

Back to the future? Russia's hybrid warfare, revolutions in military affairs, and Cold War comparisons

by Diego A. Ruiz Palmer¹



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Conflicts over the last two decades have often been described as ushering in a “new way of war” characterized by complexity, ambiguity and asymmetry in means and stakes.² While the “fog of war” is inherent to warfare,³ hostilities in this new age of asymmetry have exhibited, nearly universally, complex combinations of actors, narratives, tactics and technologies — as well as an ambiguous interaction between the local, regional and international contexts in which they take place. In its most recent and evolved form, as witnessed during Russia's illegal annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula in March 2014 and its active involvement in supporting pro-Russian separatist movements in Ukraine's Donbas region, this new way of war has often been designated as “Hybrid Warfare.”⁴

What sets Russia's brand of hybrid warfare apart from the asymmetric tactics and techniques traditionally associated with non-state actors — a weaker opponent attempting to outsmart or grind-down a superior adversary — is its *scale*. This gives a nation-state, such as Russia, the strategic capacity to use a mix of hard and soft power instruments to isolate and coerce weaker neighbors, while intimidating and deterring

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² Regina Karp, Aaron Karp and Terry Terriff (editors), *Global Insurgency and the Future of Armed Conflict: Debating Fourth Generation Warfare*, London, Routledge, 2007.

³ Barry D. Watts, “Clausewitzian Friction and Future War,” revised edition, *McNair Paper* No. 68, Institute of National Strategic Studies, Washington, D.C., National Defense University Press, 2004.

⁴ There is no unanimity of views on the terminology “hybrid warfare,” variously designated as “ambiguous warfare,” “non-linear warfare,” “no-contact warfare,” and “nth generation warfare.” Furthermore, “hybrid warfare” is *not* a Russian home-grown set of terms. See Dave Johnson, “Russia's Approach to Conflict - Implications for NATO's Deterrence and Defence,” *Research Paper* No. 111, NATO Defense College, Rome, Italy, April 2015, pp. 1-2.



more distant, but also more capable, opponents. Unlike non-state actors, which often can only attempt to leverage their asymmetric methods by fighting against their opponents, Russia aims to achieve politically decisive outcomes with, if possible, no or only a limited and overt use of military force, while being prepared to act militarily, with devastating effect at the operational level, if necessary. It is this broad spectrum of Russia's expanding capacity to mix hard and soft power tools that represents the greatest challenge for the formulation of strategies designed to expose and counter Russia's hybrid warfare "model."

In effect, Russia's adoption of hybrid warfare is the product of a *combination* of strategic opportunity and necessity, tailored to today's environment of heightened societal connectivity, fragility and vulnerability⁵ — the *opportunity* to pursue and achieve policy objectives of the highest importance through the active, but calibrated, employment of mostly non-military means, together with the *necessity* to avoid a highly destructive, and potentially decisive, use of force by an adversary. Failure to adhere to these precepts could result, through miscalculation, in what Russian military doctrine terms "threats to the very existence of the State,"⁶ including the risk of unintended and uncontrolled escalation to strategic nuclear use.

Necessity and opportunity are the mirror-image of one another: where advances in technology that support key military functions — e.g., intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance; information fusion; communications; navigation; precision targeting — offer the prospect of attaining decisive military advantage *in the context of hostilities*, other advances in

technology — web-based information technologies; instant, mass communications; computer hacking; the persistent use of cyber warfare to inflict damage on foreign information infrastructure; etc. — aim at attaining a decisive political advantage *short of war*. In effect, hybrid warfare bridges the divide between the hard and the soft power applications that result from the technological and information revolutions of the last three decades in ways that maximize asymmetric advantages for Russia, as well as minimize risks and costs. It is partly strategic influence and partly strategic resilience, reflecting the combination of confident defiance and a deeply-rooted sense of physical vulnerability that has often characterized Russian attitudes.

Looking to the wider implications for European security and for NATO's strategy in the wake of Russia's political behavior and military performance against Ukraine, Russia's embrace of the hybrid warfare paradigm has prompted speculation over:

(i) Whether hybrid warfare represents a new transformation of warfare and should qualify as a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) that will set out a new strategic paradigm;⁷ and

(ii) Whether Russia's new political posture and countering Russia's hybrid warfare challenge effectively amount to a revival of the Cold War⁸ and the restoration of the familiar operational patterns of the NATO-Warsaw Pact strategic competition of the 1970s and 1980s.⁹

Considering these two different questions in tandem offers the prospect of identifying applicable insights for

⁵ In an article published in February 2013, Army General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the Russian General Staff, warns that "In terms of scale of the casualties and destruction, the catastrophic social, economic, and political consequences, such new-type conflicts are comparable with the consequences of any real war." General V.V. Gerasimov, "Prediction is what science is valued for," *Voyenno-promyshlennyi kur'yer* No. 8, February 27 - March 5, 2013.

⁶ For an enlightening analysis of the 2014 version of Russia's Military Doctrine, see Polina Sinovets and Bettina Renz, "Russia's Military Doctrine and beyond: threat perceptions, capabilities and ambitions," *Research Paper* No. 117, NATO Defense College, Rome, Italy, July 2015.

⁷ The connection between hybrid warfare and the concept of Revolutions in Military Affairs is addressed in Dave Johnson, "Russia's Approach to Conflict," *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3; Thomas Bjerregaard, *Hybrid Warfare: A Military Revolution or Revolution in Military Affairs*, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2012. For an alternative view, see Frank G. Hoffman, "Complex Irregular Warfare: The Next Revolution in Military Affairs," *Orbis*, summer 2006, pp. 395-411.

⁸ Paul J. Saunders, "Seven Ways a New Cold War with Russia Will Be Different," *The National Interest*, May 11, 2014; and Andrew Monaghan, "A 'New Cold War'?: Abusing History, Misunderstanding Russia," London, Royal Institute of International Affairs, May 2015.

⁹ Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, "The NATO-Warsaw Pact competition in the 1970s and 1980s: a revolution in military affairs in the making or the end of a strategic age?" *Cold War History* Vol. 14, Special Issue, 4/2014, pp. 533-573.



the future from a bygone era, as a means to decipher Russia's thinking, anticipate potential hybrid situations, and craft a suitably calibrated NATO strategy, while avoiding the pitfalls of subscribing to the appeal of historical analogies that can turn-out to be deceptive or deficient.

Against this background, this article addresses key features of Russia's hybrid warfare model and explores how, and to what extent, the RMA construct and comparisons with the Cold War might help shed light on its strategic implications for European security and for NATO.

The rise of Russia's hybrid warfare model

The ideological dimension and geopolitical ambition of Russia's world view

Russia's reliance on hybrid warfare as an adaptable instrument of foreign and security policy proceeds from an ideological vision and political ambition to achieve several aims concurrently: (a) restore Russia's international rank, through military power, as well as other forms of Moscow-centered hard and soft power; (b) assert its privileged position at the center of Eurasia, and project its exclusive influence on its periphery;¹⁰ and (c) contribute to the build-up and consolidation of a distinct and self-contained (and, seemingly, increasingly self-delusional) "Russian world" (*Russkiy mir*) that does not adhere, and is hostile, to Western values of universality and inclusiveness.¹¹ Its ideological

impetus is to pull away from cooperative processes that are described as dominated by the West and one-sided in nature, to the detriment of Russia. In this respect, Russia's suspension of its compliance with the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe stands as a compelling example.

This increasingly formed ideological construct is underpinned by a determined and expansive process of transformation of the armed forces that traces its growing momentum back to an acute awareness of Russia's post-Cold War military decline and the resulting capability shortfalls and strategic vulnerability. These were revealed, in particular, by the scale, effectiveness and outcome of successive Western air campaigns, from Operation *Desert Storm* in 1991 to Operations *Odyssey Dawn* and *Unified Protector* in Libya two decades later, as well as the mixed performance of the Russian armed forces in the two Chechen wars and in the conflict with Georgia in 2008. Since the end of the Cold War, three episodes of extensive analysis and intense debate within the Russian military over the lessons learned and the implications of these conflicts stand out:

- (i) *Early 1990s*: the rise of "aerospace war" in the shadow of the Gulf War;¹²
- (ii) *1999*: the challenge of countering both high-end and low-intensity opponents, brought home by Operations *Allied Force* and *Noble Anvil* in Kosovo¹³ and by the end of the First Chechen War that year, and Russia's first post-Soviet attempt to exercise a strategic capacity to plan and conduct operations, in the form of exercise *Zapad 99*;¹⁴ and
- (iii) *2008*: the jolt produced by Russia's less-than-stellar military performance during the conflict

¹⁰ Russia's "Eurasian moment" is described in *Toward the Great Ocean 3: Creating Central Eurasia*, Valdai Discussion Club, Moscow, June 2015.

¹¹ On the notion of a "Russian world," see Caterina Becker, Heidi Reisinger, Polina Sinovets and Brooke Smith-Windsor, "Ukraine and its Neighbourhood: How to Deal with Aggressive Russia," *NDC Conference Report* No. 2/15, NATO Defense College, Rome, Italy, March 2015; and Marlene Laruelle, "The "Russian World"," Washington, D.C., Center on Global Interests, May 2015.

¹² Timothy L. Thomas, "The Soviet Military on 'Desert Storm': Redefining Doctrine?" *The Journal of Soviet Military Studies* Vol. 14, No. 4, December 1991, pp. 594-620; and Mary C. Fitzgerald, "The Russian Image of Future War," *Comparative Strategy* Vol. 13, 1994, pp. 167-180.

¹³ Yoshiaki Sakaguchi and Katsuhiko Mayama, "Significance of the War in Kosovo for China and Russia," *NIDS Security Reports* No. 3, March 2002, pp. 1-23.

¹⁴ The name *Zapad* is associated with a series of important theater-scale, live and command post exercises led by the Soviet General Staff during the last two decades of the Cold War, aimed at perfecting operational concepts and command and control arrangements for executing a theater strategic operation against NATO. The first *Zapad* exercise of the Cold War seems to have been executed in 1969, following the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia, and the last one in 1985. The most notable *Zapad* exercises were held in 1977 and 1981. Ruiz Palmer, *Cold War History*, op. cit., pp. 546-552. Russia held a one-time *Zapad* exercise in 1999 - at the time the largest of its kind since the collapse of the USSR in 1991 - and resumed holding *Zapad* exercises regularly in 2009.



with Georgia.

These three episodes provide the conceptual, as well as ideological, subtext to an increasingly militant narrative of Russia's necessary military recovery and international resurgence.

Russia's military transformation and the overtaking of a post-Cold War legacy of decline

Since the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the Russian armed forces have undergone considerable change, as a result of major force reductions and successive, often aborted reforms.¹⁵ Starting in 2007-2008, there has been a steady increase in the Russian military's operational capacity, readiness and resulting performance that can be observed from their military operations to occupy the Crimean peninsula and to support separatist forces in eastern Ukraine, as well as the ever higher pace and wider scope of their training and exercising activities across and around Russia.¹⁶ Four key strands stand out:

(i) **Command and control:**

Russia has replaced Soviet-era military districts and theater-level high commands¹⁷ with four military districts that perform administrative and logistical functions — West, East, Center and South — and

four, corresponding operational-strategic level Joint Commands that exercise command and control for exercises and contingencies within the scope of a “strategic direction.”¹⁸ In parallel, the air force and aerospace defense forces have been consolidated twice since 2011, reportedly to better prepare the Russian military to confront the danger represented by the global rise in conventional precision-strike capabilities and to ensure effective early warning and other support to Russian strategic nuclear forces.¹⁹ The implications of these new command and control arrangements for the employment of the Russian air force, navy fleets and army aviation assets in theaters of operations, however, remain unclear.

(ii) **Force structure:**

Soviet-era divisions have been replaced by smaller, more agile brigades, which are being re-equipped with post-Soviet equipment, although concerns have been expressed that their combat potential might be too limited.²⁰ Divisions still exist in the airborne forces, which remain a special branch and enjoy particular priority as a reliable asset that can help manage fast-developing contingencies. More intriguing is the recent re-establishment of tank and motorized rifle divisions as part of a resurrected 1st Guards Tank Army in the Western Military District,²¹ which suggests a new interest in reconstituting large combined-arms formations capable of deterring or repulsing an

¹⁵ Marcel de Haas, “Russia's Military Reforms: Victory after Twenty Years of Failure?” *Clingendael Paper* No. 5, Netherlands Institute of International Relations, The Hague, November 2011; and Roger N. McDermott, “The Brain of the Russian Army: Futuristic Visions Tethered by the Past,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* Vol. 27, Issue 1, March 2014, pp. 4-35.

¹⁶ Dave Johnson, “Russia's Approach to Conflict - Implications for NATO's Deterrence and Defence,” op. cit.; Andras Racz, “Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine,” *FIIA report* No. 43, Stockholm, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2015; and Oscar Jonsson and Robert Seely, “Russian Full-Spectrum Conflict: An Appraisal After Ukraine,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* Vol. 28, Issue 1, spring 2015, pp. 1-22.

¹⁷ During the Cold War, Soviet military operations were planned and would have been executed within the boundaries of pre-identified theatres of operations designated *teatr voennykh deistvii* or TVD. Two such TVD commands were established in 1980 – the Western and South-Western – opposite NATO. Michael Sadykiewicz, *The Warsaw Pact Command Structure in Peace and War*, Santa Monica, California, The Rand Corporation, September 1988.

¹⁸ It is notable that in a recent statement, Army General Yuri Yakubov used the terminology “Western strategic theater of operations” to designate the region on Russia's Western borders. Karoun Demirjian, “Russia says it would match any U.S. military build-up in Eastern Europe,” *The Washington Post*, June 15, 2015.

¹⁹ Ionna Nikolett Zyga, “Russia's new aerospace defence forces: Keeping up with the neighbours,” *Quick Policy Insight*, European Parliament, Brussels, Belgium, February 22, 2013; and Marc Bennetts, “Kremlin beefs up air defences to meet threat of NATO attack,” *The Times*, August 5, 2015.

²⁰ Army General (ret.) Makhmut Gareev, Russia's foremost military thinker over the last three decades and currently the president of Russia's Academy of Military Sciences, has criticized the brigades for being “2.5 - to 3-fold weaker” than the divisions they replaced. See Roger McDermott, “Putin Considers New ‘Defense Plan’ as ‘Reform’ Dies,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* Vol. 10, Issue 21, February 5, 2013, p. 3.

²¹ Roger McDermott, “Russia Set to Strengthen Hard Power Options,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* Vol. 12, Issue 146, August 4, 2015. The 1st Guards Tank Army has a prestigious historical lineage in the Russian Army. During the Cold War, the 1st GTA was one of the large elite formations of the Group of Soviet Forces in (East) Germany that, in a hypothetical conflict with NATO, would have spearheaded a theater strategic operation towards the Rhine River.



adversary on or beyond Russian territory.

(iii) Training and exercising:

The Russian armed forces' manpower is being partly professionalized, to reduce dependence on conscripts, create a cadre of well-educated professionals, and form a pool of well-trained and combat-effective formations. Officers and personnel under contract now represent about two-thirds of the armed forces' total manpower.²² Land force training days, ship-days at sea, and flying hours have been increased markedly.

The training cycle now includes a yearly, theater-level joint exercise, which rotates among the four Joint Commands — *Zapad* (West) in 2009 was followed by *Vostok* (East), *Kavkaz* (Caucasus) and *Tsentr* (Center) in 2010-2012, and a new cycle was inaugurated by *Zapad* 2013. These exercises test the capacity of staffs and formations to plan and execute large-scale and complex combined-arms operations. Starting in 2004, strategic nuclear forces have also been subjected to an increasingly challenging series of exercises to rehearse the sequence of a hypothetical nuclear war.²³ Long-standing weaknesses in terms of basic education, recruitment, and professional competence, however, will likely persist.

(iv) Readiness and responsiveness:

Particular attention has been given to enhancing the readiness of Russian forces by means of large-scale “snap alert” exercises, starting in the spring 2013. Reportedly, the Russian General Staff has set a benchmark of 65,000 troops to be deployed over a distance of 3,000 kilometers within 72 hours for these exercises.²⁴

Often, snap-alert exercises coincide with preparations for a theater exercise in the *Zapad-Vostok* series, but

they have also been held to support Russian troop rotations along the border with Ukraine and to demonstrate Russia's new capacity to redeploy and concentrate forces rapidly and effectively across Russia's vast territory to meet changing strategic circumstances. Their scheduling, without prior notification, is an important component of Russian signaling for purposes of potential coercion vis-à-vis Russia's neighbors and intimidation towards NATO.²⁵ The rapidity with which Russia was able to deploy fighter, fighter-bomber and close-air-support aircraft to an air base near Latakia in Syria and initiate air operations in September 2015 also suggests that the readiness and responsiveness of Russian forces have improved markedly.

These four categories of force improvements are supported by a 10-year, rolling State Armaments Program (SAP) that defines the scope of the military requirements to be met, the research, development and procurement strategies to meet them, and the associated resources. The first SAP, running from 2011 through 2020, was approved in 2010. Although Russian defense expenditures is difficult to estimate reliably, because of the opacity of the Russian military and security establishments and associated budgeting processes, there is a widespread consensus among observers that it has been increasing steadily for a decade.²⁶ Admittedly, higher Russian defense expenditures over the last ten years has to be compared with very low levels of defense spending in the 1990s and the need to replace older, often obsolete equipment and modernize the supporting infrastructure.

An updated SAP, covering the period 2016-2025 is expected. Whether the stated goal under the current SAP of modernizing 70 percent of the Russian armed forces' equipment by 2020 is attainable cannot be answered confidently without greater insights into

²² Martin Russell, *Russia's armed forces*, European Parliament Research Service, Brussels, Belgium, April 2015, p. 11.

²³ Reportedly, the nuclear exercise conducted in February 2004 was the largest and most ambitious exercise up to that time since the unprecedented nuclear exercise conducted by the USSR in June 1982. Vladimir Isachenkov, “Russia Plans Large-Scale Exercise,” *The Washington Post*, January 30, 2004; and “Russia Begins Nuclear War Exercise; Rivals 1982 ‘Seven Hour Nuclear War’,” *Missile Threat*, February 11, 2004, <http://missilethreat.com?russia-begins-nuclear-exercise> (accessed on August 27, 2015).

²⁴ Dave Johnson, “Russia's Approach to Conflict,” op. cit., p. 3.

²⁵ Ian J. Brzezinski and Nicholas Varangis, “The NATO-Russia Exercise Gap,” *Atlantic Council of the United States*, Washington, D.C., February 23, 2015.

²⁶ The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimates that Russian defense expenditures increased by 87 percent between 2005 and 2014 and now reach USD 85 billion, which would place Russia in the third position behind the United States and China, “Trends in World Military Expenditure 2014,” Stockholm, SIPRI, April 2015, p. 2.



the state and direction of Russia's economy. The Russian economy faces increasingly adverse prospects as a result of subdued economic activity worldwide, a steep decline in the price of oil, international economic sanctions imposed in the wake of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, and a failure to reform and modernize. It would be prudent to remember, however, that, during the Cold War, Western observers often overestimated the size of the Soviet Union's gross domestic product and underestimated the scale of its defense expenditures, as well as misjudged the capacity of the Soviet regime and people to weather difficult times, under adverse economic conditions domestically, as well as challenging external circumstances.²⁷

As has often been the case in earlier times, military transformation in today's Russia is deeply-rooted in notions of identity and ideology, and cannot be disassociated from a reflexive impulse to confront asserted foreign hostility and perceived strategic, economic and technological vulnerabilities with zero-sum security assessments that derive from postulated zero-sum outcomes. It is a key component of a broader "build-up; pull-back; and pivot" strategy that strands across the strategic, ideological, and economic dimensions of Russia's current foreign policy and domestic politics, and that pursues separation from the West, reorientation towards Asia, and alignment with a global, 'anti-hegemonic' stance.

A new RMA? Russia's military transformation and the RMA impulse

The strengthening and modernization of the armed forces also aim to restore within the Russian military establishment the transformational impulse that drove the Soviet RMA of the 1970s and 1980s and that was brought abruptly to a near halt by the end of the Cold War.²⁸ However, it has a distinct focus on 21st century, distant, 'no-contact warfare,' instead of Cold War, close-range, force-on-force engagements. As remarked by General Gerasimov in his February 2013 article, "Frontal engagements of large formations of forces at the strategic and operational level are gradually becoming a thing of the past. Long-distance, contactless actions against the enemy are becoming the main means of achieving combat and operational goals."²⁹

The enduring aura of "deep operations"

In part, this transition towards precision targeting at long range reflects the philosophy of 'shooting the archer instead of the arrows.' At the same time, 'no-contact warfare' conforms to an enduring Russian operational preference for 'deep operations,' as the most accomplished means to create spatial separation with a capable adversary, deny him access to the common engagement space, and restrict his freedom of maneuver. In a conflict, modern-day Russian deep operations would aim at acquiring geographic depth away from Russian territory in order to degrade, as well as absorb, successful enemy precision-strike attacks; at isolating a theater of operations, to deprive enemy formations positioned closest to Russian territory from

²⁷ Edwin Bacon, "Perspectives for Russia's Future," in Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska and Richard Sakwa (editors) *Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives*, Bristol, United Kingdom, E-International Relations Publishing, 2015, p. 248.

²⁸ Jacob W. Kipp, "Operational art and the curious narrative on the Russian contribution: presence and absence over the last 2 decades," in Stephen J. Blank and Richard Weitz (editors), *The Russian military today and tomorrow: essays in memory of Mary Fitzgerald*, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2010, pp. 226-240.

²⁹ V.V. Gerasimov, *Voyenno-promyshlenniy kur'yer*, op. cit.

³⁰ James T. Quinlivan and Olga Olikier, *Nuclear Deterrence in Europe: Russian Approaches to a New Environment and Implications for the United States*, Santa Monica, California, The Rand Corporation, 2011; and Jacek Durkalec, "Nuclear-Backed "Little Green Men:" Nuclear Messaging in the Ukraine Crisis," Warsaw, The Polish Institute of International Affairs, July 2015. A preference for avoiding nuclear weapon employment, unless imposed by the prospect of imminent enemy nuclear first use or the prospect of defeat, has been an enduring theme of Soviet and Russian operations planning since the mid-1960s. Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, *Cold War History*, op. cit., p. 542.

³¹ For an exhaustive analysis of the importance given to military transformation in Russia, see Colonel Carl W. Reddel (editor), *Transformation in Russian and Soviet Military History*, Proceedings of the Twelfth Military History Symposium, United States Air Force Academy, Washington, D.C., Office of Air Force History, 1986.



their rear support, notably external reinforcements by allies, prior to neutralizing or destroying them; and at bringing about a stark, favorable and irreversible change in the regional ‘correlation of forces.’ These objectives would be pursued while keeping the enemy under the constant threat of Russian nuclear first use, to prevent a resort to escalation and to impose a favorable de-escalatory outcome.³⁰

Russia’s approach to deep operations in an era of no-contact warfare finds expression in a growing ‘anti-access/area-denial’ capacity, combining overlapping air and missile defenses; dense concentrations of surface-to-surface ballistic missile and land, air and sea-launched cruise missile batteries; and layered anti-submarine warfare capabilities, all anchored on three ‘strategic outposts’ — Murmansk, Kaliningrad and Sevastopol — along Russia’s northwestern, western and southwestern periphery. In wartime, these outposts would have a key role in the prompt and successful execution of anti-access and area denial operations in the Barents, Norwegian, Baltic and Black Seas and associated airspace, as the prerequisite for establishing a ‘glass dome’ over part or all of these sea areas and adjacent territories.

This transformational impulse should not be ascribed solely to Cold War nostalgia.³¹ It should be recognized as reflecting also a well-established Russian awareness that warfare is inherently evolutionary and has undergone substantial change since the end of the Cold War, as a result of continuing advances in information and guidance technologies. Advances in prompt and precise targeting of opposing forces can alter radically and unpredictably the course of operations and help achieve strategically-decisive outcomes, as witnessed

during the *Deliberate Force* air campaign in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the summer of 1995, which helped create in a matter of weeks the necessary conditions on the ground for initiating the Dayton peace process.

Russian theorists term contemporary, “informatized” operations “sixth generation warfare.”³² In particular, the concentration on no-contact warfare reflects a growing concern over a putative vulnerability of various categories of Russian forces to Western advances in global, prompt conventional strike and ballistic missile defense capabilities that was already in evidence in Soviet military literature and official statements in the 1980s.³³ In effect, advanced conventional strike capabilities are seen by Russian military theorists as an outgrowth, with strategic impact, of the ‘deep attack’ technologies associated with NATO’s Cold War ‘Follow-On Forces Attack’ concept that aimed at enhancing deterrence by threatening in a hypothetical conflict to break decisively the forward momentum of a Warsaw Pact offensive operation against NATO. Concurrently, the precedence now given to ‘fires over forces’ represents an extension of premonitory Soviet efforts in the 1980s to develop integrated ‘reconnaissance-strike complexes’ able to deliver massed artillery and missile strikes promptly and accurately into the depth of an adversary’s military deployments and infrastructure.³⁴

Hybrid warfare as ‘control war’

What would qualify Russia’ hybrid warfare model as an RMA is its conceptualization of the dynamic interaction between hard and soft power as a new form

³² The term “sixth-generation warfare” was coined by the late Major General Vladimir Schlipenko, who at the end of the Cold War was Head of the Scientific Research Department of the Russian General Staff Academy, to describe the rise of a post-nuclear era dominated by conventional, high-precision weapons-systems, whose effects in war would have strategic impact and could lead to the prompt and irreversible defeat of an adversary, without the economic costs associated with long-duration conflicts and without the devastation that would be inflicted by the use of nuclear weapons. Mary C. Fitzgerald, *Comparative Strategy*, op. cit., pp. 168-169; Army General Makhmut Gareev and Major General Vladimir Schlipenko, *Future War*, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, Foreign Military Studies Office, 2007; and Jacob W. Kipp, “Russian Sixth Generation Warfare and Recent Developments,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor* Vol. 9, Issue 17, January 25, 2012, pp. 1-2.

³³ On Russian views of U.S. conventional prompt global strike and layered ballistic missile defenses as constitutive of a “unified counterforce concept” to disarm and neutralize Russian nuclear capabilities, see Dima Adamsky, “If War Comes Tomorrow: Russian Thinking About ‘Regional Nuclear Deterrence,’” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* Vol. 27, Issue 1, March 2014, p. 169. In his February 2013 article, General Gerasimov stated that “Now the concepts of ‘global strike’ and ‘global missile defense’ have been worked out, which foresee the defeat of enemy objects and forces in a matter of hours from almost any point on the globe, while at the same time ensuring the prevention of unacceptable harm from an enemy counterstrike.” V.V. Gerasimov, *Voyenno-promyshlenniy kur’yer*, op. cit.

³⁴ Dave Johnson, op. cit., p; 2-3; and Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, *Cold War History*, op. cit, p. 550.



of war that extends the military contest to society as a whole. This makes hybrid warfare in the early 21st century an accomplished form of ‘control war’ over the ends, ways and means of nations, communities and societies.

In the Russian view, hybrid warfare as allegedly practiced by the West merges the military dimension of ‘no-contact’ warfare with economic coercion, political subversion and the manipulative employment of ‘information dominance’ to weaken and demoralize an adversary and to create the conditions of ‘controlled chaos’ necessary for an overthrow of its constitutionally-established political regime by means of ‘color revolutions.’ In the typically Russian (and Soviet) practice of ascribing to foreign countries the paternity of concepts and practices developed and implemented by Russia (and, in its time, the USSR), the hybrid warfare concept described by Russian military theorists as the core of the West’s devious foreign policies is, actually, the compass that Russia has been employing, to a greater or lesser degree and in various forms, in its relations with its CIS neighbors – notably Ukraine,³⁵ Georgia and the Republic of Moldova – but also to intimidate NATO member nations.³⁶

The annexation of the Crimean peninsula, as well as the enduring hostilities in eastern Ukraine, are indicative of the application by Russia of this new hybrid warfare model, however with important differences between the two instances that illustrate the range of applicable soft power-hard power combinations. In Crimea, military forces played an important role in completing Russia’s

occupation of the peninsula, although in a deliberately ambiguous way;³⁷ the actual use of lethal force, however, was very limited, exercised only to underpin a wider political and information campaign. In eastern Ukraine, Russia’s involvement has taken a variety of forms, with the role of military forces remaining largely concealed. However, the covert use of lethal force, in support of the local, pro-Russian separatist forces, has been pursued with devastating effect on Ukrainian forces, through the use of artillery barrages targeted by drones and delivered promptly and accurately by highly effective multiple rocket launchers.

At critical moments in a hybrid warfare campaign, military power can be the indispensable enabler for soft power, facilitating or accelerating the emergence of a favorable outcome. As remarked by General Gerasimov in his February 2013 article, “the open use of forces (...) is resorted to only at a certain stage, primarily for the achievement of final success in the conflict.”³⁸ However, if properly employed, soft power can be an attractive complement and, ideally, a substitute for military power. In the same article, General Gerasimov stressed that “the role of non-military 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.”³⁹ The Russian Ministry of Defense’s National Command and Control Center for State Defense, with its expansive coordination functions across the Russian government’s ministries and agencies, encapsulates this perspective.⁴⁰

It might be premature to declare Russia’s hybrid

³⁵ One of Russia’s active agents of influence in Ukraine following the end of the Cold War was Ukrainian-born Army General Ivan Gerasimov, successively commander of the USSR’s Kiev Military District between 1975 and 1984 and of the Warsaw Pact’s Southwestern TVD high command between 1984 and 1990, prior to his retirement from the Soviet Army and, thereafter, president of Ukraine’s Veterans’ Union.

³⁶ The most authoritative Russian military statement to date on the essence of hybrid warfare is by Colonel S.G. Chekinov (Res.) and Lieutenant General S.A. Bogdanov (Ret.), “The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War,” *Voennaya Mysl*, October–December 2013, pp. 12-23.

³⁷ One of the ambiguities during the Russian force deployment into the Crimean Peninsula in March 2014 resulted from the lack of national insignia on the uniforms of what Ukrainians designated as “little green men,” to prevent attribution, although, following annexation, Russia acknowledged that the soldiers were, indeed, Russian. Kathy Lally, “Putin’s remarks raise fears of future moves against Ukraine,” *The Washington Post*, April 17, 2014. It should be noted, however, that international law does not require regular military forces belonging to a nation-state to exhibit national insignia on their uniforms. Shane R. Reeves and David Wallace, “The Combatant Status of the ‘Little Green Men’ and Other Participants in the Ukraine Conflict,” *International Law Studies* Vol. 91, 2015, pp. 394-395. The expanded practice of wearing national insignia on uniforms results primarily from the increasing involvement of national military contingents in multinational operations over the last two decades.

³⁸ V.V. Gerasimov, *Voyenno-promyshlenniy kur’yer*, op. cit.

³⁹ V.V. Gerasimov, *Voyenno-promyshlenniy kur’yer*, op. cit.

⁴⁰ A leading analyst of the Russian military has warned that “Russia now benefits from a highly developed information warfare arsenal which will be a key facilitator in preparing for further actions which the West will find unthinkable in advance and unacceptable after the fact.” Keir Giles, “Russia’s Hybrid Warfare: a Success in Propaganda,” *Working Paper 2/15*, Bundesakademie für Sicherheitspolitik, Berlin, 2015, p.5.



warfare model a new Revolution in Military Affairs. The historical record shows that RMAs are often only recognized with confidence in retrospect. At the same time, it would be unwise to turn a blind eye to the possibility that Russia's brand of hybrid warfare exhibited in 2014 may well turn out to be an RMA revelator or precursor, and to the strategic implications of such a development for deterrence and defense.

A Cold War revival? Deterrence and defense for a new era

Russia's new political belligerence has triggered speculation on whether Russian military developments and activities and NATO's military measures adopted in response in the run-up to, and at, the Wales Summit in September 2014 herald a return to the Cold War era of East-West confrontation.

The fundamentally changed geopolitical conditions in Europe today, by comparison with their antecedents of the 1970s and 1980s, suggest persuasively that assessing relations between Russia and NATO through the obsolete prism of the Cold War can be deceptive and unhelpful. Happily, the distinct geopolitical and strategic circumstances of the Cold War – a divided Europe, as well as massed forces and a large infrastructure of barracks, bunkers and air bases on both sides of the Iron Curtain — cannot be recreated a quarter-of-a-century later. The Cold War architecture of confrontation has been dismantled irreversibly. Instead, comparisons with Cold War conditions in Europe in the 1970s and 1980s should be focused on how, and to what extent, Cold War concepts and practices influence current thinking and might apply to the transformed security environment ushered by Russia's behavior.

Old Soviet wine in new Russian bottles

A widespread view among specialists is that much of Russia's hybrid warfare arsenal represents a smartly updated version of a well-documented tool box that has roots sometimes dating back to Bolshevik times and even tsarist Russia.⁴¹ During the Cold War, the USSR would have turned to this kit to 'prepare and shape the battlefield' – here understood to mean the entire space of contest – ahead, and in the early stages, of a conflict with NATO. They include, but are not limited to:

- (i) 'Agit Prop' — a Russian language contraction of the Bolshevik-era terminology for "agitation and propaganda" (*otdel agitatsii i propagandy*) — that designates measures aimed at influencing and mobilizing a targeted audience;
- (ii) *Maskirovka*, the Russian word that designates the concept of all-encompassing deception, concealment and camouflage measures and tactics;
- (iii) *Spetsnaz*, the special operations forces that are trained and equipped to conduct unconventional warfare operations in ways that comply with, and help deliver, *Maskirovka*;
- (iv) Clandestine operatives from the Warsaw Pact's various civilian and military intelligence services, including 'sleeper agents;' and
- (v) Radio-Electronic Combat, in effect the Soviet Union's early version of offensive cyber warfare, aimed at incapacitating an opponent's technical ability, through communications means, to command and control its forces in an effective and timely way, by targeting and disrupting fixed and mobile networks.

Many of these instruments were employed effectively by Russia in its war with Georgia and to occupy and annex the Crimean peninsula, as well as foment and support separatism in the Donbas, including large-scale jamming.⁴² Russia's military take-over of Crimea

⁴¹ Dave Johnson, "Russia's Approach to Conflict," *op. cit.*, p. 1.

⁴² C.J. Chivers and David M. Herszenhorn, "In Crimea, Russia Showcases a Rebooted Army," *The New York Times*, April 2, 2014; and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "On the frontlines in Ukraine, a technological gap," *The Washington Post*, August 31, 2015.



also exhibited some of the features of Soviet Cold War intervention practices in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Afghanistan in 1979, including the anticipatory setting-up of the necessary field communications networks and the tailored employment of *Spetsnaz* and clandestine operatives. In Crimea and the Donbas, Russia benefited, in addition, from nearly perfect intelligence on the territories being targeted and, particularly, on the local military and civilian infrastructure, that were key parts, two-and-a-half decades ago, of the USSR.⁴³

The threat of coercion and limited aggression – is this new for NATO?

As addressed earlier, a constitutive aspect of hybrid warfare is its deliberate ambiguity, which implicitly raises the hypothetical risk of Russia being tempted to coerce or undertake limited aggression against an Ally in the expectation that it might not elicit a NATO response.⁴⁴ While the Russian hybrid warfare model represents a new way of war for a new era, NATO's Cold War record persuasively demonstrates that, during the Cold War, the Alliance was keenly aware that an attempted invasion of Western Europe by the Warsaw Pact would likely have included a mix of the various 'active measures' referred to above, to conceal preparations for a full-scale attack or for a *more limited act of aggression*, either of them preceded by a campaign to intimidate and coerce individual Allies and break NATO apart:

(i) NATO's Strategic Concept of May 1957, often

referred to as the strategy of 'massive retaliation,' included guidance that warned specifically against the threat of "operations with limited objectives, such as infiltrations, incursions or hostile local actions in the NATO area, overtly or covertly supported by themselves, trusting that the Allies in their collective desire to prevent a general conflict would either limit their reactions accordingly or not react at all;"⁴⁵

(ii) NATO's 'forward defense' strategy to defend NATO territory all the way up to the borders with Warsaw Pact countries included, for West Germany, special provisions for defending the geographically-exposed city of Kassel in a way that would have prevented its capture and occupation, through a limited Soviet incursion, and its 'return' to the FRG in exchange for France, the United Kingdom and the United States terminating their military presence in West Berlin;⁴⁶

(iii) Trilateral contingency planning by France, the United Kingdom and the United States (under the umbrella of the *LIVE OAK* arrangements) for protecting Allied access to Berlin, in the face of Soviet and/or East German interference with, or denial of, that access, explicitly acknowledged the need to cater for ambiguity and for situations short of a full-scale attack on West Berlin, and included a wide menu of military and non-military response measures;⁴⁷ and

(iv) NATO contingency planning for the defense of Denmark and Norway, and of Italy, Greece and Turkey, on NATO's Northern and Southern Flanks respectively, was oriented deliberately to

⁴³ During the Cold War, Ukraine hosted the USSR's Kiev Military District, which, in a hypothetical war with NATO, would have played the role of a strategic pivot, astride the Western and South-western TVDs, both because of its geographic position and its role in hosting a large complement of tank divisions and a powerful strategic air army headquartered at Vinnitsa.

⁴⁴ *Towards the next Defence and Security Review: Part 2 - NATO*, Third Report of Session 2014-15, HC 358, House of Commons, London, paragraph 44, p. 30.

⁴⁵ NATO Military Committee document MC 14/2 (Revised), *Overall Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Area*, classified NATO Secret, dated May 23, 1957, p. 11; declassified and disclosed in *NATO Strategy Documents, 1949-1969*, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Brussels, Belgium, October 1997.

⁴⁶ In March 1960, the headquarters of the 1st Belgian Corps in West Germany activated in Kassel a "Covering Forces Command" (*Commandement des Forces de Couverture*), tasked in wartime, in cooperation with the 2nd *Panzer Grenadier Division* of the adjacent IIIrd Corps of the *Bundeswehr*, to prevent a Soviet advance from Nordhausen, in East Germany, towards Kassel. *Historique des Forces de Couverture, Forces Belges en Allemagne*, undated. This step was in consonance with higher NATO guidance to enhance surveillance in peacetime of the Inner-German Border. See "Peacetime Surveillance of the Iron Curtain in NORTHAG," 3340/CEAG/305/61, *History for 1960*, classified NATO Secret, Headquarters, Allied Forces Central Europe (AFCENT), Fontainebleau, France, 1961, p. 15, declassified and disclosed by NATO, November 2013; and Sean Maloney, "Fire Brigade or Tocsin? NATO's ACE Mobile Force, Flexible Response and the Cold War," *Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 27, No. 4, December 2004, pp. 588-589.

⁴⁷ Bruno Thoss, *NATO-Strategie und nationale Verteidigungsplanung*, Munich, R. Oldenburg Verlag, 2006, pp. 291-329.



detering, preventing and defending against a limited Soviet ‘land grab,’ by emphasizing high responsiveness and Allied solidarity, in the form of the land and air components of the multinational Allied Mobile Force (AMF).⁴⁸

The arrangements above suggest that NATO’s Cold War planning assumed that a hypothetical Warsaw Pact offensive operation against Western Europe would likely be preceded by a deteriorating political-military situation across the continent that would be characterized by ambiguity and uncertainty, and by the risk of accidental escalation, rather than by a sudden, ‘out-of-the-blue’ attack, even though the possibility and threat of a surprise attack with little warning was not excluded and explicitly catered for.⁴⁹

There is much from NATO’s Cold War experience, therefore, that could be examined and leveraged to enhance NATO’s current deterrence and defense posture vis-à-vis Russia, and countering Russia’s new style of warfare has meant rediscovering and recovering some of the operational concepts, practices and capacity largely abandoned at the end of the Cold War and recasting them in NATO’s post-ISAF transformation drive.

NATO’s post-ISAF military transformation and Russia’s hybrid warfare challenge

For NATO, military transformation has been a long-standing impulse since the end of the Cold War. At NATO’s Chicago Summit in 2012, Allies adopted a new transformation blueprint — ‘*NATO Forces 2020*’ — and agreed the completion of combat operations in Afghanistan and the resulting disbandment of ISAF in December 2014. Together, these agreements shaped what was soon termed a transition from a ‘deployed NATO’ to a ‘prepared NATO,’ or from a ‘campaign’

to a ‘contingency’ paradigm.⁵⁰ A central aspect in this transition was the desirability of preserving key gains in interoperability, as Allied and partner forces embarked upon a draw-down and returned to their home stations in Europe and North America. These aims were to be achieved, notably, by pursuing an ambitious program of education, training and exercising under the auspices of the Connected Forces Initiative.⁵¹

A strategic insight of greater consequence from operations in Afghanistan and elsewhere was that Allied forces were at risk of excessive specialization in counter-insurgency warfare and needed to prepare for a wider spectrum of potential missions and engagements. This meant aiming to regain a capacity for operational maneuver at *larger scales of effort*,⁵² in order to be able to deter and, if necessary, defend against a capable and determined adversary that, while competent in the employment of the tactics and means of asymmetric warfare, would also benefit from the advantages afforded by the possession of the means for conventional, high-intensity operations. Russia’s behavior in 2014 gave this requirement new urgency.

NATO’s new ambition has multiple implications in terms of doctrine; tactics, techniques and procedures; force structure; equipment; maintenance and logistical sustainment; command and control; and training and exercising. Addressing them satisfactorily will require resources and constancy of purpose. For instance, developing a sustainable *capacity* to conduct high-intensity, joint and combined-arms operations will require NATO’s Command and Force Structures to redirect their focus towards the planning and execution of larger-scale operations by larger-size formations. For land forces, this would mean a rebalancing of capabilities and training towards corps and divisional-scale operations involving the movement, integration, and potential engagement, over a compressed

⁴⁸ Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, “From AMF to NRF: the roles of NATO’s rapid reaction forces in deterrence, defence and crisis response, 1960-2009,” *NATO Review*, spring 2009; and Bernd Lemke, *Die Allied Mobile Force 1961 bis 2002*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co., 2015.

⁴⁹ Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, *Cold War History*, op. cit., pp. 552-553.

⁵⁰ *NATO after ISAF staying successful together*, Remarks by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the Munich Security Conference, February 2, 2013, Brussels, North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

⁵¹ *Connected Forces Initiative*, Fact Sheet, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, updated August 31, 2015.

⁵² Major General Mungo Melvin, “Exercise United Shield 2008: Revisiting Military Strategy for the Twenty-First Century,” *RUSI Journal* Vol. 154, No 3, June 2009, pp. 36-43. At the time of exercise *United Shield* in 2008, General Melvin was the commander of British forces in Germany.



timetable,⁵³ of a much larger increment of forces and logistics than has been envisaged and practiced since the conduct of exercise *Strong Resolve*⁵⁴ and the creation of the NATO Response Force in 2002.

The Readiness Action Plan (RAP) adopted at the Wales Summit⁵⁵ and exercise *Steadfast Juncture* held in the autumn of 2015⁵⁶ largely respond to this requirement to underpin a recast NATO deterrence and defense posture with a demonstrable capacity to deploy forces quickly and on a large scale, to match Russia's new ability to mass forces and concentrate threatening weapons systems quickly. The RAP's ultimate effectiveness in strengthening deterrence and defense, however, will also depend on the components resting at the RAP's lower and higher ends:

(i) At the lower end, the RAP's effectiveness will depend on the Allies' ability, individually and together, to generate the forces and resources necessary to give NATO's new rapid reaction capacity at larger scales of effort the suitable operational depth, by restoring the required maneuver capabilities at divisional and brigade levels and developing the applicable operational and logistical art.⁵⁷ While a particular focus of these enhancements should be on upgrading armored and mechanized infantry forces capable of defending against and repulsing an adversary's comparably-equipped forces, attention should also be accorded to the further development of rapidly-deployable airmobile forces and other capabilities optimized to counter short-notice Russian air assault and sea-landing operations. This is a collective effort that will require an equitable sharing of the burden among the Allies and, necessarily, military

arrangements based on a rotation of forces;⁵⁸ and

(ii) At the higher level, the effectiveness of NATO's deterrence and defense posture will depend on the Alliance's capacity to address the decision-making implications of having available a capacity for rapid reaction and counter-concentration, by developing an overarching crisis-management concept for deterrence and defense in Europe that takes account of the risk of ambiguity and uncertainty.⁵⁹ Where applicable, it could be modeled on the experience from the Cold War and link warning indicators, alerting procedures and transfer of authority arrangements from Allies to NATO. Countering hybrid threats in their full complexity will also require an appropriate set of military and non-military crisis-management measures, including those that would require cooperation with other international organizations, notably the European Union.

This comprehensive, three-level approach would help ensure that the inherent complexity and ambiguity of Russia's hybrid warfare model can be countered successfully through a mix of alertness, preparedness and resilience. As importantly, it would convey the Allies' determination to stand firm for one another, in all circumstances, and expose the futility of policies that promote confrontation over cooperation.

This Research Report is dedicated to the memory of two distinguished NATO commanders – General John R. Galvin, U.S. Army, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR), 1987-1992; and General Hans-Henning von Sandtrart, German Army, Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces, Central Europe (CINCENT), 1987-1991.

⁵³ For exercise *Spearpoint*, conducted by the 1st British Corps in West Germany in September 1980, the British Army of the Rhine was able to redeploy 130 main battle tanks by road, using tank-transporters, over a distance of 160 kilometers, in one night. Walter Bohm, *Cold War Exercise Spearpoint 80*, Erlangen, Verlag Jochen Vollert, 2015, p. 5.

⁵⁴ Exercise *Strong Resolve 2002* was the last, major, live NATO exercise held in Europe that rehearsed the employment of joint forces in a demanding operational environment, in the form of a sea-based combined joint task force, before the Alliance's expanding engagement in Afghanistan absorbed an increasingly large share of Allies' forces and resources. The creation of a NATO-Russia Council that year also reaffirmed that NATO and Russia did not see each other as adversaries and removed any residual requirement for large-scale exercising of NATO forces in Europe until Russia's illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula in March 2014.

⁵⁵ *The Readiness Action Plan*, Fact Sheet, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, updated September 1, 2015.

⁵⁶ *Trident Juncture 2015: NATO's most ambitious exercise for over a decade*, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, July 15, 2015.

⁵⁷ "We need to rebuild competency on several levels," Major General Duane A. Gamble, commander of the U.S. Army Europe's 21st Theater Sustainment Command headquartered at Kaiserslautern, Germany, quoted in John Vandiver, "Renewed Focus," *Stars and Stripes*, September 2, 2015, p. 2.

⁵⁸ This represents a dissenting view from that presented by Dr. Martin Zapfe, "Efficacy, not Efficiency: Adjusting NATO's Military Integration," *Research Paper No. 118*, NATO Defense College, August 2015.

⁵⁹ NATO's core task of "crisis management" is often associated, erroneously, with the conduct of "out-of-area" crisis response operations only, which represents a misreading of the Alliance's intent. Crisis-management also applies to the prevention of a conflict that would result from a failure of deterrence and an attack on one or more Allies.