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Abstract: *Russia perceives itself as surrounded by enemies, and that the strategic depth that has been its principal security must be restored. In this sense, no territory is more significant than Ukraine. Russian leadership also worries about the erosion of a zone around Russia's borders where politically dangerous ideas can be stifled before they undermine the regime's hold on power.*

Russia's leadership believes it can stem this erosion and achieve its objectives by combining organized military violence with economic, political, and diplomatic activity, a combination called new generation warfare (NGW). NGW is a concept for fighting total war in Europe, across all fronts—political, economic, informational, cyber—simultaneously through fear and intimidation without launching a large-scale attack. If fighting is required, it is highly networked and multi-directional. The stakes can be raised rapidly, possibly without limit.

President Vladimir Putin is confident in this approach because he sees U.S. hesitation as opportunity and believes the U.S. is overly dependent on military responses. Thus, NGW is designed to avoid giving the U.S. and other adversaries a reason to respond using military force. The U.S. needs to broaden its response portfolio to include political, diplomatic, economic, financial, cyber, covert, and other means coordinated into a comprehensive approach to counter the NGW strategy. Russia has brought total war back to Europe—in a hidden, undeclared, and ambiguous form. Failure to confront Russian opportunism will validate Putin's approach.

In the night of February 26 to 27, 2014, small groups of armed men, who later acquired the labels “little green men,” and even “polite green men” (which were anything but), appeared across Crimea.¹ They corralled Ukrainian forces in their bases, making it plain that any attempt to leave would be met with violence; they took over communications masts and studios, ensuring that the only messages accessible to the Crimean population were those they sent out; they took over government offices, ensuring that no decisions other than those they approved could be made; and eventually, at the point of a gun, ensured that the Crimean assembly voted to approve a plebiscite, which would eventually return a near-Soviet-era approval rating of 93 percent for the (re)-unification of Crimea with Mother Russia. Vladimir Putin,

president of Russia, later admitted the denials made at the time about Russian involvement were untrue, and that the entire operation had been planned and conducted by Russia's armed forces. Shorn of its disguise it was a Russian invasion and occupation pure and simple.

Crimea is a peninsula extension of Ukraine that, while incorporated into Russia in Tsarist times, had been part of Ukraine since 1954.² It remained so when the Soviet Union collapsed and Ukraine emerged as an independent state. The transfer was reaffirmed in a further treaty in 2003.³ Russia's invasion was an act of war in contravention of the United Nations Charter and international law. Moreover, when Russia subsequently absorbed Crimea, it was the first forced transfer of territory in

Europe since 1945. Russia's claims that it has acted legally in response to appeals by the ousted Ukrainian president Victor Yanukovich, and the region's majority Russian-speaking population, were manifestly bogus.⁴

This illegal act, and the subsequent Russian invasion of eastern Ukraine, has sparked shamefully little international outrage. The belief appears widespread that, while the West seeks a negotiated settlement to the eastern Ukraine invasion, it will acquiesce to the seizure of Crimea. The principal Western response has been economic: the imposition of a very limited range of sanctions on Russian individuals and corporations which, although they have inflicted quite possibly greater economic pain than is realized or yet apparent, has not made Russia's leadership re-think its aggression or restore the *status quo ante*.⁵ No attempt has been made to supply Ukraine with the arms it needs to expel the Russian-backed forces from its territory. This reluctant response, not least by the Obama Administration, makes a broad-based understanding of what appears to be a new Russian politico-military doctrine essential. The same goes for the steps the United States and its allies need to take to counter it successfully in the future.

How Russia Views the West

Russia perceives itself as a country surrounded by enemies. This has been a persistent theme throughout its history. It was an important driver of its westward territorial expansion into Central Europe, south across the Black Sea and into the Caucasus, and east all the way to the Pacific, in search of strategic depth. It began under the tsars, took a pause during the early days in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution, but continued in 1945 under the rule of Stalin. With the fall of the Soviet Union, significant portions of that depth were lost, most significantly in Europe.

Russians also ascribe cultural and military significance to territory; it is difficult for outsiders to understand how important it is to Russians' sense of national identity. In this sense, no territory is more significant than Ukraine, in which is located much of the original Russian heartland known as the *Rus*, and Crimea which, when transferred to Ukraine by Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, occasioned considerable resentment even at the time. Equally, it seems that many Russians are unable to appreciate

how seminal personal and political freedom, democracy, and the rule of law are to the self-identity of people living in Western Europe and North America, and to the peoples of Central Europe that retain a clear recollection of Soviet oppression.

The sense of encirclement featured prominently in the 2003 Russian Defense *White Paper*, which essentially dismissed the concept of a "common European home" that had been proposed by the last Soviet premier, Mikhail Gorbachev, along with its commitment to non-aggression.⁶ Suspicion of Western good faith, and the belief that NATO and the European Union had abrogated agreements arrived at following the fall of the Berlin Wall, compounded Russia's belief in its own isolation and vulnerability. In particular NATO was accused of expanding into former Warsaw Pact states in defiance of understandings. Yet in 1993, Russia's first post-Soviet president, Boris Yeltsin, in speeches in both Warsaw and Prague, conceded that Russia could not stand in the way if former Warsaw Pact states wished to join NATO or the European Union, and that such moves did not compromise Russian interests. Although Russian officials quickly repudiated their leader's public statements, the U.S. and NATO's European members made it clear that in the light of Yeltsin's admission they would welcome the accession of Central European states.

The crucial point, however, was that it was the facts on the ground that counted. NATO enlarged because it could. Russia, now no longer the Soviet Union, was weak. Because Russian weakness continued, Western European governments subsequently felt able to shrink their own defense establishments radically, while successive U.S. Administrations felt free to withdraw forces back to bases in America. Even as Vladimir Putin's antagonistic rhetoric and Russian investment in its military capability increased, fed by high energy prices, neither was met with a commensurate response from the West. The upshot is that NATO is relatively weaker militarily, and less cohesive politically, than it was. Russia is aggressive now because it can be.

Putin stated that Crimea was annexed to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO.⁷ While there was a remote possibility that Ukraine may have been admitted to the EU, its chances of joining NATO in the near future and sheltering under Article 5 collective defense guarantees were close to zero. Putin's statement was political: The message to his

domestic audience was that Russia was strong again and would remain so under his leadership; to NATO and Western leaders it was a signal that Russia had the means *and* the will not just to stop NATO coming to Ukraine's aid (as it had done to a limited extent with Georgia in 2008) but to take back what had been taken from it during its own period of weakness.

Russian defiance is not born of strength, but of the recognition that, while the gap has narrowed considerably, its inferiority to the West continues.

This defiance, however, is not born of strength, but of the recognition that, while the gap has narrowed considerably, its inferiority to the West continues. Russia believes it is under attack. It believes that the strategic depth, which has always been its principal security, must be restored, and for that to happen it needs to gain the strategic initiative. The narrative that the West has defaulted on, or even broken, post-Cold War agreements is useful as a justification for aggressive diplomacy and covert measures even though it takes no account of Western Europe's de-militarization and the fact NATO made no attempt to advance its front line hundreds of miles eastward. In 1994, Russian Defense Minister Igor Rodionov even stated that he had "become convinced NATO is not a threat to Russia, but I have millions to convince in Russia who are still worried that it is a threat."⁸

Under Putin, no effort was made to correct this impression, arguably because no substantial authoritarian state has survived without external enemies. Consequently, it now demands, in effect, that the West acquiesce in suppressing (or at best refusing to support) Ukrainian democracy, personal and press freedom, rule of law, and economic ties to European and world markets. It wants the countries in what it refers to as its "near abroad" to remain locked into its sphere of influence without any prospect of release.⁹ While Putin talks about the need for a military buffer zone between Russia and the West, what worries him and his lieutenants more is the erosion of a political dead zone around Russia's borders where politically dangerous ideas can be

stifled before they infect the homeland and undermine his position. A Ukraine—or even Belarus—that escaped Russian control sufficiently to hold free and fair elections, defeat corruption, guarantee judicial independence, and succeed in building a diversified market economy free of state-run enterprises would stand as a powerful rebuke to the faux democratic, corrupt, and energy-dependent home of oligarchic-capitalism that is Russia today. Unfortunately, too many Western countries are prepared to appease Russia—at least to a point—in hopes of a quiet life. Under President Obama, the United States appears to be one of them.

Russia's Tactics, Ability, and Hostility

Russia's tactics, its ability to carry them out, and its hostility toward the West have come as a shock to Western observers. In each case this shock is misplaced. Each is underpinned by a coherent strategy, but the policy that drives the strategy is mired in a sour mixture of anti-Western resentment, conspiracy theories, clericism, and nationalism.

Crucially, Russia has clearly thought about how it can use asymmetric means to offset its own weakness. In part this has meant drawing upon its Soviet past. What has occurred in Crimea and eastern Ukraine has its roots in Leninist theory and early Bolshevik military experience. Lenin built on Clausewitz when he subordinated all military activity to political purpose and drew no distinction between military and civilian domains, but left his own mark on military theory when he emphasized the role of propaganda and taught that terrorism was a legitimate tool of war. In 1924, Estonia was attacked in a manner similar to the 2014 invasion of Crimea: The attacking force consisted of unmarked Soviet troops and local agents—backed by the threat of an invasion by Soviet regular forces—which took over strategic locations, government buildings, and communications facilities in what turned out to be a failed attempt to overthrow the Estonian government.¹⁰ Later, in 1939, a large Soviet force invaded Finland in what became known as the Winter War. As soon as the Soviets crossed the border, they set up a puppet government, like the "little green men" did in Crimea.¹¹

During the Cold War the Soviet Army reportedly laid elaborate plans to infiltrate Western Europe with small groups drawn from the Main Intelligence Agency (GRU) and the *Spetsnaz*, its special

operations forces (SOF), to carry out intelligence, surveillance, sabotage, terror, and assassination missions. These groups would have worn civilian clothing, arrived in the target countries using civilian transport, and once there would have teamed up with Soviet spy networks, sleeper agents, and sympathetic locals before drawing their weapons and explosives from pre-positioned stashes.¹² Finally, the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was led by 700 *Spetznaz* troops wearing Afghan uniforms.¹³

Yet military thought does not stand still and Russian military thought, both pre-Soviet and post-Soviet, has, like Soviet military thought, a long history of sound analysis and effective innovation. U.S. military thinking over the past 20 years, for example, has been shaped in many ways by the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs, which has its origins in the Soviet concept of a “military-technical revolution” that evolved in the 1980s.¹⁴ More recently, Russian thinkers have married previous Soviet thinking about asymmetric warfare to lessons drawn from modern warfare involving the West and their own experience in Chechnya.

The chief of staff of the Russian Federation, General Valery Gerasimov, writing in the journal *Voennopromishlenniy kurier* in 2013 argued, with reference to the events of the “Arab Spring,” that the rules of warfare had changed, making open warfare both harder to realize and in many cases unnecessary.¹⁵ The objectives that had previously been viewed as attainable by direct military action alone could now be achieved by combining organized military violence with a greater emphasis on economic, political, and diplomatic activity, a combination he called new generation warfare (NGW), and which observers in the West have labelled the Gerasimov Doctrine.¹⁶

Lenin left his own mark on military theory when he emphasized the role of propaganda and taught that terrorism was a legitimate tool of war.

In Gerasimov’s view, non-military methods could be superior to direct military action in reaching political and strategic goals, and this needed to be reflected in a new and diversified order of battle. He makes the point that in recent conflicts non-military

measures occurred at a rate of four to one over military operations.¹⁷ Consequently, when laying out his argument, Gerasimov emphasized the importance of controlling the information space and the real-time coordination of all aspects of a campaign, in addition to the use of targeted strikes deep in enemy territory and the destruction of critical civilian as well as military infrastructure. The ground force element, he continued, which should be concealed as long as possible, needed to consist of paramilitary and civilian insurgents backed by large numbers of SOF and supported by robotic weapons, such as drones. Regular units “should be put into action only in the late phases of the conflict, often under the disguise of peacekeeper or crisis-management forces.”¹⁸

New generation warfare is a live topic among Russian strategic thinkers. Russian presidential adviser Vladislav Surkov has written about “non-linear” war, describing it as one that involves everybody and everything while remaining elusive in its main contours.¹⁹ Two other writers, Sergei Chekinov and Sergei Bogdanov, elaborated Gerasimov’s thesis. They argued that the Gulf War was the first NGW conflict in history and illustrated the importance of neutralizing the enemy’s military superiority through the combined use of political, economic, technological, ecological, and information campaigns, and optimizing the effectiveness of all these tools by integrating them into a single, shared system of command and control.²⁰

Chekinov and Bogdanov shared Gerasimov’s concern that the U.S. could orchestrate a NGW campaign against Russia. Consequently they argued that Russia had to develop the capacity and capability to deploy non-military methods on a large scale before—and during—any armed confrontation. They listed media, religious and cultural organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and pro-democracy movements in Russia that benefited from foreign funding, and scholars in receipt of foreign grants, as possible components in a coordinated attack; and accused the U.S. of organizing an army of Internet “trolls” and of using Twitter and Facebook for information warfare purposes.²¹ This goes some way to explain the 2012 closure of the U.S. Agency for International Development office in Moscow and the more recent crackdown on foreign donor organizations and their recipients.²²

Finally, the authors emphasized the combat importance of electronic warfare. In their view

NGW would be dominated increasingly by psychological and information warfare aimed at crushing the morale of enemy troops and the population, thus breaking their will to resist.²³

New Generation Warfare in Action

András Rácz, summing up Chekinov and Bogdanov's thesis, writes that there is a "striking similarity between the new generation war theoretically described by [them] in 2013 and the events that took place in Ukraine in 2014, particularly prior to and during the Russian operation in Crimea."²⁴ The salient features of NGW as they describe it, and the facts on the ground in Crimea and later in Eastern Ukraine, are important, but must be viewed as part of an evolving concept not an example of settled doctrine.

Phase One: Weakening the Target and Preparing the Battlespace. Aggressive war is about the exploitation of weakness for political purposes. It is distinguished from other political acts through its extensive—in the classical sense, predominant—use of organized violence. In NGW, organized violence is an ever-present threat, wielded mainly by organized civilian demonstrators, agitators, and SOF but only in the later stages—if necessary—by conventional forces:

- During Phase One of a NGW campaign, Russia would deploy all arms of Russian power to identify political, economic, and military vulnerabilities, and weaknesses in government administration and the police.
- In the information domain, Russia would seek to establish or buy media assets it could control (such as the RT network, which has built an increasing presence across Europe and North America headlined by *Russia Today*); establish or suborn NGOs to support Russian policies directly or indirectly; and establish diplomatic and media narratives that, when the time comes, can be used to justify and defend the actions of those who oppose the target government on the one hand, and on the other to cheerlead Russian support for opposition or secessionist interests. These actions are very similar to the agitprop tactics and influence operations deployed during the Soviet era. They have been upgraded significantly in terms of sophistication and reach for

superficial similarity with Western news organizations.²⁵ These Russian outlets do not, however, harbor any doubts about which side they are on.

- Beyond the information war, Russia would use political, diplomatic, media, and covert means to encourage dissatisfaction with central authority; encourage local separatist movements; inflame ethnic, religious, and social divisions; recruit politicians, officials, and members of the target country's military; make common cause with organized crime groups; and, by establishing close economic ties with the target country or specific companies, make it dependent on Russian markets or supplies, thus creating a vested interest in maintaining good relations even in the face of Russian military or political provocations. When the time for action arrives, the established networks will be activated, or the level of their activities stepped up, while Russian regular forces will be massed on the border under the pretext of military exercises.

Countering these moves is difficult because almost nothing illegal has occurred, no violent incidents have taken place, dislocations of food and energy supplies can be presented as commercial disagreements, and much of what is circulated in the media can be regarded as legitimate comment. If the target government overreacts, that can play to Russia's advantage, enabling it to protest its innocence, establish a narrative of non-intervention, and even condemn the government's actions if they prejudice the rights and interests of Russian minorities. As Rácz comments, sowing "self-doubt and fear constitute important parts" of Moscow's subversive ambition.²⁶

Phase Two: Attack. During this phase, Russia would exploit the tensions it has created to bring down the legitimate government and establish its own substitute regime.

- The first moves would be to launch mass protests and riots in key population centers in an attempt to render them ungovernable (and if the target government uses disproportionate force in an attempt to suppress them, so much the better); infiltrate SOF disguised as civilians to sabotage infrastructure and take over administrative centers; mount attacks and commit acts of sabotage

to inculcate fear and chaos by stretching thin the government's resources while using intense media attacks to exaggerate the sense of un-governability. Attempts by the targeted government to respond using its own police and armed forces would be deterred by the massed presence of Russian regular forces threatening a conventional military attack from across the border, and neutralized by blockading them in their barracks, bribing their officers, cutting their communications, and using disinformation to break their morale.

- Attempts by the international community to intervene would be confused and deterred by sustained international media and diplomatic campaigns—and economic disruption—designed to isolate the target country. Uncertainty would be increased by a relentless campaign denying that Russian forces were involved. Previously unheard of political groupings would emerge, which by seizing administrative control, would shroud the Russian-sponsored alternative power centers in quasi-legitimacy.

The operations in Crimea and eastern Ukraine both opened with the appearance of men in unmarked Russian uniforms (“little green men”), in unmarked Russian vehicles, carrying Russian military-issue weapons. They established barricades and checkpoints and blockaded Ukrainian army and police bases, making it clear that force would be used if the units inside attempted to leave.²⁷

Political targets were of primary importance. The Crimean parliament building was occupied on February 27, 2014, effectively ending local decision making.²⁸ Similarly in Donetsk, the regional state administrative office was one of the first targets when the occupation began in April 2014. It remains the headquarters of the self-declared Donetsk People's Republic. At the same time, well-drilled demonstrators in civilian clothes (though often carrying guns) occupied less-defended government buildings, media outlets, and critical infrastructure.

Throughout, Russian official spokesmen and domestic media consistently denied that the troops were Russian, and described the demonstrators as members of the “opposition” or the “resistance.” However, on April 17, 2014, Putin admitted that Russian troops had been present, and on March 15,

2015, triumphantly tore down the whole fiction in an elaborate TV documentary.²⁹ Gratuitously, he made a point of saying that he had “considered” placing Russia's strategic nuclear forces on alert at the same time.³⁰

This denial policy must be considered a clear success. If Russia were to attack a member of NATO—say, one of the Baltic states—Moscow would undoubtedly mount a similar, but likely more intense, denial campaign to at least slow down the invocation of NATO's Article 5 commitment to mutual self-defense, and to isolate and demoralize the government and population of the target country.³¹

Phase Three: Consolidating Power. The proponents of NGW recognize that occupation is insufficient for achieving a *fait accompli*; an alternative government must be installed, however manufactured its legitimacy may be.

- This legitimacy hinges on a referendum on secession or independence taking place quickly with strong Russian backing and media support. Once the correct answer has been obtained, Russia is able either to provide larger quantities of support openly or establish a military presence that fights, openly or covertly, alongside the “resistance” to the original government as it defends the newly established state. “A sub-variant,” as Rácz puts it, “is an open invasion under the pretext of ‘peace-keeping’ or ‘crisis management.’”
- The original state would be confronted by two enormous problems: First, the loss of territory would mean economic and political dislocation, currency devaluation, loss of taxation income, and thus a significant weakening in its international economic standing—problems that may be made worse by fleeing refugees and a humanitarian crisis.³²
- The Crimean vote was superficially successful with reportedly 97 percent of the population voting to secede on an 80 percent turnout. Putin used these results to publicly justify Russian intervention in his March 2015 broadcast. In fact, as the Russian Human Rights Council inadvertently admitted later, turnout was only 30 percent, half of whom voted against independence, meaning that Russia gained the support of only 15 percent of the population.

In eastern Ukraine, the initial intervention overthrew the local administrations in the Donetsk and Luhansk *oblasts*. However, without the presence of Russian bases, as existed in Crimea, and the pressure these could be used to exert on elites and the general population, support for secession remained low. All the irregular forces could do was to hold the two regions in a political and military limbo. Recognizing this, the Ukrainian government launched a counter-offensive, the Anti-Terror Operation (ATO), on April 15, 2014. Initially it could not be regarded as a success.

In May, the Russian-sponsored separatists held referenda in the two territories with results (unsurprisingly) in line with those registered in Crimea. However, following the election of Petro Poroshenko as president of Ukraine on May 25, 2014, the ATO gained new momentum. While the separatists and their Russian backers were able to use NGW methods to undermine and significantly weaken Ukraine, like other irregular forces and irregular methods they were unable to sustain their position in the face of the advancing Ukrainian regular formations.

Hybrid warfare blurs the distinction between combatants and non-combatants.

Russia could have withdrawn its support at this point. It chose, instead, to launch an invasion and initiate a conventional, if limited, inter-state war. For the second time in two years Russia abrogated the Budapest Memorandum it signed in 1994 committing it to “respect the independence and sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine.”³³ For the second time in two years the other signatories to the treaty, the United States and the United Kingdom, while under no treaty obligation to do so, nonetheless failed to provide Ukraine with the political, economic, and large-scale military assistance it needed to prevent its dismemberment.

What War Are We Fighting?

Clausewitz exhorts political leaders and military commanders to understand clearly the enemy and the war upon which they are engaged.³⁴ The current confusion over terminology invites practitioners to both overestimate and underestimate Russia's

ability to fight NGW, and run the risk of being ill-prepared for similar campaigns in the future.

NGW is referred to widely in the West as “hybrid” warfare. Other terms including “ambiguous,” “gray zone challenges,” and “non-linear” have also been used, but hybrid was the term adopted by NATO.³⁵ The term hybrid was first linked with warfare by William Nemeth in his Naval Postgraduate School thesis on the Chechen war in which he proposed that for the Chechens the war amounted to much more than the battlefield itself. Militarily they brought together regular and irregular methods in a highly flexible combination. However, they also perceived war “in a wider, non-linear sense and hence, in addition to field tactics, they also employed all the means of the information age to gain an advantage over their enemies.” In Nemeth's estimation this style of warfare was made possible by the structure of Chechen society and was specific to it.³⁶

Two American scholars who studied the phenomenon subsequently, Michael McCuen and Frank Hoffman, did not view it as society-specific. For McCuen, hybrid conflicts were “full spectrum wars with both physical and conceptual dimensions: the former, a struggle against an armed enemy and the latter, a wider struggle for control and support of the combat zone's indigenous population, the support of the home fronts of the intervening nations, and the support of the international community.”³⁷ He drew two critical lessons from his reading of these conflicts: The first was that hybrid warfare required simultaneous success on all fronts instead of following the sequential form of conventional warfare; the second was that in order to win hybrid conflicts, military victories had to be followed immediately by social reconstruction to prevent the opponent from filling the vacuum.³⁸

Hoffman came to hybrid war by studying Hezbollah in its 1992 war with Israel. His conclusion was that hybrid threats

incorporate a full range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder...[and] are generally operationally and tactically directed and coordinated within the main battlespace to achieve synergistic effects in the physical and psychological dimensions of the conflict.³⁹

For Nemeth and McCuen, hybrid warfare was practiced by non-state actors; for Hoffman, it could be practiced by states as well.⁴⁰ The Soviet Union was the first state to practice hybrid warfare (against Estonia and Finland), establishing a pattern that Nazi Germany followed against Czechoslovakia and Austria, and to which Russia is now returning. In Hoffman's view, hybrid warfare does not signal the end of conventional warfare, but adds a further layer of complexity to the way violent actors fight to win.⁴¹

A third American, Russell Glenn, added additional dimensions to hybridized warfare when he argued that any definition that focused predominantly on the use of force and violence and underplayed the use of political, diplomatic, and economic tools was turning a blind eye to critical aspects of this new form of war.⁴² Grasping this is essential to understanding what Russia is doing. For Glenn, hybrid warfare involves state and non-state actors, singly or in combination, that "simultaneously and adaptively employ some combination of (1) political, military, economic, social, and information means, and (2) conventional, irregular, catastrophic, terrorism, and disruptive/criminal warfare methods."⁴³ This definition accords strikingly with the observed actions of Russian forces and the Russian government during the takeover of Crimea and the invasion of eastern Ukraine.⁴⁴

Current Russian strategic thinking is clearly guided by the Leninist view of warfare; that is to say its only limit is what is possible and expedient politically.

Glenn's definition, the Gerasimov Doctrine, and the behavior of Russian forces starting with the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 and developing through the Crimean and eastern Ukrainian crises, all link back directly to the revolutionary warfare theories of Lenin and early Bolshevik practice. NGW is also reflected in Mao, in more recent Chinese thinking about psychological, legal, and media warfare, which is referred to together as the "Three Warfares," and the theories of "Unrestricted Warfare" articulated by two People's Liberation Army colonels in 2002.⁴⁵ Consequently, the world

is likely to see further examples of this warfare around Asia's periphery.

But Nemeth made another salient comment about hybrid warfare: Its nature, he wrote, is "total."⁴⁶ It blurs the distinction between combatants and non-combatants. The Chechens had no compunction in using terrorism, massacres, criminal methods, and the inhumane treatment of prisoners. Glenn similarly saw potentially no theoretical limit preventing the use of every weapon up to and including acts of catastrophic terrorism that could include the destruction of dams and nuclear power plants.⁴⁷

Current Russian strategic thinking as embodied in the NGW concept is clearly guided by the Leninist view of warfare; that is to say its only limit is what is possible and expedient politically. Putin is nothing if not an opportunist. While Russia's domestic and economic policies are no longer guided by Marxist-Leninism, Putin has filled the resulting hole with nationalism. Putin and the current Russian elite have embraced the idea of Greater Russia. They have married the expansionist nationalism of the tsars to the absolutist military strategy of Lenin. Given Russia's continuing research, development, and manufacture of biological and chemical weapons, and its investment in low-yield nuclear weapons, these too could conceivably play a role in future confrontations while staying true to the NGW formula. It is worth recalling that Leninism never assumed it had the support of the people; it always came to power by seizing it.

Continuing to refer to NGW as hybrid war may, therefore, blur understanding of its true nature. It may circumscribe the West's response by encouraging the belief that what the West is facing is a sub-set of conventional war, a variation that might be best viewed as a complication, when in fact it is total war that can be escalated without limit. NGW is a concept for fighting total war in Europe that borrows many of its features from what the Russians encountered—and learnt from—during the brutal fighting in Chechnya.⁴⁸ It envisages achieving effect across all fronts—political, economic, informational, and cyber—simultaneously. It aims to achieve its objectives through fear and intimidation without launching a large-scale attack. If conventional fighting is required, however, it is highly networked and multi-directional; the stakes, moreover, can be raised rapidly and possibly without limit. Russia has brought total war back to Europe—in a hidden, undeclared, and ambiguous form.

Contextualizing and Defeating NGW

It is worth repeating that it is important to neither overestimate nor underestimate Russian capabilities.⁴⁹ It is important, too, to recognize that the local circumstances that made Russia successful in Crimea and eastern Ukraine may not be repeatable, at least not initially:

- Russia achieved strategic and tactical surprise; the first is unlikely to be repeated while the second will be if defensive methods remain underdeveloped.⁵⁰
- Surprise worked best when combined with deception, such as making the attackers indistinguishable from civilians.
- Information warfare was successful at all levels in confusing and isolating defensive forces; the relentless denial program succeeded in sowing doubts about Ukrainian claims while meshing with Western reluctance to revise widely held opinions about Russia as an economic and political partner; political leaders and commentators in many countries found it difficult to acknowledge that a member of the G-8 was willing to tear up international norms and defy Western good opinion.⁵¹
- High levels of Russian ownership of media assets made it easy to hammer home pro-Russian messages; the Ukrainian government found it practically impossible to counter this messaging; it also lost contact with many of its own units which, in the absence of higher direction, often gave up their arms or went over to the Russian side, a collapse of morale that was exacerbated by the presence of disloyal Ukrainian army and police commanders.
- Russia was able to portray Russian-speaking minorities as threatened and in need of protection, although the actual level of popular support was far less than claimed. The exaggeration and exploitation of minority dissatisfaction has been a feature of Russian policy in what it refers to as the “near abroad” since the fall of the Soviet Union. Long and bitter experience of living under Soviet rule had pre-conditioned large numbers of people to react passively in the face of threatened violence.

- Shared borders enabled Russia to mass large numbers of regular forces that inhibited Ukrainian (and Western) reactions, for fear of provoking a larger conflict; this presence was especially marked and effective in Crimea, where Russian forces were based inside the country; common borders also enabled and simplified covert, and eventually overt, Russian logistical support for its separatist proxies.
- Finally, Ukraine was a weak and divided country; had suffered years of economic mismanagement and widespread corruption; and those living in the eastern *oblasts* and Crimea had legitimate grievances against the Kiev government that Russia could exploit.

Consequently, it is possible to suggest that NGW can be stymied and defeated providing:

- The target government has a sound democratic mandate, manages the economy competently, counters corruption, and responds to minority concerns without alienating majority interests; the latter is important because experience suggests that Russia is able to leverage low levels of dissatisfaction among a Russian minority even in the absence of active support.
- Dependence on Russian energy supplies is progressively reduced; permitting the export of U.S. oil and gas would provide European countries with an important alternative.
- That the sum total of national and NATO collective defense measures is able to neutralize the threat of a mass Russian military attack. The difference between the Crimean and eastern Ukrainian outcomes suggests that the proximate presence of Russian forces and their ability to provide insurgents with large-scale logistical support is a crucial factor for NGW success.
- That while there may be no direct defense against NGW’s preparatory phase, national and collective intelligence resources must be capable of monitoring developments, adequate police resources must be available to investigate subversive activities, and riot teams must be in a position to move decisively against street demonstrations,

irregular forces, and Russian SOF within an agreed and understood legal framework that meets international standards.

- Civilian and military infrastructure is hardened and protected.
- The target government maintains information warfare dominance by ensuring that sufficient communications channels remain open to deliver its message throughout the country, and it is able to influence public opinion internationally.
- Advanced offensive and defensive cyber and electronic warfare capabilities are developed and deployed.
- NATO adopts a strong defensive posture throughout those Central European and Baltic members under greatest potential threat from Russia. Regalvanizing European solidarity is perhaps the greatest obstacle. What NATO cannot afford is to be dissuaded from such a move by a concerted and relentless Russian information warfare program, which would likely include a repeat of the threats to enhance its nuclear warfare capabilities that proved so effective in deterring the Obama Administration from positioning anti-ballistic-missile (ABM) defensive systems in Poland and the Czech Republic. NGW seeks to exploit weakness, and the decision not to deploy ABM systems as planned communicated weakness rather than strength.

Why It All Matters to the United States

President Obama made no immediate response when Russia absorbed Crimea—the first unilateral change in European political geography since 1945. When he spoke about it on March 24, 2014, nearly one month later, his judgment was that Russia was no more than a “regional power,” one that was lashing out “not in strength but in weakness,” could only threaten its near neighbors, and presented no existential threat to the U.S. President Obama was saying, in effect, that it was a matter of little consequence.⁵² He was correct as far as he went. In fact, on April 7, when armed men in civilian clothes occupied government buildings in the eastern Ukrainian cities of Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkiv, his assessment was confirmed: The action was regional,

demonstrated weakness because five months later Russia needed to rescue its irregular action with a limited conventional invasion, took place on the territory of the same near neighbor, and proffered no direct military threat to the United States.⁵³

The world, however, is made up of regions. Russia’s regional action, and America’s relative inaction regionally and globally, has made the world a more dangerous place. The current global order is largely America’s creation. It requires American leadership to survive. While the current global order works to America’s advantage—and why should it not?—it also works to the advantage of others, which is why it attracts widespread, though not universal, support. All it takes for less-benign orders to arise is for America to do nothing.

Russia’s assault might be confined physically to its near neighbors. It might well arise out of weakness: Russia is not strong enough to confront American conventional military power.⁵⁴ It may also be true that the tactics it uses against its neighbors may present no direct threat to the U.S. and its allies; although to imply that Russian military power as a whole, given its enormous nuclear arsenal, presents, no existential threat to the U.S., is some way short of the truth. NGW, however, is an asymmetric strategy. It is not designed to confront America where it is strong but where it is weak. It is designed to exploit America’s inability since the fall of the Berlin Wall to conceptualize its global role in grand strategic terms and thus to see indirect threats for what they are, its consequent political and military uncertainty when confronted by indirect challenges, and finally its concomitant inability to seize the strategic initiative by molding what Frank Hoffman has described as the “full range of methods and modes of conflict”—including political, diplomatic, economic, legal, military, cyber, and covert forms of warfare—into a comprehensive approach.⁵⁵

NGW is designed to exploit the West’s current, limited interpretation of what constitutes conflict and the dangerously unbalanced American and European preference for conflict prevention and conflict resolution over conflict engagement and deterrence. Suggestions, therefore, that the U.S. should engage in risk-reduction and renewed confidence-building measures with Russia are wide of the mark; theorists of NGW view “peace treaties and other initiatives” as a way of hamstringing the opponent and limiting its freedom of action.⁵⁶ Russia has

all the confidence it needs because it sees U.S. hesitation as its opportunity. Failure to confront Russian opportunism will validate Putin's approach. Russia is a canny opponent. It will learn from the successes and failures of its recent campaigns and the West's response, as it did from its war with Georgia, and is likely to continue to use and refine NGW to accomplish its objectives.

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The United States needs to recognize that its own organizational, institutional, and intellectual approach to war is precisely what is enabling Russia to succeed. The U.S. is overly dependent on military responses. The Russian approach is designed specifically to avoid giving the U.S. and other outside powers a reason to respond using military force. The U.S. consequently needs to broaden its response portfolio to include political, diplomatic, economic, financial, cyber, covert, and other means coordinated into a "whole of government" approach that is able to counter rapid moves by an adversary across the whole spectrum of potential conflict. America has the means and resources to counter this hidden, undeclared, and ambiguous form of warfare, but will only be able to deploy them if it is able to become more flexible and less predictable in its responses. In particular, the 1947 National Security Act, which has served this country well for over half a century, needs to be revised or replaced to facilitate a more comprehensive approach. Deterrence thinking, which is associated too often with nuclear issues, also needs to be revised and reinvigorated to counter moves by adversaries that are intended to operate below the level that the U.S. would regard as war.

The risk to America's position as the world's only global superpower is not confined to Europe. Other states, China and Iran particularly but also non-state actors such as Hezbollah and ISIS, will have learned from what Russia has achieved and will use these lessons to diminish U.S. power and harm Western interests.⁵⁷ China's actions in the South China Sea have many similarities with Russia's in Crimea.⁵⁸ Unless the United States recognizes that its enemies are willing to engage in a war that is total but hidden, undeclared and ambiguous, is prepared to show the American people what this truly entails, and coordinates all elements of national power to confront this challenge, U.S. global power will erode, as hostile regional powers arise to take its place.

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