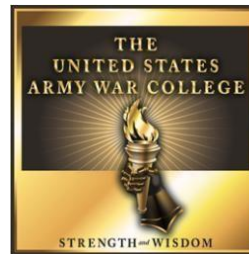


Implications of Russia's Wars in Georgia and Ukraine

by

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Abstract

In August 2008 Russia initiated military operations against Georgia to establish domination in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Within five days Russia was able to achieve its strategic objectives with minimal casualties. The swift victory over Georgia was not accidental. Russia thoroughly planned its invasion over the course of several years and formulated a well-balanced strategy that mitigated the risk of violating international norms. Six years later Russia followed a similar design when it illegally annexed Crimea and intervened in eastern Ukraine. Unlike its invasion of Georgia, Russia has been unable to achieve its strategic objectives in Ukraine. This strategy research project argues that Russia's success in Georgia was a result of a calculated strategic formulation consisting of clearly defined objectives and careful application of its instruments of national power. In Ukraine, however, Russia's failed to define the ends it sought to achieve before taking armed aggression and has been unsuccessful in gaining a strategic advantage.

Implications of Russia's Wars in Georgia and Ukraine

In August 2008 Russia initiated military operations against Georgia to establish domination in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Within five days Russia was able to achieve its strategic objectives with minimal casualties and loss of its international standing. The swift victory over Georgia was not accidental. Russia thoroughly planned its invasion over the course of several years and formulated a balanced strategy that mitigated the risk of violating international norms. Six years later Russia followed a similar design when it illegally annexed Crimea and intervened in eastern Ukraine. Yet unlike its invasion of Georgia, Russia has been unable to achieve its strategic objectives in Ukraine and finds itself mired in an unresolved and economically draining conflict. Russia's aggression against two ex-Soviet nations raises several questions. What accounts for the fact that Russia quickly achieved its strategic objectives in Georgia but has yet to do so in Ukraine? Do Russian military operations in Georgia and Ukraine indicate a shift in the character of warfare? What are the implications for the U.S. and its NATO allies with Russia's willingness to use armed force against its neighbors? What policy options exist for the U.S. to prevent Russia from taking similar steps in the future?

This strategy research project will argue that Russia's success in Georgia was a result of a calculated strategic formulation consisting of clearly defined objectives and careful application of its instruments of national power. In Ukraine, however, Russia failed to define the ends it sought to achieve before undertaking armed aggression and has been unsuccessful in gaining a strategic advantage. NATO can draw numerous lessons from both conflicts and prepare for Russian aggression against alliance members. Comparisons between the two actions show that Russia utilized similar ways and means in its strategic formulation. Studying Russian tactics in these conflicts

provide NATO strategists tools to recognize Moscow's intentions and offer strategic leaders sound advice to deter Russian aggression.

Russian National Interests

Considering Russia's actions in Georgia and Ukraine and its ongoing efforts to disrupt the international rules-based order, it is apparent that three vital national interests guide Russia's strategic formulation in Europe: authoritarian regime survival, regional hegemony, and the "Russian World." The survival of the current autocratic regime under the control of Russian President Vladimir Putin is the primary national interest for Moscow. Putin enjoys high popular support despite the international isolation and economic damage his policies have wrought. He has been able to achieve a firm hold on power by developing a cult of personality, eliminating political opposition, and consolidating control of the Russian media.

Russia's second national interest is regional hegemony, which it works to establish by threatening former Soviet states seeking to join the EU or NATO. Russian aggression against its neighbors should not be a surprise. The attempt to influence bordering states by force is a Russian tradition that one can trace to at least the Eighteenth Century and the "Great Game" activities against the United Kingdom in Central Asia. This paranoia and skepticism of peaceful coexistence with outside forces continued as an underlying ideology of the Soviet regime. George Kennan argued that the Soviet leadership resembled their Czarist predecessors and that ideology taught them "the outside world was hostile and that it was their duty eventually to overthrow the political forces beyond their borders."¹ Even immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia's main priority was to restore hegemony over the post-Soviet space in neighboring countries such as Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine.² Russia

considers NATO and EU expansion a direct threat to its attempts to establish a sphere of influence.

Finally, Russia's third vital interest is the "Russian World." To further emphasize an official policy of preventing Western encroachment on Russia's sphere of influence, Putin based his second presidency on "an overlapping triple project: pushing conservative values against postmodern Europe, launching the Eurasian Union as an alternative to the EU, and exalting the 'Russian World.'"³ Putin used the Russian World policy as a tool to address the concerns of ethnic Russians or Russian speakers who live in post-Soviet states. In 2014, Moscow cited this policy as a justification to illegally annex Crimea by claiming Russia was a "divided nation." According to Putin, Russia has a responsibility "to protect not only ethnic Russians abroad, but also all those allied in some way to 'Russian civilization.'"⁴ Although the narrative of a Russian World was a rationalization for Moscow's actions in Ukraine, Russia has used this concept to justify aggression against other former Soviet states, specifically in Georgia where Russia intervened to protect ethnic Abkhazians and Ossetians. Since Abkhazians and Ossetians are not ethnically Russian, this action demonstrated Russia's claim that it also reserved the right to protect ethnic minorities in former Soviet states under its Law of Compatriots Abroad. Igor Zevelev explains that "the notion of 'compatriots' applies first and foremost to ethnic Russians, but also includes into this category all of the non-titular groups living in the CIS and titular groups retaining their Soviet traits."⁵ In 2008 it became apparent that Russia was not destined to be a benign partner of the West when its military crossed an international border to attack a sovereign state under the pretext of protecting an oppressed minority.

Russia's Invasion of Georgia - August 2008

The 2008 invasion of Georgia signaled to the world that Russia was willing to use force and violate international norms to achieve its desire for regional hegemony. Russia launched the invasion after a period of worsening relations with the Georgian government under the leadership of Mikheil Saakashvili that sought EU and NATO membership. The conflict can trace its roots to the early 1990s and the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The newly independent Georgian government found itself combating separatists in the autonomous regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia until it accepted Russian dictated peace terms. During these conflicts, the Russian army was an active participant supplying weapons and assistance, both by smuggling and legal transfer, to Abkhaz and Ossetian militias.⁶ After the cessation of hostilities, Russia obtained the right to maintain military bases in Georgia, set the mandate for peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and compelled Georgia to join the Commonwealth of Independent States in exchange for its assistance in ending the conflict.

Throughout the remainder of the 1990s and early 2000s, Georgia slowly moved away from Russian Federation domination toward a policy that sought closer ties to the West and membership in NATO. In 2003, the pro-democracy Rose Revolution brought Saakashvili to power and indicated a profound shift in Georgian domestic and international policy. Saakashvili sought to construct a strong Georgian state built on liberal democracy that could re-establish its territorial integrity.

From the Russian perspective, Saakashvili and the Rose Revolution were seen as a political shift orchestrated by the U.S. in which it replaced a pro-Russian government with one dominated by Washington. The Orange Revolution in Ukraine a

year later further fueled these fears leading to the perception that color revolutions were coordinated U.S. efforts to counter Russia's sphere of influence over the former Soviet states.⁷

In formulating its strategy for the invasion of Georgia, Russia was able to execute a plan that effectively balanced risks between its ends, ways, and means. Russia's geopolitical and long-term strategic ends were four-fold. First, expel Georgian troops and terminate Georgian sovereignty in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Second, prevent NATO expansion and send a message to other former Soviet states, especially Ukraine, that seeking closer ties to the West may lead to war. Third, increase its control of the Caucasus, particularly over strategic energy pipelines. Finally, create a sphere of influence in the former Soviet Union and beyond.⁸

The various ways Russia utilized to achieve its strategic ends included economic intimidation, subversion of the Georgian government, use of separatist forces, pre-positioning and commitment of conventional forces, and disinformation dissemination. Russia would use these ways in a similar manner during the 2014 action against Ukraine. First, to achieve its strategic end of terminating Georgian sovereignty in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, it was necessary for Russia to undermine the legitimacy and stability of the Saakashvilli government through economic pressure and subversion. Additionally, Moscow recognized that it had to forcibly expel Georgian military presence from the contested areas to achieve de-facto control. Using conventional and separatist forces, Russia would demonstrate the vulnerability of Georgia as a viable corridor for energy pipelines and Russia's ability to exert its dominance in the region.⁹

To achieve its second strategic end of preventing Georgia from joining NATO, Russia had to create an internal conflict that would deter NATO from offering Georgia a NATO Membership Action Plan. In March 2008, German Chancellor Angela Merkel told top German military commanders “countries that are enmeshed in regional and internal conflicts cannot become NATO members.”¹⁰ Russian leadership understood that an invasion of Georgia would satisfy these conditions and confirmed their intentions in public statements. After Merkel’s pronouncement, the Russian envoy to NATO warned that, “as soon as Georgia gets some kind of prospect from Washington of NATO membership, the next day the process of real secession of these two territories from Georgia will begin.”¹¹ In August 2008, Russia’s invasion would spoil Georgia’s NATO aspirations and warn other nations seeking closer ties to the West.

In order to achieve the strategic end of creating a sphere of influence in the former Soviet Union, Russia had to send a strong message to its neighboring states through the permanent dissolution of Georgia’s territorial integrity. Russia relied on a concerted disinformation campaign that placed the blame on Georgia as the aggressor and exploited divisions in the West to prevent a unified response. The result was that even those nations who supported Georgia felt compelled to criticize Saakashvili for rashness and provocative behavior.¹² These criticisms resulted in a tepid response from the West and enabled Russia to extend its sphere of influence.

To execute its strategic concepts, Russia employed all its instruments of national power with a range of resources. The first instrument, and the primary resource, was its military strength. The utilization of overwhelming conventional force coupled with separatist militias ensured that Russia could destroy Georgia’s military capability while

overcoming significant readiness shortcomings. One can trace Russia's decision to rely on a military solution with its 2003 transfer of heavy military equipment including T-55 and T-72 main battle tanks to South Ossetia. Elements of the Russian military would continue to advise and train separatist militias to augment its conventional capability. During the conflict, between 10,000 and 15,000 militias and auxiliary fighters participated in operations ranging from standard partisan operations to coordinated combined arms operations with the Russian military.¹³

To successfully deploy its massive conventional invasion force, Russia took several preparatory steps. First, in April 2008 Russia doubled its peacekeeping contingent in Abkhazia to 3,000 soldiers under the pretext that Georgia was concentrating forces and weapons in Abkhazia.¹⁴ Next, In May Moscow sent a battalion of railroad troops into Abkhazia to repair a key rail line and bridges that would later play a critical role in moving armored equipment into Georgia. Finally, in July the Russian military conducted a large scale exercise, Kavkaz-2008, involving 8,000 troops, 30 aircraft, and 700 combat vehicles near the Russian-Georgian border.¹⁵ After the completion of the exercise, the units remained in their positions and would later participate in the invasion.

By August 2008, Russia was able to pre-position and employ a force with significantly more combat power than the Georgian military, and with viable lines of communication into Abkhazia and South Ossetia. On the first day of hostilities, Russia deployed to South Ossetia the 58th Army consisting of the 19th and 42nd Rifle Divisions as well as a battalion of the 33rd Special Mountain Brigade. Russia also sent elements

of the 76th Guards Air Assault Division and 98th Airborne Division into action along with the 45th Airborne Special Forces Regiment.¹⁶

In Abkhazia, Russia employed the Black Sea fleet to land marines at the Georgian port of Ochamchire while the 20th Motorized Rifle Division moved into Abkhazia via the recently repaired rail line. In total, Russia deployed up to 15,000 soldiers to Abkhazia and 12,000 to South Ossetia. The total number of Russian troops moved into Georgia was approximately 25,000-30,000 supported by more than 1,200 pieces of armor and heavy artillery.¹⁷

With the employment of its diplomatic instrument of national power, Russia's objectives were to undermine the legitimacy of the Georgian government and set the conditions for the 2008 invasion and eventual annexation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Moscow began to apply pressure in 2002 when it initiated mass distribution of Russian passports to Georgian citizens in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In doing so, Russia established a justification for the eventual use of force to protect what it considered Russian citizens.

Additionally, in 2007 Putin used diplomatic power to enable the pre-positioning of the invasion force by terminating Russia's participation in the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe. This move effectively removed all limits on the deployment of Russian troops and equipment in the North Caucasus.¹⁸ The final utilization of Russia's diplomatic power came in April 2008 when the then outgoing President Putin authorized direct official relations between the Russian government and secessionist authorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This decree marked the first overt Russian move to

change the post-1991 internationally recognized borders by setting the conditions for eventual annexation of the two territories.¹⁹

Economically, Russia's focus was to isolate the legitimate Georgian government and prop up the separatist regions. In 2003 it broke the international embargo on Abkhazia by sending a tourist ship from Sukhumi to Sochi.²⁰ Moscow increased its economic intimidation in early 2006 by attempting to cut off energy supplies in the midst of an extremely cold winter. A series of explosions in the Russian Republic of North Ossetia damaged power transmission and gas pipelines that connected Russia with Georgia. These moves were followed in March 2006 with a Russian ban on Georgian wine and mineral water under the pretext of health and safety concerns.²¹ Later that year in response to Georgia's detention of four Russian military officers suspected of espionage, Russia cut all rail, sea, air, road, and postal links with its neighbor.²² With these steps, Russia effectively subjected Georgia to a complete economic embargo. The final economic resource that Russia employed was its March 2008 announcement that the country was withdrawing from the treaty imposing sanctions on Abkhazia. At the same time, Russia continued its commercial embargos, transport blockades, and visa restrictions against Georgia. By withdrawing from the treaty, Russian essentially annexed Abkhazia economically.²³

The final instrument of national power Russia employed to achieve its strategic ends was an informational campaign based on three themes. First, Georgia was the aggressor and provoked the conflict. Second, Moscow had no choice but to intervene on behalf of its citizens. Third, the West had no basis to criticize Russia's actions because of NATO's involvement in Kosovo.²⁴ Furthermore, in foreshadowing similar

arguments that it would use in Ukraine, Russia maintained that the right of nations to self-determination took precedence over any claims concerning territorial integrity.²⁵ To advance these themes, the Russian government pre-positioned journalists in South Ossetia before the commencement of hostilities. These journalists were a part of Russia's media assault on Georgia to spread disinformation and distorted accounts of the war. Although several Russian news stories were outlandish and easily discredited, enough contained a careful mix of obvious truths with falsehoods that many found either plausible or impossible to check. As a result, other media sources quickly picked up Russian disinformation and used it in good faith, which in turn added credibility to the disinformation.²⁶

When considering Russia's application of available resources and the use of its instruments of national power, its strategy was feasible and suitable. Georgia's inability to counter the Russian invasion demonstrated the strategy's feasibility. The Georgian military force in South Ossetia consisted of about 15,000 soldiers with little air support capability. The combined Russian invasion force quickly overwhelmed Georgian resistance and achieve its operational objectives. As for its suitability, the strategy was successful in the achievement of Russia's national objectives. By destroying Georgian military capability and establishing permanent control over the contested areas, Russia has stopped any further NATO expansion in former Soviet states. Furthermore, Georgia appears unable to regain control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia and may lose both to Russian annexation.

Where Russia assumed risk was with the strategy's acceptability. In order to realize its strategic objectives, Russia could have considered other applications of its

resources that did not include the violation of another state's sovereignty. The decision to defy international norms risked its global standing and could have led to a severe reaction from the West. Since the EU and U.S. provided tepid responses to the invasion, the strategy appears to have been acceptable. Dr. Stephen Blank argued "the Russian government has yet to pay a serious price by its reckoning for what it did. Thus Moscow showed that it was not deterred and exploited Western division and irresolution."²⁷

With its strategic objectives met, what lessons did Russia learn from its war with Georgia? At the strategic level, Russia understood that armed aggression was acceptable if it could effectively employ the informational instrument of national power to dominate the narrative in its favor. Additionally, the employment of conventional forces required substantial planning and pre-positioning to set the conditions for success.

At the tactical level, the Russian military's performance resulted in an intensive reform effort to address deficiencies with equipment maintenance and personnel management. Additionally, the Russian military demonstrated other weaknesses to include poor command and control, breakdowns in interoperability between the air force and army, and difficulty in locating Georgian artillery.²⁸ Most notably, Russia was ineffective in countering Georgia's air defense systems and lacked the training and technology needed to employ precision munitions.²⁹ These shortcomings in Russian military capability provide NATO with an opportunity to focus its training efforts.

With respect to how NATO countries should tailor their combined arms training to counter a potential near-peer threat, Russian forces generally used Soviet tactics. They did not attempt to stop, establish support by fire positions, and maneuver to the flanks of

Georgian forces. The use of these tactics provided a number of advantages to Russian forces to include speed, simplicity, and significant shock effect when combined with massive air and artillery attacks.³⁰ Simple maneuver tactics and synchronization of surface-to-surface fires and maneuver are traits that the Russian military would utilize again in its invasion of Ukraine in 2014.

Russian Action against Ukraine - 2014

The events in Georgia should have dispelled any doubts about Russia's willingness to prevent former Soviet states from pursuing closer integration with the West. Emboldened by its actions in Georgia, Russia again took an opportunity to exert its dominance in response to Ukraine's attempts to foster closer relations with the EU. The chain of events that lead to Russia's aggression against Ukraine began in November 2013 when protests broke out on the Maidan, Kiev's central square. Demonstrators took to the Maidan in response to Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych's refusal to sign an Association Agreement with the EU. The protests would become increasingly violent and eventually morphed into a full-scale uprising that prompted Yanukovych and his inner circle to flee the country in February 2014. Fearing a contagion of pro-democracy protests and sensing Western indecisiveness, Putin took the opportunity to further Russia's national interests.

Within a week of Yanukovych's departure, Russia rapidly annexed the Ukrainian Crimea peninsula. In April 2014, Ukrainian forces clashed with pro-Russian militants in the Donbas area of eastern Ukraine. Initially expecting a rapid victory over Ukrainian forces, Russia limited its support to the Donbas separatists until Ukraine mounted a successful counteroffensive in July 2014. The conflict in Donbas quickly escalated into a conventional conflict with Russia providing substantial support in the form of money,

lethal weaponry, personnel, and the unofficial commitment of regular Russian military formations. The invasion of sovereign Ukrainian territory “shattered any remaining illusions about this Kremlin’s willingness to abide by international law or live by the rules of the institutions that Russia joined at the end of the Cold War.”³¹ In February 2015, German Prime Minister Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande negotiated the Minsk II ceasefire that outlines a roadmap to resolve the conflict.

Russia’s strategic formulation against Ukraine utilized similar ways and means as the successful invasion of Georgia. Unlike in 2008, however, Moscow did not execute a balanced strategy, assumed excessive risk, and remains in an unresolved, costly quagmire. The primary reason for Russia’s failure is that it did not clearly define its ends before undertaking armed aggression against Ukraine. Instead, Moscow’s actions in 2014 were reactionary and its ends shifted as the situation developed. In Georgia, Russia was able to set the conditions so that when war came it was positioned for rapid success. In Ukraine, though, events moved too fast for Moscow to develop a strategy that would achieve a quick victory in the Donbas or influence the information campaign to portray Kiev as the aggressor. Before the collapse of the Yanukovych government, Moscow’s primary strategic objective for Ukraine was to keep it aligned with Russia as a member of the Eurasian Customs Union. Lawrence Freedman explains that the Customs Union “was to mimic the EU in terms of starting as a customs union, then becoming a supra-national entity with Russia dominant that would bring together economies, legal systems, customs services, and military capabilities to rival the EU, the U.S., and China.”³² Ukraine was an essential element for the Customs Union’s

creation and if Kiev instead aligned with the EU, Putin's aspiration for the Customs Union would be shattered.³³

With Yanukovych's departure, Russia commenced to execute a strategy meant to achieve three geopolitical and long-term ends in Ukraine. First, Russia aspired to halt Ukraine's efforts to foster closer relations with the EU and join Western institutions. Lawrence Freedman argues that Putin's actions post-Yanukovych were to recover his lost position to his long-standing ambitions and "turn Ukraine away from the EU and back toward the Customs Union."³⁴ If that failed, then Moscow could repeat its actions in Georgia and create a situation of chaos and conflict that would prevent Ukraine from joining the EU. Russia's actions would also send a message to other Eurasian states such as Armenia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan that any move away from the Customs Union would result in conflict.

Second, Russia sought to ensure it maintained control over the Russian Navy's Sevastopol port in Crimea and home to the Black Sea Fleet. In 2010, the Yanukovych government extended the Russian lease of the Sevastopol port facilities until 2042 in exchange for discounted gas prices. The agreement caused public protests in Ukraine and Russia worried that a Western-aligned government could conceivably terminate the lease.³⁵

Finally, Russian government leaders saw the actions in Ukraine as a larger Western orchestrated plot and pursued a strategy meant to stop the spread of pro-democracy "color revolutions." Putin saw popular demonstrations such as the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia, 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and 2014 EuroMaidan Revolution as conspiracies to peel former Soviet states away from Moscow. John

Mearsheimer notes, “when Russian leaders look at Western social engineering in Ukraine, they worry that their country might be next.”³⁶ Thus, the survival of the Putin regime required assertive action to stop the contagion of Western backed popular movements.

With these ends, Moscow initially utilized strategic concepts to pressure Ukraine and turn it away from the EU back toward the Customs Union. Moscow applied this pressure in the form of pro-Russian activists who quickly established a hostile presence to Kiev in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. Dr. Freedman contends “a case could be made that the initial moves in Crimea were intended for coercive rather than separatist purposes.”³⁷ The subsequent Russian annexation of Crimea was a rash reaction in response to escalating events rather than a calculated strategy.

Once Russia decided to annex the Crimea, the ways that it employed were similar to those taken against Georgia in 2008. These included subversion of the Ukrainian government, use of pre-positioned conventional forces, coordination with pro-Russian separatist groups, dissemination of disinformation, and economic intimidation. Moscow relied on the substantial military garrison stationed in the Crimea to set the conditions for annexation in the same way Russia pre-positioned peacekeepers in Georgia. Together with pro-Russian Crimean elites, the Russian Army was able to quickly take over government buildings and terminate Ukrainian sovereignty. Once Russia secured Crimea, it then sought to create a perpetual state of chaos in Ukraine by equipping separatists in the Donbas who would work to undermine the legitimate government.

Russia's application of its national power to execute its strategy was unsynchronized and resulted in a significant decline in its international standing. The Georgia invasion depended on overwhelming military power in close coordination with pre-planned use of other resources. Similarly, Russia relied primarily on its military resources to prevent Ukraine's movement toward the West. Beginning in Crimea, the 25,000 strong Russian garrison and special forces provided the backbone to support Crimean elites in the pro-Russian Party of Regions. In late February, armed forces in unmarked uniforms began capturing government buildings and blockading Ukrainian units. With Crimean elites casting their bid with Russia and no pro-Ukrainian voice among the public, Ukraine was unable to defend Crimea.³⁸

In addition to using the Crimea garrison, Russia took action within weeks of Yanukovich's departure to pre-position conventional forces. On March 1st, Putin gained approval from the Russian parliament to deploy peacekeeping troops to Ukraine to stabilize the situation in Crimea and protect Russian citizens.³⁹ To further intimidate and deter Kiev, Russia massed 40,000 troops within 30 miles of the Ukraine border between March and April.⁴⁰ These forces would later cross into the Donbas in August when Ukrainian forces began to threaten the region's main cities, Donetsk and Luhansk, although it remains unclear in what capacity since Russia has never formally acknowledged any Russian military presence in Ukraine.

To augment its conventional military force, Moscow relied on Russian citizens to form separatist militias in the Donbas. The Ukrainian government claimed that 10,000 Russian mercenaries constituted the bulk of the proxy forces that supplemented local pro-Russian activists.⁴¹ This mixed group began receiving substantial military hardware

in June 2014 to include main battle tanks, multiple rocket launchers, and sophisticated air defense systems.⁴²

In applying its diplomatic instrument of national power, Moscow was able to solidify its influence with Party of Region officials in Crimea who organized anti-Ukraine rallies and set the conditions for an eventual Russian annexation. Russia also installed its own citizens into leadership positions in the Donetsk and Luhansk separatist governments to fortify its control in the Donbas.⁴³ In late 2014 Russia would use the Minsk cease-fire discussions as an opportunity to pressure Ukraine into granting autonomy to the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Economically, Russia did not take steps to isolate Ukraine before hostilities commenced as it did in Georgia since its initial objective was to coerce Ukraine into joining the Customs Union. Once it annexed Crimea and initiated conflict in the Donbas, however, Russia concentrated its economic power on subsidizing its newly annexed territory and the separatist regions. It will cost Russia \$4.5 billion or more to maintain and modernize Crimea and another \$4 billion to build a bridge to connect Crimea with the Russian mainland.⁴⁴ In the Donbas, Russia directly finances pensions and public sector salaries in Donetsk and Luhansk according to former senior officials from eastern Ukraine.⁴⁵

With its informational instrument of national power, Russia promoted a narrative based on three themes. First, that the EuroMaidan Revolution was a fascist coup planned and carried out by Western saboteurs. Serhy Yekelchuk notes that “conspiracy theories abound in regard to both the Orange and the EuroMaidan revolutions, in part because Russian state media and the Yanukovich camp persist in trying to present

them as American plots not reflecting the will of the Ukrainian people.”⁴⁶ Russia continued to push disinformation mostly for a domestic audience to generate support for separatists in the Donbas and solidify the regime’s internal standing. The second theme was that Crimea was historically a part of Russia and its citizens overwhelmingly voted to return to the Russian Federation in a referendum. This served as the basis for Russia’s justification for annexation and integration of Crimea. The final theme was that Russia’s actions were justified to promote the concepts of self-determination and freedom of speech. As in Georgia, Russia would use the West’s actions in Kosovo to rationalize its aggression.

Considering the means employed in its strategy formulation, Russia has yet to achieve its ends. The conflict is approaching its third year with Crimea firmly under Moscow’s control and sporadic clashes in eastern Ukraine, but no definitive conclusion. Dr. Freedman describes the conflict as one in which both sides are seeking to exhaust each other and in which neither has a strategy to end it.⁴⁷ Although Russia’s strategic formulation was feasible in that it had the means available to achieve its ends, the stalemate demonstrates that it was not suitable or acceptable. Some may argue that the frozen conflict in the Donbas achieves Russia’s end of preventing Ukraine from moving to the West, but it is unlikely that Ukraine will ever join the Eurasian Customs Union and has established closer ties to the EU and NATO. This demonstrates the strategy’s unsuitability and its inability to attain Russia’s desired effects. As for the strategy’s acceptability, the costs to Russia for annexing Crimea and supporting Donbas separatists do not justify the effects it has achieved. Its petroleum-based economy will not improve in the short term with continuing sanctions and low oil prices. As a result,

Russia is not able to deliver on its promises of economic prosperity for Crimea or maintain its commitments to the Donbas separatists. Moreover, Russia's actions have ruined its international reputation and galvanized NATO. With dwindling means and unrealized ends, Russia has attained a worse peace that places its national interests in jeopardy.

Despite its failure to achieve its strategic ends, Russia did increase the tactical capability of its military. Russia's combined arms operations in the Donbas revealed an evolution of tactics and use of combat enablers against Ukraine, primarily with electronic warfare, unmanned aerial systems, and massed fires. First, Russia used electronic warfare to deny Ukrainian communications, defeat unmanned aerial systems, defeat artillery and mortar rounds, and target command and control nodes.⁴⁸ The use of electronic warfare was less prevalent in Georgia. Russia's skill in employing it indicates an understanding of the modern battlefield environment and its vulnerabilities.

Second, the use of unmanned aerial systems was ubiquitous for both sides. Since 2008, Russia has been able to exponentially increase its capability to employ these systems for targeting, real-time adjustment of massed fires, and intelligence collection. Additionally, Russia used unmanned aerial systems as mini-bombers carrying incendiary explosives against ammunition and fuel storage areas.⁴⁹

Finally, with massed fires, Russia's use of dual-purpose conventional munitions, scatterable mines, top-attack munitions, and thermobaric warheads had catastrophic effects and accounted for approximately 80 percent of Ukrainian casualties.⁵⁰ In an improvement over its performance in 2008, the Russian army was able to better utilize its counter battery assets and disrupt Ukrainian artillery.

Russia's evolved conventional tactics combined with the use of proxies, disinformation dissemination, and cyber-attacks lead some analysts to hypothesize that we are witnessing a shift in the character of war. For example, Molly McKew and Gregory Maniatis wrote that Russia's annexation of Crimea redefined 21st-century warfare that is likely the design of the future.⁵¹ However, the argument that Russia deliberately devised, adopted, and executed a hybrid warfare approach fails to acknowledge that all armed conflicts employ various means. Operations in Ukraine are not so fundamentally different that they indicate a revolutionary shift in the character of war.

Roger McDermott notes that Russia is rapidly learning how to leverage proxy forces to complement its weapons modernization programs and generate additional options at the disposal of the Russian state.⁵² One could argue that the U.S.-led coalition follows a similar methodology in its fight against the Islamic State, leveraging proxy forces in the form of the Iraqi Army, the Peshmerga, and Syrian opposition to compliment conventional and information operations. Even if the means that Russia has employed are not new and do not indicate a shift in the character of war, its willingness to use force and violate international norms results in significant implications for the U.S. and NATO.

The Implications to NATO of a Resurgent Russia

As Europe grapples with a refugee crisis and with a festering conflict in Ukraine, there may not be an appetite among Western leaders to take significant action to deter further Russian aggression. Nevertheless, NATO members cannot assume that Russia will abstain from taking aggressive action against its member nations, especially in the Baltics. President Putin is an opportunist and despite the rising costs of occupying

Crimea and Donbas, sees that the West does not have a cohesive policy toward Russia or the conflict in Ukraine. Paul Miller maintains that Putin considers NATO a hostile agent and the primary obstacle to Russia's greatness. Therefore, Putin's strategy requires undermining NATO and making the Article V mutual security guarantee meaningless.⁵³ If that is a Russian strategic objective, what are the implications to NATO and what must the alliance do to counter and deter the threat?

First, NATO must study and recognize those Russian tactics that could indicate an attempt to prepare for armed aggression. Fortunately, Russia attacked Georgia and Ukraine utilizing similar ways. Oscar Jonsson and Robert Seely propose the concept of Russian Full-Spectrum Conflict to capture how Russia employs its resources to achieve strategic ends. They divide Russian Full-Spectrum Activity into four parts: kinetic violence, information, economic and energy, and political influence operations.⁵⁴ Russian activities in these areas against a NATO nation could indicate potential conflict.

The difficulty in identifying and preventing conflict is that Russia does not adhere to the West's binary and legalistic definition of warfare. Jonsson and Seely explain that Russia uses Full-Spectrum Conflict with differing degrees of ambiguity and intensity.⁵⁵ The gray areas between war and peace are where Russia utilizes its means most effectively. In fact, it was already targeting the Baltic nations before its intervention in Ukraine with various forms of economic and political intimidation and information operations such as cyber-attacks against Estonia in 2007. The challenge that NATO faces is defining at what point Russian interference in a nation's affairs denotes a violation of sovereignty. Additionally, NATO must determine when Russian actions ascend beyond harassment and interference to definitive preparations for war as in

Georgia. Russia's pattern of intimidating NATO states along its border could lull the alliance into assuming preparations for war are "normal" Russian actions.

NATO's next requirement is to build a credible military capability that changes Russia's strategic calculation. As currently postured, NATO cannot defend the Baltics from a Russian invasion. The RAND Corporation estimates that Russia would be able to reach the Estonian and Latvian capitals within 60 hours and leave NATO with limited options to restore territorial integrity.⁵⁶ The U.S. Army recognizes this gap and has begun rotating armored brigade combat teams to Europe to create a continuous armored presence. Additionally, the U.S. Army is assembling more pre-positioned stocks of a division-sized force in Europe to reduce deployment timelines and provide supplementary combat power.⁵⁷

These steps, although positive, are insufficient. David Shlapak and Michael Johnson argue that seven brigades, including three heavy armored brigades, with adequate fire support and airpower, could prevent a rapid overrun of the Baltics.⁵⁸ These additional forces would not be enough to mount a sustained defense in the Baltics or conduct a counterattack but at a minimum would influence Russia's strategic formulation and deter an invasion.

Finally, it is essential that the U.S. and NATO address their inability to counter Russia's superiority in air defense systems and indirect fires. Even if NATO increases its number of armored brigade combat teams in the Baltics, it would not be able to reinforce or sustain those forces with Russia's considerable military strength in Kaliningrad. Since 2008 Russia has accumulated radars, air defense systems, and anti-ship missiles in Kaliningrad to develop an anti-access and area denial capability. Most

recently, Moscow has sent Bastion cruise missile launchers, nuclear-capable Iskander short-range ballistic missiles, and S-400 air defense systems to the Russian enclave.⁵⁹

In order to penetrate Russia's anti-access screen and establish air superiority, NATO must possess a multi-domain ability to suppress Kaliningrad's integrated air defense network. NATO has air and maritime forces in Europe that can contribute to the suppression of enemy air defenses, but there is no land-based capability such as the Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) within range of the Baltics. Typically, destruction of key command and control nodes has the most disruptive effect on an integrated air defense system and ATACMS can provide NATO the means to destroy these nodes. Currently, Greece and Turkey are the only NATO nations that maintain an ATACMS capability positioned in Europe, but neither could affect a conflict in the Baltics.⁶⁰ The U.S. should consider stationing an ATACMS-equipped artillery battalion to Poland or one of the Baltic nations where it can range Russian air defense command and control nodes. With eleven active duty ATACMS-equipped battalions, the U.S. Army has the ability to station one in Europe and still meet its global obligations without adding to its force structure.

Additional long-range artillery would also allow NATO to exploit demonstrated Russian reliance on artillery fires and improvements in delivering counter-battery fires. Russia maintains ten artillery battalions in the Western Military District whereas NATO has no fires units in the Baltics.⁶¹ As demonstrated in Ukraine and Georgia, Russia prefers to mass preplanned fires in support of maneuver formations. U.S. Army counter-battery radar systems such as the AN/TPQ-53 and AN/TPQ-37 coupled with long-range artillery systems would be able to identify and disrupt Russian use of fires.

Even if NATO can disrupt Russia's quantitative fires advantage, it does not address self-imposed restrictions on the types of munitions the U.S. and NATO employ. Russia freely used cluster munitions with devastating effects against Georgian and Ukrainian armored formations. The Convention on Cluster Munitions prohibits the use of cluster munitions due to humanitarian concerns from unexploded ordnance. Of the 28 NATO nations, 22 are state parties to the convention.⁶² Although the U.S. is not a signatory, by the end of 2018 it will no longer use cluster munitions that result in more than 1% unexploded ordnance rate.⁶³ The Alternate Warhead is designed to achieve the same effects as multiple launch rocket sub-munitions without the danger of unexploded ordnance, but has limited effect on armored formations.⁶⁴ NATO must leverage its industrial base to develop alternative artillery munitions that can neutralize enemy armored vehicles without the use of cluster munitions. The cumulative effect of these steps will significantly affect Russia's strategic formulation in further aggression against NATO members.

U.S. Policy on Russia

In addition to contributing to increasing NATO's readiness, the U.S. must review and revise its Russia policy that currently consists of the following four areas. First, seek to deter further aggression by projecting U.S. strength and unity with its Allies. Second, build the resiliency of U.S. partners facing Russian aggression. Third, find areas to cooperate with Russia on national security priorities where U.S. interests align. Finally, foster direct engagement with Russian businesses, organizations, and individuals who want to work with the U.S.⁶⁵ Since this policy has resulted in a standstill in the Ukraine crisis and cooling relations with Russia, the U.S. should consider other options.

Some advocate for the U.S. to cut its allies loose and defend only those countries unable to defend themselves. Professor Andrew Bacevich, for example, contends that when it comes to Russia, the U.S. European allies are “happy to resurrect the Cold War division of labor where the U.S. carried most of the security responsibilities.”⁶⁶ In this argument, Europe is fully capable of defending itself against Russian aggression and the U.S. should gradually divest of its European defense responsibly, shutdown all U.S. military installations in Europe, and terminate its membership in NATO. This policy option is feasible and many believe that it is suitable, but it is not acceptable for furthering U.S. global interests. The United States’ continuing membership in NATO ensures that it has reliable partners that are militarily interoperable to fight violent extremism, transnational criminal organizations, and respond to humanitarian crisis.

An option that is acceptable, feasible, and suitable is to take a long-term diplomatic approach that may span several administrations with the desired national objective defined as the reintegration of Russia into the international rules-based system. To achieve this end state, the U.S. should focus its diplomatic and informational elements of national power to quickly stabilize the relationship with Russia and set the conditions for a long-term solution. Once the situation with Russia is stabilized, the U.S. and EU should continue to apply economic sanctions until Ukraine regains control over its sovereign territory. These sanctions coupled with negative demographic trends could weaken the current regime and force democratic reforms.

Diplomatically, this course of action requires open channels of communication to find areas of mutual interest with the Russian government. The U.S. must send a clear message that Russia is a worthy partner and has equal status. This approach worked

well during the Iranian nuclear program negotiations and can continue with finding a solution to the situation in Syria. To stem Russia's concerns about Western encroachment on its sphere of influence, the U.S. should privately signal that further NATO expansion is on hold.

In the informational area, the U.S. should encourage and fund soft power tools that strengthen the appeal of liberal democracy and U.S. national values. Examples include programs such as educational exchanges, broadcasting mechanisms like Radio Liberty, and military exchanges that explore areas of mutual security concerns. To stem Russian aggressive cyber behaviors and reduce the effect of disinformation and cyber hacking activities, the U.S must clearly articulate what it considers harmful cyber activities through the following four steps.⁶⁷ First, develop a policy for determining when an action carried out in cyberspace constitutes an act of war. Second, use the language of international law to develop norms in the cyber domain. Third, act consistently with these positions when incidents occur. Finally, be more forthright about its response to incidents when they do happen.

Militarily, the U.S. cannot trust Russia to behave in accordance with international norms and must be prepared to defend its allies. Improving the U.S. military readiness in Europe will send a clear message to Moscow that the U.S. is willing to meet its NATO obligations. Although Russia may view an increased NATO posture in Europe as an escalation, its leaders understand strength and NATO cannot allow the possibility of an adverse Russian reaction deter it from establishing a true deterrence and denial capability. The U.S., however, has no obligation to defend Georgia and Ukraine and any appearance of increased U.S. involvement in these two countries may invite further

Russian aggression. The U.S. should continue military assistance to both countries in the form of staff training and military equipment sales.

Economically, the U.S. should follow the European lead on continuing the sanctions program put in place after the annexation of Crimea. Ideally these sanctions will remain until after Russia fully complies with the Minsk II accords. Yet, our European partners have more interests in the economic ties with Russia to include energy security.

At first the diplomatic and military recommendations may seem to contradict each other since this option calls for an increased NATO capability that could escalate Europe's security situation on one hand and a diplomatically conciliatory approach on the other. However, both recommendations are complimentary to realize U.S. interests in Europe. For the U.S. to maintain NATO as a viable security agreement, it must be able to meet its Article V obligations and increasing NATO's posture affords the alliance the greatest chance of deterring aggression. Working with Russia on the political level to find common ground, moderating the U.S. stance on NATO enlargement, and acknowledging Russia's sphere of influence will reduce the likelihood that Russia reacts negatively to any increases in NATO's capability.

The diplomatic long-term solution is the most feasible, acceptable, and suitable course of action, but there are several associated risks and potential unintended consequences. First, in signaling that the U.S. will not pursue further NATO expansion and acknowledging Russia's interests in its sphere of influence, Putin may feel emboldened to take further aggression in other ex-Soviet states. Second, by limiting our assistance to Ukraine and Georgia, Russia could potentially dominate both countries

and stop their march toward liberal democracy. Third, Russia may formally annex all contested areas in Georgia and Ukraine. Finally, a conciliatory stance toward Russia and acknowledging a Russian “sphere of influence” may be politically unacceptable to some in the U.S. security and foreign policy community. In choosing this option, the U.S. must keep a long-term outlook and if Russia takes further steps to dominate its neighbors, look to revisit territorial disputes and NATO enlargement once the Putin regime falls. With ongoing economic sanctions, costly foreign engagements in Syria and Ukraine, and poor demographic trends, time is in the West’s favor if it can show patience.

Conclusion

Russia’s actions against Georgia and Ukraine provide NATO and the U.S. numerous insights into Moscow’s methods for formulating strategy. Through careful planning and effective application of its elements of national power, Russia was able to execute a decisive victory over Georgia in only five days. Alternatively, Russia did not define its strategic ends when it decided to annex Crimea and intervene in the Donbas and was unable to gain an advantage. Although the conflict in Ukraine remains unresolved and Russia has not met its strategic objectives, it has demonstrated a conventional capability that poses a significant threat to NATO. To deter Russian aggression, NATO must understand and recognize Russia’s tactics that indicate threatening action. Additionally, it is essential that U.S. and NATO increase their military capability in Europe and address their inability to counter Russia’s superiority in air defense systems and indirect fires. The implications for NATO are not in response to a shift in the character of war that Russia revolutionized, but rather to address deficiencies in basic combined arms operations. Russia’s effective employment of

cross-domain capabilities to achieve tactical success demonstrates that NATO is unprepared to defend alliance members facing a potential Russian threat.

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