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Role of the hybrid component in Crimea occupation

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INTRODUCTION

This report aims to conceptualise the Hybrid War in order to develop the understanding needed to establish a holistic counterstrategy. It is based on the Ukrainian experience as seen through the eyes of a former defence attaché and national and international subject matter experts.

Crimea is used to illustrate the combined effects of the military and non-military means¹ employed as the basis for the recommended countermeasures.

SUMMARY

Ukraine is only an object and not the strategic aim of the Hybrid War. It is a conflict between Russia and the West over the world order, and the conflicting ideas of the authoritarian "Russian World" and the Western liberal democracies. A Russian victory in Ukraine is, however, a prerequisite for its global ambitions.

The current Russian regime is threatening peace and security in Europe. The European Parliament has listed a chillingly, long, and comprehensive list of the Russian aggressions and has formally acknowledged the anti-Western vector of the Russian foreign policy underlining the fundamental and systemic incompatibility of the socio-political systems of Russia and the West. It acknowledges that Russia is trying to destabilize the EU and its Member States through hybrid warfare.²

Hybrid War is **the parallel and synchronized use of both military and non-military means to destabilize nations from within**. Synchronization is the ability to

effectively coordinate the employment of both military and non-military means in time, space, and purpose to create the desired effects.

The strategy exploits the protest potential of the population of both the nation under assault and that of its partner nations. It manipulates and reinforces existing vulnerabilities trying to ignite social instability. It aims to destabilize the nation from within by inducing economic hardship, corrupting the juridical and political system, undermining trust in government, politicians, institutions, and democratic processes, and not least, create fear and foster inaction.



It is designed to ensure victory through the limited use of military power. Its consequences, however, are as far-reaching and dramatic as any conventional war.

Hybrid War knows no borders and takes place across all sectors of society. Since the different instruments of power are used in multiple dimensions and on multiple levels simultaneously in a synchronized fashion, detecting and responding to Hybrid War becomes exceedingly difficult.

The ability to effectively coordinate the employment of both military and non-military instruments means that the latter becomes a force multiplier³. Being militarily inferior to NATO, the ability to synchronize its complete toolkit, combined with risk willingness, a quick decision-making process and military posture, puts Russia potentially on near equal footing with NATO.

The Hybrid War has been expanding for years. Ukraine is today facing a bigger threat by far than at any given time since it gained independence. Structural weaknesses have not yet been properly addressed. Ukraine will remain vulnerable until outstanding reforms have been implemented. The risks are reinforced by the weak international response. The West has not only failed to discourage further Russian aggressions but might have even emboldened it to strengthen its efforts.

An effective counterstrategy must be developed and implemented accordingly: Europe-wide and across all sectors, focusing on people, their needs and the institutions established to serve them.

HYBRID WAR CONCEPTUALIZED

Nations do not wage war for war's sake but in pursuance of policy in which a better state of peace is the main objective. Hence, it is essential to conduct war with constant regard to the peace one desires.⁴ This is particularly true for Hybrid War. Since war is never declared and conventional warfighting is limited, Hybrid War is far better designed to restore “peace” when the war is won. It is designed to ensure a cost-effective victory while allowing for a near peaceful coexistence.

Russia intends to be victorious, but its strategy does not necessarily involve a military victory. Hybrid War exists below the threshold of war. It is, however, also not peace (the absence of war). It is a war in a time of peace. It is a type of warfare that exists round the clock. It is not a set campaign; it is a way of life.⁵

It knows no borders. Hybrid warfare breaks down the distinction between what is and what is not part of the battlefield. It involves more players, from national governments and transnational corporations to nongovernmental actors and private individuals.⁶ The distinctions between peace and war, between public and private, between foreign and domestic and between state and non-state are blurry.

It is a total war, where the aggressor is using its total resources to shape the operational environment. This encompasses the use of diplomatic, political, energy, economic, informational, religious, legal, security and military instruments.

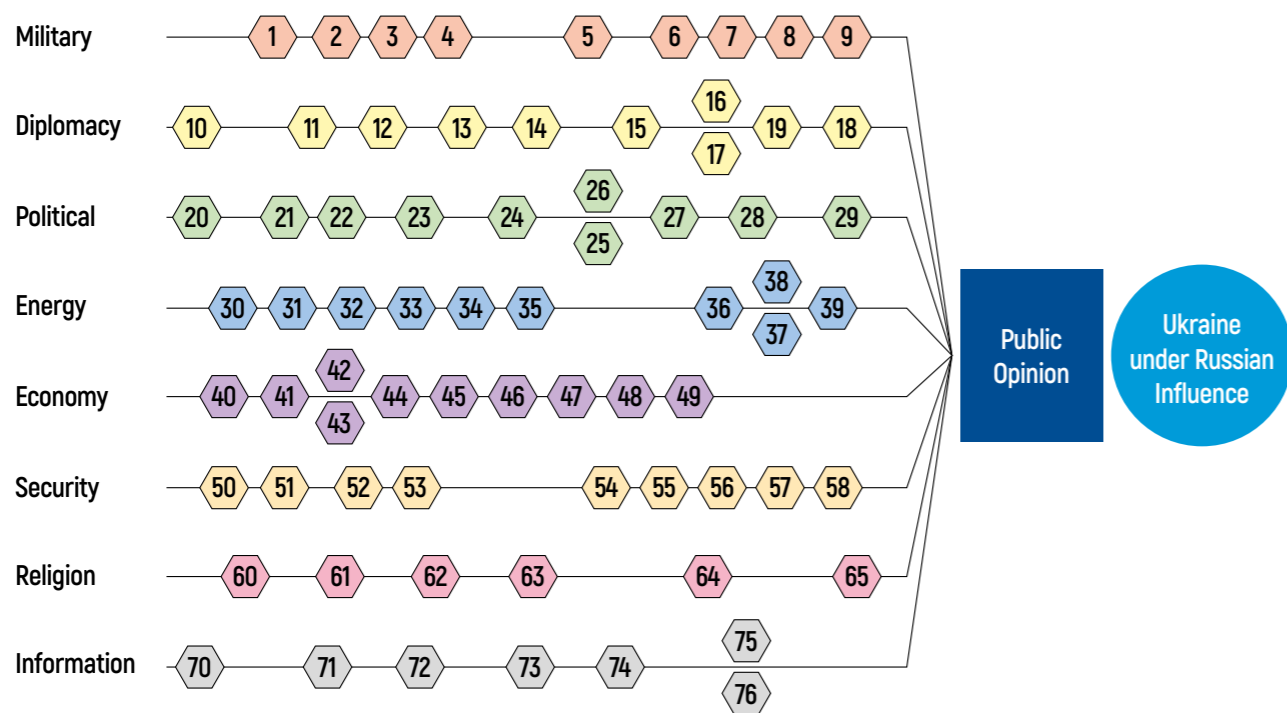
Asymmetry in military, diplomatic and economic power has resulted in an asymmetric strategy, intended to neutralize the enemy's superiority in conventional warfare whilst identifying and exploiting their vulnerabilities.

Hybrid War is the parallel and synchronized use of both military and non-military means to destabilize nations from within. Synchronization is the ability to effectively coordinate the employment



of both military and non-military means in time, space, and purpose to create the desired effects. It allows Russia to 'escalate' or 'de-escalate' horizontally rather than just vertically, thus providing further options for the attacker. In this context, horizontal escalation or de-escalation refers to it's the many instruments of power being applied in parallel.⁷ For example, by escalating the military aggressions, and simultaneously intensifying its diplomatic, political, economic and information efforts, Russia can achieve effects greater than through a one-dimensional military effort only. Instead of only military gains (if any at all),⁸ Russia ensures multiple effects across NATO, EU and Ukraine (e.g. impact on foreign policy, diplomatic initiatives, bilateral relationships, finance markets, costs of living, information sphere, public opinion, fear, and more).

Russia has modified warfare from direct destruction to direct influence; from direct annihilation of the opponent to its inner decay; from a war with weapons and technology to a culture war; from a war with conventional forces to specially prepared forces and commercial irregular groupings; from the traditional (3D) battleground to information/psychological warfare and war of perceptions; from direct clash to contactless war; from a superficial and compartmented war to a total war, including the enemy's internal side and base; from war in the physical environment to war in the human consciousness and cyber-space; from symmetric to asymmetric warfare by a combination of political, economic, information, technological, and ecological campaigns; from a war in a defined period to a state of permanent war as the natural condition in national life.⁹



Hybrid War – Lines of Efforts (LoE). The numbers represent mission and tasks executed in the individual LoE, coordinated, and interlinked to ensure the desired strategic outcome. Military Power is only one of several instruments employed.

The key is to understand that the different instruments are used in multiple dimensions and levels simultaneously in a synchronized fashion.¹⁰ This makes it exceedingly difficult to detect and respond to Hybrid War. The holistic and comprehensive approach is possible because Russian military-strategic culture (unlike the West) reaches deeply into other security services and other government ministries, facilitating how the country functions as a unit in war.¹¹

Traditional physical spaces such as land, sea, air and space are increasingly accompanied by psychological spaces (e.g. social, political, economic, cultural, etc.) and built spaces (e.g. infrastructural, cyber, etc.).¹²

The main battlespace occurs inside the cognitive spaces of populations and key

decision- and policymakers, making them, and not the military, the main target of the operation.¹³ The population is the centre of gravity.

The strategy exploits the protest potential of the population of both the nation under assault and that of its partner nations. It manipulates and reinforces existing vulnerabilities trying to ignite social instability. It aims to destabilize the nation from within by inducing economic hardship, corrupting the juridical and political system, undermining trust in government, politicians, institutions, and democratic processes, and not at least, create fear and foster inaction.

The Russian Hybrid War abuses universal rights, democratic principles and shared values. The rights and principles enacted

to protect and empower the individuals are also enabling the aggressor to destabilise democracies. Fifth columnists¹⁴ (politicians, judges, oligarchs, media, individuals) play a crucial role in undermining both core democratic principles and reforms.

Russia aims to confuse and manipulate both international audiences as well as its domestic population. Using disinformation, cyber-attacks, blackmail, provocations, fabrications, military deceptions, and other active measures, it creates a virtual reality that prompts not only its victims but also their partners into making the political decisions Russia wants without suspecting (or acknowledging) they are being manipulated.¹⁵

By operating under the threshold of war it delegitimizes any military response by both the victim and the international community. The Hybrid War is designed to avoid a confrontation with the West while ensuring victory through the limited use of military power.

Both ambiguities and the duality between the threat of military escalation and the hope of a peaceful resolution is used to complicate or undermine the decision-making processes¹⁶ making a military response – or even a political response – difficult.

Military power is an essential element. It serves three purposes: Firstly, having demonstrated the will and ability to use military power it supports and reinforces the effect of non-military means.¹⁷ Secondly, the employment of military power effectively stops Western military support to the victim of its aggression. Thirdly, it offers Russia an alternative solution to the Hybrid War.

The initial use of force and the threat of further escalation support the use of non-military means. It creates a psychological shock that reverberates across diplomacy and all sectors of society, including politics, energy, economy, information, religion, and international and national law.

Hybrid War is highly dynamic and has no agreed-upon rules. It is tuned to counter western will to respond. It takes advantage of the fear that escalation is uncontrollable.¹⁸ By establishing a military fait accompli on the ground, the West feel compelled to avoid military intervention to avoid the risk of an escalation up to and including a nuclear confrontation.¹⁹

This is supported by intense Russian force generation, posturing and stationing of its military forces in preparation for the hypothetical military confrontation. This includes the development of military and non-military means capable of exploiting weaknesses in NATO military strategy, doctrine, and concept.

It is a long-time strategy that starts years before the outbreak of hostilities. It uses non-military means to shape the operational environment, preventing an effective response to the aggressions. The strategy is implemented through several phases, starting with establishing a favourable political, economic, and military set-up long before military force is employed, and the active phase of the conflict starts.

The war did not start in 2014. The first out of six phases²⁰ (hidden) started decades ago. It involved the dismantling of the Security and Defence Sector, the shaping of the information domain, corruption of key decision-makers, preparation of the economic and political space, and more. The

second and third phases (aggravation and start of the active phase of the conflict) started in 2013 and 2014. The last three phases (crisis, resolution, and restoration of peace) lay still in the future.²¹

Most importantly, it is not limited to Ukraine. Ukraine is crucial for Russia's ability to further its strategic ambition of restoring its status as a Global Power. The Hybrid War is a conflict over the world order: the conflicting ideas of the authoritarian "Russian World" and the Western liberal democracies. The list of Russia's global aggressions is consequently, long and getting longer by the day.²²

It challenges some of the fundamental weaknesses of the West, including its lack of resilience, its short-term focus, its desire for dialogue and political solutions (while discarding military options), lack of unity and the individual nations focus on national interests at the cost of international law, common values, and principles, aversion for costs and lack of burden-sharing.

It seeks to legitimize and justify "intervention" through designing the humanitarian crisis on the ground, establishing the national framework²³ to intervene, conducting influence operations to undermining any multinational efforts to solve the conflict, and aggressively challenging the international security architecture.

The ability to effectively coordinate the employment of both military and non-military tools means that the latter becomes a force multiplier. Being militarily inferior to NATO, the ability to synchronize its toolkit, combined with risk willingness, a quick decision-making process and military posture, puts Russia potentially on near equal footing with NATO.

HYBRID MEANS

a. Military

The illegal occupation of Crimea had far-reaching impacts beyond the loss of territory. It enables Russian power projection in the Mediterranean and beyond. It ensured the annihilation of the Ukrainian Navy and the depletion of Ukrainian Air Defence.

The militarization of the peninsular increased the military threat against Ukraine. Additionally, the occupation weakened an already fragile economy and increased the likelihood of Russian success in future economic warfare.

Russia has been militarizing the Crimean Peninsula for more than 7 years already. The overall force structure has increased annually. Presently, there are more than 33,000 servicemen on the peninsula, the 22nd Army Corps being the main strike force. The numbers are at times substantial higher because of exercise activities.

Russia has particularly strengthened its naval capabilities in the Black Sea. The number of new warships and auxiliary vessels has increased by thirty, which is much more than in the Baltic and Northern Fleets. At the start of 2021, the Black Sea Fleet consisted of 56 surface warships (boats) and 7 submarines.

Starting in 2014, Russia established an Anti-Access/ Area Denial Area (A2/AD) around Crimea based on the following core military capabilities:

- S-400 air defence systems – mobile anti-aircraft and anti-missile system, with a maximum range of 400 km;
- "Iskander-M" – a mobile system designed to carry out both conventional (500 km), and tactical nuclear strikes (range up to 700 km)²⁴;
- six submarines of project class 636.3, equipped with 4 cruise missiles "Caliber-PL", anti-ship and anti-submarine weapons;
- sixteen missile ships (cruiser, frigate, corvette, rocket boat classes), including six Caliber-NK cruise missile carriers;
- Bal and Bastion coastal missile complexes, equipped with X-35 Uranus and Yakhont (Onyx) anti-ship missiles with a range of surface targets of 120 and 300 (600) km from the Crimean coast, respectively (96 missiles in total);

- 43. Naval Assault Air Regiment (Su-30SM, Su-24M, and Su-24MR), 37. Mixed Air Regiment (Su-24M, and Su-25SM) and 38. Hunting Regiment (Su-27P, Su-27UB, Su-27SM, and Su-30M2). The Russian Federation also regularly deploys a squadron of Tu-22M3, Tu-95, and Su-34 bombers to Crimea.²⁵

The total naval missile salvo will be up to 234 missiles, of which up to 96 will be "Caliber" missiles. The missiles are both conventional and nuclear warhead capable.

The Black Sea Fleet is planned to receive further two corvettes of project 20380, 3 missile ships of project 22800, 3 patrol ships of project 22160, and 1 minesweeper project 12700 in 2022-23. This will further increase the naval strike capacity.

Russia continues the "creeping expansion" of the Black Sea. It obstructs the freedom of navigation in international waters by blocking vast and enduring areas of the sea allegedly for combat training and shooting. In August 2019, it blocked almost 25% of the waters of the Black Sea for 3 weeks, obstructing international shipping routes between Ukraine, Georgia, Romania, Turkey, and Bulgaria. Even though most of the declared activities were not carried out, commercial vessels were forced to sail around the areas.

Russia tries to legalize its jurisdiction over the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) around the Crimean Peninsula. It behaves aggressively towards any attempts to defend the rights of freedom of navigation or challenge its jurisdiction. In February 2017, an An-26 aircraft of the Ukrainian Navy was fired upon from small arms and damaged during the overflight of the Odesa gas field. In November

2018, Russia attacked 3 warships of the Ukrainian Navy south of the Kerch Strait, capturing 24 servicemen. In July 2020, the FSB ship obstructed the movement of warships participating in the "Sea Breeze 2020" exercise, threatened to use weapons and issued illegal demands to leave the area²⁶. In April 2021, the FSB arrested 4 Ukrainian fishermen 40 miles from the Crimean coast, for alleged poaching in the "EEZ of the Russian Federation." On June 23, 2021, Russia conducted simulated attacks against HMS Defender off the coast of Crimea while the warship was conducting innocent passage through an internationally recognized shipping lane. On June 24, 2021, Russian fighter jets armed with air-to-surface missiles harassed the Dutch frigate, HNLMS Evertsen, in international waters off Crimea, conducting mock attacks and jamming communication systems.²⁷

Russia is spoofing the Global Positioning System (GPS).²⁸ Trying to hide violations of Crimean sanctions, cargo ships heading to or from the peninsula's ports often turn off their Automatic Identification System.²⁹ Since 2014, Russia has been trying to gain control over air traffic management in Ukrainian airspace.³⁰ Such actions increase the risk of accidents with serious consequences, both at sea and in the air.

These are only samples of the many incidents which have taken place in and above the Black Sea since 2014. Security in the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea was described in detail in the report "Ukrainian storm warning – A grave danger to Europe in the Maritime Domain"³¹ and by Ukrainian experts, recommending robust international actions to deter Russian aggression in the Black Sea.³²

The Russian illegal occupation of the Crimean Peninsula, and its subsequent militarization, has increased the military threat against both Ukraine and the Black Sea countries that make up NATO's southern flank. Additionally, Russia has

demonstrated the ability to quickly strengthen its maritime capabilities by transferring units from the Northern and Baltic Fleet, and the Caspian Flotilla. This was last demonstrated during the sudden strategic exercises in April 2021.

The threat against Ukraine includes both conventional and hybrid threats. This includes the following scenarios:

- **A limited offensive** against the southern Kherson region to establish control of the North Crimean Canal to reopen critical important water supply. Russia has created a powerful airmobile group on Crimea, which, together with naval landings and air support, are able to establish full control over the canal starting from the city of Tavriysk (Kherson region). To conduct an amphibious assault, Russia can form one main landing detachment numbering 18-24 ships and vessels to land at any point of the Black and Azov Seas with up to a brigade of marines with armoured vehicles. The A2/AD capabilities on Crimea allow the Navy to operate under its protection in almost the entire Black Sea.
- **A maritime embargo** of Ukraine. Russia has already demonstrated the ability in the Sea of Azov since mid-2018. Russia paralyzed merchant shipping for months, reducing import and export from Mariupol and Berdyansk by 50%. Vessels bound for or departing from the Ukrainian ports still suffer unreasonable long waiting times at the Kerch Strait. In April 2021, Russia illegally closed access to the Sea of Azov for all foreign state-owned vessels until October 2021.

The Russian "justification" for, the economic consequences of and the subsequent psychological impact of a maritime embargo is outlined later in the report. Operating under the protection of A2/AD, supported by the Russian threat of escalation up to and including a nuclear confrontation in case of international intervention, and facing a Ukraine unable to challenge a maritime embargo, an embargo fully supports the Hybrid War concept. It would be a grey zone operation based on legal ambiguity, ensuring "a cost-effective victory" while reinforcing the effect of the non-military means.

The militarization of Crimea is not unique³³. The same development is taking place along the Ukrainian borders, in the Black Sea, the Baltic Sea³⁴, the Barents Sea³⁵, and the Arctic³⁶. The military threats to Ukraine in 2021 are far bigger than in 2014 due to the constant build-up of forces and bases along the Ukrainian borders and on occupied territories, attempt to integrate Belarus into Russia, the increased presence of Russian Armed Forces in Belarus, the evolving situation in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, the modernisation of the Russian Armed Forces, its increasingly more complex exercises, and last but not least, the effect of more

than a decade of Hybrid War on Ukrainian society. Additionally, Ukraine's failure to address critical vulnerabilities within both society and the Security and Defence Sector and the West's weak response to the increasingly more comprehensive Russian Hybrid War might have further emboldened Russia.

While the ongoing process does not necessarily mean that a full-scale war is likely, the development is still translated into both diplomatic pressure and restraint, political confrontation, psychological stress, and financial ambiguity.

As past wars and conflicts have shown, when Russia establish a fait accompli on the ground and at sea, nuclear weapons discourage an international intervention due to the inherent risk of conflict escalation. This is linked to a combination of Russian aggressive foreign policy, its will and ability to use military power to further its strategic aim and objectives, its nuclear posture, and not at least, its unpredictability and risk willingness.

b. Diplomacy

Since NATO's peace-support operation³⁷ in Kosovo in 1999, Russian leaders have been fixated on the principle that state sovereignty should be inviolable.³⁸ "If someone takes the view that Kosovo should be granted state independence [against the wishes of Serbia], then why should we withhold the same from Abkhazia or South Ossetia?"³⁹ Immediately after the brief Russo-Georgian War in August 2008, Russia extended diplomatic recognition to the breakaway territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, citing a parallel to Kosovo's status. Upon annexing Crimea in March 2014, Russia called on everyone to respect that voluntary choice" stating that Russia could not refuse Crimeans their right to self-determination.⁴⁰

According to the UN Charter article 2, All Members shall refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. It also states that international disputes shall be settled by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered.⁴¹ Having illegally occupied Crimea by military force, Russia is using the Charter to settle the war on its terms. Both the international society and Russia has reverted to preventive diplomacy to avoid the conflict from escalating or spreading.⁴²

While the international community might be acting according to the intention of the charter, Russia misuses international institutions, primarily the UN and the OSCE, to prevent justice and conflict resolution.⁴³ Diplomacy is used to keep the hope for a peaceful resolution alive, thereby keeping all other options off the table. Moreover, it is using diplomacy to weaken international unity and resolve.

Normally, diplomacy is seen as a broad range of measures to influence the decisions and behaviour of foreign governments through dialogue, negotiation, and other measures **short of war or violence**. Russian diplomacy, however, is a form of coercive diplomacy: a strategic mix of hard power and diplomatic know-how. It both instigates conflicts and introduce itself as the key pivot power for conflict resolution.

Russia's emerging role as a diplomatic mediator in international conflicts supports several of Russia's strategic goals. First, it addresses Russia's search for international status, providing ways for Russian diplomats to be in the room when major international security issues are discussed. Second, it corresponds to Russia's conception of how a Great Power should act. In Moscow's worldview, Great Powers have additional rights, but also take on additional responsibilities for peace and security, particularly in their

sphere of influence. The role is not least, meant to directly benefit Russia's foreign policy goals.⁴⁴

The illegal occupation of Crimea and its behaviour in the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea illustrates this to the full. Even though Russia is opposing any form for conflict resolution over Crimea, coercive diplomacy is used to blackmail Ukraine, to hinder the international community from responding forcefully to its breach of international laws, to restrict freedom of navigation, limit NATO and EUs will and ability to operate in the Black Sea and coerce the Black Sea countries into cooperation. The message is that "anything you can do; I can do worse." It induces fear of escalation and the risk of open confrontation.

Russia has repeatedly warned the West against crossing the red line. Putin has stressed that NATO's expansion into Ukraine would be regarded as crossing Russia's red lines.⁴⁵ Russia has introduced an additional layer of uncertainty when it stressed that Russia will determine in each specific case where the red line will be drawn.⁴⁶ The last statement came amid heightened tension with the West as Russia was massing military forces along the border of Ukraine and two days before it **announced** (but not fully executed) troop withdrawal.⁴⁷

The Kremlin has also stressed that Ukraine's efforts to return Crimea are illegitimate and are perceived as a **threat of aggression** against the Russian Federation. The involvement of any countries and organisations in such actions, including the Crimean Platform initiative, is seen as an unfriendly move and as a direct encroachment upon Russian territorial integrity.⁴⁸

While Russia's messaging to the West includes unambiguous warnings, Ukraine is the recipient of outright threats. During the Russian escalation in March-April this year, the Russian Foreign Minister warned of the possibility of "destroying Ukraine" in the event of a possible escalation of the conflict in Donbas.⁴⁹

Putin has stated that "those behind provocations that threaten the core interests of our security will regret what they have done in a way they have not regretted anything for a long time".⁵⁰ In his recently published article, he claims Ukraine is doing just that.⁵¹ He argued that Ukraine's path of forced assimilation, the formation of an ethnically pure Ukrainian state, aggressive towards Russia, is comparable in its consequences to the **use of weapons of mass destruction possibly** reducing the Russian population by hundreds of thousands or even millions.⁵²

According to General Gerasimov, the Russian strategy of "active defence" is based on the pre-emptively neutralization of threats to the security of the state.⁵³ The threats have been reinforced by the newly published Russian National Security Strategy where "the 'preservation of people of Russia and development of human potential" has been presented as its first national priority.⁵⁴

Russian coercive diplomacy, notwithstanding the strong diplomatic language, is always followed up by military and non-military actions. That includes military aggressions, aggressive military posture (e.g. simulated attacks against HMS Defender⁵⁵ and HNLMS Evertsen⁵⁶, overflight and manoeuvring close to NATO units operating in and over the Black Sea⁵⁷, multiple incidents of spoofing⁵⁸ and jam-



'Nothing to do with reality': Moscow slams Ukraine-sponsored Crimea resolution passed by UN (RT)

ming), and bilateral initiatives aimed at coercing foreign governments.

The success of the Hybrid War is partly reflected in the dwindling number of countries supporting the Crimean resolutions, being reduced to 63 from the 100 supporting the first declaration.⁵⁹ More and more countries have chosen passive "abstention" instead of active support. The recent Crimean Platform, the new international format aimed to ensure a peaceful resolution and Ukrainian control over the peninsula only gathered 42 countries and 4 international organisations. Even more telling, the number of countries providing practical military support to Ukraine is limited to seven⁶⁰.

The international response is, however, not only about support to Ukraine. It is most of all about upholding and supporting the

UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Paris Charter for a New Europe, as well as rules and principles of international law, including international human rights and humanitarian laws. It is a question of opposing any unilateral attempts to challenge and change an international order based on the rule of law, the determination to protect, maintain and strengthen the rules-based international order.⁶¹

This was highlighted by the European Parliament when it stated that whereas the EU's relations with the Russian Federation are based on the principles of international law, the OSCE's founding principles, democracy, the peaceful resolution of conflicts and good neighbourly relations, the Russian Government has shown contempt for these principles. It misuses interna-

tional institutions, primarily the UN and the OSCE, to prevent justice and conflict resolution worldwide.⁶²

Countries will, however, always assess the cost of defending the shared values and principles relative to the costs of opposing Russia. Unfortunately, some put their short-time national interests⁶³ before the long-term international repercussions, hoping that Russia with time will change its aggressive behaviour.

Russian coercive diplomacy has so far succeeded in influencing the decisions and behaviour of the international community. The latter has, unfortunately, failed to influence the decisions and behaviour of the Russian government because of asymmetry in strategy and resolve.

The international community has so far chosen not to increase the costs of the aggressor despite its continuous, and increasingly more wide-ranging violations of international law. Russia has instead been readmitted to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). The decision to strip the Russian delegation of voting rights in April 2014 was a direct response to the illegal annexation of Crimea which "created a threat to stability and peace in Europe".⁶⁴

The lack of international resolve is completely at odds with the recognition that "the EU's failure to respond adequately to the various Russian aggressions since the one against Georgia in 2008 prompted Russia to continue aggressive military and political campaigns, both in its neighbourhood and beyond, thus weakening and undermining the rules-based international order and stability in Europe and elsewhere".⁶⁵

After more than seven years of international preventive diplomacy and in the face of an expanding and increasingly more comprehensive Hybrid War, Russia brushes all efforts aside by establishing a list of unfriendly countries.⁶⁶ Still, some nations argue for the normalization of relationships. Worse still, in its attempt to accommodate both the aggressor and its victim, the international community might have promoted conflict resolution in breach of international law.⁶⁷

c. Political

Russia has questioned Ukraine's sovereignty and state borders from the very first day of its independence. In the early 1990th, Moscow was involved in various destabilising activities, particularly on the Crimean Peninsula,^{68,69,70,71,72} including an attempt to seize control of the territory. The Ukrainian government and special services' decisive actions prevented a sham referendum in 1995.

Having failed to achieve its goal the Kremlin decided to play a long game. At the time, Russia faced political instability, economic hardships and was in the middle of the first (modern) Chechen war.

Russia's contemporary grand strategy was defined by former foreign minister Yevgeny Primakov, in which one of the pillars is the reintegration of the post-soviet space, foremost Ukraine and Belarus, into Moscow's orbit. The Rose Revolution in Georgia (2003) and Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004) was perceived in Moscow as an encroachment on its territory and loss of the ideological battle. The Russia Today – a state propaganda machine – was established in 2005 to fill the gap.

The ideology of *Russkiy Mir* (the Russian world) was formalised and found its way into the foreign policy concept (2008⁷³ and 2013⁷⁴). The Russian World foundation (2007) and Rossotrudnichestvo (2008) were established as the government's tools to spread its "soft power" in the near abroad and elsewhere. In the meantime,

the Russian Orthodox Church became instrumental for the Kremlin to expand its influence beyond its borders. The primary targets are Ukraine and Belarus, and the secondary ones are Eastern Europe and the Balkans (especially Serbia and Montenegro).^{75,76,77,78,79} On the cultural front, dozens of fiction films, series, and documentaries were produced in line with the Kremlin political needs. They were glorifying *siloviki* (military, law enforcement and intelligence services),^{80,81,82} showing the greatness and might of contemporary Russia, evoking nostalgia for Soviet and imperial times, as well as revealing betrayal and crimes of the Ukrainian nationalists. There were published dozens of books whitewashing the crimes of the Soviet regime, explaining the geopolitical struggle of Russia against "immoral and devious" Western, as well as historical fictions that contained war between Russia and the West, Russia, and Ukraine.

The Kremlin's "soft power" was added to traditional coercive tools. Gas is one of key Moscow's instruments in both corrupt-

ing and converting energy dependency into political concessions. The Ukrainian oligarchs were tied to the Russian money inflow, thus extremely susceptible to the wishes of the Kremlin. By converting money into political projects and media outlets, the oligarchs were influencing politics at all levels. The dominance of the Russian and pro-Russian media in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine guaranteed strong support for pro-Russian forces. It should be noted that Viktor Yanukovich and his Party of Regions used political operatives from Russia or related to Russia.^{84,85} One of the most favourite political campaign strategies was the division and polarisation of voters based on regional identity, language, history, and more.⁸⁶



The pro-Russian parties forged systemic relations with Kremlin. The Russian intelligence was mastering partnerships between Ukrainian and Russian organisations, from cultural and historical ones to the sport fan clubs. The Institute of CIS Countries and its head Konstantin Zatulin played an important role in establishing dozens of anti-Ukrainian organisations. With his help, the Union of Orthodox citizens of Ukraine, the Russian party of Crimea, the Russian community in Crimea, Congress of the Russian communities in Crimea, Congress of the Russian nation, Union party, the Russian movement of Sevastopol etc. were created.

After the meeting with Vladimir Putin in October 2013, Viktor Yanukovich reversed his decision to sign the Association Agreement with the EU. It triggered the Euromaidan protest and, after its brutal dismissal, the Revolution of Dignity. President Yanukovich was ousted on February 22, 2014.

The vacuum of power in Kyiv turned out to be an opportunity that the Kremlin could not resist. The Russian propaganda machine was turned on to full power by portraying protestors as Nazi, neo-fascists, ultra-nationalists, anti-Semites, radicals, thugs, useful idiots paid and manipulated by the US. The Russian officials and propaganda machines were pushing the narrative of the *junta* that committed the *coup d'état*. The Kremlin was feeding feelings of insecurity, accusing Ukrainian politicians and "radicals" in Kyiv of their "plans" to ban the Russian language and persecute the Russian ethnic minority and Russian speaking population.^{87,88} The sham referendum in Crimea and subsequent annexation was framed as the protection of peace and stability on the Peninsula and self-determination of the Russian people in line with international law.

The leaked papers of the meeting of the National Security and Defence Council of 28 February 2014 showed that the Kremlin achieved its goal of suppressing the will of the Ukrainian political elite to resist.⁸⁹ It was the civil society that interfered at a crucial moment and stopped the Russian plans to seize other territories while the government and the military were getting back to normal.

d. Energy

The broader economic and security ramifications of hybrid warfare are evident, especially when applied to the energy sector.⁹⁰ It is a powerful component of Russia's Hybrid War as it impacts all and everything. Russia has weaponised energy and use it to coerce and threaten both Ukraine, NATO, and the EU.

Before the Orange Revolution of 2004, Ukraine was receiving gas from Gazprom at a low price to ensure that the country remained in its orbit. After the Revolution of Dignity, Russia started to use energy as a tool to stop it from leaving it.

Russia made sure that Ukraine didn't have access to any other gas suppliers. Long-term contracts signed by Gazprom with its Western clients and the transit contract with Naftogaz, Ukraine's national oil and gas company, made Gazprom the operator of gas interconnectors between Ukraine and the EU. Ukrainian companies would not be able to import gas from the West without Gazprom's consent.

Secondly, Russia corrupted Ukrainian politicians⁹¹ in order to stop any attempts to liberalize retail gas prices for households. This policy was supported by an active disinformation campaign with the help of both pro-Russian media and political forces. The aim was to convince the public that gas prices should remain low regardless of the import price, ensuring high costs for the Ukrainian state budget.

This policy, in turn, led to a deterioration of Ukraine's own gas production industry. To offset extremely high import gas prices,

the Ukrainian regulator had set a limit on the price of gas produced by Naftogaz.⁹² This cap would barely cover operating costs and made investments into modernization or new field development virtually impossible. The national gas production in Ukraine started to decline.

Another outcome of the "low price policy" was the extremely inefficient use of gas for heating by households. The artificial suppression of utility prices made any attempt at energy efficiency economically unsustainable. For consumers, gas was extremely cheap while the country was struggling to find the cash to bridge the widening deficit in Naftogaz.⁹³

Being the only source to cover Ukraine's gas shortage, Gazprom charged the country extra-high prices for the fuel. In 2009, during the gas supply crisis orchestrated by Russia,⁹⁴ Naftogaz and Gazprom signed a gas supply contract which set a base price at an extremely high level – up to



Ukrainian drilling rig "Petro Godovanets", seized by Russia after the annexation of Crimea. ©krym.org

30% above the price paid by Gazprom's clients in neighbouring Slovakia.⁹⁵

This price would later be reduced through temporary "discounts" in exchange for specific concessions in Ukraine's policy, including language, culture, religion, military, political and trade alliances. One of these was granted in exchange for an extension of Russia's navy base lease in Crimea which ironically was the point from where Russia started its occupation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014.

Immediately after the occupation, Russia cancelled all gas discounts, whereby the gas price for Ukraine increased by 81% in a day.⁹⁶ The illegal occupation of Crimea, however, also stopped Ukraine's efforts to increase its gas production in the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea to improve its energy security.

The Black Sea shelf is one of the most promising areas where Ukraine has hydro-

carbon reserves. According to Naftogaz, it is estimated that the shelf may contain up to 1 trillion cubic meters of gas.

In 2012-2013, Ukraine signed several agreements involving exploration of the Black Sea shelf (Chevron, Shell, Eni, Exxon, OMV Petroleum, and EDF). These deals were pulled after Russia annexed the peninsula in early 2014. Chornomornaftogaz, the Crimean subsidiary of Naftogaz accounted for a major share of the group's investment. It was expected that by 2015 the company would start to supply gas to mainland Ukraine and that this would help reduce Ukraine's dependency on Russia.

Chornomornaftogaz was among the first assets nationalized by the puppet government installed by Russia. Ukraine lost 17 established fields of the Black Sea shelf. It is estimated that these fields alone hold 58.56 billion cubic meters of natural gas, 1,231 thousand tons of gas condensate and 2,530 thousand tons of oil. Russia has been

illegally producing hydrocarbons in the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea near the Crimean Peninsula since 2014 in violation of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.⁹⁷

Furthermore, Russia is using the Ukrainian gas infrastructure it captured in the Black Sea for military purposes. Russia has installed surveillance and intelligence equipment on the gas rigs establishing a near full maritime situational awareness of the Northern Black Sea.⁹⁸ Russia tracks all ship traffic in and out of the Ukrainian Black Sea ports.

Its aggressive protection of the captured rigs as well as interception of any activities that might challenge Russia's claim of maritime jurisdiction in the EEZ around Crimea denies Ukraine from developing its reserves and achieve energy independence. This has become even more crucial as Nord Stream 2 is about to start operating. The pipeline circumvents Ukraine, not only depriving it of \$1.5 billion in annual revenue but also reducing Russia's and Europe's dependence on Ukraine as a gas transit country. The latter increases the risk of further military escalations as the gas delivery to Europe no longer will be affected. Paradoxically, the Nord Stream 2 project gained momentum in 2014, only months after the Russian occupation of Crimea.⁹⁹

Nuclear power, gas, oil, and coal remains crucial to Ukraine's energy security. Over half of the country's electricity is produced with nuclear power. Ukraine still receives most of its nuclear services and nuclear fuel from Russia.¹⁰⁰ The loss of Crimea resulted in the loss of both existing and future gas and oil deposits in the Black Sea. The subsequent occupation of parts of Donbas resulted in the loss of 115 out of 150 coal mines located in the region, including the only Ukrainian mines with anthracite coal needed for 12 of its thermal and electric power plants. Consequently, Russia has made sure that Ukraine remains dependent on imports for around 83% of its oil consumption, 33% of its natural gas and 50% of its coal.¹⁰¹

Russia's occupation of Ukrainian energy resources must be seen in context with its other, parallel efforts to undermine its energy security, including cyber-attacks on energy infrastructure, disinformation, diplomatic efforts to sell the Nord Stream project, and not at least, reform pushback. Corruption, monopolies, and lack of reform over time come at high costs. The energy infrastructure needs extensive renovation and modernization. Ukraine is facing substantial costs and requires considerable foreign investment over the next 9-14 years. A failure to upgrade will further erode the energy security and help destabilize Ukraine from within.

e. Information

For Russians, the information component is an integral part of modern conflict, and much of their most recent doctrine and debate is soaked in recognising the critical role of information warfare.

General Gerasimov, the Russian Chief of Defence Staff, argued in March 2017 that "the army operating concepts of the leading states postulate that **achieving information dominance is an indispensable pre-requisite of combat actions**. The means of mass media and social networks are used to perform the set tasks."¹⁰² More recently still he stated the information domain was so critical that, "...work on the questions of preparation and conduct of actions of information character is the most important task of military science"¹⁰³.

From a historical perspective, this should be no surprise given Russia's Soviet heritage where international political warfare, with propaganda at its heart, was their stock in trade. Russia does not publish its information policies, doctrines or even terminology, and there is no direct equivalent of NATO's Strategic Communication, so their activities are best summed up under the Russian term, Information Confrontation.

An unclassified definition by NATO analysts described it as, 'Targeting all aspects of a society – diplomatic, military, polit-

ical, cultural, social and religious information areas – via two efforts: Informational-technical, analogous to computer network operations and information-psychological, attempts to change human behaviour and/or beliefs in favour of Russian objectives.' Such a broad definition can be taken as embracing both lethal and non-lethal means. Information Confrontation is everyone's business.

So how was this shown in the Russian aggression in Crimea? In simple terms it can fall under several headings:

Deception: Critical to the Russian annexation was to create a smokescreen of misinformation and disinformation to hide behind and to mislead Ukraine and the wider world as to its true intentions. Essentially it wanted to buy time to carry out the operation so that by the time others woke up then it would be too late. In military parlance, it used its information Line of Efforts to successfully get inside its opponent's decision-making cycle.

Its deception operation encompassed even President Putin, who on March 4, 2014, as



7 years of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. ©MFA

his Spetnatz took over Crimea, denied their presence, saying it was local Crimean militia who "are wearing Russian-style fatigues because such attire available in army shops across the former Soviet Union."

Such nonsense served to create doubt and hence delay in the Western response. This deception was aided by a shrewd understanding of its opponents and in particular, exploiting their instinctive

desire to downplay the Russian state involvement. This was the time of the so-called US 'reset' to improve relations with Russia. This attempted warming was strongly welcomed by many NATO nations who had orientated their policy on assuming Russia could be coaxed into behaving rather better.

Acknowledging the total involvement of the Kremlin would force NATO nations to

consider a robust response rather than a re-set and that was an uncomfortable prospect. The consequence was some demanded a level of evidence that was unrealistic. The Kremlin clearly realised this and simply played for time by seeking to maintain that fog of uncertainty amongst an audience some of whom were only too willing to be uncertain.

Narrative: Russia had a very clear narrative to both justify its actions and also to seek to gain and maintain support from target audiences. This narrative plumbed deep into recent and historical Slavic, Russian and Ukrainian culture, and history so was resonant with many.

Crimeans were reminded of their defence of Sevastopol in the 'Great Patriotic War', the Kyiv government was tarred with the brush of the collusion with the Nazis by some Ukrainians in World War Two. Going further back into history, the Kremlin claimed Crimea was rightfully part of Russia. Broader still, Putin later used the common hero of Russia and Ukraine, Vladimir of Kyiv, to claim a common culture and values that united the peoples of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine.

In the service of these narratives, Russia made extensive use of social media to spread them, effectively using many of the standard techniques of persuasion used by marketing firms the world over to sell products, but here to gain support for their takeover. At the same time, they were also working hard to create an information bubble by cutting other communications channels and isolating Crimea from any but Russian-controlled information. This enabled them to not just perpetuate their broader narratives but create fear and panic by, for instance,

creating rumours that so-called Ukrainian fascists were coming to kill them.

One consequence of such narrative-based information campaigns is that the wedge it drives between competing parties is likely to be long-term – based not on policy but identity and culture, going to the heart of what people are and hold most dear.

It was in such a febrile atmosphere of fear, nervousness, ignorance and one-sided (dis)information that the Russians later rushed Crimea into its vote to join Russia.

Linking operations, strategy, and communications: As has already been noted, the Russian information campaign was intensive in some fairly obvious ways such as the use of social media, but more important is something perhaps less obvious is the integration and alignment of the communications within their overall strategy.

In his influential book, *War from the Ground Up*, former British Army officer, Emile Simpson, noted, "The strategist in war has to combine the physical and the perceived...to draw a sharp distinction between strategy and strategic narrative is misguided: as the explanation of actions, the strategic narrative is simply strategy expressed in narrative form."¹⁰⁴

Here, the Russian strategy of maintaining decisive influence over its "near abroad", in this case, Ukraine, through direct or indirect control was expressed in emotive narrative form to justify its intervention in Crimea and later Donetsk and Luhansk. The aim was the same, the tone was different.

The operational need to outpace adversarial decision-making used the information to deceive and delay while creating

the information bubble gave them freedom of manoeuvre inside Crimea both to influence Crimeans and destabilise the Ukrainian forces.

There were also clear instances of the Russian forces understanding the presentational needs of their mission, and not just in avoiding revealing their true nature and identity. For instance, in Crimea, they went to considerable lengths to intimidate but avoid the use of lethal force. The restraint was not so much humanitarian but in pursuit of a bloodless takeover that would further minimise the likelihood of an international community response. Later, in Donetsk, they would use massive violence to achieve their aims, showing their ability to scale the use of force, to send a message, to the circumstances.

In sum, the Russians in Crimea used information well as a key line of effort. While much analysis suggests a new way of doing business, this needs caveating as in many respects the Russians applied new tools to old principles of political warfare that they had used throughout the Cold War. Beyond that, the use of narrative to persuade is as old as mankind. What is newer is the extraordinary power of the

new internet tools that make this the information age. Information can be generated more quickly, spread more widely, distorted, and disguised more easily, and amplified with remarkable speed – and that is truly transformational and a challenge to us all.

Such change of course applies across the board to other conflicts. The principles and practices can with appropriate tailoring be applied to all hybrid conflicts. Russia to some degree had an advantage in Ukraine as it was essentially a Slavic conflict, so it had an instinctive understanding of what could work. Applying this to other cultures is a much bigger task – understanding the correlation for forces between militaries is one thing, understanding the nature and identity of very different cultures and histories, quite another.

Russia has shown us that information is now a fundamental DOMAIN of warfare, in the same way as air, land and maritime, and more recently cyber. The full implications of this new domain of warfare are something western security structures still need to fully take on board.

f. Legal

The Russian Hybrid War implies "instrumentalizing law" as a means of legitimizing all its actions. This also links back to the idea of Russian civilization with its own legal norms and interpretation of international law. The aspect of legitimacy is very important in supporting the Russian narrative. It helps Russia to appeal to its internal audience, to its compatriots abroad, and even to the international community by demonstrating that Russia is law-abiding and "doing the right thing".

It was important for Russia to instigate "legal" self-determination in Crimea [...], thus putting a veil of "legitimacy" on the annexation of Crimea. It was also very important that the self-proclaimed leadership of Crimea [...] formally requested Russia's help, intervention or even annexation. This provided "legal" grounds for the protection of compatriots and the protection of human rights."¹⁰⁵

The legal element of the Hybrid War has several objectives. The first is to ensure that its actions are seen to be legal in the eyes of its national courts and domestic audience. The second intends to challenge and amend the international security architecture. The third involves turning the Ukrainian legal system against Ukraine itself. The fourth aim is to legitimise future interventions or military actions. Lastly, the fifth aim is to reverse all legal processes initiated by Ukraine against Russia as soon as the Ukrainian defeat has been secured.

In 2016 the International Criminal Court (ICC) judged the situation within the territory of Crimea and Sevastopol to be

an international armed conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation.¹⁰⁶ The Russian foreign ministry called the court "one-sided and inefficient".¹⁰⁷ Consequently, Russia decided to withdraw from the process of joining the ICC. Russia had previously signed the Rome statute, which governs the ICC, but never ratified the agreement to become a member.

Four years later, President Putin signed a law allowing Russia's national legislation precedence over international treaties and rulings from international bodies in cases when they conflict with the Russian constitution.¹⁰⁸ Simultaneously, he signed a package of laws that establishes punishment in the form of imprisonment for up to 10 years for the alienation of part of the territory of the Russian Federation.¹⁰⁹ This includes calls to end the illegal occupation of Crimea. The bill intended to recognize calls for the "alienation of territories" as extremism.¹¹⁰

Ironically, the document was signed days after the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution urging the Russian Federation, as the occupying power, to withdraw its

Economic losses from the temporary occupation of Crimea by Russia



Infographic by CES, translated by Euromaidan Press.

military forces from Crimea and end its temporary occupation without delay.¹¹¹

This doesn't stop Russia from misusing international courts to undermine Ukraine and support its narratives. Russia has filed human rights complaints with the European Court of Human Rights, claiming that Ukraine is responsible for among other things, killings, abductions, forced displacement, interference with the right to vote, restrictions on the use of the Russian language and attacks on Russian embassies and consulates. It also complains about Ukraine blocking the water supply to Crimea.¹¹²

On August 24, the Russian Investigative Committee's Central Investigation Department announced the launch of a probe against "unidentified individuals, located on the territory of Ukraine and opposing the reunification of Crimea with Russia".¹¹³

Russia has signed up to the justification of Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) and humanitarian intervention. In 2008, Russia argued that it was "necessary to end what

it termed a genocide against South Ossetians and to protect Russian civilians (many South Ossetians had Russian passports)."¹¹⁴ In 2014, Putin claimed that the annexation of Crimea was a response to "real threats" to Russian-speaking minorities in the region.¹¹⁵

"The distribution of passports also helped cement Russia's control over Abkhazia and South Ossetian before the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. It has not at least played an important role in the Kremlin's Crimean policy, both before and after the 2014 seizure of the Ukrainian peninsula".¹¹⁶ On March 20, a Russian presidential decree came into force banning non-Russian citizens from owning land in most of Crimea.

Both its war in Donbas and the illegal occupation of Crimea has allowed Russia to create what it sees as a justification for a future "humanitarian intervention". The humanitarian situation (due to the Russian induced war and occupation), combined with an active "passportification", diplomatic initiatives, legal actions, information campaign and its strategic framework¹¹⁷ aim to legitimize future military aggression

against Ukraine. Russia will claim that it acts according to the international intervention in Kosovo and Libya. Russia has threatened to intervene several times already.¹¹⁸

Ukraine is also facing a legal battle in the maritime domain. As a maritime nation, Ukraine claims an EEZ in which it has special rights regarding the exploration and use of marine resources, including energy production from water and wind. The right to exercise maritime jurisdiction is regulated by the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

"Maritime jurisdiction" may be defined as the exercise—in conformity with international law—of legislative, executive, and judicial functions over the sea, persons and things on or under the sea. It is, therefore, composed of both special rights, as well as obligations and responsibilities which must be exercised 24-7. Crucially, if the state does not (or cannot) exercise jurisdiction, someone else will.

Ukraine lost most of its capability to uphold maritime jurisdiction when Crimea was occupied. Consequently, Russia has claimed a greater part of Ukraine's EEZ and has assumed its maritime responsibilities and obligations. Exercising both its (illegal) sovereignty and maritime jurisdiction rigidly and forcefully, Russia is copying China's South-China Sea strategy, challenging international law and conventions.

Ukraine is, however, not only facing Russia in international courts but is also facing obstacles within its national judicial system. Politicians and vested interests, in close cooperation with corrupt courts and officials, have for years tried to stop,

dismantle, and reverse some of the most crucial reforms, including the reform of the judicial system itself.

In July and August 2020 alone, the Constitutional Court opened five separate proceedings aimed at various aspects of Ukrainian anti-corruption legislation.¹¹⁹ On August 28, Ukraine's Constitutional Court declared the 2015 appointment of Artem Sytnyk as director of the country's National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) unconstitutional. On October 27, 2020, it destroyed the entire asset declaration system for state officials by depriving the National Agency for Preventing Corruption (NAPC) of most of its powers. The court also cancelled criminal penalties for lying in asset declarations.¹²⁰ Land reform has been threatened. The efforts are supported by the notorious Kyiv Regional Administrative Court¹²¹ and Ukraine's High Council of Justice.¹²² The legal system has gone after Euromaidan activists, while both letting the representatives of the Viktor Yanukovich regime go free and protecting incumbent MPs and advisors from the investigation.

President Zelenskyy branded it an attempted "counter-revolution" staged by "a coalition of Russian proxies and some prominent Ukrainian oligarchs who feel threatened by the activities of our anti-corruption institutions."¹²³ While their allegiance might be hard to prove, it is not at all difficult to ascertain that their actions are not in favour of Ukraine. They are, after all, undermining Ukrainian statehood. The effect is reflected in both international and national disappointment and exasperation, weakening the support of the former and destabilising the latter. Worse still, the courts remain operational and still in the position to nullify Ukraine's reform achievements.

g. Economy

The trade between Ukraine and Russia has declined substantially. Ukraine's total imports from Russia had fallen from 18% of GDP in 2012 to 6% of GDP at the beginning of 2019. Since the annexation of Crimea, Russia has lost part of its economic grip on Ukraine. However, due to the widespread use of offshore and hidden investment, it is difficult to estimate its actual economic footprint. Russian investment into Ukraine has been assessed to be at least two times higher than the official estimates.¹²⁴

Russia's ability to dominate Ukraine economically has greatly diminished since 2014.¹²⁵ Its ability to wage economic warfare has not. Russia's ability to synchronize its use of military and non-military means continue to affect the Ukrainian economy.

The military aggression in Donbas, the illegal occupation of the Crimean Peninsula, the consequential annexation of Ukraine's EEZ, and the growing threat along the Ukrainian border has had a detrimental impact on Ukraine's economy.

Russian sanctions, its theft of resources in the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea, the building of Nord Stream 2 and Turk Stream are all elements of its economic warfare.

Russia's ability to inflict economic pain on Ukraine follows not only a direct approach but also an indirect approach in which the various elements of the Hybrid War play a crucial role.

MILITARY	<p>The military effort has economic consequences. This includes financial reaction to the war, like the decline in GDP¹²⁶, loss of credit rating, higher national debt and taxes, higher inflation¹²⁷, currency depreciation which induced deposit outflows, the collapse of the banking sector, social costs (e.g. internally displaced personnel), and loss of international investments.</p> <p>The Ukrainian economy has been further weakened through the loss of minerals, coal, gas, and oil, industry, infrastructure, and through the cost of rebuilding the Security and Defence Sector.¹²⁸</p> <p>The economic losses from the temporary occupation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia have recently been assessed to \$ 135 billion.¹²⁹ This is a conservative estimate since it only lists known oil and gas deposits. The losses will increase by the year.</p> <p>Additionally, the Russian maritime "blockade" of the Ukrainian ports in the Sea of Azov has an economic impact on the region.</p>
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DIPLOMACY	<p>Russia's coercive diplomacy and its messaging help undermine the Ukrainian economy. Apart from the inherent uncertainty as to what Russia will do next, it signals its "red lines", casting doubts about the future NATO and EU integration.</p> <p>At the same time, Russia presents Ukraine and Russia as a "single economic system" and "complementary economic partners", alienating Ukraine from the West.¹³⁰</p>
POLITICAL	<p>It is at times difficult to distinguish between normal democratic processes and political actions resulting from vested interests and Russian interference.</p> <p>Any suspicions of sabotage of reforms, lack of will to reform, corruption, breaches to the principle of distribution of power, pro-Russian affiliation, unfair dismissal of reformists, diminution of the governance and autonomy of the National Bank of Ukraine, attack on the anti-corruption framework, revanchism, etc. undermine trust and has economic fallout.</p> <p>Sabotage and the elongated and seemingly reluctant reform process are increasingly testing the patient of the international community, stopping support from IMF, World Bank, and European Union. After more than seven years of reform, Ukraine ranks 117 (of 179) in the Corruption Perceptions Index¹³¹ and 127 (of 168) in the 2021 Index of Economic Freedom. Ukraine, which continues to suffer from political and security turmoil, remains Europe's least economically free economy. Government integrity is assessed as severely compromised.¹³²</p> <p>The government need to boost investor confidence by [] undertaking deep and comprehensive reforms to strengthen rule-of-law institutions and improve the protection of property rights, judicial effectiveness, and government integrity.¹³³</p>

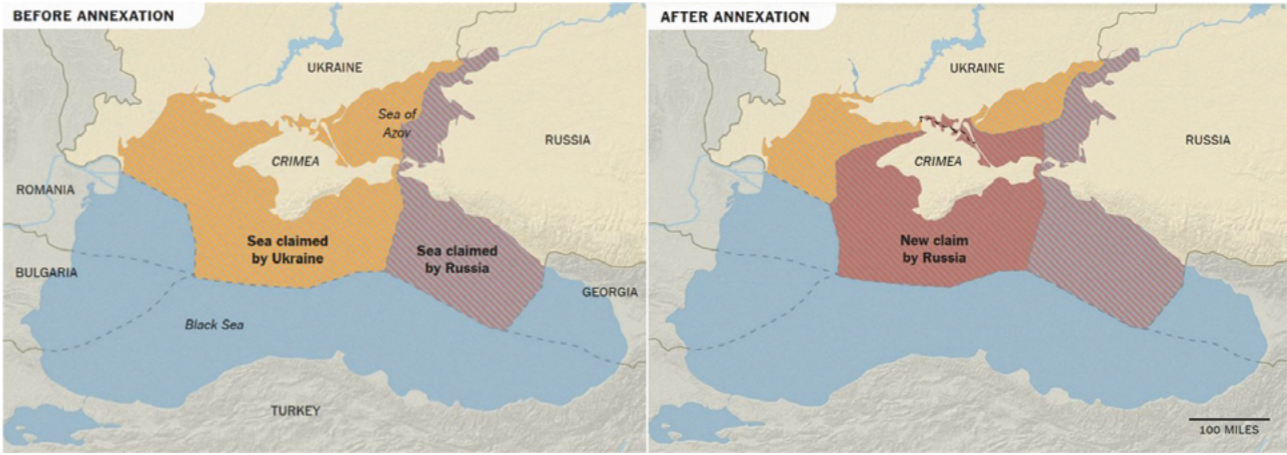
ENERGY	<p>Lack of energy security, corruption, monopoly, and interference of both government and interest groups in the energy sector raises concerns¹³⁴ and has an impact on foreign investments. There is a crisis of non-payment in the electricity market which further reduce the investment attractiveness of Ukraine.¹³⁵</p> <p>Additionally, the Nord Stream 2 project will reduce Ukraine's revenue by \$ 1.5 billion or about 1% of GDP.¹³⁶</p> <p>The Russian occupation of gas and oil fields and coal deposits further erode Ukraine's economic potential.</p>
INFORMATION	<p>The main Russian disinformation narratives have prevailed for more than seven years. This includes the Crimea-Specific Messaging like it "historically belonged to Russia", "The acquisition of Crimea by Ukraine in 1954 was a historical mistake" and "Ethnic Russian and all Russian-speaking populations of Crimea were under severe ultra-nationalist threat".¹³⁷</p> <p>Russia continues its attempts to weaken and belittle Ukraine as a country ("Civil War", "A failed state", "under external management", historically, culturally and religiously linked to Russia"), discredit the Euromaidan (a coup orchestrated by the West), and not at least, weaken and denigrate the West.</p> <p>The international community still associate Ukraine with war (though four times less than in 2015). The majority have a negative association with Ukraine,¹³⁸ such as political and economic challenges: corruption, oligarchs, poverty, shortcomings of the political system. Ukraine is often seen through the prism of its Soviet past and as a part of Russia's field of influence.¹³⁹</p> <p>The prevailing negative impression has an impact on international support and undermines investor confidence.</p>

LEGAL	<p>Despite Ukraine's potential, foreign direct investment (FDI) remains low. The effect of the crisis of the court system, the lack of the rule of law, the lack of progress in the fight against corruption, the situation around the Constitutional Court of Ukraine, the complicated interaction with regulatory and law enforcement agencies has an impact on investors' assessment of Ukraine's attractiveness.¹⁴⁰</p>
	<p>The judiciary's susceptibility to political pressure, corruption, and bribery weaken public confidence in the courts.¹⁴¹</p>
	<p>Ukraine experienced a net outflow of investment in 2020. In addition to the pandemic, foreign investors cite corruption, particularly in the judiciary, as a key challenge to doing business in Ukraine.¹⁴²</p>
	<p>A poll conducted by the European Business Association in December 2020 showed a significant decrease in investors' assessment of Ukraine's attractiveness. Only 6% consider the investment climate favourable and only 1 in 10 CEOs Expect an improvement.¹⁴³</p>
	<p>The ongoing attempt to derail reforms in all sectors (political, energy, economy, information, legal) by vested interests, including Ukrainian courts, has massive economic costs increasing the hardship people are facing and, consequently, rising discontent. Even under the most optimistic scenario, where institutional gaps are fully addressed, Ukraine would need 15 years to catch up to Poland's current income level.¹⁴⁴</p> <p>The actions by Ukrainian courts, pro-Russian politicians and oligarchs must be seen as a part of the Russian hybrid war.</p>

Ukraine has, however, not yet been exposed to the full potential of the economic war. Ukraine prosperity is connected to its access to the sea and its ability to exploit the full potential of its maritime cluster and resources. Ukraine lost a larger part of its maritime cluster with Crimea. Russia is also denying Ukraine the opportunity to explore its maritime resources, including gas and oil. While up to 70% of the explored hydrocarbon onshore have already been exploited, 96% of the offshore deposits are intact.

More than 66% of the export go through the remaining seaports, having lost 5 sea trade ports (Feodosia, Sevastopol, Yevpatoria, Yalta and Kerch) with Crimea.¹⁴⁶ Russia is, however, presently controlling approximately 19,6% (145 000 km2) of Ukrainian territory and maritime areas under its jurisdiction. This includes the Crimea Peninsula, the adjacent EEZ and certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.¹⁴⁷

Any interruption of maritime trade and freedom of navigation will cause ripple



Ownership of the Black Sea deep shelf before and after the annexation of the Crimea.
Source: Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory of Columbian University

effects across all sectors of society. The freedom of navigation and consequently, the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) is already being challenged. Russia has demonstrated both the will and the ability to restrict and ultimately, stop all maritime trade through the closure of the Kerch Strait and the regular closure of major parts of the Black Sea on the pretext of "exercises".

If (or when) Russia decides to impose a full blockade of all Ukrainian ports, the Ukrainian economy will collapse. The loss of access to the sea will stop all maritime imports and exports. This will result in the

loss of jobs and income, affecting all other parts of the Ukrainian business environment. The loss of freedom of navigation and SLOCs will severely harm the industry and affect the lives of millions of Ukrainians. This would further destabilize Ukraine from within, undermining the sovereignty and independence of the country.

Ukraine is presently unable to challenge the Russian Black Sea Fleet or its multi-layered Anti Access/Area Denial capacity in the Black Sea. That is a critical vulnerability with a potential devastating 'Maritime Ripple Effect'.¹⁴⁸

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Hybrid War consists of two crucial important elements. Firstly, the Hybrid War is about influencing people to make conscious or unconscious choices beneficial to the aggressor. It's the battle of minds and it's a fight for influence. Secondly, Russia intends to win the Hybrid War with limited use of military force.

An efficient counterstrategy must engage Russia within all fields of the Hybrid War. Russia must be engaged in the same battlespace – the mind. We need to reduce its ability to influence and shape the cognitive space of both key decision- and policymakers, as well as the population. Just as importantly, we need to address the Russian perception of the Hybrid War as a viable strategy.

This includes (but is not limited to) the following actions:

1. Restore trust

Democracy cannot endure without trust, and the lack of trust is possibly Ukraine's biggest vulnerability, making it extremely susceptible to the Hybrid War. Ukraine urgently needs to restore trust between the population, president, parliament, Verkhovna Rada, ministries, institutions, political parties, politicians, and media.

The governments need to be inclusive, transparent, receptive, and efficient. For that, they need to put their fiscal houses in order, deliver high-quality services to their citizens and provide open and transparent data. Political leadership must be seen to work for the greater good, not for themselves. This includes:

- Arming Citizens with Meaningful Information.
- Empowering Citizen Voice in Policymaking.
- Reaching Out to Marginalized Citizens.
- Empowering Citizens to Follow the Money.
- Responding to Citizen Needs.
- Enlisting Citizens in the Fight Against Grand Corruption & Elite Capture.

2. Reduce the protest potential of the population

The main battlespace occurs inside the cognitive spaces of populations and key decisions- and policymakers. The Hybrid War takes exploits existing vulnerabilities in society to fuel protests and instigate unrest. Protests are a result of expectations not met, economic hardship, inequality, injustice and more. An effective counterstrategy includes:

- Implementation of key reforms, including the judicial, central bank, and anti-corruption legislation. This will both increase trust, as well as enable an efficient fight against corruption, attract foreign investments, strengthening the economy and most importantly, enable Ukraine to reduce the very real challenges people are facing daily.
- Identify core emotional triggers. Keep track of the most sensitive topics which gain traction with the public. Increase proactive communications about these topics before a crisis occurs – explaining the strategy, managing expectations, and presenting results. Regular communication creates trust which is the barrier against disinformation.

3. Explain the Hybrid War

Ukraine must conceptualise and publish an overarching paper on the Hybrid War to:

- Develop a common, cross-sectorial terminology and understanding as the basis for the design and implementation of a joint counterstrategy.
- Establish the structure, methodology and procedures needed to detect, deter, and respond to hybrid threats.
- Build trust, resilience, and endurance in society. Policy measures that might be seen as an infringement of the legal, ethical, and moral framework must be explained. Ukraine needs to ensure that its counterstrategy is not seen to be tearing down the democratic values it means to defend, and simultaneously deny Russia the opportunity to use the perception as a tool to destabilise the nation from within.
- Introduce the Hybrid War in education plans, career plans and job descriptions across all sectors.

4. Organize and synchronize the Hybrid Defence

Russia's parallel and synchronized use of both military and non-military means require a similar response. Ukraine needs to establish a cross-sectoral platform for Hybrid Defence capable of detecting, deterring, and responding to the Hybrid War. This includes the ability to:

- Establish and maintain cross-sectoral situational awareness.
- Detect trends, outline response options, and deliver strategic cross-sectoral advice on how to respond jointly.
- Identify vulnerabilities open for exploitation and develop threat scenarios based on synchronized employment of both military and non-military means.
- Make regular cross-sectoral risk assessments. Design and implement policy to minimize risks.
- Closely coordinate Ukrainian cross-sectoral response, using Ukraine's total resources.

5. Counter the Russian diplomatic offensive

Ukraine must work to turn the mainly negative international perception resulting from decades of Hybrid War. This includes:

- Ukraine must share EU and NATO's concerns. The Hybrid War – in contrast to a low-intensity conflict in Donbas – is a common European problem.
- Establish a cross-sectoral platform for coordinating the Hybrid Defence as a model for EU and NATO counterstrategy.
- Establish a Hybrid War Lessons Learned Centre based on both the concept and counterstrategy following the previous recommendations.
- Adjust strategic messaging from a focus on support to Ukraine to the call to defend international laws and conventions.
- Assess and communicate the consequences of a potential Russian victory to help highlight the far-reaching impact on European and Trans-Atlantic security.
- Reform and prove Russia wrong.

6. Develop the non-military response means

Using the provisions of international law and the inherent right of self-defence, enhance the ability to both defend the cognitive space as well as increasing the costs of conducting a Hybrid War. The first part has already been covered in para 1-5.

- Further expand the present non-military means (blockade of transport, electricity and water, diplomatic initiatives). Introduce sanctions against the Russian Navy, commercial vessels and aircrafts working out of Crimea.
- In cooperation with NATO/EU, develop a Europe wide counterstrategy to increase Russian penalties step by step until the point it is forced to withdraw, including a greater degree of dynamic and the ability to escalate sanctions in case of non-compliance.
- In cooperation with NATO/EU start the work on an offensive Hybrid War strategy which includes the ambition of a regime change in the Russian Federation, signalling the willingness to respond in kind.

7. Reform and modernize the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF)

Critical vulnerabilities must be closed to reduce the number of Russian military options. Presently, the war might be concluded in the Black Sea at Ukraine's disfavour without a single shot being fired.

- Ukraine urgently needs a navy and the ability to challenge Russia's sea control.
- The reform must focus on capabilities needed to meet future escalations in the Black Sea, including continuous situational awareness, command and control, air defence and naval strike capabilities.
- Introduce NATO principles and values, procedures, tactics, and concepts in the military education establishments to build NATO interoperability bottom-up.

8. Prepare for what follows a Ukrainian success

A successful counterstrategy includes reforms that build trust, strengthen the Ukrainian economy and close critical vulnerabilities across all sectors of society. It will also reduce the efficiency of the Hybrid War. Russia will be left with two options. Either it will give up Ukraine, or it will escalate the Hybrid War into a conventional war. Russia cannot afford to give up since this in essence is a battle for its global power, the survival of the “Russian World” and its way of governance.

Countermeasures include:

- Reform and modernize the Ukrainian Armed Forces (para 7).
- Strengthen the Territorial Defence.
- Protect Critical Infrastructure.
- In cooperation with NATO/EU, develop options for a military presence on Ukrainian territory (para 9).

9. Develop military options

The Russian parallel and synchronised use of both military and non-military means must be countered in all dimensions. If NATO/EU cannot accept the consequences of a Russian victory in Ukraine¹⁵², military options need to be considered.

- In cooperation with NATO/EU, design a counterstrategy that makes the Russian military “fait accompli” strategy redundant.
- In cooperation with NATO/EU, work for an increasingly larger NATO/EU presence in the Black Sea.
- Ukraine should invite NATO to base military forces on its territory after the model of NATO Enhanced Forward Presence and in accordance with its Strategic Concept from 1999¹⁵³. The concept argued that a lasting peaceful order in Europe can be put at risk by crisis and conflict affecting the security of the Euro-Atlantic area and therefore, declared the need for the Alliance to not only ensure the defence of its members but to also contribute to peace and stability in the adjacent regions. In essence, it described the security situation resulting from the present aggressive Russian foreign policy.

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