

**Hybrid Regime, Hybrid Warfare?  
How Russia's Hybrid War  
Effected Ukraine's  
Democratic Transition**

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## **ABSTRACT:**

Are hybrid regimes or hybrid warfare real and how is the existence of such a regime type tied to a tactical form of war, meant to destabilize democratic development? Hybrid regimes are states or regimes in flux that do not fulfill the minimum requirements of democracy. In contrast, hybrid war is defined as a non-traditional military tactic against state and non-state actors that attacks different strata of societal structures economically, politically, militarily, and through social networks and the internet. Within the literature, both terms have often been viewed as forms of conceptual stretching. However, this study seeks to show how hybrid regimes and hybrid war could be a modern reality and certain conditions could make a hybrid regime more susceptible to hybrid war.

This study is centered on qualitative, case-based research on democratization and how authoritarian linkage lead to further instability. This study focuses on testing the causal mechanism: domestic internal political actors in Crimea in the South and Donbas in the East that assisted Russia in its hybrid war efforts to break external pressures to democratize and develop stronger authoritarian linkage. This study focuses on a regional rather than state-specific case comparisons as the leverage (density of ties between actors and external pressures of democracy) and linkages (ties of actors to the West) varied between Crimea interregionally and Donbas and Kyiv primarily due to the opinions of political actors and different structural factors (geography, history, culture etc.) that influenced the processes of democratization.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## LIST OF FIGURES

FIG 1: UKRAINE IN TRANSITION .....	11
FIG 2: MODEL OF HYBRID WAR // HYBRID REGIME .....	17

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: HYBRID REGIMES, HYBRID WARFARE .....	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Literature Reviews .....	5
1.2.1 What is a Hybrid Regime? .....	6
1.2.2 Ukraine and Russia: A Soviet Transition.....	8
1.2.3 Hybrid War, Hybrid Regime? .....	12
1.3 Research Method .....	14
CHAPTER II: UKRAINE’S HYBRID REGIME .....	19
2.1 Economic Ties .....	19
2.2 Ukraine’s Independent Media.....	21
2.3 Rule of Law and Civil Society: A State of Revolution.....	23
CHAPTER III: RUSSIA’S USE OF HYBRID WAR .....	27
3.1 Traditional Vs. Hybrid War .....	27
3.2 Hybrid War in Crimea and Donbas .....	30
3.3 Geostrategic Factors.....	32
3.4 Opening and Closing in Donbas and Crimea.....	34
CHAPTER IV: HYBRID WAR IN UKRAINE .....	38
4.1 The Breakdown of Civil Society and Rule of Law.....	38
4.2 Effect on Independent Media in Crimea and Donbas .....	42
4.3 Outcome of Cases: The Hybrid Operation.....	46
4.4 Conclusion .....	49
REFERENCES .....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

## **CHAPTER I: HYBRID REGIMES, HYBRID WARFARE**

This qualitative, descriptive study isolates the case of Russia's aggressive hybrid tactics against Ukrainian democracy and examines how such tactics effected democratic institutions in Ukraine. The causal mechanism that is tested in this study is internal, Ukrainian actors that acted as gatekeepers and allowed certain external pressures from the Western world or Russia to produce specific regime outcomes in Ukraine. This study is regionally centered on how such actors in Crimea and Donbas facilitated Russia's use of hybrid war, which produced a more consolidated authoritarian regime type in these regions and prevented processes of democratization. This thesis is subdivided into four parts: first; what is a hybrid regime and hybrid war, second; what are the unique characters of Ukraine's hybrid regime; third, how Russia's use of hybrid war was regionally unique in Crimea and Donbas; and finally, the effect regional, internal actors had on destroying democratic processes inside Crimea and Donbas through hybrid war. A system of coercive social, political and economic exploitation, via the state apparatus, already took place in Ukrainian society through internal actors loyal to the Russian state: a system that was later exploited to great effect in the hybrid war. The fear of external Western influence in these regions sparked a decisive chain of events resulting in the use of hybrid war as a form of coercive control to pull these regions closer to Russia and break their ties to the Western world and further democratization

### ***1.1 Background***

Hybrid regimes are a regime subtype locked between a democratic and authoritarian paradigm (Collier & Levitsky 1997, 441). In contrast, hybrid war is considered a pseudo form of engagement blending non-military social, economic, and political tactics with military

means to destabilize an opponent (Glenn 2009). Hybrid war is the ideal tool of war in the modern era since war has changed: state and non-state adversaries no longer directly engage in combat but rather use a variety of tactics such as information war, tactical military engagement, and non-military means to shape regime or institutional outcomes (Grimm 2008, 525-527). Both hybrid regimes and hybrid war have become an increasing focus of scholarship in the fourth wave of democracy.

The word hybrid, in both cases, represents the amalgamation of legacies, such as regime type and modes of warfare, that preceded it; however, both concepts are framed within the scholarship as ambiguous and unstable, which is difficult to critique, conceptualize, and analyze. This study argues the causal mechanism linking both terms could be the use of coercion, via the hybrid-state apparatus, by regime loyalists who seek to destroy democratic institutions from inside that state and shape political, social and economic outcomes. These actors have been crucial to shaping political and regime outcomes in Ukraine and their ideologies and socio-economic ties to external actors, such as Russia or the West, influenced the transitional nature of Ukraine's hybrid regime toward authoritarianism or democracy.

As the famous war tactician Sun Tzu argued in his treatise *The Art of War*, war is of vital importance to the state: war can result in either the continuation of the way of life or the destruction of the state's previous system. This study traces how Russia's war in Ukraine was about the continuation of a beneficial, symbiotic state system in Russian and Ukrainian society, which democracy institutionally threatened. This case examines how Russia's hybrid war was made possible by such a subversive socio-economic system that loyal Ukrainian actors, elites and those with ethnic kin ties to Russia, had perpetrated prior to the hybrid conflict. These loyalist groups wanted stronger national, social, and political ties between the Russian and Ukrainian state and to prevent democratic institutions from flourishing in Crimea in the South and Donbas in the East (Galeotti 2015, Racz 2015). State propaganda framed the West's

institutional desires to bring democracy to Ukraine as against the sovereignty of the Ukrainian people and the will of the ethnic, Russian minority (Bedritsky et.al. 2015).

Although the military capabilities of Ukraine are nearly half of the Russian state, the presence of the Western institutions (NATO, EU, IMF) meant traditional, direct engagement or all-out war was not possible without severe social and economic consequences by the international community (Zwack 2014). Thus, Russia needed to initiate a war by covert means: a hybrid war was the ideal method to ensure regime outcomes were furtively shaped for political ends. I argue even though substantive literature exists on hybrid war a key gap does exist: that hybrid states may be better able to use such covert tactics, as epitomized by hybrid war, due to internal actors who willingly exploit weaker institutional and social components of the society to produce certain regime outcomes.

William Nemeth (2002) the first scholar to use the term hybrid war, discussed how Chechnya's hybrid war against Russia was an extension of its own hybrid society: a culture transfixed by tribal legacies of its past and modern technological norms. Chechens were able to utilize psychological and informational operations against Russian forces due to their nuanced understanding of the Russian language and culture; however, Chechen forces were not as effected by Russia's similar efforts due to their lack of understanding on Chechnian religious, cultural and ethnic identity. Ukraine, in contrast, has similar ethnic-kin, ideological, socio-economic and religious ties to the Russian state (Bedritsky et.al. 2015) and these cultural similarities could have created the ideal conditions for a hybrid attack.

As this thesis will show, the war in Ukraine also represented a deep schism between the ideologies of the eastern and western philosophy of statehood. One group in the West and Kyiv sought to modernize upon Western, egalitarian democratic standards with the expansion of political freedoms and greater market liberalization while, in contrast, another group in Crimea and Donbas was more concentrated on Slavic identity and the consolidation of state power to



preserve the unique ethnonational Eurasian character of the state and its institutions (Buruma and Margalit 2005, 93-95) This Eurasian character of abolitionism and the consolidation of state power by the Russian and Ukrainian state loyalists is perhaps best illustrated in a speech in 2016 by Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a former Russian oligarch turned outspoken dissident , describing the Russian state as a highly nuanced, almost militaristic weapon, which can mobilize features of its own society to destroy institutional threats against its own sovereignty:

What distinguishes the current Russian government from the erstwhile Soviet leaders familiar to the West is its rejection of ideological constraints and the complete elimination of institutions.

Russia's hybrid state can destabilize the state opponent or opposition forces by weakening the ideological and institutional constraints that threaten its state agenda. In the international relations and security community, Russia's hybrid operations have become most apparent in former post-Soviet cases with increasing geostrategic and economic ties to the West (Chauvosky 2017). Russia's hybrid operations have expanded to Syria where militant disinformation operations obfuscate Russia's violent role in the conflict by using targeted media campaigns to place blame on state and non-state actors and institutions with financial, social and ideological ties to the West (Cornstage 2018). Arguably, Russia's hybrid operations have expanded to information wars in Western countries as is the case in the United States' primaries: an issue that is still highly controversial post the Mueller Report.

This study argues if hybrid war is a byproduct of a hybrid state isolating Russia and Ukraine, due to certain homogenous features of their societies and abundance of literature on these cases, is the ideal examination of this phenomena. In its totality, this hybrid war was

about the strategic management of info by internal Ukrainian actors, a set of political elites and citizen actors, that were loyal to the Russian state. These domestic, Ukrainian actors' strategic cooperation ( via the management of info, resources, and involvement with Russia's military-industrial complex) was for a common goal: to ensure that the South and East of Ukraine were lost to the Western world and democracy (Bolin et. al 2016)

This study seeks to understand what unique characters of the Russian-Ukrainian hybrid state structure were also tied to this hybrid war. In effect, why was a weaker Ukraine so susceptible to Russia's militant attacks on its democracy? In the case of Ukraine and Russia, their similar regime types, historical legacies, and socio-economic and political regime ties between upper-elites and ethnic loyalists meant societal penetration was less necessary as Russia was already a deep part of Ukrainian society and identity (Racz 2015, 59, Renz & Smith 2016). If hybrid war is an ideal tool to attack a hybrid regime in the post-Soviet world this case specific study could provide clarity on the conditions that make a regime more vulnerable to a Russian attack as well as the capabilities necessary to fight back against an invisible and ambiguous hybrid enemy. This study seeks to answer: *In the case of Russia in Ukraine, how are hybrid regimes more susceptible to hybrid warfare and how could certain conditions in a transitional hybrid regime make it more vulnerable to attacks by a more consolidated, hybrid-authoritarian type?*

## **1.2 Literature Reviews**

### **1.2.1 What is a Hybrid Regime?**

The term hybrid regime has been a hot topic of discussion among scholars for the last twenty years after regime developments in the post-Cold world order produced ambiguous regime subtypes known as hybrid regimes. These regimes maintained a variety of democratic

elements such as universal suffrage, free and competitive elections, and different and alternate media sources (Morlino 2009); however, upon closer examination, these regimes were not actually democracies but tied to various historical legacies and ongoing sociopolitical and economic processes that determined their ambiguous regime type (Diamond 2002). Earlier literary work on hybrid regimes determined they could categorically be defined within the boundaries of autocracy and democracy and the “grey-zone” known as a hybrid regime. (Merkel, 2004; Puhle, 2005). Later scholarship moved past these assessments of the hybrid type as diminished subtypes of democracy and autocracy and rather a multidimensional regime category, which encompassed many unique features in each case and required mixed qualitative and quantitative studies for further analysis (Bogaards 2009, Morlino 2009).

Perhaps this hybrid type in the post-Soviet world is tied to the confusing transitional legacy in Eurasia where many post-Soviet regimes, to this day, have not actually democratized. As Linz & Stepan’s work *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (1996) summarizes a functioning democratic state is contingent on a solid and functioning state and greater market liberalization - with a weakened state no democratic protections or processes could develop such as civil society or rule of law. In contrast, Barbara Geddes (1999) analysis of authoritarian regimes denoted that poor economic performance within the state could be a key factor behind any regime transition: from either democracy to authoritarianism. These scholars argued without a strong market economy maintained by strong state regulation, the efforts of democracy would fail to take hold (Linz & Stepan, 1996, Geddes, 1999).

In effect, scholars have presented their readers with a variety of conclusions about these regime types that can help us better understand how a hybrid regime functions. As Bogaards (2009) proposes, a hybrid regime can be best analyzed by taking the qualities of both a defective democracy or electoral authoritarianism and placing them in contrast to one another (double-root strategy) to more critically analyze, within the political spectrum, the qualities

that make up the hybrid type. This is a particularly useful analytical tool as scholarship on regime type has produced more insights on unstable democratic versus authoritarian subtypes (Ibid). For example, defective democracies represent many of the developments we see today in hybrid regimes: although they may not undergo a reverse wave back to authoritarianism a variance in their democratic defects produces unique regime characteristics, which are contingent on regional factors and a variety of political processes (Merkel et al. 2014). The root concept of democracy in an illiberal or defective democracy comes from an undemocratic past (for example, take all the post-Soviet cases) whereas delegative democracies are stuck somewhere in the transitional process (Ibid), which in this analysis represents Ukraine. Linz & Stepan (1996) believed studying more about the regime's authoritarian characteristics could further our understanding of how a new, pseudo-democracy could be influenced by its authoritarian core.

Both democracies and authoritarian regimes have self-reinforcing processes, which could lead to consolidation or variance in the regime type. Gerschewski's (2013) research furthered our understanding of how authoritarian types could function through the means of legitimization, cooptation, and repression. This is how consolidated authoritarian regimes mobilize features of their regime type and the state apparatus for political ends. Cooptation focused on the manipulation of political parties, legislatures and elections, legitimization used hard and soft forms of oppression to coerce the populace to comply (civil society and dissidents), whereas the use of repression was a method employed by the regime elite, who penetrated the society through the means of institutional processes available to the regime (Gerschewski 2013). This was in stark contrast to a consolidated democracy, which used self-reinforcing institutional, democratic processes, such as rule of law, that could prevent a backslide to authoritarianism (Linz & Stepan 1996) or actors who choose to actively enforce democratic intuitions to create a functioning state of democracy (O'Donnell 1996). Political

elites were essential to this system. This idea is reinforced by Dahl's theory on polyarchy, which indicates in an authoritarian-leaning state, if the cost of suppression exceeded the cost of toleration the society or group would move towards democracy (1971, pg. 15-16) These political elites are divided into "hardliners," those that consider authoritarianism a virtue and "soft-liners" those that would sacrifice the authoritarian regime for privileges (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1986, 16-17).

Currently, the literature on hybrid regime lacks a clear focus on the dynamics of political institutions and of power-ownership by elite, political actors that democratic or economic reforms would consider. In the post-Soviet world today, many elites and citizens are influenced by post-Soviet ways of thinking such as informal chains of vassalage and paternal-clientelist relations tied to past feudal systems (Hale 2014, 4-6). Examining post-Soviet literature on hybrid regimes, particularly in the case of Ukraine and Russia, one can observe how internal, political actors impacted how a regime was influenced by external pressures to become more democratic or autocratic. This symptom of the post-Soviet hybrid type is vital to the scholarship on hybrid regimes as it can help scholars create more robust categories and precise definitions of developments, or lack of democratic developments, in the hybrid regime type.

### ***1.2.2 Ukraine and Russia: A Soviet Transition***

Understanding how Russia and Ukraine's hybridity is interconnected by transitional processes is crucial to understand in this case study: why Ukraine is "stuck" somewhere in the transitional process, why Russia's state of autocracy is more stable (Gerschewski 2013) thus making it a stronger hybrid type (Cassani 2014) and how this allowed Russia, as a more authoritarian type, to mobilize certain features of its regime to perpetuate a state of war in

Ukraine. Mobilization of a regime type, such as Russia, to attack another's institutions and structures could prevent democratic consolidation of another regime (Kasper & Pei 2003) in Ukraine and other post-Soviet cases.

Thomas Carothers (2002, 8) argues that the underlying conditions of any transition are complex and certain societal structure remain fixed (social, economic, political, ethnic). A fragmented political elite overtaken by "feckless pluralism" will further complicate the transitional process by being cut off from the citizenry and blurring the lines of power between the elite and state (pg. 10), which is the case in Ukraine and many other post-soviet cases. Ukraine's weaker state cohesion could make it more susceptible to such tactics. In Gel'Man's analysis (2003) elite conflict in post-Soviet societies is an essential factor behind why Soviet countries transition from non-democratic to democratic regimes. Thus, a regime change is contingent on the set of actors within the institution and the set of choices they make: the main consequence of elite disunity is regime instability (Highley & Burton 2006, 248). Therefore, all fifteen post-Soviet cases have looked different over time and illustrate different snapshots and dynamic patterns of socio-political upheaval by the elites and citizenry.

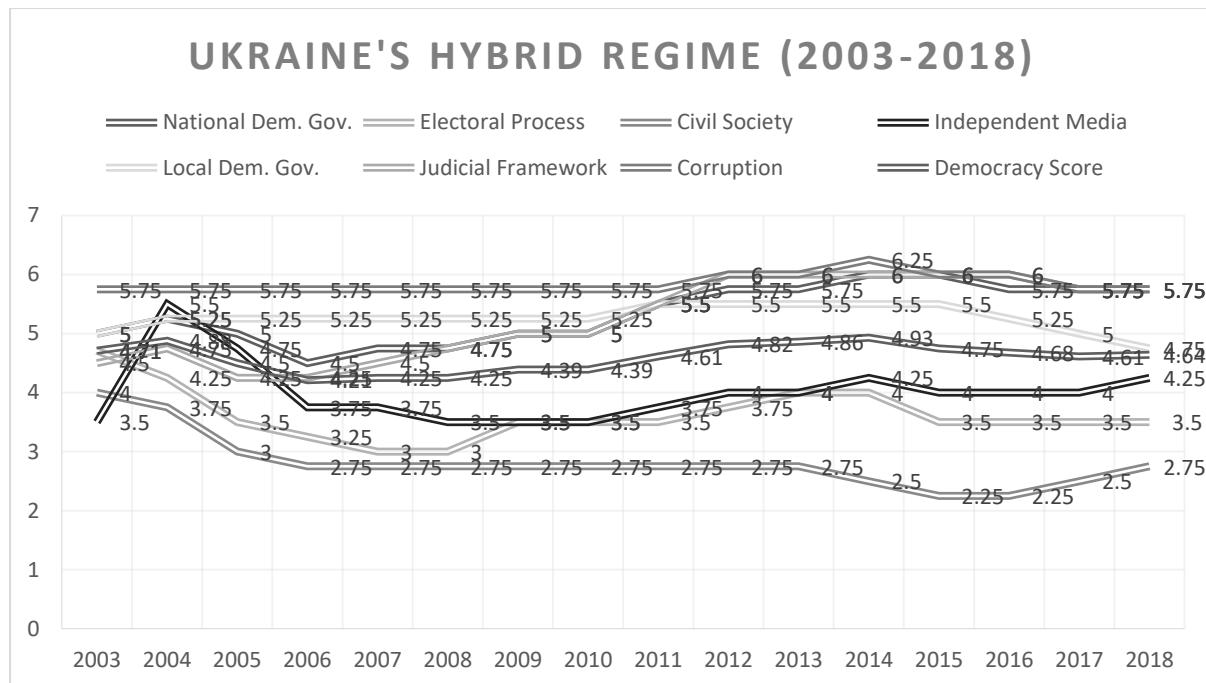
Ukraine's movement back and forth has perhaps been the starkest oscillation in any post-Soviet case and a point of fascination for scholars studying post-Soviet transitions and hybrid regimes (Hale 2014, 6). In fact, from 2005-2010 Ukraine became the only post-soviet country to be rated as "free" by Freedom House: a remarkable achievement, which has only been accomplished by the Baltic states in the 1990s when they weakened their socio-economic ties to Russia in favor of increased ties to the Western world (Ibid). After Ukrainian independence from Russia in 1991, and particularly in Kyiv in the last fifteen years, democratic breakthroughs produced sweeping democratic movements across the region rolling back many authoritarian influences (Asmus 2005, 87). Despite this, the term competitive authoritarianism was created by Levitsky and Way (2010) based on their studies of political actors' behaviors

inside Ukraine as Ukraine had both authoritarian (via harassment of the opposition, state media and the abuse of state power and democratic) and democratic (such as free and competitive elections, the development of opposition parties and broad protection of civil liberties) characteristics (pg.4-10). Overall, their research showed Russia was a more consolidated, competitive authoritarian type whereas Ukraine's relative instability meant it contained competitive authoritarian and democratic characteristics (Ibid).

In the case of Ukraine and other post-Soviet spaces the push and pull factor is a delicate regime process in a state of flux. As we can observe in data collected from Freedom House (Fig.1) the three weakest points of Ukraine's democracy are a civil society (2.75), electoral processes (3.5) and independent media (4.25). Stronger components of Ukraine's democracy are national democratic governance and judicial processes (5.75), local democratic governance (4.75) and corruption which has remained at a relative composite score of 5.75. The net composite score of 4.64, according to Freedom House, marks Ukraine as a transitional hybrid regime.

The data reflects the negative effects of a post-communist legacy on regime type as such countries have weak civil societies, rule of law (electoral processes), and private sectors, such as independent media (Way and Casey 2000, 10). These are key democratic variables that will be examined in Ukraine's democratic institutions in both the section on Ukraine's hybrid regime (Chapter 2) and Russia's use of hybrid war in Ukraine (Chapter 3). A hybrid regime in transition, as is the case in Ukraine, is a period of fifteen years (Morlione 2009). No universal agreement exists on how to categorize electoral authoritarian regime; however, their composite score should fall between a 4.0 – 6.0 in terms of political rights and electoral processes, which is the ranges of the composite scores for both Russia and Ukraine according to current Freedom House data.

**FIG 1: UKRAINE IN TRANSITION** data collected by the author from Freedom House (y) seven democratic variables time frame & composite democratic for that year (1- least free; 7 – most free) and (x) time frame. The time reflects a period of fifteen years (2003-2018), which is, according to Morlino (2009) the time frame for a Hybrid Regime in Transition.



In the case of Russia, it may appear to be an electoral democracy, however, it fails the generalizable and substantive test of how we define democracies today, which is why many scholars categorize Russia as an electoral authoritarian regime (Schedler 2006, Schmitter & O'Donnell 1986, 9; Diamond 2002, 25-31). Modern democracies should be “a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives” (Schmitter & Karl 1991, 84).

Such rule of law is an essential feature lacking in Russia, Ukraine and many other post-Soviet cases, which the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) identified prevents the development of civil societies and other institutional and democratic



sectors that could hold corrupt elites accountable (OSCE 2019). Due to this, and may confusing features of its regime type, Ukraine at best is an ambiguous regime case (Diamond 2002, 22),

### ***1.2.3. Hybrid War, Hybrid Regime?***

The best way to defend from hybrid war is good governance. In other words, strengthening internal, democratic mechanisms that promote transparency in government and private bodies will prevent elite corruption and counter the multilateral hybrid war tactics that penetrate and break a weakened society (Racz 2015, 84-87). This could be why hybrid states are more vulnerable to hybrid war because they are volatile, weak and unstable states, which can be easily exploited. Coercive, hybrid regimes must resort to ad hoc measures when they misjudge the climate of society and will use tactics to gain control through war or violence to weaken institutions and centralize control (Petrov et al 2013). Although stronger authoritarian control can result in weakened democratic institutions, such as judicial, media, and civil society sectors, it can also result in increasing distrust of the authoritarian body based on misguided policy decisions and excessive repression, which will result in societal backlashes or upheaval (Ibid). Thus, hybrid war could be a natural extension of a repressive, competitive authoritarian hybrid regime seeking to reassert its dominance and attack the democratic, institutional sectors that prevent it from consolidating its own power over the populace.

A hybrid threat is a non-traditional security threat by state or non-state actors that target their victim's decision-making processes at the regional, state, international or institutional level to destabilize the society through military, non-military, and terrorist methods. (Racz 2016, Renz & Smith 2016, Weiss and Pomerantsev 2016, Galeotti 2018). Security and military apparatuses inside states, rather than academics, have defined this term as a "hybrid war".

According to the European Center of Excellence for Countering Hybrid threats (established by NATO and the EU) these attacks are twofold against the victim: priming (study of the opponent) and the operational or the “opening” period of the operation (attack of the opponent), which is meant to lead to a finite closing period that target political (1), economic (2), military (3), civil (4), and (5) informational structures (Hybrid COE).

Within the literature hybrid-war has been called many things containing both insightful analysis and obscure definitions of what hybrid war actually represents (Renz & Smith 2016) : “new generation warfare” as an adaptation of new and old tactical techniques (Hoffman 2014), “ambiguous” or “total warfare” a term coined by US and NATO troops and Western military complexes that were scrambling to understand how the tactical military apparatus worked in order to counter the threat (Murphy 2016), “non-linear war” or “asymmetric warfare,” which combines military tactics with non-military components such as information and cyber warfare, diplomatic, and socio-economic tactics to attack and delegitimize institutions, civil societies, and elections (Galeotti 2018).

In a narrower sense, in the case of Russia in the priming and operational stage, the Russian state (top-down method tactic from the Kremlin) used hybrid war as a tool of authoritarian legitimation: a tactical tool that the West or victim could not deter because the West had no institutional or analytical tools to measure or counter the threat (Weiss and Pomerantev 2016). What is new about the hybrid operation is the utilization and capitalization of the information war: where the unregulated internet provides a means of massive exploitation and propaganda through trolls, bots, false reporting, and harassment of the free-press through state media complexes and information hubs (Khaldarova & Pantti 2016). Ultimately the border between the real and unreal is blurred to create an effective tool of manipulative propaganda towards the victim (Ibid).

Ukraine's regional divisions and weak cohesion could have made it the ideal target for Russia's tactics: within Huntington's own theory of the clash of civilizations, the Ukrainian state was identified as a cleft society due to the dichotomy between East-West: the purest epitome of insurmountable social, political, religious and ethnonational divisions that could result in continuous conflict in the post-Cold world order (Karácsonyi et al 2014, 99-100). Huntington's view on the Ukrainian case could serve as a dark premonition of the events that would come to pass in Ukraine in Kyiv (West), Crimea (South), and the Donbas (South) in 2013-2014. The weak state structures and internal conflict in Ukrainian society made Russia's exploitative attacks in the hybrid war and hybrid regime prevent the spread of democracy regionally, in Crimea and Donbas, as well as threatened the intuitional, democratic security of the Ukrainian state.

### ***1.3 Research Method***

Ukraine is thus stuck in a fight for its own regime survival: either movement towards and authoritarian Soviet past and Russia or a progressive, democratic Western future. The cases that will be tested are the annexation of Crimea and the ongoing conflict in Donbas as, in the literature, Ukraine's desire to enter the EU was considered a factor behind Russia's use of hybrid war in South and East Ukraine (Racz 2015, Galeotti 2018).

Although substantive literature exists on hybrid war & hybrid regimes, I argue a key gap exists, which could link the two: the weaponization of one regime to attack another regime's institutional security, a process made more effective by actors who facilitated the aggressors institutional, tactical attacks on democratic sectors. By examining the independent variable (Russia's hybrid warfare) and its effect on the dependent variable (Ukraine's hybrid regime) this case study will place the literature on hybrid regimes and a hybrid war in contro to one another to determine if a causal relationship exists between factors, i.e, a plausibility

probe: (Eckstein 1975). This qualitative small-n case study on processes of democratization and authoritarian linkage seeks to prove if regime outcomes in Crimea and Donbas were contingent on domestic actors facilitating external pressures from the West or Russia.

Tolstrup (2013) expands on Levitsky and Way's theories on leverage and linkage (2006) to present how elite gatekeepers (i.e. domestic actors) inside a society, such as political, economic and civil society members may actively facilitate or constrain ties of the pressures of democracy by external actors (Tolstrup 2013, 716-720). These elite gatekeepers actively interfere in the political game and become political elites and thus effect the state apparatus and regime outcomes (Tolstrup 2013, 716-720). Additionally, these gatekeeper elites are more influential than structural determinants (such as history, geography, or culture) and can influence leverage, which is the vulnerability of state to the external pressures of democracy, and linkage, which is the density of economic, political and social ties between these domestic actors and West (pg. 717) The density of these linkages, either high or low, can determine the strength and influence of democratic development whereas leverage is more contingent on the economic and military strength of the external pressures of the West (717-720).

According to Levitsky & Way's original thesis (2016), when linkage and leverage are low the pressure to democratize is minimal and autocratic external influence is higher; however, if the linkage is low and leverage high, such external pressures to democratize will be unstable. Particularly high linkage, or domestic actors ties to Western influences, has raised the cost of authoritarianism due to the higher salience of democracy for domestic actors with a political, economic, or professional stake in protecting democratic and international norms (Levitsky & Way 2006, 379). Tolstrup sites O'Donnell and Schmitter's original thesis (1986), which elaborated on how a variance in linkage by elite gatekeepers can influence how elite gatekeepers act either as "soft-liners" who sacrifice the regime for privilege and develop

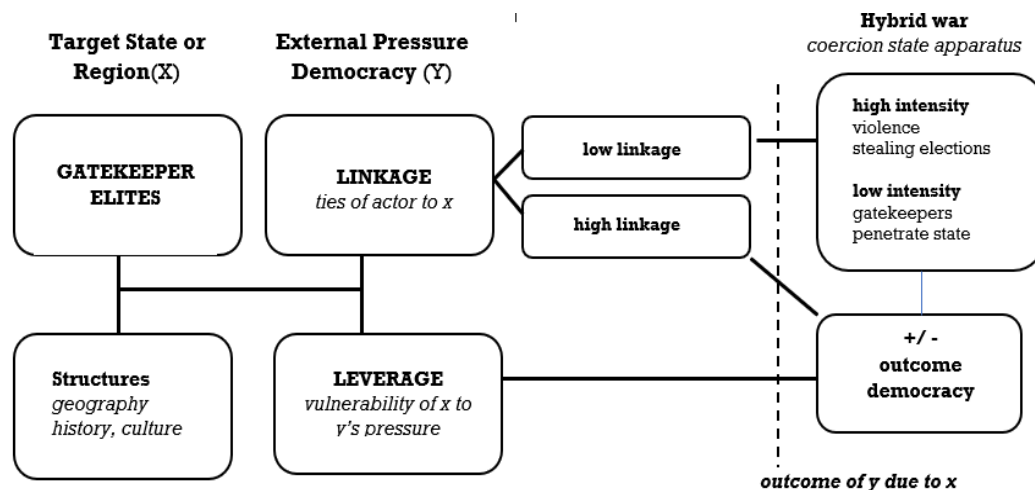
stronger ties to the West or as “hardliners” who see authoritarianism as a virtue (Tolstrup 2013, 731).

If low linkage in a region or state persists elite actors loyal to autocratic regimes could prevent Western intervention by creating strong internal mobilization against outside Western influence, which is known as “autocratic coercive capacity” (Levitsky & Way 2006, 387).

This autocratic, coercive capacity destabilizes the processes of democratization via a strong, autocratic state apparatus and through the means of high-intensity state scope (violence and the stealing of elections) and low-intensity scope, i.e. the actors penetrating the region and influencing institutional outcomes (pg. 389).

This thesis will argue the use of autocratic coercion, as epitomized by Russia’s hybrid war was in Crimea and Donbas, was used to destabilize democratic institutions and was subversively facilitated by elite gatekeepers, or the hardliner domestic group, who saw Russian authoritarian influence as a virtue. Modern post-Soviet cases have moved starkly in one direction or the other due to linkage to Western influence or Russia’s competitive authoritarian behavior. For example take Belarus, whose increased financial and ideological ties to Russia resulted in the development of a more competitive authoritarian regime (Tulstrup 2013, 729) whereas stronger Western linkage, due to series of reforms, pulled Poland closer to democracy (Asmus 2005, 87) and weakened the possibility of stronger linkage to Russian meddling or intervention

**FIG 2: MODEL OF HYBRID WAR // HYBRID REGIME** *The goal of autocratic coercion is to target weaker democratic institutions via the state apparatus by subversive regime loyalist, or elite gatekeepers, who influence if (y) the external pressures of democracy has an outcome on the target state (x) When linkage is low, based on the gatekeepers ties to the state, it is more likely autocratic coercive force can be used with a negative impact on democratic development.*



In contrast, Western institutions have no such strong or coercive mechanism: democracy itself is contingent on the will of the people in terms of participation and legitimacy (Schmidt 2013). Like many Western institutions offering aid to Ukraine, The EU functions like a weak nation-state encroaching on the sovereignty of other territories to effectively mobilize the population and integrate it into the EU (Ehin 2008). Democracy, allegedly, is non-coercive and contingent on the level of societal participation by the people as well as the will of the people. This change may not be wanted, needed, and even threatening to many members of a society, which was the case for hard-liners in Ukraine.

I argue, due to such cohesive ties, a military struggle persisted when the coercive apparatus of one regime (Russia) faced defection from another (Ukraine) and resulted in lower linkage between the two states. The coercive apparatus of the state, as influenced by loyalist elite gatekeepers, used force (war or violence) as a means of short-term risk for regime survival (Thompson 2001). Due to the diversification of linkage among gatekeepers in Ukraine, rival gatekeepers could develop different external linkages, either to the West or Russia, which resulted in a more soft authoritarian regime as well as stronger democratic developments and links to the West, which resulted in the Orange Revolution and later the Euromaidan (Tolstrup

2013, 731). As is the case in Ukraine, if domestic political elites are disunified than political regimes will remain unstable (Highley & Burton 2006, 245) and thus a regime change should analyze these structures and the casual relationship between these elites and structures in order to understand the possible outcome of transitional state of the regime (Highley & Burton 2006, 250-251).

As Tolstrup's work indicates linkage cutting is very costly and actors will fight to keep these privileges (pg. 733-734) Since the ruling political elite in Ukraine had not severed but actively weakened ties to Russia post-independence, hardliner gatekeepers still existed in Ukraine regionally that favored linkages to Russia versus the West. The Russian state fought with these hardliner gatekeepers to adapt and regain control over a section of the Ukrainian populace: that adaptation was a hybrid war. To prove this theoretical model these hypotheses will be tested:

**(H1) Ukraine's hybrid regime made it more vulnerable to hybrid warfare due to a variance in linkages, i.e. ties to the West or Russia, by domestic actors.**

**(H2) Russia's hybrid war in Crimea and Donbas was an interstate war for regime change facilitated by domestic actors with stronger ties to Russia and fewer incentives to democratize.**

## **CHAPTER II: UKRAINE'S HYBRID REGIME**

Within a hybrid war, the essential pre-phase of the operation is the priming phase where the nuance and the study of the enemy target allow the aggressor or belligerent to penetrate the society during the full-scale phase of the operation. Due to the close cultural, geopolitical, and social ties shared by Russian and Ukrainian society the priming stage was less necessary. The state system of Russia exploitation of Ukrainian loyalists helped pull Ukraine closer to Russia's regime in its transitional state away from the Western forces of democracy and thus effected Ukraine's transition to democracy and hybrid regime type. This coercive dynamic between the Russian and Ukrainian state meant regime loyalists were weaponized into a full-scale hybrid operation, which is explored further in Chapter 3, after the threat of Westernization as epitomized by the Orange and Maidan revolution, weakened ties between Russia and Ukraine.

### ***2.1 Economic Ties***

Autocratic coercive capacity in Ukraine has allowed autocratic types (particularly in the executive branch) to hang onto power due to Ukraine's weaker state cohesion (Levitsky & Way 2006, 289) and due to an absence of regime constraints that impacted developments in its regime type (Way 2012, Hale 2014). The two societies have interconnected political and socioeconomic regime ties, which have continued well-past Ukraine's independence from Russia in 1991 (Buzgalin et. al. 2016). Putin centralized an oligarchical, Soviet system of extracting political rents and natural resource rents among the political elites (Bessinger 2013), which created two diverse economic systems in Ukraine. The prosperous Russophile East carried an ideological and economic legacy tied to Soviet industrialization and saw the EU association agreement and outside influence as a threat to the economic and political way of



life. The less prosperous Europhile West saw the entry into the EU and greater market liberalization as politically, socially, and ideologically beneficial (Feigen 2014, Way & Casey 2018, 3).

The minority population of “Russophile” ethnic Russians who speak Russian and self-identify as ethnically Russian lives in the South and East Ukraine, Crimea and Donbas respectively (Karácsonyi et al 2014, 99-102). Since Ukrainian independence in 1991, a power-sharing regime has existed in the Ukrainian government, which many elites (particularly in the executive branch) have manipulated for political gain: In sum, nearly half the Ukrainian population living in the South and East self-identity as Russian whereas only 5% to 8% of the population self-identify as Russian in the West of Ukraine (Karácsonyi et al 2014, 102). Russia’s coercive strength lies in its manipulation of these sympathetic elites and ethnic groups for stability at home and in the near abroad, former Soviet Republics, with similar political, social and economic value systems and it preys upon ties established among ethnic minorities and elites that can influence Russia’s political strategies in the target state (Bessinger 2013).

In contrast, The Ukrainian state has economically been developing ties the West since independence. In 1998 Ukraine joined the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and after further assessment called for joint cooperation (2004). Ukraine was strategically added as a point of joint cooperation by the EU in the European Neighborhood Policy (2009), which is a policy targeted at strengthening social, political and economic interests in the European neighborhood and forming stronger collaborative partnerships (Kraenner 2005, 67-74). Economic linkage between the West and Ukraine has also increased since the global financial crisis (2008) because Ukraine is the third country globally most indebted to the IMF (over \$16.5 billion) and this requires a variety of institutional democratic reforms, or Westernization, to meet the conditions of the loan (Roaf et al. 2014). The IMF has also required an increase in oil prices, designed to break-up Putin’s oligarchical monopoly, which has angered many

oligarchs in Ukraine and Russia (Ibid). The Russian economy has also been effected by the financial crisis and falling prices for oil and natural gas has impacted the economic system of mafia-like rents tied territories that seek to enter the EU, such as Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine (Ibid).

Russia's economic influence in Ukraine has slowly eroded due to such economic Western intervention. To be recognized as a global superpower, while undergoing severe economic strain and a declining population, Russia has been forced to change by solidifying its military rather than economic industrial complex: allegedly Russia is investing over 710 billion roubles into its military infrastructure by 2020 (Galeotti 2018, 46-47). This Russia's coercive strength as a great power will be due to its military infrastructure to effect institutional outcomes whereas the West's is based on the economic security and access to international markets it can provide countries in the Eurasian neighborhood.

## ***2.2 Ukraine's Independent Media***

Russian media influence in Ukraine is a deniability instrument and its effects and sources are hard to trace; however, it does influence the formation of independent media sectors and democratic institutions. Access to independent media is available in authoritarian states; however, it is limited, as independent voices could weaken the power of the state apparatus and its coercive effects on the population (Levitsky & Way 2010, 8). Major media outlets in authoritarian states are linked to the governing party via proxy ownership, patronage, and other illicit means: take the example of President Kuchma controlling television coverage through the informal network of media entities in Ukraine (Levitsky & Way 2010, 12). Russia's media manipulation and false reporting have gone global with networks such as RT and Sputnik

seeking to destabilize and confuse democracy and threatening institutional structures (Khalدارova & Pantti 2016).

The soft-power influence of Russia's media operations in Ukrainian media was very pervasive due to pre-existing state media structures shared between the Russian and Ukrainian media prior to the hybrid operation. The most popular television Russian channel INTER covers 97 % of Ukraine's territory and is currently owned by Dmitry Firtash, a pro-Kremlin oligarch, Gazprom (gas company), and Russian organized crime ties (Danylyuk 2018). UMH is also an incredibly popular Russian media conglomerate of over fifty brands, and radio, internet, and press have ties to President Yanukovych's family (who is currently in exile in Moscow due to fear of corruption charges) and his former MP and current executive, Elena Bondarenko, is an outspoken supporter of Russia's actions in the Donbas and Crimea (Ibid). This blackwater-like operation between Ukraine and Russia is apparent even inside Ukraine's allegedly independent media structure. In 2013, Multimedia Invest Group, a powerful multimedia group founded in Ukraine, allegedly had ties to Yanukovych's media family (Ibid) allowing for further exploitative uses of media structures against the Ukrainian people despite appearing allegedly independent from Russian state media structures.

Social media groups are not broken from the alleged oligarchical ties with loyalties to Moscow: Alisher Usmanov has invested over \$200 million in Facebook and controls Mail.ru, Vkontakte, and other popular services (Ibid). Although popular Ukrainian news hosts Evgeniy Kiselyov and Savik Shuster may be outspoken supporters of democratic protections of journalists and free and independent media sectors their own past ties them state-owned media a sector in the Kremlin and even possible intelligence work (Ibid).

Since Russian is the dominant language regionally in these areas, the biased state-owned media sector targeted these Ukrainian regions with a dense ethnic population of minority Russians (Suhkov 2019). Those sympathetic to Ukrainian independence in media

were labeled as fascists (Ibid) or agents of the West or the Color Revolution or Maidan (Zwack 2014). Kyiv, in the West, is the media hub in Ukraine and many attacks by the Russian government have taken place against Kyiv's independent media sectors. Russian state-media sectors, such as Channel One (one of the most powerful Russian news networks with strong ties to the Kremlin) and others, targeted ethnic loyalists in the East and South prior to the hybrid operation by arguing Kyiv's weaker government would not protect ethnic Russians: to survive they should seek protection from the Russian state (Danylyuk 2018, Suhkov 2019). Alexei Garan, head of the Political Analysis School at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, called Russian media coverage in Ukrainian media sectors as "Goebbels-style propaganda" (Suhkov 2019) a chilling tie to the fascist Chief Media provocateur that engineered the first mass media that centralized the Nazi's power and targeted ethnic groups, philosophies and institutions counter to their agenda. In effect, the media ties between Russia and Ukrainian state are so blurred by elites, loyalists, and the propaganda machine prior to the hybrid war it was an ideal and effective tool for informational exploitation in Donbas and Crimea that could not be easily traced.

### ***2.3 Rule of Law and Civil Society: A State of Revolution***

In regimes, with authoritarian characteristics independent media groups do exist, and civil society groups operate above ground, but their powers are limited due to the coercive powers of the state (Levitsky & Way 2010, 8). As is the case in Ukraine, Western counter-operations seeking to break up power monopolies have funded civil society organizations and independent media outlets to promote democracy and the rule of law (Levitsky & Way 2010, 38).

Ukraine's democratic processes, particularly in terms of rule of law and civil society, impacted corruption in the executive branch as well as influenced ties to Russia. For example,

although Ukraine's President Kuchma opened the door to greater Western linkage and economic reform (Nemyria 2005, 33) he also created a climate of higher elite opposition, voter fraud, and corruption that pushed Western Ukrainians towards the "Orange Revolution Way 2005, Nemyria 2005,38). " This five-day democratic revolution in 2004 in Kyiv was a revolution by the people to challenge the run-off vote between Yushchenko and Yanukovych and it demanded more democratic freedoms, transparency in the electoral processes and further modernization and ties to Europe and the West (Ibid). After this revolution, Ukraine trended towards a period of liberalization due to legislative pressures placed on executive authority by parliament that limited the abilities of the next president, Yushchenko, to engage in the elite system of corruption that benefited Russian and Ukrainian oligarchs (Aslund 2009). Yushchenko, similar to Kuchma, still functioned in a period of lower cohesion and high scope; however, Ukraine fared far better in its democratic ratings (Hale 2014, 4). This ended in 2010 when Yanukovych an elite with deep ties to the system of elite corruption between Russian and Ukraine and Party of Regions, won the presidency: this consigned many analysts to say Ukraine would enter the "de-democratization camp" (Ibid), which was reflected in its drop in the 2010 Freedom House Ratings.

Three enlargement issues had created problems for Russian influence among domestic political elites in Ukraine: the presence of the EU and NATO, divisive internal political processes among elites in Ukraine, and the Black Sea Area ( Shepherd 2005, 19 -20). Moscow elites viewed Ukraine as a sister nation that did not want to modernize or democratize but rather believed that the elites and people of Ukraine sought guidance and influence from the Kremlin: thus, the Orange Revolution in 2004 was a huge shock (Shepherd 2005, 22-23). The Orange Revolution marked a learning period for Russia, which loosened some control over Ukraine hoping further independence would prevent a large-scale protest and Western expansion (Way 2006, 66). Fear of Western influence post the Orange Revolution also gave rise to a strong

neo-Eurasian movement of Ukrainian xenophobia and a deep hostility towards Ukrainian statehood and Western neoliberalism (Hartel 2017). These groups were willing to use permissive violence to increase ties to Russia (Ibid). Ultimately, this movement would deeply influence the separatist movement that would result in the formation of the Donetsk Republic in 2014.

The breaking point for Russia's ties to Western Ukraine came with the large-scale revolution known as the Euromaidan or the "revolution of dignity" in Kyiv (Dannenberg et. Al). This massive, large-scale protest demanded the system of elite corruption, human rights abuses, and the abuse of power by elites in Ukraine be broken (Ibid). This mass protest was sparked by Yanukovych's (a member of the Party of the Regions) back-room deals with Russia after he broke the EU Association agreement in favor of closer ties with the Eurasian Economic Union (Ibid). This deal was a less economically beneficial system to Western Ukrainians who wanted democracy and greater market liberalization and far more beneficial to Yanukovych's base in the South and East with ties to the post-Soviet, industrialized economy (Ibid).

Such a system of rampant corruption and inter-ethnic feuding resulted in the massive, violent and large-scale protest Russia dreaded. Arguably, targeting areas of weak cohesion in Ukraine were no longer possible due to the West's involvement. Russia's involvement in Ukraine was a learning process and their response to Ukraine's opposition and democratization would need to utilize a subtler form of high and low-intensity coercion. Otherwise, Western reprisal would result in weaker regime cohesion between Russia and Ukraine or economically disastrous sanctions by the international community (Jackson 2010 106 -107).

Reliance on the covert apparatus of the state (military, secret police, etc.) during periods of weaker control is an essential part of the Soviet legacy: where autocratic regimes consolidate non-democratic rule via a subversive state apparatus (Way 2002). Thus, oppression of the rule of law, civil society, and the media in hybrid regimes by using hybrid war could be a natural

extension of such a covert, state regime system among former Soviet spaces where upper-elites consolidated power via the destruction and erosion of democratic institutions. A hybrid war was simply an exploitation of the system of coercion already existing between Russian and Ukrainian political leadership within the hybrid regime. Due to pre-existing features of the hybrid regime, it could easily be turned into a covert war to influence a populace in the South and East afraid of Western intervention. Scholars that argue hybrid war did not occur in Crimea and Donbas may have a fundamental lack of knowledge of how post-Soviet hybrid regimes function and how political elites attack similar but weaker state structures through coercive means, which could include hybrid war.

## **CHAPTER III: RUSSIA'S USE OF HYBRID WAR**

Prior to discussing the cases and the effects of Russia's coercive use of hybrid war to destabilize democratic development in Crimea and Donbas, two clear distinctions must be made: firstly, (3.1) why hybrid war is not a new phenomenon but rather an adaptation of military techniques that have changed throughout military history and secondly (3.2 & 3.3), why Russia's use of hybrid war in the opening and closing period has some unique features, which could have led to success in Crimea and a lack of success in the Donbas. Russia's use of coercion to effect Ukraine's regime outcome and democratic future, as is the case in Russia's attacks on Ukraine's transitional hybrid regime (Chp II), can also be observed in the hybrid operation in Crimea and Donbas. Russian loyalists in these Ukrainian regions were exploited by the Russian and Ukrainian political actors to prevent the Western expansion of democracy through hybrid war.

For Russia, the use of hybrid war drastically cut down the costs of traditional military engagement and, like Russia's hybrid influence in Ukraine's regime, served to destabilize democratic institutions in the South and East. The hybrid operations effect on democratic sectors, such as independent media and civil society and electoral processes, will be further explored in the following chapters.

### **3.1 Traditional Vs. Hybrid War**

History has a way of repeating itself – especially the history of war. The famous Prussian political thinker Carl Von Clausewitz said: *"War is the continuation of policy by other means."* Clausewitz discusses how war is a political tool meant to compel the enemy to submit to the aggressor's political agenda. In war, the aggressor can either disarm the enemy through



direct, symmetric military engagement or the use of indirect or asymmetric war (i.e. hybrid war), which is a military tactic used to exhaust rather than annihilate the enemy. Irregular war or a “people’s war” exploits sentiments or feelings (such as religious, ethnic, or national) in the heart of an enemy’s territory through insurgency or occupation that is meant to destabilize the opponent’s hold over a territory. Clausewitz’s account does not discount that war could combine both symmetric and asymmetric tactics but rather that the variation of a state’s tactics in war is dependent on the interaction between people, the military forces, and the state.

In Murray and Mansoor’s seminal historical account on hybrid warfare (2012) their qualitative analysis shows that a state or non-state actors use of asymmetric war has been present in history of war: the Barbarian vs. the Romans (AD 9-16) the American’s vs. the British in the American Civil War (17<sup>th</sup> C.) the Boers vs. the British (18<sup>th</sup>) the Vietnamese vs. Americans (20C.) and in modern-day terrorists use of force in Iraq, Afghanistan and other instants of terrorism by non-state groups.

The goal of such an asymmetric war is to gain control over the population whereas regular military forces seek to break-up the physical and human landscape (Murray & Mansoor 2012, 308). Hybrid war combining such conventional military forces and irregular actors (guerilla, insurgents, and terrorists) can include state and non-state actors that aim to achieve a common political purpose (Murray & Mansoor 2012, 3) Hybrid war and guerilla war employ many of the same common techniques (use of local populace, terror techniques, waging a war in the land of their adversaries); however, unlike guerilla war hybrid war is not against using conventional, symmetric means to serve political ends (Lanoszka 2016, 180). Hybrid war favors using asymmetric versus symmetric tactics due to the higher costs associated with conventional, direct engagement such as higher economic and social costs and a high number of casualties. Hybrid aggressors can threaten to use symmetric conflict of course; however, they are less likely to use it due to higher perceived costs (Ibid)

In all these historical cases, socio-political and economic factors drove the weaker opponent to engage in a hybrid war against a stronger enemy to great military effect by exploiting latent grievances within the populace. Although symmetric engagement has its benefits, such as preventing a frozen conflict and a decisive and resolute engagement against a definitive enemy, the asymmetric conflict's use of subversive tactics makes it harder to counteract, which makes it a highly attractive tactic (Murray & Mansoor 2012, 252).

Hybrid conflicts engage in the physical and conceptual dimensions of warfare and its goal is to gain the indigenous population and international community's support (McCuen 2008). As Sun Tzu famously said, "*Knowing your enemy is knowing yourself*:" this quote is a key way to gain an upper hand in a conflict, especially in a hybrid war. In such asymmetric warfare, regardless of capabilities, the weaker side can win if it engages in an all-out psychological and physical war against an opponent, they deeply understand due to previous cultural assimilation or cross-cultural ties.

Throughout the book, Murray & Mansoor identify hybrid conflict as a traditional tactic of the Western world particularly America, which was "*birthed in hybrid war*" (pg. 13) during the American Revolution. However, due to a lack of success in Vietnam and the war on terror in Iraq and Afghanistan many parts of the Western world, i.e. America and Britain, favor symmetric over asymmetric tactics (pg. 9-13). The West's failure in these cases was a lack of knowledge of their enemies and understanding the grievances of the people in the region. This is particularly relevant in the case of hybrid war in Ukraine as the West's lack of ability to capitalize on the historical lessons of asymmetric warfare has allowed Russia to develop a nuanced military industrial complex combining asymmetric and symmetric tactics that the West fears and has difficulty in countering or understanding (Racz 2015, Renz & Smith 2016, Galeotti 2018).

### **3.2 Hybrid War in Crimea and Donetsk**

Understanding the history behind the hybrid war in the West is essential to this case study: as the enemy in the hybrid war in Crimea and Donbas was not the Ukrainian people but the influences of Westernization. Although the attack may appear to be on the populace, what Russia and these political actors sought to do was break the East and South away from the influences of democracy during a weak period of cohesion between Russia and Ukraine post the Maidan. Why the hybrid war was successful in the South and East is inconclusive; however, weaponizing the pre-existing system of coercion between these hybrid regions and exploiting grievances felt by ethnically Russian people and Eurasian loyalists against Kyiv and the West to effect political outcomes created the ideal conditions for a hybrid operation inside Ukrainian territory.

Russia used the hybrid war to exploit fears the Ukrainian populace had in the South and East had of a Western, democratic future. The use of hybrid war by Russia is not new: Russia used hybrid war in The Soviet Union with Cominform sponsoring communist movements in Europe and elsewhere to undermine capitalist countries from within (Campbell 1993) and Lenin used elements of hybrid war such as information propaganda, terrorism, and exploitation for political ends in Soviet time (Galeotti 2016). More recently, Russia failed in executing an effective hybrid war in Georgia and Chechnya; however, a lack of nuanced development in Russia's symmetric and asymmetric capabilities to destabilize institutional and military structures and deeper cultural, social and economic is perhaps what produced such poor outcomes (Racz 2016, 52-63).

Inside Russia's modern military complex, the development of informational tools to attack structures is key: General Makhmut Gareev was the first to identify that the use of information inside the digital age was the key to a successful hybrid operation. This idea was

further capitalized upon by General Gerasimov whose report on Russia's use of hybrid war stated: "*the information space opens wide the asymmetrical possibilities for reducing the fighting potential of the enemy*" (Gareev 1998, 51-52). This concept of the information operation being the ultimate capitalization of the hybrid operation was expanded upon in a paper by current Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces General Gerasimov (so-called author of the modern, Russian hybrid operation) whose work discusses the successes of the failures of the Western hybrid operation and the lessons Russia learned from Russia's devastation in World War II (or the Great War). These were the educational building blocks to re-engineer Russia's military capabilities to be both symmetric and asymmetric, i.e. *Гибридная Война* ("hybrid war" or *gibridnaya voina*). The post-Soviet world remembers the massive devastation caused by WWII or the "Great War" as it destroyed the core of their Russian identity and way of life. Gerasimov cites the blood split by the peoples of Russia in this terrible conflict, which for the Russian people conjures particularly vivid images of a painful wartime Soviet past such as Nazi invaders and fascists in the West who contributed to the Soviet collapse.

Perhaps Russia's military hybrid military apparatus developed due to the Russian people's fear of the high costs of another World War.. Thus, what academics and many new to the subject of hybrid war fail to realize is what happened in Crimea and Donbas is not a new military tactic but the Russian military complex finessing and adapting pre-existing military means, particularly the information war, for political and regime purposes and to paralyze the Westernization of Russia and vulnerable members of the Russian neighborhood to Westernization.

Allegedly, within Mark Galeotti's own report on the defensive capabilities of *gibridnaya voina* it is cheaper and possibly more effective than America's current military techniques: in effect, the US spends nearly ten times what Russia spends on defense (Gaelotti

2018, 9). As one NATO officer allegedly said to Galeotti regarding the ongoing push and pull in Eurasia between Russia and NATO forces (particularly Crimea and Donbas) “*we spent billions preparing to fight the wrong war*” (Galeotti 2018, 9). The Western world did not have the military means, capabilities or a deeper understanding of Eurasian culture to stop the chaos of Russia’s carefully engineered hybrid operation in Crimea and Donbas. Additionally, despite stronger Western linkage initiated by policy reforms in the Eurasian near abroad, the West would not involve itself due to fear becoming involved with domestic actors and Russian that could initiate a “Cold-War 2.0 ( Asmus 2017, 93-100)

A system of coercive apparatus by political actors in Russia and Ukraine’s hybrid regimes processes could, in a hybrid war, further be exploited for political ends to effectively break the institutions of democracy. The Ukrainian people in the East and South truly believed that Russia was helping Ukraine fight back against a Western coup that had occurred in the Maidan revolutions and by fascists in Kyiv – thus, poignant and vile imagery could be exploited to great effect in the information war (Marples & Mills 2015, 13). Russia capitalized on a period on Ukraine’s regime chaos in February and March of 2014: as Yuschenko fled to Moscow and Poroshenko, a democratic-oligarch reformer, quickly rose to the presidency Crimea was swiftly annexed and Russia began funneling weapons and humanitarian aid to Donbas covertly (Ibid).

### **3.3 Geostrategic Factors**

The literature on geostrategic factors also notes how crucial Crimea and Donbas were for hybrid war due to geopolitical tensions with the EU and NATO (Raz 2015, Renz & Smith 2016). This is because in both the EU and Russia interest in post-Soviet spaces geopolitical and geostrategic factors were essential to their actions and reactions to former Soviet states

(Levitsky Way 2010, Vachudova 2014). For Russia, former satellite territories with strong Russophile identities forced to cooperate with the West could result in Russian military aggression further igniting bitter regime struggles between the West and Russia (Ibid).

Senior Eurasia Analyst Eugene Chausovsky sites that Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and other former satellite territories with increasing ties to the EU and West are key examples of this behavior. Known as "Tier 1" cases, Russia's tactics are targeted at breaking down their opponents resolve and social and economic infrastructure through direct and covert means. "Tier 2" cases (the Baltics, Balkans, and Central Europe) and "Tier 3" cases (United States, Southeast Europe) rely more heavily on information war than direct engagement since these countries receive further protection from NATO, Europe and the West (Chausovsky 2017). Arguably direct engagement could trigger NATO's article 5, an attack on one NATO member is an attack on all members of NATO, resulting in an unwanted war between Russia and the West.

Two geostrategic factors in Ukraine's geography are essential to Russia's military strategy: the defense of the three-hundred-mile wedge created by the Northern-European Plain, now a gateway from Russia to Europe-friendly former satellite states, and Russia's lack of warm water passageways (Zwack 2014, 145). Crimea gave Russian paramilitary troops a better defensive base against NATO aggression and Crimea's access to the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov also gave Russian naval ships access to warm-water ports (Ibid). In Donbas, Russia's actions were more nationalistically motivated. Russian forces aided pro-Russian separatists shortly after Crimea's annexation: this effectively created two separate republics or oblasts (administrative divisions): the loyalist Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic, which are still controlled by violent separatists and Russian government pawns (Dannenberg et. al).

Russia's involvement in these three regions was a clear violation of the long-held peace established in the Budapest agreements (1994), which protected Ukraine's sovereignty from Russia (Ibid) and to this day these three regions are considered Russian occupied and not an officially recognized voting member of the Ukrainian government until a further resolution can be reached in the Minsk agreements (Ibid).

In the next two sections, Ukraine's weaker democratic institutions will be studied as Ukraine's independent media sector and the rule of law and civil society were easier sectors to infiltrate prior to and during the hybrid war in Ukraine due to the volatility of Ukraine's hybrid regime and Ukraine's ties to Russia.

### ***3.4 Opening and Closing in Donbas and Crimea***

As is the case in Russia and Ukraine's hybrid regime, the system of subversion by elites and loyalists is hard to trace in the hybrid war operation in Crimea and the Donbas; however, the "opening" period of the conflict was targeting ideological, economic, psychological, and informational sectors to depress the population and spark discontent in the government prior to and during the hybrid operation. Subversive agents, such as elites and those ethnically tied to the regime, penetrated the society's infrastructure easily and effectively during the hybrid operation (Chekinov & Bogdonov 2016, 3-4). An intense disinformation campaign occurred in both cases prior to the high-intensity period known as the closing stage where intense violence destabilized means of resistance, which was targeted at civil dissidents and electoral sectors (Chekinov & Bogdonov 2016, 5-8). Both Crimea and Donbas were attacked by "polite green men" (Russian soldiers with no distinctive ties to the military) who overran public administration buildings and civilian infrastructures, replaced independent media sectors with pro- Russian government channels, quickly rewrote both regions' constitutions and laws and

quietly transferred a variety of institutions from Ukraine to Russian loyalists or newly elected officials (Racz 2015, 57-65).

Within Levitsky and Way's model, (see Fig 2, pg. 20) hybrid war utilizes, through symmetric and asymmetric means, the system of coercion as used by Russia against Ukraine on social, economic, and political levels in Ukraine's hybrid regime. The event after the Maidan created a period of weak cohesion in Ukraine and war could decide a regime outcome (Marple 2015, 13). Subversive political agents in South and East Ukraine used high and low-intensity coercion to penetrate the territory and through information war, changing systems of governance and electoral systems, and physical violence to break institutions or groups that could threaten a complete takeover. Additionally, many scholars discuss how the priming period in the case of Ukraine and Russia's hybrid war was very easy since Russia had a nuanced understanding of Ukraine's weak and cohesive state structure and how to exploit the political actors within it, which made a hybrid operation highly effective (Racz 2016, Galeotti 2016, Renz & Smith 2016, Lanoszka 2016).

Alexander Lanoszka's (2016) definition of hybrid war applies to the case of Russia: Russian coercion preys upon pre-existing latent grievances and cleavages in ethnopolitical structures meant to destabilize the threat of Western expansion and expand the belligerent's (i.e. Russia) territorial and psychological boundaries by using both symmetric (traditional military operation) and asymmetric operations. In the case of Ukraine, Russia sought escalation dominance and to revise the status quo: they targeted the weaker state with its similar ethnonational and linguistic frameworks and destabilized democratic protections, such as independent voices in media and civil society to great effect through domestic political elites who saw Russian influence as social, economically, and politically beneficial

The people inside these Ukrainian regions were an ideal tool for such a system as both state and non-state actors were willing to escalate an interstate war for a regime change:



utilizing military, operational, informational, terrorist, and guerilla tactics towards a common political purpose. A regular war was not possible for a variety of reasons: retaliation from the West, the high costs of engagement, and the higher number of casualties that could weaken the will for such a war by the Russian and Ukrainian people.

Crimea and Donbas are both considered the ideal case of Russia's hybrid warfare tactics within the literature by employing the "Gerasimov doctrine" (see sec 3.2). Russia now employs hybrid war as a defensive methodology against Western expansion as well as to expand its military capabilities and dominance (Renz & Smith 2016). In the case of Ukraine, the latest ethnic grievances, the dichotomy of East (Crimea), South (Donbas) and West (Kyiv), make it the ideal case for Russia's exploitative use of hybrid war.

The purpose in Crimea was to revise the status quo and enable a regime change; however, the operation in Donbas was to engineer chaos after a successful operation in Crimea emboldened the Russian state (Racz 2016, 23- 27). Crimea was the crown jewel of Russia's Soviet legacy and modern-day military ambitions (Ibid). The swift and successful operation emboldened political actors to act in a region that was not their main target: as one Russian military officer exclaimed in an interview: *"it is unlikely without the swift success of Crimea that Russia would have acted in the Donbas since Crimea was the target and Donbas was an added objective to the hybrid operation"* (Galeotti 2016, 16).

What occurred in both cases was Russia's charismatic leader, Vladimir Putin, seizing on Ukraine's relative instability to re-seize Soviet territory it had long coveted. Territorial goals have motivated and guided Putin's domestic and foreign policy since he took presidency 14 years ago – goals he has pursued with remarkable consistency and persistence to recover most, if not all, key assets – political economic, and geostrategic – lost in the collapse of the Soviet Union (Aron 2013). Strong leadership and a decisive military doctrine and agenda are also key to a covert, hybrid operation (Murray & Mansoor 2012, 14); arguably, Putin's strategic

manipulation of these grievances among domestic actors and people with similar ideologies has engineered the mechanism of push and pull factors between the West and Eurasia since his rise to power. The methodology and ideology of Putin's rhetoric clearly had an effect not just on Ukraine's hybridity, but also military methods employed in the hybrid operation: not to just destroy the people but reshape them and the society around them to return to the Russian Federation.

On March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014 Vladimir Putin delivered a landmark speech that addressed the same-day annexation of Crimea, which sent shock waves around the globe. His argument was based in atypical Putin narratives: anti-Western rhetoric, heart-breaking dissolution of the Soviet Union, and a need for a strong defense against external forces. However, a certain turn of phrase *русский народ* (*rossiiski narod*) was deeply rooted in Russia's imperial and Soviet past (Kilts 2016, 18). It was later a physical and metaphorical call to arms for separatists in Crimea and the Donbas that riled animosities in ethnic Russians. The lost Russian people were returning to the Russian state and the values of the West, and democracy would need to be eliminated to allow these Ukrainian regions to return to the Russian state.

## **CHAPTER IV: HYBRID WAR IN UKRAINE**

The power of media in communication, the power of words and images to influence social, political and economic outcomes, should not be taken lightly. In a digital age, the phrases “war on truth” or “fake news” have become popularized yet the true impact of the “weaponization of information” (Weiss & Pomerantsev 2016), as is the case in Donbas and Crimea, cannot fully be comprehended. A modern reality of our times is that media is omnipresent – it exploits our personal choices, perceptions, interactions with people and institutions (Featherstone 2009, 1-22). If this media is tied to the state, the influence and scope of the media’s effect on a population can spread and infect and sicken the populace: in other words, fake news can kill and break independent voices that could allow democracy to flourish.

### ***4.1 The Breakdown of Civil Society and Rule of Law***

In hybrid war, as is the case in the coexistence between Russia and Ukraine’s hybrid state, no true civil society can flourish when a coercive system exists that allows agents of the regime to relentlessly assault democratic freedoms as a form of endemic and social control. In terms of the takeover of Crimea and Donbas the formation of weak lawfare further undermined the possibility of a government flourishing with voices counter to the will of loyalists who supported the Kremlin’s takeover. What occurred in terms of lawfare was not just the ultimate weaponization of power politics in hybrid war but, quite simply, the reformation of a society’s rule of law by political actors to serve Russia’s sociopolitical agenda and break ties with Kyiv and the international community (Uehling 2015, 78).

During the elections in 2014 electoral politics in Ukraine, due to the weak cohesive state of the regime, were totally undermined despite some of the democratic successes of the

Euromaidan. In total, two major elections in Ukraine occurred: The May 25<sup>th</sup> Presidential elections and the October 26<sup>th</sup> Parliamentary elections. Despite pro-Euromaidan candidate Poroshenko's democratic win he won with only 54 % of the vote, which was due partially to the fact no one could vote in Crimea due to the ongoing conflict, and in Donetsk and Luhansk region separatists leaders barred a majority of voters (over 80 %) from participating in the elections due to severe restrictions placed on the populace (Marples 2015, 13-18). Ukrainian politics, on a larger scale, made a very undemocratic choice in this sense – to allow the disaffected South and East to fall to Russian influence rather than fight back to include these regions in a democratic voting process. The Party of Regions was weakened by Yanukovich's treachery, and due to the ongoing conflict in these regions, the conscious choice made by elites in Kyiv was to allow Crimea to return to Russia and for the Donbas to descended into an unending state of war rather than further weaken Ukrainian society by engaging with a more dominant aggressor (Marples 2015, 13-14).

From a policy perspective, understanding the outcome of these elections was a conscious choice by Ukrainian policymakers: they allowed Ukraine to be a truncated state and loose key, industrial and economically beneficial regions to prevent a state of war (Economist 2014). In addition, these regions were essentially cast out from being officially recognized as a member of the Ukrainian state. The outcome of the Maidan was a key element of this electoral divide as, in a broader sense, this electorally divisive process illustrated that Ukraine had no democratic future if territories in the East and South were Russian occupied (Ibid). As previously mentioned the outcome of the occupation were they were not official voting members of the Ukrainian state. To understand how deeply this group of Russian, ethnic loyalists manipulated the rule of law in Crimea and Donbas one needs to more closely examine what occurred in these individual cases.

In February of 2014, convoys of covert military personnel took over the international airport in Simferopol, control of the Black Sea Port and fleet in Sevastopol and quickly (as if the effort has been coordinated prior to the assault) domestic political operatives, separatists and military personnel took over the Supreme Council (Ueheling 2015, 70). They installed Sergei Aksyonov, a petty criminal and gang leader, as Prime Minister and other shady Russian loyalists (Ibid). On the 17<sup>th</sup> of March a referendum was instated that adopted legal statutes that broke Crimea from Ukraine: now, Crimea was known as the “Autonomous Republic of Crimea” and an official member of the Russian Federation under its jurisdiction and protection (Ibid). The next day, after the reinstatement of a treaty, a chaotic process of changing regimes from Kyiv to Russia began: Crimeans were now members of the ARC with new passports, legal documents, road signs, etc. and their entire identity was reshaped on legal and electoral lines to be transferred from Ukrainian to Russian society (Ibid). The constitution was quickly formed, an in effect rule of law or the semblance of rule of law began in Crimea (Ibid).

A similar electoral or civil process has not occurred in the Donbas. Although separatists worked covertly with Russian authorities to take over key buildings of public administration and establish a form of shaky rule of law the violence of these groups, has created a state of unending conflict (Racz 2016, 77). The conflict was worse in Donbas and Crimea due to the more violent involvement of domestic actors: the violence of the separatists and the lack of support in Donbas for the transition compared to the people of Crimea made the transition far shakier, which caused Russia to socially, politically and economically distance themselves from the conflict (Racz 2016, 77-78). In contrast, Russia has admitted its involvement in Crimea, which resulted in a series of severe international penalties; yet, the unending war in has morphed from a hybrid war to an all-out conflict where true rule of law cannot occur due to the endemic chaos and violence (Ibid).

To this day, the Donbas region is not an officially recognized member of the Russian Federation despite Russia's covert support of the conflict. The failure of Kyiv and Western powers to negotiate with the separatists has created a frozen conflict (Tsygankov 2009), which has morphed away from simply hybrid tactics to an all-out guerilla or symmetric engagement. Although in the Donbas some members of the local population may have been in support of a possible Russian take over, there were no large pro-Russian demonstrations as in the case of Crimea (Uthleide 2015, 69).

According to a survey by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, support of separatism was fairly-low in the Donbas's divided regions: 27.5 % in the Donetsk region and 30.3 % in the Luhansk region. Therefore, saying most of the population or political domestic actors supported Russian rule of law in the Donbas region, the takeover of public administration, and separation from Kyiv is far shakier claim to make than in Crimea. In fact, the shortage of support by locals and domestic political actors was a key issue during the siege of Donetsk in October as, noticeably, the local population or government did not share the same zeal as in Crimea in handing over governance to Russian authorities (zerkalo nedeli 2014a)

What occurred in terms of rule of law and the interface of Russian society into the South and East is mythologized in different ways depending on the perspectives of the outcome of the hybrid conflict. According to follow-up poll from the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology over two-thirds of residents saw the invasion of far-right separatists as a military formation that was politically and influentially a threat to national unity (zerkalo nedeli 2014ab). Most people in the South and East (62%) blamed the loss of Crimea on inadequacies and government corruption in Kyiv rather than separatists (24%) or the Russian state (19%) (Ibid). In total around 60% of those polled in Donetsk and Lugansk believed Russia was not responsible for guiding and funding the rebel's actions and seizure of rule of law; however,

around 70% of those polled did not support succession and only 25 % wanted to join the EU (Ibid).

In sharp contrast, another poll reflects the deep divide regarding Russian intervention in these regions between popular attitudes in the Donbas and Western Ukraine: a majority in the West believes that the ongoing conflict and bloodshed is caused by Russian interference and far-right separatists, which will continue to upset democratic processes from taking place (Petro 2015, 29 – 32) In the Donbas the prevailing opinion is Russia is not responsible for interference – which means the prevailing attitude by locals is Russia is not responsible for the conflict (Ibid).

#### ***4.2 Effect on Independent Media in Crimea and Donbas***

Russia, as the attacking country already had an incredibly strong media presence in Ukraine (as shown in Sec 2.2) that was easily harnessed for the dissemination of disinformation. This full spectrum information warfare made possible by the dominant position of Russian media inside Ukraine and this well-established and functioning media weapon was used to attack and strengthen distrust vis-a-vis the central government, isolate the attacked region from any information emanating from the capital (Kyiv), and cut off the target communities from international and national alternative views (Racz 2016, 81). The action for Russia in Crimea, and later in Eastern Ukraine, focused on key terminology besides “the Russian people”: Russia’s actions were motivated by the protection of the compatriots’ (sootchestvenniki) ‘ethnic Russians’ (etnicheskie russkie) and ‘Russian speakers’ (russkoiazychnye) and this terminology in Russian media denoted Russia’s alleged support for protection of this ethnic Russian group against the influence of “fascists” in the West (Hutchings and Tetz 2012, 179-181).

The ‘compatriots’ theme was not only reflected by newscasters but also pseudo-imperialists like Prokhanov and the Eurasianist Dugin who praised the resistance of Russian speakers of domestic actors Crimea and the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine to resist the Kyiv authorities (Hutchings and Totz 2012, 181-182). As reflected on frequent Russian broadcast a dominant media narrative transpired of union between Russia and Ukraine that called for a state of return where no true separation existed from one regime to another and the Ukrainian people of the South and East should return to Russia.

We Ukrainians are with the Russians; we are one country, one nation; we have both Ukrainian and Russian blood in us; there is no separate Ukraine and no separate Russia’... ‘the fraternal people of Ukraine are connected to us historically, culturally and by their spiritual values. our grandfathers and great grandfathers fought together on the front and liberated our great Soviet Union (Channel 1, 2014).

In Crimea and East Ukraine, the Russian media was very successful in constructing an alternate reality where they could claim, on newly created and pro-Russian networks, that these regions were in total favor of succession. No independent media existed: pro-Russian separatists and state media structures replaced TV, radio airwaves, websites and even Russian state-media trolls jammed any forms of communication on internet forums that could prevent any form of alternative views developing on internet forums (Racz 2016, 81-82). In Crimea in the Donbas, TV and radio companies, switched sides – even working with separatists to advertise the Russian state media perspective. What has occurred in Donbas and Crimea is complete information ghetto: where, due to a prolonged conflict, and the influence of domestic media personnel with ties to the Russian state no counter alternate voices could develop or true perspectives or events inside the conflict could exit or enter the Donbas or Crimea (Horbulin 2017, 42).



In war, media narratives become an essential tool of the game: fear can easily be manipulated to destabilize institutions and state structures (Altheide 2002). The use of information war allows the Russian state to place the blame for any actions on non-state actors or political domestic actors loyal to the regime as a means of international and national deniability (Cornstage & York 2018). Particularly in the attacks in the information war in Ukraine was is the simulacra-images of something that does not exist but can be manipulated for political purposes (Horbulin 2014, 9). The strategic goal is to exploit these images and objective perceptions of the target group by preying upon their fears within the conflict that the aggressor needs them to believe to achieve political ends (Ibid).

The information war in Ukraine entailed a concerted use of Russian state-controlled media (Kofman and Rohanksy 2015, 5). Russia may have carried out the same activities in Donbas (Donetsk and Luhansk) as they did in Crimea; however, the use of strategic information in Donbas has resulted in much more aggressive and violent attacks by domestic political actors in the information sphere: kidnapping and arrests of journalists and activists, the use of trolls and bots to prevent the circulation of alternate voices from seeping into to occupied territories and the destruction of the media infrastructure necessary to allow independent voices and democratic developments (Horbulin 2017, 42).

Domestic actors helped facilitate Pro-Kremlin information material by engaging with or disseminating the material: first it was published on non-journalistic sites and then substantiated in the news-cycle such as Vkontakte. YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, blogs and other conservative or pro-Eurasian websites while trolls disseminate this information (Aro 2016, 124). Information is designed to manipulate the subject's emotions: younger audiences are targeted with memes, caricatures, and videos and, for older audiences, images of corpses and Ukrainian soldiers and teens with pro-Nazi and fascist regalia (edited in photoshop) depict

a fake, engineered state of chaos blamed on the Western World and Kyiv instead of Russian forces (Aro 2016, 124-125).

One survey showed the trust in certain stories by the local population was higher than a neutral stance. For example, President Poroshenko keeping Donbas children in cellars (80 %), Ukraine building a dam to prevent fresh water from entering Crimea (20 %), and the MH17 aircraft being shot-down by Ukrainian army (30.5 %) (Khaldarova Pantti 2016, 896). In sum, online negative comments for these stories express anger at the government in Kyiv and the Western world and a true belief in very damaging and fake accounts that could further Russia's use of coercion via hybrid information war in the Ukraine (Ibid).

During a phone interview with a co-founder of Stop Fake News, Ruslan Deynychenko, it was clear that engineering this ideological and physical rift was an essential part of the hybrid information operation. Fake stories were meant to scare people or assist the covert Russian operatives to seize back territory. Prior to a major event in either the South or East, the number of Russian journalists at a press conference would increase signaling a level of social engineering between the state and media sector that indicated a major event was about to occur. Deynychenko also believes that certain media moments were engineered to push East Ukrainians into refugee camps, so the fighting could escalate, and territory could be more easily seized.

How much fake news has affected violence and the movement of refuge is unclear; however, according to the OHCHR over 500,000 people have fled from South and East Ukraine to Russia and the casualties in Donbas from 2014 to present day include a staggering 40,000 deaths, which includes the 298 civilians Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, 4,000 Ukrainian forces, and 5,500 armed groups around 30% of the casualties (a staggering 7,000 – 9,000 civilians) died in the crossfire. In Crimea, the tight control by the Russian Federation prevents a full picture of how the populace is either surviving or thriving under Russian control;

however, reports of civil rights abuses and sporadic physical violence towards civilians, civil society personnel, and members of the media demonstrate that the system of high-intensity and low-intensity coercion is still in place by both domestic actors (OHCHR 2019).

### ***4.3 Outcome of Cases: The Hybrid Operation***

Although the state of Ukraine's entry into the EU is unclear one thing is apparent: Crimea today is lost to Russia and Donbas and is still in a state of war. One could argue the people in this region made a choice to allow the hybrid system of coercion to infiltrate the society. The people and political actors in Crimea and Donbas had different loyalties to Russia and links to the West and responded to Russian aggression differently. The Crimean people facilitated a relatively peaceful transfer and favored Russian influence whereas the people of Donbas, perhaps due to the extreme violence of far-right Russian separatists, did not necessarily favor stronger ties to Russia or the West. In hybrid war for the purposes of a regime change one can conclude that if external actors, either the West or Russia, are able to win the hearts and the minds of the people in the region their efforts for a regime change are unlikely to succeed – regardless, as is the case in Crimea, such a strategy was successfully tested in another context, .i.e. Donbas (Grimm 2013, 745). Such external involvement by actors in war efforts can only be accepted by local and political elites regionally based on the degree of legitimacy of the war or intervention in creating substantial and positive political reforms (Ibid). So, this is why the hardliners or political reformers that favored authoritarianism and saw Russian involvement as a virtue had an easier time in reshaping the society in Crimea in Donbas as the war in Crimea had a greater degree of legitimacy among the people than in Donbas. In neither case was the authoritarian influence of Russia delegitimized, which was why regional, political actors were unwilling to fully accept external, Western involvement in

their affairs for the purpose of democratization and to deescalate the conflict (Grimm 2013, 745). Russia's success was the weaponization of a pre-existing system of coercive exploitation used in Ukraine's hybrid regime by the Kremlin and those politically loyal to Russia's authoritarian influence regionally to mount a full-scale hybrid war operation. Crimea and Donbas were a litmus test of Russia's hybrid capabilities. A war that is not a war, a war that cut at the heart of an opponent that it understood as well as played on the people's distrust of the West and Kyiv to hold the Ukrainian state together.

Ukraine as a state is once again teetering on the edge of a democratic breakthrough: on April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019 Volodymyr Oleksandrovyh Zelensky, an actor who formerly played the President, has now officially won the presidency (Lindsay & McMahon 2019). Zelensky's relative popularity, despite his lack of political experience, is because his platform represented something new – A Ukrainian citizen outside of the endemic corruption among elites. A system, which Poroshenko, despite his democratic platform and perhaps due to his status as an oligarch, was unable to break (Ibid). Zelensky, prior to his win, had made it clear that he views separatists in the DPR and LPR as puppets of Russia and that no amnesty of support will be given to these groups to end the violence (Genin 2019). In addition, Zelensky has also publicly stated the Crimea will be lost until a regime change in the Kremlin takes place (Ibid). Perhaps, as is the case under Yushenko (from the period of 2004-2009), a period of democratic reform could take place increasing cohesion among Ukrainians who believe democracy could loosen ties between Russia and Ukrainian elitists: breaking the manipulation of social and economic, rule of law, and media systems that allowed Russia to so easily exploit ethnic grievances and turn certain groups inside Ukraine in the South and East against the government in Kyiv and the West.

Of importance to the new President's approach is his ability to include these hardliners, or Russian loyalists, in the political process, which is essential to Ukraine's democratic

legitimacy, political infrastructure, and a more cohesive Ukrainian identity (Hillenbrand & Kempe 2005, 53-56). Without the inclusion of these politically divisive voices is a far likelier Ukraine's democracy will be stable as these hardliners will again be exploited again by Russia, through hybrid war or other means, for political purposes, to delegitimize democratic development.

What one can summarize about the hybrid operation in Donbas and Crimea is that the ideal hybrid operation exploits grievances among people and political elites closely tied to the aggressor's culture (religious, ethnically, socially) and turns these aggressions against the populace breaking them from the "other" that threatened their way of life. What occurred in Russia was a war for the fate of what regime system would dominate in the South and the East: those pro-Western capital holdings of the center and the more Russian aligned capital of the South-East (Buzgalin et al. 2016, 255). Although what has occurred in the Donbas could arguably have no longer be a hybrid operation, this thesis argues that Russia's testing of a new military policy, and the failures and successes in the South and East, have military allowed Russia to develop their hybrid capabilities. What the Russian military-industrial complex developed was a method of waging a war on democracy that could break a society from inside the region through the people. In Crimea, the operation was a positive success arguably due to a stronger desire for tie to Russia based on the strong ties to Soviet traditions, history, and a ninety percent Russian speaking population (Buzgalin et al. 2016, 255) In contrast, the lack of cohesion among the people inside Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republic meant neither external pressures, from the West or Russia, could take hold thus producing a frozen conflict and an uncertain regime outcome.

In 2018 a ban was extended for three more years against many forms of Russian media and greater press restrictions on foreign journalists (including RIA Novosti, Channel One, VGTRK, Zvezda, TNT, Ren TV, TV-Center, NTV-Plus, RT, and RBC, Russian social

networking sites Odnoklassniki, VK, and Yandex, and other Ukrainian telecommunications networks) in order to ensure that democracy could flourish against the outside external pressures of the Russian state. In effect, the act of banning alternate media voices, such as the hardliner Eurasianist, is anti-democratic; however, it may be one of the many possible harsh measures the Ukrainian government may take to break the system of elite corruption and ties to Russia

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

What made Ukraine more susceptible to hybrid war than other post-Soviet cases in the surrounding regions such as Georgia, Belarus, Moldova, the Baltic States, and Poland? Categorically, to explain the correlation between the possibility of hybrid war and different state or regional outcomes, one needs to group these states into regime type to determine their susceptibility to hybrid war. It follows that Poland and the Baltics are more consolidated democracies, Belarus is a hegemonic autocracy, and Moldova and Georgia are similar cases to the Ukraine (Levitsky & Way 2006, 387-388). Moldova and Georgia exhibit similar characteristics to Ukraine's regime type as various external linkages among political elites led to a less stable state (Ibid). Since all regime transitions are path dependent one can observe a set of decisions made by domestic political actors, in the past or present, impacted future regime outcomes (Pleines 2012, 126-127). In other words, there is a correlation between domestic political actors' decisions and regime outcomes.

Similarly, actors and their decisions are also essential to the hybrid wars outcome. For example, in this case, a successful hybrid operation was due to the choice of domestic, political actors that favored ties to Russia over stronger ties to the West. Stronger Western linkage would make a hybrid operation less effective: take the case of Poland or the Baltic States. Whereas stronger linkage to authoritarianism, which is the case in Belarus, would make the hybrid

operation unnecessary. Cases like Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are more susceptible to hybrid war due to deeply divided views among domestic, political elites that cause these actors to develop a variety of external linkages (Levitsky & Way 2006, Gel'man 2008) In all these cases, a hybrid war will be more effective when hardliner political elites support the goals of authoritarianism regionally or within the state .

To prove such divided domestic, political elites can create various linkages and make a society more susceptible to hybrid war take the war in Georgia in 2008. Georgia favored stronger ties to the West, which caused Russia to initiate the hybrid operation and, even though Russia favored symmetric versus asymmetric engagement, Russia similarly exploited domestic, political elites to effect regime outcomes (Becker 2012).

In all these cases, we can observe political elites are essential to the outcome of the hybrid operation as well as developing these external linkages. Weaker Western linkage can result in the use of further coercion by authoritarian states to break the influences of democracy. Stronger Western linkage raises the cost of authoritarianism because it creates pressure points among actors that authoritarian state cannot ignore. If authoritarian states want to break ties to the West they will use some form of violence to coerce the populace to comply (Levitsky & Way 2005, 25).

The developments of Western linkage in Central Europe and Eurasia have been a slow process: it took domestic actors nearly five to ten years of incentivizing democratic reforms to produce positive effects (Asmus 2005, 90-91) In societies where linkages are cleft due to divided views among domestic, political elites it is far likelier regions or states with weaker Western linkage could be attacked by a hybrid war. The events that took place in Crimea and Donbas produced different outcomes based on stronger versus weaker authoritarian linkage: one resulted in a successful hybrid operation, the other a frozen, conflict with no clear outcome in sight. As Russia rises and expands its military operations the success of Crimea and the

failure of the Donbas serve as a lesson that the people of Ukraine are as unpredictable as its regime type and that the effects of hybrid war could result in weakening linkages to the West. Western linkage develops slowly, through the means of economic and social reform, whereas coercion of a populace develops stronger authoritarian linkage and destroys the developments of democracy. Both forms of linkage rely on domestic political actors. To combat hybrid war these domestic actors need to be incentivized not to engage in developing these violent authoritarian ties but rather turn towards the path of democracy and reform.



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