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The Russian Concept of New Generation or Non-linear Warfare

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Abstract: This article discusses Russia's non-linear (hybrid) warfare concept. In order to fight a new generation war, Russia has created 'hard' and 'soft' forces, which are used situationally depending on need. By employing a mentality of secrecy and 'maskirovka' and following its own rationale, Russia not only creates the concept, suggests a specific *modus operandi*, but also designs and establishes a system of command, control, and coordination for this new concept in warfare. Since the time that the Gerasimov Doctrine first articulated this concept in 2013, it is being used everywhere every day – both inside and outside of Russia. At the same time, it has taken the West too long to realise the novelty and shrewdness of this approach; an approach that requires constant vigilance.

Keywords: non-linear warfare, hybrid warfare, Russia

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Introduction

The character of war is changing, but its nature remains the same – to defeat an opponent and impose one's will on their behaviour. In general, while waging a war, three areas of military matters are involved: forces (e.g. structures), technologies (e.g. weapons), and fighting concepts (e.g. doctrines). In the history of confrontations, there have been situations in which these three interrelated matters, either alone or together, have led to undeniable changes in the conduct of war. This sort of interrelated paradigmatic transformation is commonly referred to as a 'Revolution in Military Affairs' (RMA).

Many authors have written on the subject (Toffler, 1993; Perry, 1997; Murray, 2001; Chapman, 2003; Townshend, 2005; Langley, Parkinson, and Webber, 2005). One of the most comprehensive descriptions is provided by Andrew Marshall, former director of the Office of Net Assessment, the think tank of the U.S. Department of Defense. Marshall describes an RMA as 'a major change in the nature of warfare brought about by the innovative application of technologies which, combined with dramatic changes in military doctrine, and operational concepts, fundamentally alters the character and conduct of operations' (Tilford, 1995, p.1).

In classical wars, which are generally understood as international conflicts between states, pure military forces, means, and actions prevail over a variety of other methods such as sabotage, undercover agreements, organisation of disorders, or the imposition of certain restriction on behaviour. It is possible to have cases when military and non-military means and actions act in concert, but one can also imagine situations in which non-military methods and forces dominate, shrouding the possibility of a real (classical) war. However, this is not a case of the Clausewitz's 'fog of war' (1832) that obfuscates pure military actions; this is a situation in which the military, despite still controlling the course of actions, lays in wait.

I argue that, since the end of the Cold War, only three states have been experiencing (or enacting) this nonlinear warfare RMA to its fullest extent. Those states are the United States, the People's Republic of China, and Russia. The U.S. was the first

country that, while taking advantage of technological breakthroughs, shifted its military structures and military fighting concepts (doctrines) and tested these changes during the First Gulf War. In the case of the United States, the efficiency of military kinetic actions prevailed and was emphasised.

China, while cognisant of and understanding its own weaknesses, responded differently. It concentrated on and made breakthroughs in the field of concepts while developing and adapting non-kinetic warfare, the so-called Three Warfares concept. This concept, first articulated in the amended Political Work Regulations of the PLA in 2003, emphasised the efficiency of non-kinetic means and prioritised them over kinetic means (Halper, 2013, pp.11-12). It became the official political and military strategy of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and was adopted to the politico-socio-economic environment, the status of the national technological development, and outdated military organisation. Three Warfares consists mainly of methods and activities performed in three domains: public opinion (e.g. media warfare), cognitive (e.g. psychological warfare), and legal (e.g. lawfare) (Halper, 2013, pp.28-30). The concept became a critical component of China's response to the situation in the South China Sea and in general (Kania, 2016). Employing the Three Warfares concept allowed China to move forward with technologies (e.g. weapons) and later, in 2015, to initiate structural changes of the entire military organisation (Petraitis, 2020, pp.84-100).

Russia developed its own approach and concept; internally named as a new generation or non-linear warfare. It represents the Russian desire to merge military and non-military domains and create new forces, weapons, and concepts. It is quite difficult to map the development of this concept, at least from open sources, as up to the time of this article's publishing, there is no single document describing it in its entirety. Chief of Russian General Staff, Valeriy Gerasimov, first presented some elements of the concept at an annual conference of the Academy of Military Science back in 2013 (Vestnik Akademijy Voennich Nauk, 2014). In addition to the aforementioned presentation, understanding a combination of laws (e.g. Law on

Defense, 2011), regulations (e.g. General Staff, 2013), other official public statements, and the like are necessary for a fuller picture.

Later, the concept was partially explained in an article by Gerasimov in which he described how Russia sees the Western approach of what he labelled as a hybrid war and schematically outlined a potential response algorithm (Gerasimov, 2013). It is worth noting that the article itself presented minimal details related to the new Russian way of war and mostly concentrated on analysing Western warfare. Still, journalists were quick to draw upon this article and named it the Gerasimov Doctrine (Galeotti, 2014).

Journalists also transmitted the term hybrid war used by Gerasimov to describe the Western approach to the Russian concept, disregarding the fact that Russians themselves almost never use this term while talking about their own concept and prefer to use the terms non-linear or new generation war. As mentioned, even as of the date of this article's publication, it is impossible to find the Russian concept in a single cohesive document, so to understand it, one must take elements from numerous studies, statements, documents, or analyse actions taken by Russia. Throughout this article, I present my own findings and elaborate on how Russia understands non-linear war and how they apply the concept in practice.

The Russian Approach

The Cold War arms race and competition between confronting sides left the defeated U.S.S.R. and later Russia with technologies (e.g. weapons) modern for the time, but its military structures were unfit for the new security environment. Previous fighting concepts also became partially obsolete and had to be replaced. The Russian military closely observed the United States' RMA and began plotting its own response by initiating change in its own military. The change, entitled as a Reform of the Armed Forces, was supposed to start Russia's own RMA by modifying all three military matters (structures, weapons and concepts). Officially, this reform began in 2008 and is commonly referred to as the 'Serdyukov reforms'. The first step was taken by reforming old Soviet military structures and shaping (or

at least trying to shape) them to mirror U.S. models. A second step, the modernisation of most advanced Soviet weapons and the development of new ones, started at approximately the same time. Finally, in 2013, Russia adopted a new warfighting concept, the non-linear or new generation war (Petraitis, 2015).

Unlike China, which has been using the Three Warfares concept to substitute and potentially avoid a kinetic fight, Russia considers kinetic action an integral part of non-linear war. The Russian concept has bound all non-kinetic means to kinetic ones into a unified approach with a ratio of 1:4 in favour of the non-military means (see Fig.1). Despite consisting of only one fifth of all impacts, the military means are considered the most effective methods to achieve a victory, especially when a conflict becomes a war (labelled as a ‘crisis’ in the diagram) (Gerasimov, 2013).

Conflict in the Gerasimov Doctrine

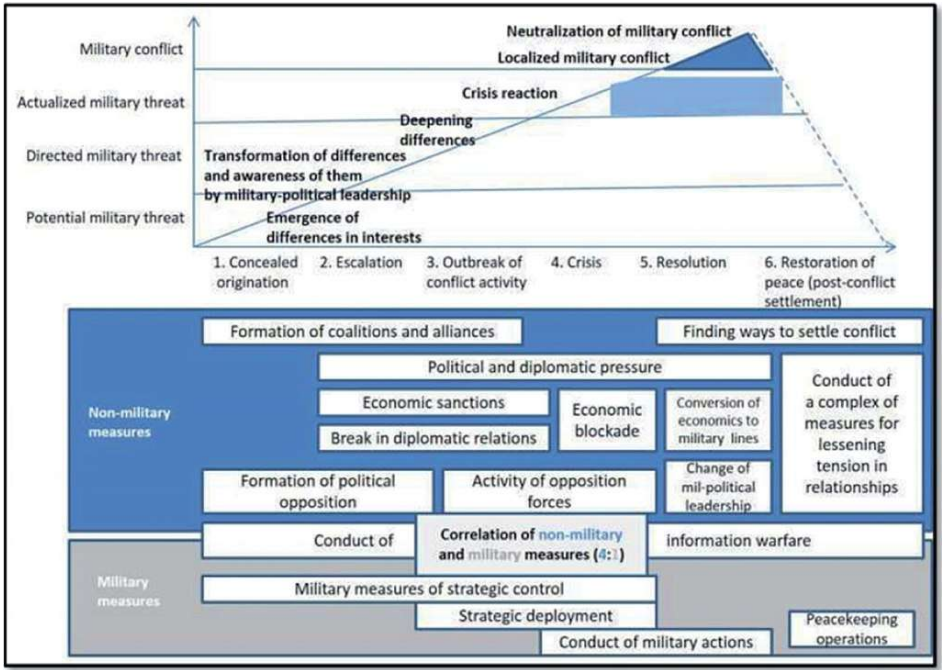


Fig. 1: Stages of Hybrid Warfare. (Source: Polismkoo 2002, available at:

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=121750541=](https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=121750541)

When examining Gerasimov (2013), articles written by military experts, and studies related to new warfighting more deeply, other particularities of the new generation war became evident. I have grouped and named those particularities as ‘postulates’ of the new Russian nonlinear or new generation warfare concept. I argue that the Russian military uses these postulates as a framework for shaping its own actions since the non-linear warfare concept was introduced. At least two of these postulates are indirectly presented in Gerasimov (2013). The implementation of these postulates can be seen during the 2014-2015 organisational restructuring of the Ministry of Defense. I present them in a random order as follows: ‘not a military of the state, but the entire state fights the war’; ‘the war is eternal and never ends’; ‘only my rules are valid in the war’; and ‘to occupy territories physically is not the most important task’ (Petraitis, 2021b).

To effectively implement these postulates, Russia reformed the entire military. As a result of this reform, a military corporation bearing the official name of the ‘State Military Organisation’ and the ‘Armed Forces of the Russian Federation’, consisting of forces from the MOD and other organisations possessing armed units and formations (e.g. Russian National Guard; Ministry of the Interior) were established.

These structural changes allow for the use of ‘not a military of the state, but the entire state fights the war’ approach while employing the entirety of its collective forces. The State Military Organisation also includes numerous services and organisations, which have no armed forces but can assist the kinetic actions done by the Armed Forces by non-kinetic impacts (Federalniy Zakon N. 61-FZ3, 1996; Russian Military Doctrine, 2014). Besides official documents, the State Military Organisation is described and explained in other sources (e.g. textbooks, articles, etc.), which are used to educate state servants as well as potential politicians and leaders to participate in the governing of the state (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 3).

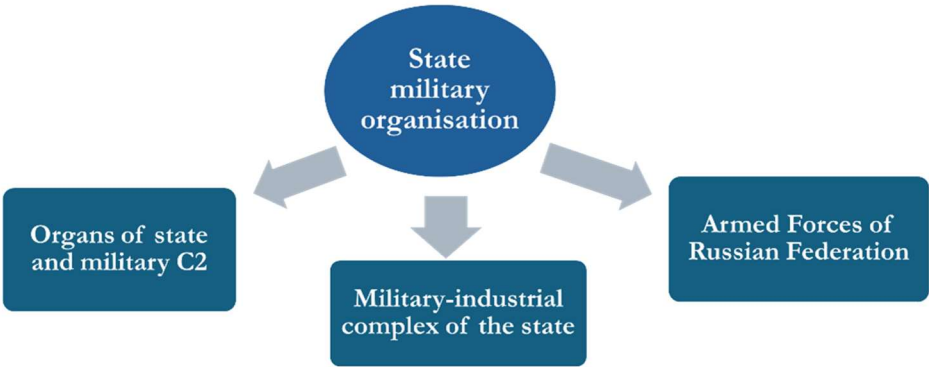


Fig. 2: The State Military Organisation. (Source: National Guard Military University Journal. Graphic inspired by Damaskin and Suprun (2023). Translated by the author).

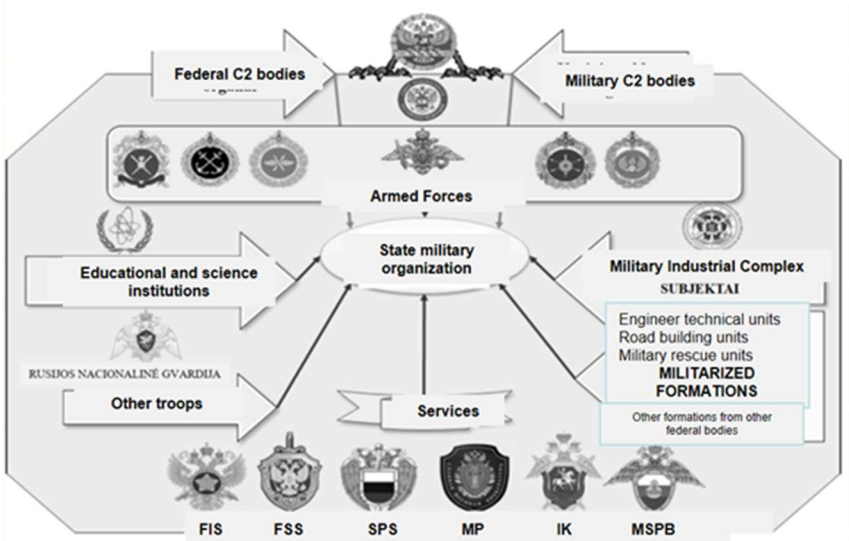


Fig. 3: The State Military Organisation. (Source: Textbook for Diplomats (Kabanenko, 2018, p.X). Translated by author).

In addition to the creation and existence of the State Military Organisation, more evidence to support the existence of this ‘not a military of the state, but the entire state fights the war’ approach is the creation of a structure, inside of the MOD and General Staff, to execute overarching command and control (C2) of all other C2 structures (centres). This structure is called the National Defence Management Centre (NDMC). In addition to the control of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and institutions from the State Military Organisation, the NDMC is authorised to control civilian state executive institutions and even state and private organisations (companies) which are included in the State Defense Plan (SDP). Examples of those institutions are the Ministries of Health or Education and the state-owned commercial organisations and companies like Russian Railways or Russian Airlines (see Fig.4). To do this, the NDMC has three different organisational cells named as ‘Supreme Commander’, ‘Military Command’, and ‘Defence Support’. The Supreme Commander’s cell is responsible for the nuclear forces, the Military Command cell for the armed forces and kinetic impacts, and the Defence Support cell for all non-kinetic actions (Petraitis, 2021a).

The involvement of state executive, commercial, and other institutions is not a secret. The Russian MOD organised a presentation about the NDMC to the foreign defence attaches in Moscow, where the slide, provided below, was demonstrated to illustrate an involvement of other organisations (see Fig. 4).



Fig. 4: Ministries, Services, and Other Institutions as part of the NSDCC.
(Source: A slide from Russian MOD briefing presentation about the NSDCC to Foreign Defence Attaches in 2015 (Russian MOD, 2015))

The N.D.M.C. operates in a wartime 24/7/365 mode and requires no mobilisation, mirroring Stalin's infamous wartime supreme HQ (STAVKA), which was established for WWII only and disbanded when the war ended in 1945. Reestablishing such a structure indicates that the General Staff considers war as the normal operating condition in Russia and indicates the postulate of 'the war is eternal and never ends' being implemented (Petraitis, 2021b).

Former Chief of the Russian General Staff General Juri Balujevskij is confident on a war being 'eternal'. While speaking at the Moscow Military Science Conference on the 26th of March in 2017, Balujevskij elaborated that every country functions simultaneously in three environments: in peace, on the eve of aggression, and at war; and that enemies of Russia are working tirelessly to destroy the country. Later he repeated the same stance in his article, *War Never Ends, it Just Sometimes takes a*

Nap (Balujevskij, 2017). An acceptance of this 'wisdom' suggests that war is becoming the standard and normalised operating environment in the minds of everyone in Russia, allowing the Russian political leadership and military to operate in a war manner without declaring mobilisation or war formally. Russia's War in Ukraine proves that.

There are no rules in the war' as a postulate and narrative of Russian military culture is a derivative notion from the culture of Prussian military organisation (i.e. the General Staff). Prussian military culture was brought to Russia by Emperor Paul I at the end of 18th century. The Prussian military organisation and culture were condemned and forbidden in Germany by the Treaty of Versailles (1919); however, it remains in Russia. Modified and adopted to Russian and Soviet specifics, this culture serves as a foundation of Russian military culture today. The foundational text, *The War Book of the German General Staff* (1915) gives a well-rounded understanding about the particularities of this organisational culture. As an example, this military culture prefers to operate according to its own rules and neglect the rules of others (Morgan, 1915). This narrative was repeated decades later at the Moscow Military Science Conference in March 2017, where the statements that 'while waging a hybrid war, international laws and norms are not applicable in determining such things as 'aggression,' 'a front,' or 'a rear' were made' (Vestnik Akademij Voennich Nauk.) Recent Russian actions in Ukraine, targeting hospitals and humanitarian aid infrastructure, all demonstrate Russia ignoring generally and legally agreed upon norms and rules.

'To occupy territories physically is not the most important task' as a postulate has been recently fulfilled for the Russian military (e.g. Russian influence in Belarus). The above-mentioned military science conference of 2017 elaborated the main task of 21st century wars as not 'an occupation of the territory but forcing opponent's state apparatus to be loyal and establishing a system of rule to control from outside lives of nations/citizens in those territories' (Vestnik Akademij Voennich Nauk, 2017) The Russian Military Academia suggests that 'to understand a war, it is important to accept that an occupation of opponent's territory is a secondary

factor compared to the establishment of overwhelming strategic control over the consciousness of [the] opponent's population and by this receiving a full rule over a future of [the] occupied state' (Vestnik Akademij Voennich Nauk, 2017).

Forces for New Generation, Non-linear Warfare: 'Hard' Forces

It has already been mentioned that Russia adopted this new generation or non-linear war concept back in 2013. At that time, Russia already had a bulk of new structures, units, and formations in place, and these forces had been partially rearmed by modernised weaponry. This was prescribed in the report, *Concrete Tasks to Develop the Military Forces of the Russian Federation*, announced on the 2nd of October 2003, by Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov, during the meeting of the Ministry of Defence. The document received the moniker of the 'Ivanov Doctrine' and should be taken as political-military guidelines for the military reforms. According to this doctrine, Russian military forces had to be divided into fighting operational forces and supporting institutional forces. The operational forces were to be ready to fight without any additional preparation or mobilisation. The supporting institutional forces were responsible for military infrastructure, education, armament, and logistics, and acted as a framework for full-scale mobilisation.

The 'Ivanov Doctrine' outlined the Russian Level of Ambition (LoA). Initially, Russia planned to have operational forces capable of fighting two military conflicts as well as maintain one peace keeping operation simultaneously, instantly, and without any mobilisation. This LoA, according to the military reform of 2008 planned to be achieved by 2015, with the entire reform scheduled to be finished after 2020. However, the deadline to complete the entire reform was extended until 2025 (Romanenko, 2023). Now, the Russian LoA has increased, and they must be capable to wage two regional wars (not conflicts) after the state declaring mobilisation and mobilising all forces to transition into a global war (Ivanov, 2004).

Following the wisdoms of non-linear war, the operational forces not only received new organisational structures (new brigades, operational, and joint strategic commands) but also were grouped to perform certain missions. For example, there

are operational forces assigned to fight conventional warfare as 'General Purpose Forces' consisting of land, air, and naval units and formations belonging to the MOD (Petraitis, 2012, pp.12-13). Another group of forces, named as 'Rapid Reaction Forces', consists of the MOD airborne and naval infantry troops and operate as a first strike force (Petraitis, 2012, pp.15-16). There are also 'Other Forces', composed of forces belonging to paramilitary institutions like the Russian National Guard, Border Guard troops, troops of the Ministry of Emergencies, and so on. They are assigned to operate in occupied or captured territories by 'cleansing' them of the remaining resistance, restoring order, and providing necessities like food supplies and energy, and through this notion of 'winning hearts and minds' of occupied population (Petraitis, 2012, p.24). Examples of those actions are seen in the 'white convoys' that deliver humanitarian goods to the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk Republics (Voice of America, 2018) or rebuilding houses in occupied Mariupol (Navarro and Galan, 2023).

The other two types of new 'hard' forces are the MOD Special Forces and Non-governmental or Quasi-governmental Forces. Officially, Russia created the MOD Special Operation Forces (SOF) only in 2015, but the SOF must have existed beforehand as Russia admitted that the 'green men' in Crimea were from the Russian SOF (Radio Free Europe, 2014). As a rule of thumb, Special Operations Forces are inserted into an area of potential operations immediately before a strike and are followed by the Rapid Reaction Forces. In addition to the MOD's SOF units, there are specialised forces belonging to Russian Intelligence and Special Services (RISS). The previously listed non-governmental forces usually operate according to the rules of the intelligence world and are placed in different countries or regions covertly in advance, under the guise of martial arts groups, paintball and sport clubs, or other organisations (Delfi, 2018; Galeotti, 2020).

There are also the Nuclear Forces and the Air-Space Forces as separate groups of the operational forces. The Nuclear Forces involve land, sea, and air units and assets with the mission of strategic deterrence and retaliation. The Air-Space Forces consists of units and formations responsible for strategic missile defence and land radar

coverage, global positioning/navigation (e.g. GLONASS), strategic (space) intelligence and surveillance, national electronic warfare (EW), and the Unified Space System (USS).

Non-governmental operational forces include private military and private guarding companies. The private military companies (PMC) today are officially illegal in Russia, but they function. Supervised by the MOD or secret services, PMCs are used everywhere where official policies do not allow intervention. Russia has even designed a new type of private military company that might be classed as a 'quasi-state' force. An example of this quasi-state force concept could be Kadyrov's forces, officially subordinated to the Ministry of Interior in the Chechen Republic but are de facto loyal to its leader Kadyrov. Another example could be the Russian National Cossack Guards belonging to the Russian Cossack Union. All these PMCs and non-governmental forces act as trainers, recruiting base, a cover for special forces, and are used for a wide variety of activities, starting from direct actions and ending as a reserve for General Purpose Forces. They all operate under the command of the Joint Strategic Commands (JSC), a strategic-level HQs established by the 2008 Serdyukov Reforms (Petraitis, 2012).

As previously detailed, the Serdyukov Reform of 2008 also created institutional forces consisting of units providing education, training, and general logistics as well. Units from numerous military education institutions, training grounds and centres, hundreds of arsenals, and the like belonging to the MOD were assigned to those forces. All those institutions and forces, depending on the situation, could be subordinated to an adequate operational JSC (Petraitis, 2015, pp.101-123).

New tactics and fighting approaches for 'hard' forces have been developed and tested during strategic and other exercises (Petraitis, 2017; Petraitis, 2019; Ratsiborynska, Petraitis, and Akimenko, 2020a; Ratsiborynska, Petraitis, and Akimenko, 2020b), with the task of polishing, calibrating, and integrating them into the Russian military to fight fast classical wars. The war in Ukraine has pinpointed mistakes in the employment of these 'hard' forces, highlighted shortages, and allowed for changes and corrections within the Russian military organisations in the conduct of

military operations/kinetic impacts. These dynamics suggest that despite losses and mistakes, the Russian military maintains military forces, mission, and kinetic impacts as the most important elements of the new generation war.

Forces for New Generation, Non-linear Warfare: 'Soft' Forces

Besides the new design of 'hard' forces, Russia created so called 'soft' forces that are designed to be involved in other areas of confrontation and produce mostly non-kinetic impacts. 'Soft' forces are controlled and commanded by Russian Intelligence and Secret Services (RISS) (Pribylov, 2024). Besides forces like electronic warfare (EW) or cyber troops, which participate in both kinetic and non-kinetic fighting modes outside and inside the country, some forms of 'soft' forces include journalists, political officers, PIOs, Church representatives, scientists, and researchers from think tanks who could be stationed inside Russia and orient activities and operations against external targets. There are also forms of 'soft' forces located and operating outside Russia (Schwartz, 2019; Rutov, 2019). Conceptually, 'soft' forces are divided into groups and are named as the 'fifth', 'sixth' and 'seventh' columns. They are labelled as 'supporters or sympathizers'; 'agents' and 'useful idiots or proxy elites' respectively.

The 'fifth' column or 'supporters and sympathisers' is well known and quite thoroughly analysed. Encyclopaedia Britannica describes it as 'a clandestine group or faction of subversive agents who attempt to undermine a nation's solidarity by any means at their disposal' (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2025). The RISS search for Russian nationals, former Soviet citizens, and supporters of the Soviet ideology abroad (Riehle, 2022, pp.229-231). The primary actions of this column include passive and active resistance, acts of simple sabotage, and so on. Simple sabotage is defined as 'covert destruction of rationally selected objects, processes and courses of action, which might help your opponent to achieve tasks, by your agents acting deliberately and competently' (Simple Sabotage Field Manual, 1944, p.3). The 'fifth' column requires both passive and active support, with the moral element as most critical for success. The 'fifth' column exists in almost all countries;

it is not only a Russian instrument and is not only used by Russia (e.g. global intelligence services).

The terms 'sixth' column or 'agents' are my own concept that is based on an analysis of numerous cases presented in open Russian and foreign sources including memoirs of intelligence officers describing the work of RISS and its agents. Conceptually, RISS officers working under different covers, are excluded from this column; meaning 'agents' are primarily defined as foreign citizens recruited by the RISS abroad. Quite a few of them are emigrants from the former Soviet bloc countries or Russia, as many people left the Soviet Union and Russia in opposition to Russian policies, and this provides a pool for the RISS to recruit agents (Riehle, 2022, pp.89-90; 141-142). It is conceivable that some of them might have been recruited by the RISS in advance and left Russia already as 'agents'. The RISS instructed them to join the flow of emigres and most probably assisted in getting established abroad. One can find this *modus operandi*, used by the former KGB and RISS, described in numerous interviews of defectors from Soviet or Russian secret services to the West or in the memoirs of the veterans of those services (e.g. Gordevsky interviews). Those who were not recruited in advance can be potentially recruited as soon as their expectations abroad are not met. Once they are recruited, they consequently join this column.

The recruitment and maintenance of the sixth column is based on the well-known Money, Ideology, Compromise, and Ego (MICE) concept. This approach is applied to both Russian and foreign individuals. Conceptually, I divide 'agents' into different categories depending on the main mission they perform. These categories are 'information agents', 'influence agents', and 'action agents'. Conceptually, 'information agents' obtain information mostly through espionage. 'Influence agents' are used to spread, both true and false, information to different audiences to influence decisionmakers or groups of people. They usually operate in different areas of society, such as education and media. 'Action agents' are supposed to provide political support for certain Russian initiatives and sometimes even perform non-kinetic direct action. 'Action agents' mostly operate in politics and attempt to

implant themselves in different administrations. Sometimes, such individuals are labelled 'useful idiots', but I do not agree with this statement and treat it as a misapplication and misuse of wording within the dynamics of political rivalries. I assign 'useful idiots' to the 'seventh' column, thus separating them from the 'action agents'.

The 'seventh column' can be identified as a 'soft' force in the Russian new generation warfare and is most probably a Russian invention. One can label this group 'proxy elites' but the label of 'useful idiots' applies to this group as well. The origin of the term 'useful idiot' is not known. Usually, this term has been applied to a person who is manipulated by a cause or an actor without realising it. I placed those easily influenced personalities into different columns due to the different approaches the RISS use to create, maintain, and employ these columns. Pure MICE, despite some of its elements being presented here, is secondary. The creation and usage of the 'seventh column' is based on a psychological bias possessed by certain individuals (Duning and Kruger, 1999).

To recruit 'soldiers' of the 'seventh' column, the RISS instrumentalise a phenomenon known to psychologists as Duning-Kruger Effect (DKE). It was described by British psychologists Justin Kruger and David Dunning in 1999. This effect represents a cognitive bias in which people with limited competence in particular areas or domains overestimate their abilities. Alongside this bias, those individuals quite often have other behavioural features that RISS can utilise as weapons of psychological war. Among those features are an individual's inability to analyse situations, failure to learn and improve, inability to tolerate more intelligent persons in their surroundings, and a reluctance in decision-making while remaining confident that he or she is correct in his or her choices (Duning and Kruger, 1999). Psychologists note that the more stressful a situation or issue is, the less effectively a decision-maker possessing the 'Duning-Kruger effect' behaves (Duning and Kruger, 1999).

I put forward that the RISS found ways to employ 'useful idiots' exhibiting a DKE bias to work on Russia's benefit. These 'proxy elites' or 'useful idiots' are the

'soldiers' of psychological warfare. The main method of 'useful idiots' is a reverse form of simple sabotage that I name 'velvet' or 'soft' sabotage. Rephrasing simple sabotage, I define velvet sabotage as an open destruction of any objects, processes, or courses of action, which might help your opponent to achieve tasks by your agents acting irrationally, incompetently, or not acting at all. Different from traditional sabotage, which is based on secrecy and requires agents to be decisive, smart, and agile; 'velvet sabotage' requires them to be ignorant if not stupid, passive, and act openly.

The success and effectiveness of velvet sabotage is quite simple – incompetent leaders surrounded by incompetent subordinates and lackies make bad decisions and, in fear of 'losing face', the 'proxy elites' postpone or avoid making any decisions at all. Incompetent leaders, despite being persuasive personalities, avoid uncomfortable issues by extending the decision-making timeline by requesting more information or analyse, a phenomenon known as defensive avoidance (Duning and Kruger, 1999).

The RISS realised that finding such people, encouraging them to join politics, social activities, and administrations and providing them with the support from 'fifth' and 'sixth' columns might get them to the leaderships positions and to become 'proxy elites'. As soon as they become leaders, they surround themselves with similar incompetent but loyal individuals and start to make bad decisions, implement misinformed policies, or strive not to act at all by distorting trust of subordinates and society in any institution. It is difficult to find such people, but it is even more difficult to fight them. An individual acting according to his or her own thoughts and deeds does not necessarily mean that these actions occur under the aegis of the Duning-Kruger effect. However, if one is found and promoted, he or she becomes almost undefeatable.

The RISS find this 'seventh column' effective for a variety of reasons. First, the 'useful idiots' and in fact the entire column requires almost no guidance or instructions on how 'to spoil things', as they do this naturally and without even realising it. This means that it is almost impossible to accuse them of being

controlled by the RISS. It might be enough for an agent from the 'sixth' column to suggest 'a brilliant idea' and leave a 'useful idiot/proxy elite' to implement it. To promote them to power, to keep them in the power, and to 'fuel' Duning Kruger effect, the 'fifth' column or 'influence' and 'action' agents also might be used.

As has been mentioned, it is very difficult to fight 'useful idiots' due to democratic and liberal societies respecting and appreciating the person as the individual. As a result, 'useful idiots/proxy elite' can stay in power or office for a long time. Finally, to name or indicate a 'useful idiot' is quite complicated because of aforementioned normative considerations of liberal and democratic societies. Still, in a paragraph describing Russian psychological warfare and presented later in this article, I will risk presenting an example from Ukraine, which could be considered as a case of 'proxy elites/useful idiots' employed in the psychological warfare.

New Generation, Non-linear Warfare: EW and Cyber Warfare

As has been already mentioned, Russian new generation or non-linear warfare utilises different forces and results in different impacts in war. Several areas of the Russian new generation warfare are 'borrowed' from China or the United States and transformed accordingly to fit Russia's specific situation. The development of technologies allowed Russia to incorporate and master new spaces and articulate its own understanding about electromagnetic and cyber warfare. One of the ways in which Russia employs electromagnetic warfare (EW) is the same as western militaries; by using the electromagnetic spectrum or directed energy impacts to attack an enemy or impede operations. Russia devoted efforts to develop its own EW capabilities and managed to develop its own defensive and offensive methods and capabilities already before the full-scale war with Ukraine (McDermott, 2017; FOI, 2019). It mastered these capabilities during different exercises and began an aggression in Ukraine already possessing quite significant EW power. For example, Russian troops managed to disrupt Musk's STARLINK communications in Ukraine (Price, 2024; Financial Times, 2024) and used different EW weapons and methods intensively in preventing an extensive use of UAVs and aviation from the Ukrainian side (Tuzov, 2024). There are cases when Russia accused of employing EW tools to

impact navigation systems in Europe as well (Seibt, 2024). Russia is suspected of conducting numerous cyber-attacks against adversarial states, trying to disrupt vital computer systems, stealing information, and planting different viruses as well as other disruptive programs. Russia also uses cyberwarfare for espionage, sabotage, propaganda, manipulation of media, and economic effects (Przetacznik and Tarpova, 2022; CSIS, 2023; Husch and Jarnecki, 2023).

New Generation, Non-linear Warfare: Cognitive, Informational (Media), and Psychological Warfare

Russia subscribes to the Chinese definition of informational (media) warfare, sometimes also named as 'public opinion warfare' (Halper, 2013, p.12). Informational (media) warfare is a 'constant, ongoing activity aimed to change at long-term influence of perceptions and attitudes. It leverages all instruments that inform and influence public opinion including films, television programs, books, the internet, and the global media network' (Halper, 2013, pp.12-13). Russian informational warfare is discussed and explained so widely (see Giles, 2016; Giles, 2023) that I will emphasise only several particularities of it. The first particularity is Russia's willingness to concentrate all efforts and coordinate them. One of the best examples of such a coordination is the Russian response to the decision of the European Parliament to equate Stalinism to Nazism by condemning 'all manifestations and propagation of totalitarian ideologies, such as Nazism and Stalinism, in the EU' (European Parliament 2019/2819 RSP, 2019). As soon as the declaration passed, Russia took this statement as an act of aggression against its national history and responded in coordinated and decisive manner in the information domain. Russia opened archives and found new 'evidence' that was favourable for Russia (Kislov, 2019). Putin himself began writing articles and lecturing heads of state (e.g. Putin, 2020; Putin, 2021a; Putin, 2021b). Numerous organisations such as veteran unions, historian associations, and the like all responded. Everything was done following the new generation warfare 'postulates' presented above and was coordinated by the military (Petraitis, 2021).

Another Russian particularity in fighting the informational war is targeting both internal and outside audiences almost equally. Different types of propaganda (white, grey, and black) are used in different proportions and by different agents. 'White' propaganda is mostly used to increase the credibility of the source. Sometimes white propaganda is used by other valuable agents (state-controlled TV, official media) and is mostly directed at weakening an opponent's societal will to fight and disturb the situational assessment of the decision-makers. 'Grey' (partially true information) and 'black' (false information and simple lies) propaganda are used much more widely and are oriented to distort the informational space of foreign audiences. Simultaneously, different grey and black propaganda messages and narratives are spread among Russian domestic audiences. They aim to maintain morale and gain public support at home. This is how media warfare gains the upper hand in fighting psychological and legal warfare.

In this new-generation war concept, psychological warfare is just another part of cognitive warfare. Psychological warfare 'seeks to undermine an enemy's ability to conduct combat operations through operations aimed at deterring, shocking, and demoralising enemy military personnel and supporting civilian populations' (Halper, 2013, p.28). The task is to influence or 'disrupt an opponent's decision-making capacity; it seeks to create doubts, foment anti-leadership sentiments, to deceive opponents and to attempt to diminish the will to fight amongst opponents' (Halper, 2013, p.28). NATO's Supreme Allied Command Transformation (SACT) sees psychological warfare as designed to modify perceptions of reality and to get whole-of-society manipulation as a new norm, with human cognition shaping becoming a critical realm of warfare (NATO SACT, 2024). Russia exercises psychological warfare through political pressure paired with false informational warfare narratives to destroy their opponent's public trust towards official information sources and leadership. At the same time, Russia also employs 'proxy elites/useful idiots' to attack and degrade the opponent's rationality, societal trust in leadership, and the will to fight.

Now allow me to apply the ‘useful idiot’ concept. I talked to some expert psychologists, and they agreed that former Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich and former Ukrainian General Prosecutor Victor Pshonko exhibited several symptoms consistent with a Dunning-Kruger Effect (DKE) bias. Their ignorance, selfishness, nepotism, narcissism, abuse of power, and profiting of Yanukovich and Pshonko as well as the strange decisions they made correlate to many criteria and features of the DKE. When Yanukovich became the President of Ukraine with the Russian aid and support, he and his subordinates, like Pshonko, who were among central figures in Ukrainian leadership, became key individuals for potential RISS exploitation.

Let us turn to this specific example, while answering questions during the 2014 trial against former President Yanukovich, former Defence Minister Ihor Techiuk stated that he himself was ready and proposed an initiative to fight Russian ‘green men’ in Crimea (BBC, 2018). Yet, Yanukovich as Supreme Commander abandoned any decision making, and as a consequence the Ukraine Security Board was reluctant to take decisive action (BBC, 2018). This lack of action diminished morale, confidence in leadership, and willingness to resist within the Ukrainian troops; and eventually led to thousands withdrawing from Crimea under Russian pressure and later, several of them even defecting to Russia (Polityuk and Zverev, 2017). Those who defected might have done so for a variety of reasons, but those who retreated were demoralised and their will to fight was already eroding.

New Generation, Non-linear Warfare: Economic Warfare

The West started economically punishing Russia in 2014 with its invasion of Ukraine. Sanctions impact the Russian economy, but these sanctions are used as justification for Russia to retaliate as well. As a response, Russia forced Western companies to leave the country by officially ordering businesses to be sold to loyal local businessmen and imposed unfavourable conditions on pricing (Moscow Times, 2023). Russia also prepared itself for the sanctions in advance. Shadow tanker fleets, shadow mediating companies in third countries to contravene sanctions, and sanctions on certain materials that are important for Western firms

(titanium, lithium, etc.), are just few examples. Sanctions became an argument for Russia to promote national business in not sanctioned areas at home as well.

As a part of economic warfare, Russia uses instruments of financial warfare as well. With aims of paying in shadow contracts, of stripping the U.S. dollar from its role as the global currency, and to financing the activities of the 'fifth', 'sixth,' and 'seventh' columns, cryptocurrencies are used. Russia has more than enough nuclear power stations to produce enough electricity to mine crypto, and steps are taken to control cryptocurrencies at the state level (Gordishev, 2024). In addition to crypto, fourth generation currencies (e.g. the 'digital Ruble') are used as a means for payments and can be used for controlling the flow of currency as well. This approach has already been adopted. Putin signed a decree on the digital Ruble back in April 2023, establishing an additional tool to control fiscal and monetary situation (Federalniy Zakon N. 339-FZ, 2023). One point for future research is the notion that the Chinese approach to the digital currency in combination with a social credit system will be considered by Russia as well.

New Generation, Non-linear Warfare: Lawfare

Paraphrasing Halper's (2013) working document on the Chinese Three Warfares, lawfare is understood as an exploitation of the legal system to achieve political or commercial objectives. This ranges from using legal claims to territory and resources by using international law, provisions, and other legal conventions for unintended purposes, employing bogus maps to justify claims, and distorting application of domestic rules and laws (Halper, 2013, pp.28-34). Lawfare uses existing rules and structures to destroy the existing international rules-based order. In addition to using official and clandestine leverage and 'soft forces', Russia tries to get useful people into important positions of international organisations. It also exploits situations and uses existing international law frameworks to its benefit at the expense of others.

As an example, in February 2014, at almost the same time Russia invaded and occupied Crimea with the SOF, Russia received control over territory approximately fifty times the size of the Crimean Peninsula itself when the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) finally approved Russian legal claims for the entire Okhotsk Sea to become Russian territorial waters based on shelf data provided by Russia (UN CLCS, 2014). The result 'closed a major fishing area for others, further embolden[ed] China to make claims in the oil-rich South China Sea, and raises the stakes over Moscow's even more expansive claims in the Arctic Ocean, because Moscow, based on this case, argues that 'much of the Arctic seabed is part of Russia's continental shelf, including regions hundreds of miles from the shoreline of the Russian Federation, and thus should be recognized as a Russian exclusion zone' (Goble, 2014). Russia used this continental shelf argument as a legal justification for why it was moving air and coastal defence systems to the Kuril Islands (Lavrov, 2015). Not one shot was fired, but the result was achieved. Even today, Russia still has two Russian national 'law-soldiers' as members of the UN CLCS, compared to other countries having only one representative.

Russia continued employing legal warfare with its sudden announcement of its intention to extend its national sea borders into the Baltics, justifying this change with a revision of national norms and documents (Seibt, 2024). This time the collective response from Baltic and northern countries immediately terminated Russia's legal warfare attack (Faulconbridge, 2024), at least in the meantime.

Exploiting and weaponising international migration laws (IML) is another instrument in Russia's lawfare arsenal. One of the key objectives of the IML is to protect the rights of individuals involved in migration. Russia uses IML to encourage migrants from poorer countries to move to the West (Grzywaczewski, 2021; Nilsen, 2023). The task here is to overburden potential opponents with large numbers of migrants and drain financial resources from social programmes, thereby causing dissatisfaction among the Western populations. For example, in 2021, Russia deliberately organised migration through Belarus to the Baltic states and Poland, which cost those countries resources and effort to deal with the issue (BBC, 2021; Grzywaczewski, 2021). Russia does this again in 2023 while by sending migrants 'armed with bikes' to Finland in freezing temperatures and urged them to request permission to enter (Nilsen, 2023).

Finally, Russia does not only use international lawfare to its own benefit and to supplement its warfighting and control over occupied territories. Russia has also changed its domestic laws to apply in ways they were never used before. For example, to get new 'recruits' for the armed forces to fight in Ukraine, the Duma made changes to criminal code to allow convicts as well as those who are under investigation and who have expressed willingness to fight in the 'Special Military Operation' will be pardoned of any charges immediately not only by courts but by prosecutors or even commanders of military units (Maksimov, 2024).

Conclusion

Russia has created its own new generation, non-linear, or hybrid warfare concept. It suits Russian needs and is initially quite complex. This concept is based on the 'postulates' of the Russian approach to war: playing according to its own rules, employing all available means, coordinating efforts at the state level, and so on.

In order to fight a new generation war, Russian has created 'hard' and 'soft' forces, which are used situationally depending on need. Employing its mentality of secrecy and 'maskirovka' and following their own rationale, Russia not only created the concept, suggesting a specific *modus operandi*, but designed and established a system of command, control, and coordination for this type of warfare. Since the time that the 'Gerasimov Doctrine' first articulated this concept in 2013, it is being used everywhere daily – both inside and outside of Russia. At the same time, it has taken the West too long to realise the novelty and shrewdness of this style of warfare, an approach that requires constant vigilance.

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