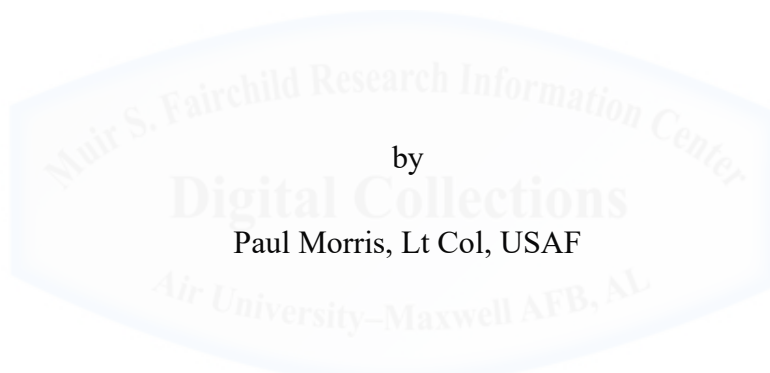


AIR WAR COLLEGE

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RUSSIAN DEEP OPERATIONS
A CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION



by

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ABSTRACT

In 2008 and 2014, the United States (US) was surprised with Russian territorial annexations in Georgia and Ukraine respectively. More surprising than the landgrabs, the execution of the operational maneuver reflected unique circumstances in the environment exploiting a deep penetration through the means of Russian diasporas while remaining rooted in the classics of Soviet Deep Operations doctrine. Today, Russia is postured to surprise the US again in its own back yard with another deep penetration through different means. In 2017, Russia opened its first counterdrugs training center outside of its borders in Nicaragua. In a seeming contradiction, the principal drug threat that drove the creation of the Russian Federal Drug Control Service (FSKN) did not emanate from Nicaragua or even the Western Hemisphere but from Afghanistan and Central Asia.¹ Russia has no fixed counterdrugs training capabilities in either location. Further, the counterdrugs training center opened despite the dissolution of the FSKN one year earlier.² Perhaps most revealing to the true nature of the facility, Russian Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov personally arrived in Nicaragua to announce support for anti-drug activities prior to its opening. The personal visit was deemed “an honor far outside the norm” for a nation of Nicaragua's military and political status.³ While US strategic talking points generally default to a hand wave Cold War narrative of extending malign influence into the Western Hemisphere, “near abroad” tit-for-tat policies, or espionage they do little to bring any degree of specificity to the latent or real threat inherent to the unique Russian activity through the lens of Russian doctrine. Short of accepting Russian intentions as sincere, a greater understanding of the origins of the Soviet military operational art of Deep Operations and application of Reflexive Control may help to prudently prepare for surprise.

ORIGINS OF SOVIET DOCTRINE

Marxism-Leninism

Conflict is inevitable between the US and Russia. Classical proponents of Marxist-Leninist theory believe in the inevitability of war between socialism and imperialism and laid the foundation of the Soviet Union to join a global revolution against capitalist states.⁴ Vladimir Lenin established the idea of imperialism as the highest form of capitalist development largely as a product of his observations during the “first world imperialist war.”⁵ Lenin provided the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the Treaty of Versailles as evidence exposing World War I as “annexationist, predatory, and a war of plunder on the part of both sides.”⁶ Further, he critiqued capitalism as “a world system of colonial oppression and of the financial strangulation of the overwhelming majority of the population of the world by a handful of ‘advanced’ countries.”⁷ The US, amongst others, are identified as capitalist threats. Lenin concluded capitalism is the root cause of an economic problem and the duty of the working class is to lead a social revolution against the capitalist elite.⁸ Lenin created a socialist frame of reference for a global revolutionary war with the Soviet Union as the leader. Subversion was a foundational idea since the inception of the Soviet Union.

Marshall Mikhail Tukhachevsky

Though the theory identified adversaries and an end state, it does not commit to a military doctrine or strategy to drive resourcing requirements and force structure.⁹ To fill the void, Marshall Mikhail Tukhachevsky advanced the Red Army to meet future war requirements during an industrial revolution against the external threats of advanced capitalist states. Tukhachevsky’s ability to present ideas through a common Marxist-Leninist frame of reference enabled the rapid

development of the Red Army in a politically charged environment and institutionalized Deep Operations doctrine into strategic thought today.

To prepare for the inevitable fight, the Soviet Union initiated a domestic transformation to counter the capitalist threat through the First Five-Year Plan from 1928-1933. Joseph Stalin, Lenin's successor, initiated the transformation of a "backward, predominately peasant-based, agricultural society into a modern industrialized state" as a top priority.¹⁰ Security projected to be a product of a strong industrial economic base. However, internal tensions arose at the rapid pace of development in balancing the short-term requirements of military production versus the long-term priority of industrial development. Stalin's political priority for the First Five-Year plan was the development of basic capital goods at the opportunity cost of military production. Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, chief of the Red Army General Staff from 1925-1928, turned the challenge into an opportunity.

Unlike his military counterparts, Tukhachevsky did not directly criticize the lower prioritization to the military and risk losing organizational relevance. Rather, Marshal Tukhachevsky exploited the politically charged environment and worked within the Marxist-Leninist frame of reference to improve the Red Army's prospects. In a seeming contradiction, Tukhachevsky praised the future achievements of the plan rather than focus on an immovable political objective. Tukhachevsky exuded optimism and reminded his political handlers "economic competition takes place in peacetime...Only a disbelief in socialism and in our future development can lead to military nihilism, which rejects the possibility of changing the correlation of forces as it presently exists with military means."¹¹ By utilizing the ideology of Marxism-Leninism and the inevitability of conflict as a common frame of reference, Tukhachevsky eased the tension by maintaining trust through empathy.¹² Common frames of

reference helped to see a problem in a shared perspective.¹³ Subsequently, resourcing to the military increased when politically tenable. The political capital earned in the indirect approach ensured the Red Army's aggressive rearmament program requests were met to meet the challenge of a pending industrialized war.

At the heart of Tukhachevsky's effort to meet future war requirements was challenging the old set of institutionalized ideas, or doctrine, to influence military strategy and achieve relative advantage against industrialized capitalist states. Firmly entrenched at the General Staff Academy was Alexander Svechin's *Strategiia* which had won the Frunze prize for military literature.¹⁴ It was shaped from a snapshot in time of Soviet economic weakness and emphasized preparation for a defensive war of attrition.¹⁵ More importantly, Svechin was a target because he was not an advocate of the aggressive pace of the Five-Year plan which was a requirement for Tukhachevsky's ideas of future warfare and rearmament. In collaboration with the Communist Academy, Tukhachevsky attacked Svechin in *Opposing Reactionary Theories on the Military-Scientific Front: Criticism of the Strategic and Military-Historical Views of Professor Svechin*.¹⁶ In the work, Svechin was discredited for an "unwillingness to distill the features of contemporary war into a 'red soviet strategic doctrine' and underestimating the effectiveness of the plan for rearmament."¹⁷ Independent of content, Tukhachevsky had achieved his objective through the collaboration with the Communist Academy and supplanted the existing frame of reference for doctrine and strategy in order to set the stage for new ideas.

Tukhachevsky was reassigned as the Commander of the Leningrad district and then as the Red Army's Technology and Armament Chief in 1928 and 1931 respectively. Escaping the traditional burdens of administering an entire army, Tukhachevsky refined his military theories of future warfare and took advantage of the resource gains to drive a mechanized force structure.

By 1934, the Red Army's mechanized forces were "armed with the most advanced weaponry and armored fighting vehicles in the world, both in quality and quantity."¹⁸ For his performance, Tukhachevsky was promoted to the Marshal of the Soviet Union and immediately attempted to carry his newfound influence to develop war games framing Germany as a first-move aggressor.¹⁹ Tukhachevsky was keenly aware of the anticommunist sentiment from German propaganda and advocated for fortifications on the western borders.²⁰

Deep Operations

Conflict and provocation with Germany during the industrial transformation did not align with Stalin's strategic thought. War was deemed inevitable against industrialized capitalist states but the Soviet Union was not ready to incite the Germans through any action that could be misunderstood. Subsequently, Tukhachevsky was reassigned and utilized the time to codify his military theory of Deep Operations in the Field Regulation of 1936. He defined Deep Operations as:

Simultaneous assault on enemy defenses by aviation and artillery to the depths of the defense, penetration of the tactical zone of the defense by attacking units with widespread use of tank forces, and violent development of tactical success into operational success with the aim of the complete encirclement and destruction of the enemy.²¹

Tukhachevsky aimed to take advantage of emerging technologies from the industrial revolution to reach the depths of an adversary's defenses through operational maneuver prior to the establishment of battle lines. The Tukhachevsky era Deep Operation envisioned a four-echelon offensive with both simultaneous and sequential arranging operations.²² The first echelon attempted to achieve a degree of control before ground echelons were employed. Concealment of movement was critical in order to achieve surprise and initial advantage.²³ In an industrialized war, this task was assigned predominately to air elements. The objective of the second echelon was to achieve a break-through in the lines by creating the effect of shock to temporarily

paralyze the adversary. Combined arms would complete the task with follow-on successive operations. The third echelon exploited the break-through in a deep penetration to the full operational depth of the battlefield with mechanized formations and parachute troops. The final echelon, the reserves, supported the advance and consolidated territorial gains. Subsequent iterations of Deep Operations included various echelons forming independent Operational Maneuver Groups and the objectives generally included:

- 1) defeating enemy operational reserves, 2) encircling forces 3) fixing enemy reserves in place, 4) occupying important objectives for follow-on forces, 5) pursuing a retreating enemy, 6) disrupting command and control, and 7) disorganizing the enemy rear.²⁴

Tukhachevsky understood the depth of operational objectives to include both the depth of enemy forces and resources and the limit of advance for friendly forces.²⁵ The limit of friendly conventional forces was inextricably tied to early limitations of the internal combustion engine and the massive fuel requirements in an industrial war. Since the information revolution, the limit of friendly forces is now beyond any conventional measurement of time and space and may constitute all of the traditional instruments of power in achieving objectives to the full depths of an adversaries defenses to include elections, public goods and services, and subversive elements of the population.

In 1937, Stalin initiated the purge of the Soviet Officer corps beginning with the forced confession, and execution, of Tukhachevsky as a German spy.²⁶ Tukhachevsky's name and ideas were associated with treason and any chance of the Red Army's initial positional advantage with the Germans were negated with a single bullet to the head. Subsequently, four mechanized corps were also disbanded.²⁷ Stalin's docile actions in relation to the Germans seemed to have paid off. On 23 August 1939, Soviet policy makers shaped the strategic environment to temporarily reduce their capitalist adversaries by aligning with Germany to occupy the Baltic states through

the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The Baltic states were deemed a strategic location securing sea access to Leningrad.²⁸ The treaty of non-aggression between Germany and the Soviet Union came with a secret arrangement to divide Eastern Europe.²⁹ The Soviet Union was complicit in German aggression and aimed to benefit from their assault.

One week after the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Germany invaded Poland. The success of the invasion advanced the Germany army well beyond the agreed to arrangement. To compensate for the overshoot, Germany secretly transferred Lithuania to the Soviet sphere of influence through the Friendship Treaty signed on 28 September 1939.³⁰ The Soviet strategy to reduce capitalist adversaries to gain relative advantage against weaker opponents held despite the German miscalculation. While western Europe would be consumed with the German advance, the Soviets acted with relative impunity and occupied the Baltics in 1940. However, in the end Tukhachevsky was right. In 1941, Stalin is surprised by an invasion from the German army and is reeled backwards to the depths of its defenses to Moscow.

Father of Red Army and Founder of Soviet Doctrine

In 1956, Stalin's successor Nikita Khrushchev exonerated Tukhachevsky and revealed, "the liquidation of many military chiefs and senior officials who fell under the suspicions of Stalin during 1937-41 and were falsely condemned...had very serious consequences, above all on the course of the war."³¹ The Soviet Union clearly had a better chance of repelling Germany with Tukhachevsky than without. The General Staff followed suit and recognized Tukhachevsky as the "creator and originator of the Red Army and founder of its strategic doctrine."³² Deep Operations would serve as the doctrinal foundation for Soviet Military thought for subsequent generations. Even more telling to its relevance, the operational concepts permeated to US military doctrine from the 1970s and 1980s in Airland Battle.³³

Contemporary Application: Georgia and Ukraine

In a parallel to Lenin and Stalin, Vladimir Putin is initiating his own transformation today. In 2005, he stated the fall of the Soviet Union was “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century” and that “tens of millions of our fellow citizens and countrymen (ethnic Russians) found themselves beyond the fringes of Russian territory.”³⁴ Historically, ethnic Russian migration to former Soviet states was part of a colonization of sorts that “disrupted ethnically homogeneous areas by forcing large groups of people to relocate from their homes.”³⁵ For example, Estonia shifted from a demographic of 90 percent ethnically Estonian to only 62 percent.³⁶ Similarly, Latvia lost over 25 percent of its ethnic demographic group to Russian migration.³⁷ The “Russification” was an attempt to control internal dissent and subversion amongst diverse groups at strategic locations. In particular, the Baltic states have historically been highly valued due to their sea lanes of approach to Saint Petersburg, historically referred to as Leningrad.

Consistent with Putin’s remarks, Russia annexed and occupied portions of the former Soviet states of Georgia and the Ukraine in 2008 and 2014 respectively. In both cases, remnants of a large ethnic Russian diaspora remained as a legacy of Soviet-era Russian migration and were utilized as part of a Deep Operation to seize territory through the deep penetrating effects of subversion. In Georgia, Russia may have enabled armed civilian separatists as first echelon forces within Georgia to attack local towns in order to craft a dilemma. Either Georgia would tolerate the domestic violence of the Russian separatist movement and lose legitimacy or respond in-kind to protect its citizens and risk invasion by Russian forces (simultaneously massing near border) under the premise of protecting Russians abroad.³⁸ In either Georgian decision, Russia achieves its objectives. The separatists, under a manufactured narrative, would create the

conditions for a second echelon break-through and a deep penetration of information operations with follow-on conventional echelons seizing territory and consolidating gains.

The manufactured dilemma is best captured under the Soviet-era concept of reflexive control as a product of Marxist-Leninist paradigm.³⁹ According to this paradigm, “cognition results from the reflection to the material world in human mind, which determines social consciousness. Man’s intelligence and cognitive processes are dependent on his sensory awareness of the outside world, which in turn determines the content and the dimensions of his consciousness.”⁴⁰ In other words, manipulation of sensory awareness can alter conscious decision-making through disinformation of reality. The invasion of Georgia could be seen as a legalistic act of protecting Russians abroad if the audience was not rooted into the reality of malign activity apart from sensory overload of disinformation. Overcoming the burdens of deciphering fact from fiction during conflict creates a “hallucinating fog of war’ and consistent deception that aims not to paralyze the West’s intelligence and anticipatory capability, but ‘alter’ Western analytical end-results and perceptions.”⁴¹ Rejecting the false dilemma consumes valuable time and overshadows the immediate task at hand.

Predictably, Georgia responded in kind to separatist violence and killed fifty Russian “peacekeepers.”⁴² In a seemingly sequential narrative, Russia responded to the aggressive attack and captured South Ossetia and Abkhazia in a maneuver consistent with the third echelon of deep penetration. In reality, Russian forces may have crossed into South Ossetia before the Georgian response to separatist violence as part of a simultaneous assault on enemy defenses.⁴³ The final echelon of Russian forces consolidated the gains of territory in return for the continued sovereignty on the remains of Georgia. The historical parallel to Deep Operations theory are evident.

In 2013, Russian Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov revealed contemporary Russian military thought, later mislabeled the Gerasimov doctrine by western analysts, in an article for the Russian Military *Industrial Kurier*.

A perfectly thriving state can, in a matter of months and even days, be transformed into an arena of fierce armed conflict, become a victim of foreign intervention, and sink into a web of chaos, humanitarian catastrophe, and civil war... The role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness. The focus of applied methods of conflict has altered in the direction of broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military measure applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population. All this is supplemented by military means of a concealed character, including carrying out actions of informational conflict and the actions of special operations forces.”⁴⁴

In a year after his remarks, Gerasimov’s thoughts appeared to be translated to conflict with Ukraine. Russia surprised the world in Ukraine and hasty analysis offered General Gerasimov’s speech as the match that lit the flames of a new way of Russian warfare. Compounding the surprise land grab, US post-analysis was led astray with a self-inflicted hallucination in the fog of war. To be blunt, there is no such thing as the Gerasimov Doctrine.⁴⁵ General Gerasimov’s speech articulated how the Kremlin understood the rampant revolutions supported by Western powers from the Arab Spring to the numerous Color Revolutions against pro-Russian regimes.⁴⁶ Russian leaders were working out how to counter Western foreign interference, not initiate, such conflicts.

Indicators and Analysis of Russian Aggression

The point of origin for the conflicts can best be explained through the various revolutions spanning former Soviet states and the declining popularity of the Putin regime. Prior to the Russian annexation in Ukraine, a wave of protests in the former Soviet states reached Russia placing the Putin regime at risk. In a perceived falling of dominos, the Colored Revolutions starting with Georgia’s Rose Revolution in 2003, Ukraine’s Orange Revolution in 2004,

Krygyzstan's Tulip Revolution of 2005, Moldova's Grape or Twitter Revolution in 2009, and Ukraine's Maidan of 2013-2014 were all a rejection of Russian influence, or perhaps domination, in domestic affairs.⁴⁷ More importantly, the ideas of the protests may have resonated with nationalist dissenters within Russia with massive public protests in Moscow from 2011-2013.⁴⁸

As a matter of precedent, Russian military actions in foreign policy have achieved the effect of solidifying the Russian domestic base. In 2000, Putin achieved an 84 percent approval rating when he sent troops to Chechnya and later an 88 percent approval rating for his actions in the Georgian War in 2008.⁴⁹ After several years of alarming decline in domestic popular support, in parallel with massive public protests in Moscow, the 2014 annexation in Ukraine marked a three-year high in approval rating that reached 85 percent.⁵⁰ Subsequently, the protests against the Putin regime could not capture the nationalist sentiment of the masses and largely disappeared. Further, Russian actions appealed to some Russian diasporas abroad "because their incorporation into the Russian Federation appeals to the strong ethnic and cultural dimensions of Russian national than civic identity."⁵¹ Ukrainian challenges with ethnic Russians integration offers a warning to other former Soviet states to resist policies that may divide, vice unite, subversive elements of their population.

In lieu of a misunderstood frame of reference dubbed the Gerasimov Doctrine, Russian operations in both Georgia and Ukraine may have showcased an evolution of Deep Operations, vice revolution, in Russian warfare rooted in Russian doctrine.⁵² Seemingly out of nowhere in Ukraine, pro-Russian demonstrators filled the streets of the Crimean capital of Simferopol demanding Crimea become a part of Russia.⁵³ Pro-Kiev demonstrators quickly clashed with the

groups creating chaos in the streets. In a rehearsed scenario, the pro-Russian governor of Crimea bypassed Ukraine and directly called Vladimir Putin for help.⁵⁴

The first echelon, in this case the concealed intent of the pro-Russian governor in conjunction with the ethnic Russian demonstrators, achieved a degree of control before second echelon forces were employed. The airspace over Simferopol was immediately closed for Russian transport planes. The break-through movement achieved such a degree of surprise reporting centered on if the “little green men” flowing into Crimea were actually Russian troops. Despite a Russian misinformation campaign identifying Russian forces as local self-defense units, the Pentagon estimated a total of roughly 20,000 Russian troops entered Crimea.⁵⁵

By the next day, the second echelon consisting of Russian troops achieved the effect of shock and occupied the entire Crimean-peninsula without firing a shot.⁵⁶ The Ukrainian government was temporarily paralyzed. The third Russian echelon of forces exploited the full depths of the ethnic divide in Ukraine and moved into the Donbass region where pro-Russian sentiment was historically strong.⁵⁷ Russian special forces fanned the flames of hatred by enabling extremist groups to replicate the chaos of Simferopol. Tanks, Chechen mercenaries, and trained guerillas were also sent in to counter any Ukrainian gains.⁵⁸ However, Russia did not achieve the same successes as it did in Crimea. The seizure of Crimea stoked the passion and will of the Ukrainian nationalist population to fight. Over the next few weeks, Russia massed a fourth echelon of nearly 30,000 troops on the Ukrainian border ready to consolidate territorial gains over all of Ukraine if needed.⁵⁹ After stiff resistance in the Donbass region, Putin “came to realize that it made much more sense for Russia to control Ukraine than occupy it.”⁶⁰ The Donbass region held autonomous local elections apart from the apparatus of the Ukrainian government and elected pro-Russian officials. The fourth echelon, consisting of thirty-two tanks,

sixteen howitzer artillery pieces, and thirty troop transport trucks crossed the border to consolidate territorial control.⁶¹ Uncertain of Russia's true objectives with other former Soviet states, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), to include the US, pledged to increase force levels in Poland and the Baltics.⁶² Further, the US executed a series of economic sanctions crippling the Russian economy and dropping the ruble to its lowest level against the dollar in almost twenty-five years.⁶³

Reframing Russian Activities in the Western Hemisphere

The case studies of Russian annexations and occupations in former Soviet States may seem incongruent with activities in Latin America if the frame of reference is regional or projects a territorial annexation in the Western Hemisphere. Russia has no historical territorial aspirations in Latin America. Further, the ethnic Russian diasporas are largely absent as are the deep penetrating conventional forces. There is no apparent threat from observations at the surface level. Yet, Russian leaders "have explicitly stated their intentions in the (Latin America) region, which are noted as retaliatory for what the Russian government views as U.S. meddling close to Russian borders, particularly in Ukraine."⁶⁴ Further, General Gerasimov has acknowledged a supplement to industrial warfare through his understanding of the information revolution. In a revealing comment, General Gerasimov asserts:

New information technologies have enabled significant reductions in the spatial, temporal, and informational gaps between forces and control organs. Frontal engagements of large formations of forces at the strategic and operational level are gradually becoming a thing of the past. Long-distance, contactless actions against the enemy are becoming the main means of achieving combat and operational goals ... The information space opens wide asymmetrical possibilities for reducing the fighting potential of the enemy.⁶⁵

If true, then Russia conventional force disposition is not a useful indicator to identify a threat. Russian activity in the Western Hemisphere is setting the conditions for a response to the depths of US defenses in a region largely disassociated with conflict in former Soviet states.

Russian activities in the Western hemisphere should not be considered distinctly from conflict in Europe despite bureaucratic resourcing tendencies and analytical divides of geographic institutions. Russian activities are intrinsically linked globally. Since the contemporary conflicts in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014, Russia has responded independent of notional geographic boundaries. For example, in response to Russian incursions into Georgian sovereign territory, US and NATO warships flooded the Black Sea to deliver aid and outnumbered the Russian Black Sea fleet in a matter of weeks.⁶⁶ In response, Russia sent two nuclear-capable bombers to Venezuela. As a historical reference point of relative significance, the last strategic bomber patrol occurred in 1992.⁶⁷ Later in the year, Russia sent 3 naval warships to Nicaragua. Similar to the bomber deployment, their arrival constituted the first naval visit since 1990.⁶⁸ The deployments signaled a significant policy change since the end of the Cold War directly linked to the Georgian conflict and a real threat military planners must account for beyond hand wave narratives of a return to the nostalgia of great power competition. Nicaragua and Venezuela make up half of the countries in the world that recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in support of Russia and cannot be dismissed in any discussion of conflict in Georgia or other former Soviet states.

Similarly in the Russian-Ukraine conflict in 2014, Russian activities in the Western Hemisphere were linked. After the annexation of Crimea and occupation of the Donbass region, the US initiated exercise Atlantic Resolve constituting nine-month rotations of 6000 soldiers across 17 countries with a headquarters in Poland. In response, Russia transitioned its funding

and support to Nicaragua from non-lethal to lethal aid.⁶⁹ Russia donated 50 main battle tanks, with a value of the entire annual defense budget of Nicaragua, and instituted the unique capability of the counter drug training center not seen anywhere outside of Russia territory. Academic narratives of espionage and malign influence or talking points centered on near abroad tit for tat behavior do little to bring any degree of specificity to the real or latent threat of Russian activities as it relates to conflict in Europe.

Russia is reestablishing bilateral ties through leaders with connections to the former Soviet Union as well as multilaterally through the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA). The ALBA nations are characterized as an alliance of “highly criminalized states” that support terrorist organizations such as the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) and Hezbollah.⁷⁰ Venezuela, one of the principal members of ALBA, has had 6 senior state officials designated as supporters of cocaine trafficking activities.⁷¹ Setting the conditions for a perfect match, Russian bankers have offset their losses from economic sanctions in response to Crimea with increased access to Latin American financial institutions; with some designated as money launders for Russian organized crime groups.⁷² The increase in the Russian business community has corresponded with an increase in former senior Soviet intelligence and military leaders and a higher activity in Russian organized crime.⁷³

Russian activities are hard to delineate amongst disparate groups because they often come together at the same point. In 2015, the US Director of National Intelligence identified Russia as nation where “the nexus among organized crime, state actors, and business blurs the distinction between state policy and private gain.”⁷⁴ Though documented and cognitively accepted as a norm within other parts of the world, the nexus of Russian state activity, business, and criminal

activity are rarely accounted for as a latent or real threat in Latin America to the US or related to conflict in former Soviet states.

The threat of Russian territorial land grabs and border provocations in Europe will most likely remain constant while Putin remains in power. The substantive change in the operational environment for Russian strategists are US forces occupying positions in former Soviet states to deter future Russian incursions. In the initial echelons of any future operation, Russia must account for the US in a different manner that it did not have to previously due to the US force posture. In one of Russia's subtle countermoves, aid to Nicaragua shifted from supplying food and medicine to military training and supplies after territorial annexations in Ukraine.⁷⁵ Despite public proclamations rationalizing the response, to include outward justification for the unique counterdrugs training center, the Russians are most likely not in Nicaragua to counter a drug threat. As a contradiction in the region, the Russians are most likely involved in the trafficking of cocaine with the FARC.⁷⁶ As part of the counterdrugs training center, a non-public agreement facilitated the presence of 130 Russian counterdrugs trainers to accompany local Nicaraguan patrols. Expanding its reach further, Russia is offering countless scholarships to attend the center to Latin American police, military, and intelligence officials.⁷⁷ A local security analyst views their role as odd and asserts "Russia doesn't have anti-narcotics intelligence information here."⁷⁸ Finding a Russian doctrinal frame of reference can help US strategists to decipher fact from fiction and see through the hallucinating fog of war to prudently prepare for surprise.

Counterdrugs Facility

In 2002, the origins of the FSKN was created to address the massive drug issues and overall chaos plaguing Russia since the departure of the tighter controls of the former Soviet Union. The drug threat, predominately opiates from Afghanistan and Central Asia, provided an

understandable impetus. However, the principle driver may have been a corrupt Russian Interior Ministry that was “simply unable to deal with the inflows due to their own involvement in drug trafficking.”⁷⁹ The new agency was given priority resourcing and developed a highly capable wire-tapping capability.⁸⁰ Predictably, the internal tensions led to prosecutions of businesses that had little to do with drug trafficking in a competition with other corrupt security organizations.⁸¹ In 2013, the FSKN expanded operations with an announcement to build the first counterdrugs training center outside of Russia; not in Afghanistan or Central Asia but in Nicaragua. Perhaps most revealing to the true nature of the facility, Russian Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov personally arrived in Nicaragua to announce support for counterdrug activities prior to its opening. The personal visit was deemed “an honor far outside the norm” for a nation of Nicaragua's military and political status.⁸² The same year, the deputy head of FSKN was directly implicated with organized crime by Interpol through an international arrest warrant.⁸³ The nexus between organized crime and the state could not be more transparent. By May 2016, the FSKN was dissolved with its remnant capabilities placed in the Ministry of Interior. Despite the setback, plans for the counterdrugs training center continued with its opening in Nicaragua in 2017. Understanding the placement of the unique facility, a contradiction with respect to both the predominant source of supply and connections with organized crime, is vital to prudently prepare for surprise.

Through Deep Operations as a frame of reference, the counterdrugs facility may be an element designed to gain information and provide a network of access for a concealed movement consistent with the first echelon of forces. Russia may view criminal activity and illicit trafficking networks as elements to map and understand in order to provide a non-state attributable break-through for a second echelon of forces into US borders in conflict. During

peace, the knowledge may facilitate profit for Russian organized crime. According to United States Southern Command, “well resourced organized crime groups move drugs, weapons, counterfeit items, money and people on these networks.”⁸⁴ With the full menu of non-state attributable deep penetrating options at the disposal of Russian forces, the southern approaches to the US offers significant relative advantage in achieving military objectives. While the deep penetration may not prove helpful in seizing territory in the Western Hemisphere, it could help achieve similar objectives elsewhere in a global application of Deep Operations.

Recommendation: Information Requirements and Doctrinally Based Wargame Scenarios

As a notional example of Deep Operations execution in the Western Hemisphere, criminal elements backed by concealed Russian special forces may have the potential to incite local migrants in Central America to move in mass to the US by creating conditions of domestic instability. The mass movement of migrants to the US southern border constitutes the second echelon of forces. Simultaneously, Russian information operations incites US domestic hate groups for a confrontation at the border. Consistent with Deep Operations objectives, the activities are designed to be too large to ignore with the objectives to fix US reserves in place, disrupt command and control, and disorganize the rear in any Russian conflict projected with former Soviet states. The operational objectives, consistent with Deep Operations as a frame of reference, can help the US intelligence community produce information requirements for collection and prioritize and expose first echelon targets to have a better understanding of Russian activities.

In the same example, reflexive control offers a complimentary frame of reference in producing strategic dilemmas consistent with the Soviet military operational art. A notional threat to the US through illicit trafficking networks could trigger both the protest potential of a

regional migrant population and subversive US domestic groups seemingly creating a no-win dilemma. US decision-makers may face a crafted disinformation campaign of defending the homeland from illegal aliens in support of domestic extremist groups or perceptions of tolerating the illegal incursion opening the borders to further violations. In either dilemma, operations in Europe could be executed under less scrutiny from US decision-makers and the public.

The access, and point of non-retribution, offered by criminal elements also allows Russian special forces a deep penetration into the critical infrastructure of the US. The disruption of basic public goods and services to incite the domestic population accomplishes some of the traditional objectives associated with Deep Operations to include fixing enemy reserves in place, disorganizing the rear, and disrupting command and control for any operation in Europe. To separate Russian activities in the Western Hemisphere from activities in Europe would be inconsistent with Russian doctrine and the operational environment of the information revolution.

It would not be prudent to wait until intelligence reports have confirmed the nexus between Russia and criminal elements at the counterdrugs facility in providing access to the depths of US defenses in modeling wargames. Consistent with characteristics of the first echelon of Deep Operations, concealment of movement is critical in order to achieve surprise and initial advantage. If the nexus exists, it most likely would not be known prior to execution without an uncharacteristically large US investment in human intelligence in the countless criminal networks in the Western Hemisphere. In the contemporary great power competition, prioritizing the fight in the first echelon may provide the resiliency to prudently prepare for surprise.

Conclusion

Understanding the Soviet military operational art of Deep Operations and Reflexive Control as a frame of reference can help to prudently prepare for surprise by establishing new information requirements with the intelligence community and adding strategic dilemmas to wargames to build resiliency. Deep Operations enabled Putin to annex former territories of the Soviet Union and is the foundation of Soviet doctrine. Russian separatists created the second echelon break-through for a deep penetration of successive operations to seize territory and consolidate the gains in Georgia. In Ukraine, Russian diasporas were similarly utilized to annex Crimea without a conventional fight. Today, the challenge for Putin is now greater with US forces in position to deter Russian incursions and future operations most likely will not be conducted in the same manner. Russian activities are postured in the Western hemisphere as a direct result of US activities in the Ukraine and other former Soviet states. Unique activities, such as the counterdrug facility in Nicaragua, offer considerable contradictions in their outward justification and most likely purpose. Strategists and planners must understand the real and latent threat it may pose. Short of Russia broadcasting its next move, providing the right doctrinal frame of reference can provide a greater degree of specificity to shape US actions vice relying on strategic talking points and hallucinate in the fog of war.

Notes

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