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NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

JOINT FORCES STAFF COLLEGE

JOINT ADVANCED WARFIGHTING SCHOOL

COGNITIVE WARFARE: HALTING THE RUSSIAN SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

by Rene J. Medrano

CDR, USN

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.

This paper is entirely my own work except as documented in footnotes.

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31 January 2023

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ABSTRACT

The U.S. government supports the consolidation of Georgia's democracy; its integration in Euro-Atlantic institutions; peaceful unification, secure in its borders; and further development of its free market economy. Russia threatens these efforts and Georgian sovereignty through gradual expansion of illegally occupied separatist zones (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and nonconventional coercive tactics aimed at reversing Georgia's European and American foreign policy aspirations. This research paper will examine if cognitive coercive methods can successfully counter the Kremlin's efforts in the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by instilling Georgian loyalty and fostering a distrust for Russia's growing influence. First, the paper will examine the cultural background of each separatist region. Next, cognitive warfare will be defined, and various cognitive methods will be introduced. Three case studies will then be discussed to identify lessons learned. Finally, those lessons will be used to make conclusions on the viability of cognitive warfare methods in achieving a unified Georgia along with potential strategies and recommendations.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Georgia is located at a strategically important crossroads and situated in the Caucasian region between Russia and Turkey, the Caspian, and the Black Seas. It is a proven ally in our effort to promote democracy in the region, combat terrorism in the Middle East, and create alternative energy export options which undermine Moscow's hegemony in the Caucasus.

The U.S. Government supports the consolidation of Georgia's democracy: its integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions; peaceful unification, security in its borders; and further development of its free market economy. Russia threatens these efforts and Georgian sovereignty through the gradual expansion of illegally occupied separatist zones, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and nonconventional coercive tactics aimed at reversing Georgia's European and American foreign policy aspirations.

Psychological warfare is the strategic use of coercive tactics and other non-combat techniques during periods of peace or war to influence the thinking or behavior of an enemy. U.S. Military applications of these techniques have also been dubbed Military Information Support Operations (MISO). MISO mission goals include the following:

1. To influence the perceptions, attitudes, objective reasoning, and ultimately, the behavior of adversary, friendly, neutral audiences, and key population groups in support of US combat operations and objectives

2. To shape and influence foreign attitudes and behavior in support of US regional objectives, policies, interests, theater military plans, or contingencies

3. Provide support to public information efforts when authorized by the Secretary of Defense or the President in accordance with Title 10, United States Code (USC)

4. Support to Special Operations[1]

To achieve specific objectives, planners attempt to gain extensive knowledge of the beliefs, likes, dislikes, strengths, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities of the target population. Knowing what motivates a group of people is the key to success.

The increased speed and volume by which information can be spread through the use of technology has given rise to a new form of psychological warfare and has transformed the concept of the "below the threshold" conflict. State actors, the United States included, can now employ technology and psychological understanding to wage cognitive warfare on nations or groups that might not be aware such tactics are in play. This notion of cognitive warfare has been defined as the weaponization of public opinion, by an external entity, for the purpose of influencing public and governmental policy and destabilizing public institutions.[2] This is done to propagate societal cracks to sow distrust in established institutions. Cognitive warfare can be waged to foster edginess regarding governance, subverting democratic processes, triggering civil disturbances, or quelling separatist movements. This is accomplished by disrupting the organization and unity of a population's systems or by manipulating a target's interpretation and understanding of the world around them.[3]

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[1] U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. "Military Information Support Operations." *Joint Publication 3-13.2.* Washington DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, December 20, 2011.

[2] Bernal, Alonso, Cameron Carter, Ishpreet Singh, Kathy Cao, and Olivia Madreperla. "Cognitive Warfare: An Attack on Truth and Thought." Innovation Hub. March 2021. https://www.innovationhub-act.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Cognitive%20Warfare.pdf (accessed November 11, 2022).

[3] Bernal et al, "Cognitive Warfare."

While these psychological methods may seem like modern constructs born from technological innovation, the United States has employed methods such as these as far back as World War I.[4] It can be argued that warfare of the mind is as old as conventional warfare itself. The purpose of this paper is to explore the viability of U.S. Forces utilizing these methods in Georgia to influence the separatist regions within to shift from their Russian allegiance to the more pro-western Georgian regime.

Since the conclusion of the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, Russia has continued to exert its influence in the region and has engaged in a long-term strategy to establish control of Georgia. Cognitive and psychological warfare methods have produced varying results in previous applications and this research intends to build upon positive results by arguing its effectiveness in this area of strategic importance. South Ossetia has tabled a referendum to join Russia in order to discuss concerns with Moscow. Abkhazia has announced it has no intention of joining the Russian federation despite its past vocal support. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the use of South Ossetian troops as "cannon fodder" has the potential to cast doubt in the minds of Georgian separatists on the utility of joining Russia.[5]

To maintain a vital democratic partner in an area of strategic importance, the U.S. needs to diversify its strategy in Georgia. Unconventional methods may prove to be a cost-effective means to provide traction toward a unified Georgia. Can MISO influence the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by instilling an idea of a strong, unified Georgia and fostering a distrust for Russia's growing influence, given its recent

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[4] Longley, Robert. "An Introduction to Psychological Warfare." *ThoughtCo.* October 22, 2019. https://www.thoughtco.com/psychological-warfare-definition-4151867 (accessed November 11, 2022).

[5] Kucera, Joshua. "South Ossetian Leader Faces Tough Election After Backing Ukraine Deployment." *Eurasianet.* May 6, 2022. https://eurasianet.org/south-ossetian-leader-faces-tough-reelection-after-backing-ukraine-deployment (accessed October 11, 2022).

aggression in Ukraine? These three data points hint at the possible viability of cognitive and psychological methods in Georgia.

Method

This paper will utilize the Case Study Method, a qualitative method that allows for a detailed understanding of a particular case.[6] Understanding the underlying issues regarding the Georgian separatists along with the lessons learned from past operations can be used to predict successful application to the target audience. Even more so if the case study has parallels that can be drawn to the issue in Georgia.

This paper will begin by providing background info on the conflict of the region to understand the target audience. It will touch on the history prior to the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 but will focus primarily on the post-Russo-Georgian war period to better understand the concerns of the separatists in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The dominant media outlets in the region will also be discussed in order to identify the most appropriate methods to employ.

Before examining the case studies, the concept of cognitive warfare and its components will be defined, including discussion on employment methods, media environments, goals, and targets. Through experience, certain principles have been developed and a few of those will be covered to codify a general understanding of cognitive warfare.

The background information and the general understanding of cognitive warfare will provide context for evaluating case studies that were selected because they shared

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[6] Mligo, Elia Shabani. "Introduction to Research Methods and Report Writing: A Practical Guide for Students and Researchers in Social Sciences and the Humanities." 2016. https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nationaldefense-ebooks/detail.action?docID=is 4835551 (accessed 10 1, 2022).

some common characteristics with the situation in Georgia and utilized more contemporary media methods.

The first set of case studies comes from allied efforts in the Balkans regarding Kosovo. They stress the importance of varied approaches and cultural understanding. Advances in technology and social media can amplify the effects of the methods utilized in these scenarios.

The third case study examines Russia and how it exploits elections in the Baltic region. As a cognitive warfare actor, Russia is extremely proficient, and it is worth examining its methods of influence. This particular case highlights the utility of exploiting existing divisive sentiment instead of expending energy trying to manufacture artificial tension.

The final case study comes from the ongoing struggle in Ukraine. It shows how militarily inferior country can resist Russia by employing cognitive methods and beating Moscow at its own game. Despite Russia's attempts at controlling the narrative, Ukrainian counter efforts have shown that Russia is vulnerable and susceptible to cognitive warfare methods; perhaps not directly as it relates to their domestic civilian population, but indirectly as it relates to the perception of Russia on the world stage.

Once examples of effective cognitive warfare strategies are identified, the resulting conclusions help identify appropriate strategies the DOD can employ for this case and others. Additionally, the data can be used to potentially develop a framework that can be employed during the Joint Planning Process. At the moment no particular agency is responsible for employing these strategies but given the methods discussed here, perhaps a particular group can be identified given the required capabilities.

Chapter 1: Georgia's Separatist Regions

Background

At the conclusion of the Cold War and the breaking apart of the Soviet Union, the territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia were the object of territorial disputes between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Georgia. The 'Ossetian problem' is a consequence of the territorial administrative system of the Soviet Union, which deliberately created ethnic enclaves within each of the Soviet Union's constituent republics, primarily as a means of preventing the centralization of authority along ethnic lines. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, South Ossetia, along with Abkhazia, declared unilateral independence from the Republic of Georgia and joined the ranks of other unrecognized republics within the territory of the former Soviet Union.[1]

Georgia is 30,000 square miles and is the 119th largest member of the United Nations (Figure 1). The population in the parts under government control is around 3.7 million ethnic Georgians, which make up the largest proportion at 87%, Azerbaijanis represent 6%, Armenians around 4.5%, and a little under 1% are Russian. Since 1991 the Georgian government has not controlled Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Abkhazia, the larger, more populous region, lies to the west and covers 3,346 square miles, and has a population of around 245,000.[2] South Ossetia is in the north-central part of the country and at 1500 square miles it makes up around 5 1/2 percent of Georgia's overall territory

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[1] Deibert, Ronald J., Rafal Rohozinski, and Masashi Crete-Nishihata. "Cyclones in cyberspace: Information shaping and denial in the 2008 Russia–Georgia war." *Security Dialogue* (SAGE Publications) 43, no. 1 (February 2012): 3-24.

[2] O'Loughlin, John, Vladimir Kolossov, Gerard Toal, and Gearoid Tuathail. "Inside Abkhazia: Survey of Attitudes in a De Facto State." *Post-Soviet Affairs* (Routledge) 27, no. 1 (May 2013): 1-36.

while official figures suggest that its population is only around 50,000.[3] They are predominantly Christian orthodox people living in an area that straddles the Caucasus mountains and they trace their ancestry to the Alans, an ancient Iranian people.

Figure 1. Political Map of Georgia. Nations Online. https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/georgia_map2.htm

The story really starts in the late 18th century when imperial Russia began to push into the caucuses after conquering the northern part of Ossetia from the Georgian Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti at the start of the 19th century. Russian forces took South Ossetia along with the rest of Georgia in 1917. The two parts would become separated by the Russian Revolution. While the north remained within Russia, the South became a part of a briefly independent Georgian state. This division led to a series of South Ossetian

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[3] Toal, Gerard, and John O'Loughlin. "Inside South Ossetia: Survey of Attitudes in a De Facto State." *Post-Soviet Affairs* (Routledge) 29, no. 2 (March 2013): 136-172.

uprisings that would eventually be put down by Georgian forces. However, in 1921 when Georgia was captured by the Soviet Red Army, South Ossetians gained hope that they would be reunified with the North. The region was instead given self-rule as the South Ossetia autonomous oblast within the new Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic that continued for the next seven decades.[4]

In the late 1980s the Soviet Union was breaking apart and South Ossetia saw its chance to break away. In 1989, following growing tensions with the Georgian leadership the South Ossetians voted to unite with North Ossetia. Although any subsequent violence was prevented by Soviet troops, the following year South Ossetia announced that it had formed a separate Soviet Republic and called for Moscow's recognition. In response, the Georgian authorities rescinded its autonomy and declared a state of emergency in 1991. As Georgia regained its independence after decades of Soviet rule it tried to retake South Ossetia by force between 1991 and 1992. But despite initial gains it was unable to seize the whole region. Resistance came from Russia, who dispatched a "peacekeeping" mission with the blessing of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).[5] Succumbing to the pressure of this action and the movement in Abkhazia to separate as well, the Georgian government accepted a ceasefire.

This ceasefire established a joint peacekeeping force along with Russia and opened the way for peace talks under the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in the decade that followed. The situation remained relatively peaceful and there was regular contact between South Ossetia and Georgia. This came to an end in 2003 however, when the Georgian government was overthrown. A new pro-western

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[4] Cornell, Svante E., and Frederick S. Starr. *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia.* New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2009.

[5] Deibert et al. "Cyclones in cyberspace."

president, Michael Saakashvili, assumed leadership and promised to reassert control over the breakaway regions. This soon led to renewed tension. While Georgia promised to give Abkhazia and South Ossetia the maximum possible autonomy, South Ossetian leaders still called for an independence referendum which showed overwhelming support for statehood over the next three to four years.[6]

After the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) recognized the independence of Kosovo in 2008 conditions worsened. Russia moved immediately to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia and after engaging in official relations, Moscow agreed to grant Russian citizenship and passports to people of both separatist regions. Georgia perceived this move as a direct challenge to its sovereignty claims. In response, Georgia withdrew from the Joint Control Commission for Georgian-Ossetian Conflict Resolution which was the body monitoring peacekeeping forces in the region and ceased cooperation with the OSCE peacekeeping mission.[7]

Tensions remained high and this was also fed by the growing hostility between Russia and the West. In April 2008, NATO formally welcomed Georgia's aspiration for membership. This decision was condemned by Moscow as a huge strategic mistake and this all came to a head on the 7th of August 2008 as the world watched the opening of the Beijing Olympics. Georgia declared war, responding to what it claimed had been an attack on its troops by separatist forces. Georgia ordered its forces into South Ossetia; however, within hours, Russian soldiers and heavy armor were flooding through the Roki tunnel linking North and South of Ossetia. Just five days later and after a massive

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[6] Cornell, Svante E., and Frederick S. Starr. *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia.* New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2009.
[7] Deibert et al. "Cyclones in cyberspace."

Russian onslaught by land, sea, and air, Georgia was forced to capitulate under the terms of another ceasefire agreement.

As a result, Russian troops withdrew from most of the country. However, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, around 20% of Georgia's overall territory remained under Russia's effective control. Just two weeks later Moscow announced that it in fact recognized the two territories as independent sovereign states. Despite Russia's recognition, South Ossetia had little real interest in independence since opinion polls appeared to show overwhelming support for unification with the far larger and more populous North Ossetia within the Russian Federation.[8] As a result calls for a referendum on integration grew. However, despite the growing economic and political ties between North and South Ossetia, as well as the growing control Russia exerted over South Ossetia, Moscow steadfastly resisted the calls for annexation.

Instead, it seemed to prefer creeping de facto integration over actual unification. This even continued after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014. For example, while a Treaty of Alliance and Integration signed in 2015 saw Russia guarantee South Ossetia's defense and security and even created a customs union between them, it was framed very clearly in terms of interstate relations.[9] Despite Russia's apparent opposition to the idea, unification nevertheless remains firmly on the South Ossetian agenda. This was most recently highlighted in Spring 2022. While international attention was focused on Ukraine, the South Ossetian leader Anatoly Bibilov, announced plans to hold a referendum on a union with Russia.

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[8] Waal, Thomas de. "South Ossetia Today." *Carnegie Europe.* June 3, 2019. https://carnegieeurope.eu/2019/06/11/south-ossetia-today-pub-80788 (accessed 10 2022).
[9] Ker-Lindsay, James. "South Ossetia: What Does Russia Really Want?" July 8, 2022, YouTube video, 14:32, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2QMKJlu5J8M.

Few took the idea seriously; it was seen as an attempt by the incumbent during his election to shore up his vote. Despite being defeated in the election, Bibilov announced that the poll would still go ahead as scheduled on July 17th. Georgia, the European Union, and the United States condemned the planned vote. What is more interesting is that Russia also rejected the notion. The referendum for annexation with Russia has since been shelved by the newly elected South Ossetian president, Alan Guliyev.[10]

South Ossetian Target Opportunities

With permission of the South Ossetian government, a public opinion survey was conducted in late 2010 on the general public within South Ossetia to measure the level of trust in local institutions and leadership, ethnic Ossetian attitudes toward other groups, return of seized property, as well as relations with Russia and Georgia.[11] Here are some of the results:

Politics. As a state, South Ossetia is relatively isolated and shows a general insecurity about what it is as a nation. The general public has a baseline distrust of all government. Regarding current relations with Russia and Georgia, there is room to educate the public on current events and to shed light on the benefits of a possible reconciliation with Georgia.[12] The average citizen has little knowledge of the complexities of Russia-Georgia politics and any sentiment is based on past experience. The current view by the South Ossetians towards Georgia is pessimistic and is primarily attributed to lingering negative effects of the war in 2008 and the aggressive unification

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[10] Ker-Lindsay, James. "South Ossetia."
[11] Toal, Gerard, and John O'Loughlin. "Inside South Ossetia: Survey of Attitudes in a De Facto State." *Post-Soviet Affairs* (Routledge) 29, no. 2 (March 2013): 136-172. (Deibert, Rohozinski and Crete-Nishihata 2012).
[12] Toal and O'Loughlin. "Inside South Ossetia."

initiative by past Georgian president, Mikheil Saakashvili.[13] South Ossetians agree that

the dislike for Saakashvili was greater than their distaste for Georgia. With Salome

Zurabishvili now in office the door is now open for softening the perception of Georgia

held by the opposition in South Ossetia.

Economics. The field report and the survey respondents present a portrayal of the

South Ossetian population that is living in a poor, peripheral area that has suffered

dramatic out-migration as a result of economic transition and warfare. The quality of life

in South Ossetia is often compared to its Russian and Georgian neighbors and 85% of the

citizens are greatly concerned about weak economic prospects.[14] South Ossetia is almost

completely reliant on foreign aid by Russia for its economy, so Georgia is behind the

curve in swaying public opinion by economic means but there is reason for optimism.

The overwhelming majority of citizens expect the authorities to address the problems of

unemployment and housing. The current pro-Russian government has failed to do so and

has little credibility. Fear of violence like what occurred in 2008 is the only factor that

discourages any potential for activism on this topic. Georgia has the opportunity to

present itself as an alternative to the status quo which has yielded poor economic growth

to date.

Perception of Russia. There is public discontent over the deployment of Ossetian

soldiers to fight in Ukraine on behalf of Russia.[15] South Ossetian leadership have

presented various reasons for deciding to support the Russians but actually they have no

say in the matter. South Ossetian soldiers have been sent to Ukraine under orders from

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[13] Toal and O'Loughlin. "Inside South Ossetia."
[14] Toal and O'Loughlin. "Inside South Ossetia."
[15] Kucera, Joshua. "South Ossetian Leader Faces Tough Election After Backing Ukraine Deployment." *Eurasianet.* May 6, 2022. https://eurasianet.org/south-ossetian-leader-faces-tough-reelection-after-backing-ukraine-deployment (accessed October 11, 2022).

Russian officials, no doubt under obligations incurred from receiving vital economic aid from Russia. Public controversy over South Ossetian deployments has manifested in several ways. Approximately 300 South Ossetian soldiers deployed to Ukraine deserted and went back to South Ossetia complaining of poor treatment and being thrown into battle unprepared.[16] Complaints were made to Ossetian officials regarding the disastrous conditions they were forced to fight in, including faulty tactics, poor logistics, and broken weaponry. The tipping point towards desertion came when Ossetian soldiers were denied permission by Russian leadership to obtain bodies of the war dead. With the tides of war shifting in favor of Ukraine, Russia is on its heels and their competence as a world power is being called into question by the residents of South Ossetia. Any support by South Ossetian officials towards Russia's campaign in Ukraine is viewed by the Ossetian public as fake and coerced. Here is a weakness in Russia's credibility that Georgia can exploit to present itself as a competent alternative to Russian patronage.

Media Outlets. There is little media activity in South Ossetia beyond the state broadcaster and news agency. TV and radio channels are based in Moscow and are relayed extensively. There is a handful of small publishing companies that produce periodicals on occasion.

Ir is the state TV and radio company. It operates the only local TV station, which airs news in Ossetian and Russian. Ir also operates the website mc-ir.ru, as well as the Osinform news agency, osinform.ru.[17]

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[16] Kucera, Joshua. " South Ossetian Leader Faces Tough Election After Backing Ukraine Deployment."
[17] Toal and O'Loughlin. "Inside South Ossetia."

Because of the limited public media outlets, social media is the dominant media source within South Ossetia.[18] The top 3 social media outlets are Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.[19]

Abkhazia Target Opportunities

A highly reputable Russian public opinion company, the Lavada Center from Moscow, was hired to conduct a survey within Abkhazia. The Levada Center is well known as an independent public opinion polling organization, with no Russian government ownership or potentially compromising ties.[20] Here are the results:

Politics. In contrast to South Ossetia, Abkhazia has a greater sense of itself and is far less insecure. There is a great sense of cultural pride amongst the various ethnic groups. Most citizens are optimistic about the future and the threat of war or general conflict is not a dominant concern among the populace. The region of Abkhazia is far more connected, and its citizens can and do travel frequently. The Abkhazian leadership have been partly successful in building a nation identity shared by the ethnic Abkhaz, Armenians, and Russians. Government institutions are trusted and there are good inter-ethnic relations amongst the various ethnic groups. The only outlier is the small Georgian community within Abkhaz which shows a general distrust for the Abkhaz lead government and feels somewhat torn between Abkhazia and the Georgian homeland to the South. There are two opportunities here. As a result of their positive outlook and pride, the Abkhazians are extremely wary of Russian influence despite the enormous

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[18]*South Ossetia: Freedom in the World 2021 Country Report.* 2021, https://freedomhouse.org/country/south-ossetia/freedom-world/2021 (accessed November 18, 2022).
[19] Toal and O'Loughlin. "Inside South Ossetia."
[20] O'Loughlin, John, Vladimir Kolossov, Gerard Toal, and Gearoid Tuathail. "Inside Abkhazia: Survey of Attitudes in a De Facto State." *Post-Soviet Affairs* (Routledge) 27, no. 1 (May 2013): 1-36.

amount of financial support accepted from Moscow. Russia's sticky power initiative has not gone unnoticed. The desire is independence and not Russian dominance despite the sizeable amounts of foreign aid received from Russia.[21] If Georgia can adopt a plan of Abkhazian inclusion while preserving the sense of autonomy within Abkhazia, it could be received more favorably than Russian patronage which typically comes with a great many strings attached. Secondly, the small pessimistic Georgian community within Abkhazia could serve as a node or originating source for an influence campaign within the region.

Economics and Security. The economy of Abkhazia is on an upswing and there is a great deal of optimism about the future. Despite the growth in the economic sector, Abkhazia is still heavily reliant on Russian foreign aid. As a result of this accepted aid there has been growth in the number of Russian troops stationed in the region. This encroachment is felt by Abkhazia and there is greater sense of caution within the local government about what will be asked of them next. Much like South Ossetia, a metric for prosperity is often based off comparison between Russia and Georgia. The question is often asked, "Do we have it better than the Georgians or the Russians?" This metric by comparison is somewhat flawed because although many Abkhazians travel often and freely, they rarely do so to Georgia. Here lies a potential opportunity. An information campaign presenting Georgia as a more profitable partner could serve to sway public opinion away from Russia. It is important to note that any effort in this arena must be directed towards Abkhazia and not "past" them towards Russia. Because of the intense pride within Abkhazia, any effort which minimizes the region as a secondary problem to Russia will fall flat. This point is better explained by an NGO activist from Sukhumi

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[21] O'Loughlin et al. "Inside Abkhazia."

named Liana Kvarchelia, who articulated an important self-fulfilling dynamic characteristic of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict in April 2010: "The more, I think, Georgia insists on the fact that there is no conflict with Abkhazia, that there is only conflict with Russia and that Abkhazia is only Russia's puppet, the more Georgia insists on this, the more Abkhazia will be drawn to Russia, and will be dependent upon Russian support."[22]

Media. Compared to South Ossetia, Abkhazia has a more diverse mass media infrastructure. It consists of several TV channels, newspapers, magazines and radio stations. Some of these outlets are privately owned as well as government controlled.

There are two government and several private newspapers, published in Russian and Abkhaz. There is a degree of diversity, opposition media criticize the government over Abkhazian-Russian relations and internal politics.[23]

Radio Soma is a popular private radio station that broadcasts 24 hours a day. It carries mostly music, but it broadcasts news on occasion. The state radio broadcasts news related programs for limited durations, typically 3-4 hours a day.[24]

Television consists of a few private and government owned organizations. The most important state-run channel is Apsua TV which runs news broadcasts in Abkhaz and Russian. Abaza TV is the only private station, and its range is limited to the capital and surrounding areas. There are several Russian stations available throughout the region and there is also some Georgian TV is the southern portions of Abkhazia.[25]

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[22] O'Loughlin et al. "Inside Abkhazia."
[23] *BBC News.* "Abkhazia profile - Media." August 27, 2015.
[24] *BBC News.* "Abkhazia profile - Media." August 27, 2015.
[25] *BBC News.* "Abkhazia profile - Media." August 27, 2015.

The same social media outlets that dominate South Ossetia are very popular in Abkhazia as well.

With background information established for both separatist regions, the discussion in the next chapter explores the various methods in which to employ that information to achieve the desired effect in the target population.

Chapter 2: Cognitive Warfare Methods

Introduction and Definitions

Over the past decades, warfare has shifted from the physical means most commonly associated with conventional warfare. The nature of warfare remains unchanged, but the means shift toward the social and ideological threats brought about by mass media and advances in technology. It draws upon previous types of hybrid warfare and its reach and impact are amplified through cyberspace and social media. Cognitive Warfare builds upon and integrates the following non-kinetic methods: psychological warfare, electronic warfare, cyberwarfare, and information warfare.[1] These methods will be discussed individually to better define the process as a whole. Cognitive Warfare takes the next step in the war of ideas by not just controlling the flow of information but fighting to control or alter the way people react to information.[2] It is the weaponization of public opinion in order to influence public and governmental policy and destabilize public institutions.[3]

The origin of this influential warfare can be traced back to the Cold War Era. With the introduction of nuclear weapons, the type of total warfare that was seen during World War II was highly unlikely. Words and ideas were the ammunition for the new civilized approach to conflict. Espionage was prevalent, with the CIA and FBI as the

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[1] Cao, Kathy, et al. "Countering Cognitive Warfare: Awareness and Resilience." *NATO Review.* May 20, 2021. https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2021/05/20/countering-cognitive-warfare-awareness-and-resilience/index.html (accessed November 2022).

[2] Bernal, Alonso, Cameron Carter, Ishpreet Singh, Kathy Cao, and Olivia Madreperla. "Cognitive Warfare: An Attack on Truth and Thought." *Innovation Hub.* March 2021. https://www.innovationhub-act.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Cognitive%20Warfare.pdf (accessed November 11, 2022).

[3] Claverie, Bernard, and Francois Du Cluzel. "The Cognitive Warfare Concept." *Innovation Hub.* February 2022. https://www.innovationhub-act.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/CW%20article%20Claverie%20du%20Cluzel%20final_0.pdf (accessed November 11, 2022).

primary organizations employing methods of non-kinetic warfare. Its full effect was realized with the fall of the Iron Curtain. It can be argued that the United States was well suited to this type of conflict, given its origins in free speech and ideas.

The effectiveness and threat of cognitive warfare tactics are demonstrated in the steps foreign powers have taken to restrict its employment. Restrictions, bans, and general censorship have long been the policy of countries such as China, Russia, and North Korea.[4] Ironically, the ideals of free speech and free press, which make the U.S. and other Democratic nations adept at this type of warfare, may also be the source of its vulnerability to outside actors employing the same methods. With that knowledge, the same countries listed above, now presumably secure in their electronic borders, have now gone on the offensive in the cognitive arena. Recent examples include Russian interference in elections here in the U.S. as well as overseas in the Baltic states.[5]

Psychological Warfare. Psychological relates to the use of white, gray, and black products used by the various entities. For the United States, these entities include various branches of the military (traditionally Army and Air Force) and the CIA or its predecessors. White products are items that are officially identifiable as originating from the U.S., gray products have ambiguous origins, and black products are attributed to

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[4] Zucchi, Kristina. "Why Facebook is Banned in China & How to Access It." *Investopedia.* October 22, 2019. www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/042915/why-facebook-banned-china.asp. (accessed November 12, 2022); Talmadge, Eric. "North Korea Blocks Facebook, Twitter and YouTube." *Global News.* April 4, 2016. https://globalnews.ca/news/2616449/north-korea-blacks-facebook-twitter-and-youtube/ (accessed November 12, 2022); Somin, Ilya. "Facebook Should Stop Cooperating with Russian Government Censorship." *The Washington Post.* December 21, 2014. www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2014/12/21/facebook-should-stop-cooperating-with-Russian-government-censorship/ (accessed November 12, 2022).

[5] Lipton, Eric. "The Perfect Weapon: How Russian Cyberpower Invaded the U.S." *Nytimes.* The New York Times. December 12, 2016. www.nytimes.com/2016/12/13/us/politics/russia-hack-election-dnc.html (accessed November 2022); Backes, Oliver, and Andrew Swab. *Cognitive Warfare: The Russian Threat to Election Integrity in the Baltic States.* Policy Analysis, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, Cambridge: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2019.

actions from a hostile force.[6] Cognitive warfare in the context of this paper and its

proposed use in Georgia will deal primarily with grey products. Black and White

products are either too transparent or obvious to affect public opinion in a reliable way.

Cognitive Warfare here draws from psychological warfare with a key exception

regarding its target. Our target is civilian social infrastructure and government where

psychological operations at its core deals traditionally with military activities on smaller

scale.[7]

      Electronic Warfare. Electronic warfare is the use of electronic spectrum to

attack or impede the enemy. This component does not directly impact civilian

populations or deal with public opinion. It is only briefly mentioned here to highlight its

logistical value in the cognitive warfare process. Electronic warfare methods promote

reliable and effective use of radio communications and wireless technologies. The

availability of these media is crucial to propagating the desired message to the target

audience.[8]

      Cyberwarfare. Cyberwarfare is defined as the use of cyberattacks with the

intention of causing harm to a nation's assets.[9] The impact of cyberwarfare has evolved

with advances in technology. The global trend towards digitization has meant that more

functions like construction, finance, civilian infrastructure, and military capabilities now

depend on complex computer networks. The relation to cognitive warfare is a shared

avenue of operation. Cyberwarfare can use social media to spread computer viruses

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[6] Bernal, Alonso, Cameron Carter, Ishpreet Singh, Kathy Cao, and Olivia Madreperla. "Cognitive Warfare: An Attack on Truth and Thought." *Innovation Hub.* March 2021. https://www.innovationhub-act.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Cognitive%20Warfare.pdf (accessed November 11, 2022).

[7] "Pyschological Operations: Air Force Doctrine 2-5.3." Edited by Timothy A. Kinnan. *Iwar.* United States Air Force. August 27, 1999. www.iwar.org.uk/psyops/resources/us/afdd2-5-3.pdf.

[8] Bernal et al. "Cognitive Warfare."

[9] Bernal et al. "Cognitive Warfare."

through social media. Cognitive warfare utilizes social media networks differently by

spreading packaged content containing targeted information. Utilizing similar tactics to

those used in DDoS attacks, namely botnets, cognitive warfare agents can spread an

overwhelming amount of false or misleading information through accounts that look and

interact in human fashion.[10]

Information Warfare. Information Warfare seeks to control the flow of

information. Out of all the components, it is the most related and often combined with the

notion of cognitive warfare. A former US Navy Commander describes it, "Information

operations, the closest existing American doctrinal concept for cognitive warfare, consists

of five core capabilities, or elements. These include electronic warfare, computer network

operations, PsyOps, military deception, and operational security."[11] A key difference

between information operations and cognitive warfare is that the first attempts to control

pure information while the latter seeks to control how people and society react to

information.[12]

Cognitive Warfare. In a broad sense, cognitive warfare is the strategy that

focuses on altering how a target population thinks and, through that alteration, how it

acts.[13] It has two separate but complementary goals: destabilization and influence. While

these goals can be done separately, one can be used in a complementary fashion to

accomplish the other to weaponize public opinion effectively. The means to accomplish

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[10] Costa-Roberts, Daniel. "Here's How to Spot a Russian Bot." *Mother Jones.* August 1, 2018. www.motherjones.com/media/2018/08/how-to-identify-russian-bots-twitter/ (accessed November 23, 2022).

[11] Green, Stuart A. "Cognitive Warfare." *The Augean Stables.* Joint Military Intelligence College. July 2008. www.theaugeanstables.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Green-Cognitive-Warfare.pdf.

[12] Bernal et al, "Cognitive Warfare."

[13] Backes, Oliver, and Andrew Swab. *Cognitive Warfare: The Russian Threat to Election Integrity in the Baltic States.* Policy Analysis, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, Cambridge: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2019.

this are as varied as its constituents discussed above. Examples include radio, television, periodicals, the internet, and social media, to name a few. The targets range from whole populations (i.e., Abkhazia and South Ossetia) to leaders in politics, economy, religion, and academics.[14] Succinctly, cognitive warfare is the weaponization of public opinion by an external entity to influence public and/or governmental policy or destabilize governmental actions and/or institutions.

Cognitive Warfare Principles

Indirect. A source is more effective if the target audience appears to be an unintended recipient of information directed at a different audience. The source does not appear to be seeking to persuade the target audience and appears to be more credible. An example is the reprinting of American articles in a Russian magazine during the cold war made the publication more credible since Soviet readers were receiving information intended for U.S. readers and not just propaganda meant for the Soviets.[15]

Subject Matter Experts. Audiences are more likely to be persuaded by sources they deem to be credible, such as an expert in a topic area.[16] To this point, credibility is directly proportional to prestige. Audiences are more likely to believe the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) on military matters by the nature of his position.

Packaging. Products containing messages that audience might dislike is often more effective if the message is presented implicitly within a neutral or even positive framework. Both sides used this technique during the Cold War between 1960 and 1963. Russian magazines aimed at Americans and American magazines targeting the Russian

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[14] Bernal et al. "Cognitive Warfare."
[15] Macdonald, Scot. *Propaganda and Information Warfare in the Twenty-First Century.* New York, New York: Routledge, 2007.
[16] Macdonald. *Propaganda.*

audience sought to project implicit images of their respective countries through a neutral framework because an explicit message might have been rejected outright as propaganda.[17]

Repetition. Even with no supporting data, repetition increases the believability of a message. It has been often repeated, for example, that Reagan was the most popular president in U.S. history, yet his approval rating averaged 50%. This is lower than the averages of Eisenhower, JFK, LBJ, and Nixon.[18]

Don't recreate the wheel. Influence themes should reinforce existing beliefs, instead of attempting to instill new beliefs in a target audience. Even though the Soviets controlled the media in Poland throughout the Cold War they could not change the Polish distrust of Russians. The effort must be to exploit the existing belief and tailor it to your end. And given how hard it is to change beliefs, the most effective propaganda reinforces simple basic themes that already exist in the audience, regardless of political beliefs.[19] Examples include the protection of children, freedom from persecution, and even more simply, the desire to not be killed.

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[17] Macdonald. *Propaganda.*
[18] Macdonald. *Propaganda.*
[19] Macdonald. *Propaganda.*

Chapter 3: Case Studies

Know Your Audience

The Balkans. The U.S. use of information warfare in the Balkans during the 1990's was a learning experience and serves a useful precedent for future cognitive initiatives. For the U.S., Balkan operations began in 1995 after the Dayton Peace Agreement ended years of civil war inside the former Yugoslavia. Some 28,000 U.S. troops led the NATO Implementation Force (IFOR) into Bosnia in December of 1995. 60,000 NATO and Russian soldiers in the IFOR, and later the Stabilization Force (SFOR), were sent in to ensure continued compliance with the cease-fire and to ensure the withdrawal of forces from the agreed cease-fire zones of separation back to their respective territories, and ensure the separation of forces.[1]

As soon as U.S. and NATO troops arrived into Bosnia and Yugoslavia, planners meticulously constructed the soft power aspect of information operations to support the overall campaign. The command directive was to help communicate their intentions to the local population and win their support for the IFOR and SFOR missions. Simultaneously, it was used to deter the former belligerent factions from violating the Dayton Agreement and to discourage attacks on NATO forces.[2]

The first effort was designed to establish IFOR's credibility with the international media to gain international support of the operation. This part of the operation was very successful due to pre-existing positive sentiment and widespread approval for the operation. The second initiative was designed to shape the local population's perception

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[1] Wentz, Larry. *Lessons from Bosnia: The IFOR Experience.* Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 1997.
[2] Wentz, Larry. *Lessons from Bosnia.*

in favor of the IFOR troops and activities. White products included posters, magazines, newspapers, and radio station programs. This effort was also considered a success despite some initial setbacks. Too many products produced in the first stage reflected an orientation toward American culture rather than European culture. Adjustments were made, and subsequent products were grey and more ambiguous, with a European feel to them. An example was a teenage magazine called MIRKO, which was much more successful.[3] The lesson learned here was the importance of cultural understanding.

Another important and more straightforward tactic produced favorable results in Bosnia. The success of the IFOR mission rested mainly on the individual actions of IFOR members and their ability to persuade the former warring factions that peace was the better alternative.[4] This old and straightforward, face-to-face communication tool with the local population-built rapport through genuine dialogue. The lesson learned here is effectiveness through simplicity. This translates well even now in the age of social media, where face-to-face communications can be substituted for conversations through direct messaging on social sites or blogs.

Kosovo. In 1999, the United States and NATO employed information operations in Kosovo to put an end to the ethnic warfare between Serbians and ethnic Albanians. In June 1999, Serbian forces withdrew, fearing an impending NATO ground invasion. The NATO Kosovo forces (KFOR) ultimately entered the region and encountered an environment with no effective central government and two ethnic groups in conflict. The Serbians, though small in number, held all political and economic power under the regime led by Slobodan Milosevic. After years of persecuting the ethnic Albanian

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[3] Wentz. *Lessons from Bosnia.*
[4] Wentz. *Lessons from Bosnia.*

population, which accounted for the majority in Kosovo, the Serbs found themselves the target of Albanian revenge.[5] Kosovo became an information struggle between KFOR, the Serbian government, and the Kosovo Albanians for influence over the civilian population.

KFOR utilized offensive and defensive information tactics to fight the battle of ideas in Yugoslavia and Kosovo. The defensive effort was to counter misinformation and propaganda distributed by the local and regional media. By disseminating KFOR's stance on events and issues, the information campaign was able to limit and neutralize the effects of provocative rhetoric and anti-KFOR misinformation. Offensively, KFOR operatives actively engaged influential Albanian and Serbian leaders and organizations. US operators employed psychological operation tactics via loudspeakers, handbills, radio, press, media events, medical assistance programs, face-to-face meetings, and force presence to achieve their goals in the information environment.[6]

Assessing the success of the Kosovo operations was difficult. Army officers tried to determine the effectiveness of specific efforts by determining trends within their areas of responsibilities using unit and media reporting assessments.[7] Most commands used the metric on whether an influence attempt resulted in a positive effect that supported KFOR's mission or a negative impact that went against it. Though the campaign dragged on without a resolution on Kosovo's political identity, the information operations were considered a success because neither side turned against NATO and the negotiations

[5] Romanych, Major Marc J., and Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth Krumm. "Tactical Information Operations in Kosovo." *Military Review*, September-October 2004.

[6] Romanych and Krumm. "Tactical Information Operations in Kosovo."

[7] Romanych and Krumm. "Tactical Information Operations in Kosovo."

continued peacefully.[8] Lessons learned here were the reinforcement of those learned in

Bosnia and the value of persistence and the exploitation of as many media types as

possible to achieve maximum dissemination of information.

Propagating Division

Russian IO in the Baltics. Russia uses disinformation, propaganda, and the

selective release of politically sensitive information to alter public opinion. Russia

amplifies this information on social and traditional media to exacerbate existing division.

Rather than trying to create new tension, Russia exploits social issues that already divide

populations. Russia inflames tensions in the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and

Lithuania to undermine their elections.[9]

The recent Eesti 200 case demonstrates how Russian information operations work

in practice. In Tallinn, Estonia, on Sunday, January 6, 2019, six posters appeared

overnight at Hobujaama tram station. Three signs read "Only Estonians here," and the

others read "Only Russians here," with a red column separating the two sets. This was an

overt attempt to highlight policies of segregation. The controversial posters were the

work of Eesti 200, a liberal Estonian party founded just a few months earlier. These

posters were intended to generate interest in the political party before the March

parliamentary elections and to point out ethnic divisions within Estonia between the

Estonian majority and the Russian minority. A phone number was also included on the

display, which, when dialed, offered a recorded message preaching unity between the two

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[8] Romanych and Krumm. "Tactical Information Operations in Kosovo."

[9] Backes, Oliver, and Andrew Swab. *Cognitive Warfare: The Russian Threat to Election Integrity in the Baltic States.* Policy Analysis, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, Cambridge: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2019.

ethnic groups. The posters were quickly covered up the next day by an advertisement for a joint production by Tallin's Russian and Estonian theaters.

The posters were up for less than a day, but they quickly generated attention within Estonian society, with citizens posting pictures and commenting on them on social media. It was propelled further by Russian news media. Television channels like Sputnik, Zvezda, Channel One, Russia Today, and Rossiya TV, called the poster situation a scandal. Coverage of the posters in Russian news media quickly reached the Russian ethnic group in Estonia as that was their primary means for news in the region. The message received by them was built upon pre-existing Russian narratives about discrimination against ethnic Russians in Estonia.[10] The speed at which the poster story was picked up by Russian news media was indicative of Russian IO.

The results of this effort took much work to measure. The new Eesti 200 party only gained 3% of the vote, but enough parliament seats shifted to cause a change in the balance of government. The Center Party gained more influence after the 2019 elections and has traditionally looked favorably toward the Russian minority. Lessons learned here are identifying fissures within a target society and propagating them using inexpensive means. The results may have been minimal, but the cost was just as small. With the high risk associated with outright cyber warfare attacks on secure election systems, it is easier and more cost-effective to go after the hearts and minds with simple tools like posters and newscasts.

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[10] Backes and Swab. *Cognitive Warfare.*

Controlling Narratives

Ukraine and Russia. At the beginning of April 2014, Russian-backed uprisings took place in Donbas, Ukraine's heavily Russian-speaking, heavy-industrial region, the base of former President Yanukovych, and set the stage for continued conflict. Russia's annexation of Crimea and support of the rebels in Donbas exacerbated the issue, and representatives from France, Ukraine, Russia, and Germany convened to end the violence. Due to the annexation of Crimea and the violence in the East, Ukrainian public support shifted toward a union with NATO. Russia was intent on preventing the union and went on the offensive. In February 2022, clashes took place between Russian separatists and Ukrainian forces in the eastern region of Donetsk and Luhansk, and the Russian troops, which carried out the largest operation in Europe since the end of the Second World War, launched an attack on the territory of Ukraine on February 24.

Cognitive warfare has played a significant role on both sides in conjunction with conventional military efforts. In the war between Russia and Ukraine, narratives are constructed to convey tailored messages to the local public and onlookers abroad.

Putin pursues a policy based on the idea that the Ukrainian identity is artificial and fragile and desires to establish political, military, and broader dominance over Ukraine from a historical perspective. Putin claims that the Ukrainian government is run by Neo-Nazis and states that Ukraine is operating biological laboratories with malicious intent. Russia portrays Ukraine and Western nations as malevolent and justifies revenge. Putin argues that Ukrainian leadership is unreliable and fashions Russian leadership as the best alternative.

Ukraine, on the other hand, emphasizes Kyiv's successes and identities in the face of difficulties in this war, highlighting a counter-challenge narrative that includes stories about Ukraine's brave warriors portrayed by the use of traditional and social media. By expressing that the invasion by Russia is damaging to international peace, Ukraine conveys the need for universal condemnation as a new narrative within a narrative. The events that started in 2014 and continue into 2022 are presented with comprehensive stories that explain the war posing a severe problem for European security, the cities that were shattered after the Russian attack, the hardships experienced by people, and the uncertainties in the diplomatic solution and migration. Ukraine uses a style to convey the truth. Ukraine, which does not pose a substantial military threat to Russia, actively shares its narratives with the world through traditional media, especially the internet. Ukraine portrays the Russian Army as a force that commits daily atrocities, using the level of emotional interest to tell the world about the war and highlighting aspects of everyday life in society to enable people to develop a new perspective and join the fight.

Ukraine has created a virtual battlefield that it carries out through the mass media and in which everyone is involved, primarily via the internet. It leverages the power of the United States over social media sites and NATO's role in strategic communications on this battlefield. Ukraine designed its strategic communications management plan by taking advantage of Russia's development of complex strategies. Ukraine has taken on a challenge with stories and videos showing the devastation and misery caused by the war. Sharing images of Moscow harming civilians on social media created sympathy for Ukraine from the outside world and gave a message to the world for aid. With this strategy, Ukraine attempted to prevent Russia from controlling the story and forced

Russia to react. In this process, the U.S. shared intelligence about Russian movements with the world to limit the effect of Putin's narrative. Satellite photos of Russian military deployments were shown, images of Russian tanks were transferred, and the details of Russian plans were revealed. In this way, Ukraine coordinated with the U.S. to potentially neutralize the Russian narrative by highlighting Moscow's disinformation campaign.[11]

With this strategy, Ukraine is preventing Russia from controlling the story and is forcing Russia to react. The conflict is ongoing, but it can be argued that Ukraine has been highly successful in the early stages in resisting Russia's advances and garnering international support. Numerous lessons are learned here, and it serves as an example that Russian influence can be beaten despite military superiority

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[11] Aydemir, Emrah. "Ukraines' Cognitive Warfare Operations Against Russia: Representation, Story and Micro-Mythology," *Eurasia International Research Journal* 10, no. 32 (September 2022): 358-367.

Chapter 4: Conclusion and Recommendations

Critically, the cognitive warfare strategy is an evolution of the longstanding Russian strategy. As one US expert on Russian foreign policy noted, Russia's use of information operations to undermine political stability in Western states is "an old story that we are only recently rediscovering."[1] While the tools employed have changed, and the information environment has evolved, the strategy remains the same. At its core, what we see in the Baltic states is similar to Soviet propaganda efforts during the Cold War. Russia today aims – as the Soviet Union once did – to divide Western societies, undermine their political institutions, and broaden fissures between Western states, placing strain on NATO and the EU.

After analysis, it is clear that Russia's recent struggles in Ukraine have severely diminished its credibility. Despite its foothold within the separatist regions in Georgia, there exist fissures, unique to South Ossetia and Abkhazia, respectively, that can be exploited to shift alignment towards a pro-western Georgia.

For Abkhazia, a plan to build upon the pride of its people could be successful. The government relies on Russia but grows weary of its sponsor's growing influence. A message that promotes support from Georgia but with less strings attached could sway Abkhazian support away from Russia. Abkhazia desires autonomy. A narrative can be created that states the best chance to accomplish that is a growing partnership with Georgia. The packaged message must also attack the Russian image. It can highlight

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[1] Backes, Oliver, and Andrew Swab. *Cognitive Warfare: The Russian Threat to Election Integrity in the Baltic States.* Policy Analysis, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, Cambridge: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2019.

Russia's growing aggressive nature and show that the end state of the Russian partnership results in succumbing to Moscow's will. An attack on Russia's credibility and competency can shift opinion in Abkhazia towards Georgia as the partner of choice.

For South Ossetia, the information campaign should center on economic relief while building upon the existing resentment regarding the mismanagement of South Ossetian troops. Russian cooperation has done little to improve the poverty and living conditions within South Ossetia. A message promoting better prospects with Georgia could be successful over the long term. It can also present an alternative to the South Ossetian government having to send young men to Ukraine to fight in an unpopular war. The difficult part of this strategy is addressing the desire for reunification with North Ossetia. There is no clear way the Georgian message could offer reunification as a possible outcome. The best it could do would be to promise free transit between South and North Ossetia, but that transit would likely be met with Russian resistance if public support shifted to Georgia. Economic prosperity must be the focus.

The recommendation is a joint effort between the U.S. and Georgia. Georgia will take the lead while leveraging the capabilities of U.S. Special Operations Command and U.S. Cyber Command. A joint planning group will develop the message for both separatist regions while tailoring the transmission means to the existing media infrastructure of the target audience. Social Media will be the primary media for South Ossetia, while the Abkhazian message can be delivered through a combination of social, television, and newspaper media.

This case study analysis did not show much historical data regarding the effectiveness of social media as an information warfare tool, but it is still at an early stage

in its employment. What the case study does show is that while Russia is a capable adversary, it is also vulnerable to attack in the information domain from a comparatively weaker opponent. Social Media and U.S. support have the potential to be force multipliers for Georgian initiatives to shift separatist views in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Messaging that was previously successful when transmitted through more traditional media can have its effectiveness magnified toward this end when transmitted through social media due to its vast reach. Similar to what is being conducted in Ukraine, U.S. information gathering, and communication capabilities can augment a potentially successful Georgian information campaign.

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Vita

Commander Rene J. Medrano (USN) was commissioned in June 2006 after graduating from Oregon State University. After completing the Naval Nuclear Training pipeline and completing qualifications on his first assigned submarine, Commander Medrano was designated as a Submarine Officer. His at sea assignments include Executive Officer, USS IDAHO SSN-799; Operations Officer, USS NEW JERSEY SSN-796; Weapons Officer USS JOHN WARNER SSN-785; Tactical Systems Officer, USS WYOMING SSBN-742. He has been deployed to the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. His staff assignments include Regional Employment Officer, Commander Submarine Forces Atlantic. Commander Medrano has completed Naval Nuclear Power School and is a graduate of Naval Postgraduate School. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Nuclear Engineering and Master of Science in Applied Physics.