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The Siege of Ilovaik: Manufactured Insurgencies and Decision in War

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Introduction

Novorossiia, a tsarist era swath of Russian land that is now part of Ukraine, is an important component in Moscow's foreign policy in relation to Ukraine. Novorossiia originally consisted of six oblasts—Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, Odessa, Kherson and Mykolaiv—that were annexed during the 18th century by Tsarina Catherine II.¹ As part of post-Tsarist Soviet political reshuffling, those oblasts were gifted to Ukraine in 1922.² Unforeseen at the time, Moscow's gift to Kyiv would go on to provide the impetus, backstory and cover for contemporary Russian expansion into Ukraine. Indeed, Russian president Vladimir Putin and foreign minister Sergey Lavrov used the term *Novorossiia* to lend legitimacy to their bellicose foreign policy in Ukraine in 2014.³

The Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, the geographic center of Novorossiia, became the flashpoint of this foreign policy in the spring and summer of 2014. Russia's truculent policy towards Kyiv materialized in the form of a land-based proxy war in Ukraine's Donets River Basin (the Donbas). Russia developed a political and military apparatus in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts to wage the proxy war. In Donetsk, they established the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Donetsk People's Army (DPA), while in Luhansk they organized the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR) and Luhansk People's Army (LPA). Moscow leveraged these partisan actors to wage a manufactured insurgency throughout the Donbas to cash in on Ukrainian political and domestic turmoil that had been boiling throughout 2013 and 2014. In retrospect, Russia's manufactured insurgency, executed by the combination of partisan proxies, Russian land forces and Russian combat advisers, provides an instructive model through which to examine modern war.

The Significance of Ilovaik in Modern Warfare

Ilovaik, a small town of 16,000 in Ukraine's Donetsk oblast, played an early and important role in the ongoing conflict. Although smaller battles and engagements were fought before Ilovaik, it stands out as the first major engagement among Ukrainian armed forces, Russian proxies and Russian land forces. The battle, a brief but incredibly destructive siege, illuminates important features of the conflict often lost in the discussion of Russian hybrid warfare, Russian New Generation Warfare and gray-zone conflict.

First, Ilovaik demonstrates that insurgencies are not restricted to the shadowy confines of guerrilla wars, irregular warfare or hit-and-run tactics. Instead, it decidedly affirms that well-supported proxies can bring a state actor to its knees and so obtain decisive and strategic battlefield results through conventional land warfare.

Second, Ilovaik demonstrates the central position that a proxy can play in an aggressor state's overall strategy. The DPR, DPA, LPR and LPA collectively served as the critical capability in Moscow's Ukraine strategy. The DPR and LPR provided Moscow political cover, while the DPA and LPA provided the muscle through which Russia gained and maintained access and influence within the Donbas. To put it another way, proxies—political and military—were the vehicle through which Russia operated in the Donbas to obtain and

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maintain its political objectives in Ukraine. Although often overlooked, this is not a facet of proxy war unique to Russia and Ukraine. Instead, proxies as the centerpiece of strategy is an increasingly frequent occurrence in modern armed conflict, and it therefore warrants deeper inquiry.

Third, Ilovaik demonstrates that campaigning is again an important aspect in war. In hindsight, it is clear that Ilovaik was the first in a series of decisive battles that proved to be a decisive campaign. As noted earlier, while several smaller battles had been fought previously, Ilovaik, the Sieges of Donetsk Airport (28 September 2014 – 21 January 2015) and Debal'tseve (17 January – 20 February 2015) form the campaign's backbone. The Donbas campaign birthed the Minsk I and II Agreements (also known as the Minsk Protocol and the Minsk II Agreement), settled the issue of territorial boundaries between Kyiv and the DPR and LPR, and resulted in the de facto recognition of the DPR and LPR as proto states.⁴ In effect, Russia's Donbas campaign, fought by, with and through political and military proxies, proved strategically decisive.

Fourth, Ilovaik supports the argument that sieges, especially in the post-Soviet international system, are a defining feature of modern war. The Donbas campaign was dominated by three sieges—Ilovaik, Donetsk Airport and Debal'tseve—but beyond Ukraine, sieges have also played important roles in Iraq, Syria and The Philippines. They are not anomalies in modern war but are instead punctuated and regular features of contemporary warfare.

The point of this work is not to portray Russia as an indomitable specter haunting the international system, but to provide insight into the operational and strategic aspects of the Siege of Ilovaik that tend to get lost in discussions on hybrid warfare, new generation warfare or gray-zone conflict. As former United States National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster is fond of saying, success in war breeds emulation.⁵ As such, the operational and strategic successes that germinated at Ilovaik provide a trajectory for future trends in war: well-supported proxies are an indispensable component of strategy; campaigning is germane to unlocking strategic decisiveness in war; and sieges are useful tools of warcraft to bring about decisiveness. Before digging deeper into each of these points, it is helpful to have a brief overview of the events of the Siege of Ilovaik.

The Siege of Ilovaik

Ilovaik was an early flashpoint in the Russo-Ukrainian War's Donbas campaign due to its central location between the DPA and LPA.⁶ In July 2014, the DPA obtained control of Ilovaik. Back and forth shelling between the DPA and Ukrainian forces peppered the city throughout July and early August. By mid-August, the city was without electricity, gas or water, and the city's hospital closed because it exhausted its medical supplies.⁷

A Ukrainian force of several volunteer battalions executed a counteroffensive on 10 August to retake the city, but it was repelled.⁸ However, that defeat was temporary; on 18 August, two volunteer battalions successfully penetrated the DPA's perimeter defense and established a foothold in Ilovaik. Subsequently, four additional volunteer battalions moved into Ilovaik and strengthened Ukraine's foothold.⁹

Sensing that the DPA was flagging in Ilovaik, Moscow sanctioned Russian land forces to assist the DPA. Mechanized Russian forces launched well-supported attacks at multiple border crossing sites and punched into Ukraine on 24 August.¹⁰ By 27 August, Russian forces linked up with the DPA. Concurrently, basing locations were established in Hrabske, Ukraine, and in other towns around Ilovaik. Furthermore, DPA-Russian supply lines were either opened or extended to larger supply depots in Russia. Most important, the DPA ceded its hold inside Ilovaik and receded outside the city to augment Russia's encirclement of Ilovaik. In doing so, the DPA-Russian force surrounded the city and trapped its Ukrainian defenders inside.¹¹

Two days of siege ensued, and Ukrainian losses were high. Thirty-six civilians were killed, and 600 out of 1,800 homes in the city were destroyed. An additional 116 multi-story buildings in Ilovaik were heavily damaged. The battle caused upward of 4,000 residents to flee by the end of the siege, leaving only 12,000 of the city's original 16,000 residents.¹²

In total, Ukrainian forces suffered 366 killed in combat, 429 wounded and 300 soldiers captured.¹³ The siege's high toll on both the civilian population and the Ukrainian armed forces wrought decisiveness, triggering the Minsk Agreement on September 5.¹⁴

Hrabske, a small town of 250 residents five kilometers southwest of Ilovaik that served as the initial Russian basing location and DPA headquarters, changed hands several times during the battle. By the end, Hrabske was

pulverized, and all but a handful of the town's residents had fled.¹⁵ Mnohampilia and Pokravka, basing locations for Ukrainian forces, suffered equally. Both towns were battered by shell fire and disemboweled by Ukrainian soldiers forced to live off the land.¹⁶

A combination of elements—the ongoing sacrifice of Ukrainian forces holding Ilovaisk, the city's derelict status and the impact on the civilian population caught within the siege—caused Kyiv to negotiate a peace with the DPA-Russian partners. This peace mandated that, in exchange for Russia lifting the siege and providing safe military passage out of Ilovaisk, Ukrainian forces must cede the city to the DPA. Kyiv reluctantly accepted these conditions and, on 29 August, the Ukrainian armed forces began to depart the city along two safety corridors. However, despite the agreement, they were attacked on 29–30 August; the withdrawal turned into a slaughter. Rather than ending with a peaceful transition of power, the Siege of Ilovaisk ended with a double-crossing.¹⁷

Ilovaisk represents the effectiveness of a superior actor (or alliance) waging a closed siege against an inferior opponent. It also exemplifies the effects of a siege on the basing and staging areas used in support of siege operations. Furthermore, Ilovaisk emphasizes the importance of secure ground lines of support and exterior lines. Conversely, the besieged actor, especially if completely encircled, must rely on its on-hand resources and interior lines to survive. Without assistance, a besieged actor in an impermeable siege faces near certain defeat, as the Ukrainians found at Ilovaisk.

Manufactured Insurgency and Proxies in Strategy

The Siege of Ilovaisk provides a useful glimpse into the inner workings of Russia's Ukraine strategy. Russian strategy, coming out of its 1990s post-Soviet hangover, has focused on three primary components. First, Russia is seeking to overturn the American-led unipolar international system and instead advocate for a multipolar system brokered by a concert of major powers. Second, Russia wants to obstruct American influence and NATO expansion into eastern Europe, the Balkans and the Black Sea region, areas that were historically associated with imperial and Soviet Russia. Third, while countering American influence and NATO expansion, Russia is reasserting itself across the historically associated regions that it lost during the Soviet empire's dissolution.¹⁸ Ukraine is at the heart of that strategy; Russia has used a strategy of chaos and instability as the cornerstone of that effort.¹⁹

Russia capitalized on internal strife within Ukraine throughout 2013 and 2014 to operationalize its strategy. Consistent with its penchant for chaos, Russia used the political and domestic environment of 2013 and 2014 to manufacture an insurgency and unleash it across the Novorossiia region to advance its aims. Counterinsurgency theorist David Galula defines insurgency: "A protracted struggle, conducted methodically, step by step, in order to attain specific intermediate objectives leading finally to the overthrow of the existing order."²⁰ As the other four oblasts became more challenging areas in which to find success, Donetsk and Luhansk were ripe for insurgency.

The Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics provided political cover for this movement, while the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Armies became the military arm that physically conducted the insurgency. As a result, both the People's Republics and the People's Armies became Moscow's critical capability for waging the insurgency. Therefore, those actors' continued existence and their abilities to obtain tactical victories and retain conquered territory became vital elements of Russian strategy; they had to be preserved by Moscow.

At the Siege of Ilovaisk, as the tactical situation began to slip away from the DPA, Moscow surged land forces forward to prevent further deterioration and to retain control of the city. Due to the DPA's position within Russia's Ukraine strategy, Russia threw caution to the side and sent well-supplied armored columns into the fray to stabilize the situation and to preserve its proxy.

In short, in manufactured insurgencies—which are quite different from organic, i.e., traditional insurgencies—the proxy holds a prominent position in the strategy because its surrogacy advances its sponsor's strategic objectives. Existential threats, significant territorial loss, or a series of tactical defeats will trigger an overt, ham-fisted response from the principal actor to preserve its proxy or that proxy's tangible battlefield gains. In turn, the sponsor will provide exquisite support to the proxy, which by extension will embolden the proxy, causing it to fight harder and more overtly than it would in a traditional insurgency. As theorist Roger Trinquier contends, "Material support and the assurance of strong and continuing aid from abroad are essential to maintaining a high morale," of a partisan, proxy force.²¹

Decisiveness and Campaigning

Historian Cathal Nolan suggests that the most challenging thing in war is to “. . . translate combat into achievement of an important strategic and political goal that the other side is forced to recognize and accept when the war is over.”²² Contemporary sieges tend to be associated with decisive effects. For instance, as noted above, Ilovaik resulted in the Minsk I Agreement. The combined sieges at Donetsk Airport and Debal’seve resulted in the Minsk II Agreement—which called for another ceasefire and a pullback from the contact line, amnesty for those participating in the fighting, humanitarian assistance, the continuation of economic links between Ukraine and the Donbas and the removal of foreign and mercenary fighters.²³ The Donetsk campaign, coupled with the lesser reported Luhansk campaign, solidified the military situation in the Donbas in favor of the DPA and LPA. The threat of further Russian military action provided a cooling effect, deterring further Ukrainian attempts to retake the partisan-held Donbas.

The Donbas campaign’s decisiveness and Russia’s deterrent effect resulted in a political settlement, i.e., true decisiveness in war. The Trilateral Contact Group (TCG), which consists of representatives from Ukraine, Russia and the Office of Security Cooperation-Europe, met in July 2020 to hammer out this settlement. The TCG agreed to the extant lines of delimitation between Ukrainian forces and the DPA and LPA and all but officially sanctioned the DPR and LPR as the governing bodies for Donetsk and Luhansk’s break away regions.²⁴ Put another way, Kyiv, as a member of the TCG, recognized the DPR and LPR as sovereign proto states.²⁵

With the Siege of Ilovaik and the Donbas Campaign in mind, it is instructive to conduct a deeper analysis of decisiveness. Decisiveness is commonly associated with military operations. However, it is rarely used in the proper context. As the world wars attest, grandiose battles of attrition that do not directly achieve or have clear causal links to political outcomes are not decisive. For example, engagements such as the Battle of Verdun in 1916, the many battles of Ypres and the 1942–1943 Siege of Stalingrad, while grand and destructive, were not decisive.

Theorists J.F.C. Fuller and Basil Liddell Hart offer indispensable insight on the subject. J.F.C. Fuller posits, “In war, the object of military action is to compel the enemy to accept the policy in dispute.”²⁶ Fuller continues, stating that military action pursues decision—the policy in dispute—by destroying an adversary’s plan so thoroughly that the adversary finds no alternative but to acquiesce. He concludes that destroying an adversary’s army and resources are germane to the destruction of its plan.²⁷ On the other hand, Fuller’s more famous understudy, Basil Liddell Hart, contends that, “The function of war is to settle disputes,” and that the activities of war that achieve a political outcome, or those that when aggregated achieve a political result, are decisive.²⁸

Theorist Robert Leonhard, building on Fuller and Liddell Hart, writes that, “Warfare consists of a series of activities—preparation, movement, and opposition—that recur until an end point is reached. The victor in war is the one that can control that series, and more specifically, can control the order of events that occur.”²⁹ Sequence is controlled through deliberate or pragmatic campaigning. Indeed, Leonhard posits that decisiveness in war is not achieved through a single, overwhelming battle, but through campaigning—the purposeful sequence of battles or operations in time and space to achieve a military or political objective.³⁰

A simple framework stems from synthesizing the aforementioned theories: Decisiveness in war is the result of successful campaigns that push an actor toward a favorable political outcome. Successful campaigns are those in which military action triggers military or political leaders to change their plan, modify their strategy, reduce their policy objectives or altogether acquiesce. Single engagements or great battles alone are not often the cause of politically decisive results.

Nevertheless, successful campaigns do not guarantee decisiveness, as it is also dependent on time. Successful campaigns unlock the prospect for decisiveness, but, for that potential to be activated, military and political leaders must be astute enough to realize that potential; they must have the wherewithal to act quickly during the window of opportunity that follows the resolution of a successful campaign and so press for an activation of their strategic objectives. Failure to capitalize on potentially decisive situations in war can result in paradoxical, self-perpetuating wars that generate their own “logic” via *petitio principii*, i.e., the inability to win the war drives the necessity to fight the war.

Moreover, logistics deeply influence decisiveness in war; Ilovaik offers a glimpse into that phenomena. As noted, most of Ilovaik’s utilities were not working by mid-August. Additionally, a series of small offensives and counteroffensives were conducted on 10 August and 18 August. Based on open-source reporting, it is unknown

whether resupply was available to the Ukrainians following these offensives. Nevertheless, resource consumption is always higher during offensive operations than during defensive operations, and therefore it is not a stretch to assume that Ukrainian logistics were strained. By the end of the month, Russia and the DPA closed its grip around Ilovaïsk and its Ukrainian forces. Their dire situation certainly had an impact on the logistics situation and influenced the decisions made by Ukrainian leaders.

Working from that scenario, one can assume that failure follows a situation in which resource expenditure in an adversarial context exceeds the quantity or usefulness of incoming supplies. A simple heuristic is useful to explain this idea in granular detail:

Resource expenditure in an adversarial environment (Rx) is equal to the quantity of one's force (Qf) plus one's frontage (Ft) plus the number of points of enemy contact along that front (Pc) plus the duration of enemy contact (Dr) divided by the sum of one's on-hand resources (Re) plus an actor's ability to replenish those resources (Rp): $Rx=(Qf+Ft+Pc+Dr)\div(Re+Rp)$.³¹

Theorist Robert Taber puts it another way. Taber writes that the insurgent's military activity is used to degrade an enemy by eroding its morale while increasing its consumption of resources—funds, material and manpower—to an unsustainable rate, forcing the adversary to alter its plan or to give up the fight.³²

Lastly, despite the lure of strategic decapitation or strategic annihilation, as Ilovaïsk illustrates, decisiveness cannot be achieved without the continued existence of each strategic actor. To that end, J.F.C. Fuller contends that the complete annihilation of one actor is antithetical to obtaining decisive effects in war because political obviation leaves the victor no one with whom to negotiate. For example, the allied victory in World War II was not the result of political annihilation, but of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan's unconditional surrender.

On the other hand, overwhelming victory that obviates a governing body, like the American victory over Saddam Hussein's government in Iraq in 2003, is counterproductive because it destroys all vestiges of political and military stability and decisionmaking, leaving no institution for the victor to negotiate. In fact, the United States' Iraq war (2003–2011) clearly validates that toppling a strategic actor's ruling political apparatus can create swift, unplumbed and prolonged chaos, rather than the desired decisive results.

Similarly, the United States' strategy to defeat the Islamic State, framed by Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis as one of annihilation, was a fool's errand because of the premium it placed on killing the individual fighters at the expense of focusing on breaking the Islamic State's ability and willingness to continue fighting.³³ The ongoing strategic dissonance between the United States and the government of Iraq underscores this point.

Iraq's strategy was tied to repossessing lost territory, to degrading ISIS capability and resources to the point that it could no longer muster an army and to deterring the Islamic State from any further conventional confrontation.³⁴ By December 2017, the government of Iraq assessed that the Islamic State, which had failed to put an army into battle since the conclusion of the nine-month siege of Mosul in July 2017, was in fact defeated. On 9 December, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Abadi declared victory over the Islamic State.³⁵ As a consequence, the government of Iraq's strategy transitioned from warfighting to counterterrorism and policing to account for remnant ISIS capabilities.³⁶

Meanwhile, the United States' insatiable annihilation strategy, focused on the elimination of individual fighters, continues to this day. Iraq, unlike the United States, linked its battlefield success to its strategic objectives, allowing it to transition from war to peace, while still accounting for residual ISIS capability. The United States, on the other hand, was either unwilling to do the same, or unable to follow suit because of its vacuous strategy.

Moving forward, there are several aspects of campaigning and decisiveness to bear in mind. First, decisiveness in war is not found in fighting big, singular battles; rather, it is obtained by stringing together successful battles into campaigns that secure or accomplish an actor's strategic objectives and, in turn, result in political decisions. Additionally, time and logistics are key levers that must be positively manipulated to bring about decisiveness. Finally, a coherent, supportable strategy is a fundamental means to achieve decisiveness in war, and strategies that are tied to annihilation or decapitation are anathema to decisiveness. As Ilovaïsk demonstrates, decisiveness is the result of the ability of opposing parties to negotiate terms and agreements beyond the end of hostilities.

With that in mind, one finds that Ilovaïsk was the cornerstone to the Russo-Ukrainian War's Donbas campaign. Russia and its Donbas surrogates used the battle to generate military and political change—the Minsk Protocol. The Donbas campaign proved staggeringly successful, setting the framework that resulted in Moscow achieving its

strategic objectives vis-à-vis Kyiv—i.e., the Minsk II Agreement and July 2020's TCG agreement among Russia, the DPR, the LPR and Ukraine.³⁷ Consequently, the Siege of Ilovaik and the entire Donbas campaign provide a valuable case study in decisiveness in war.

Russia's Brand of Security Force Assistance

The Siege of Ilovaik provides an early offering of contemporary Russian security force assistance (SFA). As already established, the continued existence of Russia's Donbas surrogate was paramount for Moscow because its manufactured insurgency, carried out by the DPA and LPA, was the central element of its Ukraine strategy. This mandated a centralized form of SFA that allowed Russian land forces to have near-immediate tactical understanding and be able to react with overt force, if necessary, to any emerging crisis. Russia's response to the DPA's deteriorating situation in late August 2014 highlights this point.

Following its success in the Donbas campaign, Russia refined its SFA model to streamline operations and better support its regional proxy. It did so by reorganizing the DPA into the 1st Army Corps and the LPA into the 2nd Army Corps.³⁸ Furthermore, Russia continued its practice of commanding the DPA and LPA by placing Russian officers in command at all levels throughout the 1st and 2nd Army Corps, while formally subordinating both armies to Russia's Southern Military District.³⁹ Consequently, Russia wedded both corps to the Southern Military Districts logistics networks, while subordinating them to Russian military policy and doctrine.⁴⁰

Russia found this SFA model useful enough that it exported it to Syria following success in the Donbas. By September 2015, Russia established the 4th Corps in Syria to provide military assistance to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his regime's armed forces. However, despite successful SFA efforts in the Donbas, Russia struggled to achieve similar levels of success in Syria with its 4th Corps.⁴¹

Learning from its shortcomings with the 4th Corps, Russia established the Syrian 5th Attack Troop Corps of Volunteers (5th Corps in November 2016 to bolster al-Assad's flagging army.⁴² The 5th Corps, recruited from volunteers, well-paid and outfitted with Russian weapons, equipment and combat vehicles, was trained by Russian combat advisors and private military companies, to include the Wagner Group.⁴³ True to form, the 5th Corps was commanded at all levels by Russian officers.⁴⁴ Russian Lieutenant General Valery Asapov commanded 5th Corps, while also serving as the chief of staff for Russian forces in Syria.⁴⁵ Previously, Asapov had commanded Russia's partisan proxy 1st Army Corps in Donetsk, Ukraine.⁴⁶ It is worth noting that Asapov was killed in September 2017, leading the 5th Corps as it liberated Deir ez-Zor from the Islamic State.⁴⁷ Similarly, in August 2020, Russian Major General Vyacheslav Gladkikh was also killed in Deir ez-Zor.⁴⁸ These generals' deaths indicate an SFA model that has senior officers commanding at the front, not just visiting for photo opportunities.

The purpose behind illuminating the connections between Ilovaik, the Donbas and Russian SFA in Syria is to demonstrate that the Russians do not have a dogmatic SFA method, but instead use a pragmatic approach of tinkering, while maintaining a top-down, centralized command structure throughout their system. They appear more interested in finding a style that both fits and works within a specific environment than in puritanically advancing a narrative, such as is the custom of the United States Army and its ballyhooed by, with and through approach to SFA.⁴⁹

Russia's SFA model, built around tight coupling between Russian officers, advisors and its foreign security partners has found strategic success in both Ukraine and Syria. In Ukraine, Russian SFA enabled the military decisiveness that brought about the DPR and LPR's de facto statehood in July 2020. In Syria, Russian SFA has stemmed the al-Assad regime's diminishing hold on political power and physical control of territory. Given this model's success at the tactical and strategic levels, it is not a stretch to assume that this pragmatic, yet centralized model will be exported to other theaters in which Russia looks to leverage local partners for its own strategic interest. For example, it would not be surprising to find a similar model of SFA being employed in Belarus as Russia attempts to maximize its profit from the chaotic political situation gripping Minsk today.

Conclusion

A cottage industry exists around proclaiming that Vladimir Putin is a bad strategist. Yet, despite the rancor, and regardless of one's feelings about the methods used, Putin and Moscow have obtained many of their Ukraine policy objectives. Using Novorossiia and cultural pedigree as pretexts, Putin stopped NATO expansion into Ukraine and has contained American influence to regions west of the Dnieper River. Furthermore, Russia has reasserted itself in

Ukraine, among many other former imperial and Soviet territorial possessions. The Donbas campaign has proven decisive to that end.

The Siege of Ilovaik was the first major step in the Donbas campaign's decisiveness. As one of three significant sieges in the Donetsk region during the Donbas campaign, it was the first nail in Kyiv's coffin regarding Russian expansion in the region. Russia employed a manufactured, well-supported insurgency to fight a conventional war against Ukraine's army. In doing so, Russia demonstrated the importance of a proxy when waging a manufactured insurgency. To be sure, Ilovaik was the first time that Russia stepped outside its abstruse involvement in the war to come to the aid of its proxy, but it was certainly not the last. Russian force employment at the sieges of Donetsk Airport and Debal'tseve were the final nails in the coffin that sealed Kyiv's fate in the Donbas, securing the military gains that facilitated Russian political decisiveness in July 2020.

Furthermore, Ilovaik suggests that sieges are becoming a common feature of insurgencies and counterinsurgencies. The ongoing civil wars and insurgencies of Iraq and Syria spawned several significant sieges—Ramadi and Mosul in Iraq, and Aleppo, Ghouta, Khobani, Raqqah and Deir ez-Zor in Syria. By extension, urban wars are also a defining environmental component of modern insurgencies and civil wars.

Ilovaik also suggests that insurgencies are morphing from organic uprisings of disenfranchised locals to manufactured insurgencies that are built around an aggressor's bellicose foreign policy and waged by well-supported proxies. These manufactured insurgencies suggest that the principal-proxy dyad is willing to conduct large-scale conventional combat operations to pursue their collective policy objectives.

Building upon the previous point, Russian actions in Ilovaik and subsequently in Syria suggest that SFA is an important aspect of surrogate insurgencies. The existence of commanders and combat advisors—in addition to providing proper equipment, training, leadership and enabling support—is critical to success. To be sure, theorist T.E. Lawrence contends that, “Granted mobility, security, time, and doctrine, victory will rest with the insurgents, for the algebraical factors are in the end decisive, and against them perfection of means and spirit struggle quite in vain.”⁵⁰



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