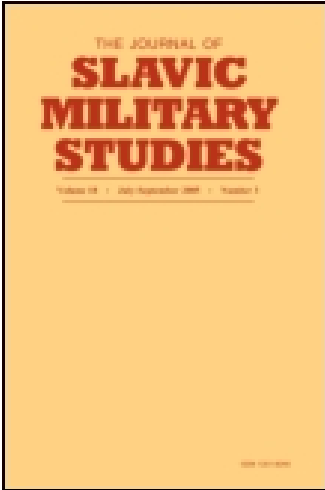


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# Russian Full-Spectrum Conflict: An Appraisal After Ukraine

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*This article argues that the current ways of conceptualizing and understanding Russian warfare are flawed. To improve this, this article reviews the current ways of approaching Russian warfare from post-independence to after Ukraine. Then, we investigate Russian warfare from the four spectrums of military, informational, economic, and energy, and from political influence operations. From this, we propose the concept of Full-Spectrum Conflict that captures the use of violent and non-violent means as well as the conduct of conflict in differing degrees of intensity from peace to war and the space in between. This remedies the problem of conceptualizing, and hopefully understanding, the conduct of Russian conflict.*

## INTRODUCTION

Following the illegal annexation of Crimea and the Russian-backed insurgency in Eastern Ukraine, Russia was raised from a Tier-3 threat to a Tier-1 threat on the UK's defense threat list.<sup>1</sup> This announcement came after

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<sup>1</sup> B. Jones, 'Russia to Top UK Threat Assessment Levels', *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, 7 August 2014, <http://www.janes.com/article/41618/russia-to-top-uk-threat-assessment-levels>.

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the publication of the House of Commons report on the implications for British and European security of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea by Russia. As concise and well written as it was, the report struggled to conceptualize some aspects of Russian warfare. It, and other scholarly works, have used a variety of descriptions of this ‘new’ warfare: ‘ambiguous’, ‘next-generation’, ‘asymmetrical’, ‘unconventional’, and ‘non-linear’ are just some of the terms. There is little reason in providing new concepts for the sake of it, but it is our conviction that there are currently flaws both in the way Russia’s warfare is understood and conceptualized. There are some new features to this warfare, but equally significantly, there are also many factors that have been part of Russia’s toolbox for generations. Furthermore, crucial means of the conflict are not warfare in the violent blast and fragmentation sense of the word.

Thus, we propose the definition ‘Full-Spectrum Conflict’ that captures the fact that several military and non-military means are under one central command and directed to the same political goal. This is noteworthy because a number of means, for instance food sanctions and the broadcasting of biased news, would be excluded while insisting on a strict definition of warfare. The tying together of all these means are essential because it is something that Western states often pay lip service to but have not managed to implement to the same degree as Russia. However, it does not make Russian warfare revolutionary, just initially successful. To support our argument, this article will review the current concepts used for understanding Russian warfare and then proceed with analyzing the Russian conduct in four different spheres and how they tie together with each other and the political goal. Lastly, it will conclude with a discussion.

Since this article focuses on updating the Russian conduct after the war in Ukraine that is ongoing, it had to rely to a certain degree on non-academic sources, such as news articles and reports from think tanks. This might be problematic, especially in a war, but the sources are treated with care and their information triangulated as far as possible. This study is also delimited in time to focus on the events up to August 2014. Since this was an ongoing event and there is not a vast amount of sources to engage with, this article should be seen as a preliminary analysis that could later be subject to change.

## CONCEPTUALIZING RUSSIAN WARFARE

Seeing warfare in terms of generations is part of the practice of divining fundamental changes in new generations. In the Russian military-theoretical debate, the prevalent framework of generations was coined by General Vladimir Slipchenko.<sup>2</sup> Ignoring the first three generations of historic warfare

<sup>2</sup> V. Slipchenko, *Voiny Sbestogo Pokoleniya: Oruzhiye I Voennoye Iskusstvo Budushchego*, Rakurs, Moscow, 2002; V. Slipchenko, *Voiny Novogo Pokolenia—Distantionnye I Bezkontaktnye*. Olma-Press,

for this article, Slipchenko argued that fourth-generation warfare brought automatic weapons, tanks, and air battles. Fifth generation, he said, consisted of nuclear weaponry, while sixth generation included precision weapons, as well as informational and electronic warfare in a no-contact manner, analogous to the Revolution in Military Affairs in the United States in the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> The Iraq war in 1991 was seen as a prototype, not a type, of this kind of war.

While the goals of earlier kinds of warfare were: to rout the opponent's armed forces, to destroy an opponent's economic potential, and to overthrow or replace his political system, the sixth generation was designed, Slipchenko held, to destroy an enemy's economic potential.<sup>4</sup> The most recent call for a 'new' generation of warfare—the sixth—came from Chekinov and Bodganov, two Russian military theorists at the Centre for Military-Strategic Studies within the General Staff. In December 2013 they published an article entitled 'The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War'. They wrote:

The aggressive side will be first to use nonmilitary actions and measures as it plans to attack its victim in a new-generation war. With powerful information technologies at its disposal, the aggressor will make an effort to involve all public institutions in the country it intends to attack, primarily the mass media and religious organizations, cultural institutions, non-governmental organizations, public movements financed from abroad, and scholars engaged in research on foreign grants. All these institutions and individuals may be involved in a distributed attack and strike damaging point blows at the country's social system with the purported aims of promoting democracy and respect for human rights. In their propaganda efforts, these organizations can obtain information to engage in propaganda from servers of the Facebook and Twitter public networks watched over by the American special services.<sup>5</sup>

Rather than being a description of the American conduct of war, it could arguably be a description of Russia's own way of visualizing warfare, presented as what others are doing to legitimize their own view. So, if the current operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine are so fundamentally different from earlier ways of conducting warfare, are they a break from the past? Are the ends, ways, and means markedly different? The answer is mostly 'no', but with a twist.

Many elements of this 'new' warfare: subversion, physical and informational provocation, economic threats, posturing with regular forces, the

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Moscow, 2004; Vladimir Slipchenko, 'For What Kind of War Must Russia Be Prepared?' In Makhmut Gareev and Vladimir Slipchenko, eds., *Future War*, Moscow: Ob"edinennoye Gumarnitarnoye Izdatelstvo, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> V. Slipchenko, 2004, pp. 32–34.

<sup>4</sup> V. Slipchenko, 2005, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> S. G. Chekinov and S. A. Bodganov, 'The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War,' *Military Thought* 22(4) (2013) p. 17.

use of special forces, and the military intelligence coordinating paramilitary groups and political front organizations, have been part of the Russian/Soviet lexicon of conflict for generations. The Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) concluded in its study of the Crimean operation that calling it new reflected a failure of imagination, rather than novel Russian military capabilities.<sup>6</sup> Thus, presenting the operations in Ukraine as new-generation warfare obfuscates as much as aids understanding of Russian warfare. Much of this ‘new’ warfare is old wine in new bottles.

One of the most distinctive features of the initial operation in Crimea was the coordination between all military and non-military means, ranging from the political-strategic to the tactical. The skillful implementation of instruments from the spectrums of Diplomatic, Economic, Military, and Information (DIME) is indeed what Norberg, Westerlund, and Franke at the FOI argued to be the only element that qualifies as new.<sup>7</sup> Equally important, however, is that the arena for the information war is changing. In this way, the Russian conduct reflects how our societies are changing. For example, at the time of the Georgian war in 2008, Twitter had 2.8 million unique users and 300,000 tweets daily. Today it has 645 million unique users with 600 million tweets a day.<sup>8</sup> The expansion of social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, enables not only instantaneous news consumption and distribution, but also crowdsourcing, enabling mass manipulation across the information spectrum, from state-directed media to paid trolls attacking anti-Russian positions.

Asymmetric warfare is also used by the parliamentary report, and one definition of it is ‘actions that an adversary can exercise that you either cannot or will not’.<sup>9</sup> This definition captures some useful points. Russian warfare has been designed to fly under the radar of international law by supporting proxies with plausible deniability. Russia has also struck against the foundations of the West’s proclaimed values of democracy and freedom of speech by financing political actors and broadcasting pro-Kremlin and anti-Western messages. The Russian narrative internationally is designed to demoralize or destabilize. Yet to take Russian media channels off air or declare them illegal—as Lithuania did with the TV stations NTV and RTR—gives Russia the opportunity to present such actions as violations of the democratic principles that the West claim to uphold. In this way, the regime uses ‘Western values’ to subvert the Western narrative.

<sup>6</sup> J. Norberg, F. Westerlund, and U. Franke, ‘The Crimea Operation: Implications for Future Russian Military Interventions’, in N. Granholm, J. Malminen, and G. Persson (eds.), *A Rude Awakening: Ramifications of Russian Aggression towards Ukraine*, Swedish Defence Research Agency, Stockholm, 2014, pp. 41, 48.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 43–44.

<sup>8</sup> K. Weil, *Measuring Tweets*, 2010, <https://blog.twitter.com/2010/measuring-tweets>

<sup>9</sup> R. W. Barnett, *Asymmetrical Warfare: Today’s Challenge to U.S. Military Power*, Brassey, Washington, DC, 2003, p. 15.

Nonetheless, the term *asymmetrical* is not very illustrating. Stephen Lambakis, perhaps flippantly, stated that the term is normally used to describe ‘an enemy that thinks or acts differently from America’.<sup>10</sup> He argues that ‘weak and clever enemies can bring stronger power to its knees by exploiting vulnerabilities or can brazenly challenge muscle-bound modern militaries with a surprise use of frightening weapons or unfamiliar manoeuvring [that] simply restates the obvious: strategy matters’.<sup>11</sup> At the heart of most strategic thought lies the importance of surprise and the benefit to strike where the opponent is weak and oneself is strong. Defining the Russian conduct in the conflict in Ukraine as asymmetrical is unsatisfactory because it excludes the role of conventional military forces (given that they are what would be symmetrical warfare). The same argument goes for conventional and non-conventional.

What is meant by the term non-linear is less certain. Its first mention comes from the presidential adviser Vladislav Surkov, who wrote under his *nom de plume*, Nathan Dubovitsky, a fiction short story on a Russian portal for literature.<sup>12</sup> The short story was not particularly useful in an academic sense and contained a few fragmented quotes of a dystopian world of all’s struggle against all. The author and TV producer Peter Pomerantsev expanded on the concept in an article in *Foreign Policy*. He argued that non-linear war included the Kremlin’s indirect intervention through local proxies, manipulation of Western media and policy, and a battle of ideas between ‘the global village’ and ‘non-linear fighters’.<sup>13</sup> Lastly, Galeotti defined the term to mean ‘new tactics . . . which focus on the enemy’s weaknesses and avoid direct and overt confrontations’. It was the latter term that was quoted in the Defence Committee’s report.<sup>14</sup>

By calling Russian warfare non-linear, there is an assumption of linearity in other forms of warfare, just as *asymmetrical* entails an assumption that other warfare is symmetrical, which again goes against the core of strategy: ‘to target an enemy’s weakness, avoid his strengths, surprise him . . . this has been the stuff of victory throughout history’.<sup>15</sup> In its favor, non-linear does capture one element of the Full-Spectrum Conflict. One could perhaps see non-linear warfare as regional or global information insurgency as practiced by a great power to wear down rivals, perhaps a ‘soft Orwellianism’ with a constant conflict with internal repression and an external confrontation that

<sup>10</sup> S. J. Lambakis, ‘Reconsidering Asymmetric Warfare’, *Joint Forces Quarterly* 36 (2004) pp. 102–108.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>12</sup> N. Dubovitsky, ‘Bez Neba’, *Russkiy Pioneer*, 12 March 2014, <http://www.ruspioneer.ru/honest/m/single/4131>

<sup>13</sup> Pomerantsev, 2014, ‘How Putin is Reinventing Warfare’. *Foreign Policy*, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/05/05/how\\_putin\\_is\\_reinventing\\_warfare](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/05/05/how_putin_is_reinventing_warfare) (accessed 24 January 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Galeotti, 2014, ‘The “Gerasimov Doctrine” and Russian Non-Linear War’. *In Moscow’s Shadows*, <https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/> (accessed 24 January 2015).

<sup>15</sup> S. J. Lambakis, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

is being redirected. The conflict is conducted in a 'low-cost, high-benefit' way that suddenly can provide opportunities.

Galeotti referred to a 2013 speech of the Russian Chief of General Staff, Valery Gerasimov, in which Gerasimov argued that the 21st century had seen 'a tendency towards the blurring lines of war and peace'.<sup>16</sup> He suggested that because of the increasing effectiveness of non-military means to achieve political and strategic objectives, the Arab Spring could be a typical war of the 21st century. For Gerasimov, the defining means and methods were the use of special forces, internal subversion, political provocateurs, and information tools.<sup>17</sup> Again, this is not new, rather an application of all existing means in changing societies with the political influence at its heart. This insight was similar to Chekinov and Bogdanov's article, and it mirrored the *modus operandi* of the Crimean annexation and the concomitant support for the insurgency in Eastern Ukraine. However, it too fails to provide a clear and crisp conceptualization of the essence of Russian warfare.

## RUSSIAN FULL-SPECTRUM CONFLICT

We propose the concept Full-Spectrum Conflict (FSC). The benefit from FSC is that it captures both the multitude of means involved: from 'conventional' military units to clandestine special forces and intelligence operatives, to economic threats, political influence, online and offline information battles, as well as 'traditional' subversion. We choose the word *conflict* rather than *war* or *warfare*, since many of these means are non-violent in character, and the standard Western way of understanding war is violence in the blast and fragmentation sense of the word. This concept importantly captures that these means do take a part in a fundamental clash of wills.

The term *conflict* can also grapple with differing degrees of ambiguity and intensity. This is opposed to the Western more binary, legalistic, or doctrinal way of viewing the absence of armed clashes as peace. Rather, the gray areas between war and peace is where Full-Spectrum Conflict is conducted most effectively. The counterargument against FSC would be that it is too broad. That is a reasonable objection, but the aim is to add emphasis to actions that are not to be perceived to be part of a doctrinal warfare, yet play an integral part in the conflict.

The conduct of Full-Spectrum Conflict is premised upon a centralized command and control that enables a high degree of coordination. Again, this gives Russia a comparative advantage to the EU and NATO's cumbersome decision making. Clausewitz's famous maxim that war is an act of force for a

<sup>16</sup> V. Gerasimov, 'Nauki V Predvidyeni', *Voyenno-Promyslennyy Kuryer* 8(476) (2013), [http://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK\\_08\\_476.pdf](http://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*



political end infuses the theory and conduct of Russian FSC. All levels of the Crimean operation were coordinated to the same political aim: The strategic blackmail of Ukraine over gas, the seizure of TV stations to limited Ukrainian narrative over area of operations, political front organizations operating in Sevastopol and the Crimea, and, at the lowest level, the pictures beamed across the globe of Russian soldiers, ‘strategic corporals’ if you like, helping Crimean *babushkas* with their shopping is contrary to the Western response where no clear political goal has underpinned the Western actions.

This is not to say that all Russian conduct shows excellent coordination; one reason that the Crimean operation went well is that it seemed to have almost exclusively been run by the GRU. On the contrary, coordination problems in Russian conduct are common and, recently, more evident in Eastern Ukraine. However, the important point is that Russia, unlike other actors, can subordinate everything from media broadcasts and oil extortion to intelligence operations and conventional means to the same political goal.

The supremacy of the political is further shown in the Russian understanding of Reflexive Control. In any form of warfare, one aim is to interfere with the adversary’s decision-making process. *Reflexive control* refers to a particular Russian school of thought whereby an enemy is pressured through the supply of information/disinformation designed to provoke a specific reaction.<sup>18</sup> Thomas, who has written at some length about Russian Reflexive Control, argues: ‘reflexive control is defined as a means of conveying to a partner or an opponent specially prepared information to incline him to voluntarily make the predetermined decision desired by the initiator of the action’.<sup>19</sup> At the heart of Reflexive Control is a reading of the enemy’s thought and decision-making processes, to find vulnerabilities in those process, or the outlook or assumptions behind them.

The most significant example was probably the 2008 Georgian War, where President Mikhail Saakashvili was provoked into ordering the initial fire. As a result, the international fact-finding commission concluded that the initial Russian response was justified, although not the later invasion.<sup>20</sup> However, the report further noted that account should have been taken of the ‘impact of a great power’s coercive politics and diplomacy against a small and insubordinate neighbour’.<sup>21</sup> This underlying pattern could be seen in the Crimean crisis, where de-escalations often occurred before EU summits, and re-escalations followed after the summit’s close.

We have divided Russian FSC activity into four constituent parts. These are: kinetic violence, information, economic and energy, and political

<sup>18</sup> T. Thomas, ‘Russia’s Information Warfare Strategy: Can the Nation Cope in Future Conflicts?’, *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 27(1) (2004) pp. 101–130.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>20</sup> Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (IIFMCG), Report, Vol 1, 2009, p. 23. Available via [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/30\\_09\\_09\\_iiffmgc\\_report.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/30_09_09_iiffmgc_report.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

influence operations. We are sure that many will find reasons to question some of these divisions or to add their own. We have chosen these divisions because we have found in our analysis that all activity can fit into these broad topics. One reason, for instance, is that the most common DIME division misses political influence operations through political parties or candidates. This perhaps makes our division PIME. At the same time, we believe that simplicity is a virtue. Both authors are aware from their own experience that a military system will, if at all possible, complicate understanding structures, if it can.

While Western writers queue up to declare Russia's FSC as revolutionary, perhaps ironically, the Russians believe that they for a long time have been the victims of this 'new' style of Western-sponsored warfare, citing the color revolutions and the Arab Spring as examples of the Western prowess at non-kinetic effect. As General Makhmut Gareev, probably the most influential military theorist post-Soviet Union and author of the latest Russian military doctrine, contends:

The breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the parade of "colour revolutions" in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, and so on show how principal threats exist objectively, assuming not so much military forms as direct or indirect forms of political, diplomatic, economic, and informational pressure, subversive activities, and interference in internal affairs.<sup>22</sup>

A reason for the prominence of this view in Russia is the intrinsic link between Russian foreign policy and regime security. The current regime is dependent on restrictions of democratic procedure and free speech.<sup>23</sup> The Western claim to legitimacy, with democracy promotion and human rights at the core, are thus at odds with the Russian political system and perceived as little less than subversive *realpolitik* couched in moral terms.<sup>24</sup> This is Russia's interpretation of the color revolutions: Western psychological manipulation of individuals, societal institutions, and states.<sup>25</sup> This is why Gerasimov's statement that non-military means are four times as important than military means is relevant. This is also why he believes that the boundary between war and peace is disappearing. The perception in Russia is that the West has become so effective at this 'new' warfare that non-military means and new

<sup>22</sup> G. Mironovich, 'Kakoy Byt' Voennoy Doktriny?', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 21 February 2007, [http://old.redstar.ru/2007/02/21\\_02/3\\_01.html](http://old.redstar.ru/2007/02/21_02/3_01.html)

<sup>23</sup> S. Blank, "'No Need to Threaten Us, We Are Frightened of Ourselves': Russia's Blueprint for a Police State, the New Security Strategy", in S. Blank and R. Weitz (eds.), *Russian Army Today and Tomorrow: Essays in Memory of Mary Fitzgerald*, Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle, PA, 2010, p. 90.

<sup>24</sup> C. R. Nation and D. Trenin, 'Russia's Threat Perception and Strategic Posture', in D. J. McKinley (ed.), *Russian Security: Strategy and Issues*, Nova Science Publishers, New York, 2010, p. 98.

<sup>25</sup> S. G. Chekinov and S. A. Bogdanov, 'Strategy of Indirect Approach: Its Impact on Modern Warfare', *Military Thought* 20(3) (2011) p. 2.

technologies are the weapon of choice rather than traditional means. The oft-repeated phrase in Russian military theory, echoed by President Putin himself, is these methods will be as effective as nuclear weapons, but more morally acceptable.<sup>26</sup>

This sense of threat is strengthened by a political system dependent on foreign dangers. Russian threat perception, one study concluded, was based on the presupposition of enemies,<sup>27</sup> an idea initially developed by philosopher Carl Schmitt. The study argued that the Russian way of viewing threats 'links together in a seamless whole (as did Leninism) and represents the perception that Western democracy as such is a threat to Russia'.<sup>28</sup> This perception, founded on a presumption of difference, justifies a constant mobilization of the Russian society against external and internal threats. This constant mobilization has induced a rallying effect for the Russian leadership: In the wake of the annexation of Crimea it reached 87 percent approval ratings. Non-participation in the rally can become dangerous due to increased clampdown on opposition, as exemplified by the branding of organizations that receive funding from abroad as 'foreign agents' and the expansion of the definition of treason.<sup>29</sup> Such behavior, in Shevtsova's view, is symptomatic of the regime's need for enemies for its own survival. She argues that without them, the post-Soviet political model cannot survive.<sup>30</sup>

## KINETIC VIOLENCE

The Russian conduct of Full-Spectrum Conflict is still partly one of physical violence. It is a small but critical element of the overall scheme of maneuver, just as Sun Tzu visualized. Indeed, the destructive nature of the escalated second phase in eastern Ukraine where the more subtle exercises of power failed to achieve their task reminded us of this, although it should be stated that the purpose of this subversive style of conflict is to avoid large-scale conventional use of force. In Crimea, the most likely scenario, and one argued by the FOI, would appear to be that Russian special forces in Crimea assaulted key objects, while military intelligence, GRU, officers were responsible for organizing self-defense units.<sup>31</sup> The presence of self-defense units confirmed the populist nature of the uprising, as well as speaking to the

<sup>26</sup> V. V. Putin 2012, 'Being Strong: National Security Guarantees for Russia', *Russia Today*, 19 February 2012, <http://rt.com/politics/official-word/strong-putin-military-russia-711/>.

<sup>27</sup> S. Blank, 'Threats to and from Russia: An Assessment', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 21(3) (2008) p. 516.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Reuters, 2012, 'Russia's Putin Signs Law Extending Definition of Treason', <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/14/us-russia-treason-idUSBRE8AD0MN20121114> (accessed 24 January 2015).

<sup>30</sup> L. Shevtsova, 'evtsova, Factorova *Journal of Democracy* 25(3) (2014) p. 74.

<sup>31</sup> J. Norberg, F. Westerlund, and U. Franke, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

propaganda of the deed; a violent political action that serves as an example to others. In terms of command and control (C2), the FOI authors suggest that the most likely scenario was that the GRU had operational control of the non-conventional phase: controlling paramilitaries and liaising with special forces and the local political leadership. Seemingly, Spetsnaz soldiers had tactical command of specific tasks, such as seizure and clearance of buildings.

Conventional forces also have their place, either as active participants, as part of a *maskirovka*, or what UK Armed Forces call presence, posture, and profile. In early spring, four days after discredited Ukrainian leader Viktor Yanukovich fled, the Russian Armed Forces began a major readiness exercise in the Western and Central Military Districts numbering up to 150,000 troops, sparking fears that the exercise was a precursor to invasion. In total, units from three of Russia's four military districts have been active in Ukraine-related activities, either in exercises or through the massing of troops on the border.<sup>32</sup> Once key operations were mounted to seize governmental administration and media centers, Russian troops without insignia began to take over the streets. Their presence was supported by Internet sites posting pictures of Russian soldiers helping local civilians. These actions were accompanied by strenuous denials from the Russian Foreign Ministry of Russian intervention (*maskirovka*) before President Putin admitted the presence of Russian soldiers in the Crimean operation in his annual TV Q&A session on the 17th of April.

Conventional troops were also a precondition for logistics. The maintenance of troops on the border ensured that the Ukrainian army was unable to cut off arms and supplies from Russia. Due in part to Ukrainian success, Russian conventional support increased over the summer. The UK estimated that by late August it consisted of more than 100 main battle tanks, 100 artillery pieces, 80 armored personnel carriers, and 500 anti-tank weapons.<sup>33</sup> Despite attempts to hide events from the media, Russian soldiers have posted geotagged comments and pictures on the social network sites VKontakte and Instagram. For instance, one artillery soldier, Vadim Grigoriev, posted several images of artillery pieces under the caption; 'we pounded Ukraine all night'.<sup>34</sup> Another, Alexander Sotkin, uploaded pictures near the border of Ukraine on 23 June. Several days later he posted a photo to Instagram, geolocated from the Ukrainian village of Krasna Talychka.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> J. Norberg and F. Westerlund, 'Russia and Ukraine: Military-Strategic Options, and Possible Risks, for Moscow', RUFBS Briefing No. 22, 2014, <http://www.foi.se/Global/Värkunskap/Säkerhetspolitiskastudier/Ryssland/Briefings/RUFBSBriefingNo.22.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> N. Watt, 'Russia Has up to 100 Battle Tanks Fighting in Ukraine, UK Believes', *The Guardian*, 29 August 2014.

<sup>34</sup> M. Seddon, 'Does This Soldier's Instagram Account Prove Russia Is Covertly Operating In Ukraine?' *AcBuzzFeed*, 31 July 2014, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/maxseddon/does-this-soldiers-instagram-account-prove-russia-is-covertl#31fidzl>.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

Later, 10 Russian paratroopers were paraded in late August in Kiev after being captured near the village of Dzerkalne, 30 miles southeast of Donetsk and 14 miles from the Russian border. Ukrainian TV reported that the men were members of the 331st regiment of the 98th Svirsk airborne division.<sup>36</sup> On the 27th of August, the Stavropol committee of the Soldier's Mothers compiled a list of 400 Russian soldiers killed or wounded, while journalists visiting the graves of recently deceased soldiers killed in eastern Ukraine and buried near Pskov have been threatened or accosted. On 18 August, President Putin signed a decree awarding the Order of Suvorov, a high military honor, to the 76th division based at Pskov, citing 'the successful completion of military missions' and 'courage and heroism' displayed by the servicemen during those missions. All these events indicate the involvement of conventional Russian troops in Ukraine.

The model of increased violence witnessed in eastern Ukraine in 2014 bears a resemblance to that used by the Russian Federation in the early 1990s in the breakaway Georgian region of Abkhazia. In her book, *Conflict in the Caucasus*, Svetlana Chernovonnaya detailed the support to the Abkhaz rebels by staff of the former KGB, many of whom were posted to Abkhazia under cover of neutral establishments.<sup>37</sup> After hostilities began, an initially successful fight-back by the Georgian forces led to a ceasefire. The Abkhaz rebels were rearmed, broke the ceasefire, and advanced. A second ceasefire was also made, and broken, prior to a successful advance on Sukhumi, the capital of Abkhazia. Throughout the campaign increased numbers of Russian advisors were attached to the Abkhaz. *Izvestia* reported that the Russian contribution to the Abkhaz arsenal, apart from its military advisors, were: 20 T-72s, a Russian landing force battalion, 20 armored personnel carriers, Grad rockets, Uragan rockets, 12 artillery pieces with Russian officers, as well as Russian aircraft bombing positions in Sukhumi.<sup>38</sup>

The resemblance to the escalation in Ukraine is striking, especially the use of ceasefires and the readiness to escalate with 'conventional' military forces. When more subtle forms of violence—subversion and diplomacy—is insufficient for Russia to reach its political goal, the amount of violence is modulated. In this light, applying kinetic violence is the means of last resort in the conduct of Full-Spectrum Conflict, the constant threat underpinning all the other means.

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<sup>36</sup> BBC, 2014, 'Captured Russian Troops "in Ukraine by Accident"', *BBC News Europe*, 26 August 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-28934213>.

<sup>37</sup> S. Chernovonnaya, *Conflict in the Caucasus: Georgia, Abkhazia and the Russian Shadow*, Gothic Image Publications, Glastonbury, 1994, p. 89.

<sup>38</sup> *Izvestia*, 'Abkhaz Troops Storm Sukhumi: E Shevardnadze Accuses Russia of Aggression', SPD Vol. XLV(11) (1993).

## INFORMATION WARFARE

Information warfare ties in with the Russian appreciation of the strategy of the indirect approach and Sun Tzu's contention that the best victory in war is when the enemy is intact and violence is not needed. This makes information warfare a main tool and a constant feature in all stages of conflict to break the adversary's will to resist.<sup>39</sup> The understanding of Russian information warfare is divided into two aspects, information-technical and information-psychological. The information-psychological arena concerns the battle of wills. An example of Russia's wider understanding of information warfare can be the Russian proto-doctrine for the armed forces in the information space. It contends that information war is a confrontation for the damaging of information systems, processes, and resources to undermine the political, economical, and social system, as well as brainwashing the population for destabilizing the society and the state.<sup>40</sup> In this way, the Russian view of information war is notably broader than any Western conception.

Control of domestic media and international media is at the core of this agenda. Following Vladimir Putin's rise to power, he started a process of consolidating control of the Russian media. It would be an exaggeration to claim that the media were perfectly free under Yeltsin, but Putin turned much of it into 'a mouth-piece for the Kremlin'.<sup>41</sup> Although, as Gehlbach argues, control is less direct than during the Soviet era, the regime gains plausible deniability by having Gazprom or Kremlin-friendly businessmen invest in and control the media outlets. Examples of this include the takeover of the oligarch Boris Berezovsky's network ORT (later Channel 1) and Vladimir Gusinskiy's critical network NTV in 2001.<sup>42</sup> The crackdown resulted in Freedom House downgrading Russia to their lowest ranking, 'Not Free', in their 2009 annual Freedom of the Media report.<sup>43</sup>

The consolidating of the media increased during the war in Ukraine with restrictions to Russia's few remaining critical outlets. Ekho Moskvy's radio director Fedutinov was replaced in February by the editor of the state-owned Voice of Russia.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Galina Timchenko, chief editor of news site Lenta.ru, was fired for 'publishing extremist material', replaced by a

<sup>39</sup> S. G. Chekinov and S. A. Bogdanov, 2011, *op. cit.*, pp. 2–3.

<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, 'Kontseptual'nyye Vzgl'yady Na Deyatel'nost' Vooruzhennykh Sil Rossiyskoy Federatsii v Informatsionnom Prostranstve', 2011, <http://pircenter.org/media/content/files/9/13480921870.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> Scott Gehlbach, 'Reflections on Putin and the Media.' *Post-Soviet Affairs* 26(1) (2010) pp. 77–87.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Freedom House, 'Freedom of the Press 2009', 2009, [http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2009#.VAh\\_w1aXnnY](http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/freedom-press-2009#.VAh_w1aXnnY).

<sup>44</sup> BBC News, 'Russian Ekho Moskvy Radio Director Fedutinov Fired', *BBC News Europe*, 18 February 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-26239715>.



staunch pro-Kremlinist Alexei Gorelavsky.<sup>45</sup> Finally, TV operators refused to carry critical TV station Dozhd.<sup>46</sup>

At the forefront of Russia's domestic information warfare effort is Dmitri Kiselyov. He was recently appointed head of the new government-owned international news agency *Rossiya Segodnya*, a merger of *Ria Novosti* and the Voice of Russia. His repertoire includes the promotion of Kremlin policies and attacks on targets such as opponents of the Kremlin, the West, or homosexuals.<sup>47</sup> During the Crimean occupation Kiselyov announced that Russia was the only country that could turn the US into radioactive ash.<sup>48</sup> In December 2013 he accused Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt of being a CIA agent in his youth, driven by desire for revenge against Russia after Sweden's loss in the battle of Poltava 1709. This was unsurprising, Kiselyov claimed, because Bildt came from a country where sex from the age of nine is the norm.<sup>49</sup> These claims may, *prima facie*, seem ridiculous; however, they are not for international audiences. In Russia—a country susceptible to conspiracy theories and with high confidence in state media, this rhetoric is effective, adding to negative perceptions of the US and the EU.

Besides the reshaping of the domestic TV channels, the Kremlin established Russia Today in 2005 to carry its message to a global audience. It now broadcasts in Arabic and Spanish as well as English and is increasing its budgets significantly. In 2011 RT, as it became known, became the second-most-watched foreign network in the US after the BBC. The narrative formulated in RT sits in opposition to Western core values, and Russian TV has given considerable air time to conspiracy theories as well as traditional Soviet propaganda themes such as racial divisions in the United States.

Both internal and external state-controlled media are being used to highlight the failings of former Soviet republics, especially those with pro-Western political leaders. In Ukraine, the master narrative is that any Ukrainian political identity that seeks independence from Russia is framed as pro-fascist and anti-Russian, which is a claim to legitimacy with strong historical connotations. Before the 'referendum' was held in Crimea, the elections banners for choosing to secede from Ukraine were commonly shown as having a swastika with a mark over them. The narrative of Ukrainians as Fascist/Nazi has been stated by President Putin himself, who in his address on 18 March,

<sup>45</sup> BBC News, 'Lenta.ru Editor Timchenko Fired in Ukraine Row', *BBC News Europe*, 12 March 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-26543464>.

<sup>46</sup> G. Persson and C. V. Vendil Pallin, Setting the Scene—The View from Russia. In N. Granholm, J. Malminen, and G. Persson (eds.), *A Rude Awakening: Ramifications of Russian Aggression towards Ukraine*, Swedish Defence Research Agency, Stockholm, 2014, p. 27.

<sup>47</sup> Tadeo, Maria. 2014. 'State Television Presenter Warns Russia Could "Turn the US into Radioactive Dust."' *The Independent*, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/state-television-presenter-warns-russia-could-turn-the-us-into-radioactive-dust-9197433.html> (accessed 24 January 2015).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> BBC News, 'Russia: Children's Toilet TV Show Drawn Into Ukraine-EU Row', *News from Elsewhere*, 4 December 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-25198264>.

described the then-interim Ukrainian government as ‘ideological heirs of Bandera, Hitler’s accomplice during World War II’.<sup>50</sup> Russia Today’s reporting of the Crimean annexation has taken its toll among its own journalists. In March, Elisabeth Wahl defected on air while saying:

The coverage of Ukraine was about promoting a Putinist agenda as Russia shamelessly invaded the country. When reports of armed military personnel at the airports surfaced, we were told to downplay them. When it became clear that troops on the ground in Crimea were Russian, RT dubbed them ‘self-defence forces’.<sup>51</sup>

Wahl continued, ‘I cannot be a part of a network funded by the Russian government that whitewashes the actions of Putin’.<sup>52</sup> The day after the shooting down of the MH17 airliner, another RT journalist, the UK correspondent Sara Firth, quit after seeing RT broadcasting ‘god-knows who blaming the Ukrainian government in such a volatile situation’.<sup>53</sup>

The conflict in Ukraine has been notable for a comparatively low level of cyber attacks on information infrastructure. Such attacks were seen as Russia’s possible new trademark, following cyber attacks against Estonia and Georgia. Regarding the Estonia attack, the Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn concluded that due to the intellectual and financial resources needed, together with the central command and control of the operation (on Russian Internet forums), the perpetrators were more specialized than average hackers.<sup>54</sup> This led Arquilla, founder of the term *cyber war*, to say ‘with a high degree of confidence that the Estonia attacks took place with Moscow’s knowledge and approval’.<sup>55</sup>

Similarly, the cyber attacks during the Georgian war also were coordinated in the Russian forums StopGeorgia.ru/StopGeorgia.info, and xaker.ru. The Grey Goose project led by Jeffrey Carr, investigating the cyber component in the Russia-Georgian war, tracked the origin of the StopGeorgia.ru-site. Although it was registered at SteadyHost in New York, it operated in St. Petersburg from the same building as the Russian Ministry of Defense’s Centre for Research on Military Strength of Foreign Countries, and with the GRU’s headquarters—the main intelligence directorate of the Russian Armed

<sup>50</sup> V. V. Putin, ‘Address by the President of the Russian Federation’, 18 March 2014, <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6889>.

<sup>51</sup> E. Wahl, ‘I Was Putin’s Pawn’, *Politico*, 21 March 2014, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/03/liz-wahl-quit-russia-today-putins-pawn-104888.html#.VahsGVaXnnY>

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> W. Turvill, ‘Russia Today London Correspondent Resigns in Protest at “Disrespect for the Facts” over Malaysian Plane Crash’, *Press Gazette*, 18 July 2014, <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/russia-today-london-correspondent-resigns-protest-disrespect-facts-over-malaysian-plane-crash>.

<sup>54</sup> E. Tikk, K. Kaska, and L. Vihul, *International Cyber Incidents: Legal Considerations*, CCD COE, Tallinn, 2010, p. 23.

<sup>55</sup> J. Arquilla, ‘Twenty Years of Cyberwar’, *Journal of Military Ethics* 12(1) (2013) p. 82.



Forces—on the same street.<sup>56</sup> The cyber attacks started at the same times as the Russian bombings of targets in Georgia on the 8th of August and ended at 12:45 on the 11th when Russia announced a cease-fire.<sup>57</sup> This is, of course, not sufficient evidence in itself, but it provides a strong argument for the case of control. Compared to the cyber operations against Georgia, the battle for control of cyberspace in relation to Ukraine took the form of physically severing communication channels such as the phone and Internet cables to Crimea, as well as special forces seizing media broadcasting stations.

A new element in the information spectrum in Ukraine has been the online efforts of hired commentators and bloggers, 'trolls', to post pro-Kremlin comments on the Internet. A document leaked from Agenstvo Internet-Isledovaniy (Internet Research Agency) to *BuzzFeed* outlines how the Agency uses its \$19 million budget to employ 600 people whose daily tasks included commenting on 50 news articles, managing six Facebook accounts with three posts a day, managing 10 Twitter accounts, and tweeting 50 times a day.<sup>58</sup> This paid 'trolling' for the Kremlin had already been revealed in September 2013 in the Russian media by journalist Alexandra Garmazhapova. Then, the agency was focusing on praising Sergei Sobyenin, a former top aide to President Putin running for re-electing as mayor of Moscow. The Agency was also tasked to spread negative comments about Sobyenin's biggest contender and the opposition leader, Alexei Navalny.<sup>59</sup>

## ECONOMY AND ENERGY

Two significant means Russia has used are food sanctions and energy supplies. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, access to Russian markets by food producers has been linked to wider political issues. The number of times that Russian food inspectors have found issue with foods from countries with which Russia has fractious relationships has a high rate of coincidence. In 2006 Russia banned Georgian wine, mineral water, and agricultural goods. The ban was only lifted as part of Russia joining WTO. The ban was then partially re-imposed in October 2013, most likely as reaction to Georgia's attempts to sign the EU association agreement. In 2009, when Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko was seen to be flirting with the

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<sup>56</sup> J. Carr, *Inside Cyber Warfare: Mapping the Cyber Underworld*, O' Oide Cyber Warfare: Map2011, p. 109.

<sup>57</sup> Tor Bukkvoll, 'Iron Cannot Fight—The Role of Technology in Current Russian Military Theory,' *Journal of Strategic Studies* 34(5) (2011) pp. 681–706.

<sup>58</sup> M. Seddon, 'Documents Show How Russia's Troll Army Hit America', *BuzzFeed*, 2 June 2014, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/maxseddon/documents-show-how-russias-troll-army-hit-america#31fdzl>.

<sup>59</sup> A. Garmazhapova, 'Gde Zhivyt Trolli. I Kto Ix Kormit', *Novaya Gazeta*, 7 September 2013, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/59889.html>.

West while releasing political prisoners, Russian health authorities cut off milk imports from Belarus.

In July 2013, Russia banned Ukrainian chocolate. The ban was only lifted after the Yanukovich Government suspended talks with the EU over its Association Agreement—at the same time Kiev also received £15 billion in exchange for Ukrainian Government-issued bonds and won a one-third reduction in the price of natural gas.<sup>60</sup> Russia banned Moldovan wines in September 2013, also in connection to the EU association agreements.

In October 2013, the import of dairy products from Lithuania was suspended. Lithuania at the time held the EU rotating presidency, and the move was linked to that country's support for several former Soviet republics seeking to establish closer ties with the EU.<sup>61</sup> As the situation in Ukraine worsened in 2014, Russian riot police closed the Roshen chocolate factory in Russia, owned by Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko. In early September 2014, Russia banned all Ukrainian confectionary.<sup>62</sup> As of autumn 2014, a number of McDonald's restaurants in Moscow, whose establishment emerged as symbols of the West after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, was closed for alleged violations of food security.

Energy resources are not only the engine of Russian growth but also a lever of influence. Much of Russian energy influence is conducted through Gazprom on behalf of the Russian government. Smith Stegen concludes in her study that it can be seen as a tool through which the regime conducts its policy.<sup>63</sup> She argues that the Kremlin's ownership of Gazprom and its relations with senior executives means that it is not the independent commercial company it claims to be.<sup>64</sup> Rather, 'to view Gazprom or any Russian energy company as anything other than instruments of Russian foreign policy is to be naive in the extreme'.<sup>65</sup>

Russia's dominance as an energy supplier in the near abroad and Europe enables it to wield an implicit 'energy weapon'. In the 2006, a Swedish Defence Agency report concluded that the majority of 55 supply interruptions between 1991 and 2006 were motivated by political or economic reasons.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, the degree of Western orientation correlates with the gas price Russia offers. Broadly, the more pro-Western a government, the higher the

<sup>60</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), 'Russia to Buy Ukraine \$3 Billion for Eurobonds', 23 December 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-ukraine-buy-eurobonds/25209504.html>.

<sup>61</sup> RFE/RL, 'Russia Suspends Dairy Imports from Ukraine', 26 September 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-lithuania-trade-dairy-ban/25128943.html>.

<sup>62</sup> *The Moscow Times*, 'Russia Tightens Screws on Ukraine with Candy Imports', 5 September 2014, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/russia-bans-sweets-imports-from-ukraine/506483.html>.

<sup>63</sup> K. Smith Stegen, 'Deconstructing the "Energy Weapon": Russia's Threat to Europe as Case Study', *Energy Policy* 39(10) (2011) p. 6506.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in K. Smith Stegen, *op. cit.*, p. 6506.

<sup>66</sup> J. Hedenskog and R. L. Larsson, *Russian Leverage on the CIS and the Baltic States*, Swedish Defence Research Agency, Stockholm, 2006, p. 46, [http://foi.se/ReportFiles/foir\\_2280.pdf](http://foi.se/ReportFiles/foir_2280.pdf).

price of gas. In 2008, Georgia paid \$235 per thousand cubic meters, while Russia-friendly Belarus paid \$46. Ukraine, despite its disputes with Russia, paid \$135.<sup>67</sup>

Russia would appear to be using two tactics. The energy threat is explicit to countries neighboring Russia that exhibit pro-Western tendencies. The threat is more implicit in Central and Western Europe, where Russia needs to be seen as a reliable supplier; around half of the Russian state budget is dependent on energy exports.<sup>68</sup> Any threat to supply is due, according to the Russian narrative, to Ukraine. Indeed, during a critical period of decision making over the Nord Stream pipeline, Russia was accused of engineering a dispute with Ukraine to highlight the need to bypass former Soviet republics to supply Central and Western Europe.<sup>69</sup> However, whether these levers work as a tool of influence is another matter. Smith Stegen found that in Estonia, Lithuania, and Georgia, energy pressure failed to result in a change of political decision making.<sup>70</sup> The common denominator of these countries is a high degree of political determination to move out of Russia's sphere of influence.

In Ukraine, perhaps due to a more divided political landscape, there was evidence that Russian energy politics did have some effect—certainly prior to 2014. Following the Orange revolution when a pro-Western government came to power, Gazprom reduced gas flows by 125 million cubic meters on January 2006 and demanded an increase of price from \$50 per 1000 cubic meters to \$230, in line with the international market.<sup>71</sup> The price continued to rise steeply after the 2010 gas war, only to fall as a result of the pro-Russian administration of Viktor Yanukovich signing the Kharkiv Pact extending Russia's right to lease its Crimean military bases until 2042. The deal Russia offered to Ukraine not to sign EU association agreements included a gas price drop of one-third. On 31 March 2014, after the formal annexation of Crimea into Russia and the breakdown of relations with the Ukrainian Government following the expulsion of President Yanukovich, Russia unilaterally cancelled the deal and demanded a price of \$480 per 1000 cubic meters.<sup>72</sup> So, while most of Russian pressure has not resulted in a strategic change for former Soviet republics, in Ukraine the gas price, linked to the orientation of the government, has been an active means by which Russia has influenced and rewarded pro-Russia forces. This makes it an important part of the conflict.

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<sup>67</sup> Jaffe A. Myers and Ronald Soligo, *Militarization of Energy: Geopolitical Threats to the Global Energy System*. James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, 2008, p. 33.

<sup>68</sup> A. Goldthau, 'Rhetoric versus Reality: Russian Threats to European Energy Supply', *Energy Policy* 36(2) (2008) p. 693.

<sup>69</sup> K. Smith Stegen, *op. cit.*, p. 6507.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6509.

<sup>71</sup> Myers and Soligo, 2008, p. 29.

<sup>72</sup> T. Malmlöf, B.-G. Bergstrand, M. Eriksson, S. Oxenstierna, and N. Roszbach, 'Economy, Energy and Sanctions', in N. Granholm, J. Malminen, & G. Persson (eds.), *A Rude Awakening: Ramifications of Russian Aggression towards Ukraine*, Swedish Defence Research Agency, Stockholm, 2014, p. 71.

## POLITICAL INFLUENCE OPERATIONS

The political element of FSC is the most difficult to overview in Russia's toolbox. Tools range from soft effects, such as Gazprom's sponsorship of the Champion's League and Aeroflot's deal with Manchester United, to politically provocative, sabotage, the funding of political groups and parties, acts of violence, and significant infiltration and subversion of governments in their 'near abroad'. These actions tie in to the battle of wills between the states and have a clear political objective that underpins their utilization.

To describe Russia's policies in its neighborhood, Tolstrup developed the idea of 'managed stability' and 'managed instability'. He argues persuasively that Russia pursued a policy of 'managed stability' in republics that are content to remain in Russia's sphere of interest and that seek neither a pro-Western foreign policy nor internal democratic reform. By contrast, Russia seeks 'managed instability' in states that are either Westernizing or modernizing.<sup>73</sup> As of 2009, Tolstrup listed Central Asia, Belarus, Armenia, and Azerbaijan as belonging to the group of managed stability states. The Baltic States, Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia belonged to the list of states in which Russia sought to create instability.

From the time of the Soviet Union, Russia has a long history of establishing and supporting front organizations. Under Vladimir Putin's rule, a number of organizations have been closely linked to the Kremlin as instruments to fulfill the Kremlin's policy. These include Nashi, Rusky Mir, the Eurasian Institute, and the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation. In Crimea there were a number of pro-Russian groups, some with close ties to the Black Sea Fleet. A freelance reporter, Peleschuk, reported that the Institute for CIS Countries in Sevastopol was headed up by a former intelligence chief of the Black Sea Fleet, Vladimir Solovyev.<sup>74</sup> Peleschuk further found that the Russian Community of Sevastopol, a civic organization with a pro-Russian policy, enjoyed close ties with the Black Sea Fleet headquarters.<sup>75</sup>

In a leaked cable from 2006, the deputy head of the US Embassy in Kiev wrote that 'nearly all [interlocutors] contended that pro-Russian forces in Crimea, acting with funding and direction from Moscow, have systematically attempted to increase communal tensions in Crimea'.<sup>76</sup> She reported

<sup>73</sup> J. Tolstrup, 'Studying a Negative External Actor: Russia's Management of Stability and Instability in the "Near Abroad"', *Democratization* 16(5) (2009) p. 929.

<sup>74</sup> D. Peleschuk, 'Uncertainty Remains Over Black Sea Fleet', *ETH Zurich*, 15 September 2009, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?id=121118>

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Wikileaks, 'Ukraine: The Russia Factor In Crimea—Ukraine's "Soft Underbelly"', 7 December 2006, [http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06KYIV4489\\_a.html](http://www.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06KYIV4489_a.html).

that this had been achieved by fanning hatred of Crimean Tatars and ethnic Ukrainians, manipulation of language rights, and fears of NATO. She concluded: 'While the total number of pro-Russian activists in Crimea is relatively low, the focus is on shaping public perceptions and controlling the information space, so far with success'.<sup>77</sup> This report shows a rarely seen dynamic where long-term political subversion operations precede military operations.

Another form of political influence has been the co-option of senior politicians. Perhaps the most high profile has been Gerhard Schroeder, who joined the board of Gazprom after losing the election in Germany in 2005. To much criticism, Schroeder publicly defended Russian action in Crimea, comparing it to Germany's support for NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999.<sup>78</sup> At the height of the Crimean annexation, President Putin hosted a 70th birthday party in St. Petersburg for Schroeder. The Russian leadership has also reached out in a myriad of different ways to Western countries to seek influencers, which Pomerantsev summarizes as the following:

Influencers often appear in Western media and policy circles without reference to their Kremlin connections: whether it's PR company Ketchum placing pro-Kremlin op-eds in the *Huffington Post*; anti-Maidan articles by British historian John Laughland in the *Spectator* that make no mention of how the think tank he was director of was set up in association with Kremlin-allied figures; or media appearances by influential German political consultant Alexander Rahr that fail to note his paid position as an advisor for the German energy company Wintershall, a partner of Gazprom.<sup>79</sup>

In addition to influential individuals, Moscow has also developed a coalition of political parties in Europe, from both the hard left and hard right in its initiative. In addition to influential individuals, Moscow has also developed a coalition of political parties in Europe, from both the hard left and hard right in its initiative. This group observed the elections in Crimea at Russia's development and included members of the Belgium extreme-right Parti Communiste National-Européen; Vlaams Belang; the French extreme-right Front National; the hard-right Ataka party from Bulgaria; the French National Front; the hard-left German Die Linke; the hard-right Neue Rechte; the Communist Party of Greece; and the Latvian pro-Russian party and mainstream Italian right-wing parties, Forza Italia and Lega Nord. The Observatory also observed local elections in Russia

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> T. Paterson, 'Merkel Fury after Gerhard Schroeder Backs Putin on Ukraine', *The Telegraph*, 14 March 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10697986/Merkel-fury-after-Gerhard-Schroeder-backs-Putin-on-Ukraine.html>.

<sup>79</sup> Pomerantsev, 2014, 'How Putin Is Reinventing Warfare'. *Foreign Policy*, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/05/05/how\\_putin\\_is\\_reinventing\\_warfare](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/05/05/how_putin_is_reinventing_warfare) (accessed 24 January 2015).

on the 14th of September. Their uniting factor with Russia is that they share an agenda against both the EU and the EU's support for countries to its east.

Subversion has also played a significant part in Russian attempts to influence the former Soviet republics. In Ukraine, the election of Viktor Yanukovich in 2010 enabled Russian subversion to restart after a hiatus in the Yushenko presidency. In the armed forces, reforms and Western-supported packages initiated by Yushenko were cut back, and FSB and GRU infiltration of the armed forces went on. The Ukrainian armed forces were left under-funded, infiltrated, and demoralized. Elsewhere in 2004, Georgian counterintelligence reported that the Russian GRU colonel Anatoli Sisoyev moved to South Ossetia and set up an South Ossetian intelligence-subversion unit, an 'Ossetian GRU'. It consisted of up to 120 men to carry out sabotage in Georgia proper. The allegations were also made public in 2005 by the Georgian minister of the interior, and the conduct of their operations and their creation were detailed by the Georgian authorities in the investigation following the war in 2008.<sup>80</sup> Another example of provocation took place in September 2014 when a decorated Estonian intelligence officer, Eston Kohver, was arrested by Russia on Estonian soil two days after a visit by US president Barack Obama. Kohver was then held in the infamous Lefortovo KGB prison and paraded on Russian TV.

Russia-leaked phone calls for political purposes is a novel use of intercept capabilities for information war purposes. The most notable example took place in early 2014 with a call between Baroness Ashton, EU high commissioner for foreign policy, and Urmas Paet, the Estonian foreign minister, who discussed a since-discredited theory that the sniper killings in Kiev and Maidan Square may have been the work of Ukrainian nationalists. Similarly, a conversation between Helga Schmidt, Ashtons. and te, and Jan Tombinski, the EU representative to Ukraine, was leaked and displayed differences between the US and the EU most notable example took place in early 2014 with a caller a visit d, assistant secretary of state, and George Pyatt, the US ambassador to Kiev, was leaked when Nuland notoriously said 'fuck the EU'. All of these were released at strategically important moments in the conflict, which is an example of the coordination of political and other means in the FSC.

## DISCUSSION

RussiaSIOAn example of the coordination of political and o Eastern Ukraine shows a steady evolution in Russian operational art with a molding of old and new tools to the current political and legal norms. Russia's initial success

<sup>80</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs Georgia, 'Major Hostile Activities by the Russian Federation against Georgia 2004–2007', 2008, [http://www.mfa.gov.ge/files/556\\_10535\\_625923\\_CHRONOLOGYMIA2008.pdf](http://www.mfa.gov.ge/files/556_10535_625923_CHRONOLOGYMIA2008.pdf); Civil.ge, 'Georgian Minister: Russian Intelligence Service Behind Gori Blast', *Daily News Online*, 25 July 2005, [http://www.civil.ge/eng/\\_print.php?id=10425](http://www.civil.ge/eng/_print.php?id=10425).

has been achieved not only by using a multitude of levers of national power, but in Crimea at least, by a centralized command and control that gave the means a sum greater than their parts. Russia took the strategic initiative to annex Crimea while most of the world was guessing what was happening. Russia started slowly, losing its momentum in Ukraine while its plausible deniability became increasingly implausible. Then a move to annex Crimea while most of the world was guessing, followed by Russian-supplied separatists and a Ukrainian counteroffensive, although this event was quickly met by a disinformation campaign to convince, or at best confuse, domestic and global audiences of the attack.

At the core of Russian policy is a refusal to allow Ukraine to move outside of Russian suzerainty. What is happening in Ukraine is not fundamentally different from what has taken place in Moldova and Georgia where armed groups were manipulated, armed, and if need be, led by agencies of the Russian state until they achieve their ends. The end state has been a de facto partition of nominally independent states with the breakaway elements under Russian protectorate. Such action cripples a state, prevents foreign investment, and inhibits economic growth.

The means applied to Russian-occupied states with the breakaway elements under Russian protectorate. Such action cripples a state, prevents foreign investment, a relentless denigration of Ukraine in the state-influenced media, a skilful application of targeted violence against individuals or against strategic assets, subversion over a number of years to weaken the Ukrainian military and bind its institutions to those of Russia, and the significant massing of conventional forces near the area of operations while the GRU and the FSB controlled the paramilitary groups. Nonetheless, the achievements should not be oversold, and there is a limit in what could be accomplished. Crimea was the most favorable target for Russia. In Eastern Ukraine, the Russian operation has run into trouble; although, like Abkhazia, it appears that the regime is willing to escalate with the increasing use of conventional troops. They should be seen as the least-preferred option and a last resort when more subtle forms of FSC fails to achieve the political goals.

This article has argued that the concept of FSC is more suited to conceptualize Russian warfare by firstly surveying the popular terms and thereafter investigating the conduct of four specific spheres. The benefit of the term FSC is that it captures both the soft and the hard means, both in times of war and peace, and most importantly the space between, and lastly the combination of conventional and non-conventional means to a single whole with the supremacy of politics in a centralized command and control system. With this article, we hope to have highlighted the difficulties in conceptualization of the conduct of Russian conflict and also to have provided a part of the remedy.

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