The West is at war. Not a war of the old sort, fought with the thunder of guns, but a new sort, fought with the rustle of money, the shrill mantras of propagandists, and the stealthy whispers of spies. Often described as 'hybrid war,' a blend of the military and the political, it reflects both the way that war is changing in the modern world as well as Russia's attempt to divide, demoralize and distract the West as it asserts its claim to be a great power, with a sphere of influence and Ukraine and beyond.

This study explores the two parallel forms of 'non-linear warfare' and provides recommendations as to how the West can best respond.
HYBRID WAR OR GIBRIDNAYA VOINA?

Getting Russia’s non-linear military challenge right

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Executive Summary

The West is at war. It is not a war of the old sort, fought with the thunder of guns, but a new sort, fought with the rustle of money, the shrill mantras of propagandists, and the stealthy whispers of spies.

This is often described as ‘hybrid war,’ a blend of the military and the political, but in fact there are two separate issues, two separate kinds of non-linear war, which have become unhelpfully intertwined. The first is the way—as the Russians have been quick to spot—that modern technologies and modern societies mean that a shooting war will likely be preceded by and maybe even almost, but not quite, replaced by a phase of political destabilization. The second, though, is the political war that Moscow is waging against the West, in the hope not of preparing the ground for an invasion, but rather of dividing, demoralizing and distracting it enough that it cannot resist as the Kremlin asserts its claims to being a ‘great power’ and in the process a sphere of influence over most of the post-Soviet states of Eurasia.

The two overlap heavily, and maybe they could usefully be regarded as the two sides of a wider form of ‘non-linear war.’ The instruments which make up ‘political war’ are also crucial to the earlier phases of ‘hybrid war.’ Nonetheless, while a comprehensive analysis of the full arsenal and objectives of Moscow’s ‘political war’ against the West are beyond the scope of this report, a study of ‘hybrid war’ as the Kremlin sees it is essential to explore the nature of the potential threat not just to the West but other countries. In addition, it is central to understanding the way war is changing in the modern age, and what we can do in order to deter, defend and, if need be, defeat any ‘hybrid’ challenge.

To this end, his report initially considers the way Russian operations in Crimea and south-eastern Ukraine led to the rise of concerns about ‘hybrid war’ and the belief that it represents
something substantively new before questioning many of these assumptions by considering Russian thinking on the matter. **To Moscow, it is the West which led the way in pioneering political-military operations** focusing on destabilizing hostile regimes, and it has taken its cues from its sometimes-acute, sometimes-deeply-mistaken perceptions about our thinking.

**What has emerged, if not wholly new, is certainly a distinctive war of war**, one that is rooted, as discussed in the second part of the report, in response to five particular challenges or conditions with which Moscow must contend, from the mismatch between assets and ambitions, to the deinstitutionalization of Putin’s state. Part three then looks at the particular assets the Russians can deploy in their pursuit of ‘hybrid’ operations short of all-out warfare, from the special forces and thuggish gangster auxiliaries who seized Crimea in 2014 to spies, propagandists and spinmasters.

The point of trying to understand this threat is to respond to it, and the final part presents a series of observations and recommendations for Western policy. **The aim must be deterrence if possible, but such is the nature of this diffuse and undeclared form of war that this will often be by denial—developing ‘hybrid defenses’—and the right mix of forces ready for a conflict that could as easily be fought in cyberspace or the courts as on the battlefield.**

Nor is this simply a threat that will subside as and when Putin’s regime implodes or subsides, however inevitable this undoubtedly is. There are other revisionist powers in the world and likely to emerge. ‘Hybrid war’ is a convenient and catchy term, even if of questionable scholarly rigor, but if anything it simply reflects the way conflict is evolving, and **the sooner the West adapts to the Russian challenge, the better it will also be positioned to face the one coming next after that.**
About the Author

Mark Galeotti is a senior researcher at the Institute of International Relations Prague and an expert in Russian politics and security affairs. He studied history at Cambridge University and took his doctorate in politics at the London School of Economics. He still considers himself an historian, even if of the present day.

He has been an adviser at the British Foreign Office, visiting fellow with the European Council on Foreign Relations, visiting professor at Rutgers-Newark, MGIMO (Moscow) and Charles University (Prague), head of the history department at Keele University and professor of global affairs at New York University. Widely published, he has 15 books and hundreds of articles to his name and blogs at https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/.

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Part One: The ‘Hybrid War’ Scare

A specter is haunting Europe, the specter of ‘hybrid war.’ Whether or not that is the right name for it in theoretical-technical terms, this has become the term of art for a style of warfare that combines the political, economic, social and kinetic in a kind of conflict that recognizes no boundaries between civilian and combatant, covert and overt, war and peace. Rather, achieving victory—however that may be defined—permits and demands whatever means will be successful: the ethics of total war applied even to the smallest skirmish. Although the antecedents of such an approach lie elsewhere, current concerns very much focus on a revanchist and adventurist Russia. As Putin becomes increasingly assertive and also apparently genuinely gripped by a belief that the United States and the West are bent on his downfall, this has eclipsed such concerns as the turbulence in the Middle East and North Africa and nuclear proliferation as the primary concerns of NATO and its member states.

What the West considers ‘hybrid war’ is, to the Russians, actually two parallel but separate phenomena: the use of political means to prepare the battlefield before direct military action, and the pure use of political methods to bring about desired changes in policy in another state. One is true ‘hybrid war,’ the other perhaps best considered ‘political war.’

Meanwhile, though, it is necessary to note one crucial point: what the West considers ‘hybrid war’ is, to the Russians, actually two parallel but separate non-linear phenomena: the use of political means to prepare the battlefield before direct military action, and the pure use of political methods to bring about desired changes in policy in another state. One is true ‘hybrid war,’ the other perhaps best considered ‘political war.’
1. Introduction

NATO’s greatest challenge coming out of the [2014] Wales Summit is to take on two different forms of strategic challenge from the East and South simultaneously. These challenges are composed of very different actors, and various forms of modern hybrid warfare.

- Then-Supreme Allied Commander Europe Gen. Philip Breedlove, 2015

It is striking how US and NATO military perspectives on Russia have changed since 2014. From being all but written off as a decaying post-imperial nation of at best limited regional military significance, it is now being characterized as America’s most serious threat, even—in something of a rhetorical over-statement—a plausible ‘existential threat.’ Thus, in July 2015, newly-nominated Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford placed Russia at the top of his list of military threats to the USA, a view echoed by a string of other senior US military commanders.

The reason for this is not so much a sudden reassessment of Russia’s military, although the neat and professional way they occupied Crimea in 2014 was a useful wake-up call that they do have elite intervention units within their forces, just as the deployment to Syria in 2015 demonstrated unexpected power projection capabilities. Rather, it is rooted in alarm that what is widely being called Russia’s

The whole debate about hybrid war is really two debates intertwined: about the strategic challenge from an embittered and embattled Russia, and the changing nature of war in the modern age.

1 Guillaume Lasconjarias & Jeffrey Larsen (eds), NATO’s Response to Hybrid Threats (NATO Defense College, 2015), p. xxi

2 Speaking at his confirmation hearings before the Senate Armed Services Committee. He also noted that ‘[If] you want to talk about a nation that could pose an existential threat to the United States, I’d have to point to Russia.’
‘new way of war’ bypasses or neutralizes much of the West’s undoubted capacities and superiorities. NATO, after all, has more combat troops and reserves that Russia, spends ten times as much on defense, and can deploy much more advanced forces on the ground, at sea and in the air. But just as having an advantage in horse cavalry matters little in the age of machine guns and barbed wire, so too the fear is that, as one US officer suggests, ‘we spent billions preparing to fight the wrong war.’

Has Russia truly redefined the nature of war through its use of proxies, undeclared armies, and covert political operations in Crimea and the Donbas, though? No, it has not. Even though each individual aspect of recent operations is familiar, and despite Moscow’s continuing focus on conventional, high-intensity warfighting, nonetheless Russia’s recent actions have highlighted changes in the nature of war that say as much about the evolving battlespace as about Russian military thinking.

Thus, the whole debate about hybrid war is really two debates intertwined: about the strategic challenge from an embittered and embattled Russia, and the changing nature of war in the modern age.

‘Hybrid War’ as an accidental project

It is worth stressing what this study is not about. It is not primarily about the purely non-kinetic aspects of Moscow’s current struggle—war is not too strong a word, especially as that appears to be how the Kremlin frames it—with the West. Propaganda, political manipulation, economic blackmail and all these other instruments that have been covered elsewhere so well

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3 Conversation, Norfolk VA, March 2016

4 For an only partial list of the most useful examples, see: Ulrik Franke, War By Non-Military Means (FOL, 2015); Peter Pomerantsev & Michael Weiss, The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money (Institute of Modern Russia, 2014); James Sherr, Hard diplomacy and soft coercion: Russia’s influence abroad (Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2013)
already naturally appear, but they are explored primarily in terms of their roles as adjuncts to or preparations for military options.

At the other end of the spectrum, it only partially touches on the regular, full-throated warfighting that is still at the heart of Russian military rather than political planning. At the very time that Moscow is exploring the less-than-war options at its disposal—not least because it believes they are being used against Russia—it is also planning, training and equipping for high-tempo modern warfare.\(^5\) As will be discussed later, if Russia ever truly goes to war, it will do so with massive, intense bombardments, combined air, sea and land operations, and all the rest of the pyrotechnic panoply of modern warfare. This is what they train for, this is what they are spending their money on, and this is at the heart of Russian military thinking and writing.

Russia is implicitly and explicitly challenging the existing international order. This is not simply a regional question of asserting Moscow’s sphere of influence in Eurasia, it is also a global issue, about the importance and effectiveness of international law and shared understandings about sovereignty.

However, Russia is also in a relatively constrained situation, and facing an alliance that, for all its internal divisions and timidities, has more and better troops and equipment, backed by a larger population and massively greater resources. Thus, this is a study only of one aspect of Russia’s wider perspective on conflict in the modern world, one forced upon it by circumstance. Because Moscow, fully aware of this mismatch, has had to find asymmetric ways to assert its political agenda globally.

\(^5\) This is best demonstrated by the scale and nature of its ambitious training regime, which is clearly oriented towards large, fast, conventional assaults—see Johan Norberg, *Training to fight—Russia’s Major Military Exercises 2011–2014* (FOI, 2015) @ http://foi.se/rapport?rNo=FOI-R--4128--SE
and regionally in such a way as to maximize its limited strengths and minimize the West’s advantages, as visible in Ukraine and indeed Syria. Pressure of circumstance and opportunity has pushed it, inadvertently as much as anything else, towards what is being called the hybrid warfare route.

A whole series of events and processes have contributed to this, including the continuing military-technical revolution, the West’s growing aversion to taking human casualties, the interconnectedness of the world economy, the 24/7 news cycle, and the ‘Arab spring’ risings (which Moscow sincerely, facts on the ground notwithstanding, see as the products of Western subversion). The outcome, though, has been a growing fear that it is possible for Russia and other revisionist powers to achieve certain local and, it must be said, limited goals through the application of political will and a tailored mix of kinetic and political assets.

The result is not a specific playbook; even if one looks at the occupation of Crimea and the fomenting of insurrection in Ukraine’s southeast, these are very different kinds of operation.

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7 In other words, nations seeking to challenge the current global order. In this context, it is worth noting that Russia’s ‘hybrid warfare’ does bear a considerable similarity to China’s notion of ‘unrestricted warfare’, as defined in the seminal book by Senior Colonels Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare* (PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999). See also David Barno and Nora Bensahel, ‘A new generation of unrestricted warfare,’ *War On The Rocks*, 19 April 2016 @ http://warontherocks.com/2016/04/a-new-generation-of-unrestricted-warfare/

8 I explore this more in “Hybrid War” and “Little Green Men”: How It Works, and How It Doesn’t,’ in *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives*,
Rather, it is a way of looking at future conflict in a non-linear or asymmetric way, using political technologies to do what military force perhaps cannot, or at least cannot so easily.

This has been combined with the development of a series of Russian capabilities and assets able to wage certain kinds of blended political-military war. In part, this is a product of Vladimir Putin’s ambitious rearmament program, committing 23 trillion rubles (worth some $770 billion before the ruble’s recent crash) in a bid comprehensively to renovate Russian military capacities by 2020. Learning the lessons of the 2008 Georgian War (one fought largely through conventional means, but also local proxies, deniable cyberattacks and A key feature of Russian cyberattacks is, after all, that they are largely carried out by so-called “patriotic hackers” encouraged and supported by state agencies but operating autonomously. Scott Applegate, ‘Cybermilitias and political hackers: Use of high-intensity propaganda’), this also has led to the expansion of Russian commando forces, including the creation of a new Special Operations Command tasked precisely with deniable and political operations behind enemy lines.\(^1\)

There have been equally striking developments in non-kinetic capabilities. The GRU, military intelligence, has enjoyed a dramatic reversal in its previously-waning fortunes, in part precisely because—as has been demonstrated in Ukraine—it has the lead role in cyberwarfare,’ \(^{10}\) IEEE Security & Privacy 5 (2011)

\(^9\) A key feature of Russian cyberattacks is, after all, that they are largely carried out by so-called “patriotic hackers” encouraged and supported by state agencies but operating autonomously. Scott Applegate, ‘Cybermilitias and political hackers: Use of high-intensity propaganda’.


in working with insurgent and organized crime elements abroad. 12 The intelligence community as a whole has continued to enjoy Putin’s favor, sharpening their ability to conduct covert political but also terrorist attacks outside Russia’s borders,13 as well as not just cyberespionage but active cyberattacks.14

12 The use of organized crime as an instrument abroad has long been an established Russian practice; according to a US diplomatic cable released by Wikileaks, Spanish investigative magistrate José Grinda Gonzalez noted back in 2010 that it is willing to “use [organized crime] groups to do whatever the [government of Russia] cannot acceptably do as a government.” (@ http://www.theguardian.com/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/247712). The crucial role of the GRU in these operations has emerged more recently. For their recovery and role in the Ukrainian operations, see Mark Galeotti, ‘Crime And Crimea: Criminals As Allies And Agents,’ RFE/RL November 3, 2014 @ http://www.rferl.org/content/crimea-crime-criminals-as-agents-allies/26671923.html and ‘Putin’s Secret Weapon,’ Foreign Policy, July 7, 2014 @ http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/07/07/putins-secret-weapon/

13 Especially in Ukraine, although one could also make the case for the series of assassination of Chechen rebels and their supporters that have taken place in Europe, predominantly Turkey.

14 This has been widely discussed and acknowledged in the West; a particularly good encapsulation of the threat is Owen Matthews, ‘Russia’s greatest weapon may be its hackers,’ Newsweek, May 7, 2015, although a more extensive and scholarly studies are Volodymyr Lysenko and Barbara Endicott-Popovsky, ‘Action and Reaction: Strategies and Tactics of the Current Political Cyberwarfare in Russia,’ Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Information Warfare and Security (2013) and Andrzej Kozlowski, ‘Comparative analysis of cyberattacks on Estonia, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan,’ European Scientific Journal 10, 7 (2014). See also Oxford Analytica, ‘Russian cyber espionage to become more aggressive,’ 16 December 2014.
The huge government foreign media operation, spearheaded by the RT multi-lingual TV network, has been mobilized in an effort to undermine the will and capacity of the West to resist Russian operations. Meanwhile, the role of Russian money in supporting disruptive and divisive political movements in the West and infiltrating strategic economic sectors remains not just a concern, but one in which European intelligence agencies are seeing growing signs of strategic coordination. In and of themselves, none of these instruments are decisive, but together—and especially if Moscow manages to coordinate them more effectively, an issue discussed below—they form the basis for a formidable machine for fighting on the political front.

This, after all, is a crucial point. While developing a doctrine which places greater emphasis on preparing the battlefield in advance with propaganda and subversion, softening up the enemy before sending in the troops, the Russians are also increasingly relying on these non-kinetic methods alone. The presence of internet trolls on British web-pages or Russian apologists in Germany does not presage some apocalyptic Russian invasion, as such measures did in the Donbas. Rather, their role is as a surrogate. This new age of ‘non-linear war’ encompasses both the wholly political and the ultimately military.

15 Peter Pomerantsev & Michael Weiss, The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money (IMR, 2014)

16 As a senior German counter-intelligence put it to me, ‘before, Russian money came into Europe to be safe, now increasingly it is coming to be a danger.’ Conversation, November 2015

Hybrid War as a security challenge nonetheless

On one level, it does not matter whether ‘hybrid war’ exists as a distinct or novel style of contestation, or what we call it. The fact is that Russia is implicitly and explicitly challenging the existing international order. This is not simply a regional
question of asserting Moscow’s sphere of influence in Eurasia, it is also a global issue, about the importance and effectiveness of international law and shared understandings about sovereignty. Given Moscow’s determination to cloak its true capabilities and intents, and also to operate below and around the existing thresholds for direct military responses, any effective new policy—both to resist further westwards adventures and also deter other revisionist or aggressive powers from considering Russia an example to follow—depends on a timely, nuanced, and accurate understanding on the strengths and weaknesses of this new ‘way of war.’

The risks are, after all, considerable. The current Russian regime appears not only to have staked its political credibility on its revisionist program, it seems genuinely to believe that this is the only way to preserve Russian sovereignty and cultural integrity. Putin himself speaks increasingly the language of the clash of civilizations between Russia and the West. When justifying the annexation of Crimea, for example, he framed it as a response to a strategic campaign by the West to isolate and control Russia:

we have every reason to assume that the infamous policy of containment, led in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, continues today. They are constantly trying to sweep us into a corner because we have an independent position, because we maintain it and because we call things like they are and do not engage in hypocrisy.18

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17 See Dmitri Trenin, ‘Russia’s Breakout From the Post-Cold War System: The Drivers of Putin’s Course,’ Carnegie Moscow Center, 22 December 2014 @ http://carnegie.ru/2014/12/22/russia-s-breakout-from-
The prospect of a new and perhaps more challenging US presidency appears, if anything, to be encouraging Moscow only to feel all the more threatened—and to toughen its own line in response.

The present atmosphere of tension and confrontation will thus continue, regardless of the outcomes of the current struggle in Ukraine. An over-reaction will play to Putin’s narrative of grievance. It may also force the Kremlin into more overt aggression in its neighborhood and mischief-making beyond it. On the other hand, under-reaction, or a response which fails adequately to address the

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19 After all, while it is widely assumed in the West that Putin wholeheartedly welcomes Donald Trump’s victory, in fact he and the rest of the Russian foreign policy establishment appear markedly uncomfortable with the thought of an unpredictable and potentially more assertive White House.

20 For an excellent analysis, see András Rácz, Russia’s Hybrid War in Ukraine (Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2015)

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21 This was something attested to by a just-retired officer in the General Staff’s Main Operations Directorate, in Moscow in May 2015: ‘had Kiev fought in Crimea, they might not now be fighting in the Donbas.’
honest, that is one of the key point: to be glib, the Russians would simply call this ‘war.’

Whether new or old, nationally-specific or simply a manifestation of wider changes in the nature of state conflict, a prelude to full-blown hostilities or a political struggle in its own right, it has been used to challenge the global order and the borders of Europe. And it is likely to be used to that end again.

To deter and resist this phenomenon most effectively, it must be understood, shorn of the temptations to exaggerate, demonize and mobilize the threat for political purpose. In comprehension there is the best security: to flip an increasingly over-used cliché, this is the true weaponization of information.
2. The ‘Hybrid War’ Bandwagon

Russia has increasingly focused on new and less conventional military techniques. These asymmetric tactics (sometimes described as unconventional, ambiguous or non-linear warfare) techniques are both more aligned to Russian strengths, and considerably more difficult for NATO to counter. The Russian use of asymmetric warfare techniques ... therefore, represents the most immediate threat to its NATO neighbours and other NATO Member States.

- British House of Commons Defense Committee, 2014.¹

The US military developed its own notion of blended political-military ‘hybrid threats’ over a decade ago, following William Nemeth’s use of the term ‘hybrid war’ in connection with the conflict in Chechnya,² but this was essentially seen in the context of kinetic struggles in which terrorism and even pseudo-criminal operations are used to support more conventional assets. It was assumed that it would generally be a tactic of insurgent states or non-state actors. Increasingly, though, there is an awareness that it can also be employed by peer states and the dominant side in a conflict. ³ In the

The corollary of the Clausewitzian doctrine that war is politics by other means is that politics can also be war by other means.


² In his 2002 masters thesis ‘Future War and Chechnya: A Case for Hybrid Warfare’ at the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, available @ http://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/5865/02J un_Nemeth.pdf?sequence=1

³ This is something which had already been raised in Western discussions, such as by Michael Breen and Joshua Geltzer, ‘Asymmetric
introduction to the 2015 edition of the International Institute for Strategic Studies' authoritative *Military Balance*, Russia's hybrid warfare is described as including

the use of military and non-military tools in an integrated campaign designed to achieve surprise, seize the initiative and gain psychological as well as physical advantages utilising diplomatic means; sophisticated and rapid information, electronic and cyber operations; covert and occasionally overt military and intelligence action; and economic pressure.4

This is a good summary, although in many ways what is actually being described is an understanding that the corollary of the Clausewitzian doctrine that war is politics by other means is that politics can also be war by other means. There is already active and sometimes ferocious debate at to whether this is something truly new or not, whether it is limited to certain specific theatres and contexts, rather than any wider evolution of military art.5

After the unexpected Russian seizure of the Crimea, especially its use of unacknowledged 'little green men'—not, it has to be said, such an innovation in the annals of warfare and statecraft—the notion that something dramatically new

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and dangerous has taken the West by storm, and led to both insightful analysis and panicked caricatures.\textsuperscript{6} This has been called ‘new generation warfare,’ \textsuperscript{7} ‘ambiguous warfare,’ \textsuperscript{8} ‘full-spectrum warfare’\textsuperscript{9} or even ‘non-linear war,’\textsuperscript{10} not least

\textsuperscript{6} For an interesting discussion, see Bettina Renz, ‘Russia and “hybrid warfare”’, \textit{Contemporary Politics}, 22, 3(2016)
\textsuperscript{7} See, for example, Martin Murphy, ‘Understanding Russia’s Concept for Total War in Europe,’ \textit{Heritage Foundation Special Report 184}, September 9, 2016 @ http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2016/09/understanding-russias-concept-for-total-war-in-europe
\textsuperscript{8} See, for example, \textit{Russia’s “Ambiguous Warfare” and Implications for the U.S. Marine Corps}, CNA, May 2015 @ https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/DOP-2015-U-010447-Final.pdf
\textsuperscript{10} This term was especially prominent in a story written as these are terms with less intellectual baggage associated with them. For better or (probably) worse, ‘hybrid war’ is for the moment the accepted term of art in Western military and strategic circles and it is not worth trying to fight that definitional struggle here. Perhaps, as Latvian scholar Jānis Bērziņš has acidly noted, it has caught on because ‘the word hybrid is catchy, since it may represent a mix of anything.’\textsuperscript{11} The alternative formulation, the ‘Gerasimov


by Vladislav Surkov, Putin’s former master political technologist. See Peter Pomerantsev, ‘How Putin is Reinventing Warfare,’ \textit{Foreign Policy}, May 5, 2014 @ http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/05/05/how-putin-is-reinventing-warfare/ and Mark Galeotti, ‘Putin’s Secret Weapon,’ \textit{Foreign Policy}, July 7, 2014 @ http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/07/07/putins-secret-weapon/
Doctrine’—because of a now-infamous article by the Russian Chief of the General Staff in 2013—is even less useful, as not only did these ideas predate Gerasimov’s appointment, but it is not a ‘doctrine’ as either Russian or Western militaries would understand it.12

‘Non-linear war’—a term whose perverse virtue is precisely that it has the least intellectual baggage to haul—is perhaps a useful omnibus term to cover both ‘political wars’ fought wholly within the realm of society and psychology and ‘hybrid wars’ which will in due course turn to shooting.

However, the fundamental point is that the Russians themselves certainly believe the nature of war is changing, and in ways which mean the use of direct force may not always or initially be a central element of the conflict—or even not employed at all. As Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov put it in that 2013 article,

The role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness... The focus of applied methods of conflict has altered in the direction of the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other nonmilitary measures—applied in coordination with the protest potential of the

12 In fairness, I have to confess my guilt in perhaps creating this phrase. Intended as a snappy title and explicitly described simply as an interim placeholder term in a 2014 blog post, it ended up getting far more currency than it deserved. ‘The “Gerasimov Doctrine” and Russian Non-Linear War’, In Moscow’s Shadows, July 6, 2014 @ https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/
population. All this is supplemented by military means of a concealed character, including carrying out actions of informational conflict and the actions of special-operations forces. The open use of forces—often under the guise of peacekeeping and crisis regulation—is resorted to only at a certain stage, primarily for the achievement of final success in the conflict.\textsuperscript{13}

The Russian government, in the midst of a revanchist backlash against what it sees as a cultural and geopolitical offensive by the West,\textsuperscript{14} is actively taking advantage of a series of developments and opportunities, from the scope to use modern media as instruments of political influence, \textsuperscript{15} to the implications of a US focus on chaos in the Middle East, to drive its interests through ‘the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other nonmilitary measures.’

However, Gerasimov was not presenting a blueprint for a future without conventional military operations, nor yet hybrid war as originally understood in the West. Instead, he was noting

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Voeno-promyshlennyi kur’er}, February 27, 2013. Translation and commentary @ https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/

\textsuperscript{14} See Mark Galeotti and Andrew Bowen, ‘Putin’s Empire of the Mind,’ \textit{Foreign Policy}, April 21, 2014 @ http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/04/21/putins-empire-of-the-mind/; Dmitri Trenin, ‘Russia’s Breakout From the Post-Cold War System: The

Russia’s conviction that the modern world was seeing more complex and politically-led forms of contestation alongside regular warfare. To this end, as will be explored below, Russia’s ‘new way of war’ can be considered simply a recognition of the primacy of the political over the kinetic—and that if one side can disrupt the others’ will and ability to resist, then the actual strength of their military forces becomes much less relevant, even if not necessarily redundant.
3. Hybrid War through Russian Eyes

Some argue that there are no external threats to Russia, beyond terrorism or internal conflicts. That defense expenditures are too high. That the notion of the defense of the Fatherland and compulsory military service have lost their meaning... However, the fact is that the security threats to Russia are not only not disappearing, but increasing ever more.

- Gen. Makhmut Gareev, President of the Russian Academy of Military Sciences, 2013

Western discussions of 'Russia's hybrid war' are in many ways alien to the Russians themselves, evident in their adoption of the direct translation gibridnaya voina. It is not just that they say—and in the main believe—that it is actually the West which pioneered such deniable methods in the Arab Spring and the Color Revolutions. Indeed, prominent Russian defense expert Ruslan Pukhov has written that it is obvious that the term 'hybrid warfare' is used as a propaganda device and not really a classification. This is because any attempt to define it ends with the conclusion that there really is nothing very new in the idea.

Furthermore, when taken in the round, Gerasimov's article—which was an encapsulation of previous debates more than a novel exegesis—presented 'hybrid war' not as an end in itself, but as a stage which could or would lead to chaos and the emergence of fierce armed civil conflict in which foreign countries could intervene. The aim for Russia, he asserted, was to be able to have the kind of forces able to shut out such external intervention and fight and

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1 Makhmut Gareev, 'Na “myagkuyu silu” naidutsya zhestkie otvety,' Voennopromyshlenny kur'er, 4 December 2013 @ http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/18404

2 Ruslan Pukhov, 'Mif o “gibridnoi voine”', Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie, 29 May 2015
quickly win any conflicts, using massive and precise military force.

Thus, Gerasimov’s vision was in many ways an essentially defensive one for a chaotic modern era, not of an army of covert saboteurs but rather a high-readiness force able rapidly to mobilize and focus firepower on direct, conventional threats. In this, he was reprising themes which had emerged in much recent military theoretical literature and presenting a sense of the comprehensive threats facing Russia, threats which required an equally comprehensive answer. 3 After all, as Andrew Monaghan has perceptively observed, facing what appears to be a near-term future of unpredictability and instability, the Russian state has adopted a strategy of mobilization involving ‘what are in effect efforts to move the country on to a permanent war footing.’4 Of course, it would be naïve to consider today’s Russia as a purely peaceable, defensive power. First of all, there is a long-established trend of discussing offensive strategies and capacities in Aesopian terms, not least by ascribing them to the other side. Nonetheless, not only the literature but also conversations with Russian military officers and observers underscores the extent to which they truly consider gibridnaya voina to be an essentially Western—American—gambit. As one recent retiree who had served in the General Staff’s Main Operations Directorate put it, ‘we only belatedly came to see the weapon you [Westerners] were developing. Even then, first we thought it just applied in unstable, peripheral countries. Then we saw you could point it at us, too.’5

3 See, for example, Aleksei Kuz’movich, ‘Evolutsiya vsglyadov na teoriyu sovremennoi voiny,’ Armiya i obshchestvo 33, 1 (2013).
4 Andrew Monaghan, Russian State Mobilization: moving the

country on to a war footing (Chatham House, 2016), p. 3 @ https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/2016-05-20-russian-state-mobilization-monaghan-2.pdf
5 Conversation, Moscow, April 2014
Secondly, though, whether they believe themselves learning a lesson ‘made in America’ or not, the Russians are naturally going to explore the offensive possibilities of this kind of conflict, not just their defensive options, hence Crimea and the Donbas, and the need for serious consideration of the potential wider threat to Europe, Russia’s southern and eastern neighbors and beyond.

**Hybrid Military Thinking**

All military doctrines are an evolution of previous ones, and influenced by the technical, political, social and economic forces shaping the battlefield at every level. Today’s Russian approach is broadly rooted in some distinctive characteristics of today’s Russia and past practice, but more specifically is the product of a series of military-political debates and organizational developments that came to fruition following the 2008 Georgian War. The 1979-88 incursion into Afghanistan had forced Soviet military planners to come to grips with asymmetric war, but many of the lessons were deliberately shelved at the time, the result of a foolishly optimistic assumption that Moscow would be embroiled in no more such campaigns. Nonetheless, the experience of that war did creep into subsequent debates in the 1990s, where they combined with a growing awareness of the sheer speed and destructiveness of modern conflict. Longer-ranged weapons, computerized guidance and launch systems, advanced ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) capacities, all these would mean that in full-scale war

\[ \text{We only belatedly came to see the weapon you [Westerners] were developing. Even then, first we thought it just applied in unstable, peripheral countries. Then we saw you could point it at us, too.} \]

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6 Marcel Der Haas, ‘Russia’s military doctrine development 2000-2010,’ in Stephen Blank (ed), *Russia’s Military Politics*

7 Mark Galeotti, *Afghanistan: the Soviet Union’s last war* (Frank Cass, 1995), chapter 11
the front line would be deep, and perhaps even ubiquitous, and the potential devastation terrifying.

To some, the answer was to put all the more emphasis on winning the war before the first shot was fired. In Makhmut Gareev’s thoughtful 1995 study *Esli zavtra voiny* (‘If War Comes Tomorrow’), for example, he noted that political and information operations could be used to spread ‘mass psychosis, despair and feelings of doom and undermine trust in the government and armed forces; and, in general, lead to the destabilization of the situation in those countries’ ready for direct intervention.  

Nonetheless, the conflict in Chechnya and the challenge coping in severely constrained budgetary circumstances continued to consume much of whatever scope there was for doctrinal innovation. A Russian officer serving in the General Staff at the time recalled that ‘the intellectual case for change was always accepted, then “temporarily” shelved until the day’s crisis was resolved. But, there was always another crisis.’ The 2000 National Security Concept document and new Military Doctrine and a 2003 White Paper on defense did place a far greater emphasis than in the past on joint military-security agency cooperation, internal wars and irregular conflicts, but primarily in the context of dealing with purely domestic insurgency. Many within the Russian security establishment who genuinely understood that the nature of war was changing. However, all such institutions tend towards conservatism, and a combination of self-interested resistance within the high command and a lack of a clear steer from the Kremlin ensured that practice did not move as quickly as the theoretical discussions.

Real progress would only follow as a result of the

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9 Conversation, Moscow, January 2014
Georgian War. Russian forces operated alongside local militias and auxiliaries, in a politically-choreographed operation designed to provide a degree of deniability and legitimacy by provoking the Georgians into the first overt act of aggression. ¹⁰ Even beforehand, Moscow had been exploring such ambiguous and arm’s-length options, but the practical experience of the war proved a crucial agent for change. The Russians won, but that was hardly in doubt given the massive disproportion between the two sides and the relatively limited objectives, ‘liberating’ the already-rebellious regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, sufficient problems emerged to allow Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov and above all his Chief of the General Staff Nikolai Makarov finally to push through sweeping reforms. Organizationally, the main change was a transition to a smaller, more flexible brigade structure—first mooted, after all, back in Soviet times ¹¹—finally carried through, but this also unblocked the way to deeper doctrinal debates within the military, not least adapting to the notion of network-centric warfare.¹²

Serdyukov, whose necessary but brutal reform program won him the loathing of most of the officer corps, would not survive long politically; a scandal saw him sacked in 2012, with Makarov following in his wake. However, their successors continued the process, hence the irony of Gerasimov getting the credit for what, if it should be considered any Chief of the General Staff’s brainchild, was closer to Makarov’s. Even so, this was still very much a discussion

¹⁰ According to the European Union’s Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (2009), the so-called ‘Tagliavini Report.’

¹¹ See Robert Hall, Soviet Military Art in a Time of Change (Palgrave Macmillan, 1990)

¹² See Roger McDermott, Russian Perspective on Network-Centric Warfare: the Key Aim of Serdyukov’s Reform (FMSO, 2010) @ http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/Collaboration/international/McDermott/Network-Centric-Warfare.pdf
about war, not the kind of deniable political operations too often regarded as Russia's new ‘art of war,’ more war than hybrid.

Meanwhile, though, as will be discussed below, a Russia that increasingly felt itself constrained, even threatened by a West too powerful directly to challenge, was looking for new instruments of contestation. Having learnt his trade as a spy, having built his career on corruption and behind-the-scenes politicking, having forged a presidency through propaganda and hype, Putin also saw the scope for ‘political war’ rooted in Soviet practices. The two variations of гибридная война were ready to be born.
Part Two: The Roots of Distinctiveness

How to square the circle between the lack of any serious Russian thinking and writing about гибридная война except relatively recently and in the context primarily of Western operations, and the apparent observable distinctiveness of much Russian activity? Is this another piece of маскировка, deception, whereby Moscow is able to keep an evolving military debate hidden? Hardly, not least because for it to be meaningfully applicable to the Russian military it needs to be discussed and manifested, from training programs to procurement plans. Rather, what has been interpreted as something qualitatively new is instead the product of the Russians’ take on the way changes in the world are influencing warfare, mediated through their own particular political, historical and cultural prisms.

In short, just as the Pentagon’s efforts to come to terms with emerging challenges and opportunities have led to the technology-driven Third Offset strategy, so too what the non-linear approaches represent the Kremlin’s response to five key issues. They are the gap between Russian aspiration and capability, assumptions about Western ‘threats,’ Moscow’s take on the changing nature of modern warfare, long-standing assumptions about the relationship of the kinetic and the political, and the impact of the shape of the contemporary Russian state, and its de-institutionalized and protean nature.

What has been interpreted as something qualitatively new is instead the product of the Russians’ take on the way changes in the world are influencing warfare, mediated through their own particular political, historical and cultural prisms.
4. The Gap between Aspiration and Capability

Russia has been a great power for centuries, and remains so. It has always had and still has legitimate zones of interest ... We should not drop our guard in this respect, neither should we allow our opinion to be ignored

- Vladimir Putin, 1999

Putin's Russia is strong on ambitions, weak on resources. From this mismatch comes a great deal of ingenuity, improvisation and introspection, as well as—in a pattern visible over the centuries—a justification for tight central control to allow a concentration of resources on national security. After all, it is seeking not only to maintain a significant global status as a great power, whose voice must be heard on all important matters, but it also has specific aspirations towards maintaining a sphere of influence in post-Soviet Eurasia (with the apparent exception of the Baltic states, which are generally accepted as having been "lost"). It must do that, though, under sharp limitations:

1. Economic. In the final analysis, most power is directly or indirectly economic in nature. Admittedly, an authoritarian regime is much more able to focus resources on its strategic priorities. Russia, for example, officially devotes around 4% of its GDP to defense, although deeper analysis suggests the real figure is closer to 6%, compared with a European NATO average of 1.2%. Nonetheless, it

1 Speech to the State Duma, quoted in BBC, 28 March 2014 @ http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-26769481

2 This is a theme which was best expanded upon by Richard Pipes, notably in his Russia Under The Old Regime (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1974)

3 A phrase which cropped up independently in several conversations with MFA and military interlocutors.

4 Paul Gregory, 'Russia cooks its defense books, Politico, 17
is still constrained by the overall size of its economy, whose rolling crisis has actually forced effective cuts in 2016 and talk of deeper ones, perhaps of 6%, over the next three years. This inevitably affects military strength directly and indirectly, from eating into procurement and training programs to making it harder to pay the salaries and provide the living conditions needed to attract and retain good personnel.

2. Technological. Despite a clear Kremlin commitment to defense-related research and development for both domestic use and export opportunities, economic weaknesses, and poor past investment decisions have served to undermine Russia’s technological capacities at a time when the nature of war is being reshaped by rapid (and expensive) advances. In a few specific aspects, Russian technology is still at the cutting edge. The S-400 surface-to-air missile system is a formidable air defense/area denial (A2/AD) asset, for example. In the main, though, economic and organizational limitations mean that not only is Russian technology falling behind that of its peer competitors, but also that its education and training is increasingly not producing sufficiently well-skilled personnel to use its most advanced systems.

In fairness, the newest kit tomorrow is less useful than adequate kit today, and Russia’s capacities should not be discounted. Furthermore, in classic style ingenuity has gone into

November 2015 @ http://www.politico.eu/article/russia-cooks-its-defense-books-military-spending-2016-nato/

leveraging what partial strengths it has, such as turning to hackers to address gaps in cyber capabilities. However, these are stopgap measures and cannot conceal—not least from Russia’s own military planners—a widening technology gap with the United States are, perhaps even more shocking to Moscow, the loss of a long-assumed advantage over China.\(^6\)

3. **Demographic.** There is considerable debate as to the Russian population’s long-term trends. Nonetheless, the consensus appears to be that a crisis is looming. The 2010 census registered a population drop of almost 3% in the past eight years, to 142.9 million, and a 2015 report from RANEPA, the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, suggested it could be down 20%, to 113 million by 2050.\(^7\) This has all kinds of implications, from the lack of potential conscripts and young, able-bodied workers, through to the need to encourage migration from China and Central Asia, which to many in the government poses security and geopolitical risks in its own right.

4. **Soft Power.** In the modern world, cultural capital and economic weight are powerful instruments of geopolitics. The limitations of a hydrocarbon state become all the more striking when oil prices are low, and Putin’s previously-touted successes are revealed as being largely a matter of simple good luck.

\(^6\) It is worth noting that for all Moscow and Beijing may talk of strategic partnership and mount joint exercises—not least to unnerve Washington—the Russians still update their contingency plans for war with China on an annual basis.

\(^7\) Ilan Berman, ‘Russia’s fraught demographic future,’ *Jamestown Foundation Russia in Decline Project*, 13 September 2016 @ [https://jamestown.org/program/ilan-berman-russias-fraught-demographic-future/](https://jamestown.org/program/ilan-berman-russias-fraught-demographic-future/)
Russia’s soft power is limited, its image in the world distinctly lackluster.\textsuperscript{8}

Some dictators may appreciate Putin’s triumphs, some would-be strongmen see him as a figure to emulate, but in the main, Russia is not considered a rising power. It is telling, for example, that the only countries Moscow could persuade to recognize its annexation of Crimea were Afghanistan, Cuba, Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua, North Korea, Syria and Venezuela.

Put all these elements together, and Russia’s claims to great power status and its scope to assert the kind of global role Putin claims begin to look threadbare. It has nuclear weapons, to be sure, but these are tools of limited utility. They may be used in heavy-handed intimidation, such as the threat made to Poland in 2008 that if it went ahead with basing US anti-missile systems, it was ‘making itself a target. This is 100% certain.’\textsuperscript{9} They may also be used, conceivably, in a limited, tactical attack to ‘de-escalate’ a conventional war—in other words, to bring it to an end on terms favorable to Russia. The former is of limited apparent utility, though, and the latter extremely risky, and even one General Staff officer called it ‘the kind of idea

\textit{Putin’s apparent aspirations are not simply to be a limited regional power able to bully smaller and poorer neighbors. ... Rather, the intent, however optimistic, is to be able to assert a meaningful global role}

\textsuperscript{8}The Pew Research Center’s 2015 survey of world opinion found only 30% of respondents viewing Russia positively: only in Vietnam, China and Ghana do half or more of the population have a favorable view of it. Pew Research Center, ‘Russia, Putin Held in Low Regard around the World,’ 5 August 2015 @ http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/08/05/russia-putin-held-in-low-regard-around-the-world/

\textsuperscript{9}\textit{Interfax}, 15 August 2008
dreamed up by theoreticians, not practical.’

Instead, Russia is left with a military force that is still only part-way through modernization, a process coming under growing economic pressure. Its armed forces number some 922,000, but the crucial Ground Forces only represent around 300,000 of these. Around half are conscripts, banned by law from being sent into combat other than in times of formal war, and serving terms of just one year, not enough to train them properly and meaning they are only truly operational for perhaps 3-4 months of that year. Given that according to Ukrainian accounts at least 40,000 and often more are typically stationed in Crimea and in and near the Donbas, others need to be stationed in the turbulent North Caucasus, and more scattered along Russia’s lengthy border, this is not as many as it may sound, especially given the need to rotate forces which have seen action.

This is by no means a negligible force, especially for its post-Soviet neighbors lacking the protections of NATO membership. Even after two years of reform and rearmament, Ukraine’s entire military establishment numbers 210,000 soldiers and 40,000 civilians, for example, while Georgia by contrast has but 37,000. Nonetheless, Putin’s apparent aspirations are not simply to be a limited regional power able to bully smaller and poorer neighbors. Indeed, when President Obama described Russia as such, Putin bristled, calling the claim ‘disrespectful’ and downright wrong. Rather, the intent,

10 Conversation, Moscow, April 2014


12 In an interview with the German newspaper Bild, 12 January 2016 @ http://www.bild.de/wa/ll/bild-de/unangemeldet-42925516.bild.html
However optimistic, is to be able to assert a meaningful global role.

In this context, ‘hybrid war’ is an attempt to make limited forces go further, degrading the defensive capacities of an enemy before the actual fighting. In Crimea, breaking the chain of command, disrupting military morale and creating temporary uncertainty as to quite what was going on meant the Ukrainian soldiers on the peninsula simply needed to be penned, captured and expelled, not fought to a defeat.

Likewise, ‘political war’ is a substitute for having to deploy those overstretched elite forces and the under-reformed rest of the military, especially against an enemy such as NATO. Instead, it bypasses most of these objective weaknesses of Russia’s and instead capitalizes on the enemy’s subjective ones, using gamesmanship, corruption and disinformation instead of direct force.
5. Perceptions and Paranoias about the ‘Western Threat’

It is necessary to focus on the main components of [Western] hybrid methods. The falsification of events, control of the media are among the most effective methods of asymmetric warfare. The effect can be comparable with the results of large-scale use of troops and forces.

Illustrative examples are the incitement of nationalism in Ukraine, the revolutionary unrest in the Arab world. The massive impact on the minds of people contributed to the growth of the protest potential of the population, and the spread of “color movements” in the states of North Africa, which led to a change of political regimes in some of them.


In part, Putin’s anger at Obama’s statement about Russia being a mere ‘regional power’ was simply a symptom of the wider collapse in Russian-Western relations, the product of a new conviction that Russia was not only betrayed in the past, it is at threat today. Moscow genuinely believes itself working to try and catch up in developing state-wrecking and coercive capabilities acquired and honed by the West. However wrong-headed it may be, this perception shapes the Russian approach to hybrid war and the ways it is building its capabilities and planning to use them.

There is not the room here to go through the full Kremlin litany of Western perfidies, from ‘betrayal’ over NATO expansion, through ‘organizing the color revolutions of Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan,’ to the ‘sponsoring’ anti-corruption and pro-democracy activism and opposition movements in Russia itself. That would take a report in its own right and

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1 In a speech to the annual general meeting of the Academy of Military Sciences, 27 February 2016; his speech was reproduced in Voennopromyshlenny kur’er, 9 March 2016 @ http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/29579
in any case not actually matter much.

Some have a certain justice about them, others patently not. What is important is that this is not simply a convenient political narrative to demonize the opposition and mobilize nationalist sentiments—although it undoubtedly is that—but it is also a genuinely-held view within a significant fraction of the political and especially security elite, most notably Vladimir Putin and his closest allies.

Security Council secretary Nikolai Patrushev, for example, has bluntly asserted that the USA ‘would very much like Russia not to exist at all—as a country.’

Former State Duma speaker and now head of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) Sergei Naryshkin has an even more florid take, claiming that ‘Washington seeks instability... to continue old and launch new acts of assault and plunder’ as it stirs ‘up anti-Russian sentiments in Europe’.

Putin himself has claimed that

Our western partners, led by the United States of America, prefer not to be guided by international law in their practical policies, but by the rule of the gun. They have come to believe in their exclusivity and exceptionalism, that they can decide the destinies of the world, that only they can ever be right.

This has also become a self-sustaining process. Given the

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2 Interviewed in Kommersant, 22 June 2015


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Kremlin’s especially broad sense of what constitutes ‘war,’ for example, the very measures imposed by the West in order to try and bring home condemnation of Russian aggression, economic sanctions, are themselves considered unilaterally hostile acts. When Andrei Kostin, chair of state-owned VTB Bank, affirmed that ‘sanctions, in other words, are economic war against Russia,’ he was speaking for the Kremlin.  

Hence the belief that gibrihdnaya voina is a quintessentially American invention, drawing on Western economic and soft power to bring about political change through covert and deniable means.

This not only contributes to a sense of being under constant threat—and from a covert and subtle threat that could be behind any reversal, from labor unrest to lost trade opportunities—it also provides a justification for Russia’s own ‘guerrilla geopolitics’ and its non-linear techniques.

5 CNBC, 30 January 2015 @ http://www.cnbc.com/2015/01/30/new-sanctions-on-russia-are-economic-war.html

6. Modern War for the Modern World

Nations have always struggled with one another with the use of armed forces and warfare capabilities, including intelligence and counterintelligence, deception and stratagems, disinformation, and all other refined and devious stratagems the adversaries could think up. It has always been held that any confrontation without resort to arms is struggle and pursuit of policies by physical force and armed violence is war. Some of our ... philosophers, though, maintain that all nonmilitary practices are a contemporary development and suggest, on this assumption, that following these practices is nothing short of war.


Gareev, dean of Russia’s military theorists, has tried to steer a path between rejecting and too-easily accepting the notion that wars can be non-kinetic. Nonetheless, Moscow is aware of the limitations of its military power, when compared with China and NATO rather than merely even more impoverished post-Soviet states. It also believes that it faces what could be an existential political threat from the West. Thus, it has had a powerful incentive than most to take full and opportunistic account of the way that the military, political and economic battlespace is changing dramatically.

Russians have been keenly aware of the potentially revolutionary impact of advanced long-range systems, from smart missiles able to sink aircraft carriers and blast command centers, to the computer-guided electromagnetic railguns that could one day claw them from the sky. In 2002, for example, the influential military thinker Major General Vladimir Slipchenko suggested that ‘any future war will be a non-contact war. It will come from the air and space. Guidance and control will come from space,
and the strike will be conducted from the air and from the seas using a large quantity of precision weaponry.'

At the same time, while pouring what resources they could into developing their own high-tech programs—with some successes and many more disappointments—they are also just as aware of the technology gap between them and their peer competitors, especially but not only the United States. As one General Staff officer put it, 'we are still living of upgraded legacy systems, and doing it quite well, but God help us when the new-generation systems really start to spread across the world.' However, this is also a style of warfare which depends heavily on communications, hence Russia’s particular interest in using jamming, spoofing and hacking to interfere with the enemy’s ability to gather, transmit and use information. More generally, while Russia makes serious efforts to adapt to network-centric warfare, this is not just about organization, technology and tactics, it demands a much more dramatic redefinition of the whole game.

Meanwhile, war becomes more expensive. A World War Two P-51 Mustang fighter cost around $51,000 in 1945, equivalent to around $675,000 today; the current F-22 in service with the US Airforce cost around

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3 Conversation, Moscow, April 2016

4 For an excellent analysis of this, see Roger McDermott, Russian Perspective on Network-Centric Warfare: the Key Aim of Serdyukov’s Reform (FMSO, 2010) @ http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/Collaboration/international/McDermott/Network-Centric-Warfare.pdf
$340 million apiece. Of course, the capabilities of the latter are similarly orders of magnitude higher, but the simple fact that modern, high-tech war is prohibitively costly.

It also has a far greater and perhaps even more important political price tag attached. Democratic electorates—and thus politicians seeking election—have shown themselves ever less willing to accept casualties lightly. The way the deaths of 241 US Marines in the 1983 Beirut barracks bombing, and 1993 ‘Black Hawk Down’ incident in Mogadishu, contributed markedly to the early end of missions in Lebanon and Somalia respectively were several times raised by Russian analysts in conversation as evidence of this trend, magnified by the impact of the modern media.

Moscow thus had particular reason to look at ways to use political and information operations to capitalize on a perceived Western reluctance to engage in open hostilities and to undermine any will to resist its encroachments. In Savinkin and Domnin’s 2007 collection Groznoe oruzhie: Malaia voina, partizanstvo i drugie vidy asimmetrichnogo voevaniya v svete naslediya russkikh voennykh myslitelei (‘Terrible Weapons: small war, partisan and other types of asymmetrical conflict in light of the legacy of Russian military thinkers’) they explored how states may use guerrilla-like tactics to bring pressure to bear on enemies while maintaining deniability, for example.

Hence, the opportunities in information operations became all the more central to Russian discussions. In a crucial study in the journal Voennaya mys’, Colonel Sergei Chekhinov, head of the General Staff’s Centre for Military Strategic Studies and

6 A. E. Savinkin and I. V. Domnin (eds), Groznoe oruzhie: Malaia voina, partizanstvo i drugie vidy asimmetrichnogo voevaniya v svete naslediya russkikh voennykh myslitelei (Russkii put’, 2007).
his colleague Lt. General Sergei Bogdanov noted in 2011 that

strategic information warfare plays an important role in disrupting military and government leadership and air and space defense systems, misleading the enemy, forming desirable public opinions, organizing anti-government activities, and conducting other measures in order to decrease the will of the opponent to resist.  

Rather than a tactical response to a specific situation, though, as noted above this can be located in long-standing Russian discussions about the way that the fog of war and the morale on the home front can be weaponized during the prelude to battle. It also draws on a long tradition of Russian interest in emphasizing the political dimension of war.

7 Sergei Chekinov and Sergei Bogdanov, ‘Vliyanie nepriamykh deistvii na karakter sovremennoi voiny,’ Voennaya mysl, June 2011
7. Traditions of Political Warfare

Where force is necessary, there it must be applied boldly, decisively and completely. But one must know the limitations of force; one must know when to blend force with a maneuver, a blow with an agreement.

- Leon Trotsky

From the tsars through the Bolsheviks, the Russians have long been accustomed to a style of warfare that refuses to acknowledge any hard and fast distinctions between overt and covert, kinetic and political, and embraces much more eagerly the irregular and the criminal, the spook and the provocateur, the activist and the fellow-traveler. Sometimes, this has been out of choice or convenience, but often it has been a response to the time-honored challenge of seeking to play as powerful an imperial role as possible with only limited resources.

In the West, for example, there has been a habit of treating counter-insurgency and state-to-state warfare as cognate but different. The Russians have long proven more comfortable applying the political lessons of the former to the latter. Indeed, their term ‘small war,’ which in literal terms the same as ‘guerrilla,’ has a distinctly different sense, as it applies to limited and deniable operations by government forces just as much as the activities of insurgents. Under the Bolsheviks, it also acquired a more explicitly political dimension: the division between the

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1 Leon Trotsky, What Next? (1932) @ https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1932-ger/
government with its plans and the generals expected to accomplish the military dimension of those plans was intentionally blurred. The Red Guard and then the Red Army was expected to be fully engaged in addressing the ideological intent of national strategy and be aware of the political intent of its actions.

As a result, the Bolsheviks undoubtedly had a relatively modern take on ‘small wars.’ Although there is literature dating back to the tsarist era, contemporary Russian writings about ‘small wars’ tend explicitly to trace their pedigree back to early Soviet works such as M. A. Drobov’s *Malaya voina: partizanstvo i diversii* (‘Small War: partisan combat and diversionary attacks’) from 1931. The Estonians, after all, rightly note that the Soviets used the same kind of mix of forces as in Crimea—troops without insignia, local proxies and the threat of a full invasion—in a failed but not forgotten operation in 1924. Furthermore, the counter-insurgency approach applied in Central Asia by Lenin’s Commission on Turkestan Affairs, *Turkkommissiya*, was in many ways ahead of its time in the integration of military and political operations, government troops, militias and covert operators.4

*Far from new ways of war, in many ways both hybrid and political war can be seen as revivals of Soviet-era methods, adapted to the modern context.*

Likewise, Soviet military thinkers had been ahead of the curve in understanding that warfare was moving

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4 I explore this in more detail in ‘Hybrid, ambiguous, and non-linear? How new is Russia’s “new way of war”?’,* Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 27, 2 (2016)
beyond the front line and into an enemy’s rear. This was central to Mikhail Tukhachevskii’s concepts of Deep Battle in the 1920s and 1930s, also picked up by his contemporary Georgii Isserson, who argued that past notions of warfare were outdated because of this: ‘the neutralization and attack of the defense were conducted only along the front line of direct combat contact. The defensive depths remained untouched.’ Combined with the interest in guerrilla-style operations noted above, and also the strong role of both the intelligence services and also the Communist Party’s active measures arms helped ensure that what the military emphasis on attacking the enemy’s rear also extended to political operations.

When they did, they were also able to draw on an especially rich experience of information operations, in which many have seen the roots of today’s activities. Too much is made of Russia’s supposed commitment to ‘reflexive control’—described as a means of conditioning an opponent ‘voluntarily’ to make the decision you want him to make—which is neither especially unique nor actually central to its planning and operational

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6 Between 1921 and 1939, the euphemistic International Liaison Department (OMS) of the Moscow-based Communist International, Comintern, was a clandestine service engaged in running agents, subversion and if need be sabotage. Even before the Comintern was abolished in 1943, the OMS had been disbanded, but the international Communist movement continued to be used as a front and support base for the Soviet intelligence services.

cycles. Nonetheless, the Soviets were especially concerned with propaganda, misinformation and political manipulation, often with the same goal of masking underlying weaknesses.\(^8\) This tradition also lives on, enriched by the opportunities in the new, diffuse and lightning-speed media age.

Far from new ways of war, in many ways both hybrid and political war can thus be seen as revivals of Soviet-era methods, adapted to the modern context.

8. Modern Russia’s Deinstitutionalization

...what distinguishes the current Russian government from the erstwhile Soviet leaders familiar to the West is its rejection of ideological constraints and the complete elimination of institutions.

- Russian Oligarch-turned-dissident Mikhail Khodorkovsky¹

Finally, while Moscow has practical reasons and an historical bias encouraging it to adopt the kind of warfighting approach under discussion, it also reflects the political definitions of Putin’s Russia. One distinctive aspect of its recent campaigns, from political ones against the West to military ones in Ukraine, has been a blurring of the borders between state, parastate, mercenary and dupe. The importance of national mobilization, discussed below, extends to mining society as a whole for semi-autonomous assets, whether eager internet trolls and ‘patriotic hackers’ or Cossack volunteers and mercenary gangsters.

The ‘hybridity’ of Russian operations reflects a conceptually analogous, even if operationally very different ‘hybridity’ of the Russian state.

When Nemeth originally posited the notion of hybrid warfare in the context of the Chechen war, it was rooted in his belief that Chechen society was itself a hybrid, still somewhere between the modern and the pre-modern, where traditional forms of social organization, notable the family and the teip (clan) could be used to mobilize for war in ways that need not distinguish between ‘regular’ and ‘irregular’ forms of war. Hence, a hybrid society fought a hybrid war.

The ‘hybridity’ of Russian operations likewise reflects a conceptually analogous, even if operationally very

different ‘hybridity’ of the Russian state. Through the 1990s and into Putinism it has, however you choose to define it, either failed to institutionalize or actively deinstitutionalized. This is a patrimonial, hyper-presidential regime characterized by the permeability of boundaries between public and private, domestic and external. Lacking meaningful rule of law or checks and balances, without drawing too heavy-handed a comparison with fascism, Putin’s Russia seems to embody, in its own chaotic and informal way, Mussolini’s dictum ‘tutto nello Stato, niente al di fuori dello Stato, nulla contro lo Stato’: everything inside the State, nothing outside the State, nothing against the State.2

Given that, after all, state institutions are so often regarded as personal fiefdoms and piggy banks, officials and even officers freely engage in commercial activity, and the Russian Orthodox Church is practically an arm of the Kremlin, the infusion of non-military instruments into military affairs was almost inevitable. Beyond that, though, Putin’s Russia has been characterized—in the past, at least3—by multiple, overlapping agencies, a ‘bureaucratic pluralism’ intended as much to permit the Kremlin to divide and rule as for any practical advantages. This is clearly visible within the intelligence and security realm, from the intrusion of the FSB—originally intended as a purely domestic agency—into foreign operations, to competition over responsibility for information operations. At an early stage in the development of the argument on ‘information

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2 As a point of interest, Mussolini sent what could be called ‘little blackshirt men’ to Spain in 1936-39 to fight on Franco’s side during the civil war, notionally all volunteers (as the Voluntary Troops Corps) and initially without insignia...

3 The proposal in 2016 of a new ‘Ministry of National Security’—still, as of writing, unconfirmed—would represent a distinct break from tradition and a consolidation of multiple services into one single super-agency.
troops’ following the Georgian war;\textsuperscript{4} for instance, the FSB appeared publicly to denounce plans by the military to develop their own capability, stating that this was their preserve. Under a 2013 presidential decree, the FSB was tasked with securing national information resources, but this apparent monopoly seems to have been eroded, as there is much anecdotal evidence suggesting GRU units active in information warfare in Ukraine.

As a result, it is not simply that Moscow chooses to ignore those boundaries we are used to in the West between state and private, military and civilian, legal and illegal. It is that those boundaries are much less meaningful in Russian terms, and additionally straddled by a range of duplicative and even competitive agencies. This can get in the way of coherent policy and create problems of redundancy and even contradictory goals, such as the 2016 hack of US Democratic National Committee servers, where FSB and GRU operations appear to have been working at cross purposes.\textsuperscript{5} However, it also creates a challenge that is complex, multifaceted and inevitably difficult for Western agencies to comprehend, let alone counter.

\textsuperscript{4} Keir Giles, ‘Information Troops: A Russian Cyber Command?,’ in \textit{Third International Conference on Cyber Conflict} (CCDCOE, 2011)

Part Three: Weapons of the New War

Accepting that Moscow has by no means turned its back on conventional warfare, nonetheless there is something to the undoubted hype. Russia does not believe wars in the main can be won with misdirection and disinformation. After all, even Crimea needed the deployment of special forces to ‘seal the deal’ and turn effective preparation into a fait accompli. Instead, it has developed, as much through misunderstanding Western approaches as anything else, a distinct and bifurcated approach to the use of these non-linear, sometimes-covert, sometimes-ambiguous, sometimes-brazen military-political methods both to bring pressure to bear on other states as an accompaniment to more conventional geopolitics or else to prepare the battlefield before outright intervention. There is the out-and-out non-kinetic ‘political war,’ and then the kind of war which may start that way but then escalate into the ‘hybrid’ and potentially thence into the regular military confrontation.

There is the out-and-out non-kinetic ‘political war,’ and then the kind of war which may start that way but then escalate into the ‘hybrid’ and potentially thence into the regular military confrontation.

Others have looked at the overt military capabilities. Here, it is therefore worth exploring Russia’s current and emerging capabilities in four main areas in which their practice differs from the West’s: the use of military personnel in political operations; the role of non-state and deniable armed auxiliaries; the intelligence agencies; and the growing importance of civilian assets.
9. ‘Polite People’: Conventional Military, Unconventional Uses

Crimean self-defense forces were of course backed by Russian servicemen... They acted very appropriately

- Vladimir Putin, 2014

As Michael Kofman has noted, ‘Ukraine was decided by large-caliber artillery, [Multiple Launch Rocket Systems], and tanks; not innovative hybrid approaches.’ Whatever other means may be used, armed force remains crucial in Russia’s approach, whether in conventional engagements (such as the air strikes in Syria or the surges into the Donbas to defeat government offensives) or as symbols of political control, as in Crimea. Whatever Russia’s regular military capabilities, what is worth exploring here is how the Russians are developing forces able to operate in the earlier, not-quite-war, preparatory stages of a hybrid conflict and maybe even in some limited and specific ways in a political

The Spetsnaz are heir to a tradition going back to the experience of the NKVD secret police in the Spanish Civil War and working with partisans in the Second World War, being tasked with covertly training, mobilizing, supporting and leading irregular forces

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1 In televised question-and-answer session, reported by RT on 17 April 2014 @ https://www.rt.com/news/crimea-defense-russian-soldiers-108/


Whether called ‘little green men’ (the Western term) or ‘polite people’ (the Russian), the deployment of Russian special forces in Crimea in February and March 2014, clearly recognizable but bare of insignia and at the time denied by Moscow, created a new trope. The less elegant use of Russian troops in the Donbas since has consolidated a belief that a central element of the purported ‘new Russian way of war’ involves the deniable use of such forces. Not that this is really new; the Russians’ traditional faith in maskirovka makes such tactics fair game in the future, as they were in the past.  

Besides which, although their gambit won them a few hours’ confusion in Crimea (admittedly essential ones), precisely because it flew in the face of diplomatic, if not military etiquette, this is not a tactic easy to repeat. Estonian army commander Gen. Riho Terras spoke for many front-line officers when he described the new lesson for NATO: when faced with armed men of uncertain provenance crossing your border, ‘you should shoot the first one to appear.’

The Russians have certainly been building and honing scalable intervention capabilities that span the military and intelligence realms and which can be used effectively in conjunction with political and economic instruments and in deniable operations.

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4 See, for example, V. A. Matsulenko, Operativnaya maskirovka voisk (Voenizdat: 1975); John Erickson, ‘The Soviet Military Potential for Surprise Attack: Surprise, Superiority and Time,’ in Robert Pfaltzgraff, Uri Ra’anani & Warren Milberg (eds), Intelligence Policy and National Security (Palgrave Macmillan, 1981); Timothy Shea, ‘Post-Soviet Maskirovka, Cold War Nostalgia, and

5 Roy Allison, ‘Russian “deniable” intervention in Ukraine: how and why Russia broke the rules,’ International Affairs 90, 6 (2014)

6 Interviewed in Financial Times, 13 May 2015, @ https://www.ft.com/content/03c5ebde-f95a-11e4-ae65-00144feab7de
First and foremost, these are the Spetsnaz ('Special Designation') special forces, but also elements of the VDV—paratroopers—and the Naval Infantry marines.

The Spetsnaz have recently been expanding, in part because of the perceived need to secure the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics.\(^7\) A new brigade and regiment has been added to their strength and, most importantly, all existing brigades have been brought to full establishment strength. There are thus some 17,000 of them, but while this sounds impressive, they are not all true special forces in the Western sense.\(^8\) Some 20% are still conscripts serving one-year terms (in theory these units will be all-volunteer by the end of 2018), and Spetsnaz are trained for larger-scale operations, making them best considered expeditionary light infantry comparable with the US 75th Rangers or the UK's 16th Air Assault Regiment.

Appreciating the need for truly 'special' special forces, able to mount small, complex and deniable operations, in 2012 the General Staff formed a new Special Operations Command (KSO) on the basis of an existing training center, built around the elite (but regimental-strength) 346th Brigade and its air and support assets.\(^9\) The KSO must be considered much more closely comparable to Western 'Tier One' special forces such as Delta and the SAS. It is also supplemented by other specialist elements attached to the other intelligence and security agencies.

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\(^7\) Although one military insider told me that Sochi was merely the excuse given by the General Staff to convince a Kremlin desperate to ensure the Games passed smoothly.


\(^9\) Izvestiya, November 27, 2012; Dmitry Trenin, 'Russia's New Tip of the Spear,' *Foreign Policy*, May 8, 2013 @ http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/05/08/russias-new-tip-of-the-spear/
These various units have seen considerable denied or covert activities of late. Spetsnaz alongside Naval Infantry seized Crimea. Spetsnaz have been operating since 2014 in the Donbas and now in Syria. This does not detract from their traditional functions of long-range reconnaissance, sabotage and subversion in a major war as well as counter-insurgency operations. Rather, as military forces with an explicit secondary political and sometimes covert dimension, whose missions also include everything from assassination to liaison with local insurgents (akin to, albeit not the same as the Green Berets in Vietnam), they have a series of roles, something emphasized by their return to the GRU:

1. *Tip of the Spear.* The primary mission for the Spetsnaz as a whole remains to support conventional military offensive operations. This ranges from seizing airfields to allow other forces to deploy (as in Prague 1968 and Kabul 1979; in the latter case the so-called ‘Moslem Battalion’ was made up of commandos of Central Asian appearance such that they were truly deniable) to providing deep reconnaissance (such as their current role as forward air controllers in Syria).

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13 ‘Peskov podtverdil Reuters gibel’ pyatogo voennogo v operatsii v Siri,’ *RBK,* March
2. ‘Agents of Chaos.’ The KSO in particular represents a force of flexible operators in political operations, including creating instability which can in turn be used as a pretext for more overt and intensive intervention. As Gerasimov put it in 2013 article, there is scope for the “open use of forces — often under the guise of peacekeeping and crisis regulation…” 14 More broadly, special forces can also be used as force multipliers for other forms of attack. In Crimea, for example, one of their key objectives was the early seizure of the Simferopol internet exchange point (IXP), accompanied by targeting the telecommunications cables linking the peninsula with the mainland.15 The result of physical control of the internet and telephone infrastructure was complete Russian control of the information environment in Crimea.16 From this, wider lessons have been drawn about the information warfare value of seizing physical control of strategically significant internet infrastructure, including satellites, subsea cables, IXPs and more. After all, this permits the destruction, interdiction or modification of information passing through the infrastructure, a key facilitator for information dominance.

14 Valeryi Gerasimov, ‘Tsennost’ nauki v predvidenii.’ Voenno-promyshlennyi kur’er, February 27, 2013
15 ‘V AP Krim nevidomimi u viis’kovyi formi povtorno zablokovano dekil’ka vuziv zv’yazku,’ Ukrtelekom, 1 March 2014, @ http://www.ukrtelecom.ua/presscenter/news/official?id=120389
16 Shane Harris, ‘Hack Attack. Russia’s first targets in Ukraine: its cell phones and Internet lines,’ Foreign Policy, 3 March 2014 @ http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/03/03/hack-attack/
3. ‘Covert Controllers.’ The Spetsnaz are heir to a tradition going back to the experience of the NKVD secret police in the Spanish Civil War and working with partisans in the Second World War, being tasked with covertly training, mobilizing, supporting and leading irregular forces. This is currently especially relevant in the Donbas, where the GRU appears to have primary responsibility for marshaling the ‘volunteers’—discussed below—and also both supporting and sometimes disciplining local militias. A spate of mysterious assassination of especially inconvenient or independent militia commanders in the Donbas, for example, is widely assumed to have been carried out by GRU or FSB Spetsnaz.\footnote{Including ‘Batman’ (Alexander Bednov) and Alexei Mozgovoi in 2015 and ‘Motorola’ (Arsen Pavlov) in 2016, along with a slew of lesser figures, although it is difficult sometimes to know exactly where to draw the line between political assassinations and murders stemming from personal and criminal feuds.}

Special forces are at once powerful and fragile. They can strike quickly, are flexible, and find it far more easily to operate covertly and deniably than conventional units. They cannot, though, seize and hold targets for long or last in toe-to-toe combat with regular forces. Their use as other than tactical assets is thus typically in conjunction with wider intelligence operations or military assaults.
10. ‘Impolite People’: Militias and Gangsters

I won’t deny that there were volunteers fighting there [in the Donbas], the best of the Russian army. I had several officers in my brigade who spent their vacation fighting for Novorossiya.

- Igor Strelkov (Girkin), former ‘defense minister’ of the unrecognized Donetsk People’s Republic, 2014

One of the roles of the intelligence agencies is to help mobilize and control auxiliary forces in local conflicts. They provide political cover, cannon fodder, forces for disruption, and muscle for local proxy regimes. In Crimea, for example, while the real task of securing the peninsula and blocking off Ukrainian garrisons fell to elite Russian forces, ‘local self-defense volunteers’ drawn largely from local organized crime groups loyal to Moscow’s local premier-in-waiting Sergei Aksenov—himself gang-connected —provided much less professional but very visible gunmen to guard government buildings. Since then, such forces have played the primary role in the Donbas, heavily supported by a mix of regular Russian

1 In a video statement summarized @ http://www.interpretermag.com/is-colonel-strelkov-making-a-comeback-or-has-he-been-tamed/

units, ad hoc collections of nationalists and adventurers, and everything in between. These auxiliaries have largely been organized by the GRU, operating out of a regional headquarters in Rostov-on-Don, close to the border.3

These kinds of forces fall broadly into three categories, each with their own distinctive strengths, weaknesses and modalities of use:

1. Volunteers and Mercenaries. First, there are Russians officially operating wholly outside Kremlin control, yet making no bones about their origins. A classic example would include the Cossacks. They have been used as deniable government assets since well before the Putin era, whether during the anti-Jewish pogroms before the 1917 Revolution or in the Transdniestrian secession war of 1992.4 Under Putin, though there has been a particular alliance formed and Cossacks fought in Chechnya, in Georgia, and now in the Donbas.5 Beyond them, there are individual Russian soldiers ‘volunteering’ in the Donbas while ‘on leave’ (even though this is technically against military law), or members of paramilitary and violent groups such as the Night Wolves motorcycle gang.6 These mercenaries, nationalists and adventurers are generally of questionable

Christopher Gilley, ‘Otamanshchyna?: The Self-Formation of Ukrainian and Russian Warlords at the Beginning of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries.’ Ab Imperio 2015, 3 (2015)

6 The Estonians, for example, have openly labeled the Night Wolves a security threat. Eesti Päevaleht, 27 June 2013

3 UNIAN, October 10, 2014
4 This was confirmed by a former GRU officer in conversation in February 2016
military value but considerable enthusiasm and also useful political-propaganda tools, demonstrating the alleged popular support for operations.

2. **Deniable Instruments.** Then there are Russians in deniable, notionally independent but essentially state-controlled structures. Some of the Russian soldiers ‘volunteering’ in the Donbas, for example, or the Cossacks, are not individuals attaching themselves to different local militias so much as formed elements that appear directly or indirectly under Russian control. They offer something of a balance, less deniable but more disciplined and effective. We may eventually see mercenaries working for other Russian private military and security companies filling this role. Putin has given his support for the creation of a legal basis for Russian private military companies, but already mercenaries have been deployed in Syria. First, as the distinctly ineffective Slavonic Corps who had a short-lived tour there in 2013, but since then the rather more effective unit known as Wagner. In the future, this may become more common a means of projecting Kremlin power. These forces may be marshaled by the FSB or the GRU, and may well as a result be working to different detail agendas in county.

3. **Warlords.** Finally, Moscow clearly makes full use of autonomous local militias and other agents of coercion, control and co-

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llaboration, as proxies and clients.

The Second Chechen War was to a considerable extent won thanks to ‘Chechen-ization’ and the increasing use of local warlords and militias to fight Chechen with Chechen. In Georgia, both Abkhaz and South Ossetian fighters played significant roles. In Crimea and amongst the first fighters in the Donbas were defectors from the Berkut special police, organized crime groups seeing a chance to convert muscle into territorial power, street gangs and personal followings. Again, while generally control of such assets would be a GRU role, in Ukraine where the FSB also has an historic stake, this can be a disputed issue. However, as is discussed below, the level of control the Kremlin can assert is sometimes limited.

These categories are, of course, broad and overlapping. An interesting twist on this model was provided by the Vostok Battalion, a force predominantly of Chechen soldiers, leavened with Ossetians and other volunteers from the Caucasus. It was formed around a core of veterans from the original battalion, a unit of Chechens which fought in the Second Chechen War and the Georgian War for the GRU before being disbanded. The GRU formed the second iteration of the battalion in 2014 and sent it into Donetsk, where as its first act it seized the rebel headquarters in what appears to have been a pointed reminder that they operated on Moscow’s sufferance. In short order, a Ukrainian, Alexander Khodakovsky, was appointed to head the battalion and many of the Chechens were withdrawn, replaced by locals. In this respect, Vostok was a thinly-deniable Russian force that then became a local militia.
bridging the two varieties of paramilitary used.\textsuperscript{8}

Either way, it is important to note, though, that there are severe limitations to such units. In some cases, they are hard to control. Ramzan Kadyrov, leader of Chechnya, whose ‘Kadyrovtsy’ served both his father and then him, helped crush the rebels but in the process has become a virtually independent ruler of the republic, funded by the federal budget.\textsuperscript{9} The more deniable the force, typically the more tenuous the control. As independent actors, they can and do demand that Moscow accommodate their political and economic agendas, from providing subsidies and payoffs through to shaping policy. They are also frequently undisciplined, and this also can create reputational costs, something most starkly visible with the shooting down of Malaysian Airliner MH17 over the Donbas, almost certainly by local militias using a Russian-supplied SA-17 Buk SAM, yet not on Russian orders.

Secondly, they are often of at best indifferent quality: there is an inverse relationship between deniability and effectiveness. In the Donbas, the conflict really began in April 2014, with the bulk of insurgent operations carried out by locals, supported by a relative handful of Russian paramilitaries. Only in late May, as government forces and their irregular allies looked likely to be able to triumph on the battlefield, did Moscow begin seriously to infiltrate its own conventional forces deniably into the conflict, along with such elements as Vostok. By August, a new approach had been adopted, and Russian regular contingents including armored units and paratroopers were being deployed.\textsuperscript{10}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[10] See Michael Kofman, ‘Russian hybrid warfare and
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conflict remains ‘hybrid’ in that Moscow continues to deny its role, and terrorist and other non-military attacks are being launched regularly, the true ‘hybrid’ phase of the conflict lasted only a few months, and ended precisely because methods effective in creating chaos were ineffective in harnessing it.\textsuperscript{11}

11. The Intelligence Agencies: Russia’s Strong Left Arms

‘For the past ten years, the West has been trying to bring us down, and we [intelligence officers] have been the frontline soldiers.’

- A recently-retired, former SVR officer

Russia also has a distinctive way of using its intelligence and security apparatus. These agencies are not simply or primarily gatherers of information: active measures from blackmail and subversion to assassination and sabotage are central to their mission. In the West, we have historically failed to understand them by mirroring our own services, when the best models are probably wartime sabotage and diversion services such as World War Two’s US Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and Britain’s Special Operations Executive (SOE). Russia’s intelligence services, after all, operate in effect on a permanent wartime footing. Indeed, this to a considerable extent event pre-dates Putin. In his 1999 autobiography, former spymaster Evgeny Primakov wrote that ‘All of us in the leadership of the Foreign Intelligence Service realized perfectly well that the concept of the enemy would not disappear with the end of the “Cold War”,’ not least because the West was trying to ‘disrupt the trend towards the increasing rapprochement with the Russian Federation’ of the other post-Soviet states.’

In the West, we have historically failed to understand Russia’s intelligence services by mirroring our own, when the best models are probably wartime sabotage and diversion services such as World War Two’s US Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and Britain’s Special Operations Executive (SOE). Russia’s intelligence services, after all, operate in effect on a permanent wartime footing.

1 Conversation, Moscow, January 2016

2 Evgeny Primakov, Gody v bol’shoy politike (Sovershenno sekretno, 1999), pp. 133, 135
The implications of this mindset are serious. It strengthens the services’ role and self-image not simply as sources of intelligence for others, but as active arms of the state. Believing that Russia faces a serious, even existential threat, they are forward-leaning, believing in the main action is better than inaction, and they are much less concerned with potential diplomatic fallout that their Western counterparts. Combined with the encouragement and operational cover provided by the Kremlin—which appears to heed them much more than its own ministry of foreign affairs—they are prone to engage in active measures from assassinations to propaganda campaigns, all, as Gerasimov put it, ‘nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals.’

All Russia’s ‘true’ special forces are connected with intelligence agencies: the military Spetsnaz are subordinated to the GRU military intelligence service, with other smaller elements also under the ‘Special Designation’ rubric in a wide range of other security and intelligence agencies. Operators from the Al’fa anti-terrorist groups of the Federal Security Service (FSB) conducted the cross-border kidnap of Estonian security officer Eston Kohver in 2014, for example, while there have been reports from Syria of operators from the highly-secretive Zaslon (‘Barrier’) group of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), broadly comparable

3 I explore this more in my report for the European Council on Foreign Relations, Putin’s Hydra: inside Russia’s intelligence services (ECFR, 2016), @ http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/putins_hydra_inside_russias_intelligence_services

4 Mark Galeotti, ‘Free Sergei Lavrov!‘, Foreign Policy, 17 February 2016 @ http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/02/17/free-sergei-lavrov-putin-russia-syria/

5 See Mark Galeotti, Russian Security and Paramilitary Forces since 1991 (Osprey, 2013)

6 Telegraph, 19 August 2015 @ http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/11811729/Russia-jails-Estonian-security-officer-in-top-secret-case.html
to the CIA’s Special Activities Division or JSOC’s Intelligence Support Activity.\footnote{Rogozin opublikoval fotó s boítxami “Zaslona” v Sirií’, \textit{Vzglyad}, 24 May 2014 @ \url{http://vz.ru/news/2014/5/24/688286.html}; “Zaslon” ot vrazhskikh agentov’, \textit{TV-Zvezda}, 22 October 2015 @ \url{http://tvzvezda.ru/news/forces/content/201510220804-ln18.htm}}

The intelligence community—and the FSB in particular—also plays a central coordinating role in cyberwarfare, as well as working covertly with criminals, paramilitaries and similar non-state actors. Overall, while still primarily intelligence-gathering assets, they perform three key roles in terms of active operations:

1. \textit{Pretext}. In the age of ‘lawfare’ (the deliberate abuse of legal processes to justify aggression or prevent responses) and information operations, it becomes especially important to create narratives supportive of Russian activities. The intelligence agencies are useful for creating the pretexts for operations. They were, for example, important in encouraging and supporting South Ossetian militias to launch the attacks that provoked a Georgian response in 2008, allowing Moscow to claim it was acting to defend its own peacekeepers and the civilian populations. The potential penetration of Russophones in Baltic States primarily by the FSB, and the encouragement of protest at their treatment, could conceivably be a future similar excuse for some kind of intervention, although this seems increasingly unlikely. While many have their grievances, especially over native language requirements, few show any enthusiasm to swap citizenship of a rule-of-law-based European Union for the Russian Federation.\footnote{Especially amongst younger Russophones, the level of integration in Estonia—the front-line state—has been steadily increasing, for}
2. **Preconditions.** As previewed in Gerasimov’s article, the agencies can be powerful force multipliers used to create preconditions for successful overt or semi-overt operations. In the case of the annexation of Crimea, for example, not only did the FSB and GRU help scout out the battlespace and mobilize local ‘self-defense volunteers’, they also helped disrupt Ukrainian command and control, to ensure no coherent or timely response. Likewise, they appear to have been behind terrorist acts and cyberattacks against Kiev in support of operations in the Donbas.⁹

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³ Taras Kuzio, ‘Ukraine reignites,’ *Foreign Affairs*, January 25, 2015

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⁹ Young Estonian Russians feeling more integrated,’ *Estonian Public Broadcasting*, 15 June 2015 @ http://news.err.ee/v/news/politics/society/afe89d41-660d-4e89-a6c7-3672721cf6e2/young-estonian-russians-feeling-more-integrated

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⁴ Estonian World Review, April 21, 2011
Rossotrudnichestvo, the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States, Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation, attest to a particular interest in using Russian diaspora communities as potential instruments, even if it is open to question just how useful a tactic this will prove.\textsuperscript{11}

The old cliché that when you have a hammer every problem looks like a nail is more than a little appropriate here. Under Vladimir Putin, the security and intelligence community has done very well, with steadily growing budgets, ever-broader powers, and the indulgence and support of a president who regards them fondly as his greatest support base. That gives them a strong political voice and also a reason to lobby for a significant executive role. Both ‘hybrid’ and ‘political war’ grant this community a particularly central role, and so they are inevitably amongst their advocates. And so, in circular process, capacity shapes policy, and policy shapes investment in further capacity.

\textsuperscript{11} See, for example, Orysia Lutsevych, \textit{Agents of the Russian World: proxy groups in the contested neighbourhood} (Chatham House, 2016)
12. Weaponizing Civvy Street: Hackers, Businesspeople and Bankers as Soldiers

I must say that I don't like the term hybrid warfare, it sounds far too nice... I would like to bring your attention to CRIMINALITY as an aspect of the new hybrid war.

- Aivar Jaeski, deputy director, NATO STRATCOM Center of Excellence

The logic of Russia's mobilization of state and society is that this is not only to defend against the perceived Western 'hybrid offensive' but also to use non-military structures, forces and individuals for offensive political operations. The intelligence services, for example, often act not alone but in conjunction with other bodies, some state, some private, some voluntary. Of course, as with all aspects of contemporary Russia's playbook, this is by no means wholly new. Coercive diplomacy, the support of useful parties and individuals in other countries, propaganda and economic leverage have long been accepted instruments of geopolitics. Putin's Russia is, rather, distinctive in the scale of their use, and also in the seamless integration of state and theoretically non-state actors.

In particular, if today's Russian style of contestation is described as hybrid war for the way it blends overt and covert, kinetic and political, then Moscow must also be considered the master of 'hybrid business,' of developing commercial enterprises—legal and illegal—that ideally make money, but at the same time, whether technically private concerns or not, can be used for the state's purposes.


2 For more on this, see Mark Galeotti and Anna Arutunyan,
Overall, such hybrid businesses become integrated into the Kremlin’s geopolitical warfighting in three main ways:

1. *Information warriors:* I have heard Russian security officials describe the Russian state-controlled media as ‘warriors of the political battleground,’ a term which would seem to apply especially directly to its external networks such as the Sputnik news agency and RT multi-lingual TV foreign news service. Not only is the Russian TV media—still the way most Russians get their news—directly controlled by the state or else heavily influenced by it, but there is an extensive array of overt and covert state propaganda arms operating abroad.3 There is also an array of other ways this is carried out, from the ‘troll farms’ adding suitable comments to web pages, through the activities of open political and social organizations4 and even the suborning and supporting appropriate opinion shapers, from journalists and public figures to think tanks and political parties.5 Where possible, various forms of information

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3 For an excellent study, see Peter Pomerantsev & Michael Weiss, *The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money* (IMR, 2014)


5 Fredrik Wesslau, ‘Putin’s friends in Europe,’ *ECFR Commentary*, 19 October 2016 @ http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_putins_friends_in_europe7153
warfare are combined. In 2014, for example, Russian media reported that Dmitry Yarosh, leader of the Ukrainian Right Sector organization, had used social media to ask the Chechen rebels to stage terrorist attacks within Russia. Yarosh later stated that his social media account had been hacked in order to place the appeal, but the effect on public opinion both in Russia and Ukraine had already been substantial. They also, where possible, use the law to muzzle critics, with expensive libel and slander cases. The role of these ‘information warriors’ is to disrupt hostile and inconvenient messages through their own narratives, something especially visible over both Ukraine and Syria, but this is a long-running theme of Russian information operations.

2. Economic warriors: Even setting aside direct economic warfare such as the use of the so-called ‘energy weapon,’ something outside the scope of this paper, Russian corporations lobby in their own right, and encourage those who work with and benefit from their operations also to push a suitable message. They also use political and public relations firms, penetrate businesses using investments whose source and beneficiaries are shrouded behind multiple shell companies and obscure offshore jurisdictions and the outright cooptation of local figures (Estonia’s former president Toomas Ilves calls this “Schröderizatsiya,” after the lucrative employment of former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder by Gazprom).

Businesses acting notional on their own initiative are also used to provide financial support to political and social movements Moscow
deems convenient, from Marine Le Pen’s anti-EU Front Nationale in France (which received a €9 million loan from a bank run by a close Putin ally), to the Czech Republic’s Russophile President Miloš Zeman (whose election was partially bankrolled by the local head of the Russian oil company Lukoil, allegedly as a personal donation). The most dangerous use of such tactics is in active and potential target territories, such as Ukraine and Moldova, where oligarchs and business groups dependent on Russia become useful local allies. Again, the aim is to sway policy towards a more favorable treatment of Russian adventures.

3. Underworld warriors: Russia is especially willing to use organized crime as a source of resources, operational capacity and intelligence.

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7 For a useful survey of some actors in Europe, see Susi Dennison & Dina Pardijs ‘The world according to Europe’s insurgent parties: Putin, migration and people power,’ ECFR Report, 27 June 2016 @ http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/the_world_according_to_europes_insurgent_parties7055

8 ‘Les prêts russes au Front national inquiètent le Parlement européen,’ EurActiv, 4 December 2014 @ http://www.euractiv.fr/section/europe-de-l-est/news/les-prets-russes-au-front-national-inquietent-le-parlement-europeen/

9 Czech Radio, 23 January 2013 @ http://www.radio.cz/en/section/merchandise/if-elected-how-would-milos-zeman-or-

karel-schwarzenberg-influence-czech-economy. For a thoughtful assessment of Zeman’s potential value to Moscow, see Sławomir Budziak, ‘Czech Echoes of the Kremlin’s Information War,’ New Eastern Europe, 30 March 2015 @ http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/articles-and-commentary/1538-czech-echoes-of-the-kremlin-s-information-war

10 The use of organized crime as an instrument abroad has long been an established
The GRU appears to have been the most assiduous in developing such connections abroad, but it is not alone.\textsuperscript{11} When the FSB snatched Eston Kohver, for example, that was while he was investigating a cross-border cigarette smuggling operation that is likely to have been operating with the Russians’ sanction in return for a share of the profits being provided as operational funds with no ostensible Kremlin connection. More strikingly, freelance computer hackers (some mercenary, some ‘patriotic hackers’) tend to be the primary force behind major cyberattacks, simply encouraged and directed by, typically, the FSB. Grey and black market dealers can also arm non-state actors directly or indirectly working to Russia’s advantage (or at least causing trouble for Russia’s foes).

Eventually there may emerge a fourth category, mercenary soldiers.\textsuperscript{12} As noted above,

\begin{flushright}
\textit{Russia is especially willing to use organized crime as a source of resources, operational capacity and intelligence.}
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{11} See Mark Galeotti, Putin’s Secret Weapon,’ Foreign Policy, July 7, 2014 @ http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/07/07/putins-secret-weapon/

\textsuperscript{12} Mariya Butina, ‘Rossiya zhdet svoyu Blackwater,’ \textit{Voenny-promyslennyi kur’er}, 8 October 2014 @ http://vpk-news.ru/articles/22169; Mark
Moscow has dabbled with the use of what could be called ‘pseudo-mercenaries’ in both Donbas and Syria. Although under Russian law private military companies, unlike security providers, are still banned, the use of foreign registration and the government’s habitual disregard for inconvenient laws have allowed these test cases to be run. So far, the results have been mixed, but the potential to create military assets which are deniable and yet controlled and effective, as tools of the state, is something that has been recognized for some time. In 2011, Putin noted that such companies are a way of implementing national interests without the direct involvement of the state’ and the next year first deputy prime minister Dmitri Rogozin again floated the idea. Only in 2014, with the rapid deterioration of relations with the West and the war in Donbas did this get anywhere, though. However, at present keen interest continues to be devoted to the question of whether Russian PMCs with Russian recruits (and closely managed by Russian intelligence officers) might be the answer to the whole deniability-versus-effectiveness conundrum.

Of course, there is blurring even within these blurred categories. ‘Patriotic hackers’ mobilized or hired by the state, may target media sources as part of the information war, attack banks and companies for economic reasons, or be involved in more direct criminality. Businesses


13 RIA Novosti, 13 April 2011; RIA Novosti, 19 September 2012

14 See, for example, Jörg Becker, ‘The great Georgian/Russian media war,’ Media Development 59, 1 (2012); Rick Fawn and Robert Nalbandov, ‘The difficulties of knowing the start of war in the information age: Russia, Georgia and the War over South Ossetia, August 2008,’
may be used to bankroll useful political movements, launder criminal funds, and exert leverage, all at once. In many ways this is the quintessence of the Putin ‘total war’ approach to governance: the absence of legal, ethical and practical limitations on the state’s capacity openly or covertly to co-opt other institutions to its own ends.

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Part Four: Recommendations

The current Russian regime has staked its political credibility on its revisionist program, and the present atmosphere of tension and confrontation will thus continue, regardless of the outcomes of the current struggle in Ukraine. An over-reaction will play to Putin’s narrative of grievance and may force the Kremlin into more overt aggression in its neighborhood and mischief-making beyond it. On the other hand, under-reaction, or a response which fails adequately to address the challenge, will encourage further adventures—and not solely by Russia. The stakes are high, and a proper understanding of the nature of the threat is crucial.

The following sections outline some possible responses and recommendations. First of all, it is crucial to think in Russian—in other words, to understand Moscow’s motivations, and its understanding of the current confrontation. While ‘non-linear warfare’ may not be an official Russian term of art, by understanding how it works and the subtle distinctions between what I call proper ‘hybrid warfare’ as visited upon Ukraine and Georgia, and the ‘political warfare’ waged against the NATO powers, we can tailor appropriate and meaningful responses.

In part, this will mean considering the West’s own hybrid warfighters: how can the military best be configured and deployed in these conflicts? But to a considerable extent it will mean target hardening and hybrid defense, addressing the weaknesses that Moscow is seeking to exploit, and which encourage Russian adventurism by their very presence. Fortuitously enough, this is also an area in which the European Union and European states can play a much more important role than they have in the past.

After all, whether we consider them new wars, or new ways of fighting old wars, this is not simply about the current confrontation with Putin’s Russia. There will be other challengers and challenges.
13. Intellectual: thinking in Russian

The problem you Americans have in dealing with us is that you think you understand us, but you don’t. You look at the Chinese and you think: ‘They’re not like us.’ You look at us Russians, and you think, ‘They’re like us.’ But you’re wrong. We are not like you.

- Quote attributed originally to Vladimir Putin

The modern West—networked, globally-integrated, concerned with multiple real and perceived threats, and facing underlying crises of confidence and legitimacy—has specific vulnerabilities the Russians are eagerly exploiting. The fundamental challenges are to understand quite what this involves, what Russia’s capabilities are, and what can be done to deter and respond to it.

Lt. General David Barno, former commander of Coalition forces in Afghanistan, has warned that

The complex demands of today’s wars suggest that US defense budget and plans for the future may be significantly out of balance for the fast-changing shape of conflict. The wars of this century are less and less likely to resemble the wars of the last. And a military that was largely designed and built for the last century may need serious restructuring in order to successfully win the wars of this one.

This is entirely true as far as it goes, but the threat facing the West is likely ‘political,’ not ‘hybrid war,’ unless we make some especially bad decisions. As a result, this is not just a military issue and


the challenge of responding to the non-kinetic instruments of this new style of conflict are even more intractable. Should information warfare based on propaganda and spin be counteracted with more propaganda, or with fact-checkers and media awareness classes in schools?\textsuperscript{3} For countries with potentially fractious minorities which Moscow could exploit, is the most effective way of buying security to spend more on counter-intelligence officers, police, and social inclusion programs rather than buy tanks or missiles?

There are, of course, all kinds of conceptual and institutional obstacles to rewriting the West’s defensive playbook, not least the money invested in extremely expensive leading-edge weapons systems optimized for conventional warfare. However, Russia—and other revisionist powers—are well aware of the impossibility at present of challenging the USA’s conventional warfighting capabilities and as such are exploring alternative, asymmetric responses which shift the field of battle away from those where the West is strongest. There is a clear need to explore just what the Russians themselves are thinking, planning and building for, rather than assuming they see ‘war’ or even ‘hybrid war’ in the same terms as the West.

The 2014 Wales Summit saw NATO grappling with the new challenge and produced some welcome initiatives such as the approval of the Readiness Action Plan. However, the problem is that ‘non-linear war’ explicitly operates across traditional boundaries between the military and the political. As a military alliance, NATO is well placed to respond to direct kinetic threats, and Putin was probably speaking

\textsuperscript{3} Peter Pomerantsev & Michael Weiss, \textit{The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money} (IMR, 2014)
for his entire security elite when he said 'I think that only someone who has lost their mind or in a dream could imagine that Russia would one day attack NATO.'

For this very reason, though, it is unlikely that Moscow would even pose any such challenge, at least not unless the political context had already been manipulated to make a NATO response difficult. Instead, Russia could use intelligence, political and economic tactics beyond NATO’s remit.

This dilemma reflects a fundamental point: that the West continues to try and understand Russia through its own perspectives, rather than trying to see the view from the Kremlin’s windows. To take one specific example, the FSB’s 16th Center and the GRU’s 5th Department, believed to be their respective offensive information operations commands, and the FSB’s 8th Center, responsible for information security, all operate in a range of different kinds of activity, from propaganda to direct hacking or even destructive cyberattacks, in defiance of the kind of siloing one would see in the West. This is because ‘cyber’ as used in the West is not a Russian concept. Rather, the Russians consider information to be a domain of warfare. Instead of thinking only in terms of data held within and transmitted between computers and other electronic systems, they view information as an all-encompassing whole, of which only part is held in electronic media. So, for example, Russian planners

4 ‘Putin al Corriere della Sera: «Non sono un aggressore, patto con l’Europa e parità con gli Usa»,’ Corriere della Sera, 6 June 2015 @ http://www.corriere.it/esteri/15_giugno_06/intervista-putin-corriere-non-sono-aggressore-patto-europa-ab5eefe-0c0a-11e5-81da-8596be76a029.shtml

5 Notably, a glossary of key information security terms produced by the Military Academy of the General Staff includes no entry for the term ‘cyber warfare.’ Slovar’ terminov i opredelenii v oblasti informatsionnoi bezopasnosti (Voeninform, 2008)

6 Georgii Pocheptsov, Informatsionnye voiny (Reflobuk, 2001)
will consider propaganda and hacking as part of the same domain. To their Western counterparts, though, this defies their basic notions as to how informational warfighting is structured.  

On a more fundamental level, very few Western analyses consider how the Russians themselves expect wars to unfold. A survey of the current state of Russian military thinking by Chekinov and Bogdanov in 2011 is still the closest thing to a blueprint for how Moscow sees a modern, full-scale conflict developing. They say that

A new-generation war will be dominated by information and psychological warfare that will seek to achieve superiority in troops and weapons control and depress the opponent’s armed forces personnel and population morally and psychologically. In the ongoing revolution in information technologies, information and psychological warfare will largely lay the groundwork for victory.

They then describe a pre-conflict stage dominated by what would be described as ‘hybrid’ operations, as

the aggressor [implicitly the West] will make an effort to involve all public institutions in the country it intends to attack, primarily the mass media and religious organizations, cultural institutions, non-governmental organizations, public movements financed from abroad, and scholars engaged in research on foreign grants.

Indeed,

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7 For good primer, see Ulrik Franke, War By Non-Military Means (FOI, 2015)
8 There are, of course, honorable exceptions, but more likely to be found in the civilian than unformed world, if truth be told.
9 This and the quotes that follow are from Sergei Chekinov and Sergei Bogdanov, ‘Vliyanie nepriamikh deistviy na karakter sovremennoi voiny,’ Voennaya mysl, No. 6, 2011
Months before the start of a new-generation war, large-scale measures in all types of warfare—information, moral, psychological, ideological, diplomatic, economic, and so on—may be designed and followed under a joint plan to create a favorable military, political, and economic setting for the operations of the allies’ armed forces.

However, once the information operations, cyberattacks, 10 mis-directions, and even ‘nonlethal new-generation genetically engineered biological weapons’ have had their day, they see the war moving into its kinetic phase, a ‘shock and awe’ offensive clearly inspired by Desert Storm, starting with massive aerial attacks and moving eventually into a ground combat phase that is already a foregone conclusion because of the aggressor’s technological and informational edge, as in the closing period of the war, the attacker will roll over the remaining points of resistance and destroy surviving enemy units by special operations conducted by reconnaissance units to spot what enemy units have survived and transmit their coordinates to the attacker’s missile and artillery units; fire barrages to annihilate the defender’s resisting army units by effective advanced weapons; airdrop operations to surround points of resistance; and territory mopping-up operations by ground troops.

It is crucial for the West to break away from both mirror-imaging, assuming the Russians see the world as we do, but also caricature, seeing in them something wholly and extravagantly different.

10 Their use especially in this pre-war phase is also explored in Pavel Antonovich, ‘O sushchnosti i soderzhannii kibervoiny’, Voennaya mysl’ No. 7, 2011. In addition, see Timothy Thomas, ‘Russia’s Information Warfare Strategy: Can the Nation Cope in Future Conflicts?’ Journal of Slavic Military Studies 27, 1 (2014)
spooks-and-trolls ‘hybrid wars’ often imagined in the West, which are best considered ‘political wars.’ It is crucial for the West to break away from both mirror-imaging, assuming the Russians see the world as we do, but also caricature, seeing in them something wholly and extravagantly different.

Russia has reached back and re-learned a particular Soviet lesson, that political effects are what matters, not the means used to achieve them. Within non-linear warfare are means either to win a military conflict—such as the decapitating arrests of the Hungarian high command that prepared the way for the Soviet invasion in 1956—or else to make them unnecessary. Drawing on Russian strategic thinking, though, what implications does this have for present security calculi? If anything, the West should again turn to Gerasimov’s words, this time from a 2014 speech to the Russian Academy of Military Sciences. He called for a ‘comprehensive set of strategic defense measures embracing the entire state apparatus… to convince potential aggressors of the futility of any forms of pressure on the Russian Federation and its allies.’

The West ought to do take a leaf from Moscow’s book, and see how, without sacrificing its democratic values and liberties, it too can mobilize to deter or defeat any гибридные threats.

__11__ Valery Gerasimov, ‘Generalnyi shtab i oborona strany,’ _Voenno-promyshlennyi kur’er_, February 5, 2014
14. Hybrid Warfighters: Soldiers of the New Battlefield

I describe the role of the military, ... is to make us immune from coercion, make the nation immune from coercion.

- Gen. Martin Dempsey, former Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2014

Considering Russia’s perception of hybrid war as a complement or prelude to conventional, high-intensity conflict, it is essential that the USA and its allies maintain forces able to deter and counter such operations. Russian operations in the Donbas, in particular, have demonstrated how they are developing their capacity to target massive long-range firepower, not least through the enthusiastic use of drones, to deliver shattering blows to enemy troop concentrations. To a large extent these engagements have been defensive, preventing the Ukrainian army from being able to make advances against the separatist militias, but they give a sense of the Russians’ offensive capacities, and the planned recreation of certain division-strength formations is in part intended to form units able to exploit local successes in the attack, too.

This is not a council of despair, though. While NATO is faced with the need at least partly to reverse its previous pivot towards light, mobile out-of-area intervention forces, it has massive underlying strengths in resources, technology, and unity. Given that there is no evidence Moscow plans or seeks any direct military confrontation with NATO, there is the time to address any specific shortfalls. Furthermore, we should not fall into the trap of overstating Russian capacities. Moscow’s maskirovka frequently seeks to intimidate and over-awe through projecting an exaggerated sense of its strength, hoping to

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demoralize and thus encourage concessions. So far Russia’s actual military adventures have, we must remember, largely been under ideal or favorable circumstances and against far-from-peer adversaries.

In 2009, the Russians—supported by thousands of Abkhazian and South Ossetian militias—faced the army of Georgia, just 35,000 strong, with some of its best troops serving at the time alongside the Coalition in Afghanistan. Even so, on a tactical level the Georgians were often able to outfight the Russians on a one-for-one basis. Crimea was Moscow’s for the picking, especially given the disinclination on Kiev’s part—sadly, encouraged by Washington—not to order its troops to resist. In Crimea, as in the Donbas, the Russians have only sent professionals, and often from the elite units, at that. As is, the constant search for professionals is behind the use of scratch-built, compound battalion tactical groups in the war, with inevitable challenges to unit cohesion. In Syria, the Russians are still largely fighting an air war against an enemy with minimal anti-air capacity. In short, these wars of choice have also been fought with a stacked deck, and there is no reason to believe Moscow is willing to fight on other terms if it has a choice.

When looking at a range of operations in other theatres

While NATO is faced with the need at least partly to reverse its previous pivot towards light, mobile out-of-area intervention forces, it has massive underlying strengths in resources, technology, and unity.


in which an aggressor has tried to use covert or deniable military force, Dan Altman has noted that they usually fail, and they fail because of conventional force:

Thus, the correct Western response is to consider and address the four ways in which its military forces interact with Russian planning and any potential hybrid war threat:

1. *Conventional Military Deterrence.* First and foremost, the USA and its NATO allies need to be able clearly and credibly to be able to demonstrate the capacity to resist threats from across the kinetic spectrum, up to and including full-scale war. This remains the fundamental basis of NATO’s defense, and it is worth noting that in my contacts with Russian officers and security staffers, time and again it became clear that however worried Westerners may be about the value of NATO’s Article Five mutual defense guarantee, the Russians appear to take it very seriously indeed.

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4 Dan Altman, ‘The long history of “green men” tactics—and how they were defeated,’ *War On The Rocks*, 17 March 2016 @ http://warontherocks.com/2016/03/the-long-history-of-green-men-tactics-and-how-they-were-defeated/
2. **Political Reassurance.**
Part of the rationale for Russia’s aggressive posturing, from threatening nuclear attacks on Poland to buzzing Western ships and prowling on and over the edges of NATO airspace, is precisely the hope of intimidating and demoralizing. To this end, moves such as the basing of multi-national NATO battalions in the Baltic States and Poland, whether or not they would have a serious military impact in any future conflict, provide a tangible signal of the alliance’s commitment to mutual defense. This certainly does not escape planners in Moscow. One General Staff officer told me—after the requisite fulminations about NATO ‘aggression’ and ‘provocation’—that ‘of course the thought of shooting an American or a German is something we much take more seriously than a Pole or an Estonian.’ To this end, military deployments are also politics by other means, instruments of diplomacy and signaling. There obviously is a correlation between their deterrent capacity, but it is only partial; reassurance must be visible, take a form which has the most local impact, and may also need to be reasserted or reconfigured as the political needs of the moment change.

3. **Indirect deterrence.** The primary goal of NATO is the mutual defense of its members, but US and Western interests and broader than that. Russian interventions abroad have had a direct and often deeply problematic impact on the West, whether pushing refugees from the bombed-out cities of Syria to challenging the integrity of a global order based on international law and national sovereignty. This is especially dangerous given that perceived Russian successes may inspire other current and potentially revisionist

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5 Conversation, Moscow, March 2016
states. To this end, even if as a subsidiary goal, consideration needs to be given as to whether and how forces can also be used to dissuade Russia from hybrid adventures outside the NATO area, such as in the South Caucasus or Central Asia.

4. Hybrid warfighters. Soldiers are also hybrid warfighters—just not the only ones, and in many circumstances not the best. Their organization, equipment, and training should therefore also prepare them for the messy operations that might be involved, from hunting saboteurs to facing mobilized mobs of angry civilians. Of course, they are and must remain optimized for combat operations and, as will be discussed below, ought to be considered in their own terms as just one kind of hybrid warfighter, as other assets may prove at least as relevant to US and Western security in the present environment.
15. Resistance: Target Hardening and Hybrid Defense

What the Russians understood in Crimea is that it’s easy to take over territory when its’ people don’t want to stay. We should have fought for Crimea, but we should have fought for its peoples’ loyalty in the twenty years before, too. Then, they might have fought for us.

- Ukrainian security official, 2015

Hybrid war depends on exploiting vulnerabilities, especially ones relating to unity, will, and the capacity to resist. How can the US and its allies address these, to minimize the risk of Russian adventurism and its capacity to operate ‘under the radar,’ at least until it feels it has shaped a battlefield that suits it? 2 As András Rácz observes,

Hybrid warfare is built on capitalizing on the weaknesses of a country, on flaws in its political system, administration, economy and society. If an adversary cannot detect sufficient weaknesses, then no full-scale attack can be launched, meaning that hybrid warfare never reaches the second, attack phase. Hence, the best defence against

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1 Conversation, London, July 2015. When asked to clarify, he launched into a lengthy critique of Ukrainian government policy towards Crimea under successive administrations.

2 This section draws heavily on my “Time to think about “hybrid defense”, War On The Rocks, July 30, 2015 @ http://warontherocks.com/2015/07/time-to-think-about-hybrid-defense/
hybrid warfare is good governance.\textsuperscript{3}

These instruments are thus most applicable to countries experiencing political and social turmoil, with low or diminishing legitimacy of the existing order, and also weak security structures. Most European countries may suffer from one or two of these from time to time, but rarely all three, at once. The more plausible targets are within Russia’s ‘Near Abroad’. Georgia has already been the target of kinetic-political operations and may still be facing information- and economic-vectored aggression. Moldova remains vulnerable, and Kazakhstan may prove so in the future given the presence of ethnic Russians in the north, if the long-awaited Nazarbaev succession dismays Moscow and creates domestic disarray. Another potential target now would be Turkey, which has a powerful security structure and is a NATO member, but a series of domestic fault lines—not least the Kurdish minority—could offer the Russians opportunities to stir up trouble short of open operations.\textsuperscript{4}

\textbf{The main defense against such forms of warfare is pre-emptive, to ‘target harden’ by shoring up governance and legitimacy—a hybrid defense to resist hybrid war—sufficient to deny Moscow the hope of an easy victory}

Nicu Popescu has suggested that hybrid war is dangerous because ‘it is easy and cheap to launch for external aggressors, but costly in various ways for the defenders.’\textsuperscript{5} This is, however, questionable. The historical lesson is actually that such tactics are unlikely to succeed unless the target

\textsuperscript{3} András Rác, \textit{Russia’s Hybrid War in Ukraine} (Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2015), p. 92

\textsuperscript{4} I explored some of the options in ‘Will Putin strike back at Turkey from the shadows?’, \textit{War On The Rocks}, 2 December 2015 @ http://warontherocks.com/2015/12/will-putin-strike-back-at-turkey-from-the-shadows/

has, to a considerable extent, already lost—at least in terms of losing its capacity or will to resist. In the 1924 Estonian incident, for example, local communists stiffened and organized by Soviet intelligence officers launched a coup, which was then intended to be the basis for an ‘invitation’ for ‘Soviet assistance.’ Soviet naval forces were already at sea, and ground forces mobilized on the pretext of a training exercise near the border. They initially managed to seize several key locations, but then the government galvanized itself and declared a state of emergency, the anticipated working class support failed to materialize, and the security forces began to reassert control.  

While there is no question but that the Red Army could have conquered Estonia in a full invasion, rather than engage in an openly imperial venture, Moscow backed down. It pulled its covert operators from Estonia when it could, and disavowed any role in the attempted coup.

The main defense against such forms of warfare is thus pre-emptive, to ‘target harden’ by shoring up governance and legitimacy—a hybrid defense to resist hybrid war—sufficient to deny Moscow the hope of an easy victory. Of course, spooks, Spetsnaz and sympathizers will remain useful instruments in peace, for gathering intelligence, inspiring video games and influencing policy, respectively. Furthermore, when Russia does engage in conflict, it will employ the full spectrum of means at its disposal. However, the crucial point to make is that none of these can fully

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7 See, for example, Aapo Cederberg and Pasi Eronen, ‘How can Societies be Defended against Hybrid Threats?’, GCSP Security Sector Analysis, September 2015 @ file:///Users/mark.galeotti/D ownloads/GCSP%20Strategic %20Security%20Analysis%20 - %20How%20can%20Societies%20be%20Defended%20against%20Hybrid%20Threats.pdf
substitute for essential weaknesses in military and economic strength. They are powerful means of magnifying existing weaknesses in will and capacity and taking full advantages of any opportunities that may emerge as a result, but they are still asymmetric assets, weapons of the weak.  

Of course, the corollary for a form of warfare in which soldiers are the last, not the first into the breach, only appearing once the war has been all but won through political and economic subversion, division, and demoralization, is that Western countries need the resources and conditions to deter Russian adventurism when possible, and defeat it before its kinetic phase when necessary.

That means adequate, well-trained, and well-regarded police forces able to deal with genuine or manufactured protests. Riot control is a specialized business, and police need not just today’s panoply of intimidating armor and equipment, but the training and seasoning to stand in front of a jeering, jostling mob and neither back down nor overreact. It means counter-intelligence services with the powers, budgets, and skills to identify and turn, convict, or expel agents, provocateurs, political operators, and those who would fund and stir up divisive local movements.

It means social outreach and a strong emphasis on governance and legitimacy. After all, corruption, the exclusion of minorities and communities—not just Russian-speakers—and public disillusion all create opportunities for Moscow to exploit.

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8 A term popularized by James C. Scott in his *Weapons of the Weak: everyday forms of resistance* (Yale, 1985)

9 Martin Zapfe notes the political risks should NATO soldiers, because of human failings or an aggressor’s machinations, cause civilian casualties. "'Hybrid' Threats and NATO’s Forward Presence,' Policy Perspectives 4/7, September 2016 @ http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/PP4-7.pdf
Blocking or undermining Russian propaganda campaigns designed to spread division and uncertainty is a matter of national security in this context, as is resisting pressure on domestic and international media. As James Sherr affirms, ‘A free media should not be defenceless in the face of trolling, state-sponsored manipulation and cyber attack’.  

Maintaining social cohesion in the face of Russian covert assaults is not just a passive measure, as a willingness to use civil disobedience and other non-violent protests can also be used as a weapon against hybrid aggression, as Lithuania is already proposing.  

The most powerful defenses against Russian mischief-making and manipulation are social cohesion, effective law enforcement, an independent and responsible media, and legitimate, transparent and effective governance. 

It means proper controls on the flows of money from Russia, even if laundered through thinly-veiled front companies in third-party jurisdictions. This money otherwise can be used to buy influence, support local political movements intended to stir up trouble, and take over strategic business sectors. No country likes turning away business, but in the modern world, money is weaponized, and Moscow understands this well. 

None of these are new and all are being tackled to greater or lesser extent by all NATO’s \footnote{James Sherr, The New East-West Discord. Russian Objectives, Western Interests (Clingendael: 2015), p. 74} \footnote{Maciej Bartkowski, ‘Countering hybrid war: civil resistance as a national defence strategy,’ openDemocracy, 12 May 2015 @ https://www.opendemocracy.net/civilresistance/maciej-} \footnote{Elena Holodny, ’2015 Could Be The Year We Witness The “Weaponization Of Finance,” Business Insider, 5 January 2015 @ http://www.businessinsider.com/weaponization-of-finance-eurasia-group-2015-1}
frontline states. However, they are rarely considered as part of a comprehensive national security strategy. Nor do they fall within NATO’s traditional remit. That is understandable, as is the generals’ preference to stick to familiar measures such as the creation of the new Very High Readiness Joint Task Force. It cannot be NATO’s job to audit campaign contributions in Latvia, say, or push social inclusion in Romania.

Instead, this creates an opportunity for the European Union, which has long been more interested in governance than war.\(^{13}\) The most powerful defenses against Russian mischief-making and manipulation are, after all, social cohesion, effective law enforcement, an independent and responsible media, and legitimate, transparent and effective governance. Beyond the existing Joint Framework adopted in April 2016,\(^{14}\) a more strategic and urgent approach to ensuring these are found throughout the European Union is thus a security necessity and not just a public good. Along with its External Action Service, responsible for common foreign policy, there is scope for structures not trying to parallel or challenge NATO on the kinetic side of defense,

\(^{13}\) See Peter Pindják, ‘Deterring hybrid warfare: a chance for NATO and the EU to work together?’, *NATO Review* 2015 @

\(^{14}\) A program directed towards raising awareness of the risks, building resilience by addressing potential strategic and critical sectors (including cybersecurity, critical infrastructures, protection of the financial system, protection of public health, and supporting efforts to counter violent extremism and radicalization), crisis response, and increased cooperation within the EU and between the EU and NATO. It is, however, still a relatively vague commitment involving sharing papers and joint meetings more than anything more concrete. European Commission, ‘Security: EU strengthens response to hybrid threats,’ 6 April 2016 @
but rather to coordinate non-military defenses, incorporating bodies such as Europol and the new East StratCom counter-propaganda group.

Member states need to be imaginative and flexible when they consider the challenges they face and how best they can be resisted. A simple increase in the defense budget may not always in itself be the most appropriate response. For example, maybe a country needs forensic accountants, media analysts, or language teachers more than trigger-pullers. At the risk of making the generals unhappy, this may even mean that NATO should scrap its goal of having all members spend 2% of GDP on (conventional) defense, so long as they demonstrably are spending the shortfall on other security objectives.

It is, however, through such hybrid defense that the long-term challenge from the Kremlin will best be neutralized. And given that modern conflict is as much about politics and information management, it is worth noting that even the most hawkish Russian nationalist can hardly claim to see a threat to the Motherland from social workers and community police officers.
16. Conclusions: New Wars, or New Ways of War?

Of course, there’s nothing new in hybrid war. It’s as old as the Trojan Horse. What distinguishes it is the fact that its scale is bigger, its speed and intensity are higher, and it’s taking place on our borders.

- NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, 2015\(^1\)

Like it or (probably) not, the West is at war, but not necessarily the kind of war it imagines or with which it is accustomed. It is already at war with Russia for the simple reason that it takes only one side to make a war, and the Kremlin has already made the decision that the West has started it. The Russians’ reasoning is deeply questionable; we may debate how far Western naivety, cynicism, self-deception, or hypocrisy are to blame; there is scope to consider what could and will be the way to end this civilizational and geopolitical clash. There is even ample room for scholars, semanticists, and philosophers to decide if we even can call it ‘war’ when it is almost certainly not going to involve open conflict, rather than a shadowy tussle of politics, values, propaganda and mobilized and manipulated self-interest.

However on one level, none of that matters. For the moment, the task is to decide how best to respond to this political challenge, not least to keep it from ever becoming kinetic, but also because this is unlikely to be the last time the West must address such non-linear methods.

To a considerable degree, the overarching conclusions of this study are that while there is indeed something specific and dangerous about Russia’s current non-linear approach to war, the instruments they use are, in essence, nothing new. Deception and propaganda, coercive diplomacy and economic leverage,
subversion and deniable auxiliaries have been tools of statecraft so long as there have been states. What is new is the world in which they are being employed, and thus it may well prove that where Russia leads, we all follow. As a result, regardless of what happens in Moscow, whether or not Russia continues to be a strategic challenge (and it will, at least as long as Putin remains in power), this is an issue that needs serious attention.

If in Crimea the aim was to create a new order, in the Donbass it was as much as anything else to create chaos, albeit a controlled, weaponized chaos.

Covert and ambiguous forces and agencies such as described above should therefore be considered simply one of many potential weapons in the arsenal; as one Russian General Staff Academy instructor put it in a conversation, ‘when the enemy already has a regiment in the field, you use artillery; when you want to strike before the enemy can deploy that regiment, or without his knowing he needs to, you use gibriderchikî’—‘hybridists,’ not a term, it is worth noting, I have come across before or since. However, exploring Russian discussion of such ‘sub-military’ options, as well as their use, what emerges is an understanding is that there are sharply limited circumstances in which such instruments and approaches are truly useful.

Their main value is to lever open fault lines already present and exploit those failures of governance and security left by governmental blunder, inaction or incapacity. In Crimea, the annexation was not simply a matter of bluff and surprise, so much as taking advantage of an almost uniquely advantageous situation. The presence of Black Sea Fleet bases on the peninsula meant that forces were already in place. Decades of neglect had left a Russophone population

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2 Conversation, Moscow, January 2016
3 For an interesting exploration of Russians’ successes and limitations, see James Sherr, Hard diplomacy and soft coercion: Russia’s influence abroad (Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2013)
already disposed to a change in status, with a large organized crime community already closely linked to Russia. Kiev was in disarray, its chain of command compromised and mistrusted (not least due to FSB penetration).

Although the long-term strategic success of the Donbas operation is still debatable, in the immediate term the Russians again exploited weaknesses in local control and governance. Besides, if in Crimea the aim was to create a new order, in the Donbass it was as much as anything else to create chaos, albeit a controlled, weaponized chaos. 4 However, the lessons of the Donbas are also that relying on non-kinetic methods and deniable auxiliaries work well enough in the initial stages against an enemy still adapting and, in this case, recovering from virtual state collapse. However, they quickly become much less effective, and it is Russian artillery and armor, albeit largely based over the border, that represents the real force keeping the Donbas contested, not mercenaries and militias.

*Taking the Hype out of Hybrid*

So is talk of a ‘new way of war’ simply alarmist hyperbole? To an extent, but not entirely: the distinctiveness appears not so much in essence, but in degree. Furthermore, it must be emphasized that there are two, cognate phenomena at work: the essentially bloodless, if no less ruthless ‘political war’ which is essentially what is currently being waged on the West, and the political-military ‘hybrid war’ experienced in Ukraine.

The fragilities of the contemporary state system and the impact of social, technological and economic change provide ample opportunities for a revisionist state like Russia, in which a culture of ‘total war’ still informs doctrinal thinking and a small oligarchy essentially controls

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national military, political and also economic and informational resources. The lessons of Russia’s recent adventures—much like Western ones into the Middle East and North Africa—are that it is frightfully easy to create chaos, even if unexpectedly hard to manage it. While Moscow is unlikely to get what it wants from such adventures, the consequences of its simply launching them are often almost as serious for the West.

Addressing this challenge can no more be the sole preserve of the soldier as it is of the diplomat or the counter-intelligence officer. Instead, what will be needed is a coordinated, all-of-government response that addresses legitimacy gaps and media awareness as assiduously as military capabilities and spycatching.

In Ukraine, what we see is what we talked about earlier, diplomatic tools being used, informational tools being used, military tools being used, economic tools being used against Ukraine... We, I think, in the West, should consider all of our tools in reply.5

Finally, though, the risks ought also to be considered in context: a weak Russia may be looking to use such methods to leverage its own strengths, and above all Western weaknesses, but this is by no means a magic bullet. As of this writing, Moscow is bogged down in the Donbas and likely Syria, politically isolated, economically sanctioned, and with few options to improve its lot. Furthermore, as the

5 Jim Garamone, ‘NATO Commander Breedlove Discusses Implications of Hybrid War,’ DOD News, 23 March 2015 @ http://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/604334
impact sinks in of alleged (and highly likely) Russian hacking of the Hilary Clinton campaign and the Democratic National Committee’s servers and the subsequent leaks of embarrassing emails, the calls for a more robust Western response grows. Even as concerns continue as of writing about how far a Trump presidency will be willing to confront Moscow, there can be no question but that the US and wider Western national security establishment is becoming more and more aware of the potential threat from Russian non-linear warfare. Moscow rationalizes its ‘political war’ by claiming that the West started it. In telling irony, it may be that its very ‘counter-attack’ will actually spark such a Western campaign, albeit political rather than hybrid. This may legitimize Putin’s narrative, but it is also likely to demonstrate just how vulnerable an over-geared, under-invested, over-securitized and under-legitimate Russia may be the very same tactics it uses so profligately. From cyberattacks to deeper and broader sanctions, launching propaganda campaigns to encouraging elite conspiracies, should they want to, the United States and its allies have formidable opportunities to fight their own ‘political war’ inside Russia. Alarmist rhetoric aside, the ‘new way of war’ may well prove to be more of a threat to Russia than to the West.