Russian Military Campaign in Eastern Ukraine:

Implications of Actor Influence on Strategic Planning

By

Jonathan P. Hall

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Abstract

The study of Russian military thought, a priority for Western nations since long before the Cold War, is an ever-evolving endeavor. Constant improvements in their operational capabilities and strategic aptitude require similar developments in our analytical abilities and understanding. 2014, and the annexation of Crimea, marks the most recent advancement in the military affairs of the Russian Federation which is not yet fully comprehended. Their swift and efficient operations on the Crimean Peninsula, followed by the protracted conflict in Donbas we see today illustrates tactics and technologies used in a decidedly different manner than many claim has been seen in the past. What the Russian military has done is apparent, how to respond is another question entirely.

The answers to these questions have consistently been sought within the proposed model of so-called hybrid warfare. Russia was highly successful in using a mixed approach in their military campaign – combining conventional and unconventional methods, in addition to their sponsorship of pro-Russian separatist groups. Comprehensive analyses of the tactics used, technologies adopted and proxy sponsorships employed certainly needs to be conducted. Whether this should be done within the framework of hybrid warfare, however, will be examined.

What this research will posit, is that many aspects of the hybrid warfare model appeared due to individual actor agency on the ground, the pro-Russian separatists, rather than by clear Russian directives. If this is proven to be the case, then a frame of analysis which incorrectly assumes a unitary actor, Russia, initiating the tactics of freelancing proxies, the separatists, is flawed by its very basis.

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Chapter I

1.1 Introduction

Developing an understanding of Russian military science, a long sought-after bridgehead for Western security specialists since before the Cold War, has remained a moving target. New conflicts erupt, innovative technologies are adopted and operational planning is refined. Russia consistently maintains a degree of separation between what they are doing and how we interpret it. Since the annexation of Crimea, the term "hybrid warfare" has been buzzing in and out of security communities around the world. Academics and practitioners alike have repeatedly used this label to describe the events that led to the illegal annexation of Crimea and conflict in eastern Ukraine. Subsequent analyses have consistently adopted this term in their search for a comprehensive plan of action. In doing so, efforts to counter Russia's strategy and deter future engagements have been persistently shaped by this proposed new model of warfare. The question remains: is this the best way to view Russia's military strategy in the region? Has their military thinking evolved so much as to warrant a newly developed model of warfare? Questions regarding the analytical usefulness of such a framework should be asked before it is categorically defined as the basis from which we search for a means of response.

Many definitions have been formulated in recent years, however the term gained popularity on 3 July 2014 when NATO publicly declared that the conflict in Ukraine was a new form of warfare which they would label as "hybrid war," followed by a comprehensive definition during NATO's Wales Summit the following September which defines a war to be hybrid when: "a wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures are employed in a highly integrated

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design[1]." This definition, representative of most any other definition of hybrid warfare which has been formulated, is inclusive enough the point of obscurity. If hybrid warfare is everything, then as a concept it quickly becomes nothing.

The problem with viewing the events in eastern Ukraine as hybrid warfare is the analytical assumptions which have been framed around this concept. The definition appears straight forward, the integration of varying tactics into one militarized campaign. The problem is trying to attribute this synchronization and integration of operations to the Russian government's premediated strategy. This research does not set out to argue that many, or even all of the elements of hybrid warfare were present in one form or another in eastern Ukraine. However, what will instead be posited, is that several of these aspects did not come about from a top-down approach with Kremlin directives orchestrating the entire campaign. This is an important distinction because, for military strategists, analyzing a conflict through a framework of dealing with one unitary actor directing everything is much different than one actor, Russia, initiating a conflict, and then dealing with proxy forces, the separatists, influencing the conflict in ways that are almost as predictable to Ukraine or NATO, as they are to Russia.

Although the term may be problematic by its very definition, there remains an additional issue. In referencing these conflicts as Russian hybrid warfare, the onus in deciding how the wars will be waged has been placed on the Kremlin and their top-down directives. Hybrid warfare implies that everything that unfolds beyond the Kremlin's initiation of the conflict should work in their favor. However, there are many possible intervening factors which would prevent such a top-down approach from being successfully implemented throughout their military campaign, such

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[1] "Wales Summit Declaration" (NATO, September 5, 2014),
https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.

as individual agency on the ground or actions taken by the Ukrainian government. By viewing various military campaigns the Russian Federation has involved itself in, Crimea and Donbas for example, as the result of a unitary actor, there is the risk of oversimplifying the reasons behind why the conflicts developed in the manner they did. Rather than including the potential influence of Russia's agents, the separatist fighters, an analysis of that sort would be limited to the strategic choices made concerning the tactics and technology used by the Russian government to the possible detriment of fully understanding the situation and how it was developed.

The research aim for this project will be to improve the understanding of the events which occurred during the annexation of Crimea and ongoing war in Donbas by relaxing the assumption that Russia maintained full top-down control in each situation. The outcomes in Crimea and Donbas are visibly quite different; Crimea resulted in a swiftly executed annexation while Donbas has become a protracted conflict. The literature does not fully account for this difference. With the intervening variable of agents on the ground being included within the analysis, discrepancies leading to the disparity of outcome between the campaigns may be more likely illustrated.

To be clear, there is no dispute that the Russian strategy seeks to sow chaos into the operating environment through their use of varying tactics such as disinformation operations, funding of paramilitaries, and covert special operations, whether that be in the opposing forces military ranks, preexisting civil animosities or in the political arena. The focus of this study, however, includes how local actors are involved in the process. There is much evidence to suggest bottom-up process mechanisms for these conflicts. This challenges the view of a linear chain of command implied in the concept of Russian hybrid warfare. If we are to more deeply understand

the nature of these transnational conflicts in Russia's operations, which seem to be ever-evolving and quite unpredictable, their strategy should be analyzed not only from the traditional top-down manner coming from the Kremlin, but also from the bottom-up, illustrating how Russian-backed separatists may be influencing the situation.

The importance in exploring the impact of pro-Russian separatists is that, although the conflict may have been initiated by actors in the Kremlin, their personal agendas strongly influenced choices that follow. If governments are to prepare to deter and defend against aggressions at the operational and tactical level, then influence in regards to the direction and methods of combat which separatists may project onto Russia, as well as regional particularities, will be important aspects of transborder conflict analysis.

The reason why understanding where these differences come from is to avoid conflating aspects of the conflict to a doctrinal strategy of the Russian military. If, instead, a better way to view the conflicts is in a utilitarian fashion, in which the Russian strategy was premeditated to a certain extent, but then necessarily developed in a reactive manner to the opportunities and vulnerabilities created by the Ukrainian government, as well as environment shaped by the separatists' freelancing activities, then analysts may come to view the concept of Russian hybrid warfare to be less analytically useful than previously posited, and instead take a balanced view of such conflict-processes, with greater emphasis on local players.

1.2 Research Question

There are no longer any questions as to the level of involvement of Russia in both Crimea and the Donbas region. Gone are any reasons to speculate who the "little green men" are, who is supplying the separatists and, by and large, where their allegiance lies. The intentions of the

Kremlin will not be drawn into question. Russia's hybrid warfare campaign has been covered to a great extent, and similar studies will doubtlessly continue as new and relevant information is discovered. A pertinent question at this point, however, would be to what extent have these so-called hybrid warfare operations been developed through Kremlin directives, in the manner in which a rational actor analysis would apply.

To examine the situations on the ground and provide insight into one aspect which may account for the differences between the case studies, two models of analysis will be presented in order to provide a framework in which actor agency and strategic command can be studied. As the source of directives is an important detail when defining a conflict, this research will attempt to build from Graham Allison's three models of inspection used in *Essence of Decision*: Model I, the rational actor model, Model II, the bureaucratic politics model and Model III, the governmental politics model. Rather than mimicking Allison's research and attempting to place the conflicts in one of these three models, the case studies will search for evidence of either Model I, the rational actor model, or what will be called Model IV, the transnational actor influence model.

Model I will be characterized in the same manner as Allison defined it, treating Russia as if it were a single, unitary actor[2]. Analyzing Russia as such will assume, as Thomas Schelling states, "rational behavior – not just of intelligent behavior, but of behavior motivated by a conscious calculation of advantages, a calculation that in turn is based on an explicit and internally consistent value system[3]."

What the Model IV, transnational actor influence model will posit, is that while an actor may be a unitary actor, it is unable to retain complete top-down control when it sponsors agents in a

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[2] Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision, Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Harper Collins Publishers, 1971), 3.
[3] Ibid., 13.

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proxy environment. While a conflict may be initiated by this rational actor, conducting pre-conflict analyses and strategic planning, once they begin funding and interacting with their agents on the ground the agents begin influencing their principal in a bottom-up fashion through various freelancing behavior and unnecessary activities which shift the conflict in an unwanted direction for the rational actor. The rationale behind this model can be drawn from Kuperman's research discussing rebellious activities which are unintentionally fostered by third-party states providing funding[4].

As will be discussed in the following case studies, Crimea was swiftly annexed and, for all intents and purposes, is now a functioning part of the Russian Federation. Russia's actions in Donbas have had a different effect. By no means frozen conflicts, Donetsk and Luhansk are experiencing infighting amongst the militia members and proto-state leaders, in addition to the ongoing war with the Ukrainian government. The disparity of outcomes, in which Russia was able to conduct a successful military campaign in Crimea, while in Donbas create the quagmire we see today is apparent. These two cases may have varied in their development due to differences in level of agency on the part of separatist fighters, and to what extent they have been able to influence their principal, Russia, leading to varying command structures in the conflicts, between a Model I and Model IV framework of analysis. As Allison has stated "we should ask not what goals account for a nation's choice of an action, but rather what factors determine an outcome[5]." Through this logic, we can see how Russia's military campaign has been largely shaped not from the goals it may have initially set out to achieve, but rather how the separatists' agency affected their decision-making.

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[4] Alan J. Kuperman, "The Moral Hazard of Humanitarian Intervention: Lessons from the Balkans," 2008, 49.
[5] Allison, *Essence of Decision*, 255.

In order to test the relevance of each model of analysis in the cases of Crimea and Donbas, three hypotheses will be proposed. The first hypothesis states that, if the conflict can be analyzed through Model I, we should see actions on the ground controlled by Russia, even those actions conducted by their agents, the separatist fighters. If, instead, Model IV may be applied, the actions of the agents will go against the interests of their principal, Russia. As the level of agency available to actors on the ground rises, the ability of the principal to maintain top-down control will be further impeded.

The second hypothesis states that there should be a discernably clear goal of the Russian government as to their intentions in the theater of conflict if a Model I analysis is possible, but separatist fighters engaging in inconsistent activities which do not fall in-line with directives set forth by the Kremlin and instead problematize the situation if a Model IV analysis is better suited for the conflict. As separatist fighters are able to act according to their own agency, even if the Russian government had internally formulated clear goals and intentions as to their degree of future involvement, those may be superseded by opportunistic action taken by their agents.

The final hypothesis states that there should expectedly be consistent, internally conceived and executed war goals by the Kremlin if Model I applies, but an independent role for separatist freelancers in altering the goals of the Kremlin and influencing how they operate in the environment if Model IV. Therefore, the visible outcomes of a conflict will more closely match the assumed interests of a rational actor in a situation defined by Model I, yet appear contrary in a situation defined by Model IV.

1.3 Background

Rather than immediately concerning ourselves with ideas of a hybrid warfare model, general literature surrounding Russian strategic thought should first be consulted. Many authors have written on Russia's military in general, and operations in Ukraine specifically, without ever mentioning the necessity to create a model of hybrid warfare. As strategy can be defined as operations "based on an evaluation of the state and development trends of the military-political situation, scientifically sound objectives, principles, guidelines and tasks, and the objective requirements and actual functioning and development capability of a nation's military organization[6]," some thought should first be given to how these ideas surrounding the creation of their strategy are developed. Regardless of whether a hybrid warfare model exists, analyzing the origin of Russian strategic thought is necessary. One of the most influential books ever written in Russian military thought, *Strategy* by Alexander Svechin proposes its own definition of strategy, stating:

> Strategy is the art of combining preparations for war and the grouping of operations for achieving the goal set by the war for the AF [armed forces]. Strategy decides issues associated with the employment of the AF and all the resources of a country for achieving ultimate war aims. Strategy begins when we see a series of successive goals, or states, toward the achievement of the ultimate goal of war. Strategy must look forward and take the very long term into

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[6] Timothy Thomas, "Russia's Military Strategy and Ukraine: Indirect, Asymmetric - and Putin-Led," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 28, no. 3 (2015): 447–48, https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2015.1061819.

consideration. The strategist advances by operations, and these strategic steps extend several weeks or even months in time[7].

These long-term considerations have been fully adopted into Russian military thought, one example of this is the concept "correlation of forces" (COF) which analysts state "assists in the military's determination of objective reality." In analyzing the weak points of an enemy and where opportunities lie, "the COF is calculated on strategic, operational, and tactical directions" which is then used to predict how a future conflict will unfold, what degree of force projection will be required and what capabilities will be necessary[8]. The main point is that by incorporating this type of thinking into Russia's military studies, they are well aware of the need to maintain a long-term plan for any engagement in which they will involve their military, all the while maintaining the importance of opportunistic action. Svechin's work further illustrates this. While these long-term strategic ideas were viewed as a standard which Russian strategists should strive to meet, he realized such lofty goals would often be unrealistic. Because of this he can be cited as stating, "It is unusually difficult to foresee the circumstances of a war. […] It is necessary to work out a particular line of strategic conduct for each war, and each war represents a partial case, requiring the establishment of its own peculiar logic and not the application of some sort of model[9]."

Building from Svechin's writings, and the Russian General Staff's adoption of these ideas, analysts such as Timothy Thomas have concluded that "models and dictionary definitions are useful to a point, but unique logic and creativity applied to the situation at hand may best offer

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[7] Ibid., 452.
[8] Thomas, "Russia's Military Strategy, 452.
[9] Ibid., 453.

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the Rosetta stone for understanding Russian strategic thought." He continues to develop his point by displaying the differences between the cyber attacks which were recently made against Estonia, the 2008 war with Georgia, and now the proxy warfare atmosphere present in eastern Ukraine – all evidencing this "peculiar logic" which was long ago posited by Svechin[10]. This idea has since been reiterated by Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery Gerasimov in his 2013 article in the Russian military newspaper *Voyenno-Promyshlenniy Kurier* (Military-Industrial Courier), stating each conflict is unique in its own way and must therefore be confronted with an equally unique perspective[11].

Moving from the more classical strategic studies surrounding Russian military thought, in terms of hybrid warfare in the extant literature there are several different aspects of the concept being discussed. Much of the work over the last few years has been dedicated to the evolution of the term itself, how it was used in the past, and whether Russia's war in Ukraine is aptly named a hybrid war. The practice of referring to Russia's conflict with Ukraine as hybrid warfare will be continued as a way to easily connect back both theoretically and empirically to present-day conversations of Russia's military strategy in Ukraine and its implications on the ground.

In certain camps of researchers and practitioners they refer to hybrid warfare as an original concept, deserving of innovative theoretical analyses in order to understand it[12]. Frank Hoffman, a proponent for such an approach claims that warfare is far too sophisticated to be labeled in binary categories between "big and conventional" and "small or irregular[13]." While this is true,

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[10] Thomas, "Russia's Military Strategy," 453.
[11] Valery Gerasimov, "'Tsennost' Nauki v Predvideniye," *Voyenno-Promishlenniy Kurier*, February 27, 2013, http://www.vpk-news.ru/articles/14632.
[12] Frank Hoffman, "Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars," (*Potomac Institute for Policy Studies*, 2007).
[13] Ibid., 7.

agreeing with this facet of his argument and disagreeing with the fact that Russian hybrid warfare is neither new, nor solely unique to Russia, are not mutually exclusive decisions. The focus on hybrid warfare in Russian conflicts in large part is due to the aforementioned article written by Gerasimov. A commentary of this article by Mark Galeotti termed it the "Gerasimov Doctrine." Although in the very same article he writes a disclaimer that the ideas within Gerasimov's article are neither completely his own, nor to be viewed as doctrine, "Gerasimov Doctrine" was simply used, as Galeotti states, for a "snappy title[14]." Nonetheless, much of the analytical community has taken the ideas and imposed them to the doctrinal level of influence in regards to Russian military thought[15]. The reason there is some importance in disputing Russian hybrid warfare as a useful analytical concept, if such a concept is viewed as the creation of this "Gerasimov Doctrine," is not a purely argumentative one. There is at risk the possibility to lose sight of the entirety of Russia's military campaign. Conventional forces remain a key feature in both Russian military thought as well as budgetary allocation.

In many ways, as hybrid warfare is used as a term in the literature, it properly describes the situation in Ukraine – in terms of outcome however, and not the process through which the conflict brought about these results. By projecting Russia's heavy reliance on unconventional methods, in concert with their conventional military strength, creating for these "hybrid" tactics, this is assuming that the methods being utilized are enlisted under the top-down directive of the Kremlin in a premeditated fashion. This excludes the possibility that instead the strategies have been developed in a reactive manner, necessarily developed following the varying actors

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[14] Mark Galeotti, "The Gerasimov Doctrine and Russian Non-Linear War," inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com, *In Moscow's Shadows* (blog), 2014, https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/.
[15] Andrew Monaghan, "Putin's Way of War: The 'War' in Russia's 'Hybrid Warfare,'" (*Strategic Studies Institute*, 2016), 65–66, http://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/parameters/issues/Winter_2015-16/9_Monaghan.pdf.

involved in the conflict exerting their influence. The reason that this may be an untenable viewpoint is the assumptions about strategic directives and how they relate to so-called hybrid warfare tactics. The situation in eastern Ukraine has often been framed as a holistic military campaign, even though many facets of the conflict have arguably come about through independent activities of the separatist fighters. Rather than taking this into account, many analyses treat Russia's campaign as if it was proactively formulated in isolation from ongoing events since the conflict began, and therefore overestimates Russian foresight as well as underestimates agent influence from the separatists which they are backing[16]. Keeping this in mind, the discussion of hybrid warfare, related to Russian military action, becomes problematic when these ideas are attached to Russia's general understanding of war.

Although many argue that there has been a linear evolution in Russian military strategy over the last two decades leading to this concept of hybrid warfare, rather than a distinct shift in recent years[17], dissenting views from that of Hoffman will, however, concede that although the entirety of hybrid warfare is not new, there has yet to be an example of any state or non-state actor implementing it in such a fashion with the level of integration and cohesion among vastly different domains of operation, such as cyber warfare, disinformation campaigns, funding separatists, soliciting organized crime, deploying conventional troops, etc. More specifically, as some researchers have noted, the fact that Russia employed these tactics in Ukraine should not have left any long time Russia-watchers in disbelief[18]. Pertinent questions to be raised then should be concerning the new technologies being utilized, given Russia's advancements in cyber

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[16] Monaghan, "Putin's Way of War," 67.

[17] Pasi Eronen, "Russian Hybrid Warfare: How to Confront a New Challenge to the West" (Center on Sanctions & Illicit Finance, June 2016), 15.

[18] Nicu Popescu, "Hybrid Tactics: Neither New nor Only Russian," Issue Alert (European Union Institute for Security Studies, January 2015), 2, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/187819/Alert_4_hybrid_warfare.pdf.

and electronic warfare, not calls for a new model of analysis. The development of new weaponry may heavily influence tactical choice, but not necessarily strategic decision-making.

Certainly, Russia has made use of these varying domains in order to augment their conventional armed forces and capabilities. However, these decisions may not have always been preplanned. Their hybrid warfare strategy may have instead developed as the war was waged and separatists were able to influence Russia's strategy from the bottom-up. Having identified this gap in the literature, how separatist agency has formed Russia's strategy in the region will be investigated. Considering a key aspect of Russia's involvement in the conflict has been plausible deniability, at least during the initial stages, various actors have been tasked to do the bidding of the Russian government perhaps in lieu of an overt, directly involved chain of command. With these actors operating, often in accordance with their personal agendas, it can be easy to discern problems of agency may have arisen for Russia. For example, separatist fighters may have antagonized a militarized Ukrainian response to a degree greater than with which they could contend without additional Russian support. This situation, or others like it, may have directly, or indirectly, influenced the tactical decisions made by the Russian government concerning its involvement in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. To this end, the analyses of Crimea and Donbas will include the individual agency of separatist fighters in order to uncover the extent to which Russia's strategy can be explained through a generalizable model of hybrid warfare, and conversely what has developed reactively following separatist activity and general opportunistic action on the part of the Russian government.

With these similarities to typical conventional warfare campaigns and proxy warfare, there may not be the need to develop a general theory of Russian hybrid warfare, or, even a specific one to

what has occurred in eastern Ukraine. The wealth of knowledge which has been accumulated concerning traditional security studies dealing with conventional engagements as well as the funding of rebel groups can certainly speak to the issues arising with Russian military engagements.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

Couching this argument within the framework of analysis which will be used, much the of preexisting literature views Russia through a Model I framework, conducting a campaign which is defined by many tactics and operations better explained for by the Model IV framework. Two possible complications may result from such an approach. The first is that the likelihood is reduced concerning proper delineation between how operations were influenced by Russia's actions versus those of the separatists. Because of this, the second potential problem is that assumptions about how Russia would wage a hybrid warfare campaign in a different region or state may be inaccurate given how much actors on the ground retain bottom-up influence once the conflict is initiated. With these case-specific factors and agency issues playing such a large role, a war waged in another region could be identical to the one in Ukraine, or completely distinct. The issue is that there is no way of knowing beforehand, as this is a reactive military strategy, rather than a premeditated model of warfare.

Given these theoretical assumptions, in an effort to analyze the differences on the ground in the cases of Crimea and Donbas as they pertain to actor involvement, tactical decision-making and agent influence, the principal-agent model will be utilized. As previous research has confirmed, the principal, in this case Russia, largely influences the activities of their agents, which would be

the separatists and other classifications of fighters present in the region[19]. However, assumptions that Russia may have faced problems of agency loss given differences of interests among their agents persist. Obviously, Spetsnaz groups sent to occupy bases in Crimea or assist separatists assault the Donetsk airport, for example, will be, for the most part, under the direct command of the Russian military. However, separatist fighters, some of which coming from foreign countries may have differences of intention than what the Russian government is trying to accomplish through their hybrid warfare tactics. Considering the aims of the Kremlin may be disinteresting or even injurious to some of their agents on the ground, the potential for them to accept Russian backing financially and militarily, yet display suboptimal cooperation to the detriment of Russia's strategic goals is quite possible[20].

The effect of resources on the agent, and therefore its relationship with the principal has been explored by Salehyan, Siroky and Wood in their article *External Rebel Sponsorship and Civilian Abuse: A Principal-Agent Analysis of Wartime Atrocities*. As they found, when rebels do not have easy access to resources, they must rely on the "goodwill of the population." Conversely, easy access to commodities will result in the spread of their zone of influence and area of operation[21]. Given that Russia adequately funded separatist groups, especially at the onset of the conflict, this financial backing most likely was able to keep agency problems to a minimum. However, with the looming military support provided by the Russian government, not least of which coming in the form of massive amounts of conventional troops positioned on Russia's

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[19] Idean Salehyan, David Siroky, and Reed M. Wood, "External Rebel Sponsorship and Civilian Abuse: A Principal-Agent Analysis of Wartime Atrocities," *International Organization Foundation* 68, no. 3 (2014): 3, https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/international-organization/article/external-rebel-sponsorship-and-civilian-abuse-a-principalagent-analysis-of-wartime-atrocities/7B8C7423A615E804A829E95AEE9E4A39.
[20] Ibid., 13.
[21] Ibid., 5.

border with Ukraine[22], risk of separatists acting on their own agency due to moral hazard may be one such explanation of diverging patterns disputing a unitary actor model in regards to Russia's hybrid war. With an assumption on the part of the separatists that the Ukrainian government may be hesitant to respond with overwhelming force for fear of an imminent response from the Russian troops stationed just kilometers away[23], they may have been incited to act in a manner more aggressive, and perhaps out of line with Russian intentions, than they would have if not for the threatening mobilization of the Russian army[24]. Furthering their appearance of commitment to possibly intervening, the Russian Duma went so far as to even introduce legislation which states that the Russian government may intervene in order to defend ethnic Russians living outside the border of the Russian Federation.

In large part, much of the preparatory phase of Russia's incursion into eastern Ukraine involved augmenting preexisting separatist movements[25]. As Russia likely knew exactly what the intentions of these groups were before they began funding them, the separatist fighters from these developing militias would directly serve the purposes beneficial to the Kremlin. Kuperman's analysis provides a theoretical underpinning which can be applied to this stage of Russia's campaign in eastern Ukraine. Referencing Clifford Bob, he states that the possibility of humanitarian intervention which is necessary before moral hazard is even relevant, is often a product of NGOs succeeding in garnering attention in the media[26]. With Russia's disinformation operations, a key component of Russia's hybrid warfare stratagem, they skip this step by creating

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[22] Andras Racz, "Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy's Ability to Resist" (Helsinki, Finland: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2015), 61, https://stratcomcoe.org/andras-racz-russias-hybrid-war-ukraine-breaking-enemys-ability-resist.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Kuperman, "The Moral Hazard of Humanitarian Interventions," 51.
[25] Racz, "Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine," 59.
[26] Kuperman, "The Moral Hazard of Humanitarian Interventions," 52.

the very media environment that would be required for the recipients of their funding, and therefore agents on the ground, to be encouraged to act brashly, whether it is advisable to do so or not.

With these factors possibly influencing the situation in eastern Ukraine, as time has passed during the conflict, there is a mounting likelihood that either fighters may arrive to fight on the side of Russia for opportunistic reasons or individuals established within the separatist militias will begin acting of their own agency due to self-serving intentions. In each case, these varying levels of agency problems, appearing in the form of separatists freelancing from the standard operating procedures a unitary actor would employ, may partly explain for the inequality of outcome in Crimea and Donbas, as well as differences in tactical choice on the part of Russia, which many Russian experts have deemed "reactive" in nature[27], as opposed to predetermined.

As has been expanded upon by other experts of Russian foreign policy and military affairs, there is the argument that Putin is a "tactician but not, ultimately, a strategist[28]". Implying that Putin, and therefore Russia, has not solidified any long-term strategy in eastern Ukraine is not a statement which can be made with any degree of certainty without having insider access to Putin's inner circle. However, an argument can be made in opposition to the degree of centralized control over the operations, which is a necessary component for any one actor to pursue premeditated strategic aims. The origin of Russia's hybrid war in eastern Ukraine may have come about due to the presumption by Realist thinkers such as Mearsheimer that this

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[27] Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2016).
[28] Galeotti, "The Gerasimov Doctrine and Russian Non-Linear War."

conflict has been triggered by worries in the Russian government of NATO expansion[29]. However, as this principal-agent analysis will intend to illustrate, the ensuing hybrid warfare model by which Russia is conducting their war with Ukraine is flawed. Without taking into account the actor agency of the separatist fighters, questions regarding the centralization of Russia's control in Crimea and Donbas remain unanswered.

1.5 Methodology

With the call for a general theory surrounding hybrid warfare, there should first be enough evidence to suggest that this is a novel concept which would require such a theory in order to be analyzed. Although the term has been infrequently used prior to 2014, for example in reference to Hezbollah's activities in Lebanon, the predominant discourse surrounding hybrid war has been in reference to Russia's activities in Ukraine. Therefore, one or both of the case studies presented in this research, Crimea and Donbas, should pass preliminary examination as real examples of hybrid warfare. This necessity, before calls for a general theory are warranted, is because the case of Ukraine would be referred to as a crucial case by Eckstein who described them as cases which "must closely fit a theory if one is to have confidence in the theory's validity, or, conversely, must not fit equally well any rule contrary to that proposed[30]". In these cases, rather than testing a theory the actual concept is being called into question. In particular, as Eckstein states the case "must not fit equally well any rule contrary to that proposed[31]," if Crimea and Donbas may be accurately analyzed as conventional or transnational wars then the proposal of

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[29] John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault; The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," *Foreign Affairs*, 2014, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault.

[30] Harry Ecktein, "Case Studies and Theory in Political Science," *Handbook of Political Science*, Strategies of Inquiry, 7 (1975): 118.

[31] Ibid.

this new model of hybrid war is unnecessary. As Gerring adds, "a case is crucial if the facts of that case are central to the confirmation or disconfirmation of a theory[32]." With those analysts and practitioners calling for a better understanding of hybrid warfare, as to prevent it in other states, consistently pointing to Ukraine as their basis, the question should be raised if instead their answers lie in preexisting conflict studies.

While the first step will be correctly indicating the framework of analysis required, Model I or Model IV, the degree to which separatist agency influences the direction of Russia's strategic campaign will be studied, searching for evidence of a largely top-down approach, or rather indicators of bottom-up influence. Then, in order to attribute these cases to a model of hybrid warfare, or, instead, delineate them among preexisting categorizations, three separate models will be tested. As seen in the table below, after each case study is placed within the Model I or Model IV frameworks, they will be tested against each proposed category: hybrid warfare, rational actor conventional warfare and transnational warfare.

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[32] John Gerring, "Is There a (Viable) Crucial Case Method?," *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 3 (March 2007): 231.

Hybrid Warfare	Rational Actor Conventional Warfare	Transnational Warfare
Wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures are employed in a highly integrated design[33].	Armed conflicts waged by one state against another by means of their regular armies[34].	Conflict in which a third-party state deploys its regular armed forces and capabilities to assist non-state proxy fighters.
• Top-down control (Model I) • Clear military goals • State uses mixture of official armed forces and proxy fighters • Fully integrated conventional and unconventional tactics	• Top-down control (Model I) • Clear military goals • State predominantly uses official armed forces • Majority conventional forces/capabilities, may be accompanied by irregular tactics	• Top-down initiation, bottom-up influence throughout (Model IV) • Clear initial goals, however goals quickly become disaggregated between sponsor state and proxy fighters • Sporadic attempts of principal attempting to reestablish control over agents • Mixture of conventional armed forces and unconventional proxy fighters

Table 1

Each categorization has been defined and indicators listed which should be present in the conflict before a tenable argument justifying the forthcoming classifications of Crimea and Donbas can be made. As the analysis for this project will focus on the differences and similarities in Russia's military strategy, when combined with separatist agency issues in Crimea and Donbas, pattern matching will be utilized. With the geographic proximity, similarity of actors involved and technology utilized, the level of agency provided to the separatists in each case study will be the most important change and therefore the likelihood of intervening factors diluting the findings of the study are further reduced.

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[33] "Wales Summit Declaration."

[34] Martin Van Creveld, "Modern Conventional Warfare: An Overview" (NIC 2020, NIC, 2004), 1, http://indianstrategicknowledgeonline.com/web/MODERM%20CONVENTIONAL%20WARFARE%20AN%20OVERVIEW%20%20BY%20MARTIN%20VAN%20CREVELD%20HEBREW%20UNIVERSITY%20JERUSALEM.pdf.

As a detailed explanation regarding the chain of command in Russia's hybrid warfare campaign, personal relationships between separatist leaders, and their connections to the Kremlin, as well as contracts between the Russian government and private military companies would require data unavailable to any researcher who is not privy to the inner workings of Russia and their operations in eastern Ukraine, a necessarily more general approach will be taken[35]. As the goal of the research will be to illustrate the conditions by which certain tactics of Russian hybrid warfare appear to be used and the processes by which separatists and other actors on the ground potentially influence Russian activity through their agency, this "generic knowledge," as Alexander George terms it, will serve that purpose through its inclusion within the principal-agent analysis of Crimea and Donbas[36].

Similar to the manner in which Graham Allison analyzed the Cuban Missile Crisis, this research will illustrate whether the conflict is better suited to a Model I, rational actor framework or Model IV, transnational actor influence framework. Following this, attempts will be made to match the cases to one of the three categorizations presented in an effort to expand the argument against hybrid warfare suitably characterizing the conflict. By empirically illustrating the variable in question, separatist agency, and its effect on Russia's strategy, the cases of Crimea and Donbas can be further analyzed in order to display the existence of either a Model I or Model IV framework being responsible for the way in which the campaigns were shaped. The intention of this research is not to explain how, specifically, Russia formulated their military campaigns in either region, but rather to what extent separatist agency influenced and shifted

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[35] Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (MIT Press, 2005), 211.
[36] Ibid., 272.

their tactical choice, leading to the disparity of outcome, represented in this research as the classification of warfare.

1.6 Conclusion

The strategic implications of Russia's developing hybrid warfare operations, and the advancements in technology, command structure and tactical prowess have been well documented – and will continue to be analyzed as new information becomes openly accessible. The conversations surrounding these topics have largely involved structural level reasoning behind operational decision-making. Surely, a large component of Russia's hybrid warfare campaign may be explained by a rational actor analysis, particularly any initial decision-making which went into initiating the conflict. Strategic aims were undoubtedly present, such as acquiring the warm water port in Sevastopol, or complicating NATO efforts of expansion. However, while preliminary strategic goals may remain in the minds of those who formulated them, after the point of contact in any conflict they are often not necessarily the only intervening factors which influence future operations and decision-making.

As stated, with plausible deniability serving as a large component of the way in which Russia goes about involving themselves in these types of conflicts, that is, those to which analysts would apply the term hybrid warfare, those actors arguably only indirectly affiliated with the Russian government will inevitably 1) act of their own agency in ways which may serve personal interests, which may in turn 2) influence their principal, Russia, and the subsequent tactical choices which are made in their hybrid warfare model.

1.7 Chapter Outline

The format of the research will be as follows. The second and third chapters will serve as the case study analyses of Crimea and Donbas, respectively. Following each independent study, chapter four will include a cross-case analysis, illustrating the similarities and differences between the two cases with a discussion regarding the usefulness and possibility of a generalizable model of Russian hybrid warfare. Chapter four will end with a conclusion and recommendation for future study.

Chapter II

2.1 Crimea

Crimea is often pointed to as the most representative case of Russian hybrid warfare operations. The following analysis seeks to illustrate the main tenants of the military strategy which was implemented, ostensible shortcomings with which the Russian government had to contend, and intervening factors which may have influenced the manner in which the Russian Federation illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine in March 2014. This will be done through chronological observation of troop movement, political decision-making and illustrations of individual agency, where and if it existed, which all influenced Russia's campaign and led to the culminating act of annexation.

The treaty which was signed to annex Crimea into the Russian Federation on 18 March 2014 was far from the starting point of the conflict on the peninsula, and eastern Ukraine writ large[37]. Although the joint resolution which was developed between Sevastopol and the Supreme Council of Crimea, which proposed the referendum to join Russia, occurred on 11 March[38], there is evidence of Russian troop movement into the region as early as 22 February when battalions of both Spetsnaz as well as VDV (Vozdushno-Desantnye Voyska, or airborne forces) began to appear[39].

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[37] "'Little Green Men': A Primer on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013-2014" (Fort Bragg, North Carolina, U.S.A.: The United States Army Special Operations Command, 2014), 31, http://www.jhuapl.edu/ourwork/nsa/papers/ARIS_LittleGreenMen.pdf.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Gregory F. Treverton et al., "Addressing Hybrid Threats" (Swedish Defence University, 2018), 16, https://www.hybridcoe.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Treverton-AddressingHybridThreats.pdf.

2.2 Model I vs. Model IV: Preliminary Analysis

Before delving into the empirics of the Crimean annexation, the ways in which events should theoretically occur given a Model I or Model IV framework will be suggested. In brief, if a Model I framework is applicable to the Russian operations on the Crimean Peninsula, the maintenance of top-down directives, ensuring operational control over their forces and any possibly intervening actors such as separatists should be illustrated. While slight ad hoc adjustments may have to be made, given in reality one hundred percent control is an impossibility, any meaningful activity will be as a result of Kremlin directives. Conversely, if a Model IV framework is applicable, the annexation will occur in a more convoluted manner. Once Russia chose to occupy the peninsula, certain events and operations would be the result of bottom-up influence from separatists acting on their own agency for their personal agenda. This is not to say Russia may not have maintained the largest sway of influence, but rather that separatists were able to meaningfully shift the Kremlin's strategy.

2.3 Mapping the Conflict

27 February marked the first day in which Russian forces visibly displayed activity, forcing the Crimean parliament to "hold an emergency closed-door session" which would occur without then Prime Minister Anatolii Mohyliov in order to elect Sergei Aksynov, a pro-Russian politician, as the new president of Crimea. He would join the ranks of pro-Russian politicians assuming power in the region such as Aleksei Chaliy, a Russian citizen, who had become mayor of Sevastopol three days prior[40]. In addition to effectively holding the parliament and Supreme Council of Crimea hostage, during this time, the Spetsnaz, VDV and other irregular pro-Russian

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[40] Treverton et al. "Addressing Hybrid Threats", 16.

forces captured and commanded key political locations such as Sevastopol's Belbek air base, the Isthmus of Perekop and the Chonhar Peninsula[41].

Following these blitzkrieg-like activities, the military landscape on the Crimean Peninsula quickly shifted. The following day, 28 February, Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that it had informed the Ukrainian government that it would be bringing armored units from its Black Sea Fleet base as a measure of protection for its naval forces stationed there. Coming in the form of three Mi-8 transport helicopters and eight Mi-35M attack helicopters[42], Russia rapidly augmented their military presence in the region. Using their growing presence, Russian forces took the Simferopol airport in order to transport additional VDV units onto the peninsula[43], which were then used in combination with other unmarked troops to close off the remaining Crimean border crossings[44].

In the Kremlin, several political actions were taken which were then used to further escalate operations in the region. First, the Russian State Duma adopted a bill which allowed steps to be taken in order to give Russian speaking citizens of the former USSR who are in danger "of a real threat" Russian citizenship if they should choose to attain it. Then, on 1 March, Putin received approval from the Duma for the use of troops in Ukraine in order to protect the Black Sea Fleet[45]. On the same day, the Kerch Strait ferry was taken, the Yevpatoria air defense systems captured[46] and over the next two days reinforcements were brought in with landing ships to

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[41] Vladimir Voronov, "Crimea and the Kremlin: From Plan 'A' to Plan 'B,'" *The Henry Jackson Society*, March 2015, 5, http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Crimea-and-the-Kremlin.pdf.
[42] Michael Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine" (Santa Monica, California, U.S.A.: RAND Corportation, 2017), 9, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1498.html.
[43] Ibid., 9.
[44] Treverton et al., "Addressing Hybrid Threats," 16.
[45] Ibid., 17.
[46] Voronov, "Crimea and the Kremlin," 5.

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capture the additional military bases and facilities[47]. With the subsequent blockage of the Black Sea by Russia's Ochakov Kara-class cruiser[48], motor rifle brigades, artillery, air-defense and anti-ship weaponry[49] along with Russia's long-range anti-access and area-denial capabilities, the Russian military, for all intents and purposes, controlled the peninsula. Further preventing any potential Ukrainian response, Russia cut off landline communications through cyber attacks and cell phone signals via electronic warfare capabilities positioned on their Black Sea Fleet[50]. Through this troop mobilization, in concert with the Ukrainian military retreating, surrendering or even defecting, Russia achieved operational control of the Crimean Peninsula in a little over a week, leaving only the formality of a referendum left before the annexation would be accomplished.

2.4 Contextualizing the Situation

Although the aforementioned timeline of Russian activity on the Crimean Peninsula presents an accurate depiction of the events which led up to the annexation, additional factors need to be taken into consideration before any proper analysis may be conducted. The foremost issue which should be contended with is what the Ukrainian government was doing at the time, and why their reaction was simply nonexistent. Following the removal of President Viktor Yanukovych on 22 February, the Ukrainian government was missing more than simply their president. Vitaliy Zakharchenko, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Lieutenant General Stanislav Shulyak, commander of the Internal Troops of Ukraine, Oleksandr Yakymenko, head of the Ukrainian

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[47] Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," 9.
[48] Treverton et al., "Addressing Hybrid Threats," 17.
[49] Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," 9–10.
[50] Ibid., 10.

Security Service all fled Ukraine and had subsequent warrants for their arrest issued[51]. The most important departure of these high-ranking officials, however, came when Pavel Lebedev, the Minister of Defense also fled Kyiv, later appearing in Sevastopol with a Russian passport on 27 February, and was subsequently elected to the Sevastopol Legislative Assembly[52]. Although Admiral Ihor Tenyukh, the former commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian Navy replaced Lebedev on 27 February, the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, in effect, did nothing for an entire week. Albeit a huge loss in terms of any attempts to signal political cohesion, these are all very bureaucratic positions with not much immediate power to respond to the crisis occurring in Crimea. Therefore, the biggest difficulty in terms of crisis response was Colonel General Volodymyr Zamana, the commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, the one most responsible for troop command, arriving in Sevastopol also on 27 February, only to suffer a heart attack, remain there, and subsequently be replaced by Admiral Yuriy Ilyin, the commander of the Ukrainian Navy[53]. Far from the only issues plaguing the Ukrainian government and their ability to respond, these instances of corruption and treason, such as the commander of the Ukrainian navy in Crimea, Rear Admiral Denis Berezovsky, not only pledging his allegiance to Russia, but convincing 5,000 other Ukrainian troops to do so in the process[54], help explain for the ease in which Russian troops and separatist paramilitaries stormed the peninsula.

2.5 Key Factors of the Russian Operation

Many analysts have pointed to the success of disinformation operations conducted by the Russian Federation as the essential tool which created the strategic environment necessary for

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[51] Voronov, "Crimea and the Kremlin," 10.
[52] Voronov, "Crimea and the Kremlin," 8.
[53] Ibid., 9.
[54] Racz, "Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine," 68.

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such political subterfuge. The effectiveness of these disinformation operations, as well as the level of importance they held in the overall Russian military strategy should be contended with in order to fully understand the situation.

Many have pointed to the extensive psychological warfare campaign, targeting political leaders and military personnel in Crimea, as responsible for the pervasive lack in morale and high rate of retreat or desertion. However, a factor more rarely included in such an analysis was the massive Russian troop presence just beyond the Ukrainian border. Crimea neighbors Russia's Southern Military District, which had been consistently maintaining a 90 percent readiness level in terms of operationally available personnel. In addition, there was heightened awareness given the Sochi Olympics occurring that same month, therefore Russia's immense force presence in such close proximity to the Crimean Peninsula was undeniable[55]. When viewed in concert with the fact that the Black Sea Fleet and other Russian troops have been maintaining activities, in cooperation with the Ukrainian military since Soviet times, the assertion that the Russians may have been viewed even in an amicable manner in some circumstances becomes understandable – and therefore so does their lack of resistance.

Furthermore, given the Russians met virtually no resistance, it would be impossible to gauge the effectiveness of not only their overall strategy, but also singular pieces of it which many argue make up this hybrid model. This is not to say that they had no effect on the situation, certainly cutting off communication, effectively severing a military chain of command, would lessen the likelihood that a government would be able to respond. However, with a crippled administration rife with corruption and defecting politicians, it is highly probable the level of response would

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[55] Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," 17–18.

have been the same. Although a counterfactual argument which cannot be stated with any degree of certainty, there does remain some worry that analysts have overstated the importance and effectiveness of these strategies[56].

An additional factor related to Russia's disinformation campaign which could be used to augment the previous argument would be that the strategic environment was not necessarily hostile enough to warrant such techniques and therefore many analysts have focused, incorrectly, on the target of Russia's disinformation. The campaign was used to broadcast propaganda *about* Crimea, rather than strictly *in* Crimea, with the domestic Russian audience being the main target. It would have been more important for the Kremlin to convince the Russian populous that an annexation of the Crimea Peninsula was not only warranted, but a historically and morally justified course of action to take, rather than further demoralize the already dispirited Ukrainian military and security forces[57].

2.6 Generalizability to a Model of Russian Hybrid Warfare

There can be no question that the Russian annexation of Crimea was an overall success. The speed at which the Russian military was able to covertly infiltrate the peninsula in order to set up a conventional limited invasion mixed with the ease of carrying out the operation is unparalleled in recent times. This analysis would not attempt to dispute this characterization, but rather question whether the operation fits this mold of hybrid warfare. While some analysts classify the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula as Russian hybrid warfare at its finest, others would rather describe it as a "conventional military take-over," a statement with which the Russian General

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[56] Racz, "Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine," 51.
[57] Ibid.

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Staff would most likely agree[58]. While the covert operations which initiated the invasion may arguably fit the model of hybrid warfare, with the "little green people" taking point throughout the region, many other facets of the operation do not. As previously stated, Moscow was quite successful for a number of reasons, among them being the chaotic political environment in Kyiv at the time, rate of Ukrainian defection, and generally apathetic response by the military and police which did not choose to switch sides. These are indicative of case-specific factors which would not be easily replicated in another region[59], the Baltic states, for example, and therefore exclude the annexation of Crimea as being representative of a hybrid warfare model which Russia fully planned ahead of time and would be able to repeat elsewhere to the same effect.

The argument which has previously been presented that the Crimean annexation may be better defined as a traditional covert set-up for a conventional incursion is strengthened by the inefficiencies or failures related to operations generally included in attempts to classify a case as hybrid warfare. Among them would be the political incoherence that was witnessed following control of the peninsula. While the Russian military successfully and efficiently took power in the region, the political process of annexing Crimea did not suggest adequate planning – displayed by the difficulties in coordination. Moscow seems to have been inadequately ready to deal with the local political entities, and was improvising as they went along[60].

The Kremlin may have achieved command over all Ukrainian bases in a little over three weeks[61], however during that time the referendum was rescheduled several times to an increasingly earlier date. Each new declaration occurring as the operation seemed more and more likely to succeed

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[58] Treverton et al., "Addressing Hybrid Threats," 18.
[59] Racz, "Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine," 51.
[60] Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," 27.
[61] "Little Green Men," 57.

signals this reflexive aspect to the Russian campaign. The covert invasion may have been heavily preplanned, the political process afterward, however, was most likely not given the apparent lack of coordination with the Crimean political elite[62]. Given the hurried manner in which initial meetings calling for the referendum occurred[63] , the political element of the annexation seems to have been largely accomplished through impromptu measures, and therefore should not be used to strengthen arguments for a hybrid operation having been planned.

Although there lacked the political cohesion necessary to accomplish the final bureaucratic processes of annexing the peninsula with the same level of efficiency as the militarized takeover had occurred, the "local politicians" who were ultimately responsible for the referendum were very much pro-Russian, and would have otherwise not gained their status if not for the covert invasion on the part of Russian Spetsnaz and VDV, in addition to the paramilitaries which augmented their forces. The initial political decisions, however, were done at gunpoint, before pro-Russian politicians could replace any preexisting members of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea who would dissent against a vote toward the referendum, information revealed by Strelkov in an interview done in Russia in January 2015, following his removal by the Russian government from the war in Donbas[64].

The "little green men," or masked Spetsnaz operators as is now clear to the international community, the main subject of the Crimean invasion for international media, may wrongly suggest that the effectiveness of these troops was due to their masked appearance, and missing insignias. However, their activities would have been impossible without the conventional

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[62] Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," 11.
[63] Ibid., 10.
[64] Racz, "Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine," 62.

presence of the Russian military as well as operations done prior to overt troop movement on the peninsula such as seizing the only Internet exchange point between Crimea and mainland Ukraine and jamming radio connections[65], in effect completely disconnecting the region from Kyiv. The most important thing to note, however, is that while part of the strategy, these tactics had a largely superfluous effect as the Ukrainian government was chiefly unable, and in many ways unwilling to respond to this Russian blitz in Crimea.

To further illustrate the conducive nature of the Crimean environment for such an invasion, an analysis in opposition to the usage of a translatable hybrid warfare model, Russia had extensive transit agreements with the Ukrainian government which not only gave them basing agreements, but also the ability to deploy military personnel and equipment across the Russian border into Crimea. Therefore, although the Ukrainian military maintained superiority in terms of force presence, the Russian military was able mobilize its "best-trained, best-paid, and most professional forces." These troops, the "little green men" were the antithesis of the contract soldiers previously used in the 2008 war in Georgia or Second Chechen War and arrived with operational capabilities an opponent would not expect on such short notice, largely due to aforementioned arrangements between the two countries' governments[66]. Therefore, the environment in which these masked troops operated, rather than the effectiveness of the tactic itself, is what led to their overall level of success.

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[65] Eronen, "Russian Hybrid Warfare: How to Confront a New Challenge to the West," 10.
[66] Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," 22.

2.7 Conclusion

Hybrid Warfare	Rational Actor Conventional Warfare	Transnational Warfare
Wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures are employed in a highly integrated design[67].	Armed conflicts waged by one state against another by means of their regular armies[68].	Conflict in which a third-party state deploys its regular armed forces and capabilities to assist non-state proxy fighters.
- Top-down control (Model I) - Clear military goals - State uses mixture of official armed forces and proxy fighters - Fully integrated conventional and unconventional tactics	- Top-down control (Model I) - Clear military goals - State predominantly uses official armed forces - Majority conventional forces/capabilities, may be accompanied by irregular tactics	- Top-down initiation, bottom-up influence throughout (Model IV) - Clear initial goals, however goals quickly become disaggregated between sponsor state and proxy fighters - Sporadic attempts of principal attempting to reestablish control over agents - Mixture of conventional armed forces and unconventional proxy fighters

Table 2

With the empirics of the annexation displaying only marginal involvement by separatist fighters on the Crimean Peninsula, a key aspect defining the transnational actor influence model, Model IV, has been removed from the equation. Precluding this as a possibility, and while acknowledging the slightly hectic political environment preceding the referendum, it is clear that Russia maintained operational control over the Crimean Peninsula from the first covert incursion by Spetsnaz to the mobilization of large conventional equipment such as attack helicopters. As

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[67] "Wales Summit Declaration."
[68] Van Creveld, "Modern Conventional Warfare: An Overview," 1.

all meaningful aspects of the annexation came as directives from Russia, the rational actor model, Model I, may be applied in this analysis.

With Model I assumed as the framework of analysis, an important indicator of the rational actor conventional war categorization has been fulfilled. In addition to the top-down control, Russia displayed clear military goals – complete operational control over the Crimean Peninsula. Finally, although separatist fighters, such as Strelkov, were present, they played no great role in the campaign. Russia predominantly used official armed forces, albeit often without insignia or markings[69].

Conflicts rarely neatly fit generalizable labels; this does not mean that it would be more analytically useful to create a new concept than make use of preexisting frameworks if they more or less fit. The case of Crimea, given the discernible similarities, would be categorized, although initiated through covert means[70] as an example of rational actor conventional warfare.

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[69] Treverton et al., "Addressing Hybrid Threats," 59.
[70] Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," 23.

Chapter III

3.1 Donbas 2014-2015

Invariably grouped with the annexation of Crimea given their geographic proximity and shared location within the state of Ukraine, the case studies will illustrate that they are quite different military campaigns. As displayed in the previous chapter, Crimea was a swift and efficient operation conducted under the direction of the Russian military. While the case of Donbas in this research will be limited to the 2014-2015 period, it should be noted that the situation on the ground remains as a protracted conflict until today.

3.2 Model I vs. Model IV: Preliminary Analysis

In the same manner as the previous case, preliminary discussion will be provided concerning how the Model I and IV frameworks of analysis would define the case of Donbas during 2014-2015. If a Model I framework of analysis is present, then the activities which characterize the war during this period will have resulted from Kremlin directives. Both the decisions to deploy official Russian troops, as well as operations undertaken by Russian-backed separatists will be displayed to occur in a top-down manner. If, instead, a Model IV framework of analysis is better suited to this case, then the decision to involve official Russian troops and government funding will have been made by Russia, a unitary actor, however ensuing aspects of the conflict will be heavily influenced from the bottom-up through freelancing activities undertaken by separatist fighters.

3.3 Mapping the Conflict

By most accounts, the conflict in the Donbass region began when pro-Russian protestors in Luhansk and Donetsk took control of the regional government buildings on March 9 and 15, respectively. These protests, shortly following the removal of President Yanukovych, included violent exchanges, however there was a resurgence in its intensity in early April following news of Crimea's annexation[71]. In Donetsk, on 12 April 2014, the government buildings in the city of Sloviansk were captured and subsequently became the epicenter of the so-called Donetsk National Republic[72]. Far from average protestors, this operation was carried out by a well-equipped pro-Russian paramilitary group led by a former Russian military intelligence officer Igor Girkin, better known as Strelkov[73]. The next day similar events unfolded in the Luhansk Oblast. On 13 April in Mariupol the city hall building was seized, as well as several government buildings in both Makiivka and Yenakiieve. Rather than be met with opposition, the Luhansk police joined the separatists[74].

In response, then-President Oleksandr Turchynov signed into effect the beginning of the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) on 14 April[75]. As the Ukrainian government at this point still was quite weak, the initial military response was ineffectual, even being blocked by local Ukrainians, who had been "incited by Girkin's militants," from continuing along at some points in their armored convoys[76]. With much of the Ukrainian military lacking clear command, refusing to

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[71] Treverton et al., "Addressing Hybrid Threats," 22–23.
[72] Racz, "Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine," 60.
[73] Mykola Balaban et al., "Donbas in Flames: Guide to the Conflict Zone" (Lviv, Ukraine: Security Environment Research Center "Prometheus" NGO, 2017), 35, https://prometheus.ngo/donbas-v-ogni.
[74] Voronov, "Crimea and the Kremlin," 11.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid., 36.

engage their countrymen, and even at times defecting to the pro-Russian side, the People's Republic of Donetsk and Luhansk held referendums on 11 May for "self-rule[77]."

In an effort to respond to the ATO, and hedge their bet of sponsoring separatist activity against the Ukrainian government, during this time, Russia began transporting Spetsnaz and other "volunteer" battalions along with weapons and supplies across the eastern border, resulting in the first instances of the war of fighting along the Ukrainian-Russian border[78]. Although the referenda in Donetsk and Luhansk were ostensibly successful, resulting in control over the territory by separatist militias, Russia was forced to make use of their newfound troop presence in the region. The Kremlin deployed their Vostok Battalion in "an effort to clean up the criminality and institute discipline among the separatist[79]." Most likely due to the increased cohesion among the separatists, accompanied by the Kremlin-backed Vostok Battalion, on 22 May there was a joint declaration in Donetsk and Luhansk of the creation of "New Russia," in which Russian Orthodoxy was declared as the state religion, and all private industries were nationalized[80].

On 22 May, Petro Poroshenko was elected as the new president of Ukraine and the following day the battle for the Donetsk airport began, representing an important shift in the strategic environment. Over the course of two days, the Ukrainian military successfully repelled separatist fighters with air strikes and a paratrooper assault, killing over fifty pro-Russian fighters[81]. This battle, in addition to the strategic importance of its location, represented a change in the conflict on the part of both sides. The battle for the Donetsk airport was the first instance of heavily

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[77] Treverton et al., "Addressing Hybrid Threats," 23.
[78] Balaban et al., "Donbas in Flames," 37.
[79] Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," 59.
[80] Treverton et al., "Addressing Hybrid Threats," 23.
[81] Ibid., 23–24.

involved conventional troop movement and weaponry against the separatists on the part of the Ukrainian government, as well as the first instance of volunteers, allegedly by order of Ramzan Kadyrov, Chechya's president and well-known Putin supporter, arriving from Russia in substantial numbers to assist the separatist fighters[82]."

Far from being simply "volunteers," these fighters came from Kadyrov's highly seasoned "dikaya diviziya," or "savage division." This practice of conventional reinforcement continued from June to August, during which time it is documented that the Kremlin provided "mechanized equipment, armor, advanced munitions, and medium air defenses[83]." However, despite increasing these reinforcements, by August the Ukrainian government had successfully reclaimed around 75 percent of the territory previously held by separatist fighters[84].

In an effort to ensure the Russian-backed separatists were not completely decimated by the ATO, among other reasons considering Russian citizens were among the paramilitaries, Russia subsequently launched a joint offensive between the pro-Russian militias and the Russian Army[85]. Battalion-level tactical groups, comprised of up to 4,000 troops, accompanied the separatists and were able to successfully push back the Ukrainian military[86]. With the conflict effectively transformed into a conventional engagement, 5 September marked the beginning of the ceasefire brought about by the first Minsk agreement. Although the ceasefire was honored for some time by the Russian government, they intensified their activities related to both training

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[82] Treverton et al., "Addressing Hybrid Threats," 24.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid., 24–25.
[85] Balaban et al., "Donbas in Flames," 67.
[86] Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," 44.

and equipping separatist fighters in an effort to further augment them into a formidable conventional fighting force[87].

Heavy fighting resumed in November, with Russian tanks crossing the border as well as artillery strikes being utilized. The Russian military and separatists eventually retook the Donetsk airport, and soon after brought about Minsk II on 15 February[88]. Following the second Minsk agreement, Russia disbanded their battalion and company level tactical groups and instead began integrating troops, up to the squad level, among the militias of pro-Russian local fighters and foreign mercenaries in the newly formed 1st and 2nd Army Corps in Donbas[89]. By integrating their troops and evenly dispersing them amongst paramilitary fighters, Russia was able to maintain some semblance of deniability in addition to bolstering the conventional capabilities of separatist fighters as efficiently as possible using official troops as force multipliers. Sporadic fighting continued in this fashion for much of 2015 and has set the stage for the protracted conflict which has sustained until today.

3.4 Contextualizing the Situation

Certain elements surrounding the war in eastern Ukraine are pertinent to any analysis if we are to understand more fully the underlying reasons why Russian went about their operations in the manner they did. Namely, Russia's overwhelming conventional capabilities would have always been in the minds of the Ukrainian government and military when making decisions on when to intervene, in what manner, and to what degree they were willing to risk providing reason for the Russian Federation to invade their eastern flank .One of the key points in the Russian military

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[87] Treverton et al., "Addressing Hybrid Threats," 25.
[88] Ibid., 25–26.
[89] Balaban et al., "Donbas in Flames," 67–68.

strategy as they supported separatists in eastern Ukraine was the ever-looming presence of the Russian military just across the border which, simply due to their presence, further complicated the initial Ukrainian response time from fears of retaliation.

The second important aspect of the environment in Ukraine at the time when the war in Donbas began is concerning Russia's disinformation operations, and to what extent it created opportunity for the Russian Federation to incite revolutionary activities. Although the Russian disinformation campaign succeeded in portraying the scene in eastern Ukraine as one of strong anti-Ukrainian sentiment, the separatist movement never gained much traction in the local populous and struggled to garner their support. This proved to be operationally problematic for the pro-Russian fighters, necessarily changing the military calculus once it was understood that local support would never be realized – this frustration being displayed in the complaints of one Russian Chechen war veteran reported as saying the Ukrainians in Donbas were fleeing rather than choosing to stay and fight. This was a common trend throughout the Donbas region. Even in cities with up to one million residents there may have only been protests with a few hundred to a couple thousand present, hardly the display of public outrage which was portrayed by Russian news outlets[90]. If the situation had developed differently, with massive amounts of ethnic Russians protesting in the streets, then perhaps Russia could have incited a much more intense conflict in Donbas with far more limited means on their end.

This lack of support for the separatist fighters was especially noticeable during the battle for the Donetsk Airport [91], a reason likely responsible for the ensuing conventional engagement by the Russian military. If any assumptions by the Kremlin were made that the ethnic Russians would

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[90] Racz, "Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine," 79.
[91] Ibid.

take the side of the pro-Russian separatists, these notions were quickly dispelled when many of the Russian speakers began to fight on the side of the Kyiv government[92].

It can be seen that the initial objectives of the Russian government in the eastern Ukrainian campaign was to force the interim government into installing a scheme of federalization which the Russians could then capitalize off given the unstable political environment. Rather than imbedding their special operation forces with separatists, as was the case in Crimea, Moscow began by attempting to foster secessionist activity through their connections with various actors involved in business, local crime and fringe political groups[93]. The diverging interests of these actors often, as can be seen through frequent reshuffling of leaders or the case in which the Vostok Battalion was forced to physically quell the Donbas separatists' disorderly activities, was the source of unplanned reorientation for the Russian strategy, which will be further analyzed.

3.5 Key Factors of the Russian Operation

Albeit many tactics have been synchronized by the Russian military and pro-Russian separatist fighters in the Donbas region, conventional, unconventional and even non-military among them, the conventional aspects of their operations were by far the key to their successes in the region. This fact was most aptly displayed when the "hybrid forces" were handily defeated at the first battle for the Donetsk Airport by the Ukrainian military, making use of air power, paratroopers and conventional ground troops. Later that year the Donetsk Airport was retaken by pro-Russian forces with tanks, several rocket launch systems, drones and methods of electronic warfare,

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[92] Racz, "Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine," 80.
[93] Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," xii–xiii.

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rather than any heavy reliance on the irregular fighters found in separatist militias comprised of foreign mercenaries and crime syndicates[94].

The argument could be made that this conventional engagement is the "logical, culminating sequel in the Russian information campaign[95]," however given the costliness of the war in terms of financial backlash from the cost of training and equipping separatists as well as the adverse effects felt as a consequent of U.S. and EU sanctions this seems unlikely. Additionally, the fact that each conventional build-up came directly after a military setback for the separatists is indicative of a reactive Russian chain of command having its hand forced to supply additional reinforcements as a way to hedge the bets they had made in the region.

This is no revelation for military analysts, irregular forces may excel when tasked with unconventional operations such as guerilla warfare, however, they do not fare well when they attempt to control territory in the face of a professional army. This would have been a well-known fact amongst those charged with planning and directing operations in Donbas for the Russian government. Therefore, two main possibilities for heavy losses which Russian-backed separatists faced without Russian conventional support would be either a lack of foresight that the Ukrainian military would be able to mount such a response under Poroshenko, such as the ATO, considering interim President Turchynov's statement that the police and security services "were helpless against the pro-Russian gunmen taking hostages and occupying public buildings,[96]" as well as the crippling corruption rampant in the Ukrainian government and political society, or perhaps their plan was all along to transition from this hybrid approach to a

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[94] Monaghan, "Putin's Way of War: The 'War' in Russia's 'Hybrid Warfare,'" 68.
[95] Treverton et al., "Addressing Hybrid Threats," 29.
[96] Racz, "Russia's Hybrid War in Ukraine," 77.

more conventional style of warfighting. This research instead would posit that the shift toward conventional warfare came about as an indirect result of separatist agency, which placed the paramilitary groups in a precarious situation facing certain defeat by the Ukrainian military, thereby intensifying Russia's involvement in the conflict.

3.6 Separatist Influence

If the argument is to be made that Russia made this shift toward a conventional engagement as a result of necessarily reactive responses to the situation, a closer look on the ground and the actors which may have potentially influenced such responses needs to be taken. This research will argue that the sudden conventional shift in Donbas occurred due to agency issues and incoherence amongst the separatist fighters. It can be seen that many of the shortcomings of the pro-Russian separatists come after paramilitary leaders such as Strelkov pushed their personal agenda, soliciting an armed response from the Ukrainian government, as well as the failure of not only commanders who were given leeway as way of creating plausible deniability for the Russian government, but also the failure of the Russian information campaign, a key aspect of hybrid warfare, was shown through "studies using survey data and technical analysis of the penetration of Russian broadcasting signals found that the impact of the campaign was grossly overestimated[97]" and therefore did not cause the effect for which it was intended, nor influence the strategic environment in Donbas in any meaningful way[98].

A closer inspection of the cohesion amongst separatist fighters further illustrates why there was a need for a conventional shift in the war. Secession began with confusion, displaying a lack of clear directives from the Russian government. Separatists throughout Donbas were giving

[97] Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," 54.
[98] Treverton et al., "Addressing Hybrid Threats," 29.

simultaneous, and contradicting, demands for federalization, independence, as well as unification with Russia, all met with silence from Pushilin and Bolotov, the early leaders of Donbas[99]. Without a coordinated assault from the Russian government akin to what had previously occurred on the Crimean Peninsula, the separatist leaders were left with individual agency and seemingly no clear ideas how to use it. With similar difficulties controlling the separatist leaders, whether due to insubordination or simply incompetence, Moscow routinely replaced the leaders in an attempt to maintain control[100]. This practice is representative of the overall picture of how Russia's strategy in the region was carried out, not just in terms of controlling governance structures, but in tactical choice as well – reactive rather than predetermined.

The political crisis unfolding in Ukraine represented a great risk for Russia, with fears of increasing Western influence likely pervading throughout the Kremlin[101], risk management of the situation would have been a top priority. As plausible deniability was a main concern for the Russian government, at least in the beginning phases of the conflict, these actors had to be necessarily utilized. Sponsoring these groups and individuals reduced "the operational cost and political consequences for Moscow but at the price of control, coherency, and effectiveness." Rather than official Russian forces, these nationalist paramilitaries, such as Igor Strelkov, were relied upon quite heavily in the beginning of the conflict to stir up trouble and thwart any attempts by the Kyiv government to regain control in Donbas. Although the decision to initiate the conflict, and the beginning steps to prepare the strategic environment were premeditated, this displays Russia's willingness to carry out their campaign from that point on in an impromptu,

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[99] Balaban et al., "Donbas in Flames," 35.
[100] Ibid., 47.
[101] Thomas, "Russia's Military Strategy and Ukraine," 446.

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opportunistic and reactionary manner. The Russians quickly learned in Donbas that there was an inverse relationship between deniability and rate of success.

The manner in which Strelkov conducted his operations and interacted with other separatist groups throughout his time in the conflict is not merely anecdotal evidence, but rather representative of a larger phenomenon with which Russia had to contend. Strelkov and his paramilitaries, directly funded by Malofeev, an equally religious and nationalistic Russian oligarch, frequently pushed for their personal interests, leading to clashing personalities and differences of opinion with other separatist commanders such as Khodakovsky, the commander of the Vostok Battalion. These diverging interests between the separatists and Moscow would have to be frequently dealt with, demonstrated most publicly by Strelkov's removal, reportedly by the FSB due to his noncompliant activities which frequently ran in direct contrast to Kremlin directives[102]. Although Strelkov, as well as Borodai, the governor of the Donetsk People's Republic, were both forcefully removed by Moscow, they were able to influence the direction of the conflict for quite some time.

Khodakovsky, in his own right further illustrates problems the Kremlin would have faced in any attempts to streamline whatever semblance of a command structure existed in Donbas. The Vostok commander has been documented to have threatened other pro-Russian separatists who had been vying for leadership positions which would encroach upon him and his allies, even referencing the previous assassinations of two "outspoken separatist commanders." Khodakovsky would go on to involve himself in the political realm after the Minsk I ceasefire stating that "a ceasefire since September does not mean that the Ukraine war is over: 'Let's

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[102] "Little Green Men," 45.

finish it.'" This brash attitude forced Moscow to eventually remove much of the command responsibilities of the Vostok Battalion from him[103]. Although further illustration of separatist fighters, many of whom had extensive criminal backgrounds, receiving assistance from other Russian and Ukrainian oligarchs as well as Yanukovych supporters could be continued, the point of this being a pervasive problem within the separatist apparatus Russia was sponsoring should be stressed.

3.7 Generalizability to a Model of Russian Hybrid Warfare

How best should the war be viewed if separatist fighters are able to influence Russia's strategic decision-making process? As a top-down operation coming from the Kremlin or as a grass-roots revolution which Russia opportunistically sponsored? The truth here lies somewhere in the middle. The operations in Donbas were almost certainly initiated by the Russian government, however as can be seen, there was a large amount of back and forth in terms of decision-making and influence between the Kremlin and the separatist paramilitaries.

What should be noted is that especially given the problematic backgrounds of many of the pro-Russian separatists which garnered immense clout as leaders of the paramilitary groups and/or governance structures within Donbas seemingly overnight, it would be implausible to suggest they did so without direct backing by the Russian government. This illustrates a top-down initiation of the conflict on the part of the Russian Federation. This line of argumentation loses strength, however, as it became apparent that the vast majority of the individuals in positions of power throughout the region did not maintain them for extended periods of time, in part due to

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[103] Paul Quinn-Judge, "Ukraine's Eastern Separatist Leaders Turn on Each Other," Russia and the Separatists in Eastern Ukraine (International Crisis Group, March 1, 2016), http://blog.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/2016/03/01/ukraines-eastern-separatist-leaders-turn-on-each-other/.

being underprepared for such responsibility, but also because they proved themselves to be unreliable interlocutors with the Russian government who would rather take their newfound influence and push for personal goals which caused problems for the Russian government in the future[104].

As can be seen, the original leaders in the Donbas were largely self-selected given their prior presence in the region. Their respective arrests by the Ukrainian government would have given Moscow the opportunity to replace them with individuals of its choosing. Given the pro-Russian ties of every subsequent leader taking power, the likelihood this opportunity was taken is high. This displays the reactive nature of the Russian campaign, taking advantage of an opportunity, which would have been impossible to foresee. The following sequence of events should not deter from the analytical awareness of Russia's strategy being one of impromptu decision-making, rather than premeditated formulation. Albeit pro-Russian, these new leaders maintained their own agency which they used as they saw fit, evidence of their ideas diverging from that of the Kremlin exist with their systematic removal. Therefore, the shift in direct action taken by the separatists[105], which led to frequent combat failures, such as the first battle for the Donetsk Airport, which initiated Moscow's apparent alterations toward a conventional engagement following Minsk I cannot be solely attributed to the wants of the Kremlin – and therefore are not indicative of any "hybrid warfare model" having been pre-formulated and implemented.

Harmonizing their military and political campaigns in eastern Ukraine would have been made difficult for any hybrid warfare model to be implemented, directed and carried out to fruition, and therefore the Russian government necessarily was forced to abandon ideas of achieving

[104] Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," 37.
[105] Ibid., 38.

plausible deniability and instead further involved their official forces in the fighting. This is not to say that Russia was even eventually successful in achieving direct control over the situation. Despite several assassinations, removal of leaders and imposition of force such as the Vostok Battalion attempting to bring about order in Donetsk, the separatist proto-states would still be characterized by persistent in-fighting amongst the separatists, stymieing coherent strategies against the Ukrainian military resulting in a situation in which Moscow appears to be more of a sponsor than an actual coordinator in many ways[106], further diminishing the possibility of a hybrid warfare model from being implemented in a top-down fashion.

As in Crimea, but to an even greater extent, the Russian government was forced to adapt to events as they occurred[107], often changing the course of their campaign, sometimes slightly and sometimes drastically. In the beginning stages of the war in Donbas, Russia was focused on spreading the anti-Kyiv movement through disinformation and support for separatist militias in the form of financing, equipment and distanced leadership. As the initial leaders of the paramilitary groups active in the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics were subsequently arrested by the Ukrainian government, the Kremlin took the opportunity to place pro-Russian fighters, often Russian citizens, in their place where they thought they could control them[108]. They would see this to not be entirely possible, as in the case of Strelkov and would eventually remove him themselves.

Additional argument can be made for the conventional nature of this campaign, detracting from the reliance on hybrid warfare, and therefore likelihood that the Russian military devised their

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[106] Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," 67.
[107] Treverton et al., "Addressing Hybrid Threats," 15.
[108] Ibid., 22.

campaign with this strategic angle in mind. As proponents of the hybrid warfare model posit, the disinformation campaign largely influences subsequent Russian tactical choice and operational possibilities. Analysts, however, have found these disinformation techniques to be grossly overestimated in terms of effectiveness. What they found was that, while highly polarizing, the broadcasts and propaganda being spread were ineffectual at mobilizing support[109], which was illustrated with the low turnout at protests and frequency at which the citizens of Donbas would flee, or at least abstain from joining the war effort, rather than willfully take up arms amongst the other separatist fighters.

Although many analysts argue that Russia conducted hybrid warfare in the region, others would state that Russia had no such intentions. Indeed, the document written by General Gerasimov exists, however there is no indication that the logic of his argument or policy relevant ideas have been adapted into general thought by the Russian General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Moreover, the initial stages of the conflict in Ukraine, which would be the most likely time period when a hybrid warfare model would be present, did not likely involve the General Staff, and instead Russia's "selection of tactics was not doctrinally driven but, rather, it was a series of improvised responses to Ukrainian resistance[110]."

The application of the term hybrid warfare, in the way that analysts have used it in reference to Russia's military strategy, would most aptly be used during the period between the first battle for the Donetsk Airport, in which Russian-backed separatists suffered heavy casualties, and the Russian conventional counter-attack in late August of 2014. During this span of time Russia heavily integrated the preexisting irregular fighters with their incoming conventional troops and

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[109] Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," 54.
[110] Ibid., 69.

operational capabilities[111]. This research would argue, however, that a better explanation for this might be that this shift, from irregular warfare being conducted in large part by the separatists to a more hybrid approach as Russia sought to include conventional forces was not done strictly by choice, but rather by the failure of the Russian government to successfully fund a proxy conflict. As there can be no way to instantaneously change the military landscape from one of unconventional war to a conventionally armed presence in the region on the part of the Russian Army, this amalgamation of varying classifications of fighters and tactics, operating according to fluctuating levels of agency and under erratically changing directives was the result.

With the illustration of issues the Russian's have faced in Donbas, it should be clear to defense planners that "Ukraine is a case study not in pioneering new nonlinear approaches but in the failure of hybrid warfare," if it can be categorized as such, "to deliver the desired political ends for Russia[112]." As General Valery Gerasimov stated in his 2013 article, each conflict is unique in its own way and must therefore be confronted with an equally unique perspective[113]. Ironic that such an outlook should come from the very author which many have claimed to have created the military doctrine currently being implemented in Ukraine.

3.8 Conclusion

Calling into question the validity of this hybrid warfare model, placing the war in Donbas in either the Model I or Model IV frameworks of analysis is the first step. As illustrated, the beginning stages of the conflict display all the relevant aspects of top-down control, there is no need to argue that Russia chose to involve its forces, albeit often unofficially, as well as fund,

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[111] Ibid.
[112] Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," 70.
[113] Gerasimov, February 27, 2013.

equip and train the pro-Russian paramilitaries. This top-down approach has been empirically shown to become disrupted through the freelance activity of the separatist fighters. Through their own agency, they were able to influence the situation from the bottom-up, shifting the ways in which the Russian government was forced to react. For example, losing the first battle for the Donetsk airport, an operation initiated in large part through separatist paramilitary leaders vying for increased influence throughout the region, forced Russia to eventually increase its sponsorship to a greater degree, bringing in more troops and bolstering its training and equipping efforts[114]. With the separatists able to influence the war to such a degree, this precludes the possibility that Russian operations in eastern Ukraine can be exclusively analyzed through a Model I framework, and instead suggest the viability of the proposed Model IV, transnational actor influence model as the most suitable lens of inspection.

Concerning the way to view this war in the categorizations presented. As said, a Model I framework insufficiently explains for certain characteristics of the campaign, as they were initiated by freelancing separatists, rather than top-down Kremlin directives. Next, the military goals of the Russian government should be called into question. Attempts could be made in the beginning to posit that Russia wanted to simply decentralize control from Kyiv, or even create a frozen conflict such as Transnistria through limited engagement. However, given bottom-up influence from separatist fighters, regardless of the goals Russia may have initially developed, they would have necessarily had to adapt their strategic planning in order to accommodate for how separatists, of their own agency, were becoming further embattled against the Ukrainian military, drawing Russia into the extended conventional engagement we see today. This reactive military campaign on the part of the Russian government can be characterized by the sporadic

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[114] Balaban et al., "Donbas in Flames," 67.

attempts to reintroduce control over the situation, to varying levels of success. Concerning the composition of fighters on the ground, Russia has mixed much of their official forces with preexisting militia fighters. While there may be a seemingly integrated approach concerning personnel, the conventional firepower provided by the Russian government and either used by Russian military or Russian-trained separatist makes up for the main defining characteristic of the tactical prowess in the region[115]. The presence of these elements precludes the option to define Donbas as an instance of hybrid warfare for two important reasons. The first is that rather than seeing a case of adroitly integrated conventional and unconventional forces and tactics, the situation would be better defined as the painstaking introduction of conventional forces to correct for the mistakes of separatist paramilitaries. The second, displayed by the first, is that Russia was unable, or unwilling, to maintain top-down control over operations in the region. Because the characteristics which describe the conflict in terms of this so-called model of hybrid war cannot be attributed to Russia, then the proposition of a Russian hybrid warfare strategy being at play should necessarily be refuted as well. In its place, this conflict can be better defined as transnational warfare.

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[115] Balaban et al., "Donbas in Flames," 68.

Hybrid Warfare	Rational Actor Conventional Warfare	Transnational Warfare
Wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures are employed in a highly integrated design[116].	Armed conflicts waged by one state against another by means of their regular armies[117].	Conflict in which a third-party state deploys its regular armed forces and capabilities to assist non-state proxy fighters.
- Top-down control (Model I) - Clear military goals - State uses mixture of official armed forces and proxy fighters - Fully integrated conventional and unconventional tactics	- Top-down control (Model I) - Clear military goals - State predominantly uses official armed forces - Majority conventional forces/capabilities, may be accompanied by irregular tactics	- Top-down initiation, bottom-up influence throughout (Model IV) - Clear initial goals, however goals quickly become disaggregated between sponsor state and proxy fighters - Sporadic attempts of principal attempting to reestablish control over agents - Mixture of conventional armed forces and unconventional proxy fighters

Table 3

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[116] "Wales Summit Declaration."
[117] Van Creveld, "Modern Conventional Warfare: An Overview," 1.

Chapter IV

4.1 Cross-Case Analysis

With the respective conclusions drawn for the operations which took place in Crimea and Donbas, the usefulness of hybrid warfare, as a generalizable concept in respect to Russia's strategic preferences, can be illustrated by the comparison that has been laid out in this study. Among them, the main tenants should be reiterated. Namely, in what manner the conflicts should be viewed, whether they are as a result of top-down directives, Model I in the case of Crimea, or, Model IV if there are intervening factors such as the agency of separatist fighters in the case of Donbas which result in a top-down initiated conflict followed by transnational actor influence continuing the war in a direction which led to further engagement on the part of the Russian Federation in ways for which they had perhaps not planned. The next factor which should be compared between the two cases is elements of the Russian operations, meaning tactics utilized and actors involved. Lastly, differences in the strategic environment and Ukrainian response will be included as way of necessarily contextualizing each situation as to avoid incorrectly positing the causes of certain events as correlated to actions on the part of the pro-Russian side, when instead it may be more appropriate to suggest correlation due to the environment created by the Ukrainian government and military.

4.2 Hybrid Warfare: A Generalizable Model?

Although analysts have difficulty properly describing and defining the concept of hybrid warfare, two things are more or less the same across the board: they most always use Crimea and Donbas as case studies, and they most always suggest, implicitly or explicitly, that hybrid

warfare is the result of top-down Kremlin directives. After having analyzed Crimea and Donbas, the differences in the strategic chains of command are stark. With Crimea, the preexisting argument of the operation being a traditionally covert set-up for a conventional invasion, albeit limited in scope, has been extended. With the data currently available at this point in time, Model I, in accordance with Graham Allison's rational actor model, most aptly describes the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula into the Russian Federation. Despite separatist engagement, events were largely directed by the Russian government and, even where individual agency may have intervened in the complete top-down control by Moscow over the situation, the effects were seen to be largely superfluous. This characterization falls in direct contrast to Donbas. The conflict began, strategically speaking, in the same manner – with top-down Russian initiatives. This is where the similarities end, and why this research has described the situation as "Kremlin-initiated," however continued and influenced by separatist agency, leading to an engagement in which the Russian government is most likely involved both to a greater extent and in a different manner than it initially would have planned. Thus, the proposed Model IV, characterized by transnational actor influence, is a more apt lens of inspection.

4.3 Elements of the Russian Operations

In terms of tactical choice and actors involved, even from the very early stages of conflict, Crimea and Donbas have displayed themselves as being quite different. In Crimea, the Russian Federation sought to make immediate use of their best forces, sending Spetsnaz and VDV to seize the peninsula at breakneck speed. In this case, the separatists played a minor role, and were used in large part as a way of creating the image that this was a grassroots uprising – even though this strategy both failed and was unnecessary for previously mentioned reasons. In

contrast, Donbas saw the beginning operations mostly taken on by separatist fighters being sponsored by the Russian government. A way to illustrate this, without even needing insider information, would be the speed at which Russian special operations forces were able to take over bases and parliamentary buildings in Crimea. Conversely, as compared to Spetsnaz units in Crimea, the masked men which stormed various governmental buildings throughout Donbas did so in a highly disorderly manner, rather than with the precision of trained soldiers. They took an excessive amount of time to, for example, remove the windows and enter the building, in addition to the close proximity in which they grouped themselves, creating unnecessary vulnerabilities to rockets, grenades, etc.[118] These tactical deficiencies almost certainly expose these forces as untrained separatists, considering even minimally trained soldiers would have the requisite skillset as to avoid these fundamental mistakes.

Crimea fell victim to a limited, but quickly initiated conventional build-up of troops and mechanized equipment such as attack and transport helicopters. Donbas, on the other hand, was mostly fought by proxy through the pro-Russian separatists, with funding, equipment and training provided by the Russian Federation. As the conflict was waged, Russia began to provide more and more equipment, and eventually forces. The individual agency of the separatists, in the end, forced Russia into the conventional conflict we see today. This displays the large impact separatist paramilitaries were able to have on the military calculus in Donbas, in comparison to Crimea where Strelkov was documented as claiming he and the members of his small militia were largely ineffectual and not able to do anything very meaningful in terms of the annexation, as it was mostly carried out and directed by the Russian military and its forces there.

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[118] Voronov, "Crimea and the Kremlin," 11–12.

4.4 Variance in the Strategic Environments

In war, what is possible – and therefore the decisions that are made, are largely contingent on the opposing force. What they are capable of and how they will likely respond are questions any military planner would ask of themselves when strategizing how to go about initiating a conflict. In the two case studies presented, Crimea and Donbas, the answers to these two important questions were drastically different. Without an extensive reiteration of the unfolding of events in each respective case, the Ukrainian government was in a wholly different position during the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, and the war beginning in Donbas. In the short amount of time that Russia was able to infiltrate, seize and annex the Crimean Peninsula, there was virtually no response on the part of the Ukrainian government. With almost every important political and military body missing at the very least their head of command, response was unlikely. In contrast, the Donbas separatists were forced to confront headlong the ATO, first declared by interim President Turchynov, and then bolstered under President Poroshenko. This conventional military strength which was able to be utilized by the Ukrainian government easily began to defeat paramilitary militias, and eventually is the reason Russia was forced to enter the fray with increased conventional force.

4.5 Conclusion

As shown in this research, the cases of Crimea and Donbas do not fit with the proclaimed model of hybrid warfare. This does not mean there was nothing novel about the situation which spurred researchers and practitioners to view the conflict as something different. Certainly, Russia has been making use of new technologies augmenting their cyber and electronic warfare capabilities. Furthermore, they are using these technologies in cunning ways which are difficult to thwart

even for the most seasoned and dedicated defense planners. However, deceit is certainly not anything new in the Russian playbook. Additionally, their tactics being integrated with separatist fighters in eastern Ukraine, while a difficult situation eluding both diplomatic and military solutions, does not require a new model of warfare for its framework of analysis. This environment, which is the result of sporadic top-down Russian directives, in collaboration with separatist fighters often going against the assumed wants of the Russian government makes for a messy situation. Analyzing these events with the rationale presented in Model I would be problematic if instead they should be analyzed in the Model IV framework. If this point can be taken to be true, then the idea of hybrid warfare should be reevaluated.

What can be illustrated for certain is that no one analytical model can perfectly encompass the events which unfolded in Crimea and Donbas, a model of hybrid warfare included. Several aspects of the war in Ukraine augment this line of reasoning. First, as previously stated, this research has shown that while Crimea can be analyzed through a Model I, rational actor approach, the events in Donbas were decidedly different and convoluted, justifying the presentation of the Model IV, transnational actor influence model. Second, the role of the separatists was quite distinct between the two case studies, thereby resulting in a variance in the influence caused by individual actor agency and divergence of interests. Even if paramilitary groups may have wanted operations in Crimea to play out more to their liking, such as Strelkov's dismay at his rebuked attempts to command during the invasion[119], the fact that the Russian military took point all but negated this possibility. Finally, the atmosphere of the conflict, and how it can be categorized was distinctly different in Crimea than what occurred, and is ongoing, in Donbas. Crimea, although set up through covert tactics, became a conventional invasion

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[119] Kofman et al., "Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine," 60.

within a matter of weeks. Donbas, on the other hand, took months before a large conventional war had begun, and was rather initiated by proxy, with the Russian Federation sponsoring the separatists until they were eventually drawn into further conventional engagement out of necessity. The key difference here lies in the suspected motives. Crimea was conventional because Russia likely wanted it to be that way. With a heavy reliance on their own troops, they maintained top-down directive of the situation, further taking advantage of the vulnerable political situation in Ukraine at the time. In the case of Donbas, however, the operation on the part of the Russian Federation turned conventional because the separatists forced Russia into the situation by their consistent battlefield failures, which necessitated Russia's backing to avoid further setback[120].

To conclude, one single, generalizable, model of hybrid warfare cannot describe two separate instances with more separating than connecting them. Theoretically, one can be described as Model I and the other Model IV, while empirically Crimea was comprised of Spetsnaz infiltration followed by heavy conventional equipment from the very beginning, while Donbas may be characterized as a failed attempt at influencing foreign policy by proxy, in large part through separatist fighters, and then eventually a forced conventional engagement.

As stated in the introduction to this research, definitions thus far presented in attempts to save hybrid warfare as an analytically useful concept are overly inclusive to the point of confusion. Russian hybrid warfare may be an amalgamation of things, but then again so is most any example of war. Given the case-specific elements which have shaped these conflicts, in addition to the operational differences amongst them, analysts would do well to search for a better way of

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[120] Balaban et al., "Donbas in Flames," 67.

defining Russia's military strategy than hybrid warfare if they hope to provide any generalizable insights for future deterrence and defense against the Russian Federation. A more pragmatic approach of analyzing case-specific weaknesses which Russia would likely exploit, combined with their military's continual advancements in adapting and adopting new technologies would be a good place to start.

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