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**Citation:** Lanoszka, A. (2016). Russian hybrid warfare and extended deterrence in eastern Europe. *International Affairs*, 92(1), pp. 175-195. doi: 10.1111/1468-2346.12509

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## Russian Hybrid Warfare and Extended Deterrence in Eastern Europe

Forthcoming in *International Affairs*

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October 2015

How Russia has used force against Ukraine since early 2014 has prompted some observers to remark that it is engaging in ‘hybrid warfare’. Rather than openly using military power to secure its political objectives in Ukraine, Russia has adopted a subtler approach intended to give the Kremlin ‘plausible deniability’ while reducing the costs associated with engaging Ukraine’s armed forces directly. To illustrate, Russia did not launch a traditional invasion to wrest Crimea away from Kiev’s control. Instead, it fomented local pro-Russian demonstrations; inserted unmarked militia groups (‘little green men’) to occupy official government buildings; and oversaw a local referendum to lend an air of legitimacy to the annexation effort. In eastern Ukraine, Moscow continues to deny that it is directly involved in armed hostilities between Kiev and rebel groups. Nevertheless, it provides those rebels with diplomatic cover as well as heavy munitions and logistical support. Despite the Kremlin’s assertions to the contrary, strong evidence indicates that some Russian units are fighting Ukrainian forces in the Donbas region.<sup>1</sup>

Russia’s military statecraft has also raised concerns regarding the security of Russia’s other neighbors, especially the Baltic countries. Amplifying these concerns is the June 2015 announcement that Russia is reconsidering the legitimacy of the

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<sup>1</sup> Maksymilian Czuperski, John Herbst, Eliot Higgins, Alina Polyajova, and Damon Wilson, *Hiding in Plain Sight: Putin’s War in Ukraine*, Atlantic Council (2015). Online: <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/hiding-in-plain-sight-putin-s-war-in-ukraine-and-boris-nemtsov-s-putin-war>, accessed 18 August 2015. Other labels have been used to refer to Russian military tactics in Ukraine. On non-linear warfare, see Mark Galeotti, ‘The ‘Gerasimov Doctrine and Russian Non-War’, *Moscow’s Shadows*, 6 July 2014. Online: <https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/>, accessed June 24, 2015.

independence they had won in 1990–1991.<sup>2</sup> Individually and collectively, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania suffer from an unfavorable balance of power with Russia. Their armies feature about 2800, 1250, and 7350 soldiers respectively. By contrast, the Russian Ground Forces has 250,000 soldiers, to say nothing of Russia’s aerial, maritime, and nuclear capabilities.<sup>3</sup> Yet the Baltic countries are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and so enjoy an Article Five commitment from the United States and other allies. This provision of the alliance’s founding treaty affirms that an attack against one member constitutes an attack against all. Accordingly, the Baltic countries enjoy the military protection of a conventionally superior and nuclear-armed NATO, thereby offsetting the disparities they have with Russia. Still, they see themselves as vulnerable. They fear that, with hybrid warfare, Russia would use subversion rather than pursue a conventional military engagement against them. It remains unclear what an alliance like NATO could do to deter (and defend against) such forms of aggression against them.

Despite these concerns, existing descriptions of hybrid warfare suffer from important conceptual weaknesses. The purpose of this essay is to describe the logic of hybrid warfare and explain why former Soviet republics like the Baltic countries might be vulnerable to it. This essay first defines hybrid warfare, conceiving it as a marriage of conventional deterrence and insurgent tactics. Rather than being a new form of warfare, hybrid warfare is a strategy that the belligerent uses to advance its political goals on the battlefield by applying military force subversively. The essay then describes why former Soviet republics are vulnerable to Russian hybrid warfare. Upon doing so, it inductively proposes four conditions that jointly make hybrid warfare more likely: first, the belligerent has local escalation dominance; second, the belligerent seeks to revise the status quo; third, the belligerent has a relatively weak neighboring state insofar as it lacks a robust civil society and has local ethnic or linguistic cleavages that can be exploited; and fourth, the weak neighbor has some ethnic or linguistic ties to the belligerent.

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<sup>2</sup> “How Russia Sees Baltic Sovereignty,” *Moscow Times*, 14 July, 2015. Online: <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/how-russia-sees-baltic-sovereignty/525643.html> , accessed 17 August, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> *The Military Balance*, International Institute for Strategic Studies (2015): 90; 114-115; and 180.

By describing why Russia has resorted to hybrid warfare within the former Soviet Union, and where other belligerents might do the same elsewhere, this paper shows that military solutions are incomplete. After all, hybrid warfare exploits nationalist identities, thereby obfuscating responsibility and even gaining political support among foreign audiences. Hybrid warfare incorporates the most potent attributes of an insurgency while minimizing the drawbacks associated with using conventional force. It is not a strategy borne out of weakness but out of strength. Thus, in the Baltic context, Russia's strategy aims to weaken NATO willingness to follow through on its own deterrent threats. Military solutions overlook this dimension of Russian hybrid warfare because they focus disproportionately on modifying or restructuring military capabilities. These capabilities can deter some forms of aggression, but they may be insufficient for preventing Russia from sowing local discord. Political solutions that lie beyond NATO's ambit are necessary for the Baltic countries to overcome their biggest vulnerability to hybrid warfare: namely, the presence of large stateless populations in Estonia and Latvia.

This essay first conceptualizes 'hybrid warfare' and proceeds to explain its appeal for the Kremlin in NATO's eastern flank. The essay then induces the general conditions under which a belligerent might launch hybrid warfare before reviewing recent proposals for how NATO should deter Russia.

### **The Concept and Utility of Hybrid Warfare**

Military strategists have long been aware of how belligerents could wage war against their adversaries in ways that do not involve set-piece battles or large coordinated military campaigns between opposing armies to score decisive victories. With the emergence of nationalism and class identities in the nineteenth century, military theorists like Carl von Clausewitz and political thinkers like Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Lenin contemplated the conditions under which insurgencies could prevail against central governments. T.E. Lawrence and Mao Ze-Dong also wrote on how best to mount military operations against stronger adversaries. A common thread in all these analyses is that direct military confrontations would only benefit the strong. Accordingly, more incremental, subtler, and indirect tactics are appropriate. These tactics include using

propaganda to mobilize support for the insurgency and to demoralize enemy forces as well as attacking the weak points of opposing militaries.<sup>4</sup>

Contemporary military theorists have drawn on this intellectual tradition to speculate over the nature of war in an age marked less by interstate wars and more by civil wars. Presumably because nuclear weapons make direct military confrontation between them too risky and costly, major powers choose not to fight each other.<sup>5</sup> When they do wage wars, as the United States did in Vietnam and Russia did in Chechnya, they fight weaker adversaries, usually to change regimes, mount counterinsurgencies, or launch proxy campaigns against peer competitors. Military theorists argue that contemporary wars between adversaries of vastly unequal capabilities now combine elements of regular conventional warfare with elements of irregular (guerilla) warfare. That is, in one military campaign, large formations might still be used for some missions, but other missions could require smaller, more mobile units that sometimes need to act covertly to inflict damage on the adversary. Russell Glenn thus defines a hybrid threat as:

‘any adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs a tailored mix of conventional, irregular, terrorism and criminal means or activities in the operational battlespace. Rather than a single entity, a hybrid threat or challenger may be comprised of a combination of state and non-state actors.’<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, although they argue that hybrid warfare has been a feature of international politics for millennia, Williamson Murray and Peter R. Mansoor define hybrid warfare to be “a conflict involving a combination of conventional military forces and irregulars (guerrillas, insurgents and terrorists), which could include both state and non-state actors, aimed at achieving a common political purpose.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> András Rác, ‘Russia’s Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy’s Ability to Resist’, *FIIA Report*, no. 43 (2015): pp. 19-24.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Jervis, *The Meaning of the Nuclear Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Russell W. Glenn, “Thoughts on “Hybrid” Conflict”, *Small Wars Journal*, 2 March, 2009, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/mag/docs-temp/188-glenn.pdf>, accessed 24 June 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Williamson Murray and Peter R. Mansoor, *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): p. 3.

Yet the alleged hybrid warfare that Russia has used against Ukraine reveals the inadequacies of these definitions. Specifically, the focus on the combined use of regular and irregular warfare is at once too broad and too narrow. It is too broad because many wars in history have incorporated features of both regular and irregular warfare. As much as the Grand Coalition waged set-piece battles against Nazi Germany in the Second World War, its members also backed resistance groups fighting Nazi occupation, dropped propaganda leaflets, and supported acts of sabotage (e.g., Operation *Gunnarside*). Even the Second World War can be considered to have been a hybrid war. The focus is also too narrow because in these definitions both regular and irregular wars are used either simultaneously or sequentially in the theater of operations. However, the occupation of Crimea did not involve Russia deploying regular forces in Ukraine until the peninsula was already secured under its control. The annexation of Crimea was conspicuous in its *lack* of regular warfare.

Mindful of these observations, I reconceptualize hybrid warfare as a strategy rather than a new form of war. It is a strategy because it deliberately integrates the use of various instruments of national power so as to achieve international objectives in light of the believed goals and capabilities of the adversary. It can cover a range of expedients so long as an overarching goal guides their purpose.<sup>8</sup> As such, hybrid warfare involves the coordinated use of regular and irregular military means towards different but complementary ends. The use of irregular warfare is to expose and to exploit a target's vulnerabilities at lower levels of violence than a direct military confrontation between militaries. Ironically, the purpose of regular warfare is to engage in it as minimally as possible. That is, the belligerent threatens to use higher gradations of military force so as to deter its target from retaliating strongly. Hybrid warfare thus requires that the belligerent possesses escalation dominance, meaning that it can engage and defeat its target at different levels of military escalation.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, in waging hybrid warfare, the belligerent is actively striving to undermine its target's territorial integrity, subvert its internal political cohesion, and disrupt its economy. Hybrid warfare can serve such

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<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, a belligerent using hybrid warfare can alter and adapt its approach to respond to unforeseen events or moves made by its target.

<sup>9</sup> A similar point is made in Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014): p. 129.

revisionist goals as territorial expansion and the imposition of indirect rule over another (nominally) sovereign state.

The irregular military component of hybrid warfare can encompass different tactics of varying intensity, many of which have been used in insurgencies. On one end of the spectrum is *propaganda*, which is a communicative act that a belligerent undertakes in order to influence the attitudes held by members of the target's society. Propaganda serves to hamper the target's ability to draw on popular support in pursuing its policies and mobilizing its resources. Next is *espionage* whereby agents clandestinely gather intelligence in order to confer a coercive bargaining advantage for the belligerent. Alternatively, agents could spread deliberately false information among unsuspecting members of a public regarding the activities and intentions of particular organizations. More intensely, the belligerent can resort to *agitation* so as to create dissension and discord within a target society when none yet exists. The next tactic is *criminal disorder* whereby the belligerent's agents engage in hit-and-run attacks, cyber attacks, sabotage, or kidnapping. The belligerent could also cultivate *fifth columns*, or groups of individuals, usually acting covertly, who are embedded within a much larger population that they seek to undermine. Fifth columns could agitate, but they might simply wait for hostilities to break out between the target and the belligerent before becoming active. Such fifth columns might facilitate the military campaign of the government they support at an opportune moment. Next, the belligerent could *insert unmarked soldiers* who are armed but lack the insignia that would identify them and their home government. Unmarked soldiers enable the belligerent to man checkpoints, occupy government buildings and other sites of strategic interest, seize prized military assets, and clear an area ahead of an overt military operation. Most intensely, but still short of a direct military confrontation, the belligerent might launch *border skirmishes* to unsettle the target, probe its weaknesses, and sap its resources.

All these actions take place in the shadow of possible conventional war, and so it should be apparent that hybrid warfare is not a recent invention. Indeed, the Soviet Union employed these tactics immediately after the Second World War with Cominform, sponsoring communist movements in Europe and elsewhere to undermine capitalist

countries from within. Aggressors have used so-called ‘fifth columns’ to fulfill political objectives at the expense of their adversaries. One illustrative example of a ‘fifth column’ was the Sudeten-German Free Corps that was active in Czechoslovakia in the late 1930s. This paramilitary organization was ethnically German and had Nazi sympathies. It launched terrorist attacks to incite the Czechoslovak government into a military or political response that would precipitate Nazi actions to rescue co-ethnics and annex the Sudetenland into the Third Reich.<sup>10</sup>

Hybrid warfare is not simply guerilla warfare waged by a strong state. Consider one definition of guerilla warfare that emphasizes four distinguishing attributes. First, guerrilla fighters are irregular forces “organized in small, highly mobile units and operating without heavy weaponry such as tanks, artillery, or aircraft.” Second, guerilla fighters prefer protracted warfare, use such tactics as hit-and-run attacks and terrorism, and avoid set-piece battles. Third, guerilla forces often operate in areas that their adversaries control, thereby waging warfare in a manner that obscures the lines of battle. Finally, guerrillas depend on local populations for support. Guerilla fighters even hide amongst members of the local population to prevent detection by their adversary.<sup>11</sup> Hybrid warfare can incorporate these features, but some aspects of guerrilla war do not have to be present. For example, hybrid warfare does not preclude the use of heavy weaponry. The belligerent can arm local groups with heavy weapons in order to erode the strength of the target while still avoiding a direct confrontation. Moreover, protracted warfare might be unacceptable. The belligerent could use a fifth column for destabilizing a contested environment, thereby positioning itself to move swiftly to grab a certain prize before the target can respond.

This desire for avoiding a direct military confrontation can have different sources, some of which may become more salient in contemporary times. First, global norms against war, conquest, and territorial violations have strengthened since the Second

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<sup>10</sup> Bruce B. Campbell, ‘The SA After the Rohm Purge’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 28:4 (1993): p. 667.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin Valentino, Paul Huth, and Dylan Balch-Lindsay, “‘Draining the Sea’: Mass Killing and Guerilla Warfare’, *International Organization* 58:2 (2004): pp. 383-384.



World War.<sup>12</sup> States find it harder to justify unilateral seizures of territory held by other sovereign states. They prefer to legitimate or rationalize their uses of forces through international institutions like the United Nations Security Council.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, Russia annexed Crimea in a manner intended to make the take-over appear indigenously led. Second, more direct uses of force might elicit resistance from a militarily superior coalition of adversaries. If the target has powerful allies or friends, then hybrid warfare also helps avoid triggering an intervention that the belligerent does not believe it can handle. This observation implies that the belligerent has local escalation dominance but not global escalation dominance. By introducing an element of ‘plausible deniability’, the belligerent could forestall a widening of the conflict while still degrading the capabilities of its target. Third, domestic considerations might make hybrid warfare an attractive option to the belligerent. An overt military conflict could be unpopular, especially if it means imposing some hardship on the domestic public. Put together, hybrid warfare is appealing because it is not as costly as a direct military confrontation on the battlefield. It also skirts international norms and escapes harmful political consequences.

Hybrid warfare thus features a paradox. By resorting to irregular warfare in order to realize political objectives, the belligerent appears to be averse to military escalation. However, the belligerent is using the threat of military escalation to unsettle and to deter a strong response by its target. How can this threat be credible if the very adoption of the hybrid strategy should undercut it? Several answers are possible. Because the belligerent has local escalation dominance, the target is self-deterred from escalating. It knows that it will be defeated in an actual military confrontation with that belligerent. Another possibility is that hybrid warfare gives the belligerent ‘plausible deniability’ and thus deters external intervention by confusing the potential opposition. The belligerent can disclaim responsibility for local agitators and rebel groups. Alternatively, it could claim that the actions of local agitators have popular support. In either case, the belligerent can exploit the resulting uncertainty so as to keep its adversaries off balance.

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<sup>12</sup> Tanisha Fazal, *State Death: The Politics and Geography of Conquest, Occupation, and Annexation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> On legitimating military force, see Ian Hurd, *After Anarchy: Legitimacy and Power in the United Nations Security Council* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). On rationalizing military force, see Alexander Thompson, ‘Coercion Through IOs: The Security Council and the Logic of Information Transmission’, *International Organization* 60:1 (2006): pp. 1-34.

Of course, the benefits of hybrid warfare must be considered alongside the costs. Subterfuge generally requires patience and care. It does not yield immediate results: fifth columns need nurturing before they can become operational and propaganda might take time to resonate with the target population, if at all. Local enforcement agencies and intelligence communities can also undertake countermeasures against agitators, saboteurs, and enemy agents. Moreover, targets of hybrid warfare will not take the bait if they suspect that they are being goaded into a certain reaction. Agitation might even backfire if members of the target population rally around their government rather than show dissension. Finally, as in any war, miscalculation is likely. It might even be more common because the local agents serving the belligerent could have their own interests and become difficult to manage once they are armed.

### **The Appeal of Hybrid Warfare in the Former Soviet Region**

The seeming paradox at the heart of hybrid warfare is also resolvable if we consider situational factors. Below I argue that particular conditions within the former Soviet Union might facilitate Russian subversion, forestall military escalation, deter external intervention, and, by extension, make hybrid warfare viable. At least four attributes of the region deserve mention: its ethnic heterogeneity, the presence of latent historical grievances, the weakness of local civil societies, and the resulting regional complexity that Russia is better positioned to grasp than external powers. Although Russia has escalation dominance over Ukraine, this asymmetry alone does not account for the substance of the Russian hybrid warfare we have so far observed. Nor does it fully reveal the ways in which other countries of the former Soviet Union might be vulnerable. Finally, the foregoing attributes of the region would not matter if Russia had no interest to mount hybrid warfare. I discuss briefly the political and doctrinal drivers of this interest before inducing several general propositions regarding where we should observe hybrid warfare.

Because the following discussion addresses issues regarding ethnicity and nationalism, several definitions are necessary. An ethnic group has a group name, a sense of common descent, shared historical memories, shared cultural attributes like language

and religion, and some degree of territorial attachment.<sup>14</sup> A nation is a ‘socially mobilized body of individuals ... striving to create or maintain their own state.’<sup>15</sup> Nationalism is the ideology underpinning this effort. Ethnic groups can engage in nationalism if they value independent statehood.

### *Ethnic Heterogeneity*

The Soviet Union was one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world. Ethnic Russians barely formed a majority of its total population. Its collapse in 1990–1991 meant that some ethnic groups declared that the Soviet republic they dominated as their own newly independent country.<sup>16</sup> Conversely, many ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking peoples found themselves in new countries governed by an elite who did not speak their language or share their ethnicity. For example, Estonia and Latvia feature populations that are about a quarter Russian. In Estonia and Latvia, about seven percent and twelve percent of their populations, respectively, are stateless, the majority of which are ethnically Russian. They lack political rights and are more likely to experience unemployment.<sup>17</sup> Other countries might have much smaller Russian populations but they still contain diverse populations. Ethnic groups in these countries sometimes clamor for greater autonomy. Abkhazians and South Ossetians in Georgia are two examples. Ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis still contest the region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Ethnic heterogeneity in the former Soviet region alone does not mean conflict, but it does offer opportunities for the Kremlin to foment local discord to its advantage. First, Moscow can assist the efforts of aspiring secessionist groups at the expense of those countries that pursue foreign policies Russia sees as inimical to its own interests. These secessionist groups do not necessarily have to be Russian or speak Russian to be of value

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<sup>14</sup> Anthony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986): pp. 22-28.

<sup>15</sup> Ernst B. Haas, ‘What is Nationalism and Why Should We Study It?’ *International Organization* 40:3 (1986): pp. 707-744.

<sup>16</sup> On how ethnic mobilization and nationalism spurred the demise of the Soviet Union, see Ben Fowkes, *The Disintegration of the Soviet Union* (London: Macmillan, 1997); Mark Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Astrid S. Tuminez, ‘Nationalism, Ethnic Pressures, and the Breakup of the Soviet Union’, *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5:4 (2003): pp. 81-136.

<sup>17</sup> Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2014/15: The State of the World’s Human Rights*, 2015: pp. 147, 226.

to the Kremlin. What matters is whether they can challenge or fight governments that the Kremlin dislikes. Second, as the Kremlin has done already with regards to Ukraine, it can assert itself as a guarantor for the political rights of self-identifying Russians or Russian-speaking peoples. Whether those groups see such protection as desirable is immaterial. Russia can still intervene in domestic policy debates of its neighbors when language and other cultural rights are debated. The Kremlin might even find individuals within those Russian minority populations to do its bidding. Such a situation is dangerous. If governments start seeing certain minority populations as potential fifth columns, then they could take repressive measures. Not only would such a response entail the unfair and harmful treatment of minority populations, but it would also prompt the Kremlin to act upon its self-proclaimed status as the defender of Russian rights.

### *Latent Historic Grievances*

Ethnic politics have salience in this region because it involves myths and symbols that continue to resonate. Symbols are emotionally charged referents to beliefs that supply meaning to events or actions for a particular group of people. Ethnic groups value symbols that evoke kinship feelings as well as a shared sense of history. Sometimes these symbols justify chauvinism or hostility towards another group. When members of an ethnic group fear that their rights and welfare are threatened, the symbols that orient their worldly outlook can shape their response. Those groups with a history of having experienced victimization, domination, and other collective traumas might react more forcefully than others to safeguard their interests. Accordingly, ethnic conflict does not have to be the result of cynical elites seeking to keep their political offices. Mass-led movements could instead emerge, thereby compelling elites to make ethnic appeals in order to retain support.<sup>18</sup>

As elsewhere in Europe, nationalist and ethnic identities in Eastern Europe were the product of social processes that began in the nineteenth century. However, elite reactions to imperial domination influenced the formation of these identities. Lithuanian nationalism developed in response to perceptions of Polish cultural hegemony among

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<sup>18</sup> Stuart J. Kaufman, *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001): pp. 30-38.

literary elites. Ukrainian nationalism was partly borne out of a shared sense of subjugation to Polish, Russian, and even Soviet control.<sup>19</sup> Several other nationalisms coalesced in light of how ethnic groups (e.g., the Georgians) experienced imperial Russian, and later Soviet, colonization.

A history of experiencing domination can already create an acute sensitivity to external threats. Compounding this problem in the former Soviet region is how traumatic events impinged upon the historical development of these nationalisms over the course of the twentieth century. For an illustration, consider the history of Polish-Ukrainian relations. In the interwar period, ethnic Ukrainians living in eastern Poland saw Polish rule as discriminatory and repressive. So much so that some used the Soviet invasion in 1939 as an occasion to launch reprisals against local Poles. The bloodshed that ensued created spiral dynamics whereby members of both ethnic groups would escalate conflict by targeting each other with increasingly brutal violence.<sup>20</sup> A campaign by the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) to cleanse the region of Volhynia ethnically led to the killing of about 100,000 Poles. In the internecine conflict that continued even after 1945 in what is today western Ukraine, Poles committed their own atrocities against Ukrainian populations, particularly during a campaign of forcible resettlement called Operation Vistula. Both sides thus have their own grievances and a sense of being wronged. The history of Lithuanian-Polish relations features similar moral controversies in light of Polish massacres of Lithuanians and Lithuanian cooperation with Nazis.<sup>21</sup>

These events unfolded against the backdrop of a larger struggle between Nazi German and Soviet forces. This conflict had visited its own terrors upon the many civilians caught in the middle. The Soviet Union ultimately prevailed against Nazi Germany, with the benefit of being positioned to rule over a large share of Central-Eastern Europe in the post-war period. Establishing this rule was oftentimes violent. The three Baltic countries once again lost their independence and were absorbed into the

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<sup>19</sup> For a comparative history of how these nationalisms developed, see Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> On spiral dynamics and ethnic war, see Barry R. Posen, 'The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict', *Survival* 35:1 (1993): pp. 27-47.

<sup>21</sup> On these ethnic conflicts in the 1940s, see Snyder, *Reconstruction*, pp. 154-201.

Soviet Union. If they had survived the war, elites from the interwar period fled from their home countries, withdrew from political life, or suffered some fate at the hands of Soviet police. The communist parties that installed themselves in power in the region regarded stakeholders in the interwar regimes and anti-communist opponents alike as counterrevolutionary enemies and treated them accordingly. Over time these communist regimes consolidated power, even gaining the acquiescence of the populations over which they ruled despite the occasional revolt and reformist movement.

These traumatic experiences provide a repository of historical grievances and emotionally charged symbols that the Kremlin can use to divide and conquer target societies and to prevent strong alliance ties from developing between them. It is not accidental that it denounced Euromaidan and the post-Yanukovich regime in early 2014 as being steeped in the historical influence of Stepan Bandera, the leader of the OUN. After all, under his leadership, the OUN briefly sided with Nazi Germany in 1941 to subvert Soviet influence in Ukraine. Even after the annexation of Crimea, the Kremlin appealed to the linguistic and ethnic identities of populations in eastern Ukraine so as to present itself as a legitimate guarantor of their security. The Kremlin arguably hoped to inspire an indigenous movement that would agitate for unification with Russia, provoke Kiev into a violent response, and invite a Russian intervention to rescue it.<sup>22</sup>

Such manipulation of symbols has become common. Elsewhere in the region, Facebook groups have appeared demanding the deployment of ‘little green men’ to support greater independence on behalf of Russian and Polish speaking populations living in Lithuania.<sup>23</sup> Polish and Lithuanian government officials quickly denounced these efforts as provocations. Another cynical manipulation of symbolic politics involved President Vladimir Putin’s defense of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. This treaty between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union contained guarantees of non-aggression as well as secret provisions outlining the annexation and partition of countries in Eastern Europe. In

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<sup>22</sup> For a refutation of these propagandistic efforts, see ‘Четыре мифа о Степане Бандере’, *BBC Russia News*, 28 February 2014. Online:

[http://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2014/02/140227\\_bandera\\_myths.shtml](http://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2014/02/140227_bandera_myths.shtml), accessed 18 August 2015.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Chcą na Wileńszczyźnie ‘polskich zielonych ludzików’. I podszywają się pod legalną organizację,’ *Gazeta Wyborcza* (2 February, 2015). Online:

[http://m.wyborcza.pl/wyborcza/1,105226,17346094,Chca\\_na\\_Wilenszczyznie\\_polskich\\_zielonych\\_ludzikow\\_.html](http://m.wyborcza.pl/wyborcza/1,105226,17346094,Chca_na_Wilenszczyznie_polskich_zielonych_ludzikow_.html), accessed 18 August 2015.

defending this treaty, Putin referred to Poland's annexation of disputed territories in Czechoslovakia to argue that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was typical of its time. Yet these abortive efforts to create discord are a reminder of how nationalist controversies could be stirred in a manner that disrupts the internal cohesion of NATO members and the diplomatic relations between them.

### *Weak Civil Societies*

Because of the historical legacies with which they reckon, many former Soviet states have weak civil societies.<sup>24</sup> Of course, groups of people participate in voluntary associations independent of government and business, but social networks in the region have not acquired the same density found in Western Europe.<sup>25</sup> The weakness of civil society in the region has several implications for local political order. First, norms conducive to liberal democracy and civic values remain under-developed. These norms include those that promote community participation and inter-group cooperation. Second, as Francis Fukuyuma writes, 'civil society serves to balance the state and to protect individuals from the state's power.'<sup>26</sup> Consequently, authoritarianism remains a persistent feature of the post-Soviet space. Alexander Lukashenko's autocracy in Belarus endures partly because national identity is weak and voluntary associations have historically been repressed. Lukashenko has sought to extend his rule by actively discouraging the formation of Belarusian national identity and keeping tight control over associational life in Belarus. Even where elections are contested, as in Ukraine, elite infighting dominates national politics, resulting in governments with democratic *and* authoritarian features.<sup>27</sup> Still, robust liberal democracies like the Baltic countries have the strongest civil societies

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<sup>24</sup> On the origins of authoritarianism in some post-communist states, see Keith Darden and Anna Grzymala-Busse, 'The Great Divide: Literacy, Nationalism, and the Communist Collapse,' *World Politics* 59:1 (2006): pp. 83-115; Valerie Bunce, 'The National Idea: Imperial Legacies and Post-Communist Pathways in Eastern Europe,' *East European Politics and Societies* 19:3 (2005): pp. 406-442; and Grigore Pop-Eleches, 'Historical Legacies and Post-Communist Regime Change,' *Journal of Politics* 69:4 (2007): pp. 908-926.

<sup>25</sup> Roger Sapsford and Pamela Abbott, 'Trust, Confidence, and Social Environment in Post-Communist Societies,' *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 39:1 (2006): pp. 59-71.

<sup>26</sup> Francis Fukuyuma 'Social Capital, Civil Society and Development,' *Third World Quarterly* 22:1 (2001): p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> On the elite nature of Ukrainian politics, see Neil Robinson, 'Economic and Political Hybridity: Patrimonial Capitalism in the post-Soviet Space,' *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 4:2 (2013): pp. 143-144; and Taras Kuzio, 'Twenty Years as an Independent State: Ukraine's Ten Logical Inconsistencies,' *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 45:3-4 (2012): pp. 429-438.

in the former Soviet space.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, Estonia and Latvia feature large numbers of stateless persons who are not yet integrated in local political institutions and the domestic economy.

Civil society matters because it provides a buffer against social cleavages being exploited by hybrid warfare. After all, hybrid warfare involves manipulating existing cleavages to sow internal dissension and foment local discord. A strong civil society is one where different groups overcome the cleavages that may divide them so as to cooperate with another in the interests of larger political stability. It immunizes against some forms of hybrid warfare. By contrast, a weak civil society and the accompanying weakness of civic values will not inspire confidence among citizens in the governing institutions of the state. A belligerent can exploit this situation by finding recruits and opportunities to pursue its political objectives to the detriment of the target government.

### *Regional Complexity*

The former Soviet region is complex because it features diverse ethnic groups that may have their own latent historical grievances against each other. These tensions are likely to persist if local civil societies remain weak. Outsiders are thus prone to misunderstanding regional politics. They might attribute ethnic conflict to situations where none exists; underestimate the power of symbols that particular groups cherish; overlook cleavages that could affect local political allegiances; and mistake the goals and preferences of local populations and their leaders. Accordingly, because it is relatively more familiar with its own region, the Kremlin has a tactical advantage over other major powers. It can exploit western uncertainties and misperceptions by justifying its actions as having indigenous support. Other states (or at least members of their publics) that could otherwise mobilize a response to Russian hybrid warfare might too easily accept the Kremlin's interpretation of regional events. Using its media outlets, the Kremlin can disseminate its own perspective widely, thereby framing local political developments on favorable terms.

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<sup>28</sup> See Anders Uhlin, *Post-Soviet Civil Society: Democratization in Russia and the Baltic States* (New York: Routledge, 2006).



This tactical advantage was apparent in the early stages of the crisis between Russia and Ukraine in early 2014. Beforehand, a common interpretation of Ukrainian politics in the western media was that Ukrainian politics featured two coalitions, one pro-Western (or pro-European) and another pro-Russian. These coalitions formed on linguistic cleavages between Ukrainian speakers located in western Ukraine and Russian speakers in eastern Ukraine. Samuel Huntington once called attention to these demographic factors to argue that Ukraine represented a ‘fractured state’ – the allegiance of which would always be torn between the west and Russia so long as it continues to exist in its post-Soviet form.<sup>29</sup> Yet this view oversimplifies pre-2014 Ukrainian politics. The western city of Odessa is a pocket of a Russian-speaking population whose relationship and identification with Russia is at best ambiguous. The Crimean status referendum in March 2014 is another case in point. The reported poll results suggested that voters overwhelmingly favored joining Russia as a federal subject. Reports of coercion and fraud cast doubt on these results. Nevertheless, studies predating the Ukrainian crisis show that survey respondents in Crimea were mostly in favor of Crimea gaining at least more autonomy vis-à-vis Ukraine, if not integration with Russia. Yet pro-separation forces in Crimea generally lost strength over the course of the post-Soviet period.<sup>30</sup>

Notwithstanding this complexity, the western narrative of the Ukrainian political crisis in early 2014 relied on standard tropes of an east-west national division. The implication of such characterizations of Ukraine is that Russian claims of indigenous support might have some validity, if not legitimacy. The result is that international efforts to challenge Russian efforts became difficult to mount on liberal principles, especially if the majority of a region’s population had expressed support for Russian integration in the past. Moreover, uncertainty deepens among outsider states as to the true nature of the political interests of local actors and how they ought to be accommodated in a political solution that differs from Russian proposals. Russia’s strategy had this goal in mind since its leaders adopted such legal rhetoric to deter a western response. As Roy Allison wrote,

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<sup>29</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996): pp. 165-168.

<sup>30</sup> Taras Kuzio, ‘Strident, Ambiguous, and Duplicitous: Ukraine and the 2008 Russia-Georgia War’, *Demokratyzatsiya* 17:4 (2009): p. 357.

its legal rhetoric ‘aimed to blur the legal and illegal, to create justificatory smokescreens, in part by exploiting some areas of uncertainty in international law, while making unfounded assertions of ‘facts’ (especially ostensible threats to Russians and Russian-speakers).’<sup>31</sup> And so despite condemning the annexation of Crimea and the subsequent local referendum, NATO leaders had few ideas for reversing this outcome.

### *Why Russia Might Use Hybrid Warfare*

Whether the Baltic states or other former Soviet republics are vulnerable to hybrid warfare is only if Russia has an interest to expand or reassert its regional hegemony. After all, Putin famously stated that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest tragedy of the twentieth century. Moreover, Putin and other Russian leaders might see their political survival as linked to the fate of those neighboring regimes that share similar political values. The Kremlin might regard the success of opposition movements in nearby countries as unsettling because they fear “the transnational spread of revolution.”<sup>32</sup> Regardless, the interest driving hybrid war is not oriented on defending the international status quo since it can involve territorial expansion and violating the sovereignty of other countries.

Contemporary Russian military doctrine emphasizes the need to respond to both external and internal threats. This doctrinal perspective has a historical basis because the Kremlin has feared not only other great powers, but also subversive organizations operating within areas of its control. Against external threats, under the influence of Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky’s military thought, Soviet war-planning centered on using combined arms to strike deep into the enemy’s rear, thereby exploiting firepower and mobility to go on the offensive.<sup>33</sup> These plans went unchanged even when the Soviet Union incorporated nuclear weapons into its arsenal. Against threats emanating within its sphere of influence, the Soviet military played more of a domestic political role within

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<sup>31</sup> Roy Allison, ‘Russian ‘Deniable’ Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules,’ *International Affairs* 90:6 (2014): p. 1259.

<sup>32</sup> Mark R. Beissinger, “Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions,” *Perspectives on Politics* 5:2 (2007): p. 259.

<sup>33</sup> William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998): pp. 72-82.

satellite countries, intimidating potential opponents by its mere presence.<sup>34</sup> In Czechoslovakia, where the Soviet Union did not have a troop presence before 1968, Warsaw Pact forces invaded in order to quash the Prague Spring. Similarly, the Soviet Union deployed its military in Afghanistan to prop up a communist regime.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia inherited most of its military assets. Due to its weakened international position and fragmented domestic politics, countering internal threats preoccupied the attention of the Russian Armed Forces in the post-Cold War period. It fought two brutal counterinsurgencies in the republic of Chechnya that employed indiscriminate warfare extensively between 1994 and 2009. However, partly thanks to increased revenues from its indigenous energy sources, Russia restored its economy, modernized its military, and became more assertive in the former Soviet space. In 2008, the Kremlin fought a war against Georgia, ostensibly to protect South Ossetia and Abkhazia from Georgian military aggression. Russia resorted to traditional military means in persecuting its war against Georgia in 2008. This conflict involved set-piece battles and large-scale conventional military operations. Though Russia eventually prevailed, several logistical challenges and poor tactical performance bedeviled its conduct of the war.<sup>35</sup> Moscow evidently learned from its mistakes so as not to show the same clumsiness in its use of force against Ukraine in 2014.

The conductivity of the region to hybrid warfare was not apparent to the Kremlin throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Still, some Russian military theoreticians and leaders have speculated on the future of war. They have been aware since the 1970s that the United States was gaining an edge in information, precision strike, and communications technologies. One prominent Russian military theoretician declared in 1995 that countries could “become objects of information warfare.” He speculated that the opening stages of a war would feature disinformation campaigns whereby belligerents would seek to undermine local trust in the governments they target.<sup>36</sup> Sergei Chekinov and Sergei

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<sup>34</sup> Condoleezza Rice, *The Soviet Union and the Czechoslovak Army, 1948-1983* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>35</sup> Carolina Vendil Pallin and Fredrik Westerlund, ‘Russia’s War in Georgia: Lessons and Consequences’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 20:2 (2009): pp. 400-424.

<sup>36</sup> Makhmut Gareev, *If War Comes Tomorrow? The Contours of Future Armed Conflict* (London: Frank Cass, 1998): p. 53.

Bogdanov describe ‘new-generation war’ whereby “the role of mobile joint forces operating in an integrated reconnaissance and information environment is rising.”<sup>37</sup> In their view, information superiority has become a necessity in contemporary warfare. Though they have the United States in mind as an adversary that will exploit such advantages, they write that “with powerful information technologies at its disposal, the aggressor will make an effort to involve all public institutions in the country it intends to attack.”<sup>38</sup> Subversive missions would thus precede any conventional military campaign.<sup>39</sup> Other Russian military leaders have drawn similar conclusions. The Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces hypothesized that in future conflicts the use of force would be disguised and the information space exploited so as to undermine the target’s ability to retaliate. Even Presidential advisor Vladislav Surkov, writing under a pseudonym, claimed shortly after the annexation of Crimea that contemporary war would be total yet discrete in its conduct. Thus, by the time Russia launched hybrid warfare against Ukraine, its military leaders and strategists came to the view that war would increasingly use subversion in the information space to achieve coercive effects.<sup>40</sup>

#### *Putting It Together: A Theory of Hybrid Warfare*

Several features of the former Soviet political landscape make hybrid warfare a tempting strategy for Russian leaders. The diversity of the groups that inhabit the region, some with at least latent historical grievances against others, make the area ripe for tension. Russia has a tactical advantage by virtue of being in it. Russia has historical familiarity with the conflicts, latent or actual, that abound in the region. It is positioned to frame local events and conflicts in a manner favorable to its interests, thereby forestalling an unfavorable response from outside actors. Yet these factors would be irrelevant if Russia did not have escalation dominance over its neighbors and an interest to expand its zone of influence and revise the status quo.

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<sup>37</sup> Sergei Chekinov and Sergei Bogdanov, “The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War,” *Military Thought* (October-December 2013): p. 12.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20

<sup>40</sup> Rącz, *Russia’s Hybrid Warfare*, pp. 36-37.

To be sure, hybrid warfare has not been equally effective across all parts of the former Soviet space. Russia has found some areas of Ukraine more amenable to its waging of hybrid warfare than others. This observation is unsurprising since war turns on unforeseeable and sometimes random developments. In annexing Crimea, Russia was able to avail itself of the large military presence it already had there. Indeed, the presence of many retired servicemen in Crimea's major cities was useful for rallying indigenous support. By contrast, eastern Ukraine has proven harder for the Kremlin in terms of mobilizing the local population against Kiev. Russia remains prone to miscalculation despite its relative familiarity with the region. Yet the larger point stands: that, at least during the beginning of the crisis, Russia was able to claim greater knowledge of regional politics and to frame local events favorably. That is, Russia's advantage in local knowledge and access over NATO was relative and not absolute. When other governments finally started appreciating the complexity of Ukrainian politics, Russia had already taken control of Crimea and began arming rebels in eastern Ukraine.

This discussion thus reveals four conditions in which a belligerent would use hybrid warfare. First, the belligerent has local escalation dominance but not necessarily global escalation dominance. Because the belligerent has greater military power, it can threaten to unleash greater violence in order to deter a particular military response from its target. Not having global escalation dominance means that the belligerent wishes to contain the conflict locally and deter external intervention. Second, the belligerent wishes to expand its sphere of influence and to revise the status quo by changing borders and influencing the political regimes of neighboring states. Hybrid warfare is not a defensive strategy that status quo states use. Third, the target state is weak specifically because it lacks a strong civil society that mends ethnic and linguistic cleavages. The belligerent can manipulate local grievances and animosities to weaken the target from within. Finally, ethnic or linguistic groups in the neighbor have some ties with the belligerent. These ties confer an informational advantage on the belligerent since it can better understand the nature of local rival and grievances. Moreover, these ties might even lend the efforts of the belligerent some legitimacy in its framing of the conflict.

### **Implications for NATO in the Former Soviet Region**

If the region is conducive to Russian hybrid warfare, then how can the United States and NATO best contribute to the defense and deterrence against such forms of aggression? How should they use military power to protect members like the Baltic countries from hybrid warfare? What are the limits in providing extended deterrence on their behalf?

The Baltic states already benefit from NATO membership in many ways. They can call other allies to a joint session for consultations if they feel threatened, as Poland and Lithuania did in April 2014 by invoking Article Four of the North Atlantic Treaty. Moreover, Article Five of this treaty asserts that an attack against one ally is an attack against all. Beyond the provisions of the treaty itself, NATO has in aggregate conventional and nuclear supremacy over Russia. The defense pact also facilitates joint military exercises that enhance the war-fighting capabilities of its members. Still, Russian actions against Ukraine have prompted observers to debate whether NATO poses as effective of a deterrent as possible against Russia. Many of the solutions that strategists have described as being useful for countering Russian aggression rely largely on making adjustments to the military infrastructure that NATO already has in place in Europe. The problem is that Russia pursues its hybrid warfare to lower the risk of triggering the use of NATO's capabilities more appropriate for conventional or even nuclear war.

Consider a sophisticated and comprehensive discussion by Matthew Kroenig of how NATO should adapt its military posture to the current security environment in the former Soviet Union. After all, the military presence of both the United States and NATO is limited in the Baltic countries. American forward deployed troops and tactical nuclear weapons are located primarily in Western Europe.<sup>42</sup> His proposals include extending and expanding NATO's temporary deployments to the Baltics; having a forward presence in Eastern Europe despite the injunctions against so doing in the NATO-Russia Founding Act; assisting Eastern European members with the modernization and standardization of their military forces; and developing and deploying a new generation of sub-strategic nuclear weapons to Europe to respond to potential Russian nuclear aggression at the

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<sup>42</sup> Lucas and Mitchell, 'Central European Security,' pp. 2-4.

tactical level.<sup>43</sup> Kroenig does address strengthening NATO capabilities at levels of violence lower than conventional and nuclear war. He writes that NATO ought to:

‘... strengthen Eastern European states, including military assistance with intelligence and early-warning capabilities, cyber security, airpower, and stepped-up training in policing, border patrol and counter-insurgency. Although outside of NATO’s normal lane, vulnerable member states should also be encouraged to pursue a political agenda to incorporate ethnic minorities into a shared national-identity conception. *In case all else fails*, Eastern European allies must make themselves indigestible to a Russian occupation.’<sup>44</sup>

This brief passage aside, much of his attention centers on deterring Russia at much higher levels of violence.

The primacy accorded here to military means is understandable given that NATO is a military alliance. Indeed, many of the measures adopted by NATO so far have this flavor. At the Wales Summit in September 2014, NATO members agreed to Readiness Action Plan. Some of the measures have included increasing the number of fighter jets on air-policing patrols four-fold and starting surveillance flights over the Baltics. NATO members also pledged to send more ships on patrol in its eastern flank as well as to deploy ground forces to Eastern Europe for training and exercises on a rotational basis.<sup>45</sup> NATO also organized the new Spearhead Force – a “land brigade of around 5000 troops” – with the goal of bolstering its high readiness capabilities.<sup>46</sup> In summer 2015, the United States even decided to pre-position heavy weaponry in Eastern Europe. NATO military exercises have also become more frequent, including Trident Juncture in autumn 2015 – the largest military exercise it has undertaken in thirteen years.

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<sup>43</sup> Matthew Kroenig, ‘Facing Reality: Getting NATO Ready for a New Cold War,’ *Survival* 57:1 (2015): pp. 49-70. For a similarly strong but military-centric view of how NATO should respond, see Edward Lucas and A. Wess Mitchell, ‘Central European Security After Crimea: The Case for Strengthening NATO’s Eastern Defense’, *Center for European Policy Analysis*, Report No. 35 (25 March, 2014).

<sup>44</sup> Emphasis added. Kroenig, ‘Facing Reality,’ 60.

<sup>45</sup> *Fact Sheet: NATO’s Readiness Action Plan*, NATO (December 2014). Available: [http://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2014\\_12/20141202\\_141202-facstsheet-rap-en.pdf](http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2014_12/20141202_141202-facstsheet-rap-en.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> “Defense Ministers Agree to Strengthen NATO’s Defenses, Establish Spearhead Force,” *NATO* )23 February, 2015). Online: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_117188.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_117188.htm).

However, my discussion regarding the applicability of hybrid warfare in the former Soviet region reveals some of the shortcomings associated with a predominantly military solution. To begin with, too much emphasis on deterring aggression at higher levels of violence might undercut deterrence at lower levels of violence. Such is the stability-instability paradox that Glenn Snyder describes. Under mutual assured destruction between two nuclear-armed adversaries, direct and major war becomes very unlikely since both sides seek to avoid annihilation. Consequently, both sides might perversely find it safe to engage in conflicts that do not involve nuclear weapons.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, bolstering alliance capabilities at higher levels of violence could make hybrid warfare even more attractive. After all, hybrid warfare exploits the vulnerability of targets at even lower levels of violence whereby the belligerent can plausibly deny that it is even engaging in aggression. The belligerent could thus deter its target from undertaking escalatory measures. It also denies the adversaries a clear, compelling rationale for military intervention by obfuscating the nature of local crises fomented from without.

Such is the concern that the Baltic countries have with respect to NATO. Although NATO has escalation dominance over Russia, Russia has escalation dominance over the Baltic countries individually and collectively. Yet their level of susceptibility to Russian hybrid warfare varies between them. Lithuania does not have a stateless Russian-speaking population. Though it is more homogenous of the three, Lithuania granted citizenship to all residents shortly after independence regardless of their ethnicity. Elsewhere in the region, the Estonian Centre Party is popular among ethnic Russians and has even courted United Russia, which is associated with Putin.<sup>48</sup> The Latvian Union of Russians tried unsuccessfully to amend the country's language laws in 2011 and has supported Russian moves in Crimea.<sup>49</sup> More urgently, Estonia and Latvia have large stateless populations that are largely Russian. As such, Russia could opportunistically incite ethnic tensions. Such actions could destabilize

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<sup>47</sup> Glenn Snyder, 'The Balance of Power and the Balance of Terror', in Paul Seabury, ed., *The Balance of Power* (San Francisco: Chandler Books, 1965).

<sup>48</sup> "Party with ties to Putin ahead in Estonian polls," *Financial Times* (27, February, 2015). Online: <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/1decfbac-be8a-11e4-a341-00144feab7de.html#axzz3o6fvyRcV>, 9 October, 2015.

<sup>49</sup> "Pro-Russia Party Signs Major Deal with Crimea Group," *Baltic Times* (13 August, 2014). Online: <http://www.baltictimes.com/news/articles/35355/#.VA97mRbgJHU>, 9 October, 2015.



those societies and forestall an unfavorable NATO reaction if its members cannot agree that Russia bears responsibility, especially if some semblance of local initiative exists. It might not be entirely clear whether and how much Russia instigated it.

And so the Baltic countries remain exposed to more subversive Russian tactics that are ambiguous enough not to prompt such escalatory measures like an Article Five invocation. Indeed, Article Five is most appropriate for scenarios that involve overt and unambiguous forms of military attack against a NATO member. More subtle forms of attack that give the belligerent ‘plausible deniability’ – such as those involving local ethnic tensions – might not even trigger Article Five considerations. Alternatively, though invoking Article Five does not automatically mean a military response, it might still be a disproportionate answer to hybrid warfare since it has only occurred once in the history of NATO (after the September 11 attacks).

The Baltic countries benefit from NATO enhancing its aggregate military capabilities, but they remain vulnerable if their western counterparts are unwilling to defend them. Indeed, NATO’s deterrent threat depends just as much on the willingness of the entire alliance as it does on its capabilities – something which predominantly military solutions overlook. Russian hybrid warfare seeks to dampen such willingness because situational factors unique to the Baltic countries might confound efforts to attribute a seeming act of aggression to Russia. The Baltic countries accordingly have an incentive to improve their counterintelligence capabilities, among themselves and other NATO allies. Yet even this solution needs to be coupled with a concerted effort to integrate those stateless populations politically and economically so that they do not develop grievances regarding their status. Alliance members would do better by strengthening local civil societies and their law enforcement capabilities. Strong civil societies inoculate states from belligerents attempting to undermine them from within. Strong law enforcement capabilities can improve the detection and arrest of agents and provocateurs.

Another reason exists for why western NATO allies might be reluctant to defend the Baltic countries. Already some NATO members have trouble abiding fully by their stated alliance commitments. Members like Spain and Italy that do not feel threatened by

Russian actions are likely to keep defense expenditures low.<sup>51</sup> Those countries are also less likely to back strong sanctions against Russia. Moreover, the Kremlin has actively courted populist political parties in Europe regardless of their political orientation. The most prominent examples are Le Front National (France), Jobbik (Hungary), the United Kingdom Independence Party, Podemos (Spain), and Syriza (Greece). These parties have recently made electoral gains in their home countries because they capture the disaffection of voters who feel the strain of persistent economic crisis or are disillusioned with more mainstream political parties. Out of their affinity with the Kremlin, these parties have endorsed the Crimean referendum and separatist-organized elections in eastern Ukraine, criticized efforts to sanction Russia, and express an admiration for Vladimir Putin and his brand of social conservatism.<sup>52</sup> If they become more popular, then NATO might be hamstrung in its efforts to show unity, counter Russian narratives, and sanction Russian efforts. Already surveys have shown domestic publics in some European countries expressing reluctance to provide military to vulnerable NATO members.<sup>53</sup>

This observation suggests that a reliance on military solutions obscures the underlying political dimension of the conflict. It is no coincidence that Russia has used nationalism both to legitimate its efforts and to engage in hybrid war when political parties friendly to Russia in Western Europe have populist or nationalist platforms. Russian pledges to support the initiative of local co-ethnics align well with the ideological agendas of Western European nationalist parties.<sup>54</sup> European nationalists in these societies have little to no experience of Soviet or Russian domination so as to feel threatened by Russian policies. Accordingly, unlike in the former Soviet region, no anti-Russian element abounds in Western European nationalisms. This political situation enables Russian hybrid warfare if NATO has difficulty crafting a unified and coherent

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<sup>51</sup> “Financial and Economic Data Relating to NATO Defense,” *NATO Press Release*, 22 June 2015. Online: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_120866.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_120866.htm).

<sup>52</sup> Michael A. Orenstein, ‘Putin’s Western Allies’, *Foreign Affairs*, 26 March, 2014. Online: <https://www.foreignaffairs.org/articles/russia-fsu/2014-03-25/putins-western-allies>. See also Marlene Laruelle, ed., *Eurasianism and the European Far Right: Reshaping the Europe-Russia Relationship* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015).

<sup>53</sup> Pew Research Center, June 2015, “NATO Publics Blame Russia for Ukrainian Crisis, but Reluctant to Provide Military Aid.”

<sup>54</sup> Andrew Wilson makes a similar point in *Ukraine Politics*, p. 194.

policy to check Russian aggression. Consequently, Russia is able to deter a stronger response from an international coalition while fighting to obtain its goals in Ukraine. Hybrid warfare is something that a military alliance like NATO alone might not be able to deter. It could provide an institutional framework to augment jointly the counterintelligence and law enforcement capabilities of the Baltic states. However, integrating stateless populations in the region is a political challenge that demands a political solution rather than a military one.

The larger problem of nationalist politics points to how NATO members should respond to Russian disinformation campaigns. Already the Netherlands and Poland have launched a Russian-language news agency intended to dispel Russian claims.<sup>55</sup> Yet the receptivity of some Western European political parties to Moscow suggest that such campaigns should also be directed to European audience. These campaigns would require NATO members in Western Europe and North America to cultivate regional expertise in the political affairs of the Central-Eastern Europe and the former Soviet space.<sup>56</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Hybrid warfare brings together significant conventional military power and tactics normally associated with guerilla operations. The belligerent uses hybrid warfare to obtain its political objectives at the expense of its target by keeping the conflict local. Russia's use of hybrid warfare reflects to some degree its position of strength and local advantages. Accordingly, international security analysts are incorrect to argue that Russia has resorted to hybrid warfare because it is an 'option of weakness.'<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the strategy of hybrid warfare has applicability in the former Soviet region because Russia can leverage its escalation dominance over its neighbors and its relatively better local knowledge.

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<sup>55</sup> "Dutch-Polish 'Content Factory' to Counter Russian Propaganda," *EUObserver*, 21 July, 2015. Online: <https://euobserver.com/foreign/129724>, 18 August, 2015.

<sup>56</sup> Charles King, 'The Death of International Studies: Why Flying Blind is Dangerous,' *Foreign Affairs* 94:4 (2015): pp. 88-98.

<sup>57</sup> Sten Rynning, 'The False Promise of Continental Concert: Russia, the West, and the Necessary Balance of Power', *International Affairs* 91:3 (2015): 545.

Of course, hybrid warfare has its drawbacks. Its subtlety requires patience and, as with any strategy in war, miscalculations could hamper its effectiveness. Agitators and ethnic allies become difficult to control once they receive weapons. Russia might have learned this lesson when rebels inadvertently shot down Malaysian Airlines Flight 17, prompting the United States and the European Union to impose stronger sanctions. Just because a region is susceptible to hybrid warfare does not mean that hybrid warfare will succeed.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the military solutions that some observers advocate are at best incomplete. NATO members must display political unity and resolve as much as they need to be capable. Vulnerable countries, like Estonia and Latvia especially, require strong civil societies and law enforcement capabilities whereas NATO must counter Russian propaganda efforts, even among its own domestic publics.

In outlining why the former Soviet Union is conducive to hybrid warfare, I inductively postulate the conditions under which a belligerent could engage in it. First, the belligerent has local escalation dominance but not global escalation dominance. It can deter escalation by the target but its military capabilities are insufficient against an international coalition or a global power. Second, the belligerent seeks to revise the status quo. Third, the belligerent's target is weak insofar as its society features exploitable cleavages. Fourth, the neighbor has some ethnic or linguistic ties to the belligerent. Such ties offer opportunities to sow local discord. They also confer an informational advantage at the expense of outside actors whose intervention is feared.

For policy-makers, these propositions suggest that only under narrow circumstances would belligerents resort to hybrid warfare. It is not necessarily the future of warfare, but many of the conditions described above obtain in the former Soviet Union. In Moldova, the government currently faces allegations of graft after 1.5 billion American dollars disappeared from the country's three largest banks just weeks before national parliamentary elections. Opposition groups have held large protests, demanding

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<sup>58</sup> On how Russia has experienced challenges in its military and political operations against Ukraine, see Lawrence Freedman, 'Ukraine and the Art of Limited War', *Survival* 56:6 (2014): pp. 7-38.

a government inquiry.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, throughout its post-Soviet existence, Moldova has experienced political instability, armed conflict with the partially recognized state of Transnistria, and tensions between the majority Romanian-speaking population and the minority Russian-speaking population. Thus, Moldova is vulnerable to Russian hybrid warfare. In other conflict-prone regions like East Asia, however, hybrid war should be less prevalent. China might already have escalation dominance over Vietnam and Taiwan, but only against Taiwan could it potentially use tactics to divide and agitate the population because of linguistic and ethnic ties. Still, China would find it very difficult to smuggle weapons and supplies to local agitators over the Taiwan Straits. For these reasons, too, China cannot use hybrid warfare against Japan or South Korea.

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<sup>59</sup> “10,000 protest in Moldova over missing \$1.5 billion,” *Associated Press* (4 October, 2015). Online: <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/d84a23a5b89c4a9ab7415a45cbb5cd2c/10000-protest-moldova-over-missing-15-billion>.