

Centre d'étude des crises  
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# Russian strategy in the Gray zone

A way of waging war in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

Godfroid Julien

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## Table des matières

1. Introduction: Russia and its great power ambitions	6
2. The Gray zone: a new area of confrontation	7
2.1. Definition and relevance	7
2.2. Doctrines to wage twenty-first century wars	8
2.2.1. The “Gerasimov’s doctrine”	8
2.2.2. Beyond the “Gerasimov doctrine”	11
2.2.3. The recent emergence of a comprehensive model	15
3. The Russian maneuvers in the Gray zone: Ukraine and Crimea	20
3.1. Historical and geopolitical considerations	20
3.2. Crimea Annexation	21
3.2.1. Try to understand the Russian perspective.	21
3.2.2. Hybrid warfare operations waged by Russia in Crimea	23
3.3. Lessons learned and perspective	30
4. Conclusion: Russian hybrid warfare doctrines, an adaptation to the revolutions in military affairs.	32
Bibliographie	34

## 1. Introduction: Russia and its great power ambitions

Nowadays, Russia hits the headlines on a regular basis. Whether through its intervention in Ukraine, its military and informational support to the Assad regime in Syria or its activities on social media and the dissemination of its worldview, which have led to accusations of interference, Russia is seen as one of the main threat to the liberal world order dominated by the United States. On the international scene, Russia is perceived as a moderated revisionist state. We call “revisionist”, states that are not satisfied with the current world order and that try to make it change. Russia, since the famous Putin’s speech pronounced in Munich in 2007<sup>1</sup>, shows its clear willingness to fight against American hegemony and thus, make the world more multipolar. This kind of ambition generates indubitably American resentment. Furthermore, considering the absolute Western domination in military, economic, and influence-capacity fields, Russia innovated in terms of doctrines and means.

To achieve its objective in accordance with its national interests, Russia developed innovating doctrines in order to wage different kinds of hybrid warfare operations efficiently. Within a context of ongoing information warfare between Russia and the less and less united Western countries which make it more difficult to distinguish reality from information warfare operations, this present note will attempt to clarify the Russian point of view of the current competition between states on the international scene. In order to do so, the concept of Gray zone will be defined, and its relevance clarified. The Ukrainian case study will be useful to understand why and how Russia implements hybrid warfare doctrines to achieve national interest objectives.

This note will be based on both Russian and Western sources in order to give a comprehensive vision of the topic by avoiding falling into the trap of providing a moral or partisan analysis of such a controversial issue. Nevertheless, by writing this paper, the main methodological issue was to make the distinction between Western accusations toward Russia and Russian perception of national security threats posed by NATO countries.

Making the effort to understand the other’s point of view is the best way to reduce misunderstanding. The peace Nobel Price, Lester Pearson said: *“Misunderstanding arising from ignorance breeds fear, and fear remains the greatest enemy of peace”*.

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<sup>1</sup>“I consider that the unipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible in today’s world. And this is not only because if there was individual leadership in today’s – and precisely in today’s – world, then the military, political and economic resources would not suffice. What is even more important is that the model itself is flawed because at its basis there is and can be no moral foundations for modern civilization” (Part of the Putin’s speech pronounced in Munich in 2007). Full version available on: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>

## 2. The Gray zone: a new area of confrontation

### 2.1. Definition and relevance

The means employed to wage warfare have evolved throughout history. Warfare is defined as *“the mechanism, method or modality of armed conflict against the enemy<sup>2</sup>”*. The technology used to conduct warfare as well as the type of actors that conduct it are constantly changing. In order to define warfare more accurately, we can distinguish two forms, the traditional and the irregular one. Traditional warfare is governed by the law of war, part of international law, via the rules of jus ad bellum (answering the question: when can we wage a war?) and jus in bello (answering the question: how can we wage a war?). More concretely, the articles VI and VII of the charter of the United Nations are the base of current jus ad bellum. The jus in bello is defined in the Geneva Convention. When an actor such as a transnational terrorist group, a rebel’s group or even a state carries out a warfare without respecting jus ad bellum and jus in bello, we speak about irregular warfare. Nevertheless, these two categories of warfare aren’t neatly divided. We speak about hybrid warfare when *“an adversary simultaneously and adaptively employs a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal behavior in the battle space to obtain their political objectives<sup>3</sup>”*. Besides these concepts, the “Gray zone conflicts” emerged among scholars, strategists and members of special operations community in the United States. Among a large number of available definitions of the Gray zone, there are commonly accepted ideas useful to understand this concept. Considering the Gray zone as an operational environment (OE) allows us to make a distinction between both kind of conflicts. Indeed, the Gray zone is an operational environment (OE) such as the jungle or the cyberspace. In such an OE, conventional and irregular tactics can be used. According to John Chambers, *“the Gray zone is actually an operational environment, albeit not a physical one. Additionally, Gray-zone conflicts are those in which nation states and non-state actors use hybrid threats-tactics such as fusing political and information warfare with non-violent civil resistance, to achieve strategic objectives without violating international norms or crossing established thresholds and leading to open war<sup>4</sup>”*. This definition shows a clear distinction between the Gray zone and the American conception of hybrid warfare. Indeed, if the Gray zone is considered as an operational environment situated between peace and open war, hybrid tactics could be used by different actors to carry out open war as well as confrontation in the gray zone. As a matter of fact, the Gray zone is not a type of warfare such as conventional or irregular. This research will focus on the Gray zone’s hybrid threats used by Russia in this OE in order to achieve political gains. Indeed, because of nuclear deterrence, interdependence or economic interests, a traditional war between great powers became unlikely.

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<sup>2</sup> The joint Staff, « Joint publication 1, Doctrine for the armed forces of the United States”, March 25, 2013

<sup>3</sup> Hoffman F., “Hybrid vs Compound war”, Armed Forces Journal, October 1, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Chambers J., “Countering gray-zone hybrid threats: an analysis of Russia’s “New Generation Warfare” and implications for the US Army”, Modern War Institute at West Point, October 18, 2016, p.13

The Russian doctrine to implement hybrid threats and its evolution will be address in this chapter. The “Gerasimov doctrine” is increasingly used by Western analysts. Therefore, it seems important to analyze what this “doctrine” really prescribes. The contribution or the influence of other Russian analysts such as Vladislav Surkov, Sergei Chekanov, Sergey Bogdanov or the most recent articles published on the Russian Defense Ministry website written by A.A. Bartosh will be summarized and analyzed. The concrete examples of the Ukrainian crisis as well as the Russian intervention in its near abroad will illustrate the implementation of hybrid tactics in the Gray zone in the second part of this note. It clearly appears that Russia is ready to use traditional armed forces in the last phase of a confrontation considered here as hybrid warfare but, it is important to r that, according to the Russian National Security Strategy, the main threat for the Russian security is the West and the Atlantic Alliance.

## 2.2. Doctrines to wage twenty-first century wars

### 2.2.1. The “Gerasimov’s doctrine”

In order to achieve political gains by waging competition within the international scene, Russian strategists/experts had to establish new strategies. This quote cited by A.A Bartosh summarizes the Russian perception of current global competition: *“At present, the U.S. aspiration to prevent the loss of global leadership and to preserve the unipolar world by any means, including the military, has a decisive influence on the development of the military and political situation in the world. Not all states unconditionally accept attempts to impose a dictate of a single superpower on the whole world, which has led to a sharp increase in interstate confrontation based on non-military measures: political, economic and informational. The confrontation, which also includes many other aspects of modern society's activities - diplomatic, scientific, sportive, cultural - has in fact become total<sup>5</sup>”*.

Considering this perception of international confrontation, Russian strategists had to establish new doctrines and assess the way of using means in the Gray zone. Because of many factors such as relative weakness of Russia if we take into account military spending, economic power, interdependence -factors that could be summarized by using the explanations of the classification of Russia as a moderate revisionist state- or nuclear deterrence, Russia has no interest in entering into open conflict with the West. Nevertheless, since the Putin’s speech in Munich in 2007, Russia has reaffirmed its willingness to make the global order multipolar by increasing its relative power -as an ability to do, to make do or to prevent from doing<sup>6</sup>- at the expense of the United States of America. To do this, Russia needs a comprehensive doctrine adapted to the modern way of waging confrontation. In 2012,

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<sup>5</sup> Bartosh A.A., “Strategia I kontrstrategia gibridnoy voyny -Hybrid warfare strategy and counterstrategy”, Military thought, Russian Ministry of Defense website, October 10, 2018 [On Line], <https://vm.ric.mil.ru/Stati/item/138034/>, consulted on 12/11/19, translated from Russian to English by the author of this note

<sup>6</sup> Sur S., « la puissance et le rang revisit  », French Foreign Affairs Ministry webiste, [On Line], <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/FD001159.pdf>, consulted on 12/11/19



when Putin replaced the Minister of Defense Anatoly Serdioukov by the current acting one, Sergey Shoigu, he chose Valeri Gerasimov as Chief of Staff. Some months after his nomination, Gerasimov published an article entitled “the value of science in prediction”. Mark Galeotti used the term of “Gerasimov doctrine” as a snappy title for his article. This concept was wrongfully used by a large number of analysts because, as Mark Galeotti said, *“it’s not a doctrine, which is in the Russian lexicon a truly foundational set of beliefs as to what kinds of war the country will be fighting in the future and how it will win them — this is more an observation about a particular aspect of particular kinds of wars in the 21stC, there is certainly no expectation that this is the Russian way of war”*<sup>7</sup>. Nevertheless, this article describes the Russian perception of modern warfare. Actually, it is the most known article published by a Russian official about this topic. This note will propose a different interpretation of the Gerasimov’s article. Indeed, Mark Galeotti, among others, on his blog called “in Moscow’s shadows”, commented chosen parts of this article and made appear the resurgence of Russian aggressiveness on the international scene.

This part of this note will start from another premise. Actually, the Russian Federation’s National Security Strategy of December 2015<sup>8</sup> is clear about the main threats to Russian security. NATO is considered as the main threat because of its desire to expand and the colored revolutions which took place in the Russian near abroad. These so-called revolutions are perceived by Russia as American destabilization maneuvers, clear implementations of a regime change strategy or coups d’état funded by the American government. The scandal about Ukrainian neo-Nazi groups funded and trained by the American army, the Victoria Nuland’s declarations about funding Maidan revolution and the Joe Biden’s link with Ukraine provide fuel to Russian official rhetoric that singles out the United States as a destabilizing force. The Iraqi, Libyan, Syrian cases and the most recent Iranian episode could corroborate this thesis.

The main ideas coming from the Gerasimov’s article will be extracted in order to give an overview of the Russian conception of modern warfare. Far from being an applicable doctrine, this contribution will be updated by more recent studies. Therefore, after summarizing Gerasimov’s article, we will see how this vision has been adapted by other experts.

About the twenty-first century warfare, Gerasimov said that the space between war and peace is blurry. Indeed, *“a perfectly thriving state can, in a matter of months and even days, be transformed into an arena of fierce armed conflict, become a victim of foreign intervention, and sink into a web of chaos, humanitarian catastrophe, and civil war”*<sup>9</sup>. He uses the example

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<sup>7</sup> Galeotti M., “The ‘Gerasimov Doctrine’ and Russian Non-Linear War”, in Moscow’s Shadows, February 27, 2013, [On Line], <https://inmoscowshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/>, consulted on 12-11-19

<sup>8</sup> Russian National Security Strategy, December 2015 – Full-text Translation, [On Line], <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf>, consulted on 13/11/2019

<sup>9</sup> Gerasimov V., “tsennost nouky v predvidenii- value of science in prediction”, Voenno-promychlennyi kourier, April 27- Mars 5 2013, [On Line], <https://vpk->

of Arab Spring to illustrate this point which reflects one of the biggest fears of post-soviet Russia, namely, a regime change caused by a foreign power.

At first sight, the lessons learned from the Arab Spring events -which occurred before the Maidan revolution of 2014- were not relevant for the armed forces. Nevertheless, Gerasimov thinks that these events reflect the kind of conflicts of the twenty-first century Russia will face. The use of non-military means became much more effective than the military force. He cites political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military means that have to be applied in coordination. He adds that this kind of means could be supplemented by actions of informational conflicts and special-operation forces. Western experts jumped on these declarations to claim that Russia applied these methods during the Crimean crisis. Nevertheless, it seems that Gerasimov analyzed the methods applied by the United States from 2003 and the intervention in Iraq to 2011 and the Syrian crisis. This Gerasimov's article is more an accurate analysis of the way of waging modern conflicts than a new doctrine for Russian armed forces. Indeed, we should keep in mind that Russia, as the great power it intends to remain or become again, must retain a comprehensive military tool to be able to respond to any kind of threats. Therefore, Russian armed forces cannot only be adapted to response to hybrid threats because it would weaken its ability to wage other kinds of war. Furthermore, considering the weakness of the Russian economy and the limited military budget, crucial choices have to be made to ensure the best possible compromise to adapt to modern warfare while maintaining a capacity to re

Then, he came to the conclusion that the Russian armed forces must be adapted to this kind of conflict. He also sets the focus on the importance of using special operations, internal opposition as well as informational actions. This triptych will be analyzed in this part about the annexation of Crimea by Russia. Confirming our previous point, Gerasimov speaks about the Libyan conflict where *"no-fly zone was created, a sea blockade imposed, private military contractors were widely used in close interaction with armed formations of the opposition"*<sup>10</sup>. This quote will be important in order to understand the hybrid tactics used by Russia.

In the following part of the same article, Gerasimov speaks about the importance of science and development of robotized military forces. Utilization of drones is just the genesis of an ongoing robotization of the armed forces. That conception could be considered as the premise of the Putin's declaration during a meeting with students in 2017. Indeed, the Russian Federation President said: *"the one who becomes the leader in this sphere [artificial*

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[news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK\\_08\\_476.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0fQxkoGxs\\_nFrHxexoUoiAzzh0sy3b8slgYdyLyTpTG\\_HlwiCRYLCxCSew](https://news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0fQxkoGxs_nFrHxexoUoiAzzh0sy3b8slgYdyLyTpTG_HlwiCRYLCxCSew), consulted on 13-11-19.

<sup>10</sup> Gerasimov V., "tsennost nauky v predvidenii- value of science in prediction", Voenno-promychlennyi kourier, April 27- Mars 5 2013, [On Line], [https://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK\\_08\\_476.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0fQxkoGxs\\_nFrHxexoUoiAzzh0sy3b8slgYdyLyTpTG\\_HlwiCRYLCxCSew](https://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0fQxkoGxs_nFrHxexoUoiAzzh0sy3b8slgYdyLyTpTG_HlwiCRYLCxCSew), consulted on 13-11-19

*intelligence] will be the ruler of the world<sup>11</sup>*. More concretely, the Forbes magazine spoke about: *“These killer robots AKA lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) were the focus of discussions at the UN last week when states met in Geneva at a treaty convention called the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)<sup>12</sup>”*. The development of LAWS could generate a new revolution in military affairs and even change our current conception of warfare. Let’s imagine two robots’ armies fighting each other without any human life at stake. This could make evolve military doctrine in a completely different way than the innovation due to the generalization of confrontations in the operational environment known as the Gray zone.

On the other hand, the information warfare is also addressed in this article. As a matter of fact, Gerasimov said: *“the information space opens wide asymmetrical possibilities for reducing the fighting potential of the enemy. In North Africa, we witnessed the use of technologies for influencing state structures and the population with the help of information networks. It is necessary to perfect activities in the information space, including the defense of our own objects<sup>13</sup>”*.

Finally, Gerasimov recommends rethinking the Russian armed forces in order to be able to make power projection through peacekeeping operations or traditional use of conventional forces to preserve geopolitical interests of the Russian Federation. A few years later, Russia will intervene in Syria to support Al-Assad’s regime and prevent a regime change.

### *2.2.2. Beyond the “Gerasimov doctrine”*

The official documents that summarized the Russian conception of modern warfare are: The Military Doctrine<sup>14</sup>, the National Security Strategy<sup>15</sup> cited earlier in this note, the Foreign Policy Concept<sup>16</sup> and the Information Security Concept<sup>17</sup> which could be considered as a cyber doctrine.

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<sup>11</sup> Karpukhin S., “Putin : leader in artificial intelligence will rule world”, CNBC, September 4 2017, [On Line], <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/09/04/putin-leader-in-artificial-intelligence-will-rule-world.html>, consulted 13-11-19.

<sup>12</sup> Sharkey N., “Killer Robots From Russia without love”, Forbes, November 28 2018, [On Line], <https://www.forbes.com/sites/noelsharkey/2018/11/28/killer-robots-from-russia-without-love/#5fac05f8cf01>, consulted 13-11-19.

<sup>13</sup> Gerasimov V., “tsennost nauky v predvidenii- value of science in prediction”, Voenno-promychnyyi kourier, April 27- Mars 5 2013, [On Line], [https://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK\\_08\\_476.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0fQxkoGxs\\_nFrHxoeUoiAzzh0sy3b8slgYdyLyTpTGHIwiCRYLCxCSew](https://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0fQxkoGxs_nFrHxoeUoiAzzh0sy3b8slgYdyLyTpTGHIwiCRYLCxCSew), consulted 13-11-19

<sup>14</sup> Russian Federation, “Voennaya Doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii-The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, December 25 2014, consulted 13-11-19

<sup>15</sup> Russian National Security Strategy, December 2015 – Full-text Translation, [On Line], <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf>, consulted 13/11/2019

<sup>16</sup> Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Foreign Policy Concept”, December first, 2016

<sup>17</sup> Russian Federation, “Doktrina Informatsionnoi Bezopasnosti Rossiskoi Federatsii-Information Security Doctrine of the Russian Federation”, December 5, 2016.

Besides these official documents, the Surkov leaks<sup>18</sup> revealed thousands of emails exchanged between Russian officials concerning the means used to wage hybrid warfare against Ukraine. A comprehensive analysis without any biases while remembering the genesis of the Ukrainian Maidan revolution, the American implication and the clear danger coming from neo-Nazi groups such as Azov Battalion, Pravy Sektor and Svoboda could allow us to understand how the Russian actions were implemented in Ukraine. The main interest of the Surkov leaks is to make us understand the role of Vladislav Surkov and his collaborators within a country with a high degree of power centralization in the hands of the Federation President. A more in-depth study of these emails, without an irrelevant anti-Russian feeling in vogue since the Skripal case recalling the Berezovsky and Litvinenko murders, could be useful in order to highlight some possible conceptual innovations regarding the way hybrid warfare could be conducted in the Russian near abroad.

In addition to the article published by Gerasimov, two former Russian army senior officers, Chekinov and Bogdanov, worked on asymmetrical actions to maintain Russia's security<sup>19</sup> and tried to describe the nature of new generation warfare<sup>20</sup>. These two authors are the most cited Russian experts about the topic of hybrid warfare in Western analyses. More recently, the Russian ministry of Defense published two articles addressing the Russian vision of hybrid warfare and establishing a comprehensive model to respond to a hybrid threat. This part will focus on these two articles. Understanding the response model and the recent Russian vision of hybrid warfare will allow us to anticipate other hybrid tactics implemented by Russia in the future.

At the end of October 2018, the article "strategia i kontrstrategia gibridnoy voyny- strategy and counterstrategy of hybrid warfare" was published in "Military Thought" which is the Russian Ministry of Defense journal<sup>21</sup>. This is the most recent contribution that could be considered as a part of a comprehensive Russian strategy concerning hybrid warfare. Therefore, it seems necessary to analyze this article, which may have benefited from the exploratory work of Gerasimov, Chekanov or Bogdanov among others. acc

First, the definition of hybrid warfare given by the author is quite different from the Western one cited earlier in this note. Indeed, while American scholars consider hybrid warfare as a conventional warfare for which methods similar to irregular warfare tactics could be used, Russia considers hybrid warfare- with striking similarities to Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui's

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<sup>18</sup> Shandra A., Seely R., "The Surkov leaks: the inner workings of Russia's hybrid war in Ukraine", Royal United Services Institute, July 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Chekinov S.G., Bogdanov S. A., "Asymmetrical actions to maintain Russia's military security", Military Thought no.1, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> Chekinov S.G., Bogdanov S. A., "The nature and content of a new generation war", military thought, October-December 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Bartosh A.A., "Strategia I kontrstrategia gibridnoy voyny -Hybrid warfare strategy and counterstrategy", Military thought, Russian Ministry of Defense website, October 10, 2018 [On Line], <https://vm.ric.mil.ru/Stati/item/138034/>, consulted on 12/11/19, translated from Russian to English by the author of this note

“unrestricted warfare”- *“as an armed struggle, which is a specific content of war, it also uses economic, diplomatic, scientific and technical, informational, ideological, psychological means and methods of imposing the will of the enemy, weakening his military capabilities and strengthening his own positions<sup>22</sup>”*. Instead of being a conventional war, in the Clausewitz sense of the term, fought with irregular tactics, Russia sees hybrid warfare as a confrontation in which all power factors of the State are used. This could be related to a new kind of total war. Using the armed or military forces comes at the end of this type of confrontation but the continuation of policy (definition of the war according to Clausewitz) could be carried out by non-military means. This confirms the relevance of the Gray zone as new OE in which interstate confrontation takes place.

To adapt its military forces and its way of waging war, it was essential to determine a new strategy. Bartosh uses the Von Moltke’s definition of strategy: *“strategy is more than science; it is the transfer of knowledge into practical life, the further development of initial guiding thought according to constantly changing circumstances; strategy is the art of acting under the pressure of the most difficult conditions<sup>23</sup>”*. The Russian conception of hybrid warfare and the knowledge about this topic on which Russian decision-maker should be based are summarized in this article. In order to understand the Russian strategy, according to Von Moltke’s definition, it is essential to figure out the recent Russian knowledge concerning the hybrid warfare concept.

Some attention points on which Russia should focus are cited in this article. As explained earlier in this note, Russia’s strategy is determined by two complementary conceptions. First, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the NATO expansion and the feeling of landlockedness because of geographical considerations, Russia considers itself as a besieged citadel. It is clear in these terms: *“In these circumstances, the meaning of the hybrid war between the U.S. and its allies against Russia lies in the elimination of the Russian statehood, fragmentation of the country and the transfer of some of its parts under external control<sup>24</sup>”*. To avoid such a disaster scenario, there are some points Russia should focus on, according to Bartosh:

Uncovering the following enemy actions<sup>25</sup>:

- Finding sources of sustainable funding for the protest movement and then for armed groups, both from external stakeholders and through internal capacity;
- Identifying extremist social groups and political associations that can participate in planned non-violent and then violent actions, up to and including civil war;

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<sup>22</sup> Idem

<sup>23</sup> Von Moltke G., “About Strategy”, Strategy in the works of military classics, 1926.

<sup>24</sup> Bartosh A.A., “Strategia I kontrstrategia gibridnoy voyny -Hybrid warfare strategy and counterstrategy”, Military thought, Russian Ministry of Defense website, October 10, 2018 [On Line], <https://vm.ric.mil.ru/Stati/item/138034/>, consulted on 12/11/19, translated from Russian to English by the author of this note

<sup>25</sup> idem

- Identifying practical slogans that are as close as possible to the real demands of extremist social groups, whose actions can ultimately be used to undermine legitimacy and break existing power;
- Training leaders capable of leading a political protest with the ultimate goal of a coup d'état;
- Training in specialized camps for field commanders and militants for power actions, organization of mobilization points abroad and routes for mercenaries;
- Supporting extremist elements in the opposition and expanding into the regions, primarily through the coordinated use of opposition-controlled electronic domestic and foreign media; an important place is given to gaining support from international organizations and the international community;
- Organization of network structures of subversion management, procurement, communication and monitoring of the situation;

Because of the blurred space between war and peace, the enemy maneuvers in the Gray zone are becoming more and more unclear. That is why the activities of intelligence services thanks to human intelligence [Humint] and technological intelligence [TechInt] have taken a crucial importance. For this purpose, reconnaissance should be organized taking into account the following main features of hybrid warfare<sup>26</sup>:

- Hybrid warfare is not declared, military operations may not be conducted for a long time, there is no front and rear, and operations cover the entire territory of the victim state;
- For a certain period of time the aggressor state does not disclose itself, does not carry out large-scale mobilization activities, strives to wage war with other people's hands, uses mercenaries, private military companies, activates the actions of internal irregular formations, "fifth column" and agents of influence;
- Formally, there is no single governing center of hybrid warfare, the general target for the destruction of the enemy's state is developed and agreed upon at the level of government agencies, the management of transnational corporations, financial and banking institutions, and individual influential persons;
- Action plans to destabilize the administrative-political, social-economic and cultural-worldview spheres provide for the creation of distributed network structures with a high degree of independence and the ability to self-synchronize in the enemy's territory. Channels of financial, material and technical, information and personnel support are being developed in advance, weapons, ammunition and communications stores are being set up, and places for training militants are being selected;
- Catalysts are used to accelerate subversive processes, in particular, diplomatic demarches, economic sanctions, information throws and, especially, successful actions of irregular forces against important objects; a powerful catalyst - a "color

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<sup>26</sup> Idem, translated from Russian by the author of this note

revolution", organized at a critical turning point in the war in order to accelerate the process of avalanche-like destabilization of the state; timely opening of the preparation of operations aimed at accelerating the processes of the collapse of the state - the most important task of intelligence;

- Special operations forces are used against strategic targets, to kidnap and kill political leaders, and to support militias;
- Regular armed forces start operating in the final stages of hybrid warfare under the pretext of "humanitarian intervention" or peace enforcement operation. Obtaining a UN mandate is desirable, but not necessary.

Even if the starting point of the Russian conception of hybrid warfare is purely based on a defensive consideration that led them to establish a comprehensive strategy useful to respond to a hybrid threat coming from the West, Russia does not exclude to act offensively with the kind of tactics that it lends to the United States of America. This assumption is literally expressed in the Bartosh's article.

### *2.2.3. The recent emergence of a comprehensive model*

In the course of 2019, "Military Thought", the Russian Defense Ministry journal, published an article describing a comprehensive model developed to plan an adapted response to hybrid threats<sup>27</sup>. The fog of the war, Clausewitz's concept, required the development of a model to assist and formalize the decision-making process. This model has three phases:

- the creation of a matrix that determines what should be taken into account in order to establish a hybrid warfare strategy
- the development of an algorithm for implementing this hybrid warfare strategy
- the construction of a synchronization tool to move from the strategy to the tactical and operational levels

Analyzing each phase of this model will allow us to understand the real Russian strategy concerning confrontation in the Gray zone.

#### *A matrix as situation analysis assistance*

This matrix describes the elements that must be taken into account to determine a strategy to adopt when Russia is facing a hybrid threat. In addition to the processor, which is the most important element, the goals, the scope (global, regional, sub-regional), the network of alliances and partnerships and the system foreseen to monitor the situation will be analyzed through four models of measurements. The static model divided into two sub-sections - general and specific- characterizes, as its name suggests, the elements that are unlikely to change during the analytical process of the conflictual situation. The control dimension requests to analyze the existing rules and procedures regulating the Russian decision-making

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<sup>27</sup> Bartosh A.A., "Model gibrinoy voyny-Hybrid Warfare Model", Military thought, Russian Ministry of Defense website, Mai 1, 2019, [On Line], <https://vm.ric.mil.ru/Stati/item/191517/>, consulted on 15-11-19

process in order to identify whether they are appropriate for the decisions concerning hybrid warfare response strategy. The international legal framework and the interactions with partners must be considered as limitations for the use of the state resources. The dynamic and forecasting characteristics are useful to identify the possible strategic adaptations that could be made. This illustrates the importance of the assessments of the situation in order to develop a strategy adapted to the real situation. Indeed, the most crucial aspect of a confrontation within the Gray zone is the difficulty to understand the real intentions of a potential enemy and to avoid overreaction.

Bartosh emphasizes the importance of the processor component of this matrix. The algorithm, based on algorithm models of artificial intelligence, should assess the conformity of the strategy to the conflictual situation. The hybrid threats are the main focus of the Russian strategists because, in order to establish an adapted strategy, determining the threats we have to face is imperative. These threats could be military or non-military. The examples used by Russian experts to identify this kind of threats are always the same, namely, colorful revolutions with a focus on the Maidan revolution. Resources are the means of the state that could be used to respond to the threats determined before. Accelerator or catalyst is a way to accelerate an ongoing destabilization of a sovereign state. The United States of America and its regime change strategy are, as is often the case, pointed out by Russian analysts.

This matrix is the first part of the Russian model. It has to help the analysts to automatize the study of a conflictual situation.

System components		Characteristics of basic model measurements			
		Static.	Control.	Dynamic.	Forecasting
1. Model of function and goals		The corresponding cells describe the state of each system component of the model in the static dimension. This allows us to obtain two types of model characteristics:	Each system component of the model is compared with the existing rules and procedures for decision-making, the international legal framework, regulations	Evolution of each system component over time is shown, which allows to get the most complete picture of the directions of adaptation of the model. At the same time,	Describes the development prospects and possible future of each system component of the model as a result of the measures taken for its adaptation. It is a natural
2. Scope of the model (global, regional, sub-regional)					
3. Processor	Algorithm				
	Hybrid threats				
	Basic resources				



	Accelerator (catalyst) HW	general (basic), which reflect the essence of the elements of the model and may be similar for many of them, and specific - inherent to a particular model	and limitations on the use of the model's resources in normal and extraordinary circumstances, and the content and scope of possible interaction with partners	it is possible to assess the changes in doctrinal views that determine the goals and objectives of the model's functioning in the changed conditions of the military and political situation, and often the expediency of its transformation	continuation of the dynamic measurement
4.Network of alliances and partnerships					
5.Situation monitoring system					

Figure 1: Matrix of system components of the hybrid warfare model<sup>28</sup>

*An algorithm to implement it*

This algorithm reflects the Russian desire to automatize the implementation of the strategy determined using the matrix explained above. The national interests and the legal framework are on the same level as the hybrid threats with which Russia has to deal. This presupposes the defensive characteristic of such a strategy. Nevertheless, considering the quote cited before affirming the possibility to act offensively and the fact that “attack is the best form of defense”, Russia could wage hybrid warfare in a proactive, preemptive or preventive manner.

<sup>28</sup> Bartosh A.A., “Model gibrinoy voyny -Hybrid Warfare Model”, Military thought, Russian Ministry of Defense website, Mai 1, 2019, [On Line], <https://vm.ric.mil.ru/Stati/item/191517/>, consulted on 15-11-19, table translated from Russian by the author of this note.

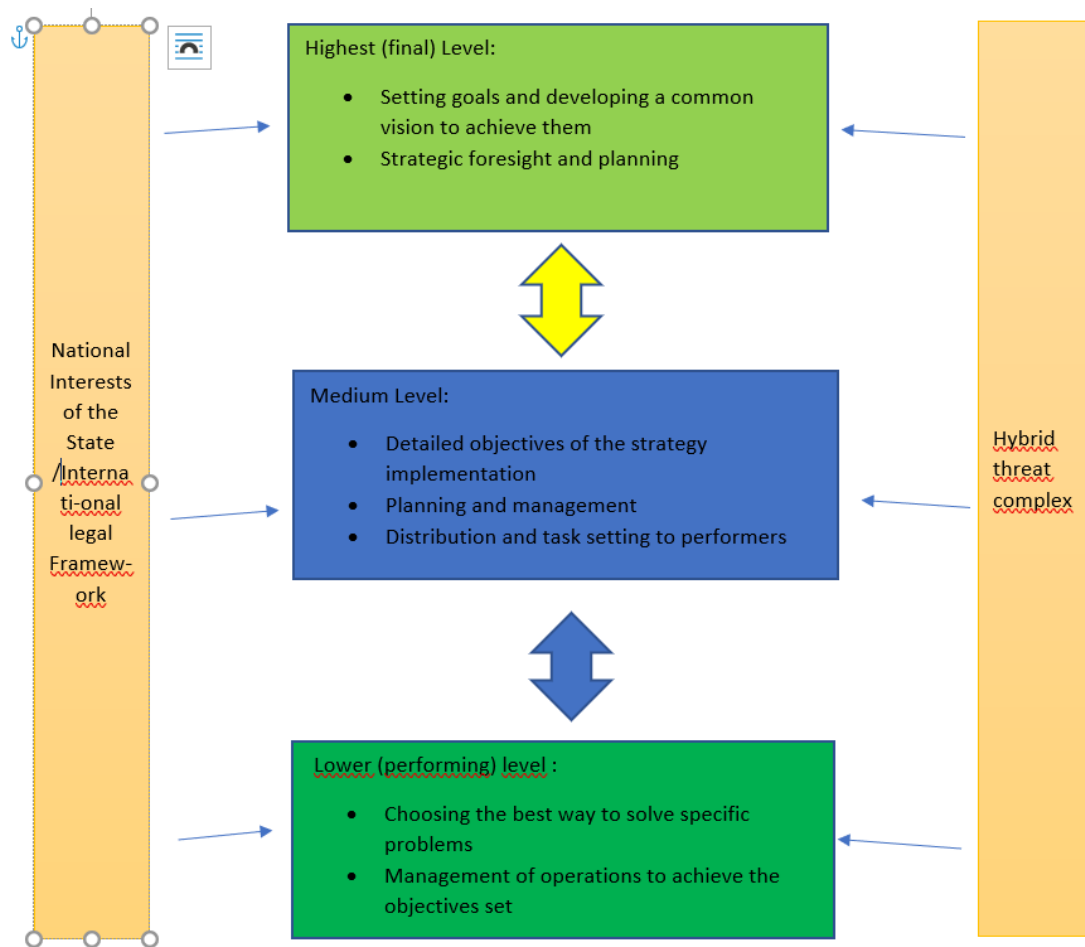
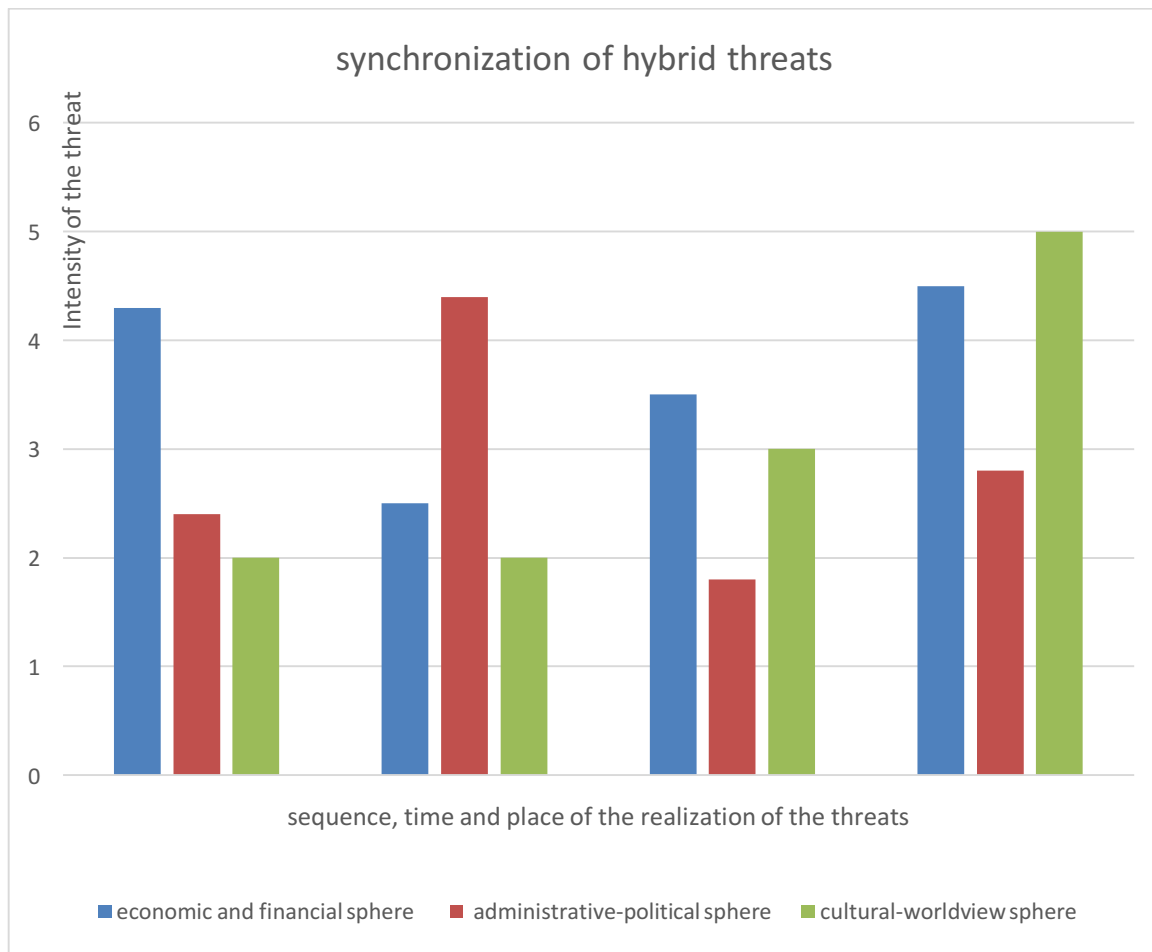


Figure 2: Algorithm for implementing a hybrid warfare strategy<sup>29</sup>

*The optimal synchronization of hybrid threats*

The clever synchronization of hybrid threats, depending on their intensity and the sequence, the time and the place of implementation of the threats, is the last phase of the Russian hybrid warfare strategy model. Hybrid threats could tackle different fields as we can see on the graphic below: economic and financial, administrative and political, cultural and worldview spheres.

<sup>29</sup> Idem, translated and rebuild by the author of this note



*Figure 3: graphic explaining the synchronization of the hybrid threats<sup>30</sup>*

This graphic explicitly expresses the way Russian analysts make a balance between implementing hybrid actions in order to achieve political goals in the Gray zone and avoiding open war outbreak justified by Russian aggressive actions.

Burtosh also describes what actions could be taken in each sphere. He still seems to use examples coming from real- or perceived as real by Russians- Western hybrid campaigns waged against Russia and its national interests.

Within the administrative-political sphere, in order to discredit political leaders, an enemy could manipulate demonstrations against unpopular reforms or affect the political image of the state through internet campaigns. Weakening the defense capacity by attacking military-industrial complex, denouncing excessive military expenses or by disrupting supplier-customer relations are well-known hybrid threats. In this sphere, intelligence services and cyber campaigns could have crucial impacts.

<sup>30</sup> Idem, translated from Russian by the author of this note.

Illegal economic sanctions and cyberattacks against bank systems or the manipulation of socio-economic data to provoke social contestations are all threats that can be used in the economic and financial sphere.

In the cultural and worldview sphere, Russia feels very cornered by the omnipotence of the Western mass media that could lead to biased information campaigns. Bartosh wants to warn the decision-maker that a potential enemy using hybrid threats could try to undermine Russian language position in Russia and in its near abroad or to ensure the discord between orthodox Christians.

According to the designer of this model, American general and former Secretary of State James Mattis and Frank Hoffman are working on this kind of hybrid threats since 2005, wishing to prove the American origins of such practices.

### 3. The Russian maneuvers in the Gray zone: Ukraine and Crimea

Even if the Russian doctrines foreseen to wage modern wars are quite recent, several cases could illustrate some Russian maneuvers in the operational environment defined as “the Gray zone”. In this part, we will address the Russian hybrid activities linked with the Ukrainian civil war that has been ongoing since 2014 and the so-called Euromaidan revolution. In order to understand the Russian activities in Ukraine, the reasons behind such operations will have to be discussed. Afterwards, the means used by Russia in Crimea will be assessed and analyzed. Furthermore, actions in Eastern Ukraine will also be addressed.

#### 3.1. Historical and geopolitical considerations

To understand the Russian actions in Ukraine, it is necessary to explain and clarify some historical and geopolitical considerations. For the sake of brevity and because these issues could be analyzed as extensive research topics, this part will only try to explain the Russian vision of the events that have been ongoing in Ukraine since 2014 based on historical and geopolitical considerations.

This crisis began with the Maidan revolution, which has turned violent on January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014, based on protestations against President Yanukovich’s decision to suspend the EU-Ukraine association agreement. Even if Western countries consider this revolution as a search for freedom, Russia sees a new colorful revolution instigated by the United States in its near abroad. Some sort of red line would have been crossed if Ukraine, following the Maidan revolution, had entered NATO and the European Union. This red line has been a constant Russian national interest since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Geopolitical issues could explain the inflexibility of Russia concerning some national interests in its near abroad. First, geographically speaking, Russia is an enclosed power, by Europe in the West, frozen seas in the North and central Asia in the South, that is permanently looking for hot seas accesses to reduce this enclosing. Letting Ukraine and Crimea enter NATO would have compromised the Russian access to the Black Sea via the port of Sebastopol leased by

Russia to Ukraine. From a broader perspective, according to the Spykman's theory, Ukraine is a part of the "Rimland" geographic area separating "Heartland" from the seas. The same theory explains that, in order to limit the influence of continental powers- such as Russia- maritime powers- such as the United States- should control the "Rimland". This geopolitical explanation could illustrate what is at stake in this Ukrainian crisis.

Recent events are quite relevant to show the American implication within this civil war. Indeed, despite the accusations of collusion between Trump and Russia, some scandals have broken out concerning the American military aid to Ukraine, the American support of Neo-Nazi groups emphasized by Stephen Cohen and, among others, Victoria's Nuland declarations. These elements often emerge, rightly or wrongly, in the Russian argument concerning the Ukraine crisis. In addition, the link between Russia and Ukraine is historical. In particular, the genesis of modern Russia, which is located in Kiev, is worth mentioning. Furthermore, Russian speaking Ukraine citizens, as illustrated by the map below, are in majority, located in the regions indicated in red. In addition to Crimea, which will be a focus point of this chapter, we will notice that the clashes are in these regions. This could be explained by a clear will of the Kremlin to defend Russian speakers' interests in its near abroad.

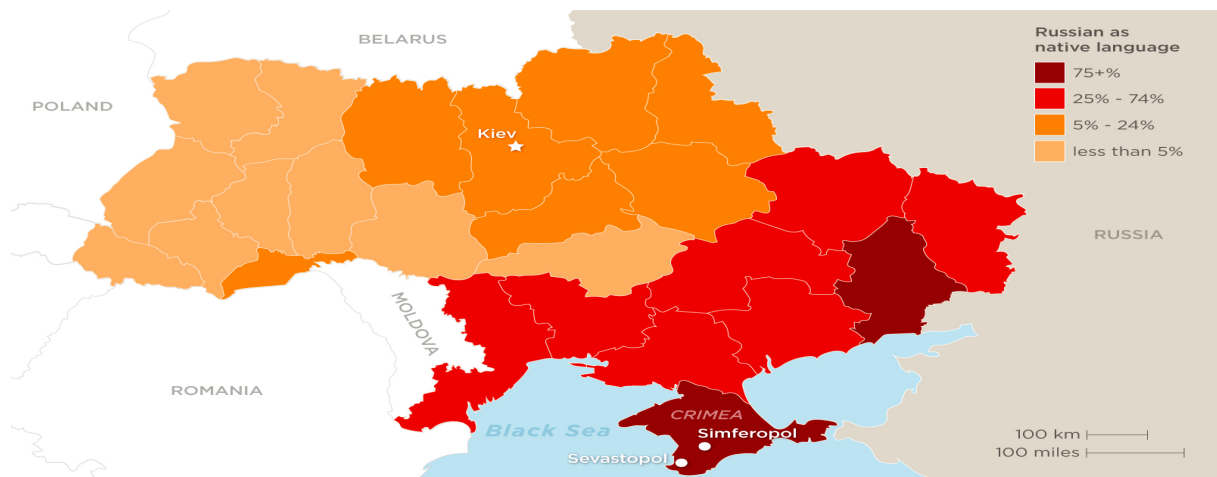


Figure 4: Map illustrating the linguistic cleavage in Ukraine<sup>31</sup>

## 3.2. Crimea Annexation

### 3.2.1. Try to understand the Russian perspective.

In order to understand the Russian activities in Crimea that led to its annexation, it seems relevant to think as Russian decision-makers. First of all, according to military and security doctrines and Russian analysts, the main threat on the Russian national security is "colorful revolutions- (tsvetnye revolioutsii)". Panarin defines this kind of hybrid warfare operation as: *"special operations of hybrid warfare waged against all international laws, in order to provoke a regime change within a State thanks to political, informational, communicational, diversion-*

<sup>31</sup> Unknown author, « A divided Ukraine », CNN, March 3 2014, [On Line], <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2014/02/world/ukraine-divided/>, consulted on 17-12-19

*terrorist and moral-psychological methods*<sup>32</sup>". Such a revolution fomented from outside could have many underlying objectives. Russian experts are all concerned about this threat and often cite examples such as Yugoslavia, Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Tunisia, and Egypt. Besides this fear, Russian experts used to analyze the way NATO is evaluating since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Indeed, one of the most often cited Russian hybrid warfare expert, A. Bartosh, emphasized the apparition of a new function of NATO: "*to serve as an information and ideological channel for the international socialization of States seeking to join the alliance, to communicate with partner States and other international organizations*"<sup>33</sup>". This is how we should analyze the Russian reaction to the so-called Euromaidan revolution. Information warfare is still ongoing between Russia and the West. For instance, Kiev and Moscow are still arguing about the nature of Euromaidan. For Kiev, this revolution was conducted by citizens struggling for freedom and economic prosperity while Moscow considers it as another colored revolution fomented by the West to undermine Russian influence in the Rimland.

Russian reaction to this "colored revolution", according to Russian terminology, could be explained by different geopolitical considerations. First of all, it is important to remind that Sebastopol naval base was occupied by Russian military Navy since 1997. As counterpart to this Russian military presence in Ukraine, Russia furnished natural gas to Ukraine. This naval base is crucial to Russia- we all remember the way the Russian Empire defended Sebastopol during the Crimea War between 1854 and 1855- because it gives a permanent access to the black Sea, which has been a Russian geopolitical obsession for centuries. Furthermore, Crimean population, as you can see on the map above, has a majority of Russian native speakers. Demographic and historical concerns could, besides language and geopolitics, explain why (almost) all Russian politicians as well as Russian people backed the come-back of Crimea within the Russian Federation.

Before analyzing the concrete actions waged by Russia in the Gray zone that led to the annexation of Crimea, we cannot ignore the discussion about the legality of this annexation. Even if we can, once again, speak about information warfare between Russia and the West around the legality of this annexation, we should mention the contradiction between two important legal principles within the international public law namely : "the right to people to self-determination" and "the principle of territorial integrity". This contradiction led to the independence of Kosovo- former part of the Serbian territory- and allowed Russia to use this legal precedent to improve its rhetoric used to justify the annexation of Crimea. We will remember that Panarin, previously cited, mentioned the non-respect of international law in his definition of "colorful revolution".

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<sup>32</sup> Panarin I., "gibridnaia voyna- Teoria i praktika- Hybrid warfare- Theory and Practice", Moscow, Goriatchaia liniia telekom, 2019, p. 315 (translated from Russian by the author of this note).

<sup>33</sup> Bartosh A.A., "Touman gibridnoy voyny- Neopredelennosti I riski konfliktov XXI Veka- the fog of hybrid warfare, uncertainties and risks of conflicts in XXI century". Moscow, Goriatchaia liniia telekom, 2019, p.205. (translated from Russian by the author of this note)

### 3.2.2. Hybrid warfare operations waged by Russia in Crimea

#### Information warfare

Firstly, many Western experts present the information warfare waged by Russia to explain the Crimean annexation. For instance, Murphy argued that: *“the Crimean vote was superficially successful with reportedly 97 percent of the population voting to secede on an 80 percent turnout. In fact [...] turnout was only 30 percent, half of whom voted against independence<sup>34</sup>”*. Another analyst, Giles, pointed out the blockage of Ukrainian TV channels replaced by Russian ones and the isolation of Crimea from the outside world by taking control of telecommunications including internet<sup>35</sup>. Furthermore, as a part of information warfare methods, social media discussions about the historical link between Crimea and Russia, the Western immersion within Ukraine, the role played in Ukraine by Neo-Nazi paramilitary groups such as Pravy Sektor or Azov Battalion among other white, grey or black propaganda, were used by Pro-Russian activists (“paid trolls” term is often used by Western analysts but it seems really difficult to make the distinction between a “conscientized citizen” and a “paid troll”). Referendum, media control, social media campaigns are all means used by Russia. In order to confirm the difficulty due to an ongoing information warfare, this citation of Panarin emphasized the fact that Russia is pressing the same charges on the West : *“the most important part of the deterrence strategy chosen at the NATO summit in Warsaw is the hybrid warfare against Russia and States of the Collective Security Treaty organization (CSTO-ODKB) consisting of the weakening or the break down of these States. The strategy of information warfare covers activities in the cultural and philosophical sphere, interferes in sports, educational and cultural exchanges, activities of religious organizations<sup>36</sup>”*. Russia as well as Western countries claim that the other side is waging an information warfare. In the specific case of the Ukrainian crisis, we can argue without any doubt that both “camps” conducted such a warfare.

A propaganda contest between the West and Russia around the Euromaidan revolution is ongoing. This revolution would have been a revolution for freedom, free-market and a struggle for the implementation of Western values in Ukraine. The Russian interpretation is totally different. Indeed, Euromaidan is only another colored revolution funded and fomented from abroad by using intelligence service agents and Neo-Nazis militias.

On the other hand, in addition to the ongoing information warfare around the nature of the Euromaidan revolution, Moscow used other psychological means. Military exercises such as “Crimea war games” in 2016 or “Zapad” in 2013 had a clear objective to show the force of the

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<sup>34</sup> Murphy M., “Understanding Russia’s Concept for Total War in Europe. In the Heritage Foundation, February 11, 2016 [On Line], <http://www.heritage.org/defense/report/understanding-russias-concept-total-war-europe>

<sup>35</sup> Giles K. “The Next Phase of Russian Information Warfare”; February 11, 2017, [On Line], [https://issuu.com/natostratcomcoe/docs/keir\\_giles\\_public\\_20.05.2016](https://issuu.com/natostratcomcoe/docs/keir_giles_public_20.05.2016)

<sup>36</sup> Panarin I., op cit., p. 258. (translated from Russian by the author of this note)

Russian army and increased Western reluctance to respond militarily to Russians actions. American experts used to make a distinction between information and psychological means, but it would seem more relevant to consider psychological means as a way of waging information warfare.

#### *Use of cyber means*

Secondly, when we speak about hybrid warfare, we cannot forget to mention cyber threats. Indeed, even if NATO experts claimed that cyber means were not used in a large spectrum by Russia during the Crimean operations, we could mention some examples of attacks on cyber infrastructure such as damaged fiber-optic trunk cables, IP-telephonic attacks, cyberattacks against Ukrainian and NATO institutions. These cyber means, among others, could be used by a government in order to damage and weaken cyber infrastructures while allowing plausible denial of authorship of such attacks. More precisely, the American company specialized in cyber intelligence, Booz Allen Hamilton, published, in March 2020, a comprehensive report about cyber activities conducted by the Russian Military Intelligence Service [GRU]. In this report, Booz Allen Hamilton summarized the cyber means used by the GRU during the Ukrainian Crisis. The following table shows us the contextualizing of cyber operations in Ukraine from Spring 2014-2015 to October 2017<sup>37</sup>:

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<sup>37</sup> Unknow authors, "Bearing witness: uncovering the logic behind Russian military cyber operations", Booz Allen Hamilton company, March 2020, p.23.



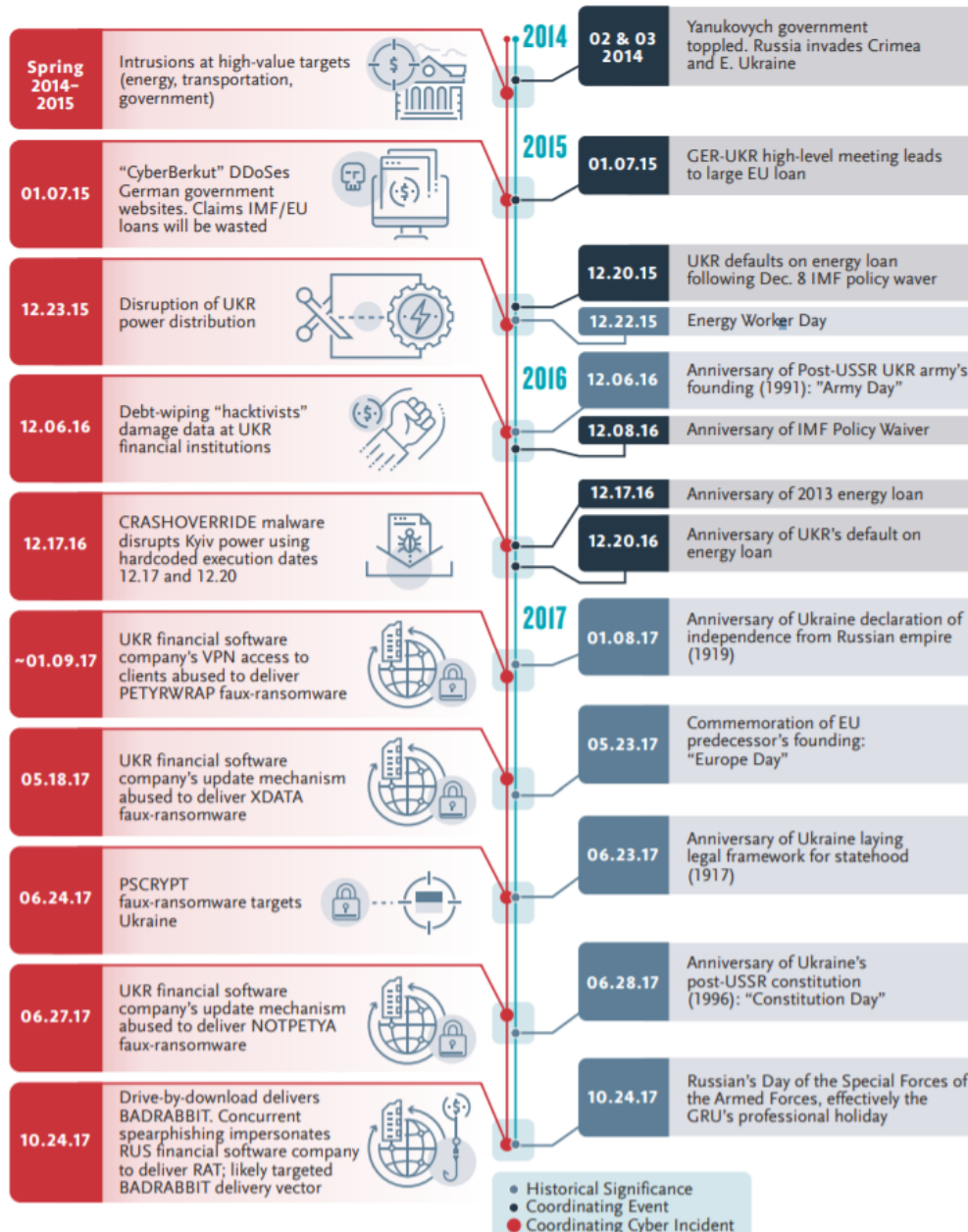


Figure 5: "Placing operations in their strategic content reveals likely motivation and intent"<sup>38</sup>

This American company claims that Russian cyber operations were conducted in accordance with historical events. We cannot pretend that this a totally irrelevant methodology, but we can argue that it is not especially useful to understand the Russian cyber strategy. Indeed, the date when a cyberattack was conducted does not help us to understand, to predict or to analyze Russian cyber strategy. The fact to choose an historical day, if this is not a pure coincidence, does not allow Russian adversaries to predict or to understand its strategy. The most interesting elements of this table are, undoubtedly, the range of cyber means used by Russia via its Military Intelligence Service to respond to the "colored revolution" that

<sup>38</sup> Unknown authors, "Bearing witness: uncovering the logic behind Russian military cyber operations", Booz Allen Hamilton company, March 2020, p.23

happened in Ukraine in 2014. Intrusions at high value targets, Distributed Denial-of-Services, use of hacktivists, malwares and ransomwares are all means used by GRU according to Booz Allen Hamilton. All of modern cyber means would have been used by Russia in order to wage hybrid warfare against Ukraine.

#### *Use of Intelligence services*

As already mentioned before, intelligence services had taken part in hybrid warfare operations in Ukraine. Besides the GRU, the FSB was also active in Ukraine. Indeed, in order to enforce the “Russia Broadens Anti-incitement Law” of 2014, which had to penalize all public incitement to separatism, the Russian government employed FSB troops in Crimea against dissidents<sup>39</sup>. Another example of the FSB’s activity in Crimea was to prevent terrorist attacks fomented by Ukrainian intelligence agency according to pro-Russian media. Within a Gray zone environment, the utilization of intelligence services is very appropriate. As a matter of fact, the doctrines and processes applied by such services allowed to increase as much as possible the plausible deniability. This is crucial for a decision-maker who tries to achieve a strategy of tactic objective by avoiding any response coming from the adversary. This concept is called “fait accompli”. In order to avoid giving any *casus belli* or any argument to undermine its credibility on the international scene, overt or covert operations waged by intelligence services could be very efficient.

#### *Military means*

In order to make possible the annexation of Crimea, Russia needed to avoid any military response coming from Ukraine, backed or not, by Western countries. The famous “little green men” applying the not less famous *maskirovka* concept- which is the Russian way of saying camouflage and nothing more- were in Crimea in order to takeover Ukrainian military headquarters or to dissuade any counteroffensives coming from Ukraine. To establish the link between this kind of military operations waged by special operations units and the Russian actions in the Gray zone, we could argue that it is an efficient way of using military means in the Gray zone. The concept of plausible deniability and the cost for the Russian credibility should be put in balance with the benefits of the achievement of the Crimean annexation operation. The Ukrainian crisis made increase the Putin’s approval rate in Russia. Moscow also ensured a permanent access to the Black sea and undermined possible future Ukrainian adversary/enemy. Thanks to this intervention, Russian-speaking population were reassured about the effectiveness of the protection provided by Russia. This crisis represented a possibility to apply new doctrines of warfare and assess adversaries’ responses and, even, enabled adaptations of the Russian hybrid warfare doctrines. These are all benefits that could compensate the loss of credibility and the possible future sanctions against Russia.

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<sup>39</sup> Rusnakova S., “Russian New Art of Hybrid Warfare in Ukraine”, Slovak Journal of Political Sciences, Volume 17, 2017, No. 3-4, p. 365.

Maneuvering in the Gray zone requires a rigorous cost-benefit assessment and adapted doctrines.

### *Civilianization of war*

During the Ukrainian crisis and afterwards in conflict areas such as Libya, Syria or Central Africa, Russia has used civilians and private military companies as proxies. Before giving some concrete examples of the utilization of civilians during the Ukrainian crisis, we have to explain the reasons behind the so-called civilianization of war. First of all, using civilian militias as proxies allows to achieve military objectives on a tactic level by threatening the enemy to create a casus bello in case of a too violent conventional military response. Furthermore, civilians could be seen as freedom or self-determination fighters

In Ukraine, besides pro-Russian unidentified militias, we could cite the Russian biker movement Night Wolves as a potential proxy used by Russia during the crisis. Indeed, the national service guard of the Ukrainian borders declared on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2019 that: *“Reinforced security measures on the State border are being implemented in order to prevent the import of weapons, ammunition, explosives and other means of terror into Ukraine, as well as the entry into or transit through Ukraine of persons with separatist and extremist sentiments that could destabilize the situation in our country. In particular, this also applies to persons on motorcycles who belong to the Night Wolves biker movement<sup>40</sup>”*. This declaration explains the methods that could be used by this kind of movement. Nevertheless, in order to have a comprehensive vision of the Ukrainian crisis, we have to notify that this movement answered to these accusations by saying that it is allowed to travel all around Europe without creating any security incidents and that measures are due to Ukrainian paranoia. Even this kind of speech exchange could be seen as a part of the ongoing information warfare.

Another aspect of civilianization of war is the use of private military companies. The most known Russian private military company is the Wagner group. The premises of the Wagner group activities were mentioned during the Ukrainian crisis. The Wagner group activities in Ukraine were summarized by Sergey Sukhankin as follows: *“the Wagner Group performed operations on the territory of the LPR that required a high level of military proficiency. For example, Wagner personnel were responsible for the assassination of LPR’s “minister of defense,” Alexander Bednov; the killing of Aleksey Mozgovoy, the leader of the Prizrak Brigade; the disarmament of the “Odessa” mechanized brigade; and of wide-scale repressions against Russian Cossacks who had previously served in Luhansk Oblast but, with the collapse of the Moscow-backed “Novorossiya” (“New Russia”) project for southeastern Ukraine, grew more “independent” of the Kremlin<sup>41</sup>*. Russia has a particular thinking about such companies.

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<sup>40</sup> Stepanova M., “Night Wolves respond to the panic of Ukrainian borders guards”, 8 May 2019, FAN-TB, [On Line], <https://riafan.ru/1176850-nochnye-volki-otreagirovali-na-paniku-ukrainskikh-pogranichnikov>, translated from Russian by the author of this note.

<sup>41</sup> Sukhankin S., “Continuing War by Other Means’: The Case of Wagner, Russia’s Premier Private Military Company in the Middle East”, the Jamestown Foundation, July 13 2018, [On Line],

First, the State remains the main stakeholder of private military companies. They are employed by the Russian government to achieve different political and economic objectives. Therefore, they are not really private. When we look at the command structure of the Wagner group, we can claim that the operational direction is led by GRU Lieutenant General (ret.) Dmitry Utkin. Furthermore, there is an international consensus on the identity of the founder of the Wagner group who would be Prigozhin, a Russian oligarch known as Putin's cooker and President's close friend. Secondly, a private military company is a useful tool in the Kremlin's hands. Indeed, Russia could employ such well-trained military troops in order to achieve high intensity combat operations by keeping an extremely low rate of mortality. In a context of information warfare, claiming that Russian conventional troops are counting such a low rate, could be an essential argument toward Russian public opinion. In the Gray zone, plausible deniability is essential in order to avoid adversary's response, loss of credibility and further sanctions. By using a private military company, Russia would be able to deny any responsibility especially thanks to the fact that mercenary groups are banned by Russian constitution. Because of the Geneva Convention and military law, conventional troops are limited in the way they conduct military operations. Therefore, private military companies could achieve tactical success without applying such rules. Indeed, thanks to the lack of international regulation, Wagner group members could maneuver with a higher level of freedom without being submitted to a strict legal framework. Besides Ukrainian area, Wagner group is also used abroad in order to achieve political, economic Russian objectives as well as Prigozhin's personal objectives according to Alexander Rabin as he showed it in the following map.

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[https://jamestown.org/program/continuing-war-by-other-means-the-case-of-wagner-russias-premier-private-military-company-in-the-middle-east/#\\_edn41](https://jamestown.org/program/continuing-war-by-other-means-the-case-of-wagner-russias-premier-private-military-company-in-the-middle-east/#_edn41)

# WAGNER DEPLOYMENT

Where do Wagner deployment, Russian political interests, Russian economic interests and Prigozhin's commercial interests intersect?

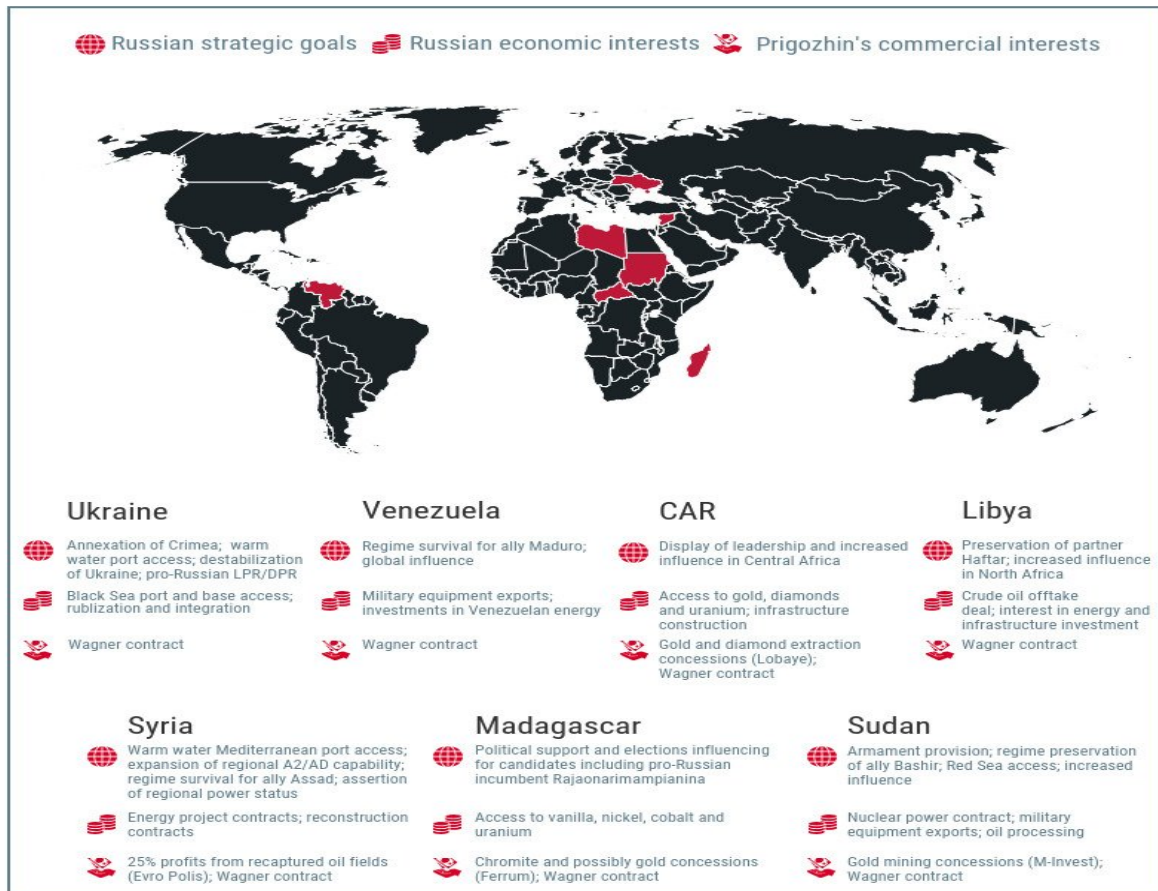


Figure 6: Wagner group deployment<sup>42</sup>

After that being said, we can put this utilization of proxies in perspective by claiming that Russia is only adapting to a modern way of waging war. Indeed, the United States are known as the precursor of the modern use of proxies. When we argue about proxies, we should remember examples, such as, among many others, the scandals linked to the behaviors of Black Water contractors in Iraq. These kinds of scandals are potential weapons for Russia to wage information warfare against the United States. Being cynical, could we claim that such a warfare would force governments to act more transparently?

<sup>42</sup> Rabin A., "Diplomacy and dividends: who really controls the Wagner group?", Foreign Policy research institute, October 4 2019, [On Line], <https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/10/diplomacy-and-dividends-who-really-controls-the-wagner-group/>

### *Energy and economic help*

One of the most important and effective tools in the Kremlin's hand are the energy means. Before the Euromaidan revolution, Vladimir Putin proposed to purchase 15 billion of Ukrainian debt and to cut-off energy prices<sup>43</sup>. President Yanukovich's Prime Minister, Azarov declared that *"The president reached agreement on exceptionally beneficial conditions for crediting Ukraine's economy, which allows us to carry out wide-ranging plans for economic modernization"<sup>44</sup>*. The purpose of this kind of maneuver is to create dependence on the lending State. Ukraine, if the revolution had not taken place, would have returned to the Russian sphere of influence by becoming what is called a client state. Even after the Euromaidan revolution, Russia used energy as a mean to implement the annexation of Crimea. For instance, Chernomornaftegas was purchased by Gazprom in March 2014 and moved two jack-up rigs from Odeske gas field- Ukrainian territory- to Russian national waters. Therefore, energetic supply of the Crimean Peninsula became dependent on Russian provisioning. This illustrates the way how energy means could be used in order to wage hybrid warfare. This kind of approach could be seen as aggressive as the Chinese policy in Africa or in Pakistan.

### **3.3. Lessons learned and perspective**

The Ukrainian crisis following the Euromaidan revolution was the very first example of the Russian doctrine's application in a specific operational environment. After observing the ongoing "colorful revolution" in Ukraine and the likelihood to see the Yanukovich regime being replaced by a very anti-Russian government, Russia reacted by applying new kinds of means. Information and psychological warfare tools, intelligence services' operations, utilization of proxies and cyber operations allowed Russia to annex Crimea, enable the secession of Russian-speaking parts of Ukraine-after democratic elections as foreseen in the Minsk II agreement- and save the main national interest despite the unfavorable regime change at the head of a crucial State within the Russian "Near Abroad" without triggering an open war against the West.

Russia tried to manage economic sanctions by developing its economical sovereignty and presenting itself as a besieged citadel. Furthermore, the ongoing information warfare has only increased tension and competition. Indeed, the Ukrainian crisis strengthened the anti-Western posture of the Russian government backed by Russian public opinion. Nowadays, despite the likely future tensions between Russia and China around hegemony in central Asia, economic power inequality- as showed by the commercial balance between both States, migration pressure at the Chinese-Russian border and many other trouble spots- Russo-Western confrontation almost cut off the European head of the Russian double-headed eagle.

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<sup>43</sup> Walker S., "Vladimir Putin offers Ukraine financial incentives to stick with Russia", the guardian, December 18, 2013, [On Line], <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/17/ukraine-russia-leaders-talks-kremlin-loan-deal>

<sup>44</sup> Idem

By reacting with such aggressiveness, Russia isolated itself from a non-negligible part of the international scene. Indeed, in order to improve its economy and be recognized as a great power on the international scene, Russia could not afford to be seen as an adversary or even as an enemy to the West. The European Union and the United States risk remaining hostile to Russia in the future especially if ideological differences increase with the arrival of a Democrat President and Administration such as Joe Biden. The recent events linked to the covid-19 show that Russia, on one hand, could send help in Italy to show its capacity to manage the struggle, emphasize the weakness of such a liberal democracy and show the Russian flag within a NATO country. Nevertheless, this was seen as an information warfare operation by some and as a nice gesture by people and politicians with a preexistent favorable opinion about Russia. Paradoxically, in the meantime, Russia became one of the Countries most affected by the virus considering the number of positive cases. On the other hand, mutual help between Russia and the United States showed that both countries could cooperate even if this is on a low scale at the moment.

#### 4. Conclusion: Russian hybrid warfare doctrines, an adaptation to the revolutions in military affairs.

By analyzing the Russian military doctrines and their application in Ukraine, we could claim that we are facing a new revolution in military affairs. Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, two Chinese colonels, wrote in “unrestricted warfare” that operation “Desert Storm” led by the American General Norman Schwarzkopf was like a revelation to military analysts around the world<sup>45</sup>. Indeed, this operation revealed the American dominance concerning military technologies and armed systems. This forced States struggling for a multipolar world- against the American hegemony- to understand the weaknesses of such an army and to develop new ways of waging war in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Among the internal struggles within the American army, they pointed out that the American army always wanted to solve operational issues with technological tools. However, the art of war consists in choosing the right combination of available tools for a given operational issue. The competence of the military strategists will remain the most important element to be victorious. Nowadays, struggles between great powers are situated in the Gray zone for many reasons such as the American domination concerning conventional military forces, nuclear weapons and deterrence capacity, the importance of economy within an interdependent world, the weight of public opinion and the possibility to influence it by using propaganda and public relations techniques, etc.

This revolution in military affairs forced the involved governments to implement the coordination of new tools -proxies, cyber means, intelligence services’ operations, financial and economic threats, mass and social media influence, etc.- in new military doctrines. In short, it is more relevant to speak about militarization of civilian tools. Indeed, as recommended by Liang and Xiangsui, current decision-makers should extend the military domain and think as Machiavel instead of or Clausewitz. The combinatorial method is the manner in which you add up certain tactics to create a completely new one adapted to a particular theater of operation, in order to achieve a particular objective. “*From 1793 to 1814, for 20 years, no warlord was as able to wield the canon as Napoléon. No one knew how to combine the deadly power of artillery with the maneuverability of cavalry*”<sup>46</sup>, this quote illustrates the relevance of the combinatorial method in order to win battles.

Russian hybrid warfare doctrines follow the principles of combinatorial method and try to optimize its strengths while identifying the opponent’s weaknesses. More generally, Decisions-makers must compose with important limitations when they have to implement global strategy on the operation level. Indeed, they have to respect International law, compose with public opinion, assess threats of retaliatory actions. Therefore, operating in the Gray zone will become compulsory in order to conduct international competition in the future. Plausible deniability, *fait accompli*, modern propaganda are concepts that will become more and more recurrent.

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<sup>45</sup> Liang Q., Xiangsui W., « La guerre hors limite », Rivages poche, January 2019, 309 p.

<sup>46</sup> Idem p.197



To illustrate the relevance of analyzing the States' activities in the Gray zone, we could claim that Russian new weapons introduced by Vladimir Putin in front of the Duma of the Russian Federation in March 2018 are tools created in order to make unlikely any military response to Russian actions in the Gray zone coming from an opponent. The revolution in military affairs induces a new kind of deterrence that will not remain only nuclear.

Even if analyzing the doctrines and their application to a concrete situation will definitely help understand the new way of waging war and reduce the nuisance capacity of an adversary, the Chinese strategist Li Shimin who said : *"When I make surprise a rule, the enemy expects surprise; I then attack him according to the rule; when I make the rule a surprise, the enemy expects an attack according to the rule; I then attack him by surprise"* illustrated the importance of surprise in strategy. Many historical mistakes that led to catastrophes, such as the Maginot line and the willingness to keep tanks within infantry brigades, were caused by thinking by analogy. Even if it seems necessary to understand Russian doctrines and be prepared to respond to future hybrid warfare operations, if Western countries consider Russia and Russia considers NATO states as the main threat to national security, doctrines and means used will evolve by increasing the audacity and the violence level of the adversary. It seems important to avoid modern McCarthyism by trying to understand the point of view of the other, by limiting ongoing information warfare and renewing dialogue in order to achieve international agreements or to restart mutual beneficial partnerships.

To conclude this note, I will cite the message sent by the Russian cultural center in Brussels to promote the celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory against Nazi Germany: «Nous sommes à la veille du 75ème anniversaire de la victoire qui a marqué la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Ce conflit fut d'une ampleur et d'une férocité sans précédent. Ce n'est qu'au prix d'efforts colossaux que la menace qui pesait sur les fondements mêmes de la civilisation a pu être conjurée. Face au bilan atroce, la communauté internationale a pris conscience qu'il lui fallait se doter d'un système de sécurité collective et mettre en place un mécanisme permettant de garantir la paix dans le monde : l'Organisation des Nations Unies ».

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