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RUSSIA’S “NEW GENERATION” WARFARE EFFECTIVE IN CRIMEA, BUT IT IS LIKELY NOT TO BE REPEATED IN POST-SOVIET SPACE

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JCSP 45

Solo Flight

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INTRODUCTION

Russia, once a republic of the Soviet Union and a "central player in international affairs, [was] locked in a Cold War struggle with the United States."¹ Both countries were pitted in a fight for world supremacy, flexing their military might. Fundamentally, the Cold War was a clash of ideals between democracy and communism, until the beginning of the 1990's with the breakup of the Soviet Union. Since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia has sought to regain its place as an influencer on the international stage.

In the post-communist era, "Russia joined with several former Soviet republics to form a loose coalition, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)."² The initial years would be challenging for Russia as it suffered from a "weak economy, high inflation, and a complex of social ills that served to lower life expectancy."³ Russia would spend the next decade struggling to find its identity and its place in a post-Soviet world. With nearly, 30 million Russians outside the borders of mother Russia post-Soviet Union collapse,⁴ "governments in [neighboring countries] feared that Moscow could, if it

¹ Encyclopedia Britannica, "Russia", <https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia>, last accessed 18 April 2020

² *Ibid*

³ *Ibid*

⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica, "Post-Soviet Russia", <https://www.britannica.com/place/Russia/Ethnic-relations-and-Russias-near-abroad>

wanted, use the Russian populations there to pressure the governments to adopt policies friendly to Moscow.”⁵

Under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, these fears would become reality. Russia has increasingly engaged in influence activities in the post-Soviet states in an attempt to reach the “hearts and minds of its citizens at home and abroad.”⁶ Investing a significant amount of resources and funds in support of propaganda campaigns, cyber operations and proxies to strengthen relations with those who share Russian objectives and points of view, while attempting to limit Western influence in effort to protect Russian interests.⁷

Did the Cold War really end with the collapse of the Soviet Union? Or did it simply take a pause, to lie in wait for a new leader to take up the fight in a new way? Under the leadership of Putin, Russia has moved away from nuclear deterrence to influence activities. Russia wants to expand back into post-Soviet space. Since the Cold War it has experimented with new warfare. The most shocking experiment, from an international perspective, was the annexation of Crimea. This paper will argue that while Russia’s “new generation” warfare was effective in Crimea, this type of warfare is not likely to be repeated in post-Soviet space. This paper will first review the definition of influence activities and Russia’s “new generation” warfare. Then it will look at what provoked Russia into overtaking the Capital of Crimea and its use of both soft and hard

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ Helms, T.C., E. Bodine-Baron, A. Radin, M. Magnuson, J. Mendelsohn, W. Marcellino, A. Bega, Z. Winkelman. “Russian Social Media Influence Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe.” *RAND Corporation*. 2018, p.1

https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2200/RR2237/RAND_RR2237.pdf

⁷ *Ibid* p. 2-3.

power in an unprecedented way. Finally, while Russia conducted a successful influencing campaign in the Ukraine what did Russia actually accomplish long term?

INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES

Since the dawn of time nations have been demonstrating influence activities to get what they want. Battles are fought and won, economies are built or destroyed, and alliances are won or lost through influencing activities. Influence is the power to change the affect or the thinking of others, to get the adversary to change the course of direction they were initially planning to take. Influence can be accomplished through soft or hard power. Joseph Nye defines soft power as “the ability to get preferred outcomes through the co-optive means of agenda setting, persuasion, and attraction.”⁸ The internet and social media have become useful tools in the use of soft power. They can be used to spread messages instantaneously around the world to billions of people. Forces are a form of hard power, which Joseph Nye, defines as the ability to get the outcomes one wants through coercion and payment.⁹ The use of military force or intervention, Trade Embargo’s, economic sanctions are some examples of the way hard power can be used to influence outcomes.¹⁰ A military force located within striking distance of a countries borders can intimidate and destroy an adversary’s morale without firing a single shot if strategically placed at the right time with a large enough force of personnel and equipment.

⁸ Nye, Joseph, S. “Power and Foreign Policy”, *Journal of Political Power* 4, no. 1 (April 2011): p. 16.

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ *Ibid*

Russia, under the leadership of Putin, has taken advantage of the internet and social media conducted a number of soft power operations within the borders of the former Soviet states, and around the world (i.e. 2016 US Elections) in an effort to discourage NATO and EU expansion and influence.¹¹ The 2014 standoff in Ukraine, was motivated by Russia's desire to be seen as a world power and a demonstration of its effective use of "new generation" warfare to accomplish its end state the annexation of Crimea. Russian "new generation" warfare involves the use of soft and hard power across a variety of means through the coordinated military, diplomatic and economic means.¹²

The Ukraine standoff was unique because it blended soft/hard power as compared to Russian influence in other countries where it's been almost exclusively soft power.

Russia has a number of reasons for using information warfare within the areas of former communist countries, such as, the Baltics, Ukraine, Georgia and Estonia. With roughly, 30 million Russians living outside the borders of mother Russia, the *Compatriot Policy*, calls for the need "to protect the interests of [Russian] populations and, more importantly, influence the population to support pro-Russia causes and successfully influence the

¹¹ Selhorst, A.J.C. Lieutenant-Colonel, "Russia's Perception Warfare the Development of Gerasimov's Doctrine in Estonia and Georgia and its Application in Ukraine." *Militaire Spectator, Jaargang 185 Number 4-2016*, p. 148.
<https://www.militairespectator.nl/sites/default/files/uitgaven/inhoudsopgave/Militaire%20Spectator%204-2016%20Selhorst.pdf>

¹² Adamsky, Dmitry. "Cross-Domain Coercion: The Current Russian Art of Strategy." *Ifri Security Studies Center, Proliferation Papers 54*. November 2015, p. 36.

politics of its neighbors” at home and abroad.¹³ The use of non-military and non-traditional means of warfare, such as youth groups, cyber-attacks, and social media proved successful in its attempt to take control of Crimea from the Ukraine.¹⁴ So what provoked Russia to seize control of Crimea in the first place?

RUSSIA PROVOKED

Russia believes it has a “privileged sphere of influence’ in the post-Soviet space, as such, any encroachment of Western-led globalization is seen as a threat to Russian interests.¹⁵ This belief has resulted in Russia stepping up its influencing campaigns, sowing “dissent against host and neighboring governments, as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union.”¹⁶ In addition, these influencing tactics are attempts to “sow confusion, stoke fears, and erode[e] trust in Western and democratic institutions.”¹⁷ In 2014, when the pro-Russian, Ukraine President Yanukovich fled the

¹³ Helms, T.C., E. Bodine-Baron, A. Radin, M. Magnuson, J. Mendelsohn, W. Marcellino, A. Bega, Z. Winkelman. “Russian Social Media Influence Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe.” *RAND Corporation*. 2018, p.4.

https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2200/RR2237/RAND_RR2237.pdf
¹⁴ Selhorst, A.J.C. Lieutenant-Colonel, “Russia’s Perception Warfare the Development of Gerasimov’s Doctrine in Estonia and Georgia and its Application in Ukraine.” *Militaire Spectator, Jaargang 185 Number 4-2016* p. 148.

<https://www.militairespectator.nl/sites/default/files/uitgaven/inhoudsopgave/Militaire%20Spectator%204-2016%20Selhorst.pdf>

¹⁵ Cooley, Alexander. “Where Rules, Whose Sphere? Russian Governance and Influence in Post-Soviet States.” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. The Chicago Council on Global Affairs. p. 1-2.

¹⁶ Helms T.C., E. Bodine-Baron, A. Radin, M. Magnuson, J. Mendelsohn, W. Marcellino, A. Bega, Z. Winkelman. “Russian Social Media Influence Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe.” *RAND Corporation*. 2018, p. 3

https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2200/RR2237/RAND_RR2237.pdf

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p.10

country and was replaced by a pro-Western government, Russia saw this as an illegal act against its people, due to the lack of impeachment procedures.¹⁸ As such, Russia used the international humanitarian intervention card as justification for its protection of Russians abroad.¹⁹ With this it experimented with its “new generation” warfare and the shocking annexation of Crimea.

MEDIA / CYBER CAMPAIGN

Russia began with a media campaign to garner Russian support by ethnic Russians in the Ukraine, and specifically in Crimea, in an effort to isolate the Ukraine government.²⁰ Using information media, Russia bombarded television and internet, which was primarily Russian state-owned, with pro-Russian content. With 95% of the populations reliant on television and nearly 50% reliant on the internet to get their news update, Russia had a significant amount of control over the messaging that was being past.²¹ Using the post-Soviet era tensions Moscow used the media “to drive wedges between ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking populations who reside in these states and their host governments.”²²

¹⁸ Selhorst, A.J.C. Lieutenant-Colonel, “Russia’s Perception Warfare the Development of Gerasimov’s Doctrine in Estonia and Georgia and its Application in Ukraine.” *Militaire Spectator, Jaargang 185 Number 4-2016* p. 158.
<https://www.militairespectator.nl/sites/default/files/uitgaven/inhoudsopgave/Militaire%20Spectator%204-2016%20Selhorst.pdf>

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 159.

²⁰ *Ibid*

²¹ *Ibid*

²² Helms, T.C., E. Bodine-Baron, A. Radin, M. Magnuson, J. Mendelsohn, W. Marcellino, A. Bega, Z. Winkelman. “Russian Social Media Influence Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe.” *RAND Corporation*. 2018, p.10
https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2200/RR2237/RAND_RR2237.pdf

The messaging was specifically targeted at Russian minorities living outside Russia, claiming they were being treated like second class citizens, claimed that their rights to being Russian citizens were being taken away, attacked their sense of belonging to Ukraine, anything to cause mistrust with the Ukraine government. In addition, Russia pushed out messaging of past events that painted the West as aggressive, stating the West used their powers to violate agreements to suit Western values and interest with respect to NATO expansion restrictions.²³

Along with controlling the media message, Russia engaged in cyber-attacks against the Ukrainian government and NATO websites.²⁴ Cyber is “one of the most cost-effective tools of non-nuclear coercion due to its ability to produce strategic effects without massive kinetic devastation.”²⁵ Russia created additional unrest and chaos using cyber-attacks, specifically when it targeted Ukraine’s largest bank.²⁶ Russia was also able to target and influence corrupt police and armed forces through the use of intimidation

²³ Selhorst, A.J.C. Lieutenant-Colonel, “Russia’s Perception Warfare the Development of Gerasimov’s Doctrine in Estonia and Georgia and its Application in Ukraine.” *Militaire Spectator, Jaargang 185 Number 4-2016* p. 161.
<https://www.militairespectator.nl/sites/default/files/uitgaven/inhoudsopgave/Militaire%20Spectator%204-2016%20Selhorst.pdf>

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 162.

²⁵ Adamsky, Dmitry. “Cross-Domain Coercion: The Current Russian Art of Strategy.” *Ifri Security Studies Center, Proliferation Papers 54*. November 2015, p. 36.

²⁶ Selhorst, A.J.C. Lieutenant-Colonel, “Russia’s Perception Warfare the Development of Gerasimov’s Doctrine in Estonia and Georgia and its Application in Ukraine.” *Militaire Spectator, Jaargang 185 Number 4-2016* p. 161.
<https://www.militairespectator.nl/sites/default/files/uitgaven/inhoudsopgave/Militaire%20Spectator%204-2016%20Selhorst.pdf>

and bribery tactics, which aided in the seizure of infrastructure given the limited force resistance.²⁷

MILITARY/PROXY FORCES

Information and Cyber activity allowed Russia to gain support from within the borders of Ukraine and specifically in the Crimea regions. These types of activities are often difficult for an adversary to predict, tough to trace and hard to defend against. They distracted the attention of the Ukraine forces away from the true Russian objective, seizure of Crimea, which allowed Russia to silently preposition forces within the region with limited to no pushback from the local government. Local paramilitary forces began to storm government building and military establishments, replacing the current security forces with pro-Russian forces.²⁸ Russian supporters working in government buildings, military institutions, security forces were not inclined to resist a force whose motives they supported. They simply laid down their weapons and moved aside. Moscow relied heavily on the fact that there was a large Russian population living inside Ukraine and played on their emotions to garner support.

As this was all going on, the Russian Army of roughly 40,000 troops along with a heavy armored equipment and vehicle presence strategically started to exercise on the Ukraine-Russian border as an act of intimidation. This too distracted Ukraine forces from the on-going situation within their borders. As they were fixated on the troops at the border, teams of Special Operations Forces secretly crossed over the border disguised as

²⁷ Selhorst A.J.C. Lieutenant-Colonel, "Russia's Perception Warfare the Development of Gerasimov's Doctrine in Estonia and Georgia and its Application in Ukraine." *Militaire Spectator, Jaargang 185 Number 4-2016 Ibid*, p. 163.

<https://www.militairespectator.nl/sites/default/files/uitgaven/inhoudsopgave/Militaire%20Spectator%204-2016%20Selhorst.pdf>

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 161

local militants in unmarked uniforms.²⁹ Russia denied existence of these forces claiming they were not Russian. These forces attacked media and telecommunication sites, jammed radios and cell phones, in order to isolate the messaging into the region.³⁰ Although this “new generation” warfare of combining the use of soft power (i.e. Information Media and Cyber) along with hard power (i.e. local paramilitary, Russian Special Forces) effectively achieved Russia tactical objectives, the seizure of Crimean, is this type of warfare likely to be repeated in the post-Soviet space?

THE AFTERMATH

Russia’s use of “new generation” warfare featuring the use of soft and hard power effectively achieved Russian support in Crimea to take down the government and facilitate the illegal annexation of Crimea, but it is likely not to be repeated in the post-Soviet space. The outcome of the event did not reap the true end state goal Russia was trying to achieve which was to attain a “sphere of influence” in post-Soviet space. While the experiment to annex Crimea using “new generation” warfare was successful, Russia faced three negative outcomes as a result it is not likely to be repeated given the heavy cost that resulted for little return.

²⁹ Selhorst A.J.C. Lieutenant-Colonel, “Russia’s Perception Warfare the Development of Gerasimov’s Doctrine in Estonia and Georgia and its Application in Ukraine.” *Militaire Spectator, Jaargang 185 Number 4-2016*, p. 162.

<https://www.militairespectator.nl/sites/default/files/uitgaven/inhoudsopgave/Militaire%20Spectator%204-2016%20Selhorst.pdf>

³⁰ *Ibid*

First it alienated a former ally. As mentioned earlier, Russia believes it has a “privileged sphere of influence” in the post-Soviet space³¹, as such, Russia has long desired to maintain ties with former communist’s countries. During the Cold War era Russia and Ukraine were the two most populous and powerful republics of the former USSR.³² The Ukraine provided much of the Soviet Unions, agricultural, defense industries and military, which made it a vital component to the success of the Soviet Union.³³ Without the Ukraine and without Russia, the Soviet Union likely would have collapsed long before the 1990’s. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union; Russia desire to maintain Soviet Era ties and perhaps achieve Soviet era glory once again depend heavily on Ukraine support and desire for the same. However, Ukraine has long been divided in this goal. Western Ukraine has attempted to align itself more closely with Western institutions, such as the European Union and NATO, moving away from its former alliances.³⁴ While Eastern Ukraine, which happens to be more ethnic Russian, has sought to keep ties with Russian institutions.³⁵ The Ukraine government largely perceived Russia’s annexation of Crimea as illegal, which further hampered Western Ukraine’s support for any sort of alliance with Russia. Russia truly gained nothing aside from controlling Crimea, making enemies of a once formidable ally.

³¹ Cooley, Alexander. “Where Rules, Whose Sphere? Russian Governance and Influence in Post-Soviet States.” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. The Chicago Council on Global Affairs. p. 1-2.

³² Masters, Johnathan. “Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 5 February 2020: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/ukraine-conflict-crossroads-europe-and-russia>.

³³ *Ibid*

³⁴ *Ibid*.

³⁵ *Ibid*

In addition to losing an ally, the annexation of Crimea drew increased and unwanted attention from the West. NATO, in an effort to enhance intelligence and surveillance capabilities, since 2014 has increased its physical presence in Eastern Europe.³⁶ NATO forces are deployed to Ukraine, Lithuania, Romania, Latvia, and Estonia all in support of reassurance measures to prevent further Russian aggression. All eyes are watching Russia. Its frustration with Western presence on former Soviet territory has not diminished. Instead, the annexation of Crimea had the opposite affect with an even greater Western presence on post-Soviet soil.

Finally, in addition to the increase NATO presence, the West responded to the illegal annexation of Crimea by placing economic sanctions against Russia. It restricted access to Western financial markets for Russian state-owned enterprises.³⁷ Placed embargos on Russian exports high-technology oil exploration and production.³⁸ And placed embargos on exports of Russian military and dual-use goods.³⁹ While these sanctions have been lifted, was the cost really worth the gain?

CONCLUSION

Six years later Russia is no further ahead in the Ukraine than it was before the events in 2014. Before the annexation, the Russian-Ukrainian Partition Treaty on the Status and Conditions of the Black Sea Fleet authorized Russia to maintain up to 25,000 troops in Sevastopol and related infrastructure on the Crimean Peninsula, given it access

³⁶ Monaghan, Andrew. "The Ukraine crisis and NATO-Russia relations." *NATO REVIEW*, dated 1 Jul 2014. www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2014/07/01/the-ukraine-crisis-and-nato-russia-relations/index.html

³⁷ Christie, Edward Hunter. "Sanctions after Crimea: Have they worked?" *NATO Review*, dates 13 July 2015. <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2015/07/13/sanctions-after-crimea-have-they-worked/index.html>

³⁸ *Ibid*

³⁹ *Ibid*

to a the Black Sea a vital shipping node.⁴⁰ Russia was not in the spotlight of NATO as much as it is today and they did not have the sanctions, while temporary, placed against them.

While the “new generation” warfare tactics of Russia were successful in the annexation of Crimea and provided an element of surprise no one saw coming, recent history has shown Russian has not used this tactic again. Rather, it has used influence and cyber activities (i.e., election interference) to expand its influence around the world to disrupt the democratic process of its adversaries. These tactics are working and more likely to continue. Though the world was shocked by the success of the Crimea annexation, and NATO strategists fretted these effective tactics would be difficult to counter, the tactics proved to be self-defeating and costly. While successful at the tactical level they provided little strategic benefits when balanced with the outcome costs.

⁴⁰ Annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, last updated 17 May 2020.
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