Making Sense of Russian Hybrid Warfare: A Brief Assessment of the Russo–Ukrainian War

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Preface

Russian warfare in the 21st century has ushered in a new paradigm—one in which states are in perpetual conflict with one another in a manner that best operates in the shadows. This model, known to Americans and most Westerners as hybrid warfare, is known to Russians as New Generation Warfare. Hybrid warfare, much like any nation's or polity's way of warfare, is explicitly linked to the country from which it derives its power.

In the case of Russia, the hybrid warfare model seeks to operate along a spectrum of conflict that has covert action and overt combat as its bookends, with partisan warfare as the glue that binds the two ends together. This model seeks to capitalize on the weaknesses associated with nascent technology and therefore acts aggressively in new domains of war—such as cyber—while continuing to find innovative ways to conduct effective information warfare.

However, what is often lost in the discussion of the technological innovation of Russian hybrid warfare is that a conventional line of effort resides just below the surface. The Donbas campaign of the Russo–Ukrainian War (2014–present) highlights this idea. The Donbas campaign showcases innovations in Russian land warfare through the actions of Russian land forces—working in conjunction with separatist land forces—throughout the campaign. Most notably, these innovations include the development of the battalion tactical group (BTG)—a formation that possesses the firepower to punch at the operational level of war—coupled with a reconnaissance-strike model not seen on contemporary battlefields. Furthermore, the BTG and reconnaissance-strike model work in tandem to create siege warfare opportunities for the Russian and separatist forces, allowing them to generate high levels of destruction while operating beneath the notice of the international community.

Russian hybrid warfare, throughout the Russo–Georgian War (2008) and the Russo–Ukrainian War, has proven itself to be an effective instrument. Its utility beyond proximity to the Russian border is unknown, but it still proves a unique problem for contemporary and future-minded military leaders.

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Introduction

Russian aggression in the 21st century has pushed warfare into unfamiliar territory. Each of Russia's major conflicts in that time—most notable the Second Chechen War (1999–2009), the Russo–Georgian War (2008) and the Russo–Ukrainian War (2014–present)—illustrate the evolution of what has become known as Russian hybrid warfare, or Russian New Generation Warfare. While the term itself is not new, the manner in which Russia conducts its version of hybrid warfare is unique and worthy of analysis.
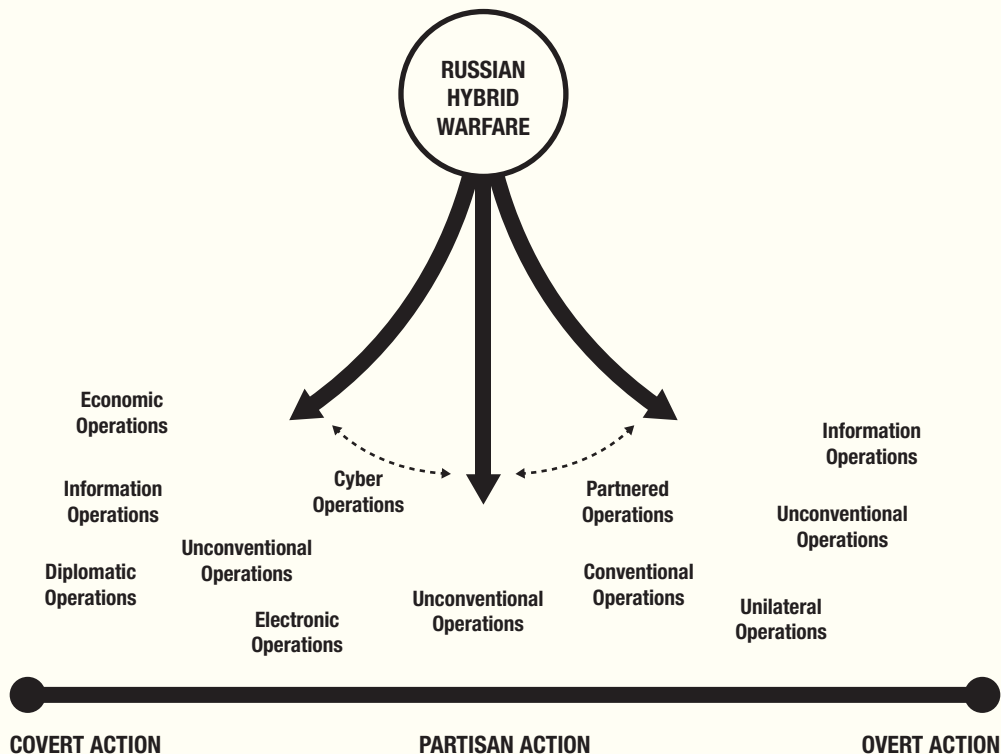
Russia's brand of hybrid warfare is a whole-of-government approach. It operates along a spectrum of conflict ranging from covert action to overt combat, with the mobilization and employment of partisan forces that serve as the glue that binds each end of the spectrum of the concept. (See figure 1.) All the while, Russian hybrid warfare makes use of information, cyber and electronic capabilities as tools of applied force. Russia uses the construct of the "Russian Identity" to justify action and to enable covert and partisan action.

Yet, lurking just below the veneer of covert action, information operations and cyber warfare is a willingness to wage full-scale conventional warfare in which traditional Russian strengths are brought to bear—a reliance on indirect fire and mechanized ground forces. In many cases, the conventional component of Russian hybrid warfare is overlooked, or brushed aside because it is assumed that there is nothing new to learn from examining contemporary Russian land warfare. However, this assumption is incorrect because Russian land warfare brings many new or forgotten ideas, organizations and methods to the forefront.

Russia's method of land warfare within the hybrid paradigm is based on a strategy of localized dominance and "addition through subtraction," in which the siege is the preferred method of fighting. Russian hybrid warfare is also temporal; it is focused on limited wars in which speed is of the essence. The goal is to move quickly, seize the objective and reinforce it with sizeable combat power before the adversary or the international community has time to realize what has occurred and provide an adequate response to stop the advance. The purpose of this essay is to further elaborate on the aforementioned ideas and then provide recommendations for identifying and addressing future hybrid threats.

Figure 1

Spectrum of Hybrid Warfare

"War is a pulsation of violence, variable in strength and therefore variable in the speed in which it discharges its energy." –Carl von Clausewitz, On War.

RUSSIAN HYBRID WARFARE

Economic Operations

Information Operations

Diplomatic Operations

Unconventional Operations

Electronic Operations

Cyber Operations

Unconventional Operations

Partnered Operations

Conventional Operations

Unconventional Operations

Information Operations

Unconventional Operations

Unilateral Operations

COVERT ACTION   **PARTISAN ACTION**   **OVERT ACTION**

Defining Hybrid Warfare

There are many definitions of hybrid warfare. The Potomac Institute's Frank Hoffman offers one of the prominent definitions, suggesting that hybrid wars "incorporate a range of different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts . . . and criminal disorder."[1]

Hoffman further states that hybrid wars are operationally and tactically synchronized and coordinated within an area of operation to achieve "synergistic effects."[2] The problem with Hoffman's definition is that it casts such a large net that it absorbs every action, meaning that anything could be considered hybrid warfare. This definition makes a concept intangible—and thus of little utility to the discussion of current hybrid wars.

The U.S. Army does not define hybrid warfare, but instead provides a definition for hybrid threat. Army doctrine states that a hybrid threat is "the diverse and dynamic combination of regular forces, irregular forces, terrorist forces and/or criminal elements unified to achieve mutual benefitting effects."[3] This definition falls short of accurately defining modern hybrid warfare and hybrid threats by failing to address hybridity beyond physical threats. In a hybrid environment, threats exist in all domains and throughout all the elements of national power.

Russia's actions in Ukraine illustrate this shortcoming because they demonstrate the linkage of information operations, cyber operations and the instruments of national power with the actors provided in the U.S. Army's definition of hybrid threat.

Contemporary American military theorist Robert Leonhard suggests that hybrid warfare and its supporting operations are driven by the notion of obtaining asymmetric advantages to enable the attainment of political aims. Hybrid operations are characterized by undeclared action that combines conventional and unconventional military operations, while coupling military and nonmilitary actions in an environment in which the distance between strategy and tactics has been significantly reduced and where information is critically important.[4] Leonhard's definition best describes not only the concept of contemporary hybrid warfare but also the unique attributes of the Russian brand of hybrid warfare.

One point that is overlooked in each definition of hybrid warfare or of a hybrid threat is the concept's relationship to its source of power and authority. A nation or polity's approach to hybrid warfare is intimately tied to the political institution from which it derives its power. National policy drives its ends, while national means, in the domains of war and in the elements of national power, guide the strategic and operational approaches. The interplay between history and geography also influence where, how and with whom a nation goes about crafting its hybrid approach. With this in mind, it is beneficial to briefly survey Russian policy and military strategy to better understand Russian hybrid warfare.

The Relationship between Hybrid Warfare and Policy, Narratives and Military Strategy

Russia's major policy objective, as articulated by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, is to see an end to the Western-dominated world order.[5] Stopping the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) encroachment into Russia's historical sphere of influence, or its Near Abroad, and achieving regional hegemony are subordinate objectives of Russia's policy.[6] Russia's focus on regional hegemony is oriented on fracturing the European Union through influencing European elections in favor of pro-nationalistic candidates.[7]

Russia has developed a useful narrative to justify aggression action in its Near Abroad. The narrative rests in a victim identity, in which they (Russia) are under constant attack from the West—politically, culturally and territorially. Furthermore, the narrative states that traditional Russian land, such as Crimea and the Novorossiya region of Ukraine,[8] rightly belongs in the hands of the Russian state.[9] In situations in which those lands are not under Russian possession, they have the right to retake that territory.

Taking this concept a step further, Russia devised an operationalized definition of the "Russian Identity," which is malleable and can be manipulated to suit its political and strategic interests. The Russian Identity is marked by five characteristics: ethnic Russians; speakers of the Russian language; practitioners of Eastern Orthodoxy;[10] Slavic people; and the geographical expanse of the Russian Empire, Russian Federation or Soviet Union. Russia's use of history is intertwined with the use of geography, going back as far as the founding of the Romanov Dynasty in the 17th century. The "Russian Identity," operationalized by Russian president Vladimir Putin, serves as the impetus and justification for bellicose actions in Europe and beyond.

Militarily, Russian strategy is driven by the idea that international politics is in a perpetual state of struggle. As a result, nations are in a constant state of tension with one another. The

nature of international politics creates conditions in which the side that can act first and move unnoticed in pursuit of its political objectives will likely acquire an advantageous position before the international community is able to make sense of the situation and work to counteract that action.[11] However, a nation must possess the capability and will to escalate the use of physical force to take what they want.

Russian military strategy is also underwritten by a strategy of dominance. The Russian strategy of dominance is shaped by its past, which assists in the understanding of its current conditions of dominance. In the past, Russia attempted a strategy of dominance which sought holistic dominance over the entirety of its empire. However, the Russians found that pursuit of this version of dominance was too costly, depleting its financial reserves. Russia had failed to take into consideration the characteristics of dominance—that it is resource- and capital-dependent, fleeting, prone to shock or surprise and has different requirements based upon the domain and element of national power.

As a result, Russia has crafted an operational approach based on localized and temporal dominance at the expense of persistent dominance, which is a defining feature of its hybrid warfare construct. Taken collectively, Russia's strategy of dominance looks to weaken those on its periphery through covert action, cyber operations and information warfare, while creating and maintaining zones of frozen conflict, or strategic outposts from which to further manipulate adversaries.[12] To put it another way, Russia's strategy of dominance is rooted in "addition through subtraction"—a weak-neighbor policy keeps Russia strong relative to those weak neighbors.[13] The best way to keep one's neighbors weak is through covert action—blending unconventional forces, cyber operations and information operations—to destabilize those neighbors.

Russia's military strategy is not naïve enough to assume that unconventional, covert action is a silver bullet. Russian policy necessitates an operational approach that embodies the Clausewitzian notion of war as "a pulsation of violence," variable in time, speed and intensity.[14] Therefore, Russian hybrid warfare operates in the shadows during times of perceived peace to destabilize enemies, while possessing the capability to pulsate to the conventional end of the spectrum to fight and win conventional engagements, battles and operations in proximity to the Russian border. The results are an escalatory hybrid-warfare model that first seeks to achieve its political objectives through covert action, then uses partisan forces if covert action is ineffective or insufficient. If partisan forces are unable to achieve objectives, Russian hybrid warfare will commit conventional Russian troops. In transitioning from partisan warfare to overt conventional warfare, Russian forces attempt to keep a partisan face forward, while quickly melting into the countryside or back across the Russian border upon the completion of localized hostilities.

Preexisting Social Networks—A Key Component of a Hybrid Strategy

The Russo–Ukrainian War's Donbas campaign provides an instructive case study in support of the use of partisan forces as the glue that binds covert action with overt conventional combat. Russia, making use of the "Russian Identity," infiltrated intelligence officers—most notable among them Igor Girkin, Igor Beslan and Alexey Mozgovoy—into the region to agitate disaffected Donbas "Russians" to foment discontent with the government in Kyiv.[15] An additional part of their task was to build an army of supportive Donbas partisans to push for independence from Ukraine, claiming that Kyiv was unrepresentative of the people of

the region.[16] Girkin and his associates tapped into preexisting social networks, leveraging the Russian Identity to form the basis of the partisan forces. The result yielded a partisan force of upwards of 30,000 soldiers, organized in battalion tactical groups and independent brigades.[17] This approach to warfare is uniquely Russian, illustrating the idea that hybrid warfare, much like other forms of warfare, is intimately linked to the society from which it derives its authority.

Russian Hybrid Warfare—Operations and Tactics

The Russo–Ukrainian War (2014–present) is the best example of Russian hybrid warfare. The war's two major campaigns—Crimea and Donbas—illuminate the unique character of Russian hybrid warfare. Crimea, historically part of Russia since the defeat of the Crimean Khanate in 1783, met all the conditions of the "Russian Identity."[18] The Crimean campaign, highlighted by the annexation of Crimea on 18 March 2014, demonstrates how Russia leveraged the Russian Identity in relation to demographics and the history of the area to quickly and quietly operate on the covert end of the spectrum of hybrid warfare. Russian covert forces destabilized Crimea's local government through infiltrating and coopting security and defense forces, which then allowed them to take control of the seats of power and security in the peninsula. Crimean demographics—the majority of the population is ethnic Russian and most are Russian speakers—played a critical role in the peninsula's annexation, resulting in little violence and almost no loss of life.[19] The annexation of Crimea highlights the effectiveness of the Russian Identity in relation to strategic objectives, but the Donbas campaign shows that hybrid warfare's effectiveness depends largely on the infiltrated population's willingness to support the intervention.

The Russo–Ukrainian War's Donbas campaign's beginning was similar to that of the Crimean campaign, but it unfolded much differently. The conditions in Donbas did not directly match those in Crimea, resulting in the campaign's escalation from strictly covert action to the use of partisans and overt military combat. Russian special operations forces and intelligence services infiltrated Ukraine and attempted to foment discontent between the citizens and their federal and local governments. Simultaneously, Russian agitators tapped into preexisting groups across the eastern portion of the country to build formidable partisan forces to fight with Russia pursuant to destabilizing Kyiv. The covert and partisan phases of the Donbas campaign occurred from April 2014 through June 2014, at which time Kyiv assembled the Ukrainian army and volunteer battalions to combat the partisan separatists.

Kyiv's forces made headway against the partisans and covert forces until the strike at Zelenopillya on 11 July 2014, which was one of the first times that the Russian armed forces made their presence known. A back-and-forth series of battles unfolded in the Donbas between July 2014 and February 2015—the most notable being the battles at Iloviask, Donetsk airport, Luhansk airport and Debal'tseve. In each of these battles, conventional Russian ground forces openly assisted the separatists in defeating Ukrainian armed forces. The Donbas campaign was directed from Stavropol, Russia, by the 49th Army, who (in conjunction with the 6th Tank Brigade), provided the preponderance of Russian battalion tactical groups (BTGs) and rocket brigades employed in the Donbas.[20]

It must also be noted that BTGs were provided by almost every field army and corps within the Russian ground forces, from as far away as Vladivostok and the Kuril Islands. At the height of the campaign, arguably during the time the siege of Debal'tseve was raging, Russian

ground forces in Donbas peaked at approximately 10,000 soldiers, while they had another 26,000 holding Crimea.[21] While those in Crimea were not organized in BTGs, the 10,000 in Donbas were. Time and again the BTGs proved their utility in the campaign, so much so that the Russian Armed Forces Chief of Staff, Valery Gerasimov, stated that the Russian army is going to increase its number of BTGs from 66 to more than 120 by 2018.[22] In light of the BTGs' ubiquitous role in the Donbas campaign, and the accolades received from the Russian armed forces, further examination of the formation and its associated concepts is required.

The Battalion Tactical Group

Not to be confused with the brigade tactical group, the BTG is a Russian innovation associated with the limited wars of hybrid warfare. Hiding beneath the veneer of hybridity are powerful conventional capabilities, as Russia demonstrated in Donbas.[23] Russia's tactical innovation in relation to its landpower influences operational thought, specifically in the area of campaign planning and the sequencing of operations. Russia has reorganized its tactical formations (specifically, their battalion- and brigade-level organizations) to generate forces with the ability to punch well above their relative echelons—the result being the BTG.[24] The Russian BTG consists of one tank company, three mechanized infantry companies, an anti-armor company, two to three self-propelled artillery batteries, a multiple launch rocket battery and two air defense batteries. (See figure 2.)

Figure 2
Battalion Tactical Group (BTG) Force Structure
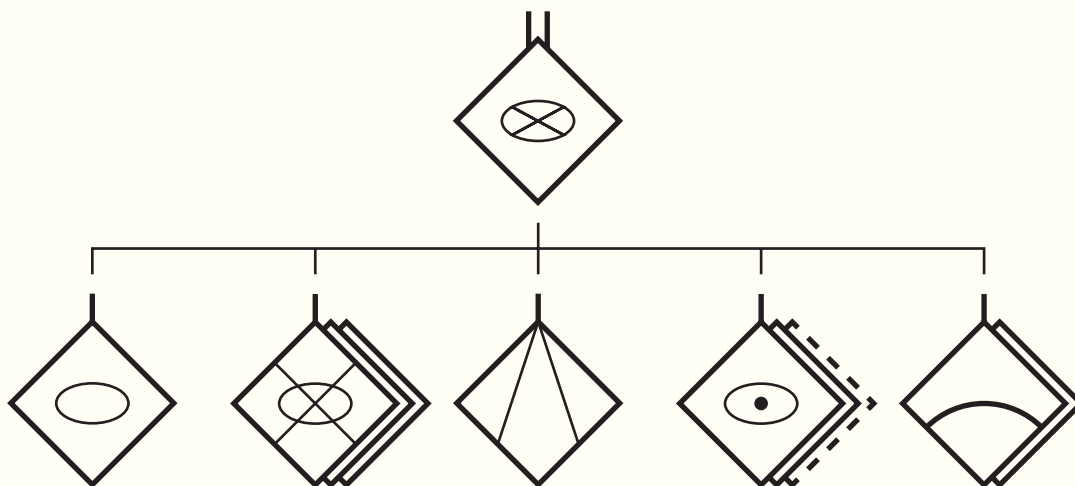
The BTG, in relation to firepower—defined as direct fire, indirect fire, anti-tank and air defense—outguns U.S. Army brigade combat teams (BCTs), being able to range out as far as 90 kilometers.[25] (See figure 3.) Of note, Russian BTGs also routinely use their self-propelled artillery in direct-fire mode, providing frontal fires extending out to 6,000 meters—exceeding the direct-fire and anti-armor range of U.S. Army BCTs by approximately 2,500 meters.[26] (See figures 4 and 5.) The BTG's ability to overmatch and outrange U.S. Army BCTs provides a unique challenge to Army leaders; however, the problems posed by the BTG exceed those of just weapon ranges.

Figure 3

BTG and Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT) Comparison

	U.S. ABCT	Russian BTG	Advantage
Tank Company	4	1	United States
Mechanized Infantry Company	3	3	–
Anti-armor Company	0	1	Russia
Field Artillery Battery	0	2	Russia
Rocket Battery	0	1	Russia
Air Defense Battery	0	2	Russia

Russian BTGs are resilient, integrated systems, designed to absorb shock and punishment while still being capable of delivering overwhelming firepower—the Russian BTG is an anti-fragile system and is absent a center of gravity (COG). While U.S. doctrine generally subscribes COGs to operational and strategic levels, one must remember that in hybrid wars such as the Russo–Ukrainian War, the BTG is a tactical formation possessing the firepower of an operational unit and capable of achieving operational effects. Therefore, a systems perspective should be used in analyzing how to operate on a battlefield littered with Russian BTGs.

A systems perspective suggests that the overall capabilities within a system must be weakened to such a point that the system breaks or acquiesces prior to reaching its breaking point. An assessment of the BTG illustrates this idea—the redundancy of mobility, firepower and protection within the formation indicates that there is not a centralized source of power or strength, but rather a symbiotic relationship between components that provides the BTG with its power.

The robust nature of the Russian BTG begs the question of where to focus one's effort when meeting a BTG on the battlefield. The systems approach would dictate that effort be applied against the BTG at any possible point, along the breadth and depth of its formation, the goal being to reduce the BTG's capabilities to the point that it can no longer continue to resist. Combating the robustness of the elusive and powerful BTG, operating under the protection of dense integrated air defense system (IADS) protection close to its border might signal a return to attrition-based warfare, as adversaries seek to degrade an opponent's capability to such a point that they cannot continue to resist. This does not suggest that maneuver is no longer relevant but that perhaps maneuver warfare, positional warfare and attrition warfare are all parts of a whole, with each part working in conjunction with the other parts as battlefield conditions dictate.

The BTG also possesses local air defense capabilities, allowing it to neutralize enemy tactical air support. Early battles and engagements during the Russo–Ukrainian War show Ukrainian forces attempting to bring in close combat attack, close air support and medical evacuation platforms, only to have those airframes knocked out of the sky. The downing of a Ukrainian Il-76 transport plane over Luhansk Oblast, in which 49 Ukrainian soldiers were killed, is but one example; the combat early in the Donbas campaign is littered with instances in which Russians and their separatist partners downed several Ukrainian airframes.[27] After the early anti-air operations in Donbas, the Ukrainian military all but refused to employ any sort of airpower. This situation has largely continued through to the present state of the conflict.

Figure 4

BTG Weapons Capabilities

Russian BTG

One per BTG

T-72B3, T-80, T-90 (125mm main gun)	
AT-11	

BTG mortars

Three per BTG

BMP-3 (100mm)

BMP-3 (30mm)

Two per BTG

2S25 (12mm TD)

One or two per BTG

BM-21 (20km)

BM-27 (35km)

BM-30 (90km)

9A52-4 (90km)

One or two per BTG

2S19 (152mm, SP)

Direct Lay

2S1 (122mm, SP)

15km

2S19 (152mm, SP)

29km

90 km

Symbol		
	1	77
	2	13
	1	67
	4	6

Scale: 1,000m 2,000m 3,000m 4,000m 5,000m 6,000m 7,000m 8,000m 10,000m 15,000m 20,000m +30,000m
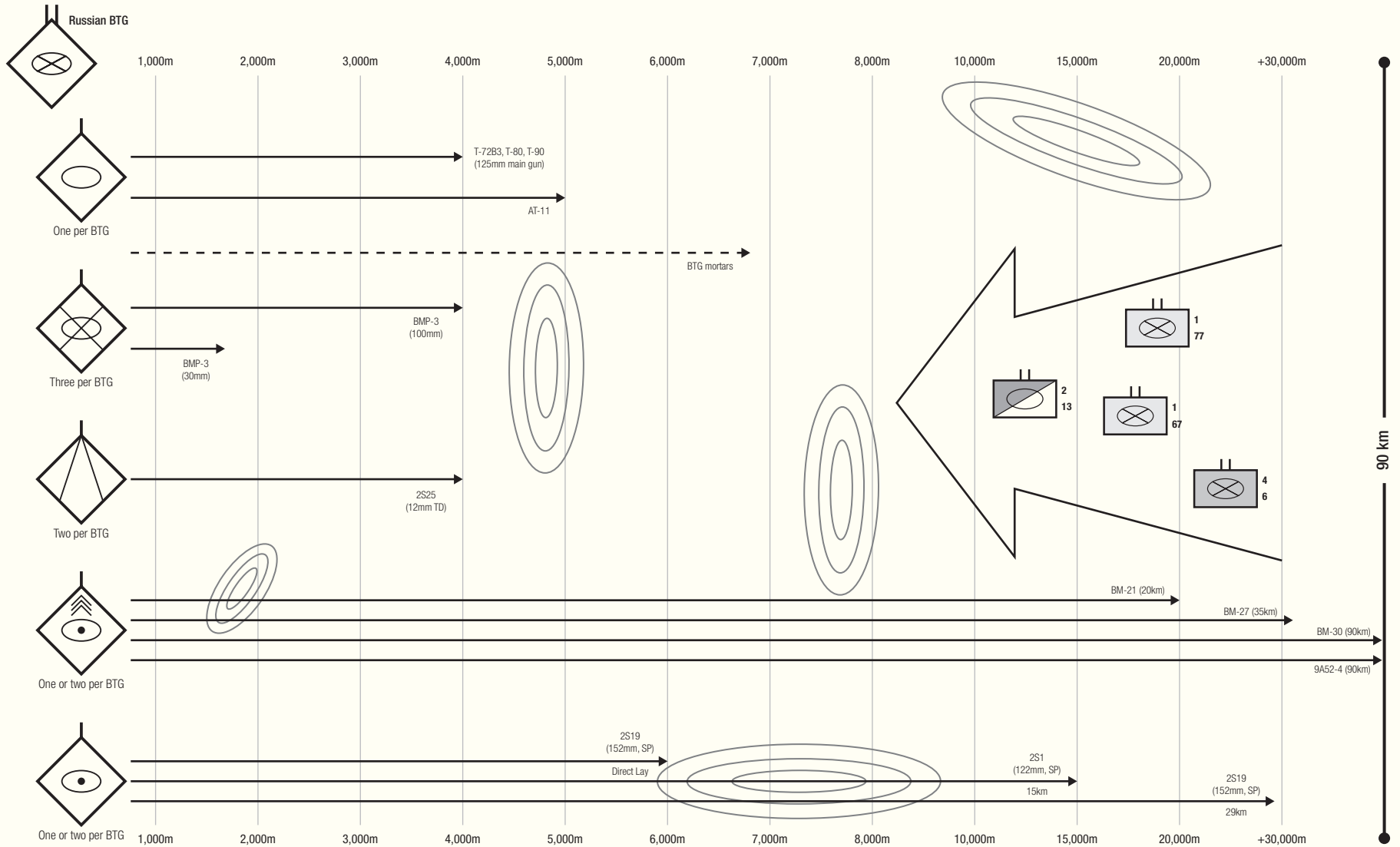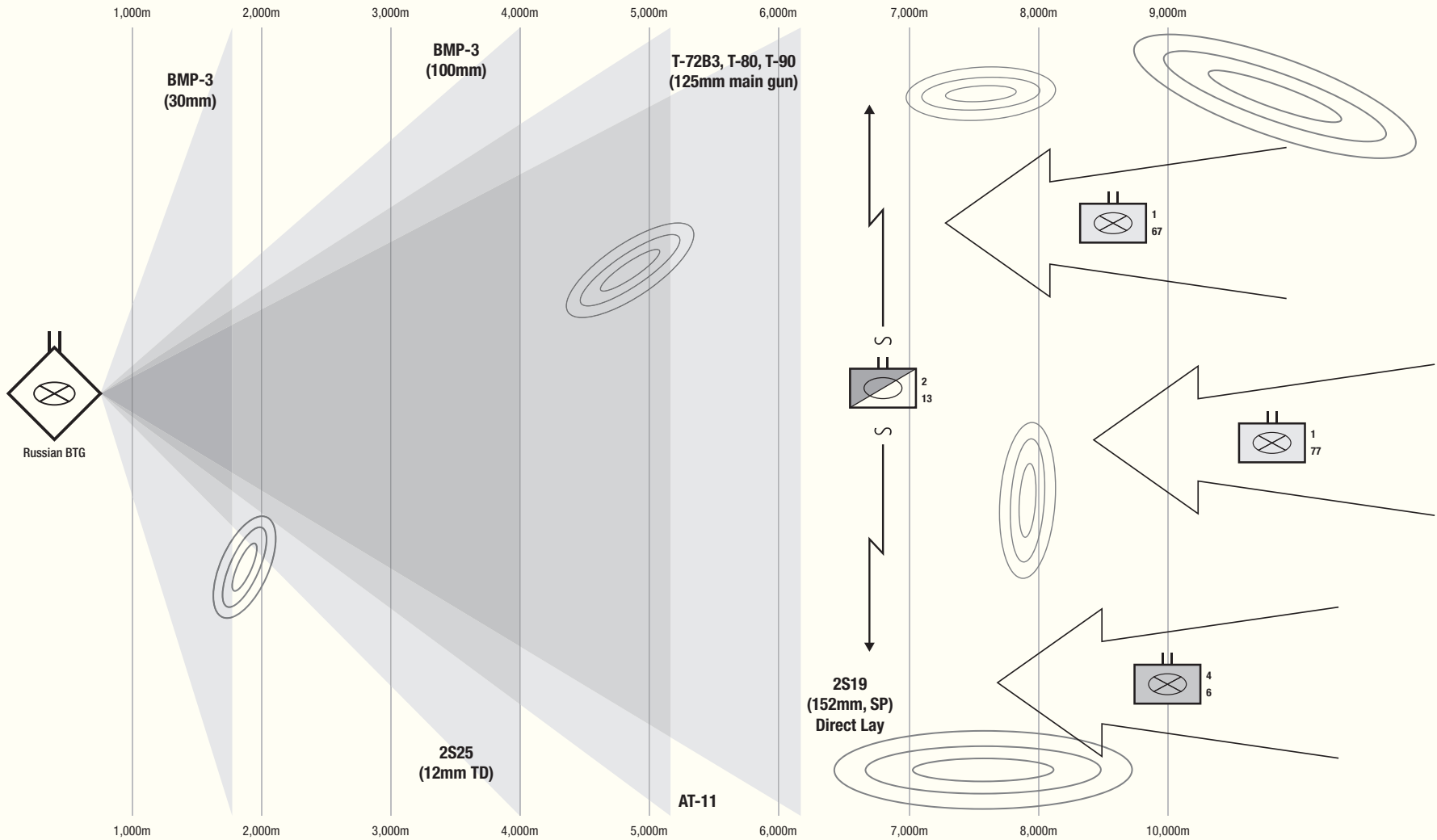
Figure 5
BTG Direct Fire Tactics and Capabilities

Reconnaissance-Strike Model and the Russian Artillery Mindset

The ubiquitous use of drones on the part of the Russians is a defining feature of the Russo–Ukrainian War's Donbas campaign. However, often overlooked in discussing the ubiquity of drones is how the Russians have employed those tools. They are not used exclusively to conduct aerial observation; instead, they are part of a highly-integrated system that benefits from IADS coverage and long-range strike capability. The Russians' reconnaissance-strike model—an amalgamation of drones, rocket and artillery fire, special reconnaissance, cyber capabilities and geo-locating technology—has continually delivered impressive tactical and operational results in Donbas.[28]

The Russian rocket attack on Ukrainian forces at Zelenopillya on 11 July 2014 was the first example of Russia's contemporary reconnaissance-strike model on display. The strike targeted a large Ukrainian assembly area where Ukrainian forces were preparing to uncoil and conduct an offensive. At approximately 0400 on 11 July, drones were heard overhead; at around the same time, Ukrainian forces lost the ability to communicate over their tactical radio network. A few minutes later a bevy of rockets and artillery fell on the assembly area. The result was carnage—upwards of 30 Ukrainian soldiers were killed and dozens were severely wounded, while more than two battalions' worth of combat power was destroyed.[29] To date, the strike at Zelenopillya was the most successful rocket strike of the Donbas campaign, but the reconnaissance-strike model continues to dominate the Russian and separatist targeting process.
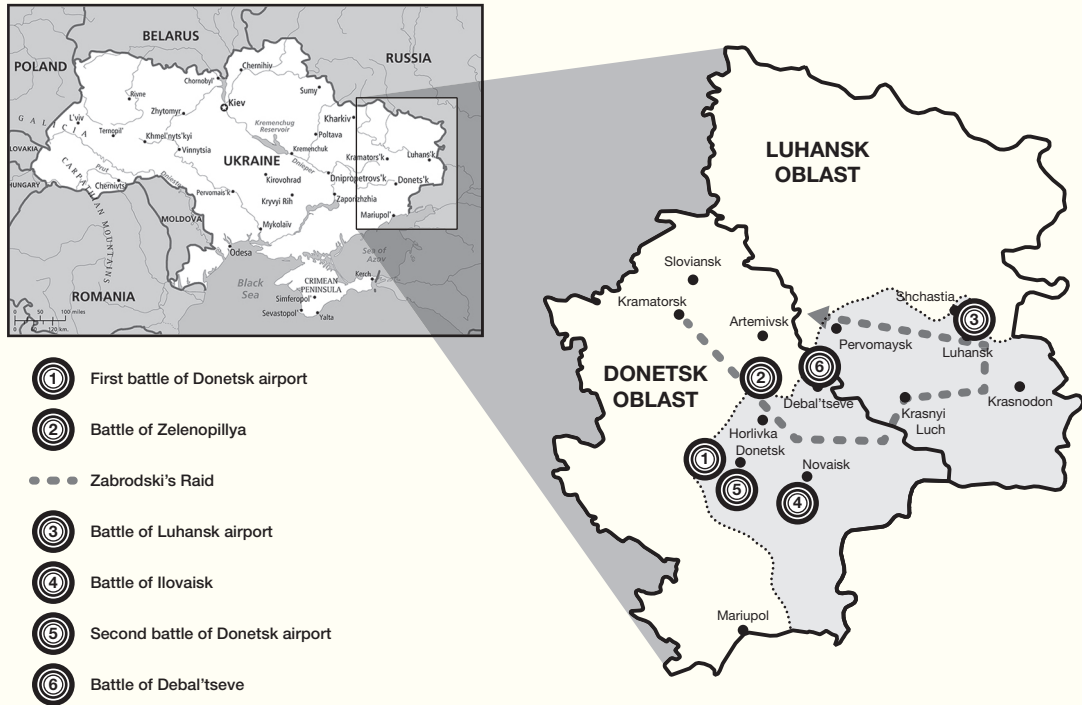
It must be noted that Russian action during the Donbas campaign parallels the historic Russian approach to the employment of rocket and artillery fire. Historically, Russian ground forces use indirect fire and ground attacks sequentially, reflecting the bromide that "artillery conquers, infantry occupies." Conversely, the U.S. Army attempts to synchronize indirect fire with land-force action.[30] Pointing out this difference is not to say that one technique is more effective than the other. It is worth noting because in anticipating combat with Russian forces, one must expect initial contact to be made through the use of inordinate amounts of rocket and artillery fire.

Similarly, Russian forces and their separatist allies are not afraid of inflicting civilian casualties. In fact, the argument could be made that they see civilian casualties as a point of leverage. To illustrate this, it is fair to point out that barrages of rocket and artillery continually fall on the civilian population throughout Donbas. The tactical use of rockets and artillery on the civilian population likely serves a political purpose for the Russians and separatists. The indiscriminate killing of civilians advances the idea that the government in Kyiv and Ukrainian armed forces are not capable of adequately protecting the local population; therefore, they (the locals within Donbas) should side with Russia and their partisan allies in the region.

The battle of Debal'tseve, which occurred from January to February 2015, is the best example of this idea. At Debal'tseve, a city of 25,000 inhabitants, Russian shelling and siege operations killed approximately 6,000 civilians and forced another 8,000 civilians into fleeing from the city.[31] Furthermore, the battle saw the Ukrainian army's 128th Mechanized Brigade, Donbas Battalion and other formations all but destroyed.[32] The connection between civilian casualties and the Ukrainian forces' inability to defeat the Russians and separatists at Debal'tseve creates a political narrative that supports Russia's information operations, which seek to undercut the credibility of Kyiv and the Ukrainian armed forces and their ability to protect the residents of Donbas.[33] Russian operations in Syria show a similar approach at work; increasing human suffering and destruction is a tool of political leverage.

Figure 6
Major Battles of the Russo–Ukrainian War

1. First battle of Donetsk airport
2. Battle of Zelenopillya
····· Zabrodski's Raid
3. Battle of Luhansk airport
4. Battle of Ilovaisk
5. Second battle of Donetsk airport
6. Battle of Debal'tseve

Siege Warfare—A Tool for Operating Under the Radar of the International Community

Collectively, the BTG, the reconnaissance-strike model, the Russian artillery mindset and a willingness to inflict civilian casualties generates a method of fighting that puts the siege at the forefront of Russian operational and tactical action. The major battles of the Donbas campaign—including the battles of Ilovaisk, Donetsk airport, Luhansk airport and Debal'tseve—were all siege operations in which Russian and separatist forces surrounded Ukrainian forces, cut their access to the outside world and slowly bled them out over time. (See figure 6.) While Russia possessed the ability to quickly annihilate the Ukrainian forces at each of these battles, they elected not to. One can reason that this was done intentionally to avoid raising the ire of the international community; 1,000 soldiers killed over the course of a few months is far less noticeable than 1,000 soldiers killed in a few days. A similar argument can be made in pointing out the absence of Russian aircraft in the Donbas campaign. Bombing runs and close air support are far more noticeable to the international community, while localized siege operations, absent airpower, allow Russia to operate with near impunity while inflicting severe losses on the Ukrainian military and civilian population.

Hybrid Warfare and Thinking Clearly about Future War

To understand the lesson of the Russo–Ukrainian War as a universal lesson of hybrid warfare would be to miss the nuance of the concept. Hybrid warfare is inherently linked to the nation or polity from which it derives its authority. Because of this, one must understand that there is no carbon-copy definition of hybrid warfare. The concept is beholden to the policy

objectives of that nation or polity. In addition, it is tied to the means that reside within the elements of the national power of its host. In the case of Russia, the hybrid-warfare approach is a product of the aggregation of the Russian Identity narrative, its IADS system and its strategic outposts and frozen conflicts throughout Eurasia.

In addition, hybrid warfare is a theory of war that makes use of American military theorist Everett Dolman's concept of strategy, which posits that "Strategy, in its simplest form, is a plan for attaining continuing advantage," the purpose of which is continued advantage for the state. Furthermore, Dolman postulates that stringing together "anticipated outcomes is the essence of applied strategy."[34] Coincidentally, the Gerasimov Doctrine closely aligns with Dolman's concept of strategy as Russia abides by the idea of perpetual political conflict due to the presence of a permanent enemy—which currently is the United States, Western culture and its values, political system and ideology.[35] Russia makes use of the Russian Identity to tap into preexisting social networks in which to generate support or justify aggressive behavior. Russia's policy, underpinned by its narrative, presents the United States with an interesting paradox. In acting to reassure NATO allies and strategic partners in Eastern Europe, the United States plays into the Russian narrative that Russian Identity is under assault by the West. Yet, in doing nothing, the United States presents a strategic vacuum, which Russia, relying on its Russian Identity narrative, will likely continue to manipulate in pursuit of its political aims.

Russia's version of hybrid warfare is built for limited war in which nations do not pursue strategies of annihilation but instead seek to impose their political will without destroying the political institutions of their adversaries. Russian hybrid warfare is a byproduct of the information age that seeks to operate in multiple domains to find methods to achieve a relative position of advantage in relation to an adversary, or to perpetually conduct operations aimed at weakening the adversary from the inside out. To do so, Russia leverages information, cyber and electronic operations in addition to employing special operations forces to sow the seeds of discontent within the target population.

Furthermore, wars of annihilation, or regime change, often create more turmoil for the aggressor, and therefore, the goal of Russian hybrid warfare is not to topple existing regimes. Instead, hybrid warfare, being a limited-war construct, attempts to create frozen conflicts that perpetually suck resources and political power away from an adversary. In the case of Russia, these ulcers—Crimea, Donbas, South Ossetia and Abkhazia—are tools that Russia can manipulate for political gain. Because of this, one can expect to see similar limited-objective advances justified through the Russian Identity narrative in other areas that Russia looks to destabilize or annex.

To be sure, one can anticipate Russian action to be oriented in areas in which the Russian Identity exists. While the United States and NATO are fixated on the Baltic States, Russia could very easily strike out at Belarus or Serbia. As part of this idea, one can anticipate action in areas that have been historically part of Russia or at least associated with Russia. Russia will use history as justification for further action, stating it is their obligation to support "Russians"— whom it defines as everyone from ethnic Russians, to speakers of the Russian language, to practitioners of Eastern Orthodox Christianity to eastern Slavic people—in areas that fall under its sphere of influence.

However, many questions remain regarding the Russian version of hybrid warfare. First, does the concept possess utility as Russian forces expand beyond the close confines of the Russian border? Russian BTGs have not yet traveled or fought further than 100 miles beyond

the borders of Russia; therefore, the true nature of Russian tactical and operational reach remains unknown. Next, is the Russian brand of hybrid warfare tied to Russian capabilities and basing? By that, is it dependent on the IADS throughout Eurasia, or is it something that Russia can export to another part of the world? Finally, is Russia's brand of hybrid warfare inherently tied to populations that it can manipulate, allowing it to operate covertly and build partisan forces to fight on its behalf? Answering these questions will not be easy but could help in identifying methods by which to overcome Russian hybrid warfare and in anticipating further Russian aggression.

Overcoming Potential Russian Advantages

If U.S. or NATO forces find themselves meeting Russia or its partisan proxy forces on the battlefield, they (U.S. and NATO forces) should anticipate tactical direct and indirect fire over-match. This is achieved through a quantitative advantage in capabilities, a diversity of munitions and a doctrine oriented on localized dominance. As previously mentioned, Russian doctrine seeks first to annihilate with indirect fire, then move in ground forces, whereas the United States seeks to synchronize indirect fire with ground-force action. In addition, the Russian BTG possesses both rocket and artillery capabilities, something U.S. tactical formations are not accustomed to meeting on the battlefield. Additionally, Russian forces, unlike U.S. forces, still maintain a robust collection of munitions in their arsenal—from dual-purpose improved conventional munitions to thermobaric warheads—which provides distinct battlefield asymmetry. The indirect-fire asymmetry enables the BTG's mechanized forces to close with an enemy or objective from a protected and covered position, while retaining freedom of maneuver to capitalize on battlefield opportunities. To put it another way, the BTG's indirect-fire capabilities provide a buffer to protect its main body while it moves to destroy opposition forces or seize an objective.

The Russian advantage in its indirect-fire system poses an existential threat to slow-moving formations, light or lightly armored formations, command posts or other nodes emanating an electronic signature. To compensate, U.S. ground forces must keep in mind a campaign's goal. Theorist Robert Leonhard posits, "The goal in military campaigning is to relentlessly act against the enemy without interruption until the objective is achieved."[36] With this in mind, U.S. ground forces should look to maximize speed and sequence in operational and tactical planning. Operational and tactical speed is important in denying Russian rocket and artillery the time needed for effective targeting and delivery. Speed also allows U.S. ground forces to outpace Russian indirect fires and their ability to protect the mechanized core of the BTG. Furthermore, speed enables U.S. ground forces' ability to close with and destroy those formations. Relentlessly acting against the BTGs will also enable the employment of friendly tactical air support through the destruction of BTG air-defense assets.

Speed and sequence are not purely physical features but also cognitive characteristics. Speed in planning will enable speed in action. Similarly, speed in planning enables sequenced action. Robert Leonard contends that sequence is predicated "on the ability to perceive and predict discrete events in war, properly analyze their relationships and then order events successfully."[37] Sequence is a fundamental feature of successful military campaigning, of which the goal is to act against the enemy until the objective is reached. Understanding the reciprocal character between a desired end state and the current state drives sequence. That reciprocal dynamic allows a force to develop a plan to ruthlessly bridge the gap between those disparate conditions. In doing so, leaders must remember that successful sequence also relies on denying the enemy's ability to sequence action.

However, leaders must not forget that Russian hybrid warfare, as illustrated by operations in the Donbas campaign, demonstrates Russia's proclivity in luring an enemy into a siege-type situation. Therefore, U.S. Army leaders must keep this in mind when planning operational and tactical action, underpinned by speed and sequence, because it could very easily lead to a situation such as that in which Ukrainian forces found themselves at the Donetsk airport—isolated, enveloped and unable to bring their capabilities to bear while under a near-continuous barrage of direct and indirect fire.[38]

Speed and sequence—and not being lured into a siege—are critical for operational cavalry. The U.S. Army is currently field-testing the Reconnaissance and Security (R&S) brigade concept with 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, in which a regular Army brigade combat team, with some augmentation and additional schooling, assumes an R&S mission essential task list. Subsequently this formation will serve as an operational cavalry formation for the U.S. Army. Furthermore, there are other proposals for operational cavalry bouncing between the Army's Armor School, the Maneuver Center of Excellence and the Department of the Army. Outside traditional channels, other recommendations for operational cavalry can be found in defense analyst Douglas Macgregor's call for Reconnaissance Strike Groups.[39] A recently published white paper also calls for an operational cavalry formation built for multi-domain battle and used to support joint force entry and serve as the link between the Joint Force Air Component Command and Joint Force Land Component Command.[40] Aside from the differing perspectives on how to go about building an operational cavalry formation, the necessity for an operational cavalry persists.

U.S. ground formations must look to bridge the firepower gap between Russian BTGs and U.S. Army battalions and BCTs. There are many different ways to go about this, but a failure to do so could prove quite costly if U.S. forces meet Russian BTGs on a hybrid battlefield. Russian advantages in indirect fire, anti-armor capabilities and air defense artillery at the battalion level allow Russian ground forces to achieve overwhelming local dominance—on the ground and in the air. The U.S. Army must break with tradition and begin tinkering with force-structure models to find relatively inexpensive solutions to these problems.

The Reconnaissance Strike Group, or a similar formation, might provide such a solution by shifting capabilities traditionally held at brigade and higher echelons to the tactical level, where they might be quickly and efficiently applied in accordance with the Army's developing multi-domain battle concept. In this type of operational environment, battalion and lower formations must have assured and quick access to the capabilities needed to succeed in a BTG battle, paired with the staff structure that is capable of the fluid mission command required to lead it. By realigning its formations' current capabilities—pushing long-range fires, close air support/close combat aviation, air defense, electronic warfare and other capabilities to the front—the Army would produce a fighting force much more capable of delivering a significant blow at operational distances, enabling the systematic disruption, desynchronization and defeat of enemy frontline forces.

Further, the United States must reexamine its investment priorities in light of the capabilities shortfalls identified. Short-range air defense is an area that is immediately lacking in sufficient scale in the current operational environment of the proliferation of unmanned aerial systems. Expensive single-use munitions are arguably the wrong way to approach this new dynamic. Pursuit of an improved electronic or cyber response to this threat, with the resultant capability pushed to the tactical level, might be the best applied answer. The shortcoming of

the multi-domain battle concept remains that frontline forces, fighting to achieve short-term windows of domain superiority, leave the possibility of those windows closing and placing formations at risk of exploitation, neutralization or destruction. These formations must have cross-domain defensive capabilities to secure themselves while conducting multi-domain offensive operations. Technology in the hands of well-trained Soldiers and teams led by adaptive, experienced leaders remains the offset required for success in this continuously evolving, dynamic environment.

Conclusion

Russian hybrid warfare is explicitly linked to Russian foreign policy, which seeks to overturn the Western-dominated world order. Subordinate aims of that policy seek to stymy NATO's advance across Europe and enable Russia to achieve regional hegemony. To accomplish this, Russia's military strategy focuses on leveraging a whole-of-government approach in relation to an era of limited warfare, operating throughout all domains of war. Operationally and tactically, Russia capitalizes on its integrated air-defense capabilities through Eurasia to conduct quick territorial grabs with its BTGs. However, the prowess of BTGs and Russia's method of hybrid warfare is largely unknown beyond proximity to its borders. In thinking on how to counter Russian hybrid warfare, it is instructive to harken back to the old cavalryman, General George S. Patton, Jr., who wrote, "Hit hard soon . . . the idea being to develop your maximum force at once before the enemy can develop his."[41]

Endnotes

1. Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, December 2007), p. 14.

2. *Ibid*.

3. Army Doctrinal Reference Publication (ADRP) 1-02, *Terms and Military Symbols* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), p. 1-42.

4. Robert R. Leonhard and Stephen P. Philips, *"Little Green Men": A Primer on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014* (Fort Bragg, NC: U.S. Army Special Operations Command, 2015), p. 17–18.

5. "Russia Calls for End to Western-Dominated World Order," *Times of Israel*, 18 February 2017, accessed 25 February 2017, http://www.timesofisrael.com/russia-calls-for-end-to-western-dominated-world-order.

6. Russia's Near Abroad includes the Baltics, Eastern Europe (Poland, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine) and the Balkans. Looking to Asia, the Near Abroad includes the Caucasus region and central Asia.

7. David M. Herszenhorn, "Europe Braces for Russian Hacking in Upcoming Elections," *Politico*, 13 December 2016, accessed 24 February 2017, www.politico.edu/article/europe-russia-hacking-elections.

8. "Novorossiya" means "new Russia," but the term also means "South Russia." The Novorossiya is the area from Donbas to Odessa, up to the Dnieper River.

9. Paul Sonne, "With 'Novorossiya,' Putin Plays the Name Game with Ukraine," *Wall Street Journal*, 1 September 2014, accessed 24 February 2017, https://www.wsj.com/articles/with-novorossiya-putin-plays-the-name-game-with-ukraine-1409588947.

10. Aside from the time of the Soviet Union, Russia has always viewed itself as the protector of the Eastern Orthodox Church and the practitioners of that religion. The 19th century's Crimean War (1853–1856) began over wrangling about Eastern Orthodoxy.

11. Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking Forms and Methods of Carrying Out Combat Operations," trans. Robert Coalson, *Military Review* 96, no. 1 (January–February 2016), pp. 24–29.

12. "Frozen conflict" is a term commonly used to describe Russian destabilizing action that creates an area of unresolved, open-ended conflict or tension. Russia creates these areas of destabilization to put political (or military) pressure on the government of the area in question. In some cases, these frozen conflicts lead to de facto states—or to strategic outposts, as is the case with South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transnistria. For more information on Russian frozen conflicts, see Christopher Walker and Robert Orttung, "Putin's Frozen Conflicts: Each of Russia's Reform-Minded Neighbors is Plagued by Separatism," *Foreign Policy*, 13 February 2015, accessed 27 February 2017, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/13/putins-frozen-conflicts.

13. Orlando Figes, *The Crimean War: A History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010), p. 41.

14. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 87.

15. Leonhard and Philips, *"Little Green Men,"* pp. 45–46.

16. Vladimir Socor, "Russia's Donetsk Proxies Anticipate Ukrainian Siege," *Jamestown Institute*, 13 August 2014, accessed 25 February 2016, https://jamestown.org/program/russias-donetsk-proxies-anticipate-ukrainian-siege.

[17] Phillip Karber, "The Russian Military Forum: Russia's Hybrid Warfare Campaign: Implications for Ukraine and Beyond" (lecture, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC, 10 March 2015).

[18] Figes, *The Crimean War*, p. 16.

[19] Leonhard and Philips, *"Little Green Men,"* pp. 55–58.

[20] Timothy L. Thomas, *Recasting the Red Star: Russia Forges Tradition and Technology Through Toughness* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office Publishing, 2011), p. 92.

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[22] "The Number of Battalion Groups Consisting of Contractors in the Russian Army to Reach 125 in Two Years," *Military News–Russia*, last modified 14 September 2016, accessed 20 September 2016, http://militarynews.ru/story.asp?rid=1&nid=425709.

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[24] Phillip Karber and Lieutenant Colonel Joshua Thibeault, "Russia's New-Generation Warfare," *ARMY* 66, no. 6 (June 2016), pp. 62–63.

[25] *Ibid*.

[26] *Ibid*.

[27] "Ukraine Crisis: Military Plane Shot Down in Luhansk," *BBC News*, 14 June 2014, accessed 25 February 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27845313.

[28] When required, this model taps into long-range Russian rocket and artillery support from Russian territory.

[29] Tom Parfitt, "Ukraine Promises Retribution for at Least 19 Soldiers Killed in Rebel Rocket Attack," *The Telegraph*, 11 July 2014, accessed 23 February 2017, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10962359/Ukraine-promises-retribution-as-at-least-19-soldiers-killed-in-rebel-rocket-attack.html.

[30] John J. McGrath, *Crossing the Line of Departure: Battle Command on the Move, A Historical Perspective* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), p. 185.

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