



**CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE
DEFENCE AGAINST TERRORISM**



**COE DAT
STUDY ON
THE ROLE OF IRREGULAR FORCES IN RUSSIA'S
HYBRID WARFARE**

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Disclaimer

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FOREWORD

We face a dangerous, unpredictable, and fluid security environment, with enduring challenges and threats from all strategic directions; from state and non-state actors; from military forces; and from terrorist, cyber, and hybrid attacks. Russia's aggressive actions, including the threat and use of force to attain political goals, challenge the Alliance and are undermining Euro-Atlantic security and the rules-based international order.¹

Brussels Summit Declaration, Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 11-12 July 2018

Hybrid methods of warfare, such as propaganda, deception, sabotage and other non-military tactics have long been used to destabilize adversaries. What is new about attacks seen in recent years is their speed, scale and intensity, facilitated by rapid technological change and global interconnectivity as it was stated by NATO secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg at the inauguration of the Helsinki Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats. Countering hybrid threats is a priority for NATO, as they blur the line between war and peace - combining military aggression with political, diplomatic, economic, cyber and disinformation measures.

More recently in the NATO summit declaration written by our Heads of State², “...Russia's aggressive actions constitute a threat to Euro-Atlantic security; terrorism in all its forms and manifestations remains a persistent threat to us all.”

Therefore, Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism with the permission of contributing nations³ decided to initiate a deep study on the methodology and roots of Russia's hybrid tactics. As a result of the study many implications for NATO were identified by the experienced authors as well as by their research mentor, Dr. Péter Tálas CsC⁴. Those valuable findings by the authors may help to identify future challenges which NATO will face with.

Ankara, June 30, 2020.



Mustafa Özgür TÜTEN

Director

¹ Brussels Summit Declaration Source: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm#21 Accessed on 30. June 2020.

² London Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in London 3-4 December 2019. Source: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_171584.htm Accessed on 30. June 2020.

³ Turkey (as framework nation), Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, The Nederland, Romania, United Kingdom and United States of America.

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The Role of Irregular Forces in Russia's Hybrid Warfare

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1.Introduction

The contemporary Russian perception of modern warfareⁱ is characterized by advocating the integral use of all tools, means and resources available, let them be of military or non-military nature. This holistic approach, frequently named “hybrid warfare”ⁱⁱ by Western analysts, as well as by NATO, includes also the use of various irregular and proxy forces, as one element of the toolkit a state may rely on when engaged in a contemporary conflict.

The present analysis argues that from Moscow’s perspective using irregular formations constitutes an ordinary way of waging war and inflicting damage to the adversary. This approach is in line both with Russia’s Soviet heritage, as well as with the holistic perception of modern warfare that characterizes contemporary Russian military thinking.

Concerning methodology, the study uses a generally deductive approach. The reason for this choice is that strategic and operational considerations behind Russia’s current operations can hardly be reconstructed from open sources. However, mapping out the historical precedents, as well as the relevant contemporary Russian theoretical thinking on the use of irregular forces in modern armed conflicts may provide a better understanding of Moscow’s actions on the ground, particularly Ukraine.

It is important to note that the study uses a narrow focus, by researching only cases of using irregular forces as a tool of warfare abroad. Meanwhile, examples of domestic use, so when Moscow employed irregular formations inside the country to counter various forms of insurgency, are mentioned only briefly in this analysis, and are not covered in detail. With other words, while we study, how the Soviet Union supported various militant groups and proxy formations abroad, we do not analyze Russia’s domestic campaigns in Chechnya.

The study is composed of four main parts. First, the Soviet experiences gained with irregular forces are getting analyzed, by focusing on how Moscow employed such formations abroad as an integral element of the Soviet toolbox to win the Cold War. Thereafter, the second chapter focuses on Russia’s contemporary military theory and the role of irregular forces in it. The third chapter deals with the practical experiences of how Russia employed – and countered - various irregular formations in Ukraine and Syria. The paper ends with a brief, concluding chapter, which also includes recommendations for NATO.

2.The Soviet Use of Irregulars as a Warfighting Tool

While striving for understanding, what role has terrorism played and is still playing in contemporary Russian military theory and practice, the importance of history and lessons learned from past conflicts should not be underestimated. This is particularly so because despite the political changes, development of Soviet/Russian military thinking continued in a largely uninterrupted, integral way from the mid-1910s on to the contemporary era. In other words, NATO needs to face a century of accumulated theoretical knowledge and practical experience which get employed, and still continuously developed by Russia.

Besides, Russia has anyways been one of the countries that massively relied on various irregular and paramilitary formations ever since the beginning of the Tsarist empire. One may think about, for example, the Cossack units that supported the operations of the Tsarist armies from the 18th century. While Cossacks were not part of the regular military, in terms of command and control they were subordinated to it. In the mid-1800s there was even a separate Main Administration of Irregular Forces in Saint Petersburg, renamed to Main Administration of Cossack Forces in 1879, parallel to the efforts to ‘regularize’ Cossack formations.ⁱⁱⁱ As other examples, one may mention the various workers’ militias in the era of the 1917

revolution and thereafter, or the dreadful ‘destruction battalions’ of 1941. The latter were hastily created irregular units in 1941, operating in Western Soviet Union, under the direct control of the NKVD, intended to secure the rear of the Red Army, to counter Nazi Germany sympathizers, local nationalists, and also to destroy all property that could not be evacuated during the Soviet withdrawal.^{iv}

Later many ‘destruction battalions’ were transformed to partisan units. Partisans units operating behind Nazi German lines played an important role in the Soviet victory, by providing the Soviet General Staff with intelligence information, by attacking the supply lines of Nazi German armed forces, as well as by tying down considerable German forces and also by suppressing anti-Soviet sentiments in the occupied territories.

Soviet Experiences with Irregular and Proxy Formations

The Soviet Union used a wide variety of irregular formations, ranging from covert interventions into foreign military conflicts to supporting terrorist organizations that operated in adversary countries.

Using proxy forces abroad

Using irregular and proxy forces abroad has been an integral part of the Soviet Union’s foreign policy inventory from the mid-1920s on. One of the most frequently used framework of conducting massive military actions abroad was publicly referring to the deployed operatives as “volunteers.” Another, widely used way of military assistance was sending “advisors.” When “volunteers” were employed, Moscow consistently denied any connection of these forces to the Soviet regular military, even if the “volunteers” used Soviet heavy weaponry and equipment.

One of the first such Soviet covert, officially denied military mission was sending first advisors to China, already from 1924 on, to assist the Kuomintang Revolutionary Alliance to unite the country. Later, the so-called Soviet Volunteer Group was deployed to China during the second Sino-Japanese war in 1937-1941. Members of the Soviet Volunteer Group were selected from the Soviet air force, but they travelled to China by using civilian documents and clothing. Though they flew Soviet-made aircrafts, they used Chinese insignia in order to conceal their presence. While officially they were volunteers and Moscow denied any connection to them, in fact the Soviet Volunteer Group was a detachment of the Soviet Union’s regular military, operating undercover in a foreign country^v.

The practice of sending regular military abroad under the disguise of “volunteers”, or “advisors” has been a widely used Soviet practice during the Cold War too. Soviet advisors fought in Vietnam against U.S. forces, there were Soviet advisors in Syria and Egypt during their wars against Israel, in Iraq, Iran, as well as in several conflicts in Africa and Latin-America too.

Direct support to foreign radical movements and terrorist organizations

In addition to this, the Soviet Union also supported various radical, and terrorist movements in the West, as well as revolutionary groups and separatist movements. In the early period after the 1917 revolution the main reason behind was yet ideological, namely to spread the Communist revolution abroad, supposedly leading to a world revolution, as envisioned by Marxist-Leninist theories, and particularly by Lev Trotsky, father of the “permanent revolution” concept. However, after the early efforts of spreading the revolution failed, in 1924 the Soviet Union adopted the ideology of “Socialism in one country”, and officially postponed (in fact: gave up) the idea of achieving a world revolution.^{vi}

Nevertheless, this did not mean that Moscow would have stopped supporting radical, revolutionary, separatist or even terrorist groups abroad, only the motivation of doing so has changed. While revolutionary ideology prevailed as an overarching theoretical façade, in fact decisions about supporting various groups were taken purely on the pragmatist consideration, i.e. that whether the given movement had the potential to advance Soviet interest.

Generally speaking, Moscow perceived supporting various political groups and armed formations, occasionally including also terrorist groups abroad as an integral part of its general struggle against the West. With other words, supporting armed insurgencies was one of the means to the desired end of winning the Cold War.

Along this logic, Moscow was ready to support national liberation movements in Africa and Latin-America, anti-Israel movements in the Middle East, radical leftist groups and even separatist groups in the West. The policy employed towards various regions demonstrated considerable variability, particularly in the Middle East.^{vii} However, from the 1970s the logic of using all possible tools and means to weaken the West, including terrorism, has become dominant in the Soviet leadership. Well-known, spectacular examples of this strategy were the direct support provided to the Red Army Faction group in Western Germany via East Germany's security service, the *Stasi*, or the arms shipments provided to the Irish Republican Army in the 1970s.

Political and financial support to opposition movements abroad was coordinated by the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, the KGB, the GRU, as well as the 10th Department of the Soviet General Staff were responsible for providing a wide range and variety of trainings to militants from all over the world, both inside the Soviet Union and abroad. Moscow was well aware and did not mind that many of these groups employed tools of terrorism as well in order to destabilize the governments they were fighting against. On one occasion, General Alexander Sakharovsky, Commander of KGB's First Directorate, boasted that "Airplane hijacking is my own invention", referring to the hijacking actions committed by the Palestinian Liberation Organization.^{viii} Massive amounts of arms and military equipment were also provided to these groups, all in a tightly controlled, centralized way. In addition to providing direct support to terrorism groups abroad, the Soviet Union used also its satellite countries in the Eastern bloc, ranging from Cuba to Czechoslovakia,^{ix} to do the same, by basically outsourcing some task to its satellite states.^x

The Soviet Union against irregulars

It is important to add, however, that the Soviet Union itself had also faced the threat of irregular warfare. Following the end of the Second World War in Europe, Moscow had to cope with a massive irregular resistance movement in Western Ukraine, the so-called Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Ukrainska povstanska armiya, UPA). Another large-scale anti-Soviet irregular resistance movement was the one of the so-called Forest Brothers in the Baltic States. Moscow's initial, post-1945 counter-insurgency measures based upon the massive deployment of regular forces turned out to be inefficient in results and costly in terms of losses. The Soviet leadership could localize and defeat both the UPA and the Forest Brothers only to the mid-1950s, by using a skillful combination of infiltration, assassinations, specialized anti-partisan units, as well as positive incentives given to the local population to turn them away from the insurgents. A common particularity of the UPA and the Forest Brothers was the none of the two movements received any meaningful military or political support from abroad.

A much more dangerous irregular opponent the Soviet Union confronted with was the one of the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan, starting from the Soviet invasion of the country in 1979. *Mujahideen* guerillas

could rely not only on their detailed knowledge of the harsh terrain, but also on continuously growing supplies of arms and other military equipment from the United States. While *mujahideen* never received direct, operational support from regular U.S. forces, the influx of modern weapons, particularly of shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles inflicted decisive losses to the Soviet army. Thus from Moscow's perspective the conflict in Afghanistan has become a proxy war against Washington, the political and financial costs of which indeed contributed to the demise of the Soviet Union.

Evgeny Messner and the Concept of *Myatezhvoina*

When it comes to the use of irregular formations, noteworthy is that Soviet – and Russian – military theorists were not shy to get inspired also by the ideas of those, who actually fought against them. A good example is the *myatezhvoina* concept of Evgeny Messner. Messner was originally an officer of the Tsarist Russian army, and in the Russian civil war he fought against the Communists. Later he moved first to Yugoslavia and after serving briefly in Boris Smyslovsky's anti-Communist First Russian National Army, in 1947 he left for Argentina and became a military theorist. He published his most important theoretical work, the *Myatezh – imya trety vsemirnoy* (Mutiny - the Name of the Third World War) in 1960, in Buenos Aires.

Messner's concept foresaw future conflict as one that employs mostly unconventional methods, including subversion, criminality and also terrorism. In a *myatezhvoina* there are no definite frontlines, and, as Adam Klus points out^{xi}, apparently random, unconnected acts of violence all serve a grand strategic design. Meanwhile, if the adversary is not aware of this very design, it may not even realize that a massive attack is going on, and the series of terrorist acts, strikes, robberies, hostage-takings and other acts of violence all constitute integral parts of it. Despite its scattered nature, Messner imagined *myatezhvoina* as a carefully planned and professionally executed way of warfare that focuses primarily on the enemy's psychology and intends to break its fighting morale, or shatter the political support and legitimacy the enemy is relying on. Regarding the actors of *myatezhvoina*, Messner suggested to rely on mobilized masses, i.e. on agitated civilians, who stage protests, and organize strikes and unrest, as well as on covert special forces and resistance movements, i.e. on typical irregular formations, while regular military has only a marginal role to play.

Despite his persistent anti-Moscow stance, Messner's concept has been widely referred to by contemporary Russian authors as well, such as Andrei Budaev or Andrei Manoylo.^{xii} Moreover, though direct causality is hard to verify, events of spring and summer of 2014 in eastern Ukraine bear a striking resemblance to how Messner imagined the multi-layered, multi-faceted, seemingly unconnected forms of violence, committed by a variety of irregular forms and groups, all conducted in the framework of one overarching plan.

2. The Russian Perception of Contemporary Wars and the Place of Irregular Warfare in It

In order to understand the role of irregular warfare, as well as of irregular military forces in Russia's hybrid warfare, it is necessary to take a closer look at how Russia perceives war itself, and particularly contemporary warfare.

Holism; the philosophical approach shaping Russian warfare and perception

Soviet mindset keeps dominating the thinking of the Russian political and military elite today. Marxist-Leninist thoughts had fundamentally determined the progress of Russian military thinking and resulted in an approach to war significantly different from its Western understanding. For instance, Lenin's idea that the cause of war is the exploitation of the working class still endures in contemporary Russian military thought today. Deputy Defense Minister Andrei Kartapolov emphasized, that it is economic interests of the leading countries that lie behind practically all modern wars.^{xiii}

An article published in the prominent military journal *Military Thought* argues, that the retreat of socialism in the 1980s and 1990s was coupled with the increase of hostilities, especially in the post-soviet space, which in the authors' perspective verifies the Leninian thought that peace is unimaginable outside socialism.^{xiv} Soviet moral principles of warfare were also determined by this ideology, as wars waged for the abolition of social classes were just while other wars were regarded unjust. This also meant that the justness in the means of fighting (*jus in bello*) was secondary in the Soviet military thought.^{xv} Russian actions in Syria and Ukraine suggest the Russian way of war remains less restrained by legal and moral principles on the acceptable methods of military violence.

Undoubtedly, the most important Soviet ideological heritage is holism, the philosophical-scientific principle that observes things or phenomena in their entirety and holds that the whole is more than the sum of its constituting parts.^{xvi} In Russian military theory holism is attested by a comprehensive, systemic approach to war. A good case in point is the National Defense Management Center, a high-tech information fusion center that has been established in 2014 to coordinate the activities of all ministries and agencies that guarantee the security of the country. On top of that, influential Russian military theorists such as the late Makhmut Gareev argued for the creation of a centralized command system similar to the World War II era State Committee for Defense and the Stavka. In an article published in 2019, Gareev and two other generals proposed that such a command system should work in peacetime, too, and embrace all ministries and agencies, as Russia is under "systemic non-military threats".^{xvii} This is in accordance with the perceived blurring line between war and peace, a remark frequently echoed since Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov's well-known speech of 2013.^{xviii}

An article titled "From the Air Defense System to the Complex System of the Fight with Air-Space Enemy" provides another interesting example of holistic military thought. Among other actions to counter an aerospace enemy, the study proposes information operations against the decision-makers, supporting personnel and pilots, as well as the assassination of persons serving in key positions of decision-making, planning and also the aircraft crew on their places of training, deployment and routes of deployment.^{xix xx} Assassination by special services as an element of a complex air *defense* doctrine sounds alien to any Western military but it seems to be an accepted method in the Russian strategic thought. As the authors of the study put, "fighting against an air and space enemy exclusively in the air and space domain is as rational as killing the enemy soldiers in a combined-arms fight only after they had left their trenches and advanced towards ours."^{xxi}

Holism not only dictates how Russia fights its wars, but also has a crucial impact on Moscow's threat perception. Assuming their adversaries' having the same systemic approach, the Russian political and military elite when observe international affairs often connect dots which belong together in their worldview but in fact are not interrelated. This explains why Gerasimov and the Russian General Staff sees the Arab Spring as a case for a "new type of war" to replace legitimate political regimes with puppet governments of the West or – if they fail – to unleash chaos and civil war to create the pretext for foreign

military intervention. All this aims to preserve U.S. hegemony, the Russian elite holds.^{xxii} This faulty assessment lies on the otherwise factual observation, that contemporary wars are largely intrastate ones whereas wars between states have almost entirely disappeared after 2010.^{xxiii} As such, when analyzing contemporary wars and making predictions for future ones, objective observations about trends and capabilities mix with subjective elements of assumed intentions and strategies. In Stephen Covington's words, "[a]s a matter of practice, Russian assessments of their opponents' military capabilities are interpreted through their own culture of thought, and project how the Russian military would prosecute war against Russia if they possessed these Western capabilities."^{xxiv}

Russian forecasts for future war; the rise of indirect approach

Russian holistic forecasts for the future operational environment take into account not only armaments, but economic, ideological, psychological, informational and other areas, too.^{xxv} A common observation is that in the past two decades indirect methods have come into the forefront of military strategy. Russian forecasts predict that future war will likely be a combination of cyber, cognitive and kinetic warfare.^{xxvi} Among these, Russian military experts put the emphasis on the cognitive and cyber domains, assuming that it is societies and not militaries that will fight the war of the future.^{xxvii}

Current information technology allows for influencing public opinion on a scale and quality never seen before. At the same time, public opinion has an increasing influence on political decision-making, including in the matters of war and peace.^{xxviii} In the end, manipulating public opinion's perception of the justness of war or the potential costs make it possible to win the political aim of war, even without the actual use of military violence.^{xxix} The public's increasing voice in policy-making also forces the political leaderships worldwide to avoid the use of open violence. There is an asymmetry however, when it comes to the use of military force as autocracies are less bound to avoid open use of military violence than democracies.^{xxx}

In addition to information technology, there is another factor that incites states to seek indirect means of confrontation, and that is the destruction potential of modern weapons systems, particularly weapons of mass destruction.^{xxxi} Nuclear parity and balance of power did not end great power rivalry; however, they just veered it into new areas.^{xxxii} Confrontation now takes place in the political, economic and – above all – information domains with the growing importance of non-military means. The above described technological and socio-political trends drive warfare toward indirect methods, Russian experts believe. Their observation about the technological, political and social developments, and their impact on future warfare seem justified.

The Russian interpretation of Western warfare: the Arab Spring as a “new type of war”

It is a paradox, that despite Russian military thought appears to be more holistic than the Western one, Russian experts frequently call for a more systemic approach to counter comprehensive non-military threats represented by the United States and its allies.^{xxxiii} “Color revolutions” (a row of peaceful regime changes in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan during the early 2000s) in the post-soviet space and especially the events of the Arab Spring and the Maidan uprising in 2013-2014 have all been interpreted by Russian military experts as Western strategies of political regime change with non-military means.^{xxxiv}

They believe the United States is using similar “hybrid” techniques against Russia to weaken and destroy the country with the help of subversion by the political opposition and the so called “fifth column”; inside enemies of the state.^{xxxv} Information warfare is perceived to be a crucial enabler of “color revolutions” as

it mobilizes the population against the government.^{xxxvi} This approach, in fact, demonstrates a strong continuity with the Soviet mindset of getting constantly attacked from abroad, described above.

Aleksandr Bartosh, a Russian military theorist deems internal destabilization of the target country an integral part of the American strategic culture. That way, he holds, the United States weakens the target country before the actual military operation takes place and avoids risks by outsourcing the fight to “foreign hands”.^{xxxvii} Such “foreign hands” – aside from peaceful demonstrators and political opposition include separatists, terrorists, criminal groups and private military companies – allow for the carrying out of the “dirtiest provocations”.^{xxxviii} Andrei Kartapolov concludes that human rights violation is not a collateral trait but fundamental content of “new type wars”, in which more than 90% of the victims are civilians.^{xxxix} Valery Gerasimov last year had named Venezuela another victim of U.S. regime change attempt, and implied that the Pentagon has been working on a new, “Trojan Horse” strategy that unites the method of “color revolutions” with long-range precision strikes against strategic targets.^{xl xli}

Russian response to these perceived threats is two-fold. First, Moscow pursues a strategy of denial; developing weapon systems that are capable of fending off high-end technological enemies, specifically large-scale attacks with precision weapons systems.^{xlii} The National Guard (Rosgvardiya) is another example. Rosgvardiya was likely established to put down mass protests during a “color revolution” scenario; hence, it is intended to counter this non-military threat by the denial of its success.^{xliii}

Second, Russia also contemplates a strategy of punishment, that is built on asymmetrical means and methods. This approach is apparently rooted in the acknowledgement that guerillas, terrorists and other actors who employ asymmetric warfare are proved to be very successful even in the 21st century. Asymmetric warfare favors smaller adversaries as new technologies and modes of operations outweigh the advantage of material resources and better military organization, as it was illustrated by U.S. military campaigns in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq.^{xliv} Two well-known Russian military theorists, Sergei Chekinov and Sergei Bogdanov in a 2011 study concluded that “success in a military campaign fought in armed conflicts and local wars of this kind [i.e. asymmetric – K.J.] depends not so much on the opponents’ power potentials as on the relationship between military and non-military factors, that is, on the political, psychological, ideological, and informational components of the campaign.”^{xlv} Chekinov and Bogdanov advised that Russia should combine symmetrical actions aiming to defeat invading troops and “asymmetrical measures that seek basically to inflict unacceptable damage to the enemy in other (non-military) security areas.”^{xlvi xlvi} This is a logical conclusion drawn from the observation of asymmetric and terrorist methods applied effectively by non-state actors in the past decades.

3. Employing and Countering Irregulars: “Hybrid War” in Practice

Since Russia’s hybrid war has come to the focus of Western scholarly attention in 2014, Russia has been engaged in two such armed conflicts, where most elements of the hybrid toolbox got employed: the wars in Ukraine and in Syria. However, in line with the narrow focus of the present study, here we study both conflict from the perspective of how Russia has been using and supporting irregular, non-state actors on the ground. Hence, neither activities of the Russian state’s armed forces are analyzed here, nor the policies of the Russian state in the occupied territory of the Crimean peninsula.

Separatists, criminals and ‘useful idiots’: non-state actors of the war in Ukraine

The war in Ukraine provided several examples of how irregular formations can be used as part of the hybrid war arsenal, ranging from inciting ethnic conflict to targeted killings. The very irregular formations varied as well, ranging from mobilized criminal gangs to barely concealed special forces operating under the cover of deniability.

Use of mobilized masses: *myatezhvoina* in practice

Particularly the early period of the conflict in Ukraine demonstrated in a number of times, how Russia used mobilized crowds to achieve strategic, operational, and sometimes even tactical objectives. Though exact causality is evidently hard to prove, these actions bore a striking similarity to what Messner described more than five decades earlier, about how to use mobilized masses, i.e. for staging protests and organizing unrest, particularly if they cooperate with covert special forces.

In Ukraine relevant examples for this practice were provided by the pro-Russian demonstrations that took place first in the Crimea and thereafter in the Donbass in late winter-early spring 2014. These actions had a clear strategic significance, as they were used by Russia to justify and legitimize first its territorial claims, and thereafter the occupation and annexation of the Crimea, by referring to the widespread public support indicated by the anti-Kyiv protests. Though particularly in the Crimea there was an indeed genuine component of the protest, strong organizational support from Russia still played a key role, particularly in their mobilization.^{xlvi} Units of the Russian armed forces provided decisive logistical, political and military support to these protests, as it was later admitted by one of the separatist commanders, Igor Girkin aka. Strelkov.^{xlvi}

In Eastern Ukraine several similar staged protests took place both in larger cities, such as Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv and in smaller towns, such as Slavyansk, Kramatorsk and others. Due to the very limited local support, many of the demonstrators arrived directly from Russia. Several independent reports pointed out that many demonstrators were actually shipped from the other side of the border.^{li} Nevertheless, Russian state media provided widespread coverage of these protests, thus creating the image that the demonstrators really represented the will of the local population.

Mobilized masses were used in Ukraine also for operational purposes, for example, to take over buildings of public administration, police and the justice system. By banning the Ukrainian government from exercising power, takeovers carried out by mobilized masses were important operational components of the Russian covert attack against Ukraine. These takeover actions were very well organized, coordinated ones. In the Crimea it is already known that the Simferopol parliament was captured by Russian special operatives dressed in civilian clothes, supported by mobilized local sympathizers. When capturing the Ukrainian airbase in Belbek, Russians skillfully put in action mobilized civilians as a cover for the advancing Russian troops. The presence of civilians made it impossible for the Ukrainian defenders to use firearms.^{lii} Similarly to the Crimea, in Eastern Ukraine violent protestors demonstrated surprisingly developed tactical skills while taking over administrative buildings. In Kharkiv they managed to break a cordon of two hundred policemen in less than ten minutes.^{liii} In some cases they were also heavily armed and were proficient users of their weapons,^{liv} while in Luhansk they put up also the flag of Russian airborne forces on the occupied public administration building.^{lv} All these indicate that among the demonstrators there were many well-trained, probably even professional members of Russia's armed forces dressed in civilian clothes, reportedly joined by locally mobilized criminals, mobsters, hooligans and also genuine sympathizers.

Besides strategic and operational purposes, Russia is able to use mobilized masses also for tactical tasks. The first case, when Russia used civilian crowds for tactical purposes took place in April 2014, immediately after hostilities started in Eastern Ukraine. On 16 April 2014 six lightly armored vehicles of the Ukrainian Armed Forces were stopped by an angry civilian crowd, when the military column moved into Slovyansk, a city captured by separatists a few days earlier. Crew of the Ukrainian APCs was obviously not trained to handle the situation: they not only let their vehicles surrounded by the crowd, but also got engaged into a verbal conversation with them, in the end of which the demonstrators simply climbed the APCs, grabbed the crews out of them, seized all six vehicles and shortly thereafter put all of them into service on the separatist side.^{lvi} Shortly thereafter, movement of another Ukrainian convoy of paratroopers was also blocked by angry demonstrators again without a single shot fired.^{lvii} In spring and summer 2014 there were a number of other cases as well, when local demonstrators attempted to block, impede or slow the movement of government forces in the cities of Eastern Ukraine during Ukraine's anti-terror operation against the Russia-backed rebels, when the frontline was still fluid and moving.

The use of mobilized crowds for aggressive actions against troops re-emerged in 2016 in the Donbass. On the separatist territories observers of the OSCE Monitoring Mission repeatedly got confronted with well-organized civilian crowds hampering or blocking their movements into certain directions. In an interview given on 19 July 2016 Head of the OSCE Monitoring Mission Alexander Hug factually spoke about *"orchestrated mobs that aggressively counter our monitors."*^{lviii} There were also cases, when mobs actually burned OSCE vehicles.^{lix}

Russian paramilitaries as proxies in Ukraine

Besides genuine, individual volunteers, Russia also sent some of its paramilitary formations to Eastern Ukraine to support the separatist conflict against the government in Kyiv. The two most prominent ones have been the Cossack and Chechen units. Cossacks constitute a very special social-paramilitary formation in Russia, with a centuries-long history of protecting Russia's Southern borders in the Tsarist times. Banned in the Soviet era, Cossacks revitalized themselves after 1991,^{lx} and nowadays constitute a state-funded paramilitary organization. When the conflict started in Eastern Ukraine in spring 2014, Russian Cossacks arrived in large numbers to Ukraine, and played an important role in the separatist movement, particularly in the territory of the so-called Luhansk People's Republic.^{lxi} Field commander Ataman Nikolay Kozitsyn controlled the city of Antratsyt with considerable autonomy^{lxii}, he even refused to recognize the separatist de-facto authorities. Nevertheless, the size and composition of his forces, and particularly their abundant supplies of weapons and ammunition – Kozitsyn commanded a force 4000 strong, equipped with armor and artillery as well^{lxiii} - made it unlikely that such a contingent could exist without Russia's continuous and direct support. However, from early 2015 on, when the frontlines stabilized, the reckless behavior of Cossack forces has become increasingly a problem for Russia. Hence, most Cossack formations got disbanded and their fighters got integrated into the regular armed forces of the Luhansk People's Republic. Others were forced to leave and go back to Russia, like Kozitsyn himself did, or got killed in unattributed, but apparently systemic ambushes.^{lxiv}

In addition to Cossacks, there were also Chechen paramilitaries fighting in Eastern Ukraine, sent there by President of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov. They were engaged in the fighting around Donetsk airport in 2014 and suffered heavy losses there. While Chechen fighters formally denied any formal connections to the Russian state and claimed to be volunteers^{lxv}, their arrival in Ukraine, as well as the supplies of weapons and ammunition indicates that their presence and activities were at least tacitly supported by the Russia.

A particularly interesting element concerning the Chechens that there have been Chechen units fighting on Kyiv's side as well.^{lxvi} These pro-Kyiv Chechen units have been composed mostly of veterans of the Russia's wars in Chechnya, who fled Russia after the conflict, but from 2014 on travelled to Ukraine in order to continue their struggle against Moscow. Their first unit was set up already in March 2014, later named Dzhokhar Dudayev Battalion after the first president of Ichkeria Chechen Republic. The battalion's first commander, Isa Munayev was a veteran of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, as well of both Chechen wars. After he was killed in the battle of Debaltsevo in February 2015, the battalion's command was taken over by Adam Osmayev. Fighting between pro-Moscow and pro-Kyiv Chechen irregulars was not limited to the battlefield: Osmayev was subject to two assassination attempts in 2017. The first one was committed by a Chechen man, Arthur Denisultanov, who was captured by Ukrainian police and was later exchanged to Ukrainian prisoners in December 2019. Perpetrators of the second attack are still unknown, though Ukrainian authorities classified the event as an ordered killing.^{lxvii} While Osmayev again survived, his wife, well-known Ukrainian-Chechen doctor, activist and fighter Amina Okueva got killed on the spot.

In addition to Chechens and Cossacks, highly diverse types of combatants arrived from Russia to Ukraine, particularly in spring and summer of 2014, i.e. before the first large-scale offensive of Russian forces that occurred in August 2014. Their composition ranged from war veterans to militants mobilized by Russian patriotic NGOs; from Communists ready to fight against the allegedly 'fascist' Ukrainian government to radical nationalists; from Russian imperialists to professional mercenaries and members of private military companies (such as the E.N.O.T. Group^{lxviii}). Local criminal groups were also mobilized in Eastern Ukraine.^{lxix}

As in the early months of the Russian attack on Ukraine Moscow's control over all these groups was far from complete. Hence, it is not surprising that some of them committed deeds that were not part of any central planning, but were driven by local, often personal motivations, including financial and criminal ones. Nevertheless, it is important to note that despite the widespread and well-documented atrocities, practically none of the perpetrators were either tried by Russia or extradited to the Ukrainian authorities for trial.

Nevertheless, however reckless these irregular forces and formations have been, they still served the overall purpose of weakening the enemy, i.e. Ukraine well, along with the holistic logic of the hybrid war. Besides, their presence on the battlefield could help Moscow employ the narrative of deniability, even though it is not realistic to think that these individuals and formations could even leave Russia without Moscow's consent, not to mention to continuous flow of weapons, ammunitions and other supplies.

Russian Experiences Gained in Syria

From Russia's perspective, Moscow's intervention in Syria in 2015 was a step to contain the tide of Western instigated "color revolutions" spreading through and destabilizing the entire North African and Middle Eastern region.^{lxx} The endeavor provided the Russian military with an exceptional opportunity to try itself in a complex operational environment typical of "new type wars". Regarding the role of irregular formations, this applied both to using them and countering them. Concerning the first, in the conflict in Syria Moscow put into action massive proxy formations, namely private military companies. Regarding the second, Russian Armed Forces have gained experience in combating a host of non-state actors in counter-insurgency operations during which was the first expeditionary operation of the Russian military since the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

Russian proxies in high-intensity operations: the Wagner Group in Syria

Syria was the first international conflict, where Russia employed private military companies in a large scale. During the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq Russian military specialists studied closely, how the United States and other Western powers have employed private security and military companies (PMCs).

President Putin supported the idea of creating Russian private military companies already in 2012.^{lxxi} Back then the desired task would have been to train foreign militaries abroad without the direct involvement of the Russian state. With other words, from the very beginning the Kremlin perceived PMCs as tools of Russia's influence abroad, and not as commercial, really non-state entities.

The first Russian PMC was the so-called Slavonic Corps deployed to Syria in 2013; however, the endeavor yet ended with a spectacular defeat due to improper planning, insufficient logistics and dysfunctional coordination with Syrian government forces. Survivors were quickly withdrawn to Russia.

A year later, in 2014 the so-called Wagner Group was established by a former GRU Lieutenant Colonel, Dmitry Utkin, who named the company after his own nom-de-guerre 'Wagner'. The company gets financed by pro-Kremlin oligarch and Putin's trustee Evgeny Prigozhin. Wagner first saw action in Ukraine's Crimea and the Donbass, yet only in small numbers. In Ukraine Wagner has operated in close coordination with Russia's GRU: according to an intercepted conversation, Utkin received orders from a GRU Colonel Oleg Ivannikov.^{lxxii}

In Syria Wagner was already deployed in massive numbers, reaching thousands of operatives on the ground. Wagner personnel played a key role in capturing Palmyra,^{lxxiii} as well as in other operations. Particularly from January 2017 on, Wagner's mercenaries conducted also high intensity operations^{lxxiv}, employing tanks, APCs and heavy artillery. They operated in close coordination with Russia's regular military deployed to Syria, sometimes even calling in air strikes.

Wagner's presence on the ground in Syria not only empowered the Assad-government with valuable, experienced military assets, but also made it possible for the Russian state to keep the officially reported numbers of Russian losses low. Ministry of Defense has always reported losses of Russian soldiers, by using a term *voennosluzhayshchie*, meaning word by word 'the ones serving in the armed forces'. However, as Wagner operatives do not count as *voennosluzhayshchie*, the losses they suffered did not appear in the Russian state's official communication. With other words, by employing a PMC, Russia could employ deniability, thus conceal the real scale of its involvement in the Syrian war.

The turning point came in 7 February 2018. A group of Wagner operatives was to attack an oil facility at Deir ez-Zor, guarded by Kurdish troops, who were assisted by U.S. special forces. The U.S. detected the approaching Wagner formation early on, and contacted the Russian command in Syria, inquiring about whether that Russian-speaking unit on the ground belonged to Russia's armed forces.^{lxxv} However, the Russian command denied, after which the U.S. launched several waves of air strikes against the Wagner operatives. Accounts vary on the exact losses of Wagner there, but the number of dead and severely wounded operatives have been around 200 at least.^{lxxvi} Survivors were transported back to Russia on Russian military medical aircrafts.

Russia's fiasco at Deir ez-Zor demonstrated that deniability could actually be turned against its employers, provided that the other side has both the escalation dominance, as well as the forces necessary for successfully attacking the Russian proxies on the ground. As actively fighting the incoming U.S. aircrafts was clearly not an option for the Russian military command in Syria, they were faced with a tough choice: either to admit that Wagner operatives belong to Russia, thus blow their cover of deniability for good, or to deny it, and thus making them subject to an air strike. One needs to add that this was a situation unique

in the sense that the U.S. could be sure about Russia unwilling to risk an all-out escalation by trying to fight off the incoming bombers. Still, the lesson of Deir ez-Zor, namely that under some circumstances Russia might be unwilling (and often unable) to choose an escalation scenario to protect its formally non-affiliated PMCs on the ground might be relevant for a number of countries that may face Russian private military companies.

Russia versus irregulars

Despite the long intermission between the wars in Afghanistan and Syria, Moscow had accumulated remarkable experience in the field of counter-insurgency in that period. The lessons learned during the two inglorious Chechen Wars proved to be invaluable when fighting against terrorists and rebels in Syria. The composition of tactical groups for urban terrain, the so-called “storm” detachments had been worked out already during the sieges of World War II, but had been almost completely forgotten and were hastily reinvented only after the Russian military suffered tremendous losses on the streets of Grozny.^{lxxvii}

In Syria, attack groups of very similar composition were employed successfully to force terrorist forces out of their positions in urban combat.^{lxxviii} Numerous new armaments and military equipment supported Russian forces in the urban terrain, including UAVs, anti-UAV techniques of different sorts and robots.^{lxxix} Beyond the well-documented use of innovative technologies and tactics, Russia could rely on old and proven methods of counter-insurgency warfare mastered in Afghanistan and Chechnya. One particularly noteworthy lesson the Russians learned during the first Chechen War was the role of media. While Moscow had lost the war of narratives in 1994, it managed to maintain support for its second campaign in 1999-2000.^{lxxx}

Moscow had full control over the information domain in the war in Syria which assured great *operational flexibility* in the applied methods. As Timothy Thomas notes:

“[t]he battlefield provided Russia with much latitude (and secrecy) in choosing how to conduct operations, since the only first-hand commentary of the conflict came from Russian and Syrian controlled media. As a result, Russia has had close to a free hand in deciding the tempo and context of operations.”^{lxxxii}

In the meantime, Russian autocratic political system ensured great *strategic flexibility* with regard to the goal, duration and content of war. Despite the fact that until the end of 2017, Vladimir Putin had announced twice the Russian troops withdrawal from Syria, Russian forces are still in the country as of now. What Michael Kofman and Matthew Rojansky dubbed as *lean strategy*, made it possible for the Kremlin to dynamically adapt to the changed circumstances on the ground and continuously reevaluate its objectives accordingly.^{lxxxiii}

It is particularly noteworthy how the proliferation of low-value targets on the Syrian battlefield forced the operational adaptation of advanced air forces (particularly the U.S. and Russian air forces) involved in the conflict. This led the Russian air force for instance to increasingly substitute its jet bombers with combat helicopters which provided a cheaper way to take out targets with no or limited air defense capabilities.^{lxxxiv} Lessons drawn by Russian military experts from NATO’s air campaign over Libya most likely also impacted how Russia used its military force in Syria. One such experience was that despite the operation’s limited scale, the European NATO allies quickly depleted their stock of precision guided munitions. This was due to NATO’s very low tolerance for collateral damage, that required a huge number of precision

weapons.^{lxxxv} Free from such limitations, Moscow could easily economize its air strikes, keeping the ratio of precision guided munitions among all weapons below an estimated five percent.^{lxxxvi}

Along with fighting against various non-state actors, Moscow also managed to hold together and work with a colorful coalition of proxies and allies. The Russian Armed Forces cooperated with the Syrian government forces, pro-Assad and Iranian militias, the Hezbollah and Russia's own private military companies, the latter of which carried out actual combat roles and were usually tasked with the riskiest missions.^{lxxxvii} Moscow also had to coordinate its activities with Turkey, the U.S., Israel and other stakeholders of the conflict to avoid accidents and unintended escalation.

Besides waging a counter-insurgency war, Russian Armed Forces also tested and demonstrated the capability of deterrence both by denial and punishment against potential high-end technology enemies through the deployment of state-of-the-art air defense systems, means of electronic warfare and the demonstrated capability to launch precision strikes from the air, ground and sea. The launching of Kalibr cruise missiles from different sea platforms including corvettes, frigates and submarines was especially noteworthy in this respect.^{lxxxviii} As the renowned Russia military expert, Dmitry Adamsky points out, these steps did not fulfill operational demands of the battlefield but fit well into Russia's holistic strategic approach, that took into account other goals as well, including informational and propaganda ones, beyond the Syrian theatre of operation.^{lxxxix} Stimulating weapons sales in the region and beyond was likely an important aspect, too. Indeed, Russian military experts accused France and the U.K. of doing the same in Libya, stating that striking T-55 and T-62 tanks with costly cruise missiles made no sense from a purely military point of view.^{xc}

4. Conclusions

A considerable continuity is present in the Soviet and contemporary Russian practices of employing – and countering - irregular formations abroad. Using irregular and proxy forces has been an integral part of the Soviet Union's political and military toolbox, perceived to be one of the many means of achieving the desired political and military ends. Hence, the Soviet Union accumulated considerable practical experience both in employing irregular formations, such as the partisans of WWII, and in fighting against them, let that take place in the Baltic forests, or among the mountains of Afghanistan.

Using proxies abroad included supporting a wide variety of separatist, revolutionary and other militant organizations operating in other countries. Though this was initially motivated by ideological considerations, namely to spread the Communist revolution abroad, later it served the exclusively pragmatic political objective of advancing Soviet interests by weakening the West. The Soviet Union has also conducted a number of large-scale, covert military and paramilitary operations abroad by deploying various proxy forces, often in order to support the same revolutionary groups or to serve the same general purpose of weakening the West. Moscow frequently used the disguise of referring to the deployed proxies as “volunteers”, thus denying their official connections to the Kremlin, or as “advisors”, thereby denying the fighting role these proxies played.

Contemporary Russian perception of armed conflicts focuses on the integrated use of all available military and non-military means in order to achieve superiority over the adversary primarily in the psychological domain, often called “hybrid war” by Western military thinkers and strategists. In terms of the tools Moscow can employ, modern Russian thinking demonstrates considerable continuity with the Soviet one. Deploying proxy forces abroad, often under the cover of deniability is an important element of contemporary Russian hybrid war strategy, as it has been demonstrated in Ukraine and in Syria. This way

Moscow is able to “outsource” subversion to players that are formally not connected to Russia; hence, deniability makes the Kremlin largely unaccountable.

Russia has also adopted the Western model of using private military companies to support regular military operations, but did so with a particular twist. In the contemporary Russian practice, demonstrated by the actions of the Wagner Group and also other PMCs, private military companies mostly operate as closely linked proxies of Russia’s state armed forces. The role they play consists mainly not of supporting the regular military, but to substitute it under the cover of deniability.

It is important to note that so far Russia did not have to bear significant political or economic costs for employing various irregular proxy formations abroad. The Kremlin did not have to face sanctions for the operations of the Wagner Group, or for its actions in Syria. Hence, as things stand nowadays, Russia has little, or practically no reason of why it should resign of employing irregular, proxy formations in various countries as parts of Moscow’s hybrid warfare arsenal against the West.

Implications for NATO

Russian forecasts on future war are scientifically well-founded and are in accordance with the holistic approach, meaning that they take into account numerous other factors beyond the development of weaponry. The value of these forecasts is not discredited by the fact that certain trends are drawn from an erroneous view of Western strategy.

On the one hand, objective evaluation of trends drives the Russian military’s adaptation to future operational environment. On the other, the attribution of the use of certain methods to the West can legitimize the application of the same methods by Russia. Some of these were actually not alien to Soviet strategy. Because of the great degree of continuity between Soviet and Russian military thought, it is crucial for NATO to analyze Russian forecasts together with traditional Soviet methods as they might be indicative of future Russian actions. The authors of this paper believe NATO should prepare for the following challenges with regard to the so-called hybrid wars and the role of irregular formations in it:

- Information warfare. Since Russian military theorists are convinced about the crucial role of information domain in future wars, NATO must continuously raise its competitiveness in this area. This is particularly so, because along the holistic logic described above, it is highly likely that if Russia decides to employ irregular formations abroad, it will do so with intensive information warfare support. Hence, member states should adapt their legislation to tackle the spread of disinformation, keeping in mind the potential impact of the development of artificial intelligence, big data, 5G technology and deep fake.
- Non-military means. Besides information means, the Alliance should also be prepared to counter other non-military actions. These include diplomatic pressure, subversive actions, economic sanctions, inciting unrests based on ethnic, national, religious or other lines of division. To tackle these threats, NATO members must enhance their resilience in the fields of finance and economy, with particular attention paid to diversification of the supply of energy resources and to combatting corruption. They must also strengthen the resilience of the society against manipulation. The experience of the war in Ukraine underlined the need for efficient riot control techniques, too.
- Non-state actors. Russian forecasts assume a continuing trend in the growth of intra-state wars. As such, future operational environment is going to be more complex with multiple non-state combatants pursuing different particular goals in internal conflicts. The growing role of non-state actors provide Russia both with opportunities and challenges. Concerning the first, in such an

operational environment Russia may widely employ the logic of deniability and thereby concealing its irregular, proxy formations. On the other hand, states employing different proxies can never exert full and complete control over them. Russia is no exception from the rule as it was illustrated by the war in Ukraine, too. This may lead to unintended escalation, as well as may make harder to regulate the conflict. Deconflicting measures are thus crucial as it was highlighted by the war in Syria.

- Increasing role of deniability and proxies: ever since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Russia has not had to bear significant political or military costs for employing various proxy formations under the umbrella of deniability. Meanwhile, these proxies turned out to be highly successful in various roles, let it be providing disguised manpower for taking over buildings of public administration, like it happened in Ukraine, or by conducting high-intensity operations, like they did in Syria. Sporadic, but grave human rights violations committed by these proxies do not change Moscow's calculus on them. As long as the benefits of using them far exceed the related political and military costs, there is no reason to believe that Moscow would stop employing them any time soon. Moreover, the Russian military leadership regards human rights violations as an inherent feature of contemporary warfare.^{xcⁱ}
- Turning deniability against its employer: the example of the U.S. airstrike against Wagner Group operatives in Deir ez-Zor, Syria demonstrated that deniability can be turned back as well. Under the clear and present danger of an incoming U.S. air strike the Russian military leadership was forced to make a choice between attributing Wagner operatives as their own, thus saving the fighters on the ground, but blowing the deniability cover for good, and maintaining the deniability, thus sacrificing that particular contingent. The Alliance needs to study the Deir ez-Zor incident in detail and map out the Russian decision-making as clear as possible in order to determine, whether this single case of turning deniability against Russia may serve as groundwork for a wider strategy of countering Moscow's efforts to use plausible deniability.
- Growing unpredictability and ambiguity. In relation to the above, there is a growing unpredictability in hybrid wars. Russian military theorist, Aleksandr Bartosh argues, that hybrid war lacks a "formal unified leadership center" and the "general guidelines are worked out and approved on the level of government organizations, leadership of transnational companies, financial and banking structures, different influential persons. Destabilization of the enemy country is carried out by various network structures with a "high level of independence [samostoyatel'nost' – K. J.] and capability to self-synchronization."^{xcⁱⁱ} This decentralized and highly autonomous operation increases unpredictability. It also makes attribution to a state actor very difficult. Consequently, NATO countries must also strengthen their foreign intelligence as well as their domestic counter-intelligence capabilities to uncover attempts of malign influence well on time to prevent any potential destabilization.

ⁱ Background research for the present study has been conducted with the support of the research grant No. 129243., titled '*Tradition and Flexibility in Russia's Security and Defense Policy*', provided by the National Research, Development and Innovation Office of Hungary.

ⁱⁱ Authors are aware of the narrative debates concerning the use of the term „hybrid warfare”. Nevertheless, the present study keeps using it, in line with NATO's official documents.

ⁱⁱⁱ Robert H. McNeal, *Tsar and Cossack 1855-1914*, Palgrave Macmillan 1987, p.49.

^{iv} Ben Shepherd: *War in the Wild East. The German Army and Soviet Partisans*. Harvard University Press, 2004.

^v For details, see: Okorokov, A.V., *Русские добровольцы (Russian Volunteers)*, Eksmo, 2007.

^{vi} E.H. Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1959, pp. 36-51.

^{vii} Rami Ginat – Uri Bar-Noi, “Tacit support for terrorism: The rapprochement between the USSR and Palestinian guerrilla organizations following the 1967 war”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 30, 2007, pp. 255-284.

^{viii} Nick Lockwood, “How the Soviet Union Transformed Terrorism”, *The Atlantic*, December 23, 2011, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/12/how-the-soviet-union-transformed-terrorism/250433/>

^{ix} John F. Murphy – Donald R. Brady, “The Soviet Union and International Terrorism”, *The International Lawyer*, Vol. 16, No. 1. 1982, pp. 139-148. p. 144.

^x Central Intelligence Agency, *SNIE 11/2-81, Soviet Support for International Terrorism and Revolutionary Violence*, May 27, 1981, 28. p. <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90T00155R000200010009-2.pdf>

^{xi} Adam Klus, “Myatezh Voyna: The Russian Grandfather of Western Hybrid Warfare”, *Small Wars Journal*, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/myatezh-voyna-the-russian-grandfather-of-western-hybrid-warfare>

^{xii} Quoted in detail by Ofer. Fridman: “Hybrid Warfare or Gibrinaya Voyna? Similar, But Different,” *The RUSI Journal*, Vol. 162 – 2017, Issue 1, p. 43-45. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03071847.2016.1253370?needAccess=true>

^{xiii} A. V. Kartapolov: “Уроки военных конфликтов, перспективы развития средств и способов их ведения. Прямые и не прямые действия в современных международных конфликтах” (Lessons of Military Conflicts, Prospects of Development of Means and Methods of Administering Them, Direct and Indirect Action in Contemporary International Conflicts), *Voennaya Mysl' (Military Thought)*, No. 2 (51) 2015 p. 26

^{xiv} The study also underlines, that “historical experience” testifies about Western states’ responsibility in initiating 60-70 percent of all armed conflicts of the 20th century while socialist countries are to blame for a mere 2-3% of wars. V. V. Kulakov, Yu. N. Ponomarev, E. I. Kashirina, “Проблемы войны и мира в XX – XXI веках” (Problems of War and Peace in the XX-XXI Centuries), *Voennaya Mysl' (Military Thought)*, No. 1 (66) 2019 p. 15

^{xv} Oscar Jonsson, “The Russian Understanding of War. Blurring the Line Between War and Peace.” Georgetown University Press, Washington D.C. 2019, p. 37

^{xvi} For a good definition of holism see the University of Oregon’s glossary: <http://abyss.uoregon.edu/~js/glossary/holism.html>

^{xvii} M. A. Gareev, E. A. Derbin, N. I. Turko, “Дискурс: методология и практика совершенствования стратегического руководства обороной страны с учетом характера будущих войн” (Discourse: Methodology and Practice of Improving the Strategic Management of the Country’s Defense, Taking Into Account the Nature of Future Wars and Armed Conflicts.), *Voennaya Mysl' (Military Thought)*, No. 1 (66) 2019 p. 12

^{xviii} V. V. Gerasimov, “Основные тенденции развития форм и способов применения Вооруженных Сил, актуальные задачи военной науки по их совершенствованию” (Fundamental Tendencies in the Development of Forms and Methods of the Application of Armed Forces, Actual Tasks of Military Science in Regard to Their Improvement), *Vestnik Akademii Voyennih Nauk (Journal of the Academy of Military Science)*, No. 1 (42) 2013

^{xix} A. V. Glebov, O. Yu. Mikheev, V. M. Oleinik, “От воздушной обороны – к системе комплексной борьбы с воздушно-космическим противником” (From the Air Defense System to the Complex System of the Fight with Air-Space Enemy), *Vestnik Akademii Voyennih Nauk (Journal of the Academy of Military Science)*, No. 4 (57) 2016 p. 59

^{xx} Information operation against aircraft crew is quite noteworthy in light of the alleged Russian harassment of the families of Dutch pilots taking part in the Baltic air policing mission. Janene Pieters, ““Russians” threatening Dutch F-16 pilots’ family”, *NL Times*, August 9, 2019, <https://nltimes.nl/2019/08/09/russians-threatening-dutch-f-16-pilots-family>

^{xxi} Glebov, Mikheev, Oleinik, p. 58

^{xxii} A. V. Kortunov: “Between Polycentrism and Bipolarity: On Russian Narratives of the Evolution of World Order,” Russian International Affairs Council, Working Papers (Rabochaya Tetrad’) No. 52/2019 p. 25-26

^{xxiii} Zoltán Szenes, “Katonai biztonság napjainkban. Új fenyegetések, új háborúk, új elméletek” (Military security today. New threats, new wars, new theories), In: *Finszter – Sabjanics (ed.) Biztonsági kihívások a 21. században*, Budapest, Dialóg Campus, 2017, p. 82

^{xxiv} Stephen Covington, “The Culture of Strategic Thought Behind Russia’s Modern Approaches to Warfare”, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, October 2016, <https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/Culture%20of%20Strategic%20Thought%203.pdf> p. 21

^{xxv} Timothy Thomas, “Russian Forecasts of Future War”, *Military Review*, May-June, 2019, p. 89

^{xxvi} Maxim Suchkov, Sim Tack, “The Future of War”, Valdai Club, August 2019 p. 23

^{xxvii} Sergey Karpachev, “Бойцы на матрице. В XXI веке на поле боя выйдут общества” (Warriors in the Matrix. In the 21st Century Societies Will Go to the Battlefield) *Voyenno-promishlenny Kurer (Military-industrial Courier)* No. 6 (819) February 18-24, 2020 p. 4

^{xxviii} Suchkov, Tack, p. 10

^{xxix} Two Russian military theorists, Pavel Doulnov and Vladimir Orlyansky argue, that threatening with destroying an object of which could have potentially disastrous ecological consequences can convince the public opinion of the enemy to force its government to change its political goals. Pavel Doulnov, Vladimir Orlyansky, “Основные изменения в характере вооруженной борьбы первой трети XXI века” (Basic Changes in the Armed Struggle Character of First Third of the XXI-st Century), *Vestnik Akademii Voyennih Nauk (Journal of the Academy of Military Science)*, No. 1 (50) 2015 p. 45

^{xxx} Suchkov, Tack, p. 10

^{xxxi} S. G. Chekinov, S. A. Bogdanov, “Asymmetrical Actions to Maintain Russia’s Military Security,” *Military Thought*, No. 1. 2010 p. 2

^{xxxii} Suchkov, Tack p. 14-15

^{xxxiii} Gareev, Derbin, Turko,

^{xxxiv} For a comprehensive overview on how the Russian perception of the color revolutions have changed over time, read Oscar Jonsson’s excellent book cited in endnote 15.

^{xxxv} Aleksandr Bartosh, “Несущая конструкция развала России. США ищут наши слабые места с помощью «пятой колонны»” (The Structural System of the Collapse of the Russia. The U.S. is Searching For Our Weak Spots With the Help “Fifth Column”), *Voyenno-promshlenny Kurier (Military-industrial Courier)* No. 33 (796) August 27 – September 2, 2019

^{xxxvi} Jonsson, p. 92

^{xxxvii} Bartosh, 2019

^{xxxviii} Bartosh, “Гибридная война – новый вызов национальной безопасности России” (Hybrid War – New Challenges for the National Security of Russia), *Natsionalnaya Oborona (National Defense)*, October 16, 2017.

<http://www.nationaldefense.ru/includes/periodics/maintheme/2017/1016/154222573/detail.shtml>

^{xxxix} Kartapolov, p. 31

^{xl} Pavel Felgenhauer, “A New Version of the ‘Gerasimov Doctrine’?”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 16, Issue 32. March 7, 2019 <https://jamestown.org/program/a-new-version-of-the-gerasimov-doctrine/>

^{xli} Fears from U.S. precision strike capability are not new in Russian military circles. The authoritative military theorist, Vladimir Slipchenko analyzing the Gulf War and the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 concluded that non-nuclear precision weapons are highly destabilizing to the strategic balance of power as their use is much more probable and credible than of nuclear weapons. Vladimir Slipchenko, “К какой войне должна быть готова Россия” (For What War Should the Armed Forces Prepare), *Otechestvenie Zapiski (Fatherland Papers)* No. 8 (9) 2002

^{xlii} Michael Kofman, “The Role of Pre-Conflict Conflict and the Importance of the Syrian Crucible”, In. John R. Deni (editor), “Current Russia Military Affairs. Assessing and Countering Russian Strategy, Operational Planning, and Modernization”, U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, July 2018. p. 23

^{xliii} Charles Bartles, “Factors Influencing Russian Force Modernization”, In. John R. Deni (editor), “Current Russia Military Affairs. Assessing and Countering Russian Strategy, Operational Planning, and Modernization”, U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, July 2018. p. 43

^{xliv} Suchkov, Tack p. 8

^{xlv} Chekinov, Bogdanov, p. 4-5

^{xlvi} Ibid. p. 9

^{xlvii} Elaborating on the means of asymmetrical measures the study proposes, that “asymmetrical actions relying on the efficiency of modern high-precision conventionally equipped strategic weapons systems, supported by subversive and reconnaissance groups is a persuasive enough factor for the enemy to cease military operations on terms favorable for Russia. This conclusion has a practical significance and relevance in view of the fact that the economy and infrastructure of any European country has a large number of objectives, some of them potentially dangerous, vital for the survival of its population and government.” Chekinov, Bogdanov, p. 8-9

^{xlviii} The massive rally in Sevastopol on 23 February 2014 that resulted in the dismissal of the city’s mayor was organized by the pro-Russian NGO Russian Front. For more information, see: W. Kononczuk, “Russia’s Real Aims in the Crimea”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 13 March 2014, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/03/13/russia-s-real-aims-in-crimea-pub-54914>

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