THE SOURCES OF RUSSIAN INFORMATION WARFARE

BY

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APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis meets master's-level standards of research, argumentation, and expression.

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DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.

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ABSTRACT

The 2014 annexation of Crimea and the pro-Russian insurgency in Eastern Ukraine involved the coordinated use of military and non-military measures facilitated by extensive manipulation of the information environment. In the immediate aftermath of these conflicts, US and NATO security officials branded Russia's asymmetric approach as "Hybrid War," a new doctrine that emphasizes information warfare to shape the conflict environment and support other asymmetric military and non-military measures to achieve political objectives. This thesis finds that the Russian emphasis on information warfare in conflict and the specific information warfare practices employed by Moscow in 2014 are not recent military innovations. Russian information warfare traces to the role of information in Russian history and culture, deception techniques practiced by the Soviet military and security community, and lessons from modern conflicts like the 2011 US-NATO intervention in Libya. This thesis analyzes these three primary sources and discusses application during the 2014 conflicts in Ukraine and Crimea. Based on these findings, this thesis concludes with recommendations for US and Western security officials to both acknowledge and effectively confront Russian information warfare in defense of security interests in the Eastern European theater.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

On March 18, 2014, the BBC observed that Russia's annexation of Crimea was "the smoothest invasion of modern times … virtually bloodless … and was over before the outside world even realized it had started."[1] Less than a month later, pro-Russian protesters occupied government buildings in the east Ukrainian cities of Donetsk and Luhansk, calling for a referendum on independence and beginning an active insurgency that continues to this day.[2] The swift progress of events and the fervor with which the local population appeared to act in Moscow's interest stunned North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Union decision-makers. Ambiguous front-line media reports further confounded officials and stalled a Western response. Subsequent evidence pointed to a well-coordinated blend of military and non-military measures directed by Moscow and facilitated by skillful manipulation of the local and global information environment. This information campaign became so effective that Russia avoided international blame when one of its surface-to-air missiles, under insurgent control, shot down an airliner carrying 298 civilians over Eastern Ukraine. The missile system had been transported from Russia that day, but Moscow quickly flooded media with false information blaming Ukraine for the incident.[3] Disinformation—coordinated dissemination of false information by Russian authorities and pro-

[1] John Simpson, "Smoothest Invasion of Modern Times," *BBC News*, March 19, 2014, sec. Europe, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26644082.
[2] "Ukraine Crisis: Timeline," *BBC News*, November 13, 2014, sec. Europe, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26248275.
[3] Nick Miller, "Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 Was Shot down from pro-Russian Rebel Controlled Territory, Investigation Finds," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 29, 2016.

Russian media—made truth and fiction in Ukraine essentially indeterminate, shielding Russia from any responsibility for the tragedy.

In the aftermath of Moscow's action in Crimea and Ukraine, both politicians and high-ranking officers in NATO now consider Russia a significant regional threat. The Alliance's Warsaw Summit Communique, issued in 2016, addressed the seriousness of the danger: "Russia's aggressive actions, including provocative military activities in the periphery of NATO territory and its demonstrated willingness to attain political goals by the threat and use of force are a source of regional instability, a fundamental challenge to the alliance, have damaged Euro-Atlantic security, and threaten our long-standing goal of a Europe whole, free, and at peace."[4]

NATO officials and analysts now suspect further regional destabilization as other member states in Russia's so-called "near-abroad" experience the same influence campaigns that presaged the conflict in 2014. Andrew Radin from RAND reports that the Baltic states of Estonia and Latvia, with significant Russian-speaking minorities, are vulnerable to the fate which befell Crimea and Ukraine.[5] According to Radin, the Baltics have been under attack for decades (since independence) by Russian propaganda, cyberattacks, and other nonviolent means of subversion. Based on lessons from Crimea and Ukraine, analysts outside the Baltic states agree this nonviolent subversion could intensify to dangerous levels, destabilizing the government and society, and yet fall short of the conflict threshold needed to trigger the collective security guaranteed by Article V of the NATO charter.[6]

In July 2014, NATO officials characterized Russia's strategic approach in Crimea and Ukraine as hybrid warfare, defining it as "a wide

[4] NATO statement, "Warsaw Summit Communique" (NATO, July 9, 2016).
[5] Radin, Andrew, "Hybrid Warfare in the Baltics" (RAND Corporation, 2017), 1–5.
[6] Radin, Andrew, 8.

range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures employed in a highly integrated design."[7] Others argued for the name "full-spectrum conflict" to characterize the approach because Russia used "several military and non-military means under a single central command, subordinated to a centrally-defined political goal."[8] The use of "conflict" in this definition aptly reflects the varying degrees of ambiguity and intensity in Russia's action. The authors noted that this continuum of full spectrum conflict, from peace to war, stands "in stark contrast to the more binary western interpretation which perceives the absence of armed fighting as peace," and where information in peace and armed fighting are governed by wholly-different modes and authorities.[9]

Clearly, a significant component of Russia's strategic approach in Crimea and Ukraine was the extensive manipulation of the information domain, accompanied by the broad use of military and non-military measures (political, economic, humanitarian) to accomplish limited, regional goals. This thesis avoids the debate on the label of Russia's style of warfare and instead isolates the information component of this approach for separate analysis. The goal is of this work is to identify the origins and primary influences of Russian information warfare as exercised in the 2014 conflicts in Ukraine and Crimea.

This thesis argues that the information warfare practiced by Russia in recent regional conflicts is not a recent innovation as some suggest. A study of Russian information warfare instead reveals three predominant historical influences: Russian culture, the Soviet experience, and lessons from modern conflict. Investigation of these three influences reveals the unique role of information warfare as both

[7] NATO statement, "Wales Summit Declaration," September 5, 2014.
[8] Robert Jonsson and Robert Seely, "Russian Full-Spectrum Conflict: An Appraisal after Ukraine," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 28 (2015): 1–22.
[9] Jonsson and Seely, 6.

an instrument that facilitates Moscow's control of Russian society and an actively employed weapon in foreign conflicts.

Importantly, an objective account of reality, or truth, has little bearing in the Russian conception of information. Instead, information is an instrument, and the quality of the instrument is determined by its ability to assist the Russian state in advancing centuries-old foreign and domestic political objectives: consolidated control of the domestic population, security from the foreign threat, and ever-expanding influence. Jolanta Darczewska at the Center for Eastern Studies writes that most Russian authors understand information warfare according to this instrumental view. The Russian concept of information warfare involves "influencing the consciousness of the masses as part of the rivalry between the different civilizational systems adopted by different countries in the information space by use of special means to control information resources as 'information weapons.'"[10]

The US analog of Russian information warfare is typically labeled "information operations" and is characterized in official doctrine as the "integrated employment, during military operations, of information-related capabilities in concert with other lines of operation to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision making of adversaries and potential adversaries while protecting our own."[11] Along with this definition, Joint Publication 3-13 outlines a framework for defining the information environment that includes cognitive, physical and informational dimensions. From this framework, the RAND corporation derived an illustration (shown in figure 1-1) that conceptualizes these various components of the information environment. Any comprehensive

[10] Jolanta Darczewska, "The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare," Point of View (Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, May 2014), 12.
[11] The Joint Staff, "Joint Publication 3-13: Information Operations" (US Department of Defense, November 20, 2014).

analysis of a subject like "information warfare" could include separate investigation of these broad and interrelated elements.[12]

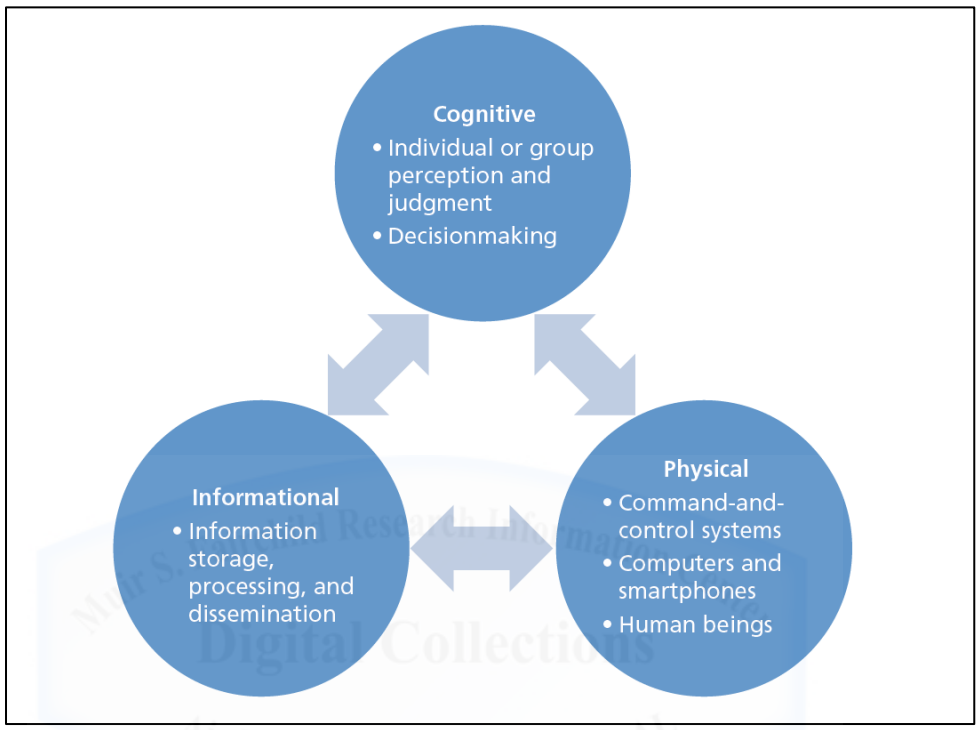

Figure 1. Components of the Information Environment
Source: William Marcellino et al., *Monitoring Social Media: Lessons for Future Department of Defense Social Media Analysis in Support of Information Operations* (RAND Corporation, 2017), p. 8

This thesis concentrates focuses on the interaction between the cognitive and physical components illustrated in figure 1-1—between humans and the messages or perceptions that influence them. This thesis explores the narratives, themes, and influences that inform Russian consciousness and decision making, and investigates Russia's deliberate use of informational themes to message disparate audiences: domestic, regional, and global. Finally, this thesis analyzes the way Russia presents the conflict environment to foreign and domestic

[12] William Marcellino et al., *Monitoring Social Media: Lessons for Future Department of Defense Social Media Analysis in Support of Information Operations* (RAND Corporation, 2017), 8–9.

audiences and shapes this narrative in pursuit of long-term strategic advantage over international competitors and specific, near-term regional objectives. In short, this thesis explores Russia's use of information as a weapon of war, as means to achieve political objectives independent of other means or part of a broader military effort. Russian information warfare, in contrast to the US conception of information operations, knows no delineation between war and peace. Instead, it is a vital tool of the state and an integral component of foreign and domestic policy, regardless of the presence or absence of conflict.

This thesis finds that the information warfare and the asymmetric strategic approach employed by Russia to achieve regional political goals is not a military advancement born from strength, but an adaptation in the face of weakness. Using social media "trolls" to steer the narrative toward media reports with a Russian or anti-Western bias is a cost-effective way to slow the spread of Western values and thwarting democratic movements in Russia's near-abroad. Russia faces a significant challenge in matching the modern warfare practice employed by NATO in the 2011 Libyan intervention. Though not involved with the military operation, senior Russian officials witnessed the rapid takedown of an authoritarian regime by Moscow's historical strategic adversary and took notice. Similarly, the intensification of Russia's information warfare coincided with the spread of democratic, popular revolutions in the Middle East and in former Soviet states. As a historically authoritarian state, Russia views the spread of such movements, often called "color revolutions," and the Western intervention that facilitated these revolutions as existential threats. Accordingly, it has synthesized information tools from historical, Soviet, and modern sources into an information warfare approach designed to counter both threats. This approach undermines future democratic, popular revolutions while simultaneously sowing confusion and discord within and among the US and its European allies, reducing the likelihood of Western intervention.

Information warfare also gives Russia a low-cost, seemingly low-risk way to restore its historical place as a great power. President Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000 with a vision of restoring Russian unity and strength. In 2005, he argued that the collapse of the Soviet Union was "a major geopolitical disaster of the century" and has promulgated a goal of restored Russian power and influence in the former Soviet space.[13] Russia's economy lacks the capacity necessary to enable Putin's great power goals, including a stronger military, capable of matching NATO's combined armed might or that of China. Under Western sanctions and overly dependent on extractive industries, including petroleum and gas, Moscow currently lacks the resources to gain greater financial or political leverage in the region. Russia also faces a stagnant, if not shrinking, population and workforce.

Russia off-sets these military, economic, and demographic disadvantages with an active information campaign to brand itself as a secure alternative to the United States and Europe: the "West." Sustaining this narrative for both continued domestic and foreign advantage means framing Western interests as diametrically opposed to Russia's prosperity and security—playing on fear for political gain. As this thesis argues, it also involves reviving the brand of Russian nationalism to appeal to domestic, regional, and increasingly global audiences, broadening Russia's influence and undermining that of the West. From historical, religious, and cultural sources, Russia frames its status as the truly secure, free, and conservative defender of traditional Christian values against the corrupt, imperial, and morally-debased influence of the West. Through disinformation and "active measures"—coordinated disinformation and deception activities intended to influence opinion or policies in foreign countries—Moscow's information warfare

[13] Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation" (The Kremlin, Moscow, April 25, 2005), http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931.

also weakens the political and decision-making processes of the US and Western democracies, curbing the appeal of democratic ideals on the world stage.

In addition to enhanced security at home and resurging influence abroad, Russia uses information warfare to back short-term political objectives, like the swift annexation of Crimea and the destabilization of Ukraine. In these actions, Russia secured permanent and unfettered access to the Black Sea Fleet at Sevastopol and temporarily derailed Ukraine's deepening economic and political ties with the European Union. Information warfare presented the conflict environment in a way that increased ambiguity and hid evidence of direct Russian involvement. Response to the conflict by the EU and NATO was therefore impeded, given the need for a consensus decision by these organizations.[14] While some analysists suggest that Russia will not repeat the same tactics in future regional conflicts, any future foreign involvement will be underwritten by a concerted information warfare campaign. A deeper understanding of the origins of Russia's information warfare will help anticipate and counter this future threat.

Structure

Chapter Two analyzes of the cultural influences that shape Russia's approach to information warfare. It explores the use of information in Russian society as part of the social fabric between a generally subservient population and a strong, paternalistic state. Chapter Two also looks at the predominant elements of culture in Russian society, and the particularly powerful theme of Russian nationalism—a frame that has defined Russian information warfare

[14] Michael Collier and Mary Sibierski, "NATO Allies Come to Grops with Russia's Hybrid Warfare," *AFP*, March 18, 2014, https://www.yahoo.com/news/nato-allies-come-grips-russias-hybrid-warfare-182821895.html.

during Putin's presidency. Chapter Three traces the forms of deception practiced by the Soviet military and the state intelligence service, the KGB. It explores the extensive use of *maskirovka*, active measures, disinformation, and Reflexive Control theory that became incorporated as tools of foreign policy and standard military operational art. Chapter Four explores the impact of modern conflict on Russian information warfare. It recounts the 2011 US and NATO intervention in Libya, then recasts this campaign through the lens of a hostile strategic competitor, to explore the lessons such a competitor might learn about the nature of modern conflict and the way the information campaign can be exploited for significant effect, both within the conflict itself and through the narratives that shape its interpretation by external audiences. Chapter Four ends with an analysis of an article by Gen. Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the Russian General Staff, that has captured the attention of Western analysts. In the article, Gerasimov suggests that the "rules of war have changed" as he articulates the value of information operations in achieving political objectives below the threshold of direct military conflict. Finally, Chapter Five brings together the three sources of Russian information warfare analyzed in the preceding chapters and shows how each of these influenced the conduct of military and non-military operations during the Russian annexation of Crimea and the pro-Russian insurgency in Ukraine. Chapter Six concludes this thesis with implications and recommendations on how to counter Russia's information warfare approach.

Chapter 2

Historical and Cultural Influences

In the aftermath of the Russian annexation of Crimea and the quick growth of the pro-Russian insurgency in Eastern Ukraine, political and military leadership within the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization recognized the danger and effectiveness of Russia's information operations. NATO's former Supreme Allied Commander, General Phillip Breedlove, described advanced information warfare doctrine as the most impressive part of Russia's non-linear approach to war. "All they do is frame a false narrative, get it out rapidly, and then sustain it through all of the tools that are out there, and they are very good at it!"[1]

Russia's doctrine for developing and delivering deceptive content to achieve a political objective is not a recent innovation. Long before Russia employed deception and information operations against a foreign adversary, the weapons and tactics comprising this unique and effective information warfare doctrine were perfected on its own population. And yet, in a way that may seem confusing to Western observers, the deliberate distortion of information within Russian media has long endured and enjoyed a largely ambivalent acceptance within society. Grounded in fundamental beliefs of freedom, human rights, and superior ethical standards, Western media and governments alike embrace the role of a free press, balanced reporting of issues, and avoiding accusations of "spin" or bias. The Western public, likewise, demands

[1] US Department of Defense, "NATO Commander Breedlove Discusses Implications of Hybrid War," U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, accessed March 21, 2018, https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/604334/nato-commander-breedlove-discusses-implications-of-hybrid-war/.

this characteristic of media in a search for the objective truth of an event.[2]

A better understanding of the role of information in Russian society begins by understanding the society itself. From a constructivist perspective, authority, media, and the public constitute a social fabric: representation of reality and the expected and acceptable actions of others.[3] Information, as the verbal or visual communication between elements of this social fabric, takes on the characteristics of the society from which it evolves. Understanding the unique character of Russian information operations demands an exploration of this social fabric and how it differs from that of most Western cultures. Unwrapping historical, cultural, and ideological influences will help clarify both the character of and motivations behind Russian information operations.

The Russian Social Fabric

The social fabric that forms the construct of Russian reality must be traced back to origins in the desolate steppes, harsh climate, and vast, uncontrollable expanse that formed the mindset of its peasant inhabitants. Diane Chotikul describes the impact of the Russian landscape on the psychology of society: "nature and history have combined to implant and develop in the Russian character certain traits that have helped their rulers establish and maintain a dictatorship over the people" along with the reciprocal effect of a population ready to "bow to the inevitable, and a willingness to submit to authority."[4] Similarly,

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[2] Han Bouwmeester, "Lo and Behold: Let the Truth Be Told—Russian Deception Warfare in Crimea and Ukraine and the Return of 'Maskirovka' and 'Reflexive Control Theory,'" in *Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies 2017*, NL ARMS (T.M.C. Asser Press, The Hague, 2017), 129, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6265-189-0_8.

[3] Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor, 1967), 82–84.

[4] Diane Chotikul, "The Soviet Theory of Reflexive Control in Historical and Psychocultural Perspective: Preliminary Study" (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School), 39, Calhoun Institutional Archiv e, accessed January 15, 2018, http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a170613.pdf.

Nicholas Vakar observed that this "peasant character" has persisted within the Russian psyche:

> Regardless of anything which Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, Suslov, or anyone else has written or said, they continue to be affected or even dominated by the indisputable facts of their peasant heritage, their peasant environment, their peasant tradition.[5]

For the Russian peasant, the basic political unit was the village that communally endured both harsh terrain and successive invasions or brutal authorities: Varangians in the ninth century A.D., Mongols in 1240, followed by Tsardom, and eventually totalitarianism under Communist rule. Largely landlocked and surrounded by an expansive border, the security of the Russian population demanded the absolute control of the leader.[6] Conversely, a large and disparate peasant population could pose a significant threat to any ruling regime. Russia's social fabric thus evolved into a deeply ingrained emphasis on control of the population by the autocrat, the acceptance of autocratic control by the population, the psychological importance of a strong leader to the survival of the Russian people, and a "siege" mentality derived from the sense of vulnerability felt by the population to invasion from the outside.[7]

This legacy of authoritarian rule has, in general, increased from the 15th century onward, as opposed to a declining trend of authoritarianism in the West.[8] Where Western societies increasingly embraced liberalism and viewed government with greater skepticism, Russian society did the opposite. Western observers traveling to Russia have noted a general acceptance of a strong government within the

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[5] Nicholas P. Vakar, *The Taproot of Soviet Society*, 1st edition (Harper, 1962), ix.
[6] Ronald Hingley, *The Russian Mind*, First Edition edition (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977), 25–30.
[7] Chotikul, "The Soviet Theory of Reflexive Control in Historical and Psychocultural Perspective: Preliminary Study," 50; Hingley, *The Russian Mind*, 195.
[8] Hingley, *The Russian Mind*, 41.

Russian culture. American author John Steinbeck noted the following observation traveling to the Soviet Union in 1947:

> It seems to us that one of the deepest divisions between the Russians and the Americans or British, is in their feeling toward their governments. The Russians are taught, trained, and encouraged to believe that their government is good, that every part of it is good, and that their job is to carry it forward, to back it up in all ways. On the other hand, the deep emotional feeling among Americans or British is that all government is somehow dangerous, that there should be as little government as possible, that any increase in the power of the government is bad, and that existing government must be watched constantly, watched and criticized to keep it sharp and on its toes.[9]

Western historians and political scientists have expressed similar views regarding the origins of a distinct Russian political culture. Richard Pipes traced the development of a distinct Russian 'patrimonial' rule to the historical peasant class, "wholly accepting of an autocratic order."[10] Other historians note different origins of autocratic rule within Russian culture, but nevertheless identify its continuity across centuries.[11] Edward Keenan found that political orientations "emphasizing traditional patterns of centralization and authority have been dominant features since the establishment of Muscovite rule in the sixteenth century."[12] American diplomat and political scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski endorsed this view of a patrimonial tradition in Russian culture during the Soviet-era, arguing that Soviet politics "cannot be separated from Russian history" and that the "central and significant

[9] Marcel Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism*, 2 edition (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015), 111.
[10] Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime: Second Edition*, 2nd Second Edition, Revised ed. edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 21.
[11] Jeffrey W. Hahn, "Continuity and Change in Russian Political Culture," *British Journal of Political Science* 21, no. 4 (October 1991): 397.
[12] Edward L Keenan, "Muscovite Political Folkways," *The Russian Review* 45, no. 2 (April 1986): 126.

reality of Russian politics has been its predominantly autocratic character."[13]

Russian Autocracy and Information

The political culture that emerges from the Russian social fabric is one that emphasizes the need for a strong leader to defend against a perceived threat from the outside. Contrary to Western tradition, this preference for authority supersedes the importance of an unbiased, objective press, and the purpose of information from this political authority is not to inform, but to control. For centuries, this instrumental view of information of facilitated a Russian tradition where facts were distorted to enhance the authority of the ruler. Ronald Hingley observed the "the re-writing of history to suit official myth was a common procedure to Tsarist and post-Tsarist Russia alike."[14] In Tsarist times, Catherine the Great has been said to have "erected self-advertisement into a system of government."[15] Media is a tool of the state, defined by the Soviets as "the means of mass information and propaganda."[16] In post-Soviet Russia, this trend has only continued.

Charles Clover wrote of two recent Putin-era trends that carry on the media tradition of control. The first, dubbed "political technology" is a method of polling, focus groups and spin-doctoring conducted by the Kremlin to understand, manipulate, and capitalize on public opinion.[17] Opposition political parties are created by the Kremlin as facades to maintain a "managed democracy" in ways that maintain Putin's political

[13] Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Soviet Politics: From the Future to the Past?," in *The Dynamics of Soviet Politics*, ed. Paul Cocks, Robert V. Daniels, and Nancy Whittier Heer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), 337.
[14] Hingley, *The Russian Mind*, 157.
[15] Hingley, 93.
[16] Brian McNair, *Glasnost, Perestroika and the Soviet Media* (Routledge, 2006), 5.
[17] Charles Clover, *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism*, Reprint edition (Yale University Press, 2017), 267.

advantage.[18] The second trend involves measures to nationalize mainstream Russian media outlets by the forced removal (under charges of tax evasion, for example) of independent TV executives in favor of Kremlin loyalists. This tightly coupled political-media system was presided over from 1999-2011 by Vladislav Surkov, head of the Kremlin's department of domestic politics, who "ensured that every political persuasion had a voice provided by a Kremlin-backed political party or movement. The goal was to manage dissent, not crush it."[19] Surkov would channel messages through mainstream Russian news outlets that reinforced themes determined by the Kremlin's political authorities.

A tightly-controlled but ostensibly free Russian media environment, along with an inherent faith in the legitimacy of a strong, autocratic government limiting personal freedom, may seem odd when viewed through the Western lens. This duality is an example of a psychological phenomenon, *dvoemyslie*—doublethink or doublemindedness—that students of Russian culture have attributed to the Russian social fabric. Chotikul describes "*dvoemyslie* as "living contrary to one's convictions, or adaptation out of necessity, convenience, or careerism."[20] According to Hingley, this cognitive process allows the mind to mentally reconcile two completely irreconcilable ideas, or to keep "two entirely separate mental account books, the one for ideal, the other for actual, transactions."[21] He further states this psychological trend originated, most plausibly, as an individual and communal protection mechanism for both the peasant and the ruling authority alike. A perfect example of *dvoemyslie* is the famous quote by Stalin: "A diplomat's words must have no relation to actions—otherwise what kind of diplomacy is it? Words are one thing, actions another. Good words are

[18] Clover, 272.
[19] Clover, 275.
[20] Chotikul, "The Soviet Theory of Reflexive Control in Historical and Psychocultural Perspective: Preliminary Study," 66.
[21] Hingley, *The Russian Mind*, 48.

a concealment of bad deeds. Sincere diplomacy is no more possible than dry water or iron wood."[22] *Dvoemyslie* is a consistent psychological mechanism within the Russian social framework that enabled popular support of a strong, legitimate state authority, yet endure misleading information or even suffering at the hand of the same leader.

Another related Russian cognitive trend related to *dvoemyslie* is *vranyo*, the Russian brand of "white lie." Distinguished from *lozh* or actual lies or untruths, *vranyo* is a slight distortion of the truth that is, importantly, highly plausible and grounded in reality. Hingley again traces the origins of *vranyo* to peasant survival of harsh reality:

> For ages the peasantry were exposed to the arbitrary power and ruthless exactions of those who were placed over them; and as the law gave them no means of legally protecting themselves, their only means of self-defense was deceit. If ordinary Russians have for centuries lied to their authorities, those authorities have been in no position to complain, owing to the high degree of institutionalized mendacity which they themselves have practiced and which has not been calculated to set a good example to the lower orders.[23]

Several important observations flow from this analysis. First, *vranyo* is two-way communicative relationship between the sender and receiver that exploits the receiver's cognitive map or constructed reality. Also, as this deliberate and more innocent form of untruth is more accepted in Russian society, it will commonly be found in communicative relationships between authority and people, especially in the media and information domain. *Vranyo*, as a tool in authoritarian communication, naturally implies a culture of extreme institutional secrecy: concealing the truth and maintaining the plausible "white lie." Finally, *vranyo* is intentionally deceptive and seeks to subtly alter the recipient's constructed reality without setting off triggers of the more serious

[22] Charles Freeman Jr., *Diplomat's Dictionary* (DIANE Publishing, 1994), 413.
[23] Hingley, *The Russian Mind*, 89.

untruth, *lozh*. Russian writers have even described *vranyo* as artful, and "like good storytelling."[24] It will thus, when manifested in the modern media environment, appear smooth, polished, and wholly truthful to the complacent or Western observer. Sir Michael Fallon, British Defence Secretary, recently called *vranyo* an integral part of Russia's information warfare approach:

> Today we see a country that, in weaponizing misinformation, has created what we might now see as a post-truth age... There is a special Russian word for this, *vranyo*, where the listener knows the speaker is lying and the speaker knows the listener knows he is lying but keeps lying anyway.[25]

From the historical and cultural fabric outlined above, three main themes emerge that form the character of information in Russian society, as practiced by state authority since Tsarist times. First, information plays a prominent role in enforcing domestic policy. Unlike the West, the purpose of information, especially the mainstream media, is not to inform the public or provide a check to authority. Instead, information has the express purpose of sustaining and enhancing the control of the authority over the masses. Flowing from this main objective, information can propagate through society while being inherently inconsistent with reality due to the pervasiveness of *dvoemyslie*. Finally, information intending to deceive or control the audience will be deliberately false but covered in a thin veneer of truth. It will appear truthful and be implicitly trusted unless the receiver is primed to distrust the sender. Throughout history, Russia's unique authoritarian culture has created an environment where the truth is made ambiguous, and the ambiguous is made more truthful, all in the interest of state control.

[24] Hingley, 90–95.
[25] "Britain Says Russia Is Trying to Undermine West by 'Weaponizing...," *Reuters*, February 3, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-russia/britain-says-russia-is-trying-to-undermine-west-by-weaponizing-misinformation-idUSKBN15I0U0.

While historical and cultural fabric explains the character of Russia's approach to information operations, these elements largely define information as a tool for increasing domestic control by the reigning authority. Nevertheless, a common historical experience and cultural fabric shared by a society will also form the basis of a common ideology: a system of ideas or ideals that forms the basis of an economic or political theory and policy. A distinct and enduring feature of Russian ideology is the notion of defending national sovereignty from foreign threats. Andrei Kolesnikov describes modern-day Russian ideology as a mystifying matrix of historical experiences, traditions, religion, and authority with one important mandate: protecting the distinctness and sovereignty of the Russian civilization-state.[26] Along these lines, Putin invoked the theme of protecting Russian sovereignty from external "subjugation" during speeches in 2014.[27] This explicit rejection of external subjugation by a major power appeared unwarranted by foreign audiences. However, a deeper dive into the nature of Russian nationalism clarifies the gravity of Putin's stand. Furthermore, the distinct features of Russian nationalism also augment the historical-cultural elements outlined above to further explain the character of information operations in Russian conflict.

Russian Ideology

The most persistent information themes in culture will manifest as ideologies or values central to society and will have a unique ability to inspire. Historical examples of powerful information themes are grounded in religion, the concept of a homeland, or pride in a common

[26] Andrei Kolesnikov, "Russian Ideology After Crimea," Carnegie Moscow Center, accessed January 29, 2018, http://carnegie.ru/2015/09/22/russian-ideology-after-crimea-pub-61350.
[27] Tom Parfitt, "Vladimir Putin Vows That United States 'Will Never Subjugate Russia,'" November 18, 2014, sec. World, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/vladimir-putin/11239052/Vladimir-Putin-vows-that-United-States-will-never-subjugate-Russia.html.

bloodline. Such modern Western information themes ascribe universal values of freedom and opportunity. Perhaps no other information theme has fundamentally altered the course of modern history as nationalism: the sovereignty of a common people over a homeland. Ernest Gellner has observed that "wherever the idea of 'nationalism' has taken root, it has tended to prevail with ease over other modern ideologies."[28] Tracing the ideology of nationalism from Russian history through the Putin-era reveals three interrelated features of Russian nationalism: imperial expansion, transnationalism, and Eurasianism.

Imperial expansion traces to the very origins of Russian society when rulers confronted the unique geographic and economic conditions of an expansive frontier prone to invasion. The vastness and emptiness of the Russian landscape facilitated rapid expansion toward Siberia that accelerated as the Mongols were driven back from the Eurasian steppe. Early Tsars Ivan III and Ivan IV accelerated this expansion to secure the land from subsequent invasions. Territorial gain eventually became so closely linked to securing the vast land border that the need to expand became the tendency of every tsar and tsarina, as evidenced by Catherine the Great: "I have no way to defend my borders but to extend them."[29] The early Russian economy, based on agriculture in feudal properties, supported this expansion. Van Herpen notes that early Russian landlords "had only two methods to increase profits: increasing exploitation of the serfs or adding new land."[30] With a limit to what the serfs could reasonably endure, expansion thus became the sole means of profit.

Similarly, Russian tsars continued this expansionist trend by compensating state service with property. "The logic of war-making and state-making in a region of little capital led rulers to buy officeholders

[28] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism, Second Edition*, 2 edition (Cornell University Press, 2009).
[29] Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars*, 17.
[30] Van Herpen, 16.

with expropriated land."[31] Russia's geographical context of a sparsely-inhabited frontier has contributed to a unique degree of imperial expansion that has endured for centuries. As Colin Gray noted, territorial expansion is "the Russian way":

> It is estimated … that between the middle of the 16th century and the end of the 17th, Russia conquered territory the size of the modern Netherlands every year for 150 years running. Furthermore, unlike the case of most other imperial powers conquest by Russia became a permanent and non-negotiable political fact.[32]

Another feature of Russia's enduring ideology is its transnational character. Edward Luttwak wrote that this aspect of Russian nationalism traces to the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and the subsequent civil war when a transnational communist ideology both preserved the Russian empire and expanded its control under the authority of transnational communism.[33] The October Revolution began by promising a new beginning for Russia: the end of the tsarist era and the right of national self-determination. The counter-revolution and ensuing civil war led ultimately to a new federation, imperial in form yet characterized as a voluntary association of socialist republics. Marcel Van Herpen wrote under the establishment of the Soviet Union, "inward looking nineteenth-century nationalism had changed into an outward-looking universalism based on Marxist theory and social revolution."[34] This new universalism expanded Russia's imperial scope to include satellite nations under Soviet control, while at the same time creating a psychological imprint in the minds of the Russian people as the vanguards of world revolution, united with other Soviet satellite states in an epochal and ideological struggle.[35]

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[31] Van Herpen, 16.
[32] Colin Gray, *Geopolitics of the Nuclear Era: Heartland, Rimlands, and the Technological Revolution*, Reprint edition (New York: Crane Russak & Co, 1977), 35.
[33] Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Soviet Union* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), 1–2.
[34] Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars*, 41.
[35] Van Herpen, 40.

In addition to changing the form of Russian nationalism, the Soviet experience also gave this ideology new character. First, it enhanced the sense of vulnerability endemic to Russian socio-cultural fabric through the fear and suspicion that characterized Soviet control. It also reinforced the persistent siege mentality by pitting the Soviet Union in a worldwide ideological struggle against the West, led by the United States. Russian nationalism, repressed by communist authority of the Soviet Union, thus took on enduring transnational and anti-Western themes. Eventually, a more traditional Russian nationalism would prevail, partly contributing to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Nevertheless, the transnational and anti-Western ideologies of the Cold War would leave lasting imprints on the character of Russian nationalism.

Another source of transnational ideology in Russian nationalism is found in the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church. Except for the Soviet-era, religion played a dominant role in Russian history and traces to the earliest beginnings of the Russian state. Grand Prince Vladimir the Great consolidated a federation of East Slavic tribes covering modern-day Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine into Kievan Rus, and ruled this federation from 980-1015. Vladimir converted to Christianity in 988 and subsequently Christianized Kievan Rus, setting in motion a unity of Church and Empire that endured until the doctrine of "state atheism" under the Soviet Union.[36] After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Russia became the only Orthodox country in the world, which solidified the special status of the Russian Tsar as the protector and defender of the Orthodox Church. Moscow began calling itself the "Third Rome" and a unique transnational messianism emerged: "Russia considered itself to be the only real source of salvation for mankind."[37] While Soviet propaganda included a messianic narrative—Russians as the forebearers

[36] John Garrard and Carol Garrard, *Russian Orthodoxy Resurgent: Faith and Power in the New Russia*, Reprint edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 148.
[37] Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars*, 33.

of worldwide Marxist-Leninist revolution—the concept of Russia as a transnational messianic state long-predated the Soviet Union. The Soviet-era merely secularized the transnational thought already established by the Russian Orthodox Church. In *The New Tsar*, Steven Lee Myers argues that the Russian Orthodox Church has enjoyed a recent resurgence after the repression of the Soviet-era. President Putin has branded the Russian government as the protector of conservative social and cultural values by restoring Moscow's historical ties with the Russian Orthodox Church.[38] In this narrative, Putin tapped into a nostalgia for the elevated status of the Church that resonates with a transnational community of religious faithful spanning more than 60 countries.[39]

The third form of Russian nationalism that has gained recent prominence in the Putin-era is Eurasianism, an ideology with intellectual roots in the 1920s that fuses cultural heritage with geopolitical theory and divides the world into opposing Eastern and Western spheres. Traditional Eurasianism identifies all Slavic, Mongol, and Oriental Eastern civilizations with the broader European and Asian continents. It also presupposes contrasting philosophies: the "West" is a world of "change, rationality, and mechanism," where the "East" is defined by "stability, conservatism, and religion."[40] As a political ideology, Eurasianism resurfaced in conservative Russian circles after the fall of the Soviet Union and bore a distinctly expansionist and anti-western character. Resurrected by Russian historian and ethnologist Lev Gumilev, Eurasianism gained increasing support during the 1990s as it

[38] Steven Lee Myers, *The New Tsar: The Rise and Reign of Vladimir Putin*, Reprint edition (Vintage, 2016), 404.
[39] "Russian Orthodox Church," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed May 17, 2018, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Russian-Orthodox-church.
[40] Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*, Reprint edition (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 115–17.

envisioned a Russia restored to its ideological and political importance on the world stage.[41]

Modern Eurasianism reinforces themes already mentioned in the above analysis of the expansionist and transnationalist features of Russian nationalism. It deliberately seeks an expanded Russian sphere of influence that extends from Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and Turkey through Mongolia and East Asia.[42] Additionally, it unites cultural groups of Slavic and Asian lineages under a common conservative and anti-western ideology. Eurasianism elevates the importance of Slavic and Eastern European heritage along with conservative symbols of cultural tradition and the Orthodox church.[43] It thus positions Russia as the protector of Eurasian civilizations and conservative values from the influence of a liberal West.

Gumilev's modern re-casting of Eurasianism draws heavily on geopolitical theory, particularly H. J. Mackinder's heartland view of strategic geography. Mackinder's theory of geopolitics divides the world into a "world-island" comprised of the bulk of the African, European and Asian continents, and various satellite continents and islands: North America, South America, Britain, Japan, Malaya, and Australia. The world island included a geographic center or "heartland" that provided ample resources for growth but was outside reach of sea-faring peoples. This heartland region stretched from the "icy, flat shore of Siberia to the torrid, steep coasts of Baluchistan and Persia, and is inaccessible to navigation from the ocean."[44] The bulk of the habitable heartland included Eastern Europe. In addition to security from sea-faring threats, Mackinder argued that the heartland possessed resource endowments: food, minerals, and space, that gave the world island a strategic

[41] Laruelle, 118.
[42] Laruelle, 118.
[43] Laruelle, 120.
[44] Halford John Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Forgotten Books, 2017), 55.

advantage over satellite continents. Thus, he postulated: "He who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World Island commands the World."[45] Eurasianism revives this notion of a strategic significance to Eastern Europe and envisions this region under exclusive Russian control or influence. The modern political manifestation of Russia's Eurasianist movement is the proposal of a "Eurasian Union" to bind Russia and Eastern European nations economically and politically, offering an alternative European integration product to the European Union.[46]

Summary and Implications

Combining historical and cultural fabric with an analysis of main themes in Russian nationalism yields several important conclusions and implications about Russia's use of information for domestic, regional, and global audiences. First, the ultimate purpose of information is to enhance the strength or security of the state. State-backed information within media and political rhetoric is generally accepted by Russian society if it supports the state's ability to secure and control the population. An unbiased account of "truth" is less important to the Russian citizen provided the content of information supports a strong authority. To maintain the appearance of truth, state authorities or state-sponsored media will deliberately distort reality with misinformation or disinformation, based on *vranyo,* while shrouding truth in secrecy. The siege mentality embedded in the Russian psyche and historical experience implies that the paramount objective of security informs the character of information aimed at domestic and foreign

[45] Mackinder, 150.
[46] Van Herpen, *Putin's Wars*, 80.

audiences. Expansion of state power enhances the security and stability of Russian people, and thus legitimizes disinformation as a deliberate tool of foreign policy. The Russian history of expansion in the face of a retreating foreign threat (the *horror vacui* of the Tsars) also suggests that Russian influence and information efforts could increase in intensity following any withdrawal of the United States influence of world order. State-sponsored information will also address foreign and domestic security concerns by elevating Moscow's defense of traditional culture, conservative values, religion, strength, and character of the Russian people. In this way, it will continue one of the distinctive elements of Russian nationalism: an identity based on alterity, or an alternative to the West. Deriving from an inherent sense of vulnerability and insecurity of Russian cultural and historical suspicion of the other, Russia's information warfare will deliberately target Western values and perceived strengths: transparency, objective media, and a commitment to the rule of law.

Russian nationalism thus combines with the cultural and historical psychological factors described above to create a unique view of conflict that is holistic in nature, knowing no distinct boundaries between war and peace. The interaction of these cultural and historical factors—authoritarianism, geopolitical vulnerability, siege mentality, cultural messianism, and a form of nationalism based on expansionist and anti-Western themes—creates a Russian tendency to pursue strength and security through perpetual struggle. Indeed, the notion of progress through conflict is central to Marxist philosophy, informed the Leninist theory of revolution and war, and subsequently defined Soviet foreign policy. For the Communist party, the terms "war" and "peace" were interchangeable, used to fit the propaganda line of the moment. The Cominform, used to coordinate actions between Communist parties under Soviet direction, set the following policy in 1947:

> The communist agitation programme is to be carried out by means of the 'peace' campaign and "peace" is to be used as the principal theme to justify whatever local communist interests demand. In particular, all attempts to build upon any organization to resist the possible use of force by the Soviet Union must be prevented."[47]

The Soviet era thus enshrined a view of conflict with no distinct lines between peace and war, only a perpetual struggle for expansion under the control of a strong and unquestioned authority. Information enables this struggle by framing context in whatever way necessary to facilitate this control, and society has accepted this mendacity as the necessary price of security.

[47] John C. Clews, *Communist Propaganda Techniques* (F.A. Praeger, 1964), 78.

Chapter 3

Soviet Influences

This chapter begins with the theory and nature of deception, outlines a framework of deception types, then explores a unique Russian style of deception developed and practice by Soviet conventional forces and the communist regime's chief security service, the *Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti* (KGB). In addition to Russia's historical, cultural, and ideological background, this Soviet and KGB deception style offers another formative source of Russia's current information warfare doctrine.

Deception in warfare is nothing new. Sun Tzu claimed that "all warfare is based on deception,"[1] and Clausewitz emphasized the importance of "cunning" as a form of deceit intended to surprise an adversary and gain an advantage in the face of weakness.[2] More recent academic perspectives define deception as the "deliberate misrepresentation of reality to gain a competitive advantage."[3] While any strategy seeks an asymmetric advantage over an opponent, many writers claim that deception has lost prominence in the recent Western style of warfare.

The principle of surprise allows a military commander to control the time, place, and circumstances of the engagement. For the modern US military, the advantage of surprise is not achieved primarily by deception but by employing advanced technologies—stealth and precision—and controlling the battlespace to determine the time and

[1] Sun Tzu, *The Illustrated Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 161.
[2] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War, Indexed Edition*, trans. Michael Eliot Howard and Peter Paret, Reprint edition (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1989), 202.
[3] Donald C. Daniel and Katherine L. Herbig, eds., *Strategic Military Deception* (New York: Pergamon Pr, 1982), 3.

place of attack. Furthermore, conventional superiority of US forces against military threats has obviated the need for deception to gain a tactical or operational advantage. Deception has thus become unnecessary to Western democracies, and most have embraced a chivalrous code in which "freedom, human rights, and superior ethical standards are paramount."[4] From this perspective, deception warfare can be viewed as 'trickery' and counter to this code: "Just as 'Gentlemen do not open each other's mail,' so decent people should not engage in what is sometimes seen as indecent activity."[5] As US forces sustain conventional superiority, any wise adversary will employ pursuing an asymmetric advantage through highly-coordinated deception.

Perception and Deception

Deception owes its success to the frailty of the human mind. In the 1960s, Herbert Simon advanced the idea of bounded or limited rationality to explain the idea that humans intend to make rational decisions, but these decisions are prone to errors in predictable ways.[6] Perception is the process that links the individual to his or her environment, yet it is subjective and prone to error, "constructing rather than recording reality."[7] Robert Jervis writes that "perceptions of the world and other actors diverge from reality in patterns that we can detect and for reasons that we can understand."[8]

Psychologist and economist Daniel Kahneman explains these patterns of erroneous perception, or "biases," deriving from an

[4] Bouwmeester, "Lo and Behold," 128.
[5] John Gooch, ed., *Military Deception and Strategic Surprise!*, 1 edition (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), 1.
[6] Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2 edition (New York: Pearson, 1999), 20.
[7] Richards J. Heuer Jr., "Cognitive Factors in Deception and Counterdeception," in *Strategic Military Deception*, ed. Donald C. Daniel and Katherine L. Herbig (New York, NY: Pergamon Pr, 1982), 33.
[8] Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, New edition with a went from a delayed paperback to simultaneous edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 3.

interaction of two primary modes of human cognition: one automatic and effortless, and another mobilized to perform complex mental activities that demand more attention.[9] In this framework, the automatic system will quickly work to make sense of new information, but commonly uses heuristics to solve a problem it has not encountered before. "When searching for an answer to a question, [the automatic mode] will simultaneously generate answers to related questions, and it may substitute a response that more easily comes to mind for the one that was requested."[10] The aim of deception, therefore, is to exploit biases and create a false reality in the mind of the adversary decision-maker.

Several perception and cognitive biases are particularly important to understanding the Russian style of deception. The first is the concept of coherence, or the "tendency to continue perceiving an object in the same manner even though the object of our perception may change."[11] Perceptions are quick to form but resistant to change. Kahneman writes that the main function of the automatic cognitive mode is to maintain and update a model of the personal world that allows for more effortless performing of routing tasks.[12] The downside of this mode is that gradual, evolutionary change can go unnoticed. An attentive observer of enemy activity can be lulled into complacency and caught off guard if a more hostile movement is concealed in "routine" activity.

Ambiguity also greatly complicates perception. Exposure to ambiguous or contradicting stimuli will interfere with accurate perception even after more and better information becomes available. As a result, intelligence analysts can form a tentative hypothesis about an

[9] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 1st edition (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 415.
[10] Kahneman, 105.
[11] Heuer Jr., "Cognitive Factors in Deception and Counterdeception," 36.
[12] Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 61.

ambiguous situation, and this tentative hypothesis will endure and continue to impact subsequent perceptions.[13]

Coherence and ambiguity can combine to create an especially challenging situation: in situations of incoherent and contradictory signals, under acute time pressure and stress, the human mind will form initial beliefs about the scenario that are difficult to change with subsequent contrary evidence.[14] Under ambiguity and information overload, people will more readily believe information consistent with previously-formed judgments or prejudices. These prejudices can be difficult to change and are the basis of most successful deception strategies. Lenin's famous dictum on deception is thus: "Tell them what they want to believe."[15] An opponent's cognitive and perception biases can be exploited to hide one's true aims by shaping a situation: establishing a routine pattern, concealing true intent within this pattern, then acting quickly to achieve a military objective while inserting confusing and contradictory information to the target.

Deception: A Theoretical Framework

Providing a theoretical framework for categorizing deception, Daniel and Herbig distinguish two broad categories that operate against a target in different ways. Ambiguity-increasing, or A-type deception, confuses a target so that it is unsure as what to believe. This type of deception deliberately targets perception and cognition biases by interfering with any attempt to construct an accurate representation of reality or change this representation in the face of contradictory information. Effective A-type deception can include deliberately injecting incoherent or confusing signals to the target through various "channels,"

[13] Heuer Jr., "Cognitive Factors in Deception and Counterdeception," 40.
[14] Heuer Jr., 42.
[15] Daniel and Herbig, *Strategic Military Deception*, 32.

or communication links between the deceiver and target. Also, this type of deception seeks to keep the level of ambiguity high enough to protect the secret of the actual operation. For success, A-type deceptions require that the deceiver's lies be plausible enough and consequential enough that the target cannot ignore them. A-type deception uses decoys, camouflage, cover, and feints to create conflicting and uncertain representations of reality. The second type of deception, M-type, reduces ambiguity around and increases the attractiveness of a single wrong alternative.[16] Where A-type conceals truth with multiple plausible alternatives, M-type misleads by providing a singular, coherent alternative of reality based on false evidence.

In addition to providing a categorical framework for deception types, Daniel and Herbig point out several challenges for the deceiver. First, deceiver's objective is for the target to recreate a misleading "puzzle" or sensed reality of a strategic situation. To be successful, the deceiver must control and infuse multiple credible channels with puzzle-pieces that the target then assembles according to its own perceptions and processes. Thus, a deceiver can rarely control whether these puzzle-pieces are sensed, interpreted, and assembled in the desired way. Second, deception becomes difficult to sustain, as time allows for more information from other channels to provide a more objective representation of reality. Relatedly, successful deception must constantly adapt to changing context to continue deceiving the target. As a result, the existence of a feedback mechanism that allows the deceiver to understand the target's perceptions, attitudes, and reactions is a vital element of successful deception. Feedback permits a deceiver to adapt to changing circumstances and tailor the deception to the target's prejudices.[17]

[16] Daniel and Herbig, 5–6.
[17] Daniel and Herbig, 9–16.

Despite the challenges facing the deceiver, one can gain the critical advantage of strategic initiative in deception if the target is unwitting of hostile intent or circumstance. Accordingly, declared or understood hostilities favor the target, as they are now vigilant and wary of potential deception. The absence of unambiguous conflict thus favors deceiver, as it has the advantage of initiative and can often define reality for an unsuspecting target.[18]

Daniel and Herbig thus describe deception as an art—difficult to master. They also point out several strategic and cultural factors that can create proclivities toward, and success in implementing deception. Both A and M-type deception require secrecy of true intentions and the development of several (or one) plausible but false alternative. As concealment of true intent is difficult to sustain over time and throughout large organizations, the most successful deceivers will be cultures that prioritize secrecy, authority, and control above individual initiative and organizational accountability. Few Western nations are comfortable with the idea of concealing true national or organization policy aims from the masses.[19] Additionally, an authority must be able to directly influence multiple communication channels to a target. This puts Western cultures that prize objective and unbiased media at a disadvantage unless faced with declared war.

Because successful deception relies on strategic initiative, cultures that view war as a discrete phenomenon, with a clear delineation between war and peace, are at a disadvantage against adversaries that take a more holistic and perpetual view of conflict. Also, cultures comfortable with subjective, rather than objective reality, will be more adept at creating a plausible false narrative a lie that is in harmony with the overall situation. Finally, cultures or organizations that face an

[18] Daniel and Herbig, 15.
[19] Daniel and Herbig, 13.

adversary from a real or perceived disadvantage or vulnerability will be more likely to lower costs of action through deception.[20] In summary, the notions of state authority, a control of information, the ubiquity of *vranyo*, and an enduring "siege mentality" discussed in chapter 2 provide Russia with distinct cultural advantages in the art of deception. Linking types and methods of deception to certain cultural factors suggests that deception will manifest differently from culture to culture. The next section uncovers the unique Russian "style" of strategic deception as developed and practiced during the Soviet era.

Soviet Strategic Deception

Analysts of Soviet strategic deception techniques in the 1980s assessed deception practice along broad themes of *maskirovka*, active measures, and Reflexive Control theory. The closest translation for *maskirovka* is 'masking' or 'camouflage,' but Soviet operational use of the term encompassed much more than blending forces or equipment with the surrounding environment.[21] It instead related to a broad range of measures conducted by Soviet armed forces to confuse or mislead an adversary. *Maskirovka* is a strictly military term, while 'active measures' refers to specialized political action aimed at influencing foreign public opinion. Despite the organizational distinction between the two deception techniques, they share the same goal of confusing or misleading the enemy through combinations of M-type (misleading) and A-type (ambiguity increasing) deception. Soviet doctrine identified four broad categories of *maskirovka*:

1. Camouflage (*skrytiye*): Any natural or technical means used for purposes of concealment.

[20] Daniel and Herbig, 17.
[21] Richards J. Heuer Jr., "Soviet Organization and Docrtine for Strategic Deception," in *Soviet Strategic Deception*, ed. Brian D. Dailey and Patrick J. Parker (Stanford, Calif. : Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books, 1987), 42.

2. Simulation or Imitation (*imitasiya*): Decoys, dummies, fake weapons effects, any action to change the identifying characteristics of weapons, installations, or force groupings.

3. Feints and demonstrations (*demonstrativnye deystviye* or *manuvry*): Military movements or combat actions to disguise true intentions or to cause the enemy to take a desired action.

4. Disinformation (*dezinformatsiya*): Dissemination of false or misleading information by technical means of communication, the media, agents, or false documents.[22]

The Soviet Military Encyclopedia entry on *maskirovka* identifies the practice as a component of military operations at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of military activity.[23] Similar techniques exist in the doctrine of most armed forces around the world. Indeed, concealment and deception are standard elements of military art and included to some degree in most military doctrine. What separated Soviet deception doctrine from contemporaneous NATO methods was its widespread and coordinated application.[24] Where NATO viewed camouflage as a passive security measure to avoid detection, *maskirovka* was an active and continuing process involving elements of all four categories outlined above. Additionally, *maskirovka* was defined as an operational function, not a staff function, meaning it was directed by the military commander. This distinction meant that a Soviet officer was compelled by regulations to employ some form of *maskirovka* to aid his attack.[25]

The Soviet term active measures (*aktivnyye meroriyatiya*) described a variety of deceptive techniques to promote Soviet foreign policy goals and undermine those who oppose Soviet actions. The term predominately

[22] Heuer Jr., 43.
[23] Heuer Jr., 43.
[24] Michael Dewar, *The Art of Deception in Warfare*, First Edition edition (Newton Abbot, Devon : New York, NY: David & Charles Uk, 1989), 115.
[25] Dewar, 115–20.

refers to coordinated deception activity conducted by the intelligence community, where 'active measures' distinguished KGB operations intended to influence opinions or policies in foreign countries from more classic espionage or counterintelligence. KGB active measures included an array of tactics designed to subvert adversaries by undermining their policy objectives or shaping world opinion, including:

1. Agents of influence: the use of well-placed, controlled agents who consciously serve Soviet matters while retaining integrity on other matters. Once manipulated and placed, the KGB sought ways to motivate and help that agent become a successful advocate for a certain issue within their circle of influence.

2. Covert propaganda: Articles supporting false information themes were placed into Western and Third World press, without attribution to Soviet origin. Covert propaganda targeted conservative or moderate publications, as material in left-wing publications was usually handled openly through Communist Party contacts.

3. Disinformation (*dezinformatsiya*): Forgeries, fabrications and modified versions of US government documents were used to incite enmity toward the United States. Another common disinformation technique used witting or unwitting agents to disseminate false stories serving Soviet interests.[26]

Again, covert activity is widespread in the foreign policy stage, but Soviet active measures were unique from American covert action in fundamental ways. First, where US covert activities are limited to intelligence organizations, Soviet active measures blended overt and covert influence activities across government and private organizations through centralized coordination of these activities at the highest levels of government. Soviet active measures were also largely immune from legal and political constraints. Active measures were thus systematic, coordinated, and had unrestrained access to a broad array of Soviet

[26] Heuer Jr., "Soviet Organization and Docrtine for Strategic Deception," 28–30.

organizations with foreign interactions.[27] Like *maskirovka*, active measures can blend both A-type and M-type deception methods. However, Sovietologists and intelligence analysts agreed that most active measures relied heavily on disinformation by creating and sustaining a credible but false narrative and mislead the target.[28]

An example of KGB active measures was the placement of Soviet agents of influence in leadership posts of the World Council of Churches (WCC) beginning in 1960. After the Orthodox Church joined the WCC in 1960, Russian Orthodox delegates were carefully selected by the KGB and the Council for Religious Affairs. From this position, agents were used to shape world opinion by denying reports of persecution of the Church by the Soviet state. The KGB later boasted: "The agenda of the WCC is also our agenda."[29] The 1983 Vancouver Assembly of the WCC adopted resolutions mildly condemning the Soviet war in Afghanistan, yet severely denounced Western capitalism as "the main source of injustice in the world, responsible for the evils of sexism, racism, cultural captivity, colonialism and neo-colonialism."[30]

Both institutional forms of strategic deception, *maskirovka*, and active measures, involve disinformation to the extent that it dominates the Soviet deception style more than any other form of deception. Misleading an adversary through false information is common strategic practice in conflict. Notable instances include the Greek victory over Troy using a hollow wooden horse to penetrate the impregnable walls of the city. Perhaps the most successful use of disinformation was the Allied effort to make the Germans believe that the invasion of France would take place near Calais instead of the beaches of Normandy. In

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[27] Heuer Jr., 31.
[28] Heuer Jr., 32–33.
[29] Ronald Rychlak and Ion Mihai Pacepa, *Disinformation: Former Spy Chief Reveals Secret Strategies for Undermining Freedom, Attacking Religion, and Promoting Terrorism*, 1 edition (Washington, D.C: WND Books, 2013), 3.
[30] Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB*, 1st edition (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 497.

Russian history, disinformation is not just a tool of war, but an instrument of permanent national policy that "distorted every facet of Russian tsarist and communist society."[31] The term "Potemkin village" in politics and economics refers to a literal or figurative construction intended to mislead others that a situation is better than it really is. To impress Catherine the Great, Prince Grigory Potemkin had fake villages constructed along the route the Tsarina would take when touring recently-annexed Crimea in 1787. The French Marquis de Custine, upon visiting Russia in 1839, concluded that "everything is deception in Russia, and the gracious hospitality of the Czar, gathering together in his palace his serfs and the serfs of his courtiers, is only one more mockery."[32]

Disinformation also pervaded Soviet national policy and strategy. In the words of Sovietologists, "top leaders were the principal players, in contrast to the west, where deception is relegated to a game of wits between intelligence specialists or military commanders, so that diplomats and top civilian leaders may keep their hands clean."[33] Rather than simply approving deception operations, official statements by politburo members themselves played an important part in achieving Soviet deception goals. Statements by Khrushchev regarding the mass production of Soviet ICBMs built on the public perception of a "missile gap" that began with the Soviet launch of Sputnik in 1957.[34] To protect classified sources, President Eisenhower withheld intelligence revealing that US strategic nuclear programs exceeded Soviet capabilities.[35] Khrushchev's rhetoric feeding the missile-gap fear is an early example of Soviet disinformation having a significant influence on the outcome of a

[31] Rychlak and Pacepa, *Disinformation*, 36.
[32] Hingley, *The Russian Mind*, 94.
[33] Heuer Jr., "Soviet Organization and Docrtine for Strategic Deception," 29.
[34] Heuer Jr., 32.
[35] Matthew Brzezinski, *Red Moon Rising: Sputnik and the Hidden Rivalries That Ignited the Space Age*, Reprint edition (Holt Paperbacks, 2008), 171.

US election, as the perceived ICBM threat propelled Kennedy to the White House in 1960. On the other hand, Soviet disinformation was also used to mask more aggressive nuclear posture in the 1970s. Benign political rhetoric from Soviet leaders—calling for 'no first use' nuclear postures, arguing that victory cannot be a meaningful goal in nuclear war, and disavowing previous emphasis on nuclear preemption—were at variance with the continuity of nuclear doctrine evident in research, development, and deployment of strategic systems and military exercises.[36]

Lt Gen Ion Pacepa, a former Soviet bloc intelligence official who defected from Romania in 1978, describes disinformation as one of two Russian styles of strategic deception, differentiated from misinformation by its covert insertion into credible Western media:

> Misinformation is an official government tool and recognizable as such. Disinformation (i.e. *dezinformatsiya*) is a secret intelligence tool, intended to bestow a Western, nongovernment cachet on government lies. Let us assume that the FSB (the new KGB) fabricated some documents supposedly proving that American military forces were under specific orders to target Islamic houses of worship in their bombing raids over Libya in 2011. If a report on those documents were published in an official Russian news outlet, that would be misinformation, and people in the West might rightly take it with a grain of salt and simply shrug it off as routine Moscow propaganda. If, on the other hand, that same material were made public in the Western media and attributed to some Western organization, that would be disinformation, and the story's credibility would be substantially greater.[37]

Gen Pacepa also remarked that disinformation worked successfully because Western media generally "tend to be indiscriminate about the nature and reliability of their sources," and the information was tailored

[36] Heuer Jr., "Soviet Organization and Docrtine for Strategic Deception," 33.
[37] Rychlak and Pacepa, *Disinformation*, 35–36.

to "fit well with the general mood."[38] Disinformation exploits cognitive biases in the mind of the target because it is packaged as a plausible but unverified narrative, wrapped in a "kernel of truth" that matches a target's previously formed judgments or prejudices.[39] This exploitation of prior prejudices works especially well against Western media, as it reinforces the skepticism of government inherent in Western culture discussed in the previous chapter.

One of the common objectives of Soviet disinformation campaigns during public discourse was to boost the Soviet image while undermining the legitimacy of the West or the US. Using a false but convincing narrative, Soviet officials became adept at the rhetorical technique of moral equivalence: convincing public audiences that the Soviets stand on at least the same moral plane as others. This would then form the basis of psychological attacks that bend public opinion toward Soviet policies and interests.[40] Interestingly, the phenomenon of "doublethink" in Russian culture provides a unique psychological advantage in formulating a convincing case for moral equivalence even in the face of contrary evidence.

Reflexive Control

The third category of Soviet deception techniques is "reflexive control." While *maskirovka*, active measures, and disinformation attempt to distort reality by increasing ambiguity of the situation or misleading with a false alternative, reflexive control targets the subconscious decision-making process of an adversary to control or pre-determine their interpretation of the environment and subsequent

[38] Rychlak and Pacepa, 17.
[39] Rychlak and Pacepa, 38.
[40] Arnold Beichman, "Active Measures and Democratic Culture," in *Soviet Strategic Deception*, ed. Brian D. Dailey and Patrick J. Parker (Stanford, Calif. : Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books, 1987), 78–80.

response.[41] Reflexive control can be viewed as the direct manipulation of an adversary's decision-making process, rather than simply confusing or altering the adversary's appraisal of the situation.

Early Soviet Reflexive Control research was led by Vladimir Lefebvre in the 1960s. Lefebvre likened the method to a chess player gaining an advantage over an opponent by sending out specific signals of intention to predetermine the opponent's view of the situation and subsequently his or her reactions.[42] Studies of reflexive control theory trace the origins to the historical and cultural background of Russia. In the paradigm of historical materialism, the philosophical foundation for Marxism-Leninism, cognition results from a reflection of the material world in the human mind, which determines "social consciousness."[43] Because reality exists in the mind of the observer, it is subjective and susceptible to influence or control.

The Soviet emphasis on population control nourished scientific exploration into the ways humans could be surreptitiously controlled by an outside authority. Continued research throughout and after the Soviet era attempted to codify reflexive control methods into formal doctrine for military employment. In 1995, Major General M. D. Ionov identified four basic methods of reflexive control in the context of military use: power pressure, a mix of force demonstrations, ultimatums and psychological attacks; disinformation, or measures to present false information about the situation; influencing the enemy's decision-making process; and altering the decision-making time.[44] The next year, Major General N. I. Turko, an instructor at the Russian Federation General Staff Academy, acknowledged the interest in extending reflexive control

[41] Timothy L. Thomas, "Russia's Reflexive Control Theory and the Military," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, no. 17 (2004): 237.
[42] Chotikul, "The Soviet Theory of Reflexive Control in Historical and Psychocultural Perspective: Preliminary Study," 80.
[43] Chotikul, 43.
[44] Thomas, "Russia's Reflexive Control Theory and the Military," 244–46.

methods from controlling physical movements of the enemy on the battlefield to influencing an adversary's decision-making using information warfare. Turko acknowledged "the most dangerous manifestation in the tendency to rely on military power relates more to the possible impact of the use of reflexive control by the opposing side through developments in the theory and practice of information war rather than to the direct use of the means of armed combat."[45] Turko indicated that post-Soviet research into reflexive control techniques includes exploration on their use to influence decisions at the international level. Students of Russian deception argue that the most disturbing evolution of reflexive control will remain its potential employment to affect a state's decision-making process through carefully tailored information or disinformation campaigns.[46] (240)

V. A. Lefebvre defined the practice applied to combat situations in his seminal study, *The Algebra of Conscience*:

> One gains an advantage in conflict if one has an accurate image of the opponent's image of the situation and of how the opponent applies a particular "doctrine" in an attempt to solve the problem as "he" sees it; above all if one is able to influence the opponent's perception of the situation or his goals or his doctrine and at the same time conceal from him the fact that one "is" influencing him.[47]

This definition of reflexive control includes both a purpose and a method, the former being an advantage in combat, and the latter being an intricate understanding of the opponent's cognitive map and operational code. Advanced reflexive control combines and operationalizes the various forms of Soviet strategic deception (disinformation, *maskirovka*, active measures) to control a conflict

[45] Thomas, 240.
[46] Thomas, 240.
[47] V. A. Lefebvre, *Algebra of Conscience: A Comparative Analysis of Western and Soviet Ethical Systems*, Softcover reprint of the original 1st ed. 1982 edition (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 35.

situation. It is fundamentally an asymmetric approach in that it forces a behavior strategy on the opponent through reflexive interaction, "not directly, by blatant force, but by means of providing him with the grounds by which he is able to logically derive his own decision, but one that is predetermined by the other side."[48] Because it involves accurate knowledge of the adversary decision-making process, it is an attractive approach for a force that faces an opponent who openly expresses the values, principles, and judgments that guide operational or strategic decisions. In the realm of reflexive control, deception, ambiguity, and concealment of true intentions become powerful weapons against the values that guide the modern Western way of war: clear conflict thresholds, a commitment to the Just War tradition, declared policy objectives, and respect for international accountability.

Soviet deception practice enshrined the concept of information as a weapon for conflict, not just a tool of domestic or foreign policy. Maintaining an information advantage is an obvious goal of any operational force and achieving information superiority is a vital component of US doctrine. The Soviet approach, however, institutionalized information operations at all levels of conflict and across organizations to an extent unmatched by US and NATO forces. A portfolio of deception methods, *maskirovka*, disinformation, and KGB active measures, relied on manipulating the information environment in ways that knew no ethical or normative restraints. Soviet information warfare practice took the distinct features of information and its use in Russian society—strength and security over truth, pervasive *vranyo*, and propaganda for state control—and operationalized these methods for the ideological struggle against the West.

[48] Lefebvre, 34.

Chapter 4

The Influence of Modern Conflict

Victory of the West was guaranteed by its advantage in information warfare

- Igor Panarin

A high-ranking Russian military official recently wrote that the experience of current military conflicts "confirms that 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." A Western perspective may initially recognize that this description accurately characterizes the 2014 Ukrainian revolution, where Russian intervention quickly transformed an escalating popular protest into a violent insurgency that continues to undermine Ukrainian sovereignty. However, General Valery Gerasimov, currently Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, published these words almost one year before the 2014 Russian intervention in Ukraine. In a 2013 article, Gen Gerasimov theorized that "the very rules of war have changed," and suggested that the recent revolutions in North Africa and the middle east—the "Arab Spring"—may be typical of warfare in the twenty-first century. He argued that in such conflicts, nonmilitary means, including information, "have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness."[1]

The timing of the article and Gerasimov's reference to the Arab Spring suggests that the 2011 US-NATO Libyan intervention was a formative experience that shaped the perspectives articulated in the

[1] Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight (Translation by Charles K. Bartles)," *Military Review*, February 2016, 23.

article. Gerasimov's central role in training and employing Russian military forces suggests that, in addition to cultural and Soviet influences described in Chapters Two and Three, the current Russian conception of information warfare includes lessons drawn from observing the role of information in modern conflict. Observation is never neutral, and the lessons of the 2011 Libya conflict that informed Gen Gerasimov's conception of modern warfare are likely different from those that a Western observer might glean from the same experience. To better understand exactly what these lessons might be, this chapter constructs an alternative analytical lens for the 2011 Libyan conflict. It then analyzes Gen Gerasimov's article from this perspective to understand how modern conflict has influenced Russian information warfare.

In late 2010, a wave of revolution spread across the Middle East. The "Arab Spring" disrupted the regional political landscape and started a cascade of conflict that endures to this day in Syria and Iraq. On 15 February 2011, inspired by the abdication of presidents Ben Ali of Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Libyan citizens took to Facebook to begin a "virtual revolt," seeking changes to the Libyan constitution and other reforms. This initial virtual action set the stage for physical protests that were confronted by Libyan authorities on 17 February and quickly turned violent. The Libyan dictator, Colonel Muammar Qaddafi, responded to the crisis by threatening to "cleanse Libya house to house" if the protests continued.[2] The situation quickly grew into a full-fledged rebellion with the Qaddafi regime threatening unrestrained violence to remain in power. International support for the Libyan rebellion grew as part of general backing for the broader pro-democracy movement in the Middle East, but the international political community was far from

[2] Christopher S. Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi: Libya and the Limits of Liberal Intervention* (New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 28.

unified on any plan for intervention, just weeks before the opening Western air strikes known as Operation Odyssey Dawn.[3]

International visibility quickly increased as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube captured violence against Libyan civilians and broadcasted these incidents rapidly across the globe. In addition to fanning the flames of international support for the rebellion, these new means of social media also enabled an unprecedented coordination of protest activity that further escalated the situation. Social media provided a command and control platform for rebel activity.[4] Internationally, increased awareness derived from social media turned the tide of international opinion, with intervention rapidly gaining support with domestic audiences of Great Britain, France, and the US. Given the extended US presence in Arab countries at the time and the state of conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa, senior US policymakers were reluctant to involve the US in another Arab conflict.

On 14 March, President Barack Obama called for Qaddafi to step down but avoided intervention.[5] Several factors aligned to reverse this course. First, Qaddafi began making greater progress against the rebels, gaining enough ground to threaten the rebel stronghold in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi. Second, because of this weakened rebel position, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Arab League subsequently voted in support of a no-fly zone over Libya. Third, intense lobbying for a no-fly zone by Britain and France coincided with the efforts of key aides within the Obama Administration to press the United Nations for a resolution demanding a no-fly zone and "all necessary measures … to protect civilian populated areas under threat of attack."[6] An additional factor leading to this resolution was the endorsement of

[3] Chivvis, 45.
[4] Karl P. Mueller, *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War* (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 2015), 65.
[5] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 53.
[6] Chivvis, 59.

Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine at the 2005 United Nations World Summit. This international political commitment codified the premise that sovereignty entails a responsibility to protect all populations from mass atrocity crimes and human rights violations. It also outlined a framework for international engagement to prevent such atrocities in the event the sovereign is unable or unwilling to do so. The Libyan intervention was the test of the R2P concept, and yet the language did not clearly define a position on Libyan sovereignty or regime change.[7] Furthermore, while the US, Great Britain, and France were united in calls for Qaddafi's ouster, they stopped short of advocating regime change by military means.[8] Aiding the rebels through air support and interdiction against regime forces would enable the rebels to solve this situation internally—Qaddafi was captured and executed by rebel forces on 20 October 2011.[9]

One prominent feature of the Libyan campaign that facilitated the coalition intervention was the early coalescence of disparate revolutionary councils into an umbrella group called the National Transitional Council (NTC). The group included a "heterogeneous mix of regime defectors, representatives of key tribes, former prisoners, human rights activists, lawyers, intellectuals, and others."[10] The NTC gave a face to the rebel movement, a voice on the international stage, and a representative body to engage with the Contact Group—a multi-national political conduit between the coalition and the rebel movement. Over the course of the conflict, the NTC was recognized by the US and other coalition nations as "the legitimate representative of the Libyan people," but importantly not the Libyan state.[11] While diplomatic engagement with the international Contact Group provided political legitimacy for the

[7] Mueller, *Precision and Purpose*, 18–19.
[8] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 63.
[9] Chivvis, 168.
[10] Chivvis, 32.
[11] Chivvis, 131.

NTC, the Contact Group-NTC relationship was a strictly political and not a military link. In this regard, the coalition kept the distance militarily to adhere to the UN mandate prohibiting a foreign occupation force.[12]

After quickly knocking-out Qaddafi's air defenses and establishing air superiority over the Libyan theater, US and NATO air forces centered their efforts around protecting civilians from attacks by regime troops, enforcing the arms embargo against the regime, protecting ports for the provision of supplies to opposition forces, and enabling humanitarian missions. Air support became the decisive enabler of a reversal-of-course that allowed the opposition to overcome the government siege of the central Libyan city of Misrata, the nadir of the campaign. NATO increased air-ground coordination with foreign advisors at Misrata and Zinta. Innovative command and control techniques using Google Earth, Skype, email, and Twitter allowed information-sharing between opposition leaders and foreign advisors, passing critical data back to coalition operations centers for targeting and eventual engagement.[13] Coalition airstrikes disrupted regime command and control, interdicted regime reinforcements, and kept Misrata's port open. Air operations decisively enabled the rebels to break the siege, push to the Libyan capital of Tripoli, and eventually overthrow the regime.[14]

Although not as arguably decisive as the coalition air campaign, ubiquitous modern information technology provided the Libyan opposition movement with a level of coordination, cohesion, and outside assistance never-before attained in a rebellion against a sovereign authoritarian regime. David Kilcullen noted that almost half of Libya's 5.6 million inhabitants live in the coastal cities of Tripoli and Benghazi. Most in these cities had access to cell technology and the internet. Demographics indicate high unemployment and an average age of

[12] Chivvis, 34.
[13] Chivvis, 65.
[14] Mueller, *Precision and Purpose*, 52.

twenty-four years old. Qaddafi's infrastructure policies had favored the communities around Tripoli at the expense of Benghazi. Ultimately, these factors created a highly-connected yet discontented urban youth bulge in the eastern part of the country—simply needing a spark to ignite the flames.[15] Though protests traditionally plagued the Qaddafi regime, his secret police were always able to suppress these revolts with great bloodshed. During the Arab Spring, the arrival of modern information technology would significantly change the game.

In addition to the early "virtual revolt" and capture of regime violence for a world audience, social media and information technology aided an insurgent "air war" that mobilized both the Libyan population and an international base of popular support. Revolution leaders used Facebook and Twitter to quickly coordinate protests. When the situation turned violent, the opposition used the same platforms to transmit the most graphic images to worldwide audiences, as well as coordinate among opposition cells with "information on medical requirements, essential telephone numbers and satellite frequencies of Al Jazeera and other international media organizations."[16] Though Qaddafi imposed a media and internet blackout on the country, activists in Benghazi devised workarounds like improvised internet satellite uplinks, smuggled SIM cards, and international dial-up numbers to keep Libyans connected to the outside world. Kilcullen wrote that modern information technology "allowed a diverse movement of small groups to act in a unified manner against the regime, making this a true case of network-enabled insurgency."[17] Importantly, information technology also connected the Libyan opposition movement with a global audience. This link to the outside world not only allowed the Libyan rebels to appeal for military

[15] David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerrilla*, Reprint edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 200.
[16] Kilcullen, 203.
[17] Kilcullen, 204.

intervention, it facilitated non-traditional support from diverse sympathizers. In one story, a high school student in the American state of Georgia "pulled together a group through Twitter to quickly produce English and Arabic guides to using an AK-47, building makeshift Grad artillery shelters, handling mines and unexploded ordnance, as well as detailed medical handbooks for use in the field."[18]

In summary, modern information technology not only sparked protests that ushered Libya into war, it subsequently defined a distinct new form of warfare. Authoritarian regimes worldwide witnessed a protest grow out of control after Qaddafi's forces attempted to contain it with time-tested methods of violent repression. International sympathy, facilitated by social media, generated international political support for intervention. Averting a humanitarian catastrophe, a Western coalition took the lead under US and NATO operational leadership and coordinated with a sub-state insurgent group—again, using ubiquitous internet communication platforms. This technology also provided the heterogeneous insurgency with a surprising level of internal command and control, ultimately enabling the opposition to overthrow a longtime dictator.[19]

Libya also set a new and complicated international precedent within the R2P-sovereignty debate. Though the international community rightly invoked the R2P doctrine to prevent Qaddafi from butchering Libyan civilians on a grand scale, the debate regarding Libyan sovereignty was never officially settled before military intervention and diplomatic recognition of the NTC. The international community increasingly worked with the sub-state NTC over the course of the campaign and provided growing political legitimacy to the insurgency.[20] Modern social networking and communication platforms enabled a

[18] Kilcullen, 205.
[19] Mueller, *Precision and Purpose*, 67.
[20] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 56–68.

Western coalition to work with sub-state actors and ultimately defeat an authoritarian regime that had successfully repressed its population for more than four decades. Though Western international leaders did not explicitly call for regime change, a UN mandate authorizing "all necessary measures" to protect civilians from regime violence and a subsequent air campaign enabled a sub-state opposition group to overthrow a sovereign regime.[21]

Perception from a Hostile Bias

The 2011 Libyan conflict, the first of a new social media era, occurred in a world where an objective account of events is increasingly difficult to find. Social media tends to amplify the most sensational aspects of world events and drown out reality. Nevertheless, biases, misperceptions, and other errors in cognition are endemic to human nature and virtually guarantee that no two people will perceive an event the same way. As Robert Jervis writes, "perceptions of the world and of other actors diverge from reality in patterns that we can detect and for reasons that we can understand."[22] This section explores the concept of cognitive consistency, and how this human psychological tendency could influence the perception of the Libyan conflict from the perspective of an international strategic competitor hostile to the West and watching from the sidelines of the campaign.

Jervis wrote that cognitive consistency can be understood as "the strong tendency for people to see what they expect to see and to assimilate incoming information to pre-existing images."[23] Jervis stated that though this condition can influence perception, it is nevertheless considered rational if the ways of interpreting evidence conform to

[21] Chivvis, 192–93.
[22] Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 3.
[23] Jervis, 117.

generally accepted rules of drawing inferences. Rationality in perception, according to Jervis, is "a very loose constraint that cannot designate a single conclusion."[24] In other words, contradictory perceptions of an event can both be considered rational, depending on the method of evidence interpretation by the perceiver. One important form of rational interpretation that Jervis discusses is William Scott's hypothesis of cognitive-affective consistency, the idea that affective judgments (liking or disliking) will influence the perception of events by another actor.[25] Policies and actions of another state are always viewed through one's beliefs about another's interests and intentions. Consistency also implies that the greater the affect (like vs. dislike) the greater the tendency for this feeling to influence perception. Institutionalized hostility of one state vis-à-vis another can lead decision-makers to fit information into pre-existing beliefs and perceive what they expect to be true.[26]

Psychologists explain cognitive-affective consistency as a pervasive phenomenon: "expectations or perceptual sets represent standing estimates of what the world is like and, therefore, what the person is likely to be confronted with."[27] In this case, they are a useful tool for an individual encountering an ambiguous and potentially hostile environment—such as the anarchy of the international political system.[28] This tendency of fitting incoming information into pre-existing images is greater the more ambiguous the information, the more confident the actor is of the validity of his image, and the greater his commitment to the established view. During the Cold War, Jervis noted that "only slight

[24] Jervis, 119.
[25] Jervis, 120–21.
[26] Jervis, 122.
[27] Jervis, 145.
[28] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 1 edition (Long Grove, Ill: Waveland Press, 2010), 117.

and ambiguous evidence was needed before American decision-makers saw a state dominated by Communists as an enemy."[29]

Two important phenomena resulting from cognitive consistency are perceptions of centralization and coherence. In the first, cognitive consistency will cause a decision-maker to see the behavior of others as "more centralized, planned, and coordinated than it really is."[30] Similarly, coherence implies that decision-makers will see random and unassociated events fitting into a constructed scheme. "Accidents, chance, and lack of coordination are rarely given their due by contemporary observers. Instead, they suspect that well-laid plans give events a coherence they would otherwise lack."[31]

A Look at Libya through a Hostile Lens

Combining Jervis' perception theory of cognitive consistency with elements of Russian cultural analysis from Chapter Two provides an alternative analytical lens for the 2011 Libyan campaign. This lens assumes the perspective of a strategic competitor to the US and the West that was not an active participant in the conflict. In this case, Russia importantly abstained from UN Security Council Resolution 1973, which defined the mandate for the intervention. At the time, Russian UN ambassador Vitaly Churkin explained that Russia abstained from the vote "because so many questions remained unanswered."[32] Also, this lens assumes at worst open hostility and at best a degree of suspicion regarding the actions of the coalition. Chapter Two provides the historical-cultural basis for an inherent anti-Western and anti-US bias: a historical Russian siege mentality and the characteristics of Russian

[29] Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, 146.
[30] Jervis, 319.
[31] Jervis, 321.
[32] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 60.

nationalism and the Soviet experience forming an ideological alterity with the West.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's 2007 Munich speech provides contemporaneous evidence for a national policy of suspicion towards the US, where he claimed the dangers of a US-led unipolar world order: "The United States has overstepped its national borders in every way… the economic, political, cultural and educational policies it imposes on other nations [are] extremely dangerous. It results in the fact that no one feels safe. I want to emphasize this – no one feels safe!"[33] Finally, this analytical framework also assumes the Russian cultural view of conflict described in Chapter Two: a more holistic struggle without defined lines between states of peace and war.

Viewing the 2011 Libyan campaign from a perspective of cognitive consistency and suspicion, there is significant evidence to suggest that the ambiguous, improvised, and ad hoc character of the operation could be perceived by a strategic competitor as a more coordinated, centrally-planned, and illicitly justified and executed operation than more accepted Western accounts suggest. The Qaddafi regime's openly hostile relationship with the US included sponsorship of terrorist attacks on a Berlin nightclub in 1986—to which the US responded with Operation El Dorado Canyon—and the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103. After the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Qaddafi renounced his nuclear program and support of terrorism. This warming trend continued as late as 2009 when the US and Libya exchanged ambassadors and normalized diplomatic relations.[34] Despite this gradual improvement in relations, the long-term hostility could be perceived by a strategic competitor as a basis for a covert policy goal of regime change.

[33] Vladimir Putin, "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy," President of Russia, accessed March 23, 2018, http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034.
[34] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 23.

The fact that the protests began under the broader auspices of the Arab Spring uprisings that demanded government reforms from autocratic state leaders lends an ideological undertone to the conflict that would naturally drive Russian suspicion. From a Russian historical-cultural perspective that prizes control and authority, democratic movements are, at best, no better as a basis for government and, at worst, a threat to the healthy function and security of the state.[35] This perspective sees democratic uprisings as a subversive tool that can weaken an autocratic regime to the point at which it can be easily engaged by conventional military action. Moreover, the uprisings and eventual insurgency were facilitated with US social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Google, YouTube) providing the taint of US influence from the viewpoint of a strategic competitor. From this point of view, actions of Western non-governmental organizations (NGOs), however separate and disassociated from state policy, could be perceived as a proxy for direct US influence.

The UN mandate proscribed a foreign occupation force, but NTC opposition units were extensively supplied with NATO equipment, technology, intelligence, advice and training, and foreign direct assistance—aid that helped turn the tide of the conflict.[36] British and French action went even further: each nation deployed special forces units that trained the rebels on the use of weapons and other equipment.[37] Allied special forces also provided imagery to rebels showing the locations of regime troops in the area, and at least once gave the insurgency telephone conversation intercepts that revealed the distress of regime commanders short on food, water, and ammunition.[38] The decision by the French and British to insert special forces was later

[35] Pew Research Center, "Attitudes Toward Democracy," *Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project* (blog), May 23, 2012, http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/05/23/chapter-3-attitudes-toward-democracy-2/.
[36] Mueller, *Precision and Purpose*, 45.
[37] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 121.
[38] Chivvis, 158.

criticized by the international law community to be a clear violation of the civilian protection mandate.[39] Chivvis also noted: "it is difficult to see how these additions could be covered even under a liberal interpretation of [UN] Resolution 1973."[40] Though these operations did not directly involve US or NATO forces, the fact that they were undertaken without reprimand from the international community could be interpreted as tacit approval for military actions by external special forces under the broader umbrella of humanitarian assistance.

Though regime change was never the stated goal of the coalition, several circumstances of the campaign suggest at least an implicit US support for regime change. US envoys met with members of the Qaddafi regime on 16 July 2011 and stipulated that there was "no solution that left Qaddafi in power." They also stressed that this stipulation did not apply to anyone but Qaddafi: if he was gone, all options for a post-conflict government "were on the table."[41] Given that Qaddafi embodied the regime as dictator of Libya for forty-two years, this offer could be easily construed as a demand for regime change communicated by US envoys. Anti-Western accounts of the Libyan conflict circulating in mainstream Russian media point to the circumstances of Qaddafi's death as further proof that regime change was a US-NATO goal from the beginning: Qaddafi was reportedly sodomized with a bayonet, then beaten and shot by a "NATO-supported mob," and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reacted to news of Qaddafi's death by joking with a reporter: "We came, we saw, he died."[42] Western accounts of the 2011 Libyan conflict emphasize the spontaneous nature of the initial uprisings, late agreement on the mandate for a no-fly zone, the

[39] Olivier Corten and Vaios Koutroulis, "The Illegality of Military Support to Rebels in the Libyan War: Aspects of Jus Contra Bellum and Jus in Bello," *Journal of Conflict and Security Law* 18, no. 1 (April 1, 2013): 59–93, https://doi.org/10.1093/jcsl/krs029.
[40] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 159.
[41] Chivvis, 152.
[42] John Wight, "Why Libya's Cry for Justice Needs to Be Heard," *Russia Today*, n.d., https://www.rt.com/op-ed/379437-libya-nato-west-moscow-gaddafi/.

insurgent-led ground campaign, and the absence of regime change as an official policy goal. From the analytical lens of a hostile strategic competitor viewing from the sidelines, cognitive consistency could beget a different interpretation: the employment of an effective new asymmetric military doctrine and one highly dependent on manipulating the information environment to conceal the ultimate political goal of regime change.

Libya and the Broader US-Russia Strategic Dynamic

Viewing the Libyan conflict from a hostile bias, a strategic competitor to the United States could perceive a threat from social media-enabled revolutions leading to international intervention on humanitarian grounds. Theories of military competition help explain subsequent actions a competitor may take to defend against an external threat. Barry Buzan postulates three models that explain why states make quantitative and qualitative changes to their defense posture or strategic doctrine, each corresponding to different levels of analysis. These include a classic action-reaction model, where arms dynamics are driven by competitive relations between states; a domestic structure model, where the driving force is found in sub-state economic, organizational, and political workings; and the technological imperative, which interprets the arms dynamic in terms of the general qualitative advance in technology.[43] Of these models, the action-reaction dynamic between strategic competitors provides a strong explanation for a dynamic shift in Russian military technology or strategic doctrine from witnessing the Libyan conflict. According to this model, states will strengthen their armaments because of the threats they perceive from

[43] Barry Buzan, *An Introduction to Strategic Studies: Military Technology and International Relations*, 1987 edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987), 65–77.

other states. As states cannot rely on a supranational enforcer for security, each must take measures to ensure its own survival. Action-reaction expresses itself not only in the size of armed forces but in the type of forces acquired and the level of concern about modernization and readiness for combat.[44] Another aspect of this theory pertinent to the Libyan scenario is the qualitative nature of interstate arms competition. Intuitively, any significant change in the types of weapons or modes of warfare experienced will subsequently drive greater change by the competitor.

The classic action-reaction arms race dynamic manifested itself between the US and Soviet Union in many ways throughout the Cold War: from the US increasing the deployment of nuclear weapons to offset the USSR's conventional superiority, to the USSR deploying large numbers of ICBMs in the late 1960s and early 1970s to match this US deployment.[45] The US and Soviet Union thus became locked in a long-term rivalry due to the opposing ideologies each superpower represented and because nuclear weapons made war—the traditional means of resolving security dilemmas—unthinkable.[46] Ultimately, the Cold War institutionalized an arms dynamic between the US and post-Soviet Russia, and any change to Russian military doctrine after the Libyan conflict is an extension of this Cold War rivalry in the minds of senior Russian decision-makers.

The 'Gerasimov Doctrine'

Almost exactly two years after the onset of the US-NATO Libyan intervention, General Valery Gerasimov, the chief of the Russian General Staff, published "The Value of Science is in the Foresight: New

[44] Buzan, 78.
[45] Buzan, 83.
[46] Buzan, 88.

Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations." The article was initially published by *Voyenno-Proyshlennyy Kurier* (VPK) (Military-Industrial Courier), a private newspaper with a broader reach than the more traditional peer-reviewed military journal *Voyennaya Mysl* (VM) (Military Thought).[47] VPK typically serves as a venue for proposing reforms to military policy and practice.[48] Charles Bartles, who translated and analyzed of the article, speculates that VPK provided Gen Gerasimov with a broader audience, including senior Russian government officials with influence in Russian military and intelligence policy. According to this assessment, Gerasimov used the article to show how the Ministry of Defense was preparing to meet future threats.[49] Russia's actions in Crimea and Ukraine one year after the publication of his article caused many Western audiences to view his writing as new Russian doctrine, the "Gerasimov Doctrine," and the seminal outline of Russia's new "Hybrid Warfare."[50]

At first glance, the article does appear to outline a new approach to war, one where a broader set of political, diplomatic, economic, and nonmilitary measures occur below the threshold of conflict to accomplish military objectives. Thus, it seems to provide a playbook that guided Russian actions in Crimea and Ukraine. Situating the article in the context of the Libyan conflict suggests that it is based on a misperceived Western way of war that Russia is ill-prepared to face.

Gen Gerasimov begins his *Foresight* article by describing the Russian view of popular uprisings as the new defining feature of modern conflict: the recent "color revolutions" in North Africa and the Middle East demonstrate that a "perfectly thriving state can, in a matter of

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[47] Mark Galeotti, "I'm Sorry for Creating the 'Gerasimov Doctrine,'" *Foreign Policy*, March 5, 2018, http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/05/im-sorry-for-creating-the-gerasimov-doctrine/.
[48] Charles K. Bartles, "Getting Gerasimov Right," *Military Review*, February 2016, 31.
[49] Bartles, 31.
[50] Molly K. Mckew, "The Gerasimov Doctrine," POLITICO Magazine, accessed March 23, 2018, https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/09/05/gerasimov-doctrine-russia-foreign-policy-215538.

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."[51] Gen Gerasimov states the main lesson for the Russian military after the Arab Spring is that these revolutions are "the typical events of warfare in the twenty-first century… The very 'rules of war' have changed. The role of nonmilitary 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."[52] (24)

In a veiled reference to the major contours of the US-NATO Libyan campaign, Gen Gerasimov outlines what he perceives as a new method of conflict that includes a "broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other nonmilitary measures—applied in coordination with the protest power of the population."[53] As previously described, a view of the Libyan conflict through the lens of a hostile strategic competitor could perceive a coordinated link between the social media-based "virtual protest," the crowds of protesters in Benghazi, and the humanitarian pretext of US and NATO intervention, all to achieve the strategic objective of removal of the Qaddafi regime. Gen Gerasimov also observes that the broad measures described above are supplemented by "concealed military means" that include informational conflict and special operations forces. He writes, "the open use of forces—often under the guise of peacekeeping and crisis regulation—is resorted to only at a certain stage, primarily for the achievement of final success in the conflict."[54] This observation is significant for several reasons. It assumes that military conflict begins with coordinated, covert use of information and special operations forces. Britain and France later acknowledged

[51] Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight (Translation by Charles K. Bartles)," 24.
[52] Gerasimov, 24.
[53] Gerasimov, 24.
[54] Gerasimov, 24.

that special forces were used in Libya to liaise with NTC elements, but not under formal NATO capacity.

As the earlier section of this chapter illustrates, new internet social media and communication platforms played a significant role in the Libyan conflict. These tools allowed a protesting public to communicate with the outside world and globalize their grievance against an authoritarian regime, thereby spurring US and NATO intervention to protect civilians from regime violence.[55] Gen Gerasimov's account of this dynamic describes it as an evolved form of information warfare that conceals and disguises military activity under the narrative of peacekeeping activity.

Most of the article is dedicated to the question of how a future force should be trained and equipped to face this new form of military conflict. Rather than a "doctrine," it could more accurately be described as a characterization of modern conflict with more questions than guidance. It does provide several useful insights into the role of information in conflict, especially considering the historical-cultural and Soviet influences described in Chapters Two and Three. Significantly, Gen Gerasimov writes that the new information environment "opens wide asymmetrical possibilities for reducing the fighting potential of the enemy." He goes on to write that information operations were used for "influencing state structures and the population with the help of information networks. It is necessary to perfect activities in the information space, including the defense of our own objectives."[56] This acknowledgment of the need to perfect Russian information activities for defensive purpose implies an understandable sense of vulnerability that an authoritarian state could feel after witnessing the enabling power of information in a repressed society.

[55] Chivvis, *Toppling Qaddafi*, 14.
[56] Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight (Translation by Charles K. Bartles)," 27.

As discussed in Chapter Two, information in Russia is a tool legitimized by its ability to facilitate state control. Authoritarian regimes could logically feel threatened when a new information environment enables an unsanctioned spread of alternative or damaging narratives. The siege mentality that defines the Russian historical psychology also explains why the Gerasimov article could see a threat in new democratized information tools that could globalize the grievance of a society and provide an opening for intervention under a humanitarian pretext.

Finally, the article clearly underscores information operations occurring throughout conflict, with most of that effort occurring before a situation evolves into direct military action. Figure 4-1, a centerpiece of the Gerasimov article, illustrates the conflict paradigm developed throughout the text. Bridging the military and nonmilitary measures on the lower section of this figure, "Conducting Information Conflict" spans the range of conflict phases outlined on the upper section, from "Covert Origin," through "Postconflict Regulation."[57] The paradigm of conflict development articulated in *Foresight* relies on military and non-military information measures conducted holistically, across the spectrum of conflict. This approach blurs the lines of war and peace; information is used as a tool to shape the political and diplomatic environment well below the threshold of military force.

[57] Gerasimov, 28.

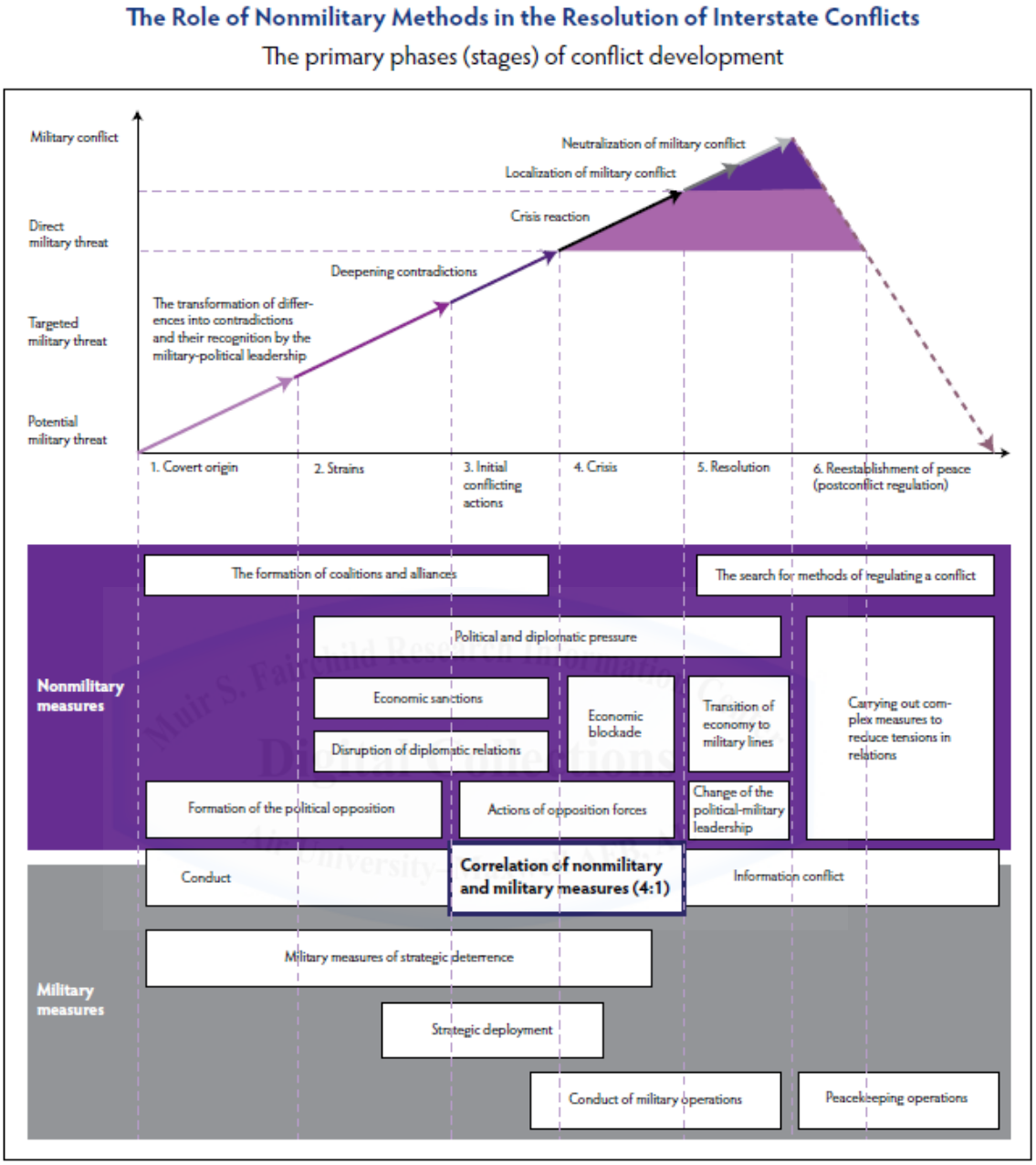

Figure 2. Graphic from Gerasimov article in *VPK*, 26 Feb 2013
Source: Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight (Translation by Charles K. Bartles)," *Military Review*, 2016, p. 28

Conclusions and Implications

The 2011 Libyan Intervention was a highly ambiguous conflict that drove the international community to quickly improvise a way to avert

humanitarian disaster. The UN mandate prohibiting foreign invasion limited Coalition military measures to airstrikes as a means of supporting humanitarian efforts and protecting civilians against retaliation by the Qaddafi regime. Cooperation between the Coalition and sub-state rebel groups found the involved nations negotiating a fine line between preventing attacks against civilians and directly enabling internal regime change by a sub-state group. New information technologies only increased the ambiguity of the conflict. Social media enabled rebel groups to coordinate activity and receive information support from Western non-governmental organizations. Given the ambiguity of the conflict, a sidelined strategic competitor could easily perceive information according to long-held biases and beliefs. An authoritarian society with a long-held insecurity regarding territorial sovereignty could also view the intervention as a disturbing new international precedent and believe that it be the next target of a coordinated, Western-backed regime change effort.

Gen Gerasimov's *Foresight* article paints a picture of change in the rules of war, one that misperceives the Libyan campaign as the manifestation of new non-military measures to achieve strategic objectives. Libya also reveals a potential new vulnerability for Russia as its authoritarian regime grapples with the rapid spread of democratizing new information technologies. *Foresight* could thus be viewed as an appeal for broader military development in asymmetric measures to counter this threat. From this perspective, Libya provides an exemplar of an indirect, asymmetric form of conflict and a model of how to use new information technologies to conceal conflict until success is finally achieved.

Chapter 5

The Synthesis: Crimea and Ukraine

> *Hybrid Warfare is the dark reflection of our comprehensive approach. We use a combination of military and non-military means to stabilize countries, others use it to destabilize them.*
>
> - Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General

At the height of the 2014 Ukrainian revolution, Russia moved quickly to annex the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and secure access to the Black Sea Fleet base of Sevastopol. Meanwhile, pro-Russian political groups, supported by Russian intelligence agents and possibly special forces elements, intensified their counter-revolution protests in southeast Ukraine, ultimately creating an enduring insurgency backed by Moscow. These actions challenged Kiev's growing relationship with the European Union and expanded Russia's ability to influence that relationship, as well as Ukrainian policy. Today, the political objectives Russia attained in 2014 seem to have only temporarily affected Ukraine's long-term policy of greater integration with EU. The war in Donbass, however, continues to undermine Ukrainian sovereignty and assures that Russia will have a long-term influence over Ukrainian affairs. After the apex of the campaign in 2014, Western security analysts expressed surprise and concern with how Russia could seize territory and gain regional political influence while avoiding direct military confrontation by shrouding the operation in confusion and ambiguity. Russia's "Hybrid Warfare doctrine," as the West called it, showed remarkable effectiveness.[1] During the annexation of Crimea, conventional Russian

[1] Maria Snegovaya, "Putin's Information War in Ukraine" (Washington DC: Institute for the Study of War, 2015), 1; Nolan Peterson, "Russia's Hybrid War against the West Began on the Battlefields of Ukraine," *The Daily Signal* (blog), November 17, 2017, https://www.dailysignal.com/2017/11/17/russias-hybrid-war-

military forces were involved but merely formalized what had already been accomplished without conflict. While later evidence revealed that the Donbass insurgency was supported by conventional military assistance from Russia, Moscow seemingly achieved a degree of influence normally associated with more significant military effort.[2] Western analysts explained these successes as the result of a sophisticated new doctrine that relied heavily on information warfare to accomplish military objectives.[3]

This chapter investigates Russia's information warfare techniques as employed in support of unconventional military and political operations in Crimea and Ukraine. Western analysts point to these operations as the advent of Russia's newly-developed Hybrid Warfare: a doctrine that synthesizes information warfare with economic, political, and criminal measures to accomplish traditional military objectives. Other sources point to these operations as the manifestation of Russian military improvements that Gen Valery Gerasimov advocated in his 2013 article: *The Value of Science is in the Foresight*. This latter view describes Hybrid Warfare as the perfected doctrinal innovation directed by the Chief of the Russian Federation Armed Forces. Instead, this chapter argues that the information warfare techniques employed at both the strategic and tactical levels during the 2014 Crimea annexation and Ukrainian conflict are neither a new synthesis of warfare doctrine, nor a recent innovation of the Russian military. Rather, these techniques can be traced to the multiple sources outlined in the earlier chapters of this thesis: Russian history and culture, Soviet deception tactics, and

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west-began-battlefields-ukraine/; Andras Racz, "Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine" (Helsinki, Finland: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, n.d.), 5.

[2] Maksymilian Czuperski et al., "Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin's War in Ukraine" (Atlantic Council, 2015), 20, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/hiding-in-plain-sight-putin-s-war-in-ukraine-and-boris-nemtsov-s-putin-war.

[3] Margarita Jaitner, "Russian Information Warfare: Lessons from Ukraine," in *Cyber War in Perspective: Russian Aggression against Ukraine*, ed. Kenneth Geers (Tallinn: NATO CCD COE Publications, 2015).

Russian views of modern conflict as articulated in Gen Gerasimov's 2013 *Foresight* article.

Crimea and Ukraine Background

The insurgency in Ukraine continues to this day, but the apex of conflict occurred in 2014. The previous fall, faced with a long-term economic recession caused by a tightening Russian export market, Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych agreed to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union.[4] This agreement promised funds in exchange for liberalizing reforms.[5] However, Yanukovych abruptly backed off this plan in and instead signed a trade agreement and multi-billion-dollar loan with the Moscow-sponsored Eurasian Union. A wave of demonstrations, now known as the Euromaidan, began at Independence Square in Kiev. A government crackdown backfired. As protests became violent and spread across the country, Yanukovych fled to Eastern Ukraine, then to Russia, and a pro-Western interim government was established. Meanwhile, opposition to this revolution in Crimea and southeast Ukraine escalated, precipitating the invasion and subsequent annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the beginning of a sustained pro-Russian insurgency in the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, the "Donbass" region.[6] The conflict in Donbass intensified in August 2014 when a Russian "humanitarian convoy" crossed the border into Ukrainian territory without the permission of the Ukrainian government. This "stealth invasion" brought conventional

[4] "Big Debts and Dwindling Cash: Ukraine Tests Creditors' Nerves," *Reuters*, October 17, 2013, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-emerging-ukraine-debt/big-debts-and-dwindling-cash-ukraine-tests-creditors-nerves-idUSBRE99G06F20131017.
[5] "The New Great Game: Why Ukraine Matters to So Many Other Nations," *Bloomberg.com*, February 28, 2014, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-02-27/the-new-great-game-why-ukraine-matters-to-so-many-other-nations.
[6] "Ukraine Crisis."

Russian forces and equipment to the aid of pro-Russian political elements in Donbass, further solidifying the insurgency.[7]

Strategic Information Warfare – Historical and Cultural Influences

Russian involvement in Crimea and Ukraine were supported by the same broad, strategic-level information operations that have defined Vladimir Putin's presidency. The core theme of Putin's domestic and foreign policies centers on a revival of Russian nationalism that in turn helps consolidate his grip on power, while seemingly advancing Russia's national and geopolitical interests. The engine behind nationalism's strength, as discussed in Chapter Two, is its ability to consolidate the myriad Russian historical identities—imperialism, Eurasianism, Soviet transnationalism—into potent political messages that resonate with Russia and the wider Russian diaspora, particularly in former Soviet states. Putin has leveraged this revival of Russian nationalism toward broader geopolitical goals by instrumentalizing the soft power aspects of culture: elevating Russian language, history, and orthodox Christian values into tools for greater regional and international influence.

One recent example of Russia's use of soft power for political gain is the policy of "passportization" or inducing holders of former Soviet passports to apply for Russian passports. Similarly, Sergey Karaganov, a former advisor to Putin, promulgates Russia's mission of expanded regional influence, invoking Moscow's obligation to protect Russian culture and safeguard ethnic Russians, of whom more than 25 million are living in the 14 former Soviet republics (excluding Russia).[8] Moscow

[7] Andrew E. Kramer and Michael R. Gordon, "Ukraine Reports Russian Invasion on a New Front," *The New York Times*, August 27, 2014, sec. Europe, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/28/world/europe/ukraine-russia-novoazovsk-crimea.html.
[8] Vira Ratsiborynska, "When Hybrid Warfare Supports Ideology: Russia Today" (Research Division, NATO Defense College, Rome, November 2016), 9, https://www.stratcomcoe.org/when-hybrid-warfare-supports-ideology-russia-today.

then uses these cultural appeals as justification to "protect" these "Russian citizens," with harder elements of power, as it did in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Crimea.[9] These policies and actions reflect Russia's long-term geopolitical objective of a Eurasian political entity that "unites Eurasian peoples in the name of a common state body."[10] They also provide a consistent information theme that Russia used to justify intervention in Crimea and Ukraine. Leveraging the cultural-theme, the Kremlin insists that the conflict in Ukraine is a civil war, with government authorities targeting Russian populations.[11] Putin declared his government's intent to protect "Russian speaking populations" allegedly targeted by Ukrainian authorities.[12]

The swift annexation of Crimea used similar ethic and cultural defense justification. Immediately after the annexation, the Kremlin suggested that the demonstrations in Kiev proved that Ukrainian authorities were unable to curb "rampant violence by ultra-nationalist and radical groups that destabilize the situation and terrorize civilians, including the Russian-speaking population.[13] In an address to the Russian Assembly, Putin invoked Crimea's historical significance to the Russian culture as the birthplace of Prince Vladimir, the ruler of who introduced Christianity to Kievan Rus and became a central figure in the Russian Orthodox Church. According to Putin, "Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia."[14] He noted that over half of Crimea's 2.2 million people are Russians and explained that the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine by President Khrushchev in 1954 was "a violation of the

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[9] David James Smith, *The Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania* (Psychology Press, 2002), 161.
[10] Euractiv, "Moscow Fleshes Put 'Eurasian Union' Plans," n.d., https://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/moscow-fleshes-out-eurasian-union-plans/.
[11] Czuperski et al., "Hiding in Plain Sight," 1.
[12] Kathy Lally and Will Englund, "Putin Says He Reserves Right to Protect Russians in Ukraine," *Washington Post*, March 4, 2014, sec. Europe, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/putin-reserves-the-right-to-use-force-in-ukraine/2014/03/04/92d4ca70-a389-11e3-a5fa-55f0c77bf39c_story.html.
[13] Mike Collett-White and Ronald Popeski, "Crimeans Vote over 90 Percent to Quit Ukraine for Russia," *Reuters*, n.d.
[14] Vladimir Putin, "Address by the President of the Russian Federation" (The Kremlin, Moscow, March 18, 2014), http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603.

constitutional norms that were in place" at the time.[15] President Putin's strategic narrative surrounding the annexation of Crimea incorporated broad information themes from history, culture, and international law to defend the legitimacy of the campaign.

Dr. Vira Ratsiborynska of the NATO Defense College writes that Russian information operations incorporate soft power themes of language, culture, and Christian values for strategic advantage in conflict. Culture-based information operations expand Russia's influence in the countries of the former Soviet Union, providing "a new identity for Russia and maintaining control over the minds of Russian speakers."[16] In this way, Russia's broader strategic-level information operations set the stage for aggressive military operations by providing both an outlet and an alternative reality that shapes the perception of the conflict by pro-Russian communities. Russia can use this advantage to spin an alternative narrative surrounding the conflict, as it did extensively during the Crimean and Ukrainian conflict. This disinformation campaign presented Russian actions as legitimate responses to illegal Western influence in Ukraine and an illegal, unconstitutional "fascist coup" in Kiev. Furthermore, culture-based information operations can foment instability in nations with large populations of ethnic Russians by inciting these communities against government authorities or other ethnic groups. In Eastern Ukraine, this instability provided an opening for further military support in the form of advisors, weapons, and masked conventional elements.

In addition to using information warfare to actively shape the conflict zone, Moscow has established extensive control over a media apparatus that delivers the pro-Russian narrative of international events to an expanding global audience. Chapter Two discussed the role of

[15] Putin.
[16] Ratsiborynska, "When Hybrid Warfare Supports Ideology: Russia Today," 9.

media as a historical tool of state control in Russian society. To consolidate political support at home and abroad, the Kremlin has a monopoly over the information space in Russia and has aggressively expanded its media presence in western Europe and the United States. The recent penetration of Kremlin-backed media into global outlets further extended the reach of this tool toward influencing world opinion with a Russian bias. In October 2014, Putin signed a new law that prevents media outlets from operating in Russia if their level of foreign ownership is greater than twenty percent, further curtailing freedom of the press domestically.[17] Importantly, the Russian-backed media domain caters to Western audiences in ways that downplay pro-Russian bias or hide overt Russian sponsorship. Russia Today, now known by the more neutral name RT, enjoys growing popularity as one of the most-watched foreign news channels in the United States.[18] Media analysts at the Martens Centre for European Studies note that in addition to fabricating news stories, the RT editorial line "systematically portrays the US as a land of corrupt capitalism, social injustice, imperialism, militarism, colonialism, and consumerism." Instead of overtly persuading the audience of Russia's point of view, RT's tactic is to sow confusion and undermine confidence in Western society. It does this by spreading virulent forms of discourse that "kill the possibility of debate and reality-based politics."[19] RT and other pro-Russian outlets also hide anti-Western bias by delivering content in a way that matches the style of mainstream news outlets and by hosting programs with American or Western journalists.

Ultimately, the domestic strength and global reach of the Russian media allows Moscow to manipulate the information domain with both

[17] Salome Samadashvili, "Muzzling the Bear: Strategic Defence for Russia's Undeclared Inforamtion War on Europe" (Wilfried Martens Center for European Studies, 2015), 25, https://stratcomcoe.org/salome-samadashvili-muzzling-bear-strategic-defence-russias-undeclared-information-war-europe.
[18] Samadashvili, 22.
[19] Samadashvili, 31.

short-term and long-term effect. In the long-term, the consistent narrative of RT and other Russian-backed global media outlets propagates a consistent narrative that showcases Russia as a secure, legitimate, and successful alternative to the weakness, corruption and liberal decay of the west. It further works to portray the West as the enemy of the interests of the Russian people, interests like tradition, conservative values and true liberty.[20] This narrative embodies the many themes that make up the Russian construction of society outlined in Chapter Two: vulnerability in the face of a foreign threat, messianism and superiority of Eurasian culture, and security through perpetual struggle. In the short-term, the global reach of Russian-backed media provides Moscow with a platform for information operations in support of specific political objectives, like the conflicts in Crimea and Ukraine. Jolanta Darczewsk with the Centre for Eastern Studies observes that the Russian media apparatus not only spreads misinformation but creates new alternative realities, and in doing so practices information warfare "with a level of sophistication and intensity that confuses and corrodes Western decision-making abilities."[21]

Tactical Information Warfare – Soviet Deception Influences

Along with strategic-level information operations that evoke historical and cultural influences, Russian action in Ukraine and Crimea saw the return of Soviet-era deception techniques deeply integrated into military and paramilitary operations. Maskirovka, disinformation, and Reflexive Control practices employed in 2014 achieved similar goals as they did in the Soviet era: advancing Moscow's interests abroad while avoiding conventional conflict. However, the means and methods of

[20] Samadashvili, 29–30.
[21] Darczewska, "The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare," 15.

these deception techniques are uniquely adapted to the modern information and security environment. Chapter Three discussed several forms of Soviet-style *maskirovka* that were widely-used in Crimea and Ukraine. The mysterious "little green men" that presaged Russia's annexation of Crimea bore no proof of official military sanction, yet they wore unmarked Russian military uniforms, spoke with Russian regional accents, and carried Russian-made weapons. At the time, Putin denied that they were Russian, but admitted their identity almost one year later.[22]

A similar employment of camouflage in Ukraine disguised Russian forces as local "separatists."[23] The heavy weapons used by separatist forces were hand-painted to remove insignia and hide the distinct Russian camouflage pattern. Geo-tagged internet postings of photographs and videos, along with satellite imagery reveal the Russian origin of tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery, and advanced anti-aircraft systems used by separatists.[24] At the height of the Ukrainian conflict, security experts estimated that approximately twelve thousand Russian military personnel were present in Eastern Ukraine, with approximately fifty thousand Russian troops stationed in camps along the Ukrainian border.[25] This mass movement of troops along the Ukrainian border is another example of operational *maskirovka* designed to disguise true intent and confound adversary assessment of the situation. While the security community successfully identified the incursion of Russian troops into Ukraine, the delay in doing was particularly worrisome for states exposed to a similar threat, like the Baltics.[26]

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[22] Steven Pifer, "Watch Out for Little Green Men," *Brookings* (blog), November 30, 2001, https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/watch-out-for-little-green-men/; "Putin in Film on Crimea: US Masterminds behind Ukraine Coup, Helped Train Radicals," *Russia Today*, March 15, 2015.
[23] Czuperski et al., "Hiding in Plain Sight," 4.
[24] Czuperski et al., 8.
[25] Czuperski et al., 6.
[26] Radin, Andrew, "Hybrid Warfare in the Baltics," 6.

The *maskirovka* techniques described above are examples of ambiguity-increasing or A-type deception methods from Soviet practice, but Ukraine and Crimea also saw the use of disinformation, the misleading or M-type deception that clarifies ambiguity around a false alternative. Russian-backed media employed this tactic heavily to misrepresent events and frame the conflict as a civil war caused by illegal Western subversion. Bringing historical animosity into the conversation, Russian media characterized the Ukrainian government as brutal, fascist 'Banderites,' a reference to the Ukrainian pro-Nazi World War II independence movement.[27] To amplify these misleading narratives, Russia employed armies of internet trolls to steer social media forums toward false news stories and visual frames that describe the brutality of Ukrainian authorities against Russian populations.[28]

Russian action in Crimea and Ukraine also followed the principles of Soviet-era Reflexive Control theory adapted to the modern information environment. As described in Chapter Three, the object of Reflexive Control theory is to present the conflict environment, through signaling and deception, in such a way that it leads the adversary to make decisions favorable to one's objectives. The signaling and deception methods can include concealment of true objectives, escalatory rhetoric, presenting distorted force postures, and power pressure. Continued denial of Russian involvement in Ukraine and Crimea forced the American and NATO security communities to guess at Moscow's true objectives and degree of involvement. This strategy also allows Putin the flexibility to advance or withdraw without significant political cost, maintaining a geopolitical advantage.[29]

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[27] "Banderites and Islamists at the service of the USA," *Svobodnaya Pressa*, April 26, 2015, http://svpressa.ru/politic/article/119446/.
[28] Mykola Makhortykh and Maryna Sydorova, "Social Media and Visual Framing of the Conflict in Eastern Ukraine," *Media, War & Conflict* 10, no. 3 (2017): 365.
[29] Snegovaya, "Putin's Information War in Ukraine," 12.

Along with denial of involvement, Putin simultaneously escalated his rhetoric and threatened a Russian response to any increased NATO involvement in Ukraine at a Russian Security Council meeting: "We will react appropriately and proportionately to the approach of NATO's military infrastructure toward our borders."[30] Hugo Spaulding from the Institute for the Study of War notes that Russian-backed separatists also escalated operations before and after ceasefire talks with Ukraine, following a power pressure strategy to force concessions from the Ukrainian government.[31]

These Reflexive Control methods, combined with *maskirovka* and disinformation techniques discussed earlier, interacted in Ukraine to create a situation where Russian involvement was ultimately undeniable but virtually unopposed. Attaining the goal of Reflexive Control, Russia's deception practices led the West to stay on the sidelines during the invasion out of concern that Russia would escalate to match any involvement and make the situation worse. Leonid Bershidsky, a Russian journalist, described this concern by writing,

> Western leaders may not admit it, but they want Putin to keep lying about the absence of Russian troops from the war. Once he stops doing that, a point of no return will be passed and the conflict will escalate until Russia, the locally stronger side, wins a decisive military victory – or until the West drops its reservations and sends in troops too. Both these scenarios would be disastrous for Ukraine.[32]

Rather than the given Western label of "Hybrid Warfare," Russia's approach to Ukraine and Crimea included a combination of Soviet deception techniques, updated and refined for today's information domain. Russia relied heavily on Soviet-era information warfare methods

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[30] Vladimir Putin, "Security Council Meeting" (2014), http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/page/229.
[31] Hugo Spaulding, "Putin's Next Objectives in the Ukraine Crisis" (Institute for the Study of War, February 3, 2015), 15.
[32] "Why Putin Is Lying About Ukraine," *Bloomberg.com*, February 9, 2015, https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2015-02-09/why-putin-is-lying-about-ukraine.

of *maskirovka*, disinformation, and Reflexive Control to increase the ambiguity of the conflict environment and accomplish political objectives while avoiding military confrontation with the West.

Full-Spectrum Operations: Lessons from Modern Conflict

Another intriguing aspect of Russia's actions in Crimea and Ukraine is how information warfare methods were combined with other military and non-military measures in ways that mirror lessons of modern conflict learned from the 2011 Libyan intervention. Chapter Four accounts how Gen Gerasimov articulated lessons learned through from the perspective of a hostile, strategic competitor on the sidelines during this conflict. Similarly, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg offered the following observation on Russia's methods in Ukraine: "Hybrid Warfare is the dark reflection of our comprehensive approach. We use a combination of military and non-military means to stabilize countries, others use it to destabilize them."[33] The conflicts in Ukraine and Libya began under similar conditions: an escalating protest that demanded extensive government reforms. From the Russian viewpoint, the escalating protests of the Ukrainian revolution portended another potential Western intervention, this time on the Russian border and in a location of deep significance to Russian history and culture. As the ninth century birthplace of Kievan Rus, Slavic civilization, and the Eastern Orthodox Church, a Western-led military intervention in the historic heart of Russia was likely an intolerable prospect from Moscow's perspective.

Russia responded to the uprisings in Kiev with the same focused application of conflict methods that Gen Gerasimov outlined in 2013: a

[33] Jens Stoltenberg, "Keynote Speech by NATO Secretary Jens Stoltenberg at the Opening of the NATO Transformation Seminar," March 25, 2015, https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/opinions_118435.htm.

"broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other nonmilitary measures, applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population."[34] Ethnic Russian communities in Eastern Ukraine were energized with inflammatory rhetoric portraying the supposed brutality of the new pro-Western Ukrainian authorities. An army of internet trolls augmented state-controlled media, dominating the information environment with false reports of humanitarian atrocities against Russian-speaking populations. This propaganda campaign was backed with real resources—Russian troops and operatives disguised as separatists, supplied with weapons and resources from across the border, and led by former Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) agents.

The modern social media environment both inflamed the initial sparks of the Euromaidan protests in Kiev and formed the defining features of the Ukrainian conflict. As modern communication methods enabled rebel forces to conduct an "air war" that mobilized both the Libyan population and an international base of popular support, so too did Russia leverage the modern information domain to intensify the conflict in support of its regional objectives. In Libya, the US and NATO provided political support and guidance to the National Transitional Council (NTC) in the form of regular meetings between the NTC and a NATO Contact Group. Similarly, Russian military and FSB operatives led the political parties defining the insurgency in Eastern Ukraine. NATO supported the Libyan rebels with lethal air support, and Britain and France even used military special forces as liaisons with the rebel militias. Russia supplied the insurgency with heavy weapons and covert military forces. As the US and NATO defended the intervention as necessary to prevent a humanitarian crisis, while supporting the right to national self-determination, Russia has used both these themes as legal

[34] Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight (Translation by Charles K. Bartles)," 24.

justification for its annexation of Crimea and its support of the Ukrainian insurgency.

Russia's strategic approach to the conflicts in Ukraine and Crimea indicate that they carefully studied of ends, ways, and means by which US and NATO intervened in Libya. Russia then used this template as a guiding approach to military reform, as indicated by Gen Gerasimov's *Foresight* article. As Ukraine and Crimea demonstrate, Russia clearly understands that the changing information and conflict environment provides the opportunity to achieve political goals while avoiding conventional confrontation with a more powerful West.

Russian information operations in Ukraine and Crimea reflect the synthesis and adaptation of information warfare techniques from historical sources into an aggressive and effective method of achieving political goals without provoking direct military conflict with the West. This approach relies on the broad use of information, in the form of strategic disinformation and tactical deception, to provide ambiguity and operational cover for political, economic, and criminal activity. In line with the Russian tradition of reflexive control, information operations deliberately shaped the Ukrainian conflict environment in a way that prevented a legitimate Western military response. Russia then used this expanded below-threshold conflict space to act quickly and decisively, achieving political objectives normally requiring much greater conventional military force and the risk of extensive casualties. Gen Gerasimov's 2013 *Foresight* article notes, "the role of nonmilitary 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."[35] By weaponizing the information tools and techniques embedded in the Russian historical experience and blending these methods with asymmetric military operations, criminal activities, and broad

[35] Gerasimov, 24.

instruments of national power, Russia perfected a strategic approach that achieved limited, yet important regional objectives in ways that the West was unable and ultimately unwilling to counter.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

Information is now a new species of weapon.

- Maj Gen (ret) Ivan Vorobyev

The information warfare Russia employed during the annexation of Crimea and the insurgency in Ukraine is not new. The influences that guide Russia's use of the information domain come from broad historical origins: Russian culture, tactics and techniques perfected by the Soviet Union, and lessons from recent US and NATO operations interpreted through a hostile lens. Russia's information warfare is the heart of an asymmetric blend of military and non-military measures that seek political advantage, in and out of military conflict. Given that Russia's views of information warfare are deep-rooted and will continue adapting to the modern information domain, the following recommendations and counter-strategies will help the US and NATO meet and defeat this enduring threat.

Russian information warfare must be recognized as an actively employed weapon of war

One key to success in confronting and countering Russian information war will be to recognize its nature and its employment in the current context. Stathis Kalyvas, writing on irregular wars and counter-insurgency, cites the Vietnam War as the prime example of the US military failing to grasp the nature of the conflict. In general, he notes the difficulty of conventional forces and conventional minds

understanding and adapting to confront irregular wars.[1] Part of this difficulty can be attributed to a failure of a conventional military recognize that irregular forces pose a serious threat. Another source of difficulty is that traditional measures of success in conventional conflict, seizing enemy territory or attiring its military force, do not translate outside of the conventional paradigm. In information war, as in irregular war, the threat is insidious. It avoids confrontation but directly assaults the will of the opponent. In information warfare, as in irregular war, ground won or lost is an inadequate measure of success. Instead, the battle is for hearts and minds of the population and for influence over the adversary's decision-making process. Giving Russia's information warfare methods their due characterization, as actively and continually employed tools of warfare, will help focus the broader security community and generate a response commensurate with the threat it poses.

Information warfare occurs throughout the spectrum of conflict, including in the absence of direct military operations

Russian culture forms the basis for a holistic view of information war in Russian society, and Soviet-era deception techniques were employed continually through the Cold War, even in the absence of hostilities. While the US definition of "information operations" limits the scope to measures applied specifically during military operations, Russia approaches information warfare as a continual exploitation of history, culture, language, and nationalism for political advantage, regardless of the presence or absence of military conflict. Given this definition and the evidence at large, European and American security officials must

[1] Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 1 edition (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 163.

recognize that Russia is in the initial phases of information war as part of a broader hostile posture. This acknowledgment should also be included in any overall assessment of Russia's military disposition, or the phase of conflict in the Baltic and Eastern European region.

Information warfare is an asymmetric approach born from weakness, not strength

The implication of the above discussion is that Russia's information warfare must not be underestimated. The converse is also true: it must not be overestimated. As Chapter Four finds, Russia's recent emphasis on asymmetric techniques and information warfare has grown alongside the contemporaneous spread of democratic, popular revolutions. Gen Gerasimov specifically referred to these "color revolutions" in the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia when describing the recent changes in the rules of war. Corroborating this view, a June 2017 Defense Intelligence Agency report, "Russia Military Power," outlined Moscow's perception of US intent:

> The Kremlin is convinced the United States is laying the groundwork for regime change in Russia, a conviction further reinforced by the events in Ukraine. Moscow views the United States as the critical driver behind the crisis in Ukraine and the Arab Spring and believes that the overthrow of former Ukrainian President Yanukovych is the latest move in a long-established pattern of US-orchestrated regime change efforts, including the Kosovo campaign, Iraq, Libya, and the 2003-2005 'color revolutions' in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan.[2]

For Russia, the threat of popular protest aided by Western influence is real and existential. It has therefore invested heavily in

[2] Defense Intelligence Agency, "Russia Military Power: Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations," June 28, 2017, 14–15.

information warfare techniques to steer information and public protest potential in ways that favor its enduring state interests: domestic stability, regional influence, and return to great power status.

Information warfare is a cost-effective approach to achieving political goals in the absence of traditional measures of state power. Pavel Baev of the Brookings Institution writes that despite Russia's military successes in Ukraine, "the former superpower is steadily and irreversibly weakening."[3] Baev argues that the Kremlin's rearmament program is unsustainable based on Russia's economic outlook. Based largely on natural resource exports, Moscow's economy faces continued stagnation from low oil prices and continued US sanctions. Measured by purchasing power parity, Russia's gross domestic product stands at one-quarter to one-fifth that of China, the European Union and the US. Russia is also confronted by a decades-old demographic downturn caused by low birth rates and an aging population. The RAND Corporation notes that these trends do not necessarily add up to a "crisis," but they do pose difficult challenges for the future of Russian policy.[4] Ultimately, Russia's military, economic, and demographic positions will continue to frustrate its great power aspirations. Instead of an innovation from strength, aggressive information warfare could potentially be viewed as Russia's attempt to "level the playing field"—using the information domain to reduce Western power, since it has little chance of dramatically increasing its own.

[3] Pavel K. Baev, "Russia Is Not Strong. And Putin Is Even Weaker.," *Brookings* (blog), June 8, 2015, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2015/06/08/russia-is-not-strong-and-putin-is-even-weaker/.
[4] Julie DaVanzo and David Adamson, "Russia's Demographic 'Crisis': How Real Is It?," Issue Paper (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013).

Russian information warfare must be countered in-kind, with an instrumental approach.

One of the fundamental differences between information in Russian society compared with the West is the view of using information as an instrument of state control, not a way to disseminate the truth. Chapter Two discusses this instrumental approach to information as an outgrowth of the relationship between the authority and society in Russian history. The imperative of a secure and strong state able to defend from a multitude of foreign threats led society to accept widespread mendacity and falsehood by authorities as the necessary price for security. *Vranyo*, or lies wrapped in a veneer of truth, became an integral part of the Russian social fabric, and truth became whatever was needed to ensure control and security.

In the Western view, based on a belief in reality apart from cognition, the truth stands on its own and will eventually win out over falsehood. This difference in the instrumental and objective views of information explains why Russia's aggressive disinformation campaigns are rarely countered. To a Western audience, the truth will eventually prevail. Unfortunately, the Russian view better aligns with the way information interacts with the human mind. Robert Jervis wrote that "once a belief or image is established, new material will become assimilated to it, with discrepant and ambiguous information being ignored or fitting into established views."[5] Similarly, RAND studies on social media suggest that public opinion "develops and stabilizes into a dominant opinion very quickly, giving the greatest advantage to large groups that can shape opinion early on."[6] Russian information warfare

[5] Robert L. Jervis, *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*, 1 edition (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 169.
[6] Marcellino et al., *Monitoring Social Media: Lessons for Future Department of Defense Social Media Analysis in Support of Information Operations*, 14.

leverages this phenomenon by augmenting disinformation campaigns with internet trolls to propagate disinformation and steer the prevailing narrative toward false perceptions of events. In information war, the truth cannot stand on its own. In today's fractured media environment, "truth" will typically solidify around the most prevalent or aggressively-defended narrative or the one that aligns with biases already formed in the audience. Western media and security organizations must adopt similar a similar instrumental approach.

An instrumental approach to the information domain could include counter-strategies outlined by the Center for European Policy Analysis. Disinformation campaigns must be systematically analyzed and tracked to understand their reach and effectiveness in shaping public opinion. Pro-Russian media outlets expend great effort to develop propaganda that targets specific audiences: domestic, regional, and global. Western media outlets must outmatch this effort to reach various audiences while maintaining a commitment to journalistic integrity. Russian social media efforts that support propaganda campaigns must be recognized and stopped or countered with similar emphasis by western sources with a commitment to the truth. Another policy approach could include the creation of new international agencies or the reconstruction of former agencies, like the US Information Agency, dedicated to strategic communications outside of conflict.[7] The US government could also increase funding for news outlets that reach target Eastern European or Russian audiences but maintain strict editorial independence, like Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty or Voice of America.

[7] Edward Lucas and Peter Pomeranzev, "Winning the Information War" (Washington, D.C.: Center for European Policy Analysis, August 2016), 1–20.

The strategic imperative to understand Russia: its culture, politics, psychology, history, and military approach, did not end with the fall of the Soviet Union

The fall of the Soviet Union saw a considerable divestiture of the academic institution of Sovietology that had been built for decades around the study of Russia and Communism. "The ostensible object of our study no longer existed," wrote Hillel Fradkin of the Bradley Foundation, an institution that supported Soviet studies at Harvard University and the University of California at Los Angeles.[8] Federal grants for post-doctoral research, area studies, and training in the languages of the former Soviet bloc were sharply reduced. Though critics of Sovietology were quick to point to the failure of the field to predict the collapse of the Soviet Union, the field nonetheless provided for a nuanced understanding of Soviet practice that included the cultural fabric underpinning the political culture of the USSR. The field also provided for robust scholarly debate that informed US policy toward the Eastern Bloc.

The US must count the costs of democracy promotion worldwide, especially in Russia's Near Abroad

Though promoting the spread of democracy worldwide may be in the enduring national interests of the US, policymakers should consider the potential repercussions from actively assisting a population in protesting against their government, especially in former Soviet states. The US and NATO likely prevented a humanitarian catastrophe in Libya, but Russia derived from this conflict a perceived new US-NATO style of

[8] William H. Honan, "Sovietologists, Years After the Collapse, Cope With a New Reality," *The New York Times*, March 13, 1996, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/1996/03/13/us/sovietologists-years-after-the-collapse-cope-with-a-new-reality.html.

regime change and acted swiftly to subvert the new post-Yanukovych Ukrainian government during its 2014 revolution. Russia argued its involvement along themes borrowed from Libya, using the right of self-determination as grounds for the annexation of Crimea and providing humanitarian assistance for Russian-speaking populations of Eastern Ukraine. Furthermore, Putin swiftly condemned the Maidan revolution movement and the Western-backed installation of the interim Poroshenko government as an "armed takeover" of the duly-elected Yanukovych government.[9] The Obama administration argued that Yanukovych's actions had "undermined his legitimacy."[10] Putin pointed out that there were constitutional means of removing Yanukovych from power that were ignored by the Western-backed revolution movement.[11] The result was a sophisticated twist of strategic narrative that portrayed US hypocrisy: its subversion international norms of sovereignty, self-determination, and rule of law in Ukraine, with Russia arguing in defense of the very values that have defined US policy for decades. Acting straight out of a Reflexive Control playbook, Russia signaled the adversary with information themes that predetermined a non-response. In Ukraine, Russia used the West's values to advance its interests, while the West, always seeking to justify actions from a legalistic high ground, was unable to decisively confront this logic.

The US and NATO must understand that the antagonism with which Russia views the West is deeply-rooted. Continued promotion of a rules-based international order, human rights, and universal freedoms will not easily penetrate Russian society. Instead, it will be met with an aggressive message that portrays Russia as the defender of a distorted

[9] "Transcript: Putin Defends Russian Intervention in Ukraine," *Washington Post*, March 4, 2014, sec. World, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/transcript-putin-defends-russian-intervention-in-ukraine/2014/03/04/9cadcd1a-a3a9-11e3-a5fa-55f0c77bf39c_story.html.
[10] Justin Sink, "White House Dodges on Legitimate Leader of Ukraine," *The Hill*, February 24, 2014, http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/199058-wh-dodges-on-legitimate-leader-of-ukraine.
[11] "Transcript."

concept of liberty, conservative values and security in the face of the corrupt, debased, and imperialistic West. The fall of the Soviet Union was not the beginning of peace with Russia. From Russia's historical view it was instead merely new chapter in an eternal conflict of civilizations.

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