA TACTICS, LURE THE ENEMY INTO THE 'TRAP,' AND UTILIZE TERRAIN FOR PROTECTION

The following vignettes underscore the strategic deployment of guerrilla tactics and various terrain to offset an adversary's technological advantages. The vignettes illustrate how apparently low-tech solutions, coupled with maneuvering tactics, proved effective in countering a superior adversary and rendering their tactics self-defeating. Additionally, the vignettes spotlight the integral role of the populace in shaping and executing the strategic maneuvers.

1. Vietnam

North Vietnam pursued a multifaceted approach, intertwining military action with a political strategy, designed to secure the support of the South Vietnamese population, while distancing the population from the South Vietnamese government. North Vietnamese leadership framed the conflict as a battle for national independence, capitalizing on the unpopularity of the South Vietnamese government and, in conjunction

⁵⁴ Johnson, "Taliban Adaptations and Innovations, Small Wars & Insurgencies, 2013, Vol. 24, No. 1, 3-27," 9.

⁵⁵ Johnson, 5.

with Viet Cong forces, executed a well-planned strategy involving protracted guerrilla warfare.⁵⁶

Guerrilla warfare encompassed the utilization of hit-and-run tactics and ambushes to both confound the US/ARVN forces and illicit a heavy-handed response—which is the ‘trap.’ This strategy proved highly successful in eroding the resolve of American forces and their South Vietnamese allies because every action or inaction they took was propagandized by the North Vietnamese and Vietcong to meet their ends of securing the ‘hearts and minds’ of the South Vietnamese populace.

The North Vietnamese and Vietcong used their intimate knowledge of local terrain to effectively counter the military might of the United States.⁵⁷ The diverse terrain of Vietnam, along with its neighboring countries Laos and Cambodia, was strategically harnessed. The region’s dense jungles and intricate cave systems were instrumental for protection against bombing raids and search and destroy mission by U.S. and ARVN forces. The North Vietnamese leveraged these natural features along with the development of extensive underground networks for strategic logistical and command-and-control (C2) support.⁵⁸ North Vietnamese military strategists exhibited a keen understanding of the vulnerabilities within the U.S. strategic bombing campaign, and to mitigate casualties and maintain operational readiness, the North Vietnamese dispersed forces, utilized intricate tunnel networks, and sought refuge among the civilian population.⁵⁹ The North Vietnamese also established an intricate network of supply lines, exemplified by the Ho Chi Minh Trail, ensuring a continuous influx of troops and resources into the south which gave a logistical advantage that was indispensable in sustaining their military efforts.⁶⁰ The U.S. inability to precisely target North Vietnamese

⁵⁶ O’Dowd, “Ho Chi Minh and the Origins of the Vietnamese Doctrine of Guerrilla Tactics.”

⁵⁷ O’Dowd.

⁵⁸ Tom Mangold, *The Tunnels of Cu Chi: A Harrowing Account of America’s Tunnel Rats in the Underground Battlefields of Vietnam* (Random House Publishing Group, 2013), 24.

⁵⁹ Giáp, *People’s War; People’s Army*, 172–76, 182–85.

⁶⁰ Macdonald, *Giáp*, 182.

and Vietcong forces and their infrastructure made it exceedingly challenging to effectively implement its strategic bombing campaign and attrition-based tactics.

2. South Lebanon

Hezbollah adopted an asymmetric warfare strategy, employing guerilla tactics such as hit-and-run assaults and ambushes coupled with IO to target Israeli military forces and assets.⁶¹ The guerilla strategy capitalized on both the logistical and psychological vulnerabilities inherent in a conventional military force like the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). Hezbollah understood the power of information and followed the mantra ‘if you haven’t captured it on film, you haven’t fought.’ Hezbollah frequently operated from within densely populated civilian areas, making it challenging for Israel to target the group without incurring substantial civilian casualties—which is the ‘trap.’ This tactic elicited international sympathy and condemnation of Israeli actions.⁶² Hezbollah successfully harnessed the effects of IO, strategically timing and coordinating media campaigns with military operations.⁶³

Utilizing the dense urban area and the population for protection, part of Hezbollah’s efforts garnered the loyalty and support of the local population. Hezbollah managed an extensive array of social services, encompassing schools, hospitals, and charitable organizations.⁶⁴ The strategy to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of the South Lebanese population contributed to their reputation as providers of crucial community services thus creating an insulating layer of security around the organization. Creating further depth within the security layer, Hezbollah strategically established a network of subterranean tunnels, fortified strongholds, and bunkers within South Lebanon, which enabled them to effectively withstand continuous Israeli incursions and airstrikes.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Cordesman, “Preliminary ‘Lessons’ of the Israeli-Hezbollah War,” 24–27.

⁶² Schleifer, “Psychological Operations,” 13.

⁶³ Schleifer, 6.

⁶⁴ Schleifer, 7.

⁶⁵ Cordesman, “Preliminary ‘Lessons’ of the Israeli-Hezbollah War,” 34.

3. Afghanistan

The Taliban pursued a multifaceted strategy, establishing shadow governance to gain support and control over areas, and subvert the efforts of GIROA, often succeeding to co-opt or intimidate local tribal and community leaders. In regions under their influence, the Taliban shadow governments offered basic services and administered justice systems, aiming to secure the loyalty of the local population.⁶⁶

The Taliban applied classic guerrilla warfare tactics to fix GIROA forces—which encompassed hit-and-run attacks, ambushes, the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and infiltrating their enemy’s organizations—to isolate GIROA from the Afghan populace.⁶⁷ The Taliban exploited the predictable patterns and tactics employed by their adversaries which, over time, effectively eroded the capabilities and morale of U.S. and Afghan government forces by exploiting both logistical and psychological vulnerabilities inherent in foreign occupation. The Taliban’s use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) exemplified this tactic of exploiting logistical and psychological vulnerabilities, enabling them to cost-effectively undermine the technological advantages of the U.S. The Taliban leveraged the predictability of coalition routes and supply lines, resulting in casualties and a diminished sense of security.

The Taliban effectively utilized Afghanistan’s diverse and challenging terrain to their advantage by leveraging the natural cover, rugged landscapes, and complex urban environments to conduct guerrilla warfare, evade detection, and mount effective resistance against foreign forces.⁶⁸ Taliban utilized Afghanistan’s mountains, valleys, and natural cave complexes as secure hideouts and command centers, offering protection from airstrikes and serving as bases of operation. The Taliban demonstrated their adaptability by their capacity to blend in with the civilian population, creating significant challenges for coalition forces in distinguishing combatants from non-combatants which

⁶⁶ Johnson, “Taliban Adaptations and Innovations, Small Wars & Insurgencies, 2013, Vol. 24, No. 1, 3–27,” 9.

⁶⁷ Johnson, 6.

⁶⁸ Johnson, 21.

should have constrained the US's utilization of air power and heavy weaponry within populated areas—which it did not—thus the U.S. fell into the 'trap...' again.

Strategically, the Taliban exercised patience, maintaining the conflict over a span of two decades. They recognized that their objectives did not necessitate swift victories, but rather the establishment of a long-term and sustainable insurgency. By protracting the conflict, the Taliban aimed to exhaust their adversaries, both militarily and politically. They counted on domestic pressure within Western coalition countries to end the costly war, particularly as casualties and financial expenditures mounted. The prolonged war placed a substantial economic burden on the U.S. and its allies, depleting resources and straining fiscal capacities, which, in turn, impacted their ability to maintain a sustained presence.

C. INFLUENCE OPERATIONS/INFORMATION OPERATIONS: CRAFTING THE NARRATIVE TO AFFECT DOMESTIC, INTERNATIONAL, AND ADVERSARY AUDIENCES

The following vignettes highlight the integral role of IO in strategy and how the evolving nature of information technology has made it one of the most powerful weapons on the battlefield.

1. Vietnam

By leveraging information operations, the North Vietnamese leadership garnered both domestic and international support, making it arduous for the United States military and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) to sustain public backing.⁶⁹ North Vietnam and the Viet Cong skillfully used propaganda tools, such as leaflets, radio broadcasts, and publications, to craft the narrative of the conflict.⁷⁰ They presented themselves as the legitimate representatives of the Vietnamese people, fighting against foreign aggression. In their efforts to erode the morale of American and South Vietnamese forces, North Vietnam employed disinformation campaigns and exaggerated

⁶⁹ Macdonald, *Giáp*, 62.

⁷⁰ Macdonald, 28.

their own successes.⁷¹ Furthermore, they capitalized on the propaganda value of civilian casualties resulting from U.S. bombing raids to generate sympathy and international support. Recognizing the pivotal role of the ideological aspect in the conflict, North Vietnam engaged in counterpropaganda efforts to undermine American narratives.⁷²

2. South Lebanon

Recognizing the power of public opinion, Hezbollah employed information operations to shape perceptions both domestically and internationally, understanding that dominating the information domain was just as, if not more, influential than their military actions.⁷³ With only a few hundred fighters and several thousand supporters, Hezbollah adeptly harnessed media and propaganda to craft the narrative of the conflict which allowed them to overcome asymmetry from a regional power.⁷⁴ Through their media outlet, Al-Manar, they established a platform to disseminate their message, framing their struggle as a legitimate resistance against Israeli occupation.⁷⁵ They utilized information operations to construct a narrative centered on resistance against Israeli occupation, portraying their struggle as a righteous quest for self-determination and characterizing Israel as the aggressor.⁷⁶ Media outlets featured images and stories that depicted Hezbollah fighters as heroic defenders while emphasizing the perceived oppression and disproportionate actions of the Israeli military. Importantly, Hezbollah directed their media efforts toward an international audience, with a particular focus on the Arab and Muslim world.⁷⁷ By aligning their narrative with broader regional sentiments, they

⁷¹ Macdonald, 95.

⁷² John M. Gates, "People's War in Vietnam," *The Journal of Military History* 54, no. 3 (1990): 331, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1985938>.

⁷³ Ron Schleifer, "Psychological Operations: A New Variation on an Age Old Art: Hezbollah versus Israel," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 1 (January 2006): 13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100500351185>.

⁷⁴ Schleifer, 15.

⁷⁵ David Sousa, "Three Phases of Resistance: How Hezbollah Pushed Israel Out of Lebanon," *E-International Relations* (blog), April 28, 2014, <https://www.e-ir.info/2014/04/28/three-phases-of-resistance-how-hezbollah-pushed-israel-out-of-lebanon/>.

⁷⁶ Sousa.

⁷⁷ Schleifer, "Psychological Operations," 9.

secured support and solidarity, which, in turn, translated into political and financial backing that further bolstered their military capabilities.⁷⁸

Hezbollah also successfully employed propaganda towards their adversary to undermine Israel's morale and political support. They drew attention to Israeli casualties, portraying the conflict as a costly and unwinnable endeavor to the Israeli public.⁷⁹ This psychological pressure on Israel had ripple effects on domestic debates and political shifts within Israel, ultimately influencing the Israeli public's stance on the South Lebanon issue.⁸⁰ Hezbollah's successful military operations, often synchronized with their media campaigns, reinforced their credibility and legitimacy to the Israeli people. Notably, high-profile incidents, such as the capture of Israeli soldiers, showcased Hezbollah's capacity to challenge Israel's military dominance, garnering extensive media coverage. The synergy between military resilience and media influence provided Hezbollah with diplomatic and political leverage, ultimately leading to international calls for negotiations and conflict resolutions. This international pressure played a pivotal role in Israel's decision to withdraw from South Lebanon in 2000.

3. Afghanistan

The Taliban employed a comprehensive media strategy, encompassing both traditional and social media platforms such as websites, videos, and radio broadcasts, to disseminate their messages and assert control of the narrative.⁸¹ Domestically, the Taliban framed their struggle as a holy war against foreign invaders while depicting the Afghan government as a puppet regime manipulated by external forces. Significantly, the Taliban capitalized on local grievances, including issues like corruption, ineffective governance, and civilian casualties resulting from actions by U.S. and Afghan forces.⁸² This approach positioned them as champions of the people against a backdrop of

⁷⁸ "What Is Hezbollah?"

⁷⁹ Schleifer, "Psychological Operations," 8–9.

⁸⁰ Schleifer, 8.

⁸¹ Johnson, "Taliban Adaptations and Innovations, Small Wars & Insurgencies, 2013, Vol. 24, No. 1, 3–27," 21.

⁸² Johnson, 5.

corruption and injustice within the government. Employing a blend of propaganda and psychological warfare, the Taliban effectively molded public perception both within Afghanistan and on the global stage, like that of Hezbollah in South Lebanon. They portrayed the conflict as a protracted battle against foreign occupation, underscoring their resilience and determination. Furthermore, the Taliban engaged in diplomatic efforts, participating in peace talks and negotiations. These diplomatic endeavors not only conferred international legitimacy upon them but also raised questions about the sustainability of the foreign presence in Afghanistan, furthering their strategic objectives.

D. EXTERNAL SUPPORT: THIRD PARTY STATES ENGAGED IN PROXY WARS

The following vignettes highlight the significance of external support, how weak states are able to sustain operations against an aggressor over time.

1. Vietnam

External support significantly bolstered North Vietnam's military capabilities and played a pivotal role in sustaining their war effort. North Vietnam adeptly conducted diplomatic initiatives aimed at securing external support for its objectives, soliciting assistance from countries such as the Soviet Union and China, which furnished military and economic aid. Notably, North Vietnam obtained substantial support from the Soviet Union and China, including the provision of weaponry, military equipment, and financial resources.⁸³

2. South Lebanon

The achievement of Hezbollah was markedly influenced by the broader regional context, with Iran, in particular, considering the group as a valuable proxy in its ongoing regional conflict with Israel and the Western powers. Hezbollah garnered substantial external support from Iran and Syria, encompassing various facets such as training,

⁸³ Macdonald, *Giáp*, 92.

financial aid, and the provision of weapons, which notably included advanced anti-tank missiles, playing a pivotal role in the development of Hezbollah's military capabilities.⁸⁴

3. Afghanistan

The Taliban leveraged regional dynamics to their advantage for external support. Several countries, each pursuing their own interests, extended support to the group, especially when their objectives aligned with those of the Taliban. The Taliban found refuge in Pakistan, where they could regroup, receive training, and strategize their operations, thereby enabling their prolonged resistance efforts.⁸⁵ Within Pakistan, elements of the military and intelligence services provided support and sanctuary to the Taliban. Pakistani support encompassed training, the provision of weapons, and secure locations for their activities.⁸⁶

E. FRAMEWORK: MOST CRITICAL FACTORS

In all three vignettes, leaders were able to inspire and gain favor with the populace, uniting the popular will of the people behind a singular objective of expelling the foreign invader. The foreign invader was characterized as an existential threat to the population's survival, inspiring in the people the will to act and the state of mind to fight. Therefore, winning the hearts and minds of the populace was the cornerstone to the strategy implemented.

Guerilla tactics and the indirect approach were the tools used to control the operational tempo through fire and maneuver to fix the enemy into position. By anticipating the enemy's response upon engagement, a continual process of instigating and exploiting events over time allowed the inherent weakness of the enemy to develop under the stress of war, which in turn is exploited to maintain the popular support and control of the people. It is the constant harassment of attack, coupled with information

⁸⁴ "What Is Hezbollah?"

⁸⁵ Johnson, "Taliban Adaptations and Innovations, Small Wars & Insurgencies, 2013, Vol. 24, No. 1, 3-27," 10.

⁸⁶ Johnson, 10.

operations, and sustained through external support that erodes the will of the aggressor over time.

Taking advantage of terrain plus using a decentralized command structure offers a low-tech solution to counter the advantages of the technologically superior adversary. Operating in smaller elements and fighting from subterranean complexes, dense urban areas, and austere environments mitigates the advantages of technology and limits its effectiveness, allowing the weaker opponent more maneuverability and the ability to avoid detection.

Vietnam laid the foundational groundwork for modern protracted war, whereas South Lebanon highlights the significance of information operations and how controlling the narrative is essential, allowing the battle to transcend beyond the battlefield to garner support. Afghanistan highlights the necessity to prepare the population to accommodate and resist versus collaborate with the enemy. Infiltrating the enemy's established organizations and institutions disrupts its operations and denies the enemy the ability to consolidate its gains over time, effectively subverting the effort of the enemy to pacify the populace to its will.

This comprehensive framework emphasizes the interconnectedness of leadership, strategy, influence/information operations, and external support. These factors are not isolated but must balance effectively to withstand and ultimately triumph in the face of external aggression. The effectiveness of this approach has been demonstrated through historical vignettes where asymmetric methodologies remain relevant in modern warfare, where leadership, strategy, information operations, and external support continue to shape the battlefield. By understanding and applying these factors, weaker states can strategically navigate the complexities of asymmetry in warfare and increase their resilience, adaptability, and capacity to deter potential aggressors, ultimately increasing their chances of success in conflicts against more powerful adversaries. The subsequent chapter will examine how Ukraine has applied, adapted, and evolved these various techniques on the contemporary battlefield.

IV. ASSESSING THE KEY FACTORS THAT BOLSTERED UKRAINE'S RESILIENCE

This chapter examines Ukraine's valiant efforts to resist Russia's incursion, with the goal of building on the literature review and historical vignettes to provide lessons learned on how weaker states can deter and/or defeat stronger adversaries in a modern context. This chapter examines the pivotal role played by Ukrainian leadership in enhancing the nation's defense capabilities through the cultivation of resilience, the use of asymmetric strategies, and the professionalization of the military, as well as its highly effective Information Operations (IO) campaigns. Finally, the chapter explores Ukraine's adept utilization of external support and the strategic significance of Western coalitions, with a particular focus on the role that U.S. and partner SOF commands have played in bolstering Ukrainian resilience and defense capabilities.

A. UKRAINIAN LEADERSHIP: INSPIRING THE PEOPLE, MODERNIZING THE MILITARY, AND BUILDING TRUST BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND THE POPULACE

Zelensky's exemplary leadership has been the most important factor enabling Ukraine to successfully resist Russia's invasion. Foremost, his decision to remain in Kyiv, despite offers of sanctuary, instilled confidence and resolve among Ukrainian citizens and armed forces to defend against the Russian invasion. Using his excellent communication skills, Zelensky's strategic messaging campaigns effectively leveraged ideology and nationalism to convey a strong sense of unity among Ukrainians and bolstered their determination to fight for their homeland. Ukrainian leadership characterized Russia as an existential threat, charted a course for the country to defend its sovereignty, and inspired military forces and the civilian population to unite behind this shared objective, enabling a whole-of-nation approach. This mobilization of the Ukrainian population was a critical factor that enabled Zelensky to implement his strategic vision.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ "'I Only Thought About Ukraine' – Zelensky Explains Decision to Stay & Fight," accessed November 12, 2023, <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/6764>.

Since Russia's takeover of Crimea, Ukrainian leaders have focused heavily on modernizing its military, aligning it closer with NATO standards and creating a more efficient and effective fighting force.⁸⁸ Aligning closer to NATO standards required Ukraine to reorganize their defense forces and procure western equipment; develop a professional NCO corps; and make key leadership changes.

Since 2014, Ukraine has been moving away from a Soviet-style top-down hierarchical driven military to organizing more along western military lines. The military reorganized into operational command post aligned regionally; north, south, east, and west. Zelensky split the commander-in-chief (CINC) position from the Chief of the General Staff (CGS) to infuse NATO's style of delegating authority—called mission command—into the DNA of the military, further reorganizing the military to meet NATO standards. Zelensky promoted Valeriy Zaluzhnyi to the position of Commander-in-Chief (CINC), and Zaluzhnyi immediately initiated a widespread purge across the military of pro-Russian military officers. The policing of the ranks was the beginning of an enduring effort to create a more efficient and effective fighting force.

The Chief of the General Staff (CGS) formulated a decade-long procurement strategy delineating the key focus areas for the Ukrainian armed forces. The key focus areas were enhancing special operations forces, artillery and missile systems, army aviation, unmanned aerial vehicles, coastal artillery, and air defense systems. The armament programs run by Ukraine between 2014 and 2022 were with, most notably, U.S. and NATO partners. Additionally, training and advisory support from NATO countries has contributed to modernizing the military away from the older soviet-system.

Ukraine has strategically concentrated on the reorganization of its defense forces, with particular emphasis on recovering and enhancing its artillery capabilities. Years leading up to the annexation of Crimea, Ukraine saw a reduction in missile and artillery

⁸⁸ Peter Dickinson, "Is Ukraine's Reformed Military Ready to Repel a New Russian Invasion?," *Atlantic Council* (blog), December 23, 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/is-ukraines-reformed-military-ready-to-repel-a-new-russian-invasion/>.

troops.⁸⁹ By Feb 2022, Ukraine had “ten brigades and one regiment as part of the Ground Forces” which were instrumental to the strategy to fix and canalize Russian forces with maneuver units and then leverage artillery fires to destroy the military target.⁹⁰ Special emphasis was placed on personnel training, with units conducting “35 field brigade tactical exercises and more than 200 field battalion tactical exercises” each year for artillery units.⁹¹ The artillery units were further augmented with UAVs for increased reconnaissance and targeting capabilities, US-radar systems and Ukrainian intelligence mapping software to significantly increase lethality and counter-battery capabilities.⁹² Additionally, Ukraine needed to reorganize and modernize its armor capabilities as well, understanding they were at a significant force disadvantage of 900 tanks to Russia’s 2,800.⁹³

Ukraine modernized its armor capabilities updating outdated tanks with modern communications, navigation systems, upgraded engines, and enhanced optical sensors to increase engagement distances up to 5,000m and increase speed and maneuverability on the battlefield.⁹⁴ Understanding the numerical disadvantage, Ukraine updated the tank doctrine to employ tanks in an indirect fire role, increasing the survivability and protection of the equipment on the battlefield outside of a traditional direct fire role.⁹⁵ To further offset the armor numerical disadvantage, integral to the Ukrainian defense reorganization was the use anti-tank weapon systems.

⁸⁹ Mykhaylo Zabrotskyi et al., “Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine: February-July 2022” (London SW1a 2ET United Kingdom: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, November 30, 2022), 16, www.rusi.org.

⁹⁰ Zabrotskyi et al., 16.

⁹¹ Zabrotskyi et al., 16–17.

⁹² Zabrotskyi et al., 16; Constantine Atlamazoglou, “A Decade of Quiet Preparations Helped Ukraine Turn the Tables on Russia’s Bigger, Better-Armed Military, Experts Say,” *Business Insider*, accessed November 16, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/years-of-military-preparation-helped-ukraine-fend-off-russian-invasion-2023-1>.

⁹³ Zabrotskyi et al., “Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine: February-July 2022,” 17.

⁹⁴ Zabrotskyi et al., 17.

⁹⁵ Zabrotskyi et al., 17; Atlamazoglou, “A Decade of Quiet Preparations Helped Ukraine Turn the Tables on Russia’s Bigger, Better-Armed Military, Experts Say.”

Following 2014, significant emphasis was placed on the training of anti-tank crews, particularly due to the complexity of certain systems that demanded extensive training for proficiency.⁹⁶ The School of Anti-Tank Artillery was developed to train crews on the Stugna-P—a wire guided ant-tank system—whereas other systems that are easier to employ, such as the U.S. Javelin or NLAW, took only hours to days for individuals to become proficient.⁹⁷ The primary means of employment of the anti-tank weapon systems was with light fighting forces that could easily displace while trying to fix or blunt enemy armor columns.⁹⁸ Furthermore, air defense would be used in a similar fashion, with mobile units armed with man-portable air defense systems (MANPADs).

Post-2014, there was a pronounced focus on elevating air defense capabilities, involving the updating and modernization of Ukraine's radar air-defense systems. The objective was to enhance detection capabilities across a diverse spectrum of incoming threats.⁹⁹ Ukraine's air-missile defense forced Russian pilots to fly at low level, effectively putting them in range of MANPADs.¹⁰⁰ The mobility of the MANPADS were effective in denying Russia air dominance over Ukraine during the invasion.¹⁰¹

A crucial aspect of Ukraine's military reform, undertaken prior to the conflict and with a direct impact on its combat effectiveness, focused on elevating Ukraine's Special Forces to meet NATO standards. During the eastern conflict in the Donbas against Russian separatists, it was identified the absence of a dedicated command structure degraded the effectiveness of Ukraine's Special Forces (SF). The lack of a dedicated command structure resulted in their treatment as makeshift infantry and supplementary

⁹⁶ Zabrodskiy et al., "Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: February-July 2002," 18–19.

⁹⁷ Zabrodskiy et al., 18–19.

⁹⁸ Zabrodskiy et al., 19.

⁹⁹ Atlamazoglou, "A Decade of Quiet Preparations Helped Ukraine Turn the Tables on Russia's Bigger, Better-Armed Military, Experts Say."

¹⁰⁰ Atlamazoglou.

¹⁰¹ Zabrodskiy et al., "Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: February-July 2002," 20.

force, seldom deployed for specialized operations. In response to these challenges, Ukraine's SF underwent restructuring, now operating under a distinct command structure, with heightened emphasis on their training and equipment provision. Anticipating the Russian invasion, Ukrainian SF had previously expanded their capabilities by incorporating land, air, and maritime components. Ukrainian SF have had a significant impact during the conflict and were integral component in the defense of Kyiv and counteroffensive in September 2022.

Integral to the overhaul of the military structure was the formation of the Territorial Defense Force (TDF)—a reorganization of volunteer militias that formed during the war in Donbas—a crucial element that significantly augmented the capabilities of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The TDF are a civilian reserve force comprised of part-time reservists, combat veterans, and expanded to include local civilian volunteers for local defense. The TDF aimed to leverage Ukraine's substantial reserves and the determination of its population to generate mass and, consequently, resilience. Formed as a cohesive entity in January 2022, the TDF displayed conceptual promise and has evolved into a valuable mechanism for developing new combat units capable of supporting the armed forces through effective training from Ukrainian SOF.

At the core of military restructuring, Ukraine focused heavily on the development of a proficient non-commissioned officer (NCO) corps, which laid the foundational groundwork for Ukrainian defenses. Through a series of reforms, Ukrainian armed forces created seven new NCO ranks and increased pay to retain experienced NCOs who fought in Donbas. The development of an NCO corps allowed for effective use of mission command, allowing units to retain a high level of autonomy and decision-making authority at lower echelons. The ability to exercise mission command was instrumental to Ukraine's ability to maximize protection and become more agile on the battlefield. Units operating in a decentralized fashion was exemplified in the Kharkiv counter offensive in the northeast of the country in September 2022, regaining large swathes of land, with individual commanders able to make decisions quicker than their Russian counterparts. In addition to Ukrainian leadership needing to reorganize their defense forces—revamping

organizations and updating doctrine—key leadership changes needed to happen to continue institutional change to meet NATO standards.

Central to military modernization, Zelensky aggressively rooted out corruption in the military, intel, and other key government institutions, to signal to both the domestic public and western leaders that Ukraine is taking corruption seriously. At the onset of the invasion, President Zelensky took decisive action by demoting two generals for treason. Throughout the conflict, Ukraine has been engaged in a continuous struggle to identify and eliminate corrupt officials. The defense minister, Oleksii Reznikov, faced removal after eighteen months due to corruption scandals related to the procurement of wartime supplies and profiteering. Zelensky also fired all of the regional military recruitment bosses amid allegations of bribery and corruption across multiple departments. This ongoing anti-corruption effort aligns with Ukraine's goals of bolstering its military capabilities, gaining support from the population, and securing international backing.

Rooting out corruption builds trust between the Ukrainian population and the Ukrainian government—removing corrupt officials or mitigating oligarchs' ability to extort the populace—fostering unity between civilian-military-government relations. Rooting out corruption also bolstered confidence among third party state-sponsors, helping Zelensky galvanize international support to secure funding, weapons, and other assistance to aid the war effort.

Many previous government officials and agencies still had ties to Russian security services, presenting serious counterintelligence risks (CI). High-risk CI situations suggest a potential vulnerability where sensitive information, strategic plans, or national security secrets could be compromised or manipulated by individuals with connections to a foreign power. It underscores the importance of addressing and mitigating these risks to ensure the safeguarding of critical national interests and maintaining the integrity of governmental operations. The Security Service of Ukraine (S.B.U), consisting of 27,000 personnel, is responsible for domestic security and intelligence. They play a leading role in spearheading the counterintelligence efforts in the country. Even those indirectly involved with collaborating with Russia have not been spared from removal. Zelensky ousted the Head of the Domestic Intelligence Agency, Ivan Bakanov, and Ukraine's

Prosecutor General, Iryna Venediktova, holding them accountable for failing to cleanse their agencies of collaborators.

In areas under Russian occupation, it is estimated that more than 60 prosecutors and domestic intelligence agents, along with over 800 civilians, are suspected of engaging in activities such as sabotage and reconnaissance for Russia. Removing and compartmentalizing the individuals who were still sympathetic to the Russian cause is necessary to ensure Ukrainian efforts are not subverted by Russian collaborators. Similar to Afghanistan, GIROA was never able to stem the inherent corruption in the governmental system which slowly eroded its ability to effectively govern. The Taliban exploited the corruption in the government to meet its ends and were successful in infiltrating GIROA institutions and organizations subverting their efforts. Ukraine's continuing efforts to root out Russian sympathizers only makes Ukrainian defense more resilient against insider threats.

By building trust and professionalizing the military, Ukraine's leadership were instrumental in steering institutional change to make Ukraine more resilient. Both Poroshenko and Zelensky recognized the imperative of mobilizing the populace for a whole-of-society approach to defense, bridging the gap between military and civilian spheres. Joint government and civilian sector initiatives focused on creating redundancy in vital systems, securing infrastructure, stockpiling resources, and developing contingency plans that ensure the uninterrupted provision of critical services.¹⁰² Collaboration across government agencies, private sector enterprises, and the civilian populace cultivated resiliency, reinforcing Ukraine mentally and physically against the Russian threat allowing Ukraine to implement an effective whole-of-society strategy.

B. UKRAINIAN STRATEGY: COUNTERING RUSSIA THROUGH TERRAIN EXPLOITATION, GUERILLA TACTICS, AND LEVERAGING THE CIVILIAN POPULACE TO RESIST OCCUPATION

Similar to the historical vignettes, Ukraine developed and employed a whole-of-society approach utilizing asymmetric methods that was essential for resisting Russia's

¹⁰² *Building Resilience for the Future – Lessons from Ukraine*, 6–28.

invasion. The asymmetric methods include effective use of terrain, guerilla tactics, leveraging the civilian populace, all while also fostering government-industry collaboration and capitalizing on readily available dual-use technology.¹⁰³

Ukraine has made good use of its terrain, namely its dense urban areas that have proven to be difficult for Russian forces due to the complexity and challenges fighting in multi-layered urban areas. Like that of South Lebanon, it is difficult for an occupying force to pacify and root out all of the resistance in a densely packed urban area, which provide sufficient cover and concealment for Ukrainian forces to implement guerilla tactics against their adversaries. The dense urban areas allowed Ukrainian forces to implement hit-and-run tactics and bait Russian forces into ambushes. The Russian armored column on the way to Kyiv, from February to April 2022, was constantly attacked by Ukrainian forces who would bait Russians into complex ambushes, and attrit them using mines, anti-tank weapons, and artillery, to fix, turn, or disrupt their advances.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, they skillfully employed precise firepower to attrit enemy forces caught in the ambush. The urban areas afforded Ukrainian forces sufficient protection from enemy fires, using urban areas as base of operations and as a natural stronghold.¹⁰⁵

Ukrainian forces also effectively used terrain to conceal Ukrainian troop movement, allowing forces to evade both adversary surveillance and avoid detection by electronic warfare systems.¹⁰⁶ The technique of masking movement through terrain would also apply to equipment as well, drones are pre-programed to fly nape-of-the-earth

¹⁰³ *Explaining the Tactics behind Ukraine's Rapid Counter-Offensive*, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fiiAmiipj8g>; *Ukrainian Soldiers Explain Tactics For Defeating Russian Forces Near Kharkiv*, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRIfiKuXHAc>.

¹⁰⁴ *Russian Tanks Seen Being Ambushed on Outskirts of Kyiv, Ukraine*, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=4g68MmLrGvM>; *Ukrainian Forces Destroy Russian Armored Column In Kyiv Region*, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ryCBcq_qxk; broforwin, "Various Aerial Clips from the Battle of Dmytrivka (Outskirts of Kyiv) Shows Russian Columns and Vehicles Being Picked off and Destroyed," Reddit Post, *R/CombatFootage*, April 3, 2022, www.reddit.com/r/CombatFootage/comments/tvb662/various_aerial_clips_from_the_battle_of_dmytrivka/.

¹⁰⁵ Kristin Ljungkvist, "A New Horizon in Urban Warfare in Ukraine?," *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies* 5, no. 1 (August 11, 2022): 96, <https://doi.org/10.31374/sjms.165>.

¹⁰⁶ Zabrodskyi et al., "Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfighting from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: February-July 2022," 21,37.

to avoid counter UAS/counter battery systems until reaching its designated target.¹⁰⁷ The utilization of terrain to mask movements afforded protection of equipment from being intercepted and targeted by Russian fires.

Similar to the strategy in Vietnam, Ukrainian leadership understood the necessity to disperse their forces to mitigate the effects of the initial Russian strike to dislocate and knock out Ukrainian defensive capabilities.¹⁰⁸ The ability to disperse forces, then efficiently mass to decisively engage with the enemy and quickly disperse again to avoid adversarial targeting proved most effective on the battlefield.¹⁰⁹ The ability to avoid detection from adversarial surveillance and firepower proved useful for the survivability of Ukrainian forces during the Russian invasion. Ukraine employed of small maneuver units, utilizing swarm tactics and relying on terrain for force protection, enhanced unit survivability by reducing detection and minimizing the units value as viable target for precision munitions.

Additionally, Ukrainian leadership, for years prior to the Russian invasion, mobilized the civilian populace and its resources for total war, utilizing a mobile defense strategy to augment regular forces and provide layers of defense. The strategy included implementing irregular forces, allowing Ukrainian leadership to generate forces from the civilian populace, specifically the Ukraine territorial defense forces (TDF). TDF are civilians who undergo basic military training designed for civil defense purposes and to serve as significant reserves for the Ukrainian army.¹¹⁰ Progressing from rear-area security roles, TDFs currently augment maneuver brigades and engage in offensive operations.¹¹¹ Bridging the civilian and military divide allowed Ukraine to enhance the defense industrial base in irregular forces, intelligence, logistics, and the effective use of commercial off the shelf (COTS) technology.

¹⁰⁷ Zabrodskyi et al., 21,37.

¹⁰⁸ Zabrodskyi et al., 53.

¹⁰⁹ Zabrodskyi et al., 3.

¹¹⁰ “Ukrainians Are Training in Civil Defense, Just in Case,” PBS NewsHour, February 12, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/ukrainians-are-training-in-civil-defense-just-in-case>.

¹¹¹ “Ukrainians Are Training in Civil Defense, Just in Case.”

Similarly, to all three historical vignettes, leveraging the civilian populace creates an informational advantage for Ukraine against the invading force, which allows Ukrainian forces to dictate the operational tempo on the ground. Ukrainian forces could outmaneuver and fire on enemy forces based on the information they were receiving from the civilian populace through software-based communications like Diia app and Telegram.¹¹² The civilian populace were reporting on enemy locations that the Ukrainian forces could then engage with ground forces or fires capabilities. Additional to maintaining the information advantage, the ability to operate on interior lines is imperative for logistics.

The joint efforts between the Ukrainian government and civilian sectors bolstered Ukraine's overall defense readiness and ensured the continuity of essential services in even the most challenging circumstances. Pivotal aspects of this collaborative framework lie in the ability to leverage expertise and technologies for dual-use applications. The Ukraine government optimized and repurposed existing civilian infrastructure, networks, and emergency services efficiently, transforming them into essential components of defense. Civilian industries exhibit distinct attributes, including a proclivity for innovation, adaptability, and cost-efficiency, which collectively play a critical role in augmenting a weak state's defense capabilities.

For example, Ukraine needed to ensure continued operations on interior lines necessitating thorough preparation of logistics networks and the skill to leverage battlefield recoveries. Non-standard logistics, encompassing unconventional supply chains and resource utilization, has become paramount for sustaining military efforts in dynamic and unpredictable environments. Ukraine has adeptly repurposed recovered Russian equipment, particularly tanks, on the battlefield.¹¹³ Establishing a network of refurbishment centers and employing skilled mechanics, Ukraine ensures the

¹¹² "Digital Transformation in Ukraine: Before, During, and After the War," ALI Social Impact Review, accessed April 28, 2023, <https://www.sir.advancedleadership.harvard.edu/articles/digital-transformation-in-ukraine-before-during-after-war>; Tom Simonite, "Ukraine's Digital Ministry Is a Formidable War Machine," *Wired*, accessed April 28, 2023, <https://www.wired.com/story/ukraine-digital-ministry-war/>.

¹¹³ *Inside the Secret Tank Repair Battalion near Ukraine's Front Lines*, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hl0j-abNd_k.

maintenance of both their existing tank inventory and those reclaimed from the battlefield.¹¹⁴ This logistical network, strategically positioned near the frontlines, plays a pivotal role in sustaining Ukraine's capability to effectively engage in armored warfare.¹¹⁵

Additionally, Ukrainian armed forces have leveraged COTS drones to offset the lack of close-air-support for ground forces and for targeting Russian forces.¹¹⁶ Using drones as part of the kill-chain to acquire targets, triangulate the position and leverage precision munitions is nothing new, but the sheer volume of drones that are being used daily is remarkable. Similarly, the use of the 'kamikaze' drone is nothing new but has proved to be effective on the battlefield. The kamikaze-drone—which is a loitering munition—has proven a cost effective multifaceted-tool to both erode morale and eliminate targets, and drones continue to evolve to become larger and more devastating.¹¹⁷

Ukraine has adroitly harnessed commercial off-the-shelf technology to enhance its defense capabilities. Initially utilized for surveillance and intelligence, drones have been ingeniously adapted to carry munitions. The Ukrainian military's inventive use of these off-the-shelf technologies extends to launching military-grade drones deep into enemy territory. The innovative approach to drone use has enabled Ukraine to target warships in the Black Sea, strike an airport in Western Russia, and even engage targets in Moscow, as reported by Russian officials and media sources. These attacks signify a strategic use of readily available technology, showcasing Ukraine's ability to leverage innovation for cross-border operations and naval attacks. The ability to produce the volume needed can only come from leveraging the populace and civilian sector, similar

¹¹⁴ *Inside the Secret Tank Repair Battalion near Ukraine's Front Lines.*

¹¹⁵ *Inside the Secret Tank Repair Battalion near Ukraine's Front Lines.*

¹¹⁶ "From Blockchain To COTS, Commercial Tech In Ukraine Is Determining The Future Of Modern Warfare," accessed November 10, 2023, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/from-blockchain-cots-commercial-tech-ukraine-future-modern-mckay>; *Face to Face with the Enemy: Trench Battles of the 3rd SAB for the "Road of Life" to Bakhmut*, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LulaA-U7-M>.

¹¹⁷ *Ukraine Releases Drone Video Purporting to Show Massive Losses of Russian Weapons* | CNN, 2023, <https://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2023/11/11/ukraine-russia-drone-ships-hit-crimea-pleitgen-ebf-vpx.cnn>.

to the production of IEDs in Afghanistan, a constant influx of materials and parts is needed to sustain the production of arguable the most effective tool on the battlefield. So, like the IED makers of Afghanistan, the individuals in Ukraine that can create, augment, and/or program drones become essential and a force multiplier in the fight on the modern battlefield.

Ukraine has implemented a mobile defense in depth strategy that combines the deployment of both regular armed forces and irregular units, thereby creating a versatile and adaptive military posture to effectively counter aggression and secure its territorial integrity. Ukraine successfully employed asymmetric methods, incorporating the strategic utilization of terrain, guerilla tactics, and mobilizing the civilian populace to resist occupation. By maintaining a small, agile, and undetectable force, while simultaneously embracing rapid modernization and capitalizing on accessible dual-use technology, Ukraine transformed its initial force disadvantage into a strategic advantage, effectively countering and exploiting the tactics of its adversaries. Additional to implementing an effective strategy to counter Russian tactics, Ukraine extended its influence beyond the physical battlefield, engaging in cognitive warfare through information operations.

C. INFORMATION OPERATIONS: TARGETING THE DOMESTIC, INTERNATIONAL, AND ADVERSARY AUDIENCES THROUGH COGNITIVE WARFARE

Ukrainian leadership adroitly, and often in an innovative way, used IO to shape internal, external, and Russian perceptions. Ukraine used the information domain as a form of cognitive warfare—targeting domestic, neutral, and adversary audiences—to secure the popular will of the global community to oppose Russian aggression and actively counter Russian propaganda and disinformation.¹¹⁸ By exposing the falsehoods spread by Russia and providing accurate information about the conflict, Ukraine aimed to undermine support for the war within Russia and shape international opinion against Russian aggression. The effective use of social media and open-source information

¹¹⁸ “Word War: In Russia-Ukraine War, Information Became a Weapon | AP News,” accessed November 12, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-technology-politics-782d23450e93b667afd7b57e0bba365f>.

emerged as essential tools in countering the Russian narrative and gaining international support.¹¹⁹

Information Operations (IO) have proven to be a cornerstone of Ukraine's strategy, especially in communicating with its domestic audience. In the face of geopolitical challenges and conflict, Ukraine has skillfully utilized IO to shape narratives, enhance national resolve, and foster unity among its citizens. The strategic communication efforts have played a crucial role in informing the Ukrainian people about national priorities, countering external narratives, and creating a shared sense of purpose. By effectively managing information, Ukraine has not only built resilience among its populace but has also rallied support for key initiatives. In essence, IO has become a vital tool for the Ukrainian government to strengthen its ability to communicate, reinforcing the nation's strategic objectives and garnering domestic backing during critical times.

The Ministry of Digital Transformation played a crucial role in Ukraine's strategy to connect with its domestic audience. It served as a channel for communication between the government and the public.¹²⁰ Utilizing software-based apps for smartphones, the government could push vital information on resistance activities, air raid warnings, or evacuation routes out of conflict areas.¹²¹ Civilians had the ability to report of Russian activity through photos and video chat. Ukraine has leveraged closer industry-government ties to engage with domestic target audiences more effectively in the effort of defense but have also leveraged it for international audiences as well.

Zelensky's ability to engage with world leaders and advocate for Ukraine's cause played a pivotal role in sustaining international attention on the conflict and securing vital external support. Zelensky has given compelling speeches, impactful press conferences, and his diplomatic endeavors have effectively conveyed Ukraine's position, highlighted

¹¹⁹ "Word War: In Russia-Ukraine War, Information Became a Weapon | AP News."

¹²⁰ Simonite, "Ukraine's Digital Ministry Is a Formidable War Machine."

¹²¹ "Technology Is Deepening Civilian Involvement in War," *The Economist*, accessed November 19, 2023, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2023/07/03/technology-is-deepening-civilian-involvement-in-war>.

Russia's unjust aggression, and bolstered solidarity from the global community.¹²² Ukraine has implemented a calculated information campaign, focusing on neutral nations, international organizations, and individuals, to garner both direct and indirect support, highlighting Ukraine's anti-corruption effort to quell any concerns about Ukraine's resolve. Ukraine has made a concerted effort to secure third-party support or, as a minimum, dissuade third parties from backing the adversary, highlighting Russian war crimes, the need for democracies to resist Russian aggression, and how Russia poses an existential threat to the free world.

Additionally, Ukraine has employed a deliberate IO strategy aimed at persuading the Russian audience, encompassing both military personnel and civilians, that their cause is, unjust and that victory in the war is unattainable, while advocating for a swift resolution to the conflict. Ukraine forces have leveraged current technologies, like Clearview AI, to personally identify Russian soldiers on the battlefield, identify their family members through internet searches, and then target and direct specific messages directly to an individual, effectively personalizing propaganda rather than targeting the masses.¹²³ The Ministry of Digital Transformation stood up an all-volunteer 'IT Army' of hackers that target Russian state agencies, state-owned firms, and banks with distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks. This phenomenon has a significant impact on the general population, as individuals naturally want to avoid an adversary targeting them specifically. Consequently, there arises a pertinent question among Russian's regarding the measures their government is implementing to safeguard its citizens from such targeted attacks.

D. EXTERNAL SUPPORT

U.S and NATO external support played a pivotal role in professionalizing the Ukrainian military through training, boosting capabilities through security assistance and

¹²² "Inside Volodymyr Zelensky's Struggle to Keep Ukraine in the Fight," *TIME*, October 30, 2023, <https://time.com/6329188/ukraine-volodymyr-zelensky-interview/>.

¹²³ Drew Harwell, "Instead of Consumer Software, Ukraine's Tech Workers Build Apps of War," *Washington Post*, March 24, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2022/03/24/ukraine-war-apps-russian-invasion/>.

intelligence sharing, and fortifying defense posture through diplomatic backing. The strategic partnerships formed with the U.S. and NATO have been integral to Ukraine's achievements.

Starting in 2015, the U.S. military established the Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine, bringing together conventional and special operations units from NATO to train the Ukrainian military.¹²⁴ Conventional units concentrated on bulk force generation across major branches, including armor, artillery, air defense, and the professional development of NCOs and officers. While staff-level planning received attention, a significant portion of the training focused tactically on small arms, marksmanship, close-quarters combat, and patrolling.¹²⁵

Special operations forces engaged in institution building, creating the Ukrainian special operations qualification course to produce Ukrainian special operators.¹²⁶ SOF also played an integral role in program development for Ukrainian special operations, covering unconventional warfare tactics such as sniper operations, ambushes, mobile-defense, and long-range reconnaissance.¹²⁷ Following the invasion, Special Operations Forces (SOF) persist in delivering urgent training remotely through advisory and assistance roles. Ukrainian SOF communicates emerging Russian tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) to their U.S. SOF counterparts. In response, the U.S. SOF swiftly develops counter-TTPs, creates concise training programs, and then instructs the Ukrainian Forces on these counter techniques before they re-enter the battlefield.¹²⁸ Given the dynamic nature of the battlefield, where changes occur every 30 to 60 days, the emphasis lies in adapting quickly and integrating new technology to gain an advantage.

¹²⁴ Stavros Atlamazoglou, "US Special Operators Borrowed a Unique Part of Army Green Beret Training to Prepare Ukrainians to Fight Russia," Business Insider, accessed February 4, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-developed-version-of-special-forces-q-course-for-ukrainians-2023-1>.

¹²⁵ Atlamazoglou.

¹²⁶ Atlamazoglou.

¹²⁷ Federico Borsari, "Hunting the Invader: Ukraine's Special Operations Troops," CEPA, March 15, 2022, <http://cepa.org/article/hunting-the-invader-ukraines-special-operations-troops/>.

¹²⁸ Borsari.

Ukraine's involvement in large joint multinational training exercises led by the U.S. and NATO facilitated the integration of conventional and special operations forces, contributing to improved command and control at both the tactical and operational levels.¹²⁹ Collaborative training exercises with U.S. and NATO forces improved interoperability, tactical proficiency, and overall military readiness of the Ukrainian armed forces. Special Operations Forces (SOF) played a pivotal role training and modernizing Ukrainian forces leading up to the 2022 invasion.¹³⁰

In addition to tactical unit training, the United States and NATO has provided Ukraine with a comprehensive arsenal of military equipment and training on how to utilize them, covering small arms, ammunition, tanks, armored combat vehicles, air defense systems, artillery, anti-armor weaponry, drones, and fighter jets.¹³¹ Most notably, the U.S. has found creative solutions in bolstering Ukraine's air defense by repurposing old munitions. The 'FrankenSAM' program is piecemealing together various components to create innovative air defense capabilities for Ukraine—radar kits with sidewinder missiles, RIM 7 Sea Sparrow missiles on Soviet era Buck launchers, older generation Hawk air defense systems, and the VAMPIRE system that can turn civilian vehicles into air defense technicals—innovating solutions to fill critical defensive gaps.¹³² This diverse and sophisticated array of equipment enhances Ukraine's ground and aerial capabilities, contributing significantly to the nation's overall military strength.

¹²⁹ "Ukraine's Special Ops Join 16 Nations at Combined Resolve XI," DVIDS, accessed February 3, 2023, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/308614/ukraines-special-ops-join-16-nations-combined-resolve-xi>.

¹³⁰ Borsari, "Hunting the Invader"; "Ukraine's Special Ops Join 16 Nations at Combined Resolve XI"; Atlamazoglou, "US Special Operators Borrowed a Unique Part of Army Green Beret Training to Prepare Ukrainians to Fight Russia"; Liam Collins, "How Ukrainians Transformed Their Military to Take on Russia, According to a U.S. Official Who Watched Them Do It," Business Insider, accessed April 28, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/how-ukrainians-reformed-their-military-to-take-on-russia-2022-5>; NATO, "NATO Recognises Ukraine as Enhanced Opportunities Partner," NATO, accessed April 28, 2023, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_176327.htm.

¹³¹ "Ukraine Weapons: What Tanks and Other Equipment Are Countries Giving?," *BBC News*, July 1, 2022, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62002218>.

¹³² Nicholas Slayton, "Pentagon Is Sending 'FrankenSAMs' to Ukraine," 1697308745, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/pentagon-is-sending-frankensams-to-ukraine/ar-AA1idicO?ocid=msedgntp&cvid=8c912edb89984da5b900dd98bdec285&ei=16>.

Simultaneously, Ukrainians embarked on training initiatives with the CIA to cultivate a force adept at organizing and executing resistance operations.¹³³ The CIA stood up the SBU 5th directorate and GUR as a proactive component of Ukraine's security service, integral to the resistance movement, focused on offensive actions, intelligence gathering, and operations within Russian-occupied territories to preempt Russian subversion.¹³⁴ This specialized force worked diligently to establish both the human and physical infrastructure required for effective resistance operations well in advance of any potential invasion. Focusing on irregular warfare operations and tactics behind enemy lines, the CIA taught Ukrainians how to maintain secure communications and provided signal intelligence equipment to assist in intelligence operations.¹³⁵

The strategic and tactical intelligence sharing between the United States and Ukraine has played a pivotal role in bolstering the Ukrainian war effort and significantly increasing the risks and costs associated with Russia's invasion. Through real-time intelligence exchanges, the U.S. has provided information on critical Russian infrastructure, including command and control nodes and supply depots.¹³⁶ Having U.S. intelligence allowed Ukraine to efficiently target Russian forces to maximize the effect of their limited resources.¹³⁷

To counter Russia's hybrid war threat, Ukraine and its NATO partners have conducted exercises and training sessions focused on cyber defense, ensuring that key national stakeholders are well-prepared to respond to major cyber threats targeting the

¹³³ "CIA-Trained Ukrainian Paramilitaries May Take Central Role If Russia Invades," Yahoo News, January 13, 2022, <https://news.yahoo.com/cia-trained-ukrainian-paramilitaries-may-take-central-role-if-russia-invades-185258008.html>.

¹³⁴ "Ukrainian Spies with Deep Ties to CIA Wage Shadow War against Russia," *Washington Post*, October 23, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/10/23/ukraine-cia-shadow-war-russia/>.

¹³⁵ "CIA-Trained Ukrainian Paramilitaries May Take Central Role If Russia Invades"; "Ukrainian Spies with Deep Ties to CIA Wage Shadow War against Russia."

¹³⁶ Julian E. Barnes and Helene Cooper, "Ukrainian Officials Drew on U.S. Intelligence to Plan Counteroffensive," *The New York Times*, September 10, 2022, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/10/us/politics/ukraine-military-intelligence.html>.

¹³⁷ "U.S. Assistance to Ukraine in the Information Space: Intelligence, Cyber, and Signaling | START.Umd.Edu," 21, accessed November 12, 2023, <https://www.start.umd.edu/publication/us-assistance-ukraine-information-space-intelligence-cyber-and-signaling>.

country's defense infrastructure.¹³⁸ Ukraine worked in partnership with the United States and NATO to establish the Incident Management Centre for monitoring cybersecurity events. The cybersecurity collaboration also involved the creation of specialized laboratories dedicated to investigating cyber incidents, along with the implementation of training programs focused on utilizing advanced technology and equipment.¹³⁹ The United States and NATO have played a crucial role in boosting Ukraine's cybersecurity by actively assisting in identifying potential cyber threats and countering executed cyberattacks.¹⁴⁰ Collaborative initiatives, focusing on strengthening network resilience in terms of both hardware and software, and enhancing detection capabilities, have emerged as pivotal factors in countering Russia's cyber effects.¹⁴¹ Key players in the U.S. IT sector, such as Amazon, Google, and Microsoft, played a pivotal role in facilitating and enhancing various preemptive measures enhancing Ukraine's cyber resiliency.¹⁴² The private sector offered their services free of charge and in a collaborative effort migrated the Ukrainian government data to cloud servers situated outside Ukraine to safeguard against Russian cyber-attacks.¹⁴³

Diplomatic efforts were instrumental to defense efforts as well. Zelensky and his team actively engaged with international allies and partners to rally support and exert diplomatic pressure on Russia. By leveraging diplomatic channels, Ukraine sought to isolate Russia and raise the costs of its aggression, potentially leading to fatigue and a reevaluation of its objectives. This diplomatic approach aimed to create a united

¹³⁸ "Cybersecurity in Ukraine: National Strategy and International Cooperation – Global Forum on Cyber Expertise," accessed April 28, 2023, <https://thegfce.org/cybersecurity-in-ukraine-national-strategy-and-international-cooperation/>.

¹³⁹ "Cybersecurity in Ukraine."

¹⁴⁰ "U.S. Assistance to Ukraine in the Information Space: Intelligence, Cyber, and Signaling | START.Umd.Edu," 11.

¹⁴¹ "U.S. Assistance to Ukraine in the Information Space: Intelligence, Cyber, and Signaling | START.Umd.Edu," 11.

¹⁴² "U.S. Assistance to Ukraine in the Information Space: Intelligence, Cyber, and Signaling | START.Umd.Edu," 13.

¹⁴³ "U.S. Assistance to Ukraine in the Information Space: Intelligence, Cyber, and Signaling | START.Umd.Edu," 13.

international front against Russian actions, weakening its position and paving the way to ending the conflict.

Stemming from the diplomatic efforts, the United States has provided Ukraine with substantial financial support, exceeding \$75 billion.¹⁴⁴ This funding is divided into \$46.6 billion for military spending, \$26.4 billion for economic initiatives, and \$3.9 billion for humanitarian aid, demonstrating a multifaceted commitment to fortify Ukraine's defense capabilities, promote economic resilience, and address humanitarian challenges.¹⁴⁵ Top donor countries of military aid to Ukraine include Germany, UK, Norway, Denmark, Poland, Netherlands, Canada, Sweden, and Finland total \$45 billion in just equipment and weapons alone.¹⁴⁶

Furthermore, the U.S. and NATO allies employed economic measures to target Russia's economic interests and impose sanctions.¹⁴⁷ The international community imposed economic sanctions with the intent to restrict Russia's access to resources, disrupt its economy, and generate internal pressures. The economic strain and potential impact on the Russian population could contribute to decreased support for the war and a reconsideration of Russia's objectives. Ukraine's external support is extensive and involves numerous countries, highlighting the importance of such assistance, even when Ukraine possesses the will, determination, and strategy to fight against Russian aggression.

¹⁴⁴ "How Much Aid Has the U.S. Sent Ukraine? Here Are Six Charts.," Council on Foreign Relations, accessed November 5, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/article/how-much-aid-has-us-sent-ukraine-here-are-six-charts>.

¹⁴⁵ "How Much Aid Has the U.S. Sent Ukraine?"

¹⁴⁶ "Ukraine Weapons: What Tanks and Other Equipment Are Countries Giving?," *BBC News*, July 1, 2022, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62002218>.

¹⁴⁷ The White House, "FACT SHEET: United States and Allies and Partners Impose Additional Costs on Russia," The White House, March 24, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/24/fact-sheet-united-states-and-allies-and-partners-impose-additional-costs-on-russia/>; NATO, "NATO's Response to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," NATO, accessed November 12, 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_192648.htm.

E. CONCLUSION ON ASSESSING THE KEY FACTORS THAT BOLSTERED UKRAINE’S RESILIENCE:

Ukraine’s adaptable leadership, flexible strategy, proficient information operations, and robust external backing exemplify Ukraine’s resilience in the face of modern warfare, which are all integral components of a protracted war strategy. Despite being ill-prepared during the Crimea crisis in 2014, Ukraine’s resilience and readiness significantly improved over the subsequent eight years. Ukrainian preparation, with U.S. and NATO support, was evident in Ukraine’s successful response to thwart a Russian coup de main attempt on Kyiv. The current stalemate in eastern Ukraine against Russia emphasizes the ongoing need for mobilizing and employing a whole of society approach, to thwart the adversary’s ability to consolidate gains on the battlefield and protect Ukrainian national sovereignty. The subsequent chapter will build on these findings and discuss lessons learned for the United States Government and its applicability for future conflicts.

V. CONCLUSION

This chapter aims to draw lessons from the Ukraine Conflict and establish best practices to provide guidelines that would help U.S. allies deter or defeat stronger adversaries in future conflicts. While the success in Ukraine has resulted from broader U.S. Government (USG) assistance with funding, weapons supply, and diplomatic efforts, this chapter focuses more specifically on the role of U.S. Special Operations Forces (USSOF) and partner nation support in the years prior to Russia's invasion. As U.S. national security challenges have pivoted from the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) to Great Power Competition, military thinkers and planners have grappled with the role of USSOF against Russia and China. The Ukraine scenario, and the significant role that USSOF and partner forces have played, highlights a critical new set of mission areas that, ironically, have been learned the hard way from fighting insurgencies like the Taliban. This chapter illustrates how USSOF can most effectively utilize these principles to thwart potential great power incursions.

In military endeavors, funding and authorities play pivotal roles. Ukraine's success is attributed to having the necessary funding and authorities in place, enabling sustained training, and equipping by the United States military to develop the Ukrainians into a formidable force. Over eight years of direct and persistent engagement, the USSOF facilitated Ukraine in developing irregular warfare capabilities, integrating both regular and irregular forces into defense, and improving civilian-military relations. This persistent engagement allowed USSOF to identify critical capability gaps that Ukraine needed for an effective defense. This chapter emphasizes the importance of proactive and persistent engagement with partner nations to inform USG planning efforts to assist countries in enhancing their deterrence and defense networks. The objective is to develop Special Operations Forces (SOF) units that USSOF can work with and through to strengthen partner nations deterrence and defense networks.

A. USSOF NEEDS TO DEVELOP IRREGULAR WARFARE CAPABILITIES AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

USSOF gains greater influence by persistent engagements at the institutional level through doctrine, organizational, training, and leadership development rather than one-off training engagements. The development of Special Operations Assessment and Selection and Qualification courses by USSOF is a sustainable model to produce competent SOF in the target country. Institutional building and reorganization play a crucial role in developing critical Special Operations Forces (SOF) capabilities to effectively conduct special operations and work with irregular units. First, by institutionalizing the integration of irregular warfare capabilities within the broader military framework, the organization creates a sustainable and enduring structure. This ensures that expertise and knowledge are embedded within the institutional fabric and are not solely reliant on individual operators that can attrit over time, losing capability.

Secondly, institutional building fosters the development of specialized training programs tailored to irregular warfare. This includes not only technical and tactical skills to shoot, move, communicate, mediate, and infiltrate, but also an understanding of the cultural, political, and social dynamics unique to irregular conflicts. By establishing dedicated institutions and training modules, SOF can enhance their adaptability and responsiveness when working with and through irregular units, who often operate in complex, asymmetric environments.

Furthermore, optimization of resources and personnel should happen early on and not in a time of crisis. Strategically positioning and adequately equipping SOF units allow for rapid response to emerging irregular threats. This targeted approach improves the overall efficiency and effectiveness of SOF capabilities, maximizing their impact in irregular warfare scenarios. Additionally, institutional building promotes collaboration and interoperability among different branches of the military and partner nations. By integrating irregular warfare capabilities into existing military structures, SOF can seamlessly coordinate with conventional forces, intelligence agencies, and other stakeholders. This collaborative approach enhances the overall effectiveness of irregular warfare operations, leveraging the strengths of various units and ensuring a unified

response to dynamic and unpredictable situations, but can only happen from early proactive engagement before the onset of a crisis.

1. Persistent Engagements

The concept of USSOF working with and through a partner nation underscores the importance of building enduring and collaborative frameworks that contribute to regional stability and security. Persistent engagement is essential in this context, as it allows for the establishment of lasting relationships and the development of a comprehensive understanding of the partner nation's unique political, social, and cultural dynamics. Persistent engagement facilitates the building of trust between USSOF and local partner forces. Trust is foundational for effective collaboration, and by consistently engaging with partner nations, USSOF can demonstrate commitment, reliability, and shared objectives. Trust becomes the bedrock upon which collaborative efforts for enhancing deterrence and defense networks are built.

Additionally, persistent engagement allows for continuous assessment of evolving security challenges within the partner nation. By maintaining an ongoing presence and dialogue, USSOF can stay abreast of local dynamics, emerging threats, and shifting priorities. This real-time understanding is crucial for adapting strategies and tactics, ensuring that collaborative efforts remain relevant and effective in the face of dynamic security environments.

Moreover, persistent engagement fosters the development of indigenous capabilities within the partner nation. By working with local forces over an extended period, USSOF can provide tailored training and capacity-building initiatives. This not only enhances the partner nation's ability to address immediate security concerns but also contributes to long-term self-sufficiency and resilience.

Persistent engagement is also instrumental in developing a shared vision and strategy for deterrence and defense. Through continuous dialogue and joint planning, USSOF can align objectives, synchronize efforts, and contribute to the creation of a cohesive and mutually beneficial security framework. This collaborative approach

ensures that the deterrence and defense networks established are rooted in shared understanding and commitment.

In summary, persistent engagement with local and other partner forces is imperative for USSOF working with and through a partner nation. It goes beyond episodic interactions, allowing for the cultivation of trust, adaptation to evolving challenges, development of indigenous capabilities, and the establishment of a lasting collaborative framework. Persistent engagement not only enhances regional security but also contributes to the broader goal of fostering stable and resilient global partnerships.

2. Understanding of Asymmetric Strategies

For USSOF, the role extends beyond operational execution; it encompasses the imperative to transfer knowledge and skills to others. Teaching individuals how to operate effectively in unconventional environments requires a deep understanding of key concepts, including asymmetric strategies, Information Operations (IO), and innovative technologies.

USSOF must comprehend the nuances of unconventional approaches, exploiting the weaknesses of larger adversaries and adapting to dynamic and unpredictable situations, adapting strategies learned from years of fighting other insurgencies such as the Taliban. This requires a reconceptualization of how to fight insurgencies, as has been the case in the GWOT, to successfully waging them to resist incursions from stronger adversaries. Understanding asymmetric strategies forms the basis for instructing others on how to navigate and succeed in contexts where conventional methods may be insufficient. Terrain utilization and guerilla warfare are essential when teaching unconventional approaches to defense. USSOF must be adept at leveraging geographical features to their advantage, using terrain for cover, concealment, and as a natural force multiplier. The ability to teach others how to optimize their surroundings is rooted in this nuanced understanding of the strategic value inherent in various landscapes. Guerrilla warfare, with its hit-and-run tactics, unconventional mobility, operating decentralized, and blending into local populations, requires a sophisticated understanding for effective instruction. USSOF must not only grasp guerilla tactics but also convey when and how to

employ them. Teaching others the art of guerrilla warfare involves imparting the knowledge to operate flexibly and adapt to ever-changing circumstances.

Moreover, USSOF should be well-versed in psychological operations, deception, and influence campaigns in support of IO. Teaching others how to manipulate information, shape perceptions, and exploit the cognitive dimensions of conflict necessitates a nuanced grasp of the strategic and psychological implications of IO.

Finally, staying abreast of innovative technologies and understanding how to properly integrate technology into operations is crucial. USSOF must comprehend the capabilities and limitations of emerging technologies, including unmanned systems, cyber capabilities, and advanced communication tools. Teaching others how to harness these innovations requires not only technical proficiency but also a strategic understanding of how these tools can be employed to achieve operational objectives. For example, utilizing COTS technology to create drones and direction finding (DF) capabilities to enhance the lethality of mortars, or using deception with swift mobility infiltration techniques to slip past an adversary's counter battery, release a swarm of drones, then using COTS DF ability to enable striking an adversary's HQ.

In essence, the ability of USSOF to teach others rests on their comprehensive mastery of asymmetric strategies. Through effective mentorship and training, USSOF can empower others to adapt and excel in complex and dynamic operational environments, ensuring the transfer of expertise and capabilities to partner nation SOF.

3. Early Proactive Engagement: Competent Partner Nation SOF Cannot be Created in a Crisis

Creating competent SOF is a complex and time-consuming process that extends beyond the capabilities of governments during the heightened urgency of a crisis. The effectiveness of a SOF unit relies on its capacity to recruit, train, and equip personnel adequately. Proper manning necessitates a considerable investment of time, resources, and planning, factors that are typically unavailable or severely limited during the acute phase of a crisis. For a SOF unit to reach its full potential, it requires a substantial lead time for recruitment. Identifying and selecting qualified personnel, conducting thorough

background checks, and ensuring a cohesive team dynamic are crucial elements that cannot be rushed. The recruitment process is not only about quantity but also quality, and hastily assembling a force during a crisis compromises the meticulous screening required for optimal unit cohesion.

Training is another pivotal aspect that demands careful consideration and time investment. Developing the skills, discipline, and coordination necessary for effective military operations is a gradual process. Training must be thorough and repetitive, allowing individuals to internalize procedures and responses. Attempting to expedite the training process amid a crisis risks inadequately prepared forces, leading to reduced effectiveness and increased risk on the battlefield. Equipping a SOF unit is equally time intensive. Procuring, testing, and distributing the appropriate weaponry, technology, and gear requires meticulous planning and resource allocation. Rushing this phase can result in logistical challenges, insufficient supplies, and compromised operational capabilities.

Furthermore, the validation of capabilities is a critical step in ensuring that a SOF unit can perform effectively in real-world scenarios. Adequate time is needed to conduct realistic training exercises, evaluate performance, and make necessary adjustments. Validation is an ongoing process that cannot be shortcut, as it forms the basis for confidence in a unit's abilities in combat.

Early and proactive engagement, occurring years before a crisis, is therefore essential. Governments cannot afford to fleetingly intervene once the situation appears volatile. Strategic foresight allows for the gradual building of competent forces, ensuring that recruitment, training, and equipping processes unfold systematically. A Proactive approach not only establishes a foundation of readiness but also enables governments to respond effectively when crises emerge, reducing risks and enhancing the overall success of military operations.

B. USSOF NEEDS TO DEVELOP SOF UNITS THAT ARE INTEGRATED IN A WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY DEFENSE

Partner SOF units, trained and developed by USSOF, need to understand how to train and equip citizens, which contributes to the creation of a well-prepared and

informed population. Through training programs, individuals gain a basic understanding of defense principles, emergency response, and national security. This knowledge empowers citizens to act as force multipliers during crises, facilitating a more effective and coordinated response. Engaging citizens in defense efforts enhances the nation's human infrastructure. By tapping into the diverse skills and expertise within the population, governments can build a versatile and adaptive defense force. This approach goes beyond traditional military capabilities, incorporating a wide range of civilian skills that can be valuable in irregular warfare scenarios and unconventional threats.

Additionally, these SOF units need to develop the human infrastructure by identifying community leaders who will stay at the onset of hostilities and can leverage pre-existing networks for defense. A strong human intelligence (HUMINT) network enhances situational awareness by collecting real-time intelligence on enemy activities, intentions, and capabilities from human sources. Human intelligence is crucial for informed decision-making at various command levels and contributes to force protection by offering early warnings of potential threats. The use of smart phone applications has been an innovative means for human networks to pass information to military forces. Training in software-based communications and appropriate signal management need implementing to avoid compromise of the network.

Furthermore, SOF units need to develop the physical infrastructure by establishing a non-standard logistics network of caches. Caches ensure operational flexibility, enabling the delivery of critical resources to military forces in unconventional or compromised supply route scenarios. Caches are particularly valuable in irregular warfare, where adapting to unconventional enemy structures and operating in discreet environments is essential.

To continue developing the physical infrastructure, SOF units should develop a defense plan with pre-planned fighting positions already established in areas identified to fix and/or turn advancing enemy columns. Pre-planned positions create defense in depth so elements can operate in a decentralized manner and mass only at the point of engagement, then disperse again, avoiding enemy targeting. Urban areas and areas with adequate foliage are suitable. Artillery is still proven king of the battlefield, and an

effective way to counter the effectiveness of artillery is to have a plan and the infrastructure to go subterranean.

C. USSOF CROSS-FUNCTIONAL TEAMS TO FOSTER CIVILIAN-GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION

The use of cross-functional teams, combining Civil Affairs (CA), Psychological Operations (PSYOP), and Special Forces (SF), should be employed to ensure seamless collaboration between government and industry, integrating their efforts into the deterrence and defense networks of nations. Civil Affairs (CA) plays a critical role in mapping and managing non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and takes charge of evacuating and handling displaced people, ensuring the provision of essential services. Concurrently, Psychological Operations (PSYOP) is deployed to promote resistance among the civilian populace. This involves enhancing the image of the legitimate government and targeting the adversary through various channels and mediums. The overarching goal is to influence public perception and bolster support for the legitimate government. Simultaneously, Special Forces (SF), operating through the host nation, focus on developing the necessary human and physical infrastructure to support resistance activities. This comprehensive approach involves a collaborative effort across CA, PSYOP, and SF to address the multifaceted aspects of managing crises and fostering resilience within the civilian population. The Civilian-Military-Government collaboration is instrumental in creating redundancy in critical services, thereby building physical resiliency. This resilience is vital for enabling both the civilian population and the military to sustain and continue their efforts in the face of challenges, ensuring a more robust defense infrastructure.

Furthermore, Leveraging the data literacy of the populace will develop the physical infrastructure further. Individuals equipped with skills in 3D printing, programming, and drone technology possess a valuable ability to swiftly adapt to emerging threats. Their capabilities extend to designing and producing customized tools, equipment, and replacement parts on-site. This reduces dependence on traditional supply chains, offering enhanced adaptability for military units. 3D printing facilitates rapid prototyping of equipment and components, allowing military units to quickly test and

modify designs based on real-time needs and feedback from the field. The collaboration between civilian, military, and government entities in maintaining services further emphasizes the interconnected and resilient nature of defense efforts.

D. USSOF NEEDS TO DEVELOP A REDUNDANCY IN THE COMMUNICATIONS ARCHITECTURE

Establishing and maintaining a robust redundancy in communications is critical to supporting various aspects of U.S. Government (USG) and U.S. Special Operations Forces (USSOF) operations, including remote advise and assist efforts, information operations (IO), psychological operations (psyop), targeting, and the effective use of drones. In environments where communications are contested, having multiple reliable pathways for communication is essential. This redundancy ensures the ability for Partner Nation SOF units to maneuver, coordinate between units, and transmit targeting information, whether originating from human intelligence or reconnaissance drones. If an adversary can disrupt communications effectively, creating a ‘blackout sphere’ over an occupied area, USSOF must develop means to ‘pierce the sphere’ to continue the flow of information to and from the area to communicate with the SOF units/operators operating within the contested area.

E. USG NEEDS TO BUILD A COALITION BETWEEN PARTNER NATIONS

Building a coalition of partner nations that can provide weapons and supplies, training, and funds offers several significant benefits. Firstly, it enhances collective military capabilities by pooling resources from various nations, allowing for a more comprehensive and robust response to security challenges. A collaborative approach promotes interoperability, as forces from different nations work together and become familiar with each other’s equipment and tactics. Additionally, the sharing of weapons and supplies among coalition partners ensures a diversified and well-equipped force, reducing the burden on individual nations to procure all necessary resources independently. This can lead to cost savings and optimization of military capabilities.

Furthermore, the provision of training by coalition partners allows for the exchange of expertise and best practices, fostering a more skilled and adaptable military force. Different nations bring unique perspectives and experiences, enriching the training environment and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the coalition. Additionally, training collaboration strengthens the bonds between military personnel from different nations, promoting trust and cooperation during joint operations.

Lastly, the financial contributions from coalition partners can significantly alleviate the economic burden on individual nations, enabling them to allocate resources more efficiently. Sharing financial commitments demonstrates a collective dedication to addressing common security concerns, reinforcing the solidarity and mutual responsibility among coalition members. In summary, building a coalition that provides weapons and supplies, training, and funds creates a synergistic effect, enhancing the overall capability, readiness, and resilience of the collective force in the face of complex and dynamic security environments.

F. PARTICIPATION OF PARTNER NATION SOF IN LARGE SCALE TRAINING EXERCISES TO DEVELOP PLANNING CAPABILITIES AT THE TACTICAL AND OPERATIONAL LEVELS, COMMAND AND CONTROL, AND BUILD INTEROPERABILITY BETWEEN UNITS

Large-scale training exercises between partner nations offer a myriad of benefits that contribute to the strengthening of international military cooperation and capabilities. These exercises foster interoperability by providing a platform for forces from different nations to train together in realistic scenarios, enhancing their ability to work seamlessly in multinational operations. The complexity of these exercises allows for the testing and refinement of tactical and operational plans, ensuring preparedness for a range of potential challenges. Additionally, such exercises develop greater command and control between units at echelon, building interoperability between units. The visible demonstration of joint military capabilities serves as a deterrent to potential adversaries, promoting stability. Furthermore, these exercises facilitate resource and burden sharing, optimizing financial and logistical resources. Lastly, they contribute to capability development by providing a platform to assess and improve military capabilities,

ensuring forces remain adaptive and relevant in the face of evolving threats. Overall, large-scale training exercises play a crucial role in promoting global security and strengthening the bonds between partner nations.

G. FINAL THOUGHTS

The United States government has the funding and a suite of authorities available to leverage to build actual deterrent capabilities compared to episodic training events. Developing a nation's capabilities benefits both USSOF and the partner force. Greater influence is gained by persistent engagements at the institutional level, influencing a partner's DOTMLPF-P, rather than one-off training engagements. This thesis provides a playbook for how weaker states can defend against a great power, with leadership being the fundamental aspect. No single template is applicable for all, and nations would need to tailor approaches to specific adversary strategies and the unique operational challenges of the environment.

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