



# A NEW GENERATION OF WARFARE

Russia has taken advantage of European  
disunity to wage asymmetric warfare

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Russian military trucks, painted white, cross into a separatist-held region of Ukraine in August  
2014 as part of what Russia claimed was a humanitarian aid convoy. AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Russia's belligerent attitude toward Ukraine surprised Europe. For most, a 21st-century war within European borders was unimaginable. This is the consequence of diverging strategic views in Europe, Russia and the United States, resulting in different levels of confrontation. And it is aggravated by internal strategic divergence among European states.

Although Russia sees Europe as its most important partner in many areas, it considers the spread of Western values in Eastern Europe part of a strategy to establish a neocolonial power relationship. It is convinced that, if the West is unable to achieve objectives using instruments of soft power, it will use military power to overthrow established regimes and impose puppet governments. This is unacceptable for Russia, which will fight to maintain not only its regional geopolitical influence, but its independence from external pressures on its internal affairs.

Russia has been preparing for three possible scenarios of military conflict: first, a major war with NATO and Japan; second, a regional border conflict scenario over disputed territories; and third, an internal military conflict as a result of terrorism. The possibility of a direct military conflict with NATO in the short term is not conceivable. However, Russia has been facing severe pressure of infringement on its strategic national interests. NATO has politically and militarily neutralized most of Russia's potential natural allies, as exemplified by NATO's expansion into the former Warsaw Pact space. According to a 2013 Russian collaborative report on defense sector reform edited by Alexander Nagorny and Vladislav Shurygin, the monetarist economic ideology imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and other multilateral organizations not only sought to weaken Russian society, but resulted in underfunding the armed forces and thus, operational degradation.

At the same time, the Afghanistan and Iraq wars and other American/NATO military interventions caused Russian President Vladimir Putin to conclude that the West is dangerous and unpredictable. In Russia's view, the trans-Atlantic

community, especially the U.S., uses instruments of irregular warfare such as nongovernmental organizations and multilateral institutions (IMF, World Bank) to destabilize Russia. As a result, the view that it constantly faces outside threats became mainstream in Russia.

In the face of these threats, Russia considers itself a fragile country. Putin and his inner circle understand that the economy is too dependent on oil and gas. As a result, there is not enough energy for expansion. At the same time, they feel regional influence needs to be retained by all means. Putin believes that external factors outside Moscow's control can influence internal events and result in Russia's collapse. This explains why Russia is interfering with Ukraine's attempt to move toward the West. At the same time, Putin is convinced that defending private interests and those of his inner circle is tantamount to defending Russia's national interests. Thus, any attempt to make Russia more transparent, democratic or tolerant is considered a personal attack against not only him and his allies, but also against the Russian state. Russia's answer to these threats is asymmetric. It is not hybrid.

## ASYMMETRIC WARFARE

Since the beginning of Russia's Crimean incursion, it has been difficult to find a term that defines how the operation was conducted. In the very beginning, some called it fourth generation warfare, referring to William Lind's idea that warfare evolves. The first generation of modern war (1648-1860) was marked by line and column tactics. Battles were formal and the battlefield relatively orderly. This generation was significant in the establishment of a separate military culture, resulting in the separation of "military" and "civilian."

The second generation addressed the contradiction between military culture and the disorderliness of the battlefield. Centrally controlled firepower was used in synchrony with the infantry: The artillery conquers, the infantry occupies. The third generation built on the second and is commonly known as Blitzkrieg, or maneuver warfare. Finally, the fourth generation represents the return of conflict between cultures. According to Lind, the state is losing its monopoly on violence and war and finds itself fighting nonstate adversaries. Therefore, since fourth generation warfare is basically about nonstate actors fighting a culture war, this concept is too narrow to characterize how Russia is conducting warfare.

One of Putin's closest advisors, Vladislav Surkov (under the pseudonym Nathan Dubovitsky), coined the term "non-linear war" in a 2014 article describing what would be the "fifth world war," the one where all fight against all. The idea is that traditional geopolitical paradigms no longer hold. The Kremlin gambles, counting on the idea that old alliances such as the European Union and NATO are less valuable than the economic interests Russia has with Western companies. Besides, many Western

in a 2012 article for the website *Ruskiy Kadet*.

The most common term used to describe Russia's new generation warfare is "hybrid," a label that NATO adopted. The seminal work on hybrid warfare is Frank G. Hoffman's 2009 article "Hybrid Warfare and Challenges" in *Joint Forces Quarterly*. Hoffman shows that a hybrid strategy is based on tactically employing a mix of instruments that are difficult to fully understand and establish a proper counterstrategy for. The main challenge results from state and nonstate actors each employing technologies and strategies that are most appropriate for their own field, in a multimode confrontation. It may include exploiting modern capabilities to support insurgent, terrorist and criminal activities, as well as use of high-tech military capabilities combined with terrorist actions and cyber warfare operations against economic and financial targets. Therefore, it still largely presupposes the application of kinetic force — military power — to defeat the enemy.

There are two problems. First, hybrid warfare presupposes application of kinetic force. Russia's new generation warfare does not. Second, it is a conceptual mistake to try to fit Russia's new strategy, the result of extensive military academic deliberation, into Western concepts. The word hybrid is catchy, since it may represent a mix of anything. However, as a military concept, it is the result of American military thought. Its basic framework differs from that developed by Russia. Therefore, it is a methodological mistake to try to view a theory developed independently by the Russian military in a theoretical framework developed in another country, reflecting a different culture and strategic understanding of the conduct of warfare.

An often ignored aspect of Russian military art is the idea of asymmetry in warfare. As Putin put it in 2006, "We should not go after quantity. ... Our responses must be based on intellectual superiority. They will be asymmetrical, not as costly, but will unquestionably make our nuclear triad more reliable and effective." In its classic definition, asymmetry is a strategy of a weaker opponent to fight a stronger adversary. The main idea, as Carl von Clausewitz put it, is that war "is not merely a political act but a real political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, a carrying out of the same by other means. ... The political design is the object, while war is the means, and the means can never be thought of apart from the object." Since the objective of war is to achieve political gains, the instruments of warfare may be military or



Russian nationalists take part in choreographed demonstrations against the pro-European movement in Ukraine and Western sanctions against Russia.

REUTERS

countries welcome obscure financial flows from the post-Soviet space, and the Kremlin bets that these economic and financial interconnections will allow it to get away with aggression. Although this concept may explain Russia's idea that there is a war of civilizations, it fails to reflect how it is conducting warfare, retired Russian Maj. Gen. Alexander Vladimirov wrote



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nonmilitary. A direct attack followed by territorial occupation and annexation might not be necessary; therefore, warfare may be direct or indirect.

In the first case, this means to disarm and destroy the enemy. In the second, it means to wear down the enemy by a process of gradual exhaustion of capabilities, equipment, troops and moral resistance. One of the best examples is the Vietnam War. The Viet Cong and its North Vietnamese ally were able to resist American forces until they withdrew. Since the Vietnamese communists achieved their political objectives, even without directly defeating American forces, they won the war. Although for Clausewitz, indirect warfare was a matter of resistance, the Russian strategy

ABOVE: Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, right, attends a wreath-laying ceremony at the Tomb to the Unknown Soldier in Moscow in April 2015 before meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin. Russia hopes to seed division within the European Union through bilateral economic and energy deals with member states. EPA



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is based rather on Sun Tzu's idea that "warfare is the art (tao) of deceit. ... Attack where he (the enemy) is not prepared; go by way of places where it would never occur to him you would go."

Another important aspect of Russian asymmetric warfare is Mao Zedong's strategy of using regular and irregular forces together. Mao viewed guerrilla and conventional forces as different parts of the same mechanism for defeating the enemy. Therefore, attacks were both symmetric and asymmetric, dispersing the enemy's strength. However, the most valuable lesson the Russians learned from the Chinese regards the ideological aspect of warfare. This was exemplified during the Sino-Japanese War. Since the ideological dimension of war is fundamental to victory, especially during stabilization operations, winning the hearts and minds of the population is decisive. Mao had a clear advantage, since he had a clear ideology to offer, while the Japanese did not, retired Japanese Lt. Gen. Noboru Yamaguchi wrote in a 2012 article for *Hybrid Warfare*.

## RUSSIA'S ASYMMETRIC STRATEGY

This is the basis for the Russian strategy of creating an alternative reality. The idea is that society's support for the strategic objectives of war — the legitimization of war — is fundamental to achieve victory. The success of military campaigns is more dependent on the relationship between military and nonmilitary factors — the political, psychological, ideological and informational elements of the campaign — than on military power as an isolated variable, retired Russian officers Sergei Chekinov and Sergei Bogdanov wrote in a 2010 analysis for *Military Thought*.

Therefore, the objective of asymmetric warfare is to avoid direct military operations and interference in internal conflicts in other countries. In a 2003 article for the Russian-language journal *International Trends*, Victor Kremenyuk laid out the specifics of fighting weaker adversaries relying on the following strategy: Employ small units of specially trained troops; take preventive actions against irregular enemy forces; spread propaganda among local populations; provide military and material support to friendly groups in the country being attacked; scale back combat operations; and employ nonmilitary methods to pressure the opponent.

Chekinov and Bogdanov describe the main instruments of asymmetric warfare employed by Russia:

- Measures making the opponent apprehensive of the Russian Federation's intentions and responses;
- Demonstration of the readiness and potential of the Russian forces in a strategic area to repel an invasion with consequences unacceptable to the aggressor;
- Actions by Russian forces to deter a potential enemy by guaranteeing destruction of his most vulnerable military and strategically important targets to persuade him that an attack is hopeless;

- Impact of highly effective, state-of-the-art weapons systems;
- Widespread employment of indirect force and noncontact commitment of forces;
- Seizing and holding enemy territory only undertaken if the benefits are greater than the "combat costs," or if the end goals of the war cannot be achieved any other way;
- Information warfare as an independent form of combat along with economic, political, ideological, diplomatic forms;
- Information and psychological operations to weaken the enemy's military potential by other than armed force, by affecting his information flow processes, and by misleading and demoralizing the population and enemy military personnel;
- Significant damage to the enemy's future economic potential;
- A clear understanding by a potential adversary that military operations against Russia may turn into an environmental and sociopolitical catastrophe.

It is interesting to note that much of what has been written by Russian military experts about Russia's strategic challenges reflects how it has conducted warfare. When analyzing Russia's most important strategic challenges, Nagorny and Shurygin established the techniques and instruments the West would employ against Russia. Although their analysis is based mostly on "Color Revolutions" as the result of what they see as a strategy of controlled-chaos being deliberately employed by the West, it reveals more about the Russian strategy itself. They have formalized nine points of a strategy that, although they could be used by the West against Russia, in reality reflect much of the Russian asymmetric strategy used in Ukraine:

1. Promotion and support of armed actions by separatist groups with the objective of promoting chaos and territorial disintegration;
2. Polarization between the elite and society, resulting in a crisis of values followed by a process of orientation to Russian values;
3. Demoralization of the armed forces and military elite;
4. Strategic controlled degradation of the socio-economic situation;
5. Instigation of a socio-political crisis;
6. Intensification of simultaneous forms and models of psychological warfare;
7. Incitement of mass panic with the loss of confidence in key government institutions;
8. Defamation of political leaders who are not aligned with Russia's interests;
9. Annihilation of possibilities to form coalitions with foreign allies.

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In the field, this strategy means employing high-precision non-nuclear weapons, together with the support of subversive and reconnaissance groups. Strategic targets are those that, if destroyed, result in unacceptable damage for the country being attacked. According to Chekinov and Bogdanov, these include top government administration and military control systems, major manufacturing, fuel and energy facilities, transportation hubs and facilities (such as railroad hubs, bridges, ports, airports and tunnels), and potentially dangerous objects (hydroelectric power dams and hydroelectric power complexes, processing units of chemical plants, nuclear power facilities, storages of strong poisons and so forth). Russia's objective is to make the enemy understand that it may face an environmental and sociopolitical catastrophe, and therefore avoid engaging in combat.

These are the key elements of Russian new generation warfare. It combines direct/symmetrical actions with asymmetrical instruments, aiming to achieve the tactical objectives established by political leaders. Since the Russians understand they are not strong enough to win a war against NATO, their strategy relies on asymmetric methods. Most important is that this strategy is based on attacking an adversary's weak points. As a result, each campaign is unique.

## COUNTERING ASYMMETRIC WARFARE

The biggest challenge for European security and defense is Europe's unpreparedness to deal with this strategy. Russian military authors place significant importance on disorganizing military control, state administration and the air defense system. The strategy can also mislead the enemy, sway public opinion the attacker's way and incite anti-government demonstrations and other actions to erode resistance. In Europe, the Russian strategy has focused on stimulating the lack of political convergence towards common security interests. According to Mark Galeotti, this includes single-issue lobbies with divisive messages, well-funded fringe parties, media such as Russia Today, think tanks and business lobbies. The objective is not necessarily to gain direct support for Russia, but rather for Russia's agenda.

Russian strategy aims at debasing support for NATO and the EU; in the first case, to remove NATO's Article 5 mutual defense assurance; in the second, to weaken the geopolitical influence of the West. In other words, Russia uses democratic tools to fight against democracy. The only way to deal with this sort of warfare is with more democracy. This means more neutral information, analysis and education. Politicians need to be more honest, transparent and connected with common people. Economic policy should also take the interests of the population into account, and should not be designed merely to support the interests of the banking sector. Unfortunately, even in Europe, this seems to be a difficult task sometimes.

Russia's strategy is based on exploiting opponent's

weaknesses. Some argued that the Baltic region is the most important soft spot for European security. It is not. From the defense perspective, the mismanagement of the European economy in the name of specific economic ideologies and the interests of the financial system is the most serious threat to European security. Rising unemployment combined with low social security jeopardize the legitimacy of the state and of the EU as democratic institutions. A concrete indicator of this trend is the significant rise of Euroskepticism and the increasing popularity of nationalist and populist political parties with radical platforms. It also undermines the EU's soft-power, reducing its influence in the global arena.

However, the pure military aspect cannot be ignored. European countries have been forced to drastically cut defense budgets as a result of bailing out the financial system. For example, Spain's 41.4 billion euro bailout was the equivalent of almost five years of its defense budget. In 2014, Spain's defense spending fell 3.2 percent, including an 8.4 percent decrease in new investments. In the United Kingdom, the banking sector's bailout was equivalent to 21 years of the British defense budget, which is equivalent to the annual cost of servicing its public debt. France is expected to cut its defense budget 10 percent over five years, including a 12 percent reduction in personnel through 2019, making nearly 34,000 people unemployed. This not only reduces operational capability, but also increases social discontent.

The U.S. defense budget is also being cut because of sequestration. Since the U.S. already pays 75 percent of NATO's budget, it is clear that Europe is expected to take increased responsibility for its own security. At the same time, Russia has made huge investments in modernizing its armed forces and soon might be more militarily powerful than Europe (without the U.S.). Although that eastern neighbor could be considered Europe's most serious security threat, there is still terrorism, instability in Africa and, very importantly, the Arctic to contend with. It is important to remember that Russia has not only been modernizing, but developing its military capabilities in the Arctic at a rapid pace.

Some European officials propose increasing the capacity of the EU armed forces. However, since this is not possible without money, its operational future is unsure. Moreover, many members of the EU are also members of NATO. A second question is: Would a larger EU armed force duplicate NATO's capacities? The answer is probably yes. Besides addressing pragmatically the problem of legitimacy and other fine points, the EU needs to assess and coordinate a realistic assessment of its resources and interoperability, reconcile ambitions and capabilities, and provide budgetary and procurement guidance. Finally, the EU needs to address the problem of divergence by trying to establish a common understanding of the main threats to European security. □