Russia's Hybrid Warfare
Waging War below the Radar of Traditional Collective Defence

by H. Reisinger and A. Golts[1]

"You can't modernize a large country with a small war"
Karl Schlögel

"Ukraine is not even a state!" Putin reportedly advised former US President George W. Bush during the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest. In 2014 this perception became reality. Russian behaviour during the current Ukraine crisis was based on the traditional Russian idea of a "sphere of influence" and a special responsibility or, stated more bluntly, the "right to interfere" with countries in its "near abroad". This perspective is also implied by the equally misleading term "post-Soviet space."[2] The successor states of the Soviet Union are sovereign countries that have developed differently and therefore no longer have much in common. Some of them are members of the European Union and NATO, while others are desperately trying to achieve this goal. Contrary to what Professor John Mearsheimer may suggest. In his article "Why the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault" he argues that NATO has expanded too far to the East, "into Russia's backyard", against Moscow's declared will, and therefore carries responsibility for recent events; however, this seems to ignore that NATO was not hunting for new members, but found them knocking at its door.[3]

Ukraine's membership aspirations have been off the agenda since 2010, and the whole crisis was not triggered by NATO but by the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement. It is true - the Russian leadership felt threatened, not by NATO's "open door" but by the prospect of the EU's soft power transforming its neighbour, the "brother" nation or "Little Russia" as Ukraine has been referred to since the 18th century. This prospect raised the

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[2] Comprising the 15 successor states of the Soviet Union: the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania); Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and the Russian Federation; the South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan); and the Central Asian States (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan).

[3] John J. Mearsheimer, Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault, *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2014, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141769/john-j-mearsheimer/why-the-ukraine-crisis-is-the-wests-fault

possibility of an alternative to Vladimir Putin's "managed democracy." There was fear that "democratic change in brotherly Ukraine could therefore spread to Russia."[4] It was this fear of "regime change" and a "colour revolution"[5] that prompted the Putin regime to go to war and use *all* means available – if necessary.

All this is nothing new. The Kremlin's growing concern, as autocratic regimes were swept away in the Arab Spring or in colour revolutions, was plain for all to see. Such developments were seen as having been inspired and orchestrated by the West, and the Russian leadership felt increasingly cornered with the fear to be "next".

This article will discuss the military aspects of the crisis in Eastern Ukraine, focusing specifically on the following points: (1) how Russia redefined war; (2) how it used its rapid deployment forces; and (3) how Ukraine responded conventionally. Finally, how NATO could respond to those undeclared wars in Europe.

It was all on the cards – Moscow "threatened" by colour revolution

President Putin's Chief of General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov wrote in early 2013: "Armed conflicts, including those associated with the so-called color revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East, have demonstrated, that a prosperous state, in a matter of months or even days, may turn into a bitter armed conflict, becoming a victim of foreign intervention, falling into chaos, a humanitarian catastrophe and into civil war." The lessons learnt for Russia were twofold: avoid a colour revolution at all costs; and take a close look at how to make the use of your own military and non-military resources more sophisticated.

Gerasimov continues: "The very 'rules of war' have changed significantly. The use of non-military methods

to achieve political and strategic objectives has in some cases proved far more effective than the use of force. […] Widely used asymmetrical means can help to neutralize the enemy's military superiority. These include the use of special operations forces and internal opposition to the creation of a permanent front throughout the enemy state, as well as the impact of propaganda instruments, forms and methods which are constantly being improved."[6] To make a virtue of necessity Russian military planners understood that they can bridge existing conventional gaps also with hybrid means and get easier to the goal to have armed forces that can effectively be used.[7]

At the end of May, when the war in South East Ukraine was at its peak, the Russian Ministry of Defence organized the "Moscow Conference on International Security."[8] The main topic was the "colour revolution", defined as a major threat to national security. During the conference, Russian military leaders came to the conclusion that the "colour revolution is a new form of warfare, taking the form of armed struggle according to the rules of military engagement but, in this case, involving all available tools," Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu stated in his speech.[9] The idea was developed by the Chief of the General Staff Main Operations Directorate in Moscow, Vladimir Zarudnitskiy:

"First, […] the military potential of countries organizing the overthrow of the enemy government is used for open pressure. The goal of this pressure is to prevent the use of the security forces to restore law and order. Then, with the deployment of the opposition hostilities against government forces, foreign countries begin to give the rebels military and economic aid. Later, a coalition of countries [...] can start a military operation to assist the opposition in the seizure of power."[10]

This scenario explains the plan that Moscow implemented in South East Ukraine. First, it concentrated its armed forces on the border, as a show of force (special forces

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[4] Maria Snegovaya, Ukraine's Crisis Is Not the West's Fault, *The Moscow Times*, 15 September 2014, http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/ukraine-s-crisis-is-not-the-west-s-fault/507100.html

[5] Term used for people's uprising that led to regime change on the Balkans, in the successor states of the Soviet Union and also in the Middle East. Most famous are the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004, and the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon in 2005.

[6] Valery Gerasimov, Tsennost nauki v predvidenii, *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*, 8(476), 27 February 2013, http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632

[7] See also Bettina Renz, Russian Military Capabilities after 20 Years of Reform, *Survival*, vol. 56 no. 3, June–July 2014, pp. 61–84.

[8] Moscow Conference on International Security (MCIS), 23/24 May 2014, based on the model of the Munich Security Conference (MSC), but with very limited participation from Europe and the US.

[9] See Yuriy Gavrilov, Igry s nulevym rezultatom, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 26 May 2014 www.rg.ru/2014/05/23/konferenciya-site.html

[10] Aleksandr Tikhonov, Otkuda izchodyat ugrozy miru, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 27 May 2014, http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/newspaper/item/16298-otkuda-iskhodyat-ugrozy-miru

might have crossed the borders at a fairly early stage, though). Then it began to support the separatists, sending armaments and trainers to the conflict area. Finally, Russia invaded directly but covertly. In this context, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine can be considered as a kind of "counter-colour revolution."

Russia's hybrid methods

Russia's recent behaviour and actions are often referred to as "hybrid warfare". They have been an effective and sometimes surprising mix of military and non-military, conventional and irregular components, and can include all kinds of instruments such as cyber and information operations. None of the single components is new; it is the combination and orchestration of different actions that achieves a surprise effect and creates ambiguity, making an adequate reaction extremely difficult, especially for multinational organizations that operate on the principle of consensus.

The Russian approach seems to be based on the lessons learnt at various testing grounds, especially during and after its war with Georgia in 2008, where Russian armed forces won, though not very convincingly. This time Moscow used mainly special forces and its "soft power" such as propaganda and technical assistance.[11] Additional components, such as energy security and economic pressure, will come to the fore during the oncoming winter. However, the following five key aspects, which are interlinked and overlap, seem to be central to the current Russian approach:

1. "Po Zakonu" - In accordance with the law: actions with an appearance of legality

Inside Russia: in March, the Russian Federation Council authorized the Russian President to use Russian armed forces in Ukraine; in asking Parliament to revoke this decision in June, Putin created a façade of legality that was irrelevant to the de facto (and undeclared) use of the Russian military in Ukraine. Officially, Russia is not a party to the conflict. In addition, several laws and regulations have been introduced or simplified, in order to facilitate Crimea's (or any territory's) integration into the Russian Federation and the recognition of new Russian citizens.[12]

In Crimea: the so-called referendum did not meet international standards – it was carried through very quickly, with unidentified military forces on the street and a total absence of credible international oversight. The results were nevertheless as intended, making it possible to counter accusations that Moscow has broken international law by picturing the take-over of the region as "the will of the people in Crimea."

In Eastern Ukraine: consistent with earlier observations that Russian passports had been freely distributed in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria, journalists reported that applications for Russian passports in Eastern Ukraine were being encouraged with food packages.[13] This increases the number of Russian citizens that have to be protected.

2. Military show of force and readiness: snap inspections

On 26 February 2014, in the midst of the Maidan clashes, Russia started bringing troops and equipment on a large scale to the Russian Western Military District, close to the Ukrainian border, for a so-called snap inspection and an unannounced large-scale military exercise.[14] A build-up of 30,000-40,000 Russian troops at the border with Ukraine, according to NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), General Philip Breedlove, left no doubt about Russia's readiness to invade Ukraine "if necessary". A few weeks later, Russia conducted another snap inspection in the Central Military District, involving more than 65,000 troops, 177 planes, 56 helicopters, and 5,500 vehicles and armoured vehicles. Military units in full formation were ready for deployment within 72 hours.[15]

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[11] For instance, when the power supply in Luhansk was shot down, Russian teams came to "repair" it by connecting the city to Russian systems and create facts. See Sabine Adler reporting from Eastern Ukraine for Deutschlandfunk, 8 September 2014, http://ondemand-mp3.dradio.de/file/dradio/2014/09/08/dlf_20140908_0715_c1740ed1.mp3

[12] This can also be seen as a Russian lesson learnt from the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where Russia has earned the obligation to feed the newborn "independent" states (especially in the case of South Ossetia) and has not been able to obtain recognition of their independence even by Russia's closest allies (with the exception of Nicaragua, Venezuela and Nauru).

[13] Sabine Adler reporting from Eastern Ukraine for Deutschlandfunk, 8 September 2014, http://ondemand-mp3.dradio.de/file/dradio/2014/09/08/dlf_20140908_0715_c1740ed1.mp3

[14] Ordered by the Commander in Chief, the Russian president.

[15] Working meeting with Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu, 2 July 2014, http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/22590

Snap inspections, formerly used during the Soviet period, were reintroduced in 2013 and have been carried out eight times since then. They are hardly effective in terms of any actual improvement in military capacity, but are giving the Kremlin the opportunity to flex its muscles again and prepare a military intervention in its neighbourhood, wherever and whenever needed. This is a long way from the idea of using the armed forces as a last resort: here, their use is seen as the continuation of policy by other means. Having armed forces continually ready for deployment in this way is contrary to the many international efforts to make security more predictable by means of arms reduction regimes.

To avoid inviting foreign observers as required by the Vienna Document, and to have a completely free hand, the Russian Minister of Defence announced that Russian troops were engaged in "intensive combat training" according to a schedule of spring and summer exercises. Ostensibly, each unit "individually" pursues its own learning activities, which may include moving more than 500 kilometres to unfamiliar testing grounds. Russian officials insisted that no joint manoeuvres were being performed, and that the number of participants in each exercise thus remained within the limits specified by the Vienna Document, which does not make specific provision for this kind of "combat training". Consequently, Russia was not obliged to invite any observers. Officially, Moscow did not even recognize the existence of the military build-up along the border.[16]

3. Putin's masked ball: "little green men"

The "little green men" (or "polite people", as Putin prefers to put it) are Russian special forces in their familiar green apparel, acting as "local security forces", without national or other identification tags.[17] Although this phenomenon has been in the news only recently, it is actually nothing new. A long-standing practice of the Spetsnaz, the Special

Forces, it was also a feature of the Chechen war in 1994.

In Crimea, the presence of these unidentified special forces was a means of psychological warfare. Would these gunmen answer questions politely, or shoot immediately? Against the military backdrop of the large-scale snap inspection, the little green men set the scene locally: a show of force, the readiness to use violence, with an unclear level of ambition, and zero political responsibility. The last point made the difference, as the Russian leadership stuck to a narrative according to which the snap inspections were a "normal" instrument to enhance combat readiness; and the "little green men" had nothing to do with Russia, as they were "local defence forces". One month later, Putin mentioned in another interview that "of course, the Russian servicemen did back the Crimean self-defence forces. They acted in a civil, but decisive and professional manner."[18] They proved to be a precise instrument: the "little green men" captured the Crimean Verkhovnaya Rada and as a result, a presiding group of the parliament voted for the referendum on independence, whereas this motion had not been passed in full session the day before.[19]

Even the open question whether the appearance of "little green men" was a violation of the Geneva Conventions demonstrates the intended ambiguity. As the show of military force was enough to take Crimea, the situation did not get to the point where the Geneva Conventions would even come into play.[20]

4. Taking advantage of local tensions and local militias

The technique was to team up and support local Russian minorities in venting their dissatisfaction with the local political leadership, before moving on to covert militarization of these movements. For the outside world, this is labelled "protecting Russians abroad". With a content Russian minority, loyal to the Ukrainian

[16] This scenario had already been "tested" in Russia's ZAPAD 13 exercise. Analysis of photos and videos posted on social networks, as well as reports of the Ukrainian and Russian press, suggests that some elite units sent their battalion tactical groups for "training" in the border region with Ukraine – for instance, the 4th Guards Tank Division (Kantemirovskaya) and the 2nd Guards Motorized Rifle Division (Taman) from Moscow, the 76th Guards Air Assault Division, the 31st Guards Air Assault Brigade, the 106th Guards Air Assault Division, and the 23rd Motorized Rifle Brigade 25. Following the capture of Russian troops in late August, this list should be completed with the 98th Airborne Division and the 18th Motorized Rifle Brigade. See http://www.vedomosti.ru/newspaper/article/653491/koncentraciya-bez-gruppirovki

[17] The phenomenon produces strange effects. See Tom Balmforth, Russia mulls special day to recognize its 'polite people', 4 October 2014, http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-ukraine-crimea-little-green-men-polite-people/26620327.html

[18] Direct Line with Vladimir Putin, April 17, 2014, http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/7034

[19] Aleksandr Golts, The forth conquest of Crimea, *Pro et Contra*, Volume 18, Issue 3-4, May-August 2014, http://carnegie.ru/proetcontra/?fa=56758

[20] David B. Rivkin Jr. and Lee A. Casey see a violation of the Geneva Conventions in their article "The Outlaw Vladimir Putin", *The Wall Street Journal*, 10 April 2014; others sources see a farce, as Russian soldiers were easy to identify, but no violation. See for instance Alberto Riva, Why Putin's use of unmarked troops did not violate the Geneva Convention, *International Business Times*, 5 March 2014, http://www.businessinsider.com/alberto-riva-putin-did-not-violate-geneva-convention-2014-3

government, Russian activity in Ukraine would have been doomed to failure.

For Ukraine, fighting the Russian-backed separatists poses many problems. The war in Eastern Ukraine is combination of actions by paramilitary groups and the regular army. The transition from guerrilla warfare to classic military operations was actually rare in the course of previous proxy wars during the Cold War, for obvious reasons. Both sides preferred to avoid a direct military confrontation. However, there are precedents in other theatres. South Africa provided support to the UNITA forces during the civil war in Angola, in 1970-1980. Whenever the rebels were defeated by government troops, units of the South African regular army crossed the border into Namibia, in order to save the proxy forces.

Almost the same has happened in Eastern Ukraine. In the first stages of the operation in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, Russian special forces acted as trainers and experts in the use of sophisticated military hardware. However, when the Ukrainian military began to push back the separatists, threatening to cut off the border with Russia, Moscow covertly sent Russian troops across the border to give direct military support to the separatists. The Russian troops fought as battalion tactical groups deployed from four airborne divisions, located in the area, together with the 18th Army Brigade (a total of no more than three or four thousand soldiers). The superiority of the Russian troops was evident; however, the offensive against Mariupol in August 2014 was stopped. Most likely, the Russian government did not want to dispel the illusion of non-participation in the war. However, the escalation of operations had already reached a level where it no longer made any sense to deny the participation of Russia. The number of their casualties had inevitably grown. This forced Moscow to adapt its narrative.

5. Propaganda or simply imprudent lies?

In May 2014, Russian President Putin awarded medals to about 300 journalists, cameramen and technicians who were involved in reporting events in Crimea. All were working for state media outlets. The group also included the head of the Russian consumer organization responsible for the shutting down of unwanted websites. The Kremlin is fully aware of the important role of media like the Russia Today TV channel, social media and internet portals, as well as PR campaigns worldwide. All of these were extensively used to prepare the ground for action in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. The full fledged disinformation campaign included multiple components.

Targeted and systematic disinformation took different forms, like labelling the Maidan movement as "fascist" to awaken memories of the Soviet fight against Nazi Germany. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, for example, spoke about "Nazis, who continue to march in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities."[21] In the same vein, Kyiv's military campaign was described as war against the Ukrainian people. Putin even compared Ukrainian military action to that of the German troops blockading Leningrad: "The Ukrainian army has surrounded small towns and big cities and is firing directly at residential areas in order to destroy infrastructure and crush the will to resist and so on. Sad as it is to say, this reminds me of the events of World War II, when the Nazi troops surrounded our towns, in particular Leningrad […] and fired directly on the towns and their people."[22] The Russian accusation that Ukrainian armed forces were not only keeping specifically residential areas in Eastern Ukraine under heavy fire but also knocking out economic infrastructure is not borne out by data on the output of Eastern Ukrainian industry. For example the production of coal in the region declined by merely 13.3 percent compared to the same period in 2013 – even in July 2014, in the midst of the fighting, 2.4 million tons of coal were produced.[23]

Plausible denial: To cover up their real aims and actions, Russian officials offered strange explanations to the world public. Some sound bizarre, such as the Russian president stating on 4 March 2014 that the unidentified troops in Crimea were not Russian soldiers, since the green

[21] U Kremlya mogut byt dva plana po Ukraine, *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 21 October 2014, http://www.ng.ru/editorial/2014-10-21/2_red.html

[22] See interview at the Russian youth camp "Seliger 2014", 29 August 2014, http://www.kremlin.ru/news/46507. See too, on YouTube and RuTube, videos of mortar attacks on the Ukrainian armed forces under US command and the resulting casualties (see, for example, http://rutube.ru/video/a736d2f5bd67b7018d0a-37f5790eed52/). The way Moscow has exploited collective memories of World War II (from the fascism narrative to the humiliation of Ukrainian prisoners being paraded through the centre of Donetsk on Ukrainian Independence Day, with the streets cleaned after them) would deserve and require an own analysis. Especially as the Kremlin extends this narrative beyond the Ukraine crisis. Vladimir Putin mentioned in an interview in Serbia "the open manifestations of neo-Nazism that have already become commonplace in Latvia and other Baltic states". See Putin: Nazi virus 'vaccine' losing effect in Europe, 15 October 2014, http://rt.com/politics/official-word/196284-ukraine-putin-nazi-europe/

[23] See Christian Neef, Putins Lügen, *Spiegel online*, 2 September 2014, http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/wladimir-putin-wie-russlands-praesident-in-der-ukraine-krise-luegt-a-989247.html

uniforms they were wearing could be purchased in any second-hand-shop.[24]

Russia denied its involvement in the fighting in Eastern Ukraine, even in the face of growing evidence to the contrary. In the beginning, one explanation was that Russian soldiers turned up in Eastern Ukraine by mistake. When a group of Russian paratroopers was arrested close to the Ukrainian city of Mariupol, the Russian news stated that "they patrolled the border and got lost." After the battle for Donetsk Airport on 26 May,[25] with the first reports of Russian casualties and burials of paratroopers, the official narrative changed. Reportedly Russian servicemen were now "volunteers" following their convictions to fight for freedom. These volunteers were fighting in Ukraine, without their commander's or unit's knowledge, "during their vacation."[26] Soldiers also reported that they were taken to the Ukrainian border and offered the choice between fighting there, after signing an application for leave, or de-facto deserting.[27] If Russian servicemen then did not come home safely from their "vacation", Russian authorities needed more time to adjust the narrative.

The families of Russian soldiers who were listed as missing or killed in action were pressured to stick to the "vacation narrative", for example by deleting postings on the Facebook site "Gruz 200."[28] When the number of casualties grew, Russian TV channels even reported the burials and there was local media coverage. For example, in early September the local state TV channel reported the funeral with military honours of 28-year old paratrooper Anatoliy Travkin, who died in action in Donbass, where he had gone while "officially on leave."[29] The emphasis turned to the heroic idealism that brought Russian soldiers to fight "fascism" (again).[30]

The pro-Russian rebels also stuck to this version, as it emphasized their own narrative of a fight for ideals and for freedom. Pro-Russian separatist leader and "prime minister of the DNP", Aleksandr Zakharchenko, said in an interview that 3,000-4,000 Russian servicemen were fighting Ukrainian troops alongside his units: "Among us are serving soldiers, who would rather take their vacation not on a beach but with us, among brothers, who are fighting for their freedom."[31]

The humanitarian narrative: When the Ukrainian army seemed to be regaining territory occupied by the separatists, the Kremlin changed tack by projecting itself as the defender of humanitarian issues. Daily news about Russian humanitarian aid convoys, Russian calls for escape corridors for civilians and encircled Ukrainian military, was beefed up with pictures of the "protesting Russian minority" (actually, in many cases, Russian citizens being taken by bus to Ukraine as "tourists"). Another example was the queue at the Ukrainian-Polish border showing Ukrainians purportedly trying to escape fascism and move to safety in Russia. The propaganda machinery was pulling out all the stops.

At the UN, Russian ambassador Churkin highlighted the humanitarian challenges throughout the conflict;[32] Russia sent convoys with humanitarian aid into Eastern Ukraine and demanded humanitarian corridors for refugees and Ukrainian soldiers. In a discussion with young teachers, Vladimir Putin mentioned with compassion the difficult situation of Ukrainian soldiers lost on Russian territory and receiving treatment in Russian hospitals: "I saw in the news reports above all, and also from the reports of

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[24] See http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6763

[25] Mariya Turchenkova, Gruz 200. Continuation, *Novaya Gazeta*, 2 June 2014, http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/63873.html

[26] Before going on leave, a soldier is obliged to write a report, in which he has to point out the exact address of where he intends to spend this holiday. Commanders have to approve the report, before the leave is confirmed.

[27] Birgit Virnich, Russland: Mütter suchen ihre gefallenen Soldaten, *ARD Weltspiegel*, 7 September 2014, http://www.daserste.de/information/politik-weltgeschehen/weltspiegel/videos/russland-muetter-suchen-ihre-gefallenen-soldaten-100.html; Andrew Higgins and Michael A. Gordon, Putin Talks to Ukrainian Leader as Videos Show Captured Russian Soldiers, *The New York Times*, 26 August 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/27/world/europe/ukraine.html

[28] "Gruz 200" is the Russian Armed Forces code for casualties brought home in zinc coffins. After the activist Yelena Vasilyeva created a Facebook page under this name, where information is shared about Russian soldiers fighting in Ukraine, the code became a synonym for Russian servicemen dying in the fight against Ukrainian forces. The TV channel "Dozhd" maintains a list of missing/captured and killed Russian soldiers, http://tvrain.ru/soldat/

[29] V Kostrome prostilis s desantnikom Anatoliyem Travkinym, kotoryy pogib v boju na vostoke Ukrainy, 4 September 2014, http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/266969

[30] Rossiyskiye i inostrannyye dobrovolcy v Donbasse: My priyekhali zashchishchat mir ot fashizma, 4 September 2014, http://russian.rt.com/article/48536

[31] Interview on the Rossia 24 TV channel, 28 August 2014, http://www.vesti.ru/videos?vid=onair; http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/angela-merkel/11060559/Serving-Russian-soldiers-on-leave-fighting-Ukrainian-troops-alongside-rebels-pro-Russian-separatist-leader-says.html

[32] See, for instance, Igor Rozin, Vitaly Churkin: Crisis in Ukraine may lead to humanitarian catastrophe, *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, July 4, 2014, http://rbth.com/international/2014/07/04/vitaly_churkin_crisis_in_ukraine_may_lead_to_humanitarian_catas_37941.html or Churkin to UN: Don't children in East Ukraine deserve safety?, 8 August 2014, http://rt.com/news/179112-un-russia-ukraine-children/

our special services what is happening. I saw the reactions of mothers and wives of these Ukrainian servicemen who are surrounded. This is a tragedy for them too. This was why I appealed to the Donbass militia to open a humanitarian corridor so that people could leave. Many of them have been there for several days without food or water. They have run out of ammunition. They should be given the chance to leave."[33]

Last but not least, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, under the authority of the President, started enquiries on the grounds that "unidentified persons from the top political and military leadership of Ukraine, the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the National Guard of Ukraine and the right wing have given orders to kill solely Russian-speaking citizens living in the Luhansk and Donetsk republics, violating the Convention of 1948 on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and other international legal acts condemning genocide."[34] While there have been reports of atrocities on the Ukrainian side, it is nevertheless suspicious to rely on a covert belligerent to verify them.[35]

Novorossiya – How branding helps to realize an agenda: With Russia's true ambitions still unclear, the controversial concept of "Novorossiya" ("New Russia") emerged. "Novorossiya" was proclaimed on 24 May 2014, one day before the presidential elections, by the "people's governor" Pavel Gubarev. The "People's Republic of Donetsk and Luhansk" announced the independence of the new state "Novorossiya", comprising Donetsk, Luhansk, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhia, Odesa, Mykolaiv, Kharkiv and Kherson – quite patently a land connection to Crimea.

On 17 April 2014, Putin explained in his already mentioned "direct link" interview that this region was historically not part of Ukraine. He had already used the term "Novorossiya", meaning Eastern Ukraine. At the end of August, Putin made an appeal to the Novorossiya militia, highlighting their success against Ukrainian

violence and calling for humanitarian corridors for the Ukrainian services, "giving them the opportunity to leave the combat area unimpeded and reunite with their families, to return them to their mothers, wives and children."[36] The term, indicating the amputation of no less than a third of Ukrainian territory, was evidently to be a lasting fixture.

Only with effective media exposure was it possible for the Russian leadership to develop and maintain its narrative nationally and, most importantly, worldwide. Within Russia, the few independent TV channels such as TV Dozhd were marginalized and are accessible only via internet. One of the most important differences from the war with Georgia in 2008 was that, in 2014, the Kremlin was able to make effective international use of the "Russia Today" (RT) TV channel. While comparable international channels in the US or Europe are faced with financial cuts and shrinking ratings, RT is still on the rise – even overtaking BBC World News and CNN on some parameters.[37] The German news magazine *Der Spiegel* has even called RT "the [Russian] Ministry of Media Defence."[38] In the current conflict in Ukraine, the channel has played exactly this role, not only representing a pro-Kremlin line but also working with targeted disinformation.

In an interview in 2013, RT editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan made clear that objectivity was never her goal. RT was set up in 2005 to send a specific message. In her view, information and media are also weapons: "In peacetime an international channel will not be absolutely necessary. But in war times it can be crucial. […] An army is also not set up a week before the war begins."[39]

It was also RT's mission to prevent an image disaster for Russia comparable to the 2008 war with Georgia, when the media focused predominantly on the destruction caused by Russian armed forces. Simonyan is therefore right, when she says that "if 2008 happened today, the media images would be different."[40]

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[33] Putin, during his visit to the Seliger 2014 National Youth Forum, http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/22864

[34] See website of the Russian Investigative Committee, 29 September 2014, http://sledcom.ru/actual/417477/

[35] See the reports of Human Rights Watch at http://www.hrw.org/europecentral-asia/ukraine

[36] President of Russia Vladimir Putin addressed Novorossiya militia, 29 August 2014, http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/22863

[37] See Gemma Pörzgen, "Soft Power" und Imagepflege aus Moskau, *Osteuropa* 1/2014, pp. 63-88, here p. 66.

[38] Benjamin Bidder, Putin's Weapon in the War of Images, *Spiegel online,* 13 August 2013, http://www.spiegel.de/international/business/putin-fights-war-of-images-and-propaganda-with-russia-today-channel-a-916162.html

[39] Tina Kandelaki, "Ne sobirayus delat vid, chto ja obyektivnaya", Interview with Margarita Simonyan, 7 March 2013, http://lenta.ru/articles/2013/03/07/simonyan

[40] Ibid.

Not only would the images be different, but so would the actual use of military resources. This time Russian regular armed forces were used only to create the right backdrop or, at most, to support local militias. The main players were specialized units, present in Crimea as "little green men."

The course of the war in Eastern Ukraine – limitations of Russian capabilities

In Eastern Ukraine, the most likely reason the "Crimean script" was not repeated was the limited level of Russian capabilities. The Kremlin did not have the necessary troops available to occupy the Luhansk and Donetsk regions. It is important to note that *all elite units* of the Russian army had already been used. The most important result of the military reform, which took place from 2008 to 2012, was the discontinuation of mass mobilization of reservists. Instead, the emphasis would be on forming 15-20 units of professional soldiers capable of operating within a few hours of receiving orders. This ability for rapid deployment was demonstrated during the Crimean stage of the operations in Ukraine, and again during the invasion of the Donbas region. Russia presumably kept its forces in permanent readiness close to the border, exchanging one battalion tactical group with another from the same division or brigade.

The Kremlin began in 2013 to set up a pool of rapid deployment forces, in order to be able to intervene in its neighborhood. These well equipped, well trained, modern forces consist of Airborne Forces (four divisions, five brigades), Marines (four brigades, eight separate regiments), GRU Intelligence Special Forces (GRU spetsnaz) brigades, three or four elite Ground Forces units, as well as air and naval support. The defence ministry planned that, in the coming years, all these units would be made up of professionals.[41] On this basis, the Airborne Forces count already up to 20 battalions. There is every reason to believe that the 30,000-40,000 troops transferred in February to the south-eastern border of Ukraine are the backbone of these rapid deployment forces.

While the existing pool of these forces is sufficient to deal with the current situation in Eastern Ukraine, they have reached their military limits. It was relatively simple to cut Crimea off from the rest of Ukraine by controlling the highway and railway through the Isthmus of Perekop, but the Donetsk and Luhansk regions cannot be dealt with in the same way. Here, Russian troops would have to establish "state" borders where they have never existed. Hundreds of roads linking the area with the rest of Ukraine would have to be cut off. Something like this cannot be done in a secret operation, or even a covert invasion, but would require the establishment of traditional checkpoints on all reasonably important lines of communication and the ability to prevent troops arriving from the rest of Ukraine. Even if the Kremlin has indeed been able to concentrate about 40,000 troops on Ukraine's borders, more than twice that number would be needed for an occupation.

Ironically, Russian strategists seem to have created these rapid deployment forces along the lines recommended by former US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell: they must be able to secure a quick victory and then withdraw immediately. Such an approach lends itself to containing the Taliban within Afghanistan, beating any attempts to break into the territory of the Central Asian states; but these troops are neither sufficient nor particularly well suited for the occupation of several regions in Ukraine.

Kyiv did not get far with a toolbox full of old tools

With hybrid warfare techniques, own deficits can be compensated. At the same time these techniques allow optimal exploitation of the opponents' vulnerabilities. Ukraine under President Janukovych was fragile, fragmented, corrupt and on the whole badly governed, offering an easy target for Russia's hybrid tactics. Kyiv's military answer to the separatists and the Russian invasion was desperate, and might have made matters even worse.

After the Russian annexation of Crimea, the Ukrainian leadership was under increased pressure to take action and avoid losing any more territory. In early April 2014, they decided to carry out an "anti-terrorist operation," using the regular army against the Moscow-backed warlords. This was Kyiv's main military and political mistake. Few (if any) armed forces in the world could win a war like this against paramilitaries, waging urban warfare, hiding

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[41] Aleksandr Golts, The forth conquest of Crimea, *Pro et Contra*, Volume 18, Issue 3-4, May-August 2014, http://carnegie.ru/proetcontra/?fa=56758

in the cities and actually turning the inhabitants into a human shield. The task would have required special forces prepared for combat in urban areas, not regular forces, who would not be able to make effective use of armoured vehicles, artillery or air strikes. Ukrainian regular forces were in a critical condition and had to deal with several major crises in rapid succession: Maidan, the Russian annexation of Crimea, and subsequent unrest in the south-eastern regions escalating into an armed rebellion. The army had been seriously underfinanced for twenty years, and dramatic troop reductions were not countered by systematic reconstruction and transition. In the fall of 2013, President Yanukovych agreed to another sharp reduction in troop numbers and a transition to a fully professional army. The Ukrainian units deployed were thus made up mostly of conscripts in their final months of service.

Explaining to the Verkhovna Rada why it was not possible to organize military resistance to the seizure of the Crimea, acting Defence Minister Ihor Tenyukh painted a bleak picture of the state of the Ukrainian army: the total number of ground forces was 41,000 men, with combat-ready units totalling 20,000 men on paper but actually reaching no more than 6,000.[42]

The situation then worsened. The authorities delayed the demobilization of conscripts who had been called up for military service in the spring of last year. The Ministry of Defence set up a partial mobilization for more than 90% of the available resources. In Kyiv, only every tenth reservist was mobilized voluntarily, according to Military Commissioner Vladimir Kidon. The armed forces were in a critical condition and also the Ukrainian oligarchs refused further support.[43] The plight of the armed forces is described by Maksim Muzyka, a parliamentarian from the new pro-European party "United Ukraine", who supports the "Narodnyy Tyl" ("People's replenishment") organization for bringing supplies to soldiers in Eastern Ukraine. He estimates that "only ten percent of the Ukrainian armed forces' needs in terms of equipment, protective clothing, medicines and meals are covered by the government. Sixty percent of supplies come from donations that are brought by volunteers to the soldiers, and the men have to buy the remaining thirty percent themselves."[44] A senior Ukrainian advisor to the NATO Liaison Office in Kyiv describes the dilemma when he was called up to fight in Eastern Ukraine, of whether he should spend privately two thousand US dollars for the necessary military equipment or to bribe his way out of the army: "It's impossible for the average family to equip their sons and brothers for war."[45]

Further rounds of mobilization are under way, but such efforts are completely anachronistic and inappropriate for operations in Eastern Ukraine. Reservists, who have not touched any military equipment for years, even decades, have no place there. They would be in danger and also represent a danger to others. They would have no chance of standing up to local militias or making appropriate use of technological superiority on the ground and, most importantly, in the air. They would probably even damage relations with the local population.[46]

It is no surprise that, during the entire operation, the morale of Ukrainian soldiers was very low; many of them surrendered and tried to escape. Exceptions were volunteer battalions, formally commanded by the Ministry of the Interior's National Guard, with good morale but a low level of training.

On the Ukrainian side, a total of almost 50,000 men were involved. All units and formations comprised military reservists, fighting alongside the newly created volunteer units of the National Guard, the special units of the Security Services and the Ministry of the Interior, other troops and a number of volunteer militias, created under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior.[47] Efficient command and control under such circumstances is

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[42] Aleksey Nikolskiy, Ukraina ne boyets, *Vedomosti*, 12 March 2014.

[43] Gundarov Vladimir, U Kiyeva zakanchivayutsya mobilizatsionnyye resursy, *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 4 July 2014.

[44] Andreas Schenk, Versorgung der ukrainischen Armee ist ein Fiasko, 19 September 2014, http://www.ostpol.de

[45] Aleksandr Lapko, Ukraine's enemy within, *The International New York Times*, 8 October 2014.

[46] All of this could be observed in 1990, when the Soviet leadership tried to use reservists in the suppression of riots in Baku. It is no coincidence that Russian generals also rejected the idea of mobilization even in the most pressing situations, for instance when Chechen rebels broke into Dagestan in 1999.

[47] The fact that Kyiv used the judicial police's special Griffin unit highlights the military command's serious lack of human resources. An important role in fighting was played by volunteer formations, not subordinate to the state. These make up the Azov Battalion (with only one company formalized as a Ministry of the Interior unit). The battalion is made up of activists from the Social-National Assembly, Patriot of Ukraine, Avtomaydan, Bratstvo and Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) movements, as well as fans of the Dynamo football club.

illusory, as seen in the many divergences of opinion between the commanders of the armed forces and volunteer battalions.[48]

"The more Ukrainian army battalions or brigades are brought up, the more troops there are from the Russian Federation," Ukrainian President Poroshenko said in an interview. His admission that Ukraine lost 65 percent of its military hardware on the front line during fighting in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions gives a strong indication that there is no military solution to the conflict.[49] Military action has made it worse, creating deep resentment on both sides. For many people in Eastern Ukraine, staying in Ukraine now seems an impossible prospect.[50] The conflict in Eastern Ukraine will hardly lead to positive options for the region, but long term instability. Subsequently it pushes Ukraine "successfully" away from potential membership in the EU or NATO. And away from Russia. Russia may continue its destabilization of the Ukraine for the foreseeable future, but all possibilities of a closer political co-operation have been lost. Whatever will be left of Ukraine, will turn to the West.

NATO and Russia: Seeing the future through the rear view mirror

Russia's hybrid warfare in Ukraine demonstrated the new capabilities of the Russian armed forces, following the military reform launched in 2008: enhanced deployability (tactical and strategic airlift), a relatively high level of training, and professional forces. At the same time, however, it is clear that these rapid deployment units are not sufficient to carry out large-scale military operations like the occupation of two Ukrainian regions, though proving remarkably effective in the hybrid war scenario. They would still not pose a new direct military threat to the countries of the Alliance. Where military capabilities are not sufficient, the Kremlin is ready to bridge the gap with all non-military means available, hand tailored to the vulnerabilities of the target.

At the same time, the Kremlin may be inspired by its success in Ukraine to repeat the venture in other post-Soviet states like Moldova or Kazakhstan. In addition, the fact that Russia owns the world's second-largest nuclear arsenal takes on new relevance under these circumstances. In the recent past the world relied on the rationality of Kremlin leaders, and believed that under no circumstances would they be prepared to "press the button."

Now the situation might have changed. Russia is becoming a lonely pariah, without real allies or sufficient conventional military capabilities to achieve its grown objectives. This means that the Kremlin might conceivably be ready to use its tactical nuclear resources, and it plans to fully renew its nuclear arsenal by 2020, according to Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin.[51]

Even Belarus has distanced itself from its closest ally. President Lukashenko rejects the recognition of the republic of Donetsk and Luhansk and in an interview with Euronews he is hoisting his own petard: "Many say that Crimea was once unjustly given to Ukraine, that Crimea is a genuine Russian territory. It is an incorrect approach. Let's take a look back at the time of Khan Batyi, the time of the Mongol-Tatar Yoke. We would have to give virtually entire Russia, Western Europe, and Eastern Europe to Kazakhstan, Mongolia or someone else. Except for Belarus because they reached us somehow but left intact. There is no sense in going back to the past."[52]

The position of President Lukashenko confirms the quiet but growing unease that Russia's hybrid war cannot be deterred outside NATO territory. To this end, Russia's aggressiveness has strengthened solidarity within NATO as a military alliance: perception of its collective defence commitment has increased, underlining that today only the borders in Europe guaranteed by NATO are safe.[53]

NATO was not the trigger of the crisis in Ukraine, but the

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[48] For example, Semen Semenchenko, commander of the "Donbass" volunteer battalion, complained that the Ukrainian military ignored his requests for support when his unit was encircled near Ilovaisk. See: http://south-west.net.ua/novost/konflikt-mezhdu-batalonami-dobrovolcev-i-armiei-shta/

[49] Poroshenko Says No Military Solution To Conflict, 22 September 2014, http://www.rferl.org/content/ukraine-poroshenko-truce-/26599248.html

[50] See Birgit Virnich, Ukraine: "Neues Russland" - Traum und Schrecken, *ARD Weltspiegel*, 28 September 2014, http://www.daserste.de/information/politik-weltge-schehen/weltspiegel/sendung/ndr/2014/ukraine-140.html

[51] Russia to fully renew nuclear forces by 2020, 22 September 2014, http://rt.com/politics/189604-russia-nuclear-2020-mistral/

[52] PLukashenko: Belarus is against the destruction of the Ukrainian state, 3 October 2014, http://eng.belta.by/all_news/president/Lukashenko-Belarus-is-against-the-destruction-of-the-Ukrainian-state_i_76220.html

[53] Ulrich Speck, Russia's New Challenge to Europe, 17 April 2014, http://carnegieeurope.eu/2014/04/17/russia-s-new-challenge-to-europe/h8dy

crisis quickly became a defining moment for the Alliance. It was clear from the very beginning of the Ukraine crisis in early 2014 that for NATO there is no military option vis-à-vis Ukraine/Crimea. First of all, Ukraine is not a member of the Alliance. Secondly, nobody wanted to wage an apparently anachronistic war against Russia. The challenge for the Alliance was to react adequately and at the same time to avoid returning to Cold War thinking, or to the action/reaction logic associated with that period. Thirdly, and most importantly, this war was undeclared. Russia's actions were deliberately placed beneath the radar. It was not a party in the war; its invasion of Eastern Ukraine was run by several thousand fully equipped servicemen officially spending their vacation in battles between Luhansk and Donetsk. The Russian hybrid model thus outflanked NATO's reaction patterns. The Alliance and its 28 nations have therefore remained bystanders during the war in Ukraine, though the conflict could clearly extend far beyond Ukraine and goes politically beyond Ukraine. The result, however, has proved paradoxical: Germany, for instance, delivered military equipment to the Iraqi Kurds in the Middle East but not to desperate Ukraine. Former Polish Foreign Minister Sikorski hit the nail on the head when he reportedly stated at NATO's Wales Summit that the Alliance had "given Ukraine every support short of help."[54]

Taking into account the diversity of Alliance members and the dramatic developments in Ukraine and the Middle East, the Alliance members demonstrated remarkable solidarity at the Wales Summit, agreeing on a number of important deliverables. Among these was the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), which is intended to ensure that NATO has the right forces and the right equipment, in the right place and at the right time.[55] In addition, the implementation of more than 40 military exercises in Eastern Europe in 2014 demonstrates that NATO nations are sending a clear signal not only to Allies and Partners in the region, but also to Russia.

NATO reacted in a cautious way to the Russian aggression. It did not follow an agenda of confrontation or "tabula rasa," but tried to keep dialogue channels open in order to ensure that balance could be restored in security. In other words: this approach is an attempt to give time to politics and diplomacy so that Russia can realize that its current politics will not be successful in the long run.

Russia's hybrid warfare cannot be answered by a military alliance alone. NATO can take care to have the right forces available, to overcome its political disagreements, and enhance the comprehensive approach with other international organizations such as the EU and the OSCE also in addressing hybrid threats;[56] main components of the Russian model are non-military and need to be addressed with economic and information campaigns which NATO does not and should not control. The nations, however, carry major responsibility to prepare and prevent becoming a target of Russia's hybrid methods mainly through good governance and, not to forget, appropriate minority rights.

NATO's SACEUR made clear that NATO Allies are aware of the questions raised by hybrid warfare and are ready to act, as was reported also in the Russian media. "Clearly we had great acceptance among the NATO allies that if you attribute this little green men issue to an aggressor nation, it was an Article 5 action, and it would mean all assets would come to bear," Breedlove said, referring to the Allies' collective defence doctrine."[57] The Alliance has to prepare for this kind of undeclared war in Europe, including to clarify what could require it to invoke Article 5. It does not have to reinvent the wheel – discussions on emerging security challenges, including cyber defence and energy security, have been on the agenda for years. Optimization of information and intelligence sharing is also necessary, as well as streamlining of the decision-making process.

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[54] The NATO member states US, UK, Canada, France, the Netherlands, Poland and Slovakia supplied Ukraine with "military and technical equipment", see Institute of World Policy, Kyiv, "Ukraine is not Alone. How the World Supports Ukrainians in Countering Russia's Aggression", *Policy Brief*, 15 September 2014, http://iwp.org.ua/eng/public/1242.html

[55] NATO's Readiness Action Plan (RAP) builds on the reassurance measures currently in place (inter alia, more than 40 military exercises to ensure a visible NATO presence in Eastern Europe) and adaptation measures such as an upgrade of the NATO Response Force (NRF), spearheaded by the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF; Land, Air, Sea, Special Forces); enhanced intelligence gathering and sharing; updated defence plans; enhanced exercise and training programmes; and infrastructure upgrades to support deployment requirements.

[56] At NATO's Wales summit, for the first time NATO Foreign Ministers met with the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to discuss closer cooperation. See Summit Declaration, para. 100 ff, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm

[57] Ria Novosti, 16 September 2014, http://en.ria.ru/military_news/20140916/192977784/Breedlove-Hybrid-Warfare-in-NATO-Nations-Opens-Door-to-Invoke.html

In this regard, while visiting Poland on his first trip, NATO's new Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg sent a strong message: "We need to keep NATO strong, we need to help keep our neighborhood stable in cooperation with our partners and we need a rock-solid bond between the United States and Europe. That creates the best foundation for a more constructive, more cooperative relationship with Russia."[58]

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[58] Wictor Szary, NATO chief says 'spearhead' plan doesn't breach treaty with Russia, 6 October 2014, http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/06/us-ukraine-crisis-nato-poland-idUSKCN0HV0K220141006