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Overcoming the Predicament of Western Operations in the Grey Zone: Analysis and Recommendations

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JCSP 47	PCEMI 47
Master of Defence Studies	**Maîtrise en études de la défense**
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OVERCOMING THE PREDICAMENT OF WESTERN OPERATIONS IN THE GREY ZONE: ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

By Lieutenant-Commander J.B. Tremblay

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ABSTRACT

The twenty-first-century strategy and security environment is marked by a constant state of strategic competition where nothing is black nor white anymore. State and non-state actors are increasingly pursuing their agendas using below-war-threshold strategies and tactics in a space called the "grey zone" by Western scholars and military analysts. In face of grey zone competition and conflicts, however, no one nation reacts the same. Some, such as non-Western nations, seem to cope better with the new security environment, while the West would be struggling with the concept, Canada included. At its core, this paper is concerned by the relevance of the Western way of war and how it is fit-for-purpose for global power competition. It contends that the grey zone exists and presents characteristics that are antithetical to the Western strategic culture, creating severe cognitive, doctrinal and structural challenges. Arguably, there is an urgency to act; the longer Western nations' leaders wait, the more they have to lose. Yet, while being serious, the situation is not as desperate as it first appears. Western nations can still correct the strategic imbalance by taking immediate and concrete steps toward acquiring the mindset, frameworks and capabilities fit for effectual grey zone operations. Some Western nations have already begun to work on the matter with relative success. The United Kingdom has recently taken the lead, demonstrating how, with enough political courage, will and commitment, it can be achieved. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said yet about Canada which is not well-positioned at this time to counter grey zone aggressions. Indeed, Canada is severely lacking the necessary mindset, frameworks and capabilities to operate effectively in the grey zone. The ball is for now within the hands of the federal government which have yet to show a real interest in addressing the grey zone threat in a meaningful way.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION AND ASSUMPTIONS

The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgement that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.

— Carl Von Clausewitz

It was an extraordinary life that we were living – an extraordinary way to be at war, if you could call it war.

— George Orwell

INTRODUCTION

In the remote areas of the South China Sea since 2012, China is literally creating new islands, pumping millions of tons of sands and rocks to transform tiny atolls into full-fledged islands outfitted with civilian ports, airports and military facilities.[1] This strange manoeuvre is China's preferred strategy to assert its historical claim on the South China Sea, which goes centuries back. Instead of seizing and occupying the atolls by military means alone, China has decided to exploit the United Nations on the Law of the Sea in nefarious ways to achieve its aims. In face of this unconventional challenge, China's competitors in the region are struggling to respond to this strange aggression, but an aggression nonetheless. Emboldened by the results of this strategy, China has started in 2021 to employ the same playbook in the Himalayas, building new villages in disputed borderlands with India, Bhutan and Nepal with the aim to slowly redrawing frontiers without having to use force.[2]

In early 2014, Ukraine was shaken by a severe political crisis, which eventually led to civil unrest across the nation, especially in the Crimean Peninsula.[3] Sensing an opportunity to bring Crimea back under Russian control, a long-dated ambition of Russia since having lost the

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[1] Rupert Wingfield-Hayes, "China's Island Factory," *BBC Online*, 9 September 2014, www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/2014/newsspec_8701/index.html

[2] Brahma Chellaney, "China's bulletless aggression in the Himalayas", *The Globe and Mail*, 20 March 2021, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-chinas-bulletless-aggression-in-the-himalayas/?

[3] Alice Popovici, *Why Russia Wants Crimea*, History, 30 August 2018, https://www.history.com/news/crimea-russia-ukraine-annexation

peninsula at the outcome of the Crimean War in 1856[4], Moscow used cunning methods and

stratagems[5] to create the conditions for the secession of Crimea. On March 16, 2014, the Crimean

population, who are mostly of Russians-speaking descent, voted at 97 percent in favour of

joining the Russian Federation.[6] Here again, instead of using force to annex Crimea, Russia used

unconventional methods to turn a foreign political crisis into a domestic political gain without

one single shot being fired.[7]

What these stories have in common is that they both illustrate how, in the twenty-first-

century security environment, states – and non-state actors for that matter – are increasingly

willing and capable to pursue their agendas using below-war-threshold strategies and tactics in

the space between war and peace, called "the grey zone" by scholars and military analysts.[8] Over

the past fifteen years or so, similar grey zone activities have been attributed to Venezuela, Iran,

North Korea, the Hezbollah, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and even the United States

of America (US).[9] Grey zone activities rely on the "weaponization" of unconventional tools, such

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[4] Gwendolyn Sasse, *Revisiting the 2014 Annexation of Crimea*, Carnegie Europe, 15 March 2017, https://carnegieeurope.eu/2017/03/15/revisiting-2014-annexation-of-crimea-pub-68423

[5] Including political and information manipulation campaigns, insertion of special forces into Ukraine territory, and false humanitarian pretences.

[6] Alice Popovici, *Why Russia Wants Crimea*.

[7] BBC News, *Analysis: Why Russia's Crimea Move Fails Legal Test*, 7 March 2014, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26481423

[8] Philip Kapusta, "The Gray Zone", *Special Warfare* (October to December 2015), 20; Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict* (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2015), 4; Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science is in the Foresight", *Military Review*, vol. 96, no. 1 (January 2016), 24; Belinda Bragg, *Gray Zone Conflicts, Challenges, and Opportunities: Integration Report* (Arlington, VA: National Security Innovation, 2017), 3; Sebastian Barote and Bogdan Eugen Curcă, *Insidious Operation and its Place into The Spectrum of Conflicts*, vol. 1. (Bucharest: "Carol I", National Defence University, 2018), 46; J. Lyle Morris *et al.*, *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone: Response Options for Coercive Aggression Below the Threshold of Major War* (RAND Corporation, 2020), 1-2. Regarding Gerasimov's article, it was originally published in the Russian military journal *Military-Industrial Kurier* in February 2013 and then translated by Robert Coalson for publication in *Military Review*.

[9] Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21ˢᵗ century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* (Virginia: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007), 7-8; Samuel Charap, "The Ghost of Hybrid War", *Survival*, vol. 57, no. 6 (2015), 53; Frank G. Hoffman, "The Contemporary Spectrum of Conflict. Protracted, Gray Zone, Ambiguous, and Hybrid Modes of War", *2016 Index of U.S. Military Strength*, The Heritage Foundation (2016), 29; Ahmed Salah Hashim, *State and Non-State Hybrid Warfare*, Oxford Research Group, Last update on 30 March 2017, https://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/blog/state-and-non-state-hybrid-warfare; Chiyuki Aoi, Madoka Futamura and Alessio Patalano, "Introduction to hybrid warfare in Asia: its meaning and shape", *The Pacific Review*, vol. 31,

as diplomacy, economy, information and legal, creating ambiguity concerning intentions and attribution.[10] This way, grey zone aggressors – like Russia in Ukraine and China in the South China Sea and the Himalayas – can gain a strategic advantage by influencing events in their favour, changing the balance of power, while still avoiding a meaningful response from the targeted nation(s) or the international community.

In face of grey zone competition and conflicts, however, no one nation reacts the same. Some, such as non-Western nations, seem to adapt better while the West is generally reported as struggling with the new security environment, Canada included.[11] Some Western scholars are even reluctant to recognize the existence of the grey zone or its values in strategic studies.[12] To operate in the grey zone, one must have the right mindset, the proper strategic and operational frameworks, and befitting capabilities, particularly with regards to detection, attribution and response. The latter must consider proportionality and appropriateness to balance the risk of escalation and the failure to deter future insidious activities.

At its core, this paper is concerned by the relevance of the Western way of war and how it is fit-for-purpose for global power competition.[13] It contends that the grey zone exists and presents characteristics that are antithetical to the Western strategic culture, creating severe cognitive, doctrinal and structural challenges for the West. The issue is as such that Western

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no. 6 (2018), 704; NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, *Hybrid Threats: A Strategic Communications Perspective* (Riga, 2019), 106-107.

[10] The different categories of war (conventional, unconventional and hybrid) and their tactics will be defined and discussed at Chapter 2.

[11] Canadian Armed Forces, *The PAN-Domain Force Employment Concept: Prevailing in an Uncertain World* (2020)*, 3; Meghan Fitzpatrick, *Cutting Through the Fog: Canadian Armed Forces Understanding of and Engagement with the "Gray Zone"* (Defense Research and Development Canada, 2020), 7-8; Adam Petrin, *Operationalizing the Gray Zone: A Challenge for Canada* (Joint Command and Staff Program Paper, Canadian Forces College, 2020), 3.

[12] Meghan Fitzpatrick, *Cutting Through the Fog…*, 7-8; Adam Elkus, *50 shades of gray: why the gray wars concept lacks strategic sense*, War on the Rocks, 15 December 2015, https://warontherocks.com/2015/12/50-shades-of-gray-why-the-gray-wars-concept-lacks-strategic-sense/

[13] As a contented concept, the Western way of war will be defined at Chapter 2.

nations, and most notably Canada, are now facing a choice that contradicts centuries of Western martial believes and political culture: either to stay entrenched in the anachronistic Western way of war and continue losing power and influence to the benefits of more agile opponents[14], or to face reality, acquire the right mindset, frameworks and capabilities and rectify the strategic imbalance. Indeed, under the twenty-first-security environment paradigm, non-Western actors (either state or non-state) benefit from a strategic culture that is much more conducive to grey zone operations, ceding them a notable advantage over Western actors. Unless Western nations take immediate and concrete actions to adapt to the new security environment, such as recognizing the threat, developing a fit-for-purpose security apparatus, developing a long-term Grand Strategy, acquiring the right capabilities and developing an agile command and control framework at the highest echelon of the government, current grey zone actors will continue to operate unimpededly in that space between war and peace, and at the expense of Western nations' influence and power. The situation is not as desperate as it first appears, however. Some Western nations have begun to work on acquiring those mindsets, frameworks and capabilities. Within the Five-Eyes network[15], the United Kingdom (UK) has taken the lead in the matter, demonstrating how, with enough political courage, will and commitment, it can be achieved. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said yet about other Western nations, especially Canada, which seems not to be well-positioned at this time to counter grey zone aggressions, severely lacking the necessary mindset, frameworks and capabilities for grey zone operations.

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[14] Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in a Modern World*, 2nd Edition (Penguin Random House, 2019), 2-5. While the West has been regularly engaged in several armed conflicts since the Second World War, it has yet failed to *win* any of them. As Smith contends, soldiers, sailors, airmen and airwomen were deployed, battles were fought and won (mostly), but very few wars were actually *won* by the West. In other words, the West appears to be good at winning *battles*, but not *wars*.

[15] Department of National Defence, *Strong. Secured. Engaged.* (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 2017), 64. The Five-Eyes is a military network regrouping the nations of Australia, Canada, New Zealand the UK and the US, where partners share intelligence and information to enhance their respective ability to understand existing or emerging conflicts and to allow cost-saving and burden-sharing among partner nations.

This dissertation is structured as follows. The current chapter aims at introducing the subject and listing the main assumptions underlying the argumentation presented in this paper. The second chapter defines the key concepts and terms used throughout this analysis so they can be clearly understood in the manner they are used. These concepts are instruments of national power, war and warfare, strategic culture, the western way of war and categorization of war.

The third chapter aims at providing a comprehensive synthesis of the nature of the grey zone, its key definitions and its actors. It will first discuss its fundamental characteristics, that is the conceptual space between war and peace, strategic choice, gradualism, unconventional tools and plausible deniability, before offering definitions for grey zone, grey zone strategies and grey zone activities.

As alluded to previously, no two nations react the same way in face of new security challenges and some seem to adapt better than others, especially non-Western nations. The fourth chapter aims at demonstrating how and why the Russian and Chinese strategic cultures are intrinsically more conducive to grey zone operations than the Western strategic culture. It will also identify what lessons can be learned from the Russian and Chinese experience in the grey zone, if any.

The subsequent chapter, chapter five, explains how the grey zone is antithetical to Western strategic culture. There, it will be argued that four paradoxes impede the ability of Western governments to adapt to the new security paradigm. These paradoxes are inadequate taxonomy, use of force, the role of civilians and new battlespaces, and laws and customs of war. The chapter will conclude that Western nations are undeniably culturally, doctrinally and structurally disadvantaged in face of grey zone competition and conflicts.

Chapter 6 intends to determine how this strategic imbalance can be corrected by answering four questions: What are the risks and limitations for Western nations to operate in the

grey zone? What needs to change? What would be the obstacles to this change? And Is such change even possible? There, the case of the UK suggests that yes, change is possible. The chapter will conclude with a brief discussion about how well Canada is positioned to embrace a similar change.

Lastly, the seventh and final chapter concludes that it is not too late for Western nations to find a suitable Western solution to the predicament represented by the grey zone, as the UK demonstrated recently. For that, Western nations must embrace change and acquire the right mindset, frameworks and capabilities, despite the risks and limitations associated with grey zone operations and the inherent obstacles to change. The ball is in the hands of politicians who must take the first courageous step to "call a spade a spade". Yet, there is a certain urgency to act; the longer Western nations leaders wait, the more they will have to lose.

ASSUMPTIONS

A World Order in Transformation

In filigree of grey zone aggressions is the transformation of the Western international world order, which has dominated international affairs over the past seventy years, slowly giving way "to a new configuration of global power, new coalition of states and new governance institutions".[16] Today, the Western-led era of liberal internationalism marked by economic openness, security cooperation, collective efforts to maintain peace, and the primacy of democratic values, the rule of law and value international institutions is being more and more beleaguered.[17] While it may be too early to determine how the future world order will look like, this transformation is not without creating a certain disorder that some emerging powers, such as

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[16] G. John Ikenberry, "The End of Liberal International Order?", *International Affairs* (London) vol. 94, no. 1 (2018), 1; Hal Brands and Charles Edel, "A Grand Strategy of Democratic Solidarity", *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2021), 29-30.
[17] *Ibid*., 22.

China and Russia, are exploiting to grow their power and their influence. Is the world entering an "age of durable disorder", as suggested by McFate[18], or is it just a temporary crisis where the West will find new ways to maintain its hegemony on world affairs? It is too early to tell with certainty. What is undeniable, however, is that the current transformation – or transition – creates an opportunity for emerging powers to restructure the international order more to their liking, and that maintaining *status quo* does not appear to be a valid option.[19]

Grey Zone Conflicts: Today's Norm for Conflicts

Also central to the argumentation of this paper are the assumptions that the term grey zone – although not perfect – is useful to strategic studies and, as others have argued before, that operations in the grey zone are now the norm for conflicts in the twenty-first century.[20] Furthermore, as international security scholars have pointed out before, most conflicts over the past century do not present clear boundaries between war and peace.[21] For example, Kapusta's historical review of the past conflicts involving the US indicates that the country would have had participated militarily in 62 conflicts worldwide from 1915 to 2015 to which only five would be fitting the Western traditional model of war, being the First World War, the Second World War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the First Gulf War.[22] While not every scholar agrees to the exact number (the Vietnam War could be considered as an *unconventional* war), these statistics still demonstrate that true conventional wars by Western standards are, in reality, more

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[18] Sean McFate, *The New Rules of War: Victory in the Age of Durable Disorder* (New York, NY: William Morrow, 2019), 8-10.

[19] Balkan Devlen, *Facing the Authoritarian Challenge: The Sino-Russian Alignment and What to Do About It* (Ottawa: MLI, 2021), 11.

[20] Rob De Wijk, "Hybrid Conflict and the Changing Nature of Actors", in Julian Lindley-French and Yves Boyer (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 14; Sean McFate, *The New Rules of War…*, 59-82.

[21] Meghan Fitzpatrick, *Cutting Through the Fog…*, 7; Philip Kapusta, "The Gray Zone", 20-21; Timothy Thomas, "The Evolving Nature of Russia's Way of War", *Military Review* (July-August 2017), 36.

[22] Philip Kapusta, "The Gray Zone", 20-21.

the exception than the norm even in the Western world. To argue further, the data compiled by the Department of Peace and Conflict Research of the Uppsala University shows clearly that the number of unconventional wars has risen significantly since the Second World War, whereas conventional interstate conflicts have sharply diminished.[23] To use the words of McFate: "Nothing is more unconventional today than conventional war".[24] Obviously, it is not to say that other forms of conflict are impossible, such as major combat (conventional or not). If there is one strategic lesson learned from the First World War is that no one should "never say never". Nonetheless, the author believes that these conflicts are less likely to happen considering the characteristics of the twenty-first-century security environment, including the advantages provided by the grey zone.[25]

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[23] Uppsala Universitet, *The Uppsala Conflict Data Program*, No Date, https://ucdp.uu.se/
[24] Sean McFate, *The New Rules of War*…, 43.
[25] Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone*…, 2; Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science is in the Foresight", 24.

CHAPTER 2 – DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

The beginning of wisdom is the definition of terms.

— Socrates

In the domain of security and defence studies, fundamental concepts often bear many definitions, which often cause great confusion and contention.[26] Definitions are generally subjective to different meanings based on cultural background, linguistics and historical contexts. What war means to one culture, for instance, does not necessarily mean the same in other cultures.[27] Yet, precise definitions are essential to strategic thinking; they provide the foundation on which theories can be built.[28] Consequently, the following terms and concepts are employed throughout this study and must be understood in the manner that they are used.

INSTRUMENTS OF NATIONAL POWER

A common feature of international relations theories is that anarchy and uncertainty are dominant attributes of international relations, forcing states to take different strategies to ensure their survival, from conflict to competition, to cooperation, to avoidance.[29] To achieve its political aims in the international arena, states use their instruments of national power. Traditionally, those are listed as Diplomatic, Informational, Military and Economic or DIME.[30] Lately, NATO added Financial, Intelligence and Legal to the list.[31] Considering the diverse

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[26] Meghan Fitzpatrick, *Cutting Through the Fog…*, 6.

[27] Emile Simpson, "Clausewitz's Theory of War and Victory in Contemporary Conflict", *Parameters*, vol. 47, no. 4 (2018), 12. Chapter 4 will provide a tangible demonstration of that affirmation.

[28] Meghan Fitzpatrick, *Cutting Through the Fog…*, 6.

[29] Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics*, New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (2008), 1-18; Steve Smith, "Introduction: Diversity and Disciplinary in International Relations Theory", in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (eds), *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, 4th Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 3-7.

[30] Canadian Armed Forces, *Canadian Forces Joint Publication 01: Canadian Military Doctrine* (Ottawa, 2011), 2-1 and 2-2.

[31] NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, *Hybrid Threats: A Strategic Communications Perspective*, 10.

nature of grey zone aggressions, this paper favours NATO's definition and related acronym

(DIMEFIL).

WAR AND WARFARE

Western literature often uses the terms "war" and "warfare" synonymously, if not

confusingly, depending on if the terms are considered being a condition, a warfare technique, an

absence of peace, or a state of continuous conflict.[32] Similar to other scholars in security

studies[33], the author abides by the political philosophy of war where the term "war" is theorized

as the "continuity of policy by other means", or like Clausewitz has put it, a duel between two or

more opponents who seek to force a suitable political outcome on the other(s), a contest for

power.[34] In addition, to use the words of Cohen, "war is not just an act of policy but a true

political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried with other means".[35] In this

view, the term war refers to its *objective nature*.[36] The term "warfare", on the other hand, refers

to the *character of war*, which is the method used to wage a war. While the political objective

nature of war remains constant through time, the methods of war are in constant evolution,

adapting their ways following political, social, economic and technological changes.[37]

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[32] Johan M.G. Van der Dennen, "On War: Concepts, Definitions, Research Data – A Short Literature Review and Bibliography", in *UNESCO Yearbook on Peace and Conflict Studies 1980* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press (1981), 1.

[33] To name a few: Colin S. Gray, "The twenty-first-century Security Environment and the Future of War", *Parameters*, vol. 38, no. 4 (2008); Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought,* 3rd and expanded edition (London: Routledge, 2005); D.J. Lonsdale, *The Nature of War in the Information Age: Clausewitzian Future* (London, New York: Frank Cass, 2004); and Hew Strachan and Sybille Scheipers (eds), *The Changing Character of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[34] Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War* (Penguin Classics, 1982), 101; Lawrence Freedman, "Defining War", in Julian Lindley-French and Yves Boyer (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6; Anatol Rapoport, "Introduction" in Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (London: Penguin, 1968), 13.

[35] Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Free Press, 2002), 33.

[36] One supporting argument to this paper is that war is conceived differently from one culture to another. This said, under the political philosophy of war, war's objective nature is believed to be universal, only its character (how war is conducted) will be influenced by local cultural preferences.

[37] Anatol Rapoport, "Introduction", 17. The author acknowledges that there are different theories about the nature of war in the twenty-first century, such as the one presented by Mary Kaldor (2012), Herfried Münkler (2003) and Martin van Creveld (2002), but a fulsome discussion on the matter will exceed the scope of this study.

STRATEGIC CULTURE

At the core of this analysis is the belief that strategic culture plays a significant role in shaping a nation's understanding of war and warfare, even if there is no formal agreement on the subject in scholarly circles.[38] Johnson, Kartchner and Larsen's view on strategic culture highlights the correlation between culture and strategic choices:

> [C]ulture conditions their members to think certain ways, while at the same time providing pre-set responses to given situations. Thus, culture bounds [people's] perceptions and the range of options [they] have for responding to events.[39]

From this perspective, culture provides a sound explanation for how populations relate differently to the use – or the avoidance of – violence. For instance, war for the Cossacks was the central cultural theme to their way of life. It was used not only to survive but also to regulate their social life as well as their economy.[40] For the Aztecs, war had a religious function, playing a fundamental role in sacred ceremonies. For Northern Canadian aboriginals, it is considered a massive waste of resources, an absurdity in itself.[41] The literature identifies numerous material and ideological sources of strategic culture. They are geography, climate and resources, history and experience, political structures, the nature of defence and military organizations, myths and symbols, classical texts, transnational norms, traditions, values, customs, patterns of behaviours, technology and generational changes.[42]

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[38] Antulio J. Echevarria II, "American Strategic Culture: Problems and Prospects", in Hew Strachan and Sybille Scheipers (eds), *The Changing Character of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 431-432.

[39] Quoted in Jeffrey Lantis and Darryl Howlett, "Strategic Culture", in John Baylis *et al.* (eds), *Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, 6th Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 90.

[40] John Keegan, *Histoire de la guerre* (Paris: Dagorno, 1993), 26.

[41] Anatol Rapoport, "Introduction", 17.

[42] Jeffrey Lantis and Darryl Howlett, "Strategic Culture", 95; Ken Booth, "The concept of strategic culture affirmed", in Carl G. Jacobsen (ed.), *Strategic Power: USA/USSR* (New York: St Martin's, 1990); Antulio J. Echevarria II, "American Strategic Culture: Problems and Prospects", 432.

THE WESTERN WAY OF WAR

First coined by Victor Hanson in 1989, the expression "the Western way of war" has been used time and time over since, and not without contention.[43] Historians are particularly quick to point out that there is not enough pre-nineteenth century historical documentation available to determine with certitude that the idea of an aggregated Western way of war exists.[44] Yet, even historians agree that when it comes to Western politics, war and warfare, there are enough commonalities between Western nations today to suggest that a certain "Western way of war" does exist.[45] Indeed, the strategic culture in the West is today one of relative homogeneity, especially when it comes to warfare.[46] As such, this paper argues that not only a common Western way of war does exist, but it is also central to explain why the West struggles so much with the concept of the grey zone.[47] The origins of Western strategic culture can be found in two main sources. Firstly, it finds its roots in unique social developments, historical events, sentiments of cultural superiority and philosophical movements particular to the Western world, from the ancient Greek philosophies to the Christian's morality and providentialism, to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' Great European Wars, to the philosophies and emancipation

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[43] Victor Davis Hanson, *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 31; Jeremy Black, "The Western Way of War", in John Buckley and George Kassimeris (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Modern Warfare* (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 29-36; See as well Peter Roberts, *The Western Way of War Podcast Series,* RUSI, No Date, https://www.rusi.org/projects/western-way-war-podcast-series

[44] Jeremy Black, "The Western Way of War", 32-33.

[45] Jeremy Black, "The Western Way of War", 35; Beatrice Heuser, *Just War Theory and Not Just War*, The Western Way of War, Episode 41, RUSI, 11 March 2021, https://rusi.org/multimedia/just-war-theory-and-not-just-war

[46] Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War…*, 1-2; Jeremy Black, "The Western Way of War", 29-30; David Petreus, *It Was The Surge In Ideas That Mattered* Most, The Western Way of War, Episode 33, RUSI, 14 January 2021, https://www.rusi.org/multimedia/general-retd-david-petraeus. One common explanation for this homogeneity is the influence of coalition warfare since the First World War, which has helped to standardize warfare methods across participating nations; a standardization highly influenced today by US and NATO doctrines.

[47] To be clear, the existence of a common Western way of war does not preclude the existence as well of a different "national" way of war for individual Western nations. When it comes to war, Americans, Canadians, British, French, Germans, and so forth, all have their unique warfare preferences within a common Western way of war. See Beatrice Heuser, *Just War Theory and Not Just War.*

movements of the Age of Enlightenment, to the technological developments of two Industrial

Ages, to the dreads of the First and Second World Wars, and to the rise of the liberal

international order.[48] All of these movements, events and developments have had a deep

influence on shaping Western classical strategy thought as well as warfare preferences,

differentiating what is just and right from what is unjust and wrong.[49] Secondly, the West has

been heavily influenced by several classical texts on war and warfare, including Sun Tzu's *The*

Art of War, Thucydides' *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Machiavelli's *The Prince* and

The Art of War, Lipsius' *Politicorum Libri Six*, Jomini's *The Art of War*, Carl von Clausewitz's

On War, and Mao Tse-tung's *Selected Military Writings.*[50] From all of those war theorists,

Clausewitz has been undeniably one of the most influential in shaping Western martial thought

and cognition.[51] As suggested by Echevarria II, one explanation for this may lie in the resilient

nature of Clausewitz's theories, which have a way to remain relevant through time.[52] Another

explanation could be a question of cultural ethnocentrism. Indeed, it would be natural for the

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[48] John Keegan, *Histoire de la guerre*, 463-365. Beatrice Heuser, *Just War Theory and Not Just War*.

[49] Bruno Tremblay, *Assessing the Consequences of Globalisation and Liberalisation on the Western Understanding of War and Warfare*, Master in International Security Studies (University of Leicester, 2020), 5.

[50] Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War…*, 1-5; Gunther E. Rothenberg, "Maurice of Nassau, Gustavus Adolphus, Raimondo Montecuccoli, and the 'military revolution' of the 17th Century", in Peter Paret *et al.* (eds), *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1986), 34-35; Félix Gilbert, "Machiavelli: The Renaissance of the Art of War", in Peter Paret *et al.* (eds), *Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1986), 21.

[51] Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War…*, 15; Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force…*, 55; Paul D. Williams, "War", in Paul D. Williams (ed), *Security Studies: An Introduction,* 2nd Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 190.

[52] Antulio J. Echevarria II, "Strategic Thought: The Relevance of Clausewitz", in John Buckley and George Kassimeris (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Modern Warfare* (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2010), 37-38; Gunther E. Rothenberg, "Maurice of Nassau, Gustavus Adolphus, Raimondo Montecuccoli, and the 'military revolution' of the 17th Century"…, 34-35; Félix Gilbert, "Machiavelli: The Renaissance of the Art of War"…, 21. Of note, some of Clausewitz's most cited ideas on war, such as war serving policy with limited political goals, were also asserted by both Machiavelli and Lipsius almost three hundred years before the publication of Clausewitz's posthumous book, *On War*. Yet, it is Clausewitz's theories that have been most cited since.

West to be more attracted by Western war theorists than the non-Western ones.[53] For brevity's sake, the Western way of war can be summarized in the following tenets.

The Continuation of Policy by Other Means

The Western tradition subscribes to the Clausewitzian political philosophy of war, where war is "the mere continuation of policy by other means". According to this view, war is a rational instrument of national policy used to create *political utility*. Thus, the words "rational", "instrument" and "national" each plays a vital role in this conceptualization of war.[54] Primo, states decide to wage war on a *rational* basis, meaning that "it ought to be based on estimated costs and gains", and not just based on hostile feelings.[55] As Chappell notes, there can only be political utility if political and military objectives are clearly defined, even if there can be confusion sometimes between the two.[56] Secundo, war is an *instrument* to achieve a specific political goal; it is not waged for its own sake, but to support the desired end state. Tertio, war is a *national* enterprise, it is waged to advance common interests; if need be, it can mobilize the whole support of the nation (or community in the case of non-state actors).

In the Clausewitzian tradition, states wage either unlimited or limited wars. Wars with unlimited aims are fought to overthrow the enemy's military or force the adversary to surrender unconditionally, whatever comes first.[57] In terms of resources, unlimited wars can be extremely taxing. They, therefore, require the whole nation's support to be won. On the other hand, limited

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[53] Hong Liu, *The Chinese Strategic Mind* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2015), 70. According to Liu, the reason why Clausewitz and Jomini have been more studied in the West compared to Sun Tzu's or Mao's principles is because these principles were written based on Chinese cognition and logic which makes them more difficult to interpret for non-Chinese.

[54] Anatol Rapoport, "Introduction", 13.

[55] *Ibid*.

[56] John S. Chappell, *The Future Use of Military Force: A Revision of the Weinberger Doctrine* (US Army War College, Pennsylvania, 1996), 14. See also Emile Simpson, "Clausewitz's Theory of War and Victory in Contemporary Conflict", 11-12.

[57] Thomas G. Mahnken, "Strategic Theory", in John Baylis *et al*. (eds), *Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, 6th Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 64.

wars aim at obtaining political leverage from battlefield successes.[58] Thus, wars with a limited

aim do not seek the destruction of the opponent's military forces. Accordingly, the level of

resources committed to the war and the level of effort ought to be proportional to the end in view.

As well, political and military objectives must be constantly revisited to avoid going too far and

transform a limited war into an unlimited one. In terms of ending, limited wars generally end

through formal or tacit negotiations between the belligerents, potentially leading to a new power

relation.[59] This distinction between unlimited and limited wars is important to the Clausewitzian

theory of war for three reasons. First, determining the object of the war will inform how to

conceive war plans and conduct the war.[60] Second, it defines how the war should end, either

when the limited aim is achieved or when the enemy's military forces have been rendered

permanently "combat ineffective".[61] Finally, it provides an interpretive structure to define what

"victory" and "defeat" look like.[62]

The importance of who the actors in war are is also a matter of policy. Arguably, if the act

of war is a policy mechanism, therefore war can only be a matter for states and their military.[63]

This tenet, central to Clausewitz's theory, is a direct reference to the Westphalian understanding

of international relations where states are sovereign on their territory and can govern as they see

fit, as well as to the classical realism belief that the state is the principal actor in world politics.[64]

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[58] *Ibid*.

[59] Hans-Georg Ehrhart, "Postmodern warfare and the blurred boundaries between war and peace", *Defense & Security Analysis*, vol. 33, no. 3 (2017), 264.

[60] Julian Stafford Corbett, *Principles of Maritime Strategy* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 43.

[61] In military speak, the term "combat ineffective" means that a military force (or system) is "so damaged that it cannot function as intended nor be restored to a useable condition without being entirely rebuild". Canadian Army, *Staff Duties for Land Operations* (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 2008), 6C-8 (404).

[62] Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground Up,* 2nd Edition (London: Hurst & Company, 2018), 66-69.

[63] Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, 119-120.

[64] Alex J. Bellamy, "The Responsibility to Protect", in Paul D. Williams (ed), *Security Studies: An Introduction,* 2nd Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 487; Colin Elman and Michael A. Jensen, "Realisms", in Paul D. Williams (ed), *Security Studies: An Introduction,* 2nd Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 17-18.

The Centrality of the Use of Force

From a Western perspective, the word "means" in the sentence "war is a mere continuation of policy by other means" strictly refers to the use of force, making war "illiberally violent".[65] The centrality of the use of force in the Western way of war has three consequences on the martial culture in the West. First, the term "violence" refers singularly to *physical violence*. From a Western point of view, the use of non-physical forms of harmful activities, such as social disruption and psychological violence, have limited values in war; they are only employed in support to the use of blunt force. Second, the military is the sole instrument of national power associated with the use of force. Consequently, it is considered separate from the other national instruments of power both in terms of utility and command and control.[66] Finally, as observed by Hanson, the trademark of Western armies regarding the use of force is generally centred on the overwhelming use of force and firepower, which includes not only the ability to deliver fatal blows but also the strong *desire* to do so.[67] This view has also been shared by other commentators, such as the UK Air Marshall Philip Osborn, who claims that at the core of the Western way of war is the strategy of a strong offensive overwhelming the enemy's defences.[68] Such desire for lethality often leads to a never-ending quest for better firepower, more destructive weapons. As Liang and Wang adroitly quipped, as far as the Western way of war is concerned, kinetic "weapons have solemnly become the chief representative of war".[69]

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[65] Colin S. Gray, *Hard Power and Soft Power: The Utility of Military Force as an Instrument of Policy in the twenty-first century* (Strategic Studies Institute, 2011), vii.

[66] Bruno Tremblay, *Assessing the Consequences of Globalisation and Liberalisation on the Western Understanding of War and Warfare*, 8.

[67] Victor Davis Hanson, *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece*, 28.

[68] Philip Osborn, *Air Marshal Philip Osborne*, The Western Way of War, Episode 6, RUSI, 9 July 2020, https://rusi.org/multimedia/western-way-war-air-marshal-philip-osborn

[69] Qiao Liang and Xiangsui Wang, *Unrestricted Warfare* (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House, 1999), 15.

While in the West war equals violence, violence does not lead automatically to war, however. For war to happen, there must be *intensity* and *duration* in the use of force.[70] Duration means an "unbroken continuity of hostilities", presuming the presence of both *hostile intent* and *coordinated violence* under one specific authority.[71] In other words, what differentiates "wars" from "armed conflicts" is the presence of "hostile intent" and "intended escalation"; thus, the presence of hostile feelings alone is not sufficient to lead to war.[72]

The Predominance of Manoeuvre Warfare

Western armed forces put a premium on the "manoeuvrist approach", a method which seeks "to defeat the enemy by shattering his moral and physical cohesion—his ability to fight as an effective, coordinated whole—rather than by destroying him physically through incremental attrition".[73] In such method, the military commander focuses on concentrating the strengths of his forces against the opponent's identified vulnerabilities and applies all conceivable tactics to break the enemy's will to fight, understanding and cohesion.[74] During a campaign or a battle, the commander tries to maintain operational initiative on the battlefield, balancing tempo, momentum and agility to achieve a decisive victory.[75] The manoeuvrist approach requires an extremely linear planning process, identifying and linking actions to desired effects to achieve the mission articulated by the political level, and concentrating on attacking the enemy's centre of

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[70] Bruno Tremblay, *Assessing the Consequences of Globalisation and Liberalisation on the Western Understanding of War and Warfare*, 9.

[71] Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, 112.

[72] Antulio J. Echevarria II, "Strategic Thought: The Relevance of Clausewitz", 39-40.

[73] Canadian Army, *Land Operations* (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 2008), 5-64.

[74] Amos Fox, *Fighting for the Soul of Western Militaries*, The Western Way of War, Episode 40, RUSI, 4 March 2011, https://rusi.org/multimedia/fighting-soul-western-militaries; Canadian Army, *Land Operations*, 5-65.

[75] Ernest Y. Wong, "Leveraging Science in the Manoeuvrist Approach to Counterinsurgency Operations", *The Land Warfare Paper*, no. 80 (Arlington: Virginia, The Institute of Land Warfare Association of the United States Army, 2010), 1.

gravity while protecting its own.[76] Linearity also means that Time and Space are two separate concepts. This type of warfare is most effective between "symmetrical" armies in size and capacities, and adversaries which present the same strength and will to fight, which, according to Smith, has been more or less the norm since the Napoleonic wars.[77] It would be, however, less useful in an asymmetrical context.[78]

Legality and Morality

Another characteristic of the Western way of war is the profound aversion for casualties, which is in dichotomy with the West's obsession for firepower and overwhelming use of force. Still, whether it is by virtue or to justify its horrors, Westerners always have sought to codify war through laws and customs of war; a tradition that goes back as far as the Middle Ages.[79] As such, the legal and moral dimension of war is a key tenet of the Western way of war. Today's international laws and customs of war are heavily influenced by the Western concept of the Just War Tradition (JWT) developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and can be found in three major bodies of law: the United Nations Charter (1945), the Geneva Conventions (1949), and the Hague Conventions (1899, 1907).[80] For instance, article 2(3)-(4) of the UN Charter establishes the legal principle of the legal use of force to support policy:

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[76] Ernest Y. Wong, "Leveraging Science in the Manoeuvrist Approach to Counterinsurgency Operations", v; NATO Allied Command Operations, *Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive COPD Interim V2.0* (Belgium: SHAPE, 2013), 1-6.

[77] Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force…*, 34.

[78] US military officer and war theorist Amos Fox even suggests that manoeuvre warfare is very difficult to apply in reality, even in conventional conflicts, because it requires pre-conditions that are rarely met. Yet, he argues, manoeuvre warfare still inexorably takes the place of predominance in Western armies' military thought. See Amos Fox, *Fighting for the Soul of Western Militaries*.

[79] Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, 102; Beatrice Heuser, "Rethinking War", in David Brown, *War Amongst the People: Critical Assessments* (Havant: Howgate Publishing, 2019), 40; Paul Schulte, "Morality and War", in Julian Lindley-French and Yves Boyer (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3; Félix Gilbert, "Machiavelli: The Renaissance of the Art of War", 13. According to Félix Gilbert, the first proof of a Western custom of war can be found in the Middle Ages where knights preferred to fight under fixed rules and a settled code of conduct.

[80] Justin Morris, "Law, Politics, and the Use of Force", in John Baylis *et al.* (eds), *Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, 6th Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 117-12; Paul

3. All Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered.
4. All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.[81]

Two legal principles regulate the use of force between states: *Jus ad Bellum*, or when it is justified to declare war, and *Jus in Bello*, or who can be killed in war. Table 2.1 summarizes both principles in relation to the JWT.

Table 2.1 – Ethical, moral and legal imperatives of laws and customs of war.

Jus ad Bellum: The Right to Wage War	
1. Just Cause	The initiating side must have a proper reason for going to war, such as protecting the innocent, restoring rights or re-establishing just order. Revenge, punishment or upholding a ruler's prestige are unacceptable.
2. Right Intention	The aim must be to create a better, more just and more lasting subsequent peace than there would have been without going to war.
3. Proportionality of Effects (or Macro-Proportionality)	To warrant engaging in war those deciding must have a reasonable expectation that the outcome will entail enough good (beyond what might be achieved in any other way) to outweigh War's inevitable pain and destruction.
4. Right Authority	The decision to go to war must be made by those with legitimate authority.
5. A Reasonable Prospect of Success	The initiators must see a reasonable chance of succeeding in their just aim. Arms must not be taken up nor lives sacrificed if, on honest appraisal, the likely result is simply death and suffering without making things materially better than they would otherwise have been.
6. Last Resort	Arms must not be taken up without trying (unless there are good grounds for ruling them out as likely to be ineffective) every other way of adequately securing a just aim.
Jus in Bello: Limits of Acceptable Wartime Behaviour	
7. Discrimination	War must not involve deliberate attacks on the innocent, that is those "not involved in harming or helping to harm".
8. Micro-Proportionality	Action must not be taken in which the incidental harm done is an unreasonably heavy price to incur for likely military benefit. Harm

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Schulte, "Morality and War", 3-11; Christine Chinkin and Mary Kaldor, *International Law and New Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 3.

[81] United Nations, *UN Charter*, No Date, https://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/

	needs to be weighed particularly over the lives and well-being of innocent people. The lives of friendly military personnel need to be brought into account, and sometimes even those of adversaries. The principle of avoiding unnecessary force always applies.

Source: Paul Schulte, "Morality and War", 3-11.

As far as the legal argument goes, wars in the West are considered legal acts governed by international law which imparts fundamental rights and responsibilities to belligerents. For the legality in war to have full weight, however, wars must ideally be "declared". Although declaring wars has fallen into disuse since the Second World War, the Western tradition still sees value in it. Dunlap explains:

> The right of states to issue declarations of war is important because the existence or non-existence of a "state of war" determines whether or not a law of war regime operates. In the absence of a state of war, international human rights law (much like civilian criminal law) applies to the conduct of state and non-state actors. The laws of war and international human rights law are separate legal architectures, and the latter could hamper a nation's ability to conduct operations against an insurgency or terrorist organisation since it carries greater restrictions on, for example, the use of lethal force.[82]

Another benefit of declaring war is defining polarity. Polarity helps to designate a clear enemy, a specific "beginning" to the conflict and set the criteria for conflict termination.[83] With greater polarity also comes a "common interpretive structure" which allows soldiers to identify with more clarity who their enemy is and, for everyone concerned, to better understand the reason for war and its objectives.

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[82] Charles J. Dunlap, "Why Declarations of War Matter", *Harvard Law School National Security Journal*, 30 August 2016, https://harvardnsj.org/2016/08/why-declarations-of-war-matter/

[83] As far as war theory goes, when political and military objectives are well-defined, so is the end state. As discussed before, the fact that a war is limited or unlimited will help to define the end state of the said war. In reality, however, two situations can contribute to end states being "moving targets". First, the lack of precision in setting war objectives makes it difficult, if not impossible, to know when to stop the war. The Second Gulf War in 2003 and the War on Libya in 2011 being potent cases. Second, as war unfolds, objectives may change which in turn will change the criteria for conflict termination. See William Flavin, "Planning for Conflict Termination and Post-Conflict Success", *Parameters*, vol. 33, no. 3 (Autumn, 2003), 99-101.

THE CATEGORIZATION OF WAR

In the study of war and warfare, Western strategists and policymakers tend to categorize warfare in "different bins", to use Hoffman's expression.[84] While this habit may lead to "categorical confusion", according to some, it also helps to better understand which type of wars one is facing, thus facilitating the formulation of an adequate response.[85] Indeed, there are many ways to wage war and not all wars require the same response. In short, wars for Western nations are generally categorized as "conventional", "unconventional" or "hybrid".[86] A war is deemed "conventional" when the main objective is to defeat the enemy's military in a decisive battle using conventional methods of warfare (violence or military means) conducted by regular armed forces, that is military forces attributable to a recognized state.[87] In light of the discussion above on the Western way of war, conventional warfare is undeniably the West preferred style of warfare. By opposition, the qualifier "unconventional" is used to define a war that is *anything but* conventional according to the Western's view.[88] It is important to recognize that from Ancient Greece to today, states have always combined conventional and unconventional tactics to achieve their strategic goals.[89] Thus, the main criteria to determine if a war is conventional or

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[84] Frank G. Hoffman, "The Contemporary Spectrum of Conflict", 28.

[85] Colin S. Gray, *Categorical Confusion? The Strategic Implications of Recognizing Challenges Either as Irregular or Traditional* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: United States War College Press, 2012), 1-3; Meghan Fitzpatrick, *Cutting Through the Fog…*, 6.

[86] Christian Malis, "Unconventional Forms of War", in Julian Lindley-French and Yves Boyer (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1-2; Rob De Wijk, "Hybrid Conflict and the Changing Nature of Actors", 1. It is worth noting that the terms "conventional", "unconventional" and "hybrid" are Western constructions based on Western cognition. What seems unconventional to the West may be entirely conventional to another culture, and vice-versa.

[87] Christian Malis, "Unconventional Forms of War", 1-2. Other common terms used to describe conventional wars are "symmetric", "regular" or "traditional".

[88] *Ibid*. Synonyms for unconventional wars would then be "asymmetric", "irregular" and "non-traditional". As Malis notes, they are numerous other criteria that can be used to define irregular forms of wars, but such study will expand the scope of this paper.

[89] Military historians and security analysts like to remind that the history of humankind is packed with examples of grey-like tactics and strategies, including during the American Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, the First and Second World Wars, the Vietnam War, the Balkans War and the Afghan War. James Wither even claims that evidence in this regard can be found as far back as the Peloponnesian War, and even beyond. After all, Sun Tzu himself, many centuries ago, emphasized the importance of gaining the "strategic advantage" where, to be

unconventional would then be a question of ratio. For instance, a war where violence would be used *mainly* through conventional methods would then be considered being a conventional war.[90] The same approach would define unconventional wars.

Finally, "hybrid" refers to a war where the non-violent instruments of national power (DIEFIL) have been "weaponized", meaning that these non-military tools are used and coordinated in a military war-like fashion alongside the Military.[91] Again, the use of unconventional tools in support of the use of force, such as information and diplomatic activities, is not new. What is novel, however, is the extent of the scale and precision in which they are now used. As Mazarr puts it, it is the "sum of their effects has become unprecedented".[92]

CHAPTER SUMMARY

As claimed at the beginning of this chapter, strong definitions are essential to strategic thinking. Consequently, this chapter aimed at defining the key concepts and terms as employed throughout this paper. First, this study favours NATO's definition of instruments of national power which adds Financial, Intelligence and Legal to the traditional Diplomatic, Informational, Military and Economic dimensions. As it will be demonstrated later, in a world where non-violent means are weaponized to achieve one's end, such proposal expends the possibilities for active measures against grey zone aggressions. Second, concerning war and warfare, this paper abides by the political philosophy of war where war is the "continuity of policy by other means",

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victorious, states shall best exploit their rival's weaknesses. See Ahmed Salah Hashim, "State and Non-State Hybrid Warfare"; Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21ˢᵗ century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*, 9; Williamson Murray and Peter R. Mansoor, *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); James K. Wither, "Making Sense of Hybrid Warfare", *Connections*, vol. 15, no. 2 (2016), 76; Carnes Lord, "A note on Sun Tzu", *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 19, no. 9 (2000), 303; and Rob De Wijk, "Hybrid Conflict and the Changing Nature of Actors", 1.

[90] This formula may seem too simplistic to some to define such a complex matter. The author aims at presenting the concepts in a simplified way to facilitate the discussion. While there are many more nuances to the concepts of conventional and unconventional war than ratio, ratio is without a doubt the most important characteristic, making this formula relevant for the nature and scope of this analysis.

[91] Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 142.

[92] Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone…*, 50.

and where it refers to the unchanging objective nature of war. Warfare, on the other hand, is deeply rooted in strategic culture and tends to change regularly. Third, war in the West is understood as being the *authorized*, *legal* and *overt* use of reasonable *physical force* by a *state* to achieve a *political outcome* otherwise unattainable by other means alone or more effectively achieved through the use of force.[93] According to the laws and customs of war, the use of force must be organized, intentional, direct, manifest, personal, institutionalized, instrumental, proportional and regulated.[94] Lastly concerning the Western way of war, the Western strategic culture favours the manoeuvrist approach, which seeks to exploit the maximum destruction possible (within international law) to deliver the decisive blow that will break the enemy's will to fight. A style of warfare where Time and Space are separated, and that works best against a near-peer enemy both in size and capabilities. Finally, war or warfare in the West can be labelled *conventional* when a recognized military force tries to defeat a defined opponent in an overt conflict using (mostly) conventional military means; *unconventional* when the conflict is anything but conventional in its nature or conduct; and *hybrid* when the non-violent instruments of national power are used in a military-like fashion and used in coordination with traditional military tools.

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[93] Bruno Tremblay, *Assessing the Consequences of Globalisation and Liberalisation on the Western Understanding of War and Warfare*, 10.

[94] Johan M.G. Van der Dennen, "On War: Concepts, Definitions, Research Data…", 1.

CHAPTER 3 – WHAT IS MEANT BY THE GREY ZONE?

In the twenty-first century we have seen a tendency toward blurring the lines between the states of war and peace. Wars are no longer declared and, having begun, proceed according to an unfamiliar template. The very "rules of war" have changed. The role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness.

— Russian General Valery Gerasimov

To assume that one method of conducting war will suit all kinds of war is to fall a victim to abstract theory.

— Sir Julian Corbett

When it comes down to strategy, defining novel concepts is seldom an easy endeavour and, as Gray warns, should never be taken lightly. To paraphrase the security scholar, strategic concepts educate perceptions and shape the interpretation of events; they find expression in the doctrine that forms strategic behaviour; an unwise conceptualization of a new strategic challenge can have severe consequences, including, but not least, fighting the wrong war.[95] For this reason, clarity in defining new challenges matters greatly. This chapter aims at providing a comprehensive synthesis of the fundamental notions associated with the concept of the grey zone, mainly its common defining aspects and key definitions.

COMMON DEFINING ASPECTS

In the past decade or so, discussions about grey zone conflicts and their underlying modes of warfare have dominated research on the twenty-first-century security environment.[96] Although the description of grey zone conflicts differs from one analyst to another, five defining aspects are common to most. They are, in their short form, the space between war and peace, strategic choice, gradualism, unconventional tools and plausible deniability.

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[95] Colin S. Gray, *Categorical Confusion?…*, 46-48.
[96] Frank G. Hoffman, "The Contemporary Spectrum of Conflict…", 26.

Conceptual Space Between War and Peace

First, the term grey zone refers to the *conceptual space between war and peace just below the threshold of war*. Traditionally, Western nations define relations between nations as being either at a state of peace or a state of war (Figure 3.1). In this spectrum, as one observer notes, being at war is similar to being pregnant: either a state is or is not.[97]
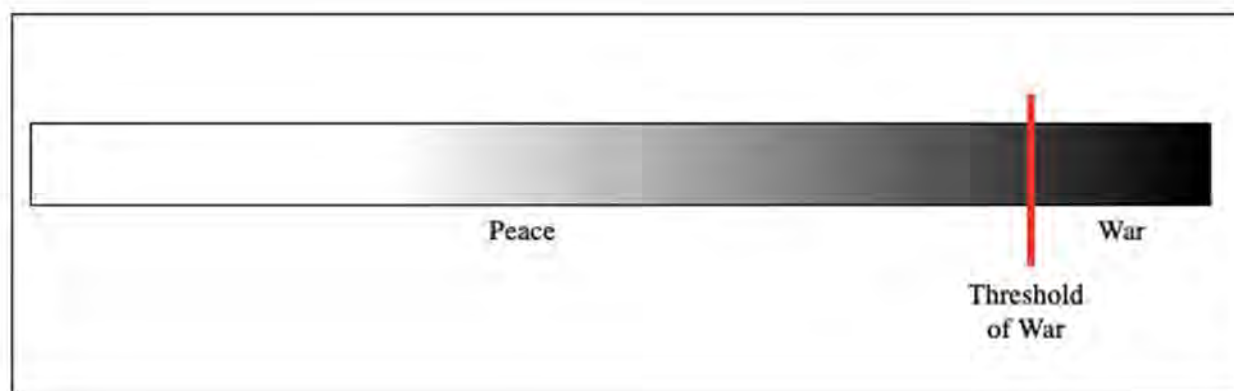
Figure 3.1 – Traditional spectrum of conflict.[98]
Source: Author.

In this traditional Western binary concept, peace is understood as being "the absence of violence or the threat of force".[99] Peace, however, does not equal the absence of conflicts. When nations' interests eventually collide – and they arguably always do in the chaos of the international arena, nations enter into conflict. In those situations, they use the non-violent forms of instruments of national power at their disposal to try to resolve the conflict to their advantage. While being in conflict, nations are still considered being "at peace". However, when the use of non-violent measures failed to achieve the desired results, nations have then the choice to either give in or opt to use physical force (the Military) to coerce the rival toward a more acceptable solution. "Wars" would then occur when violence or the threat of violence becomes the main tool

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[97] Sean McFate, *The New Rules of War...*, 64.
[98] The literature also uses the term Continuum of Conflict.
[99] Canadian Armed Forces, *Canadian Forces Joint Publication 01: Canadian Military Doctrine...*, 2-10. The nature of peace will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

used to coerce a solution to the opponent[100]; a concept fitting the Western way of war as defined previously. Three assumptions support this understanding of conflict and war. First, the use of violence is considered of last resort and, when used in support of other instruments of national power, it is generally done in a limited fashion.[101] Second, conventional conflicts are between two or more recognized states. Lastly, it is assumed that nations seek to resolve their conflicts quickly to revert to a state of peace as soon as possible, especially for democratic nations. Indeed, there is an argument to be made that democratic liberal states, by the nature of their constitution, can only go to war in the interests of the people. Therefore, authentic democratic states – and not the pseudo-ones[102] – are reluctant to use violence unless it is well supported by the population (a reference here to Clausewitz's notion of the Passion of the People[103]). Furthermore, in cases where democratic nations need to engage in war to defend or protect their sovereign territory, it is then in the interests of the state to limit destruction and suffering as much as possible as to preserve the lives of their citizens, hence the importance of the legal principle of *Jus in Bello*.[104] The situation in authoritarian regimes is often different, where the premium is not put on saving people's lives, but rather protecting the political regime at all costs; Gaddafi's Libya, al-Assad's Syria, Putin's Russia and, more recently, Hlaing's Myanmar being potent cases. This last assumption – seeking to resolve conflicts quickly to revert to a state of peace as soon as

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[100] John Garnet and John Baylis, "The Causes of War and the Conditions of Peace", in John Baylis *et al.* (eds), *Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, 6th Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 87.

[101] Canadian Armed Forces, *Canadian Forces Joint Publication 01: Canadian Military Doctrine*, 2-1 to 2-3.

[102] "Pseudo-democracy" is a term used in political studies to define those nations that identified themselves as democratic, but offers no choice to their citizens, even ignoring their democratic rights. See Larry Diamond, "Thinking about Hybrid Regimes", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 2 (2002), 24.

[103] Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, 102-103.

[104] One could argue that in the case of foreign wars, some nations' military-industrial complex is powerful enough to lobby–if not corrupt–politicians to perpetuate foreign wars for profits. While recognizing this possibility, it is also fair to assume that situation is probably more the exception than the norm. See Beatrice Heuser, *Just War Theory and Not Just War*; and Charles J. Dunlap, "The Military-Industrial Complex", *Daedalus*, vol. 140, no. 3 (Summer 2011), 135-147.

possible – implies a form of linearity in the process where a nation's state of being moves from peace to crisis, to war and, finally, to peace again.[105]

A post-modern representation of the spectrum of conflict, however, suggests that nations are in perpetual competition one with another; while not being officially at war, they are not at total peace either, at least not in the traditional sense. In such competitive environment, a nation's interests depend on its ability to compete in the space "between war and peace". It is to this conceptual space that the term "grey zone" refers to; a place where nations are in a constant state of either peaceful competition, harmful competition, animosity or rivalry to maintain their power and influence.[106] Accepting that states are in constant competition, this conceptualization of conflicts, therefore, suggests a gradation of the type of competition from the peaceful or harmless competition (peace) to harmful competition (grey zone), which is illustrated in Figure 3.2.
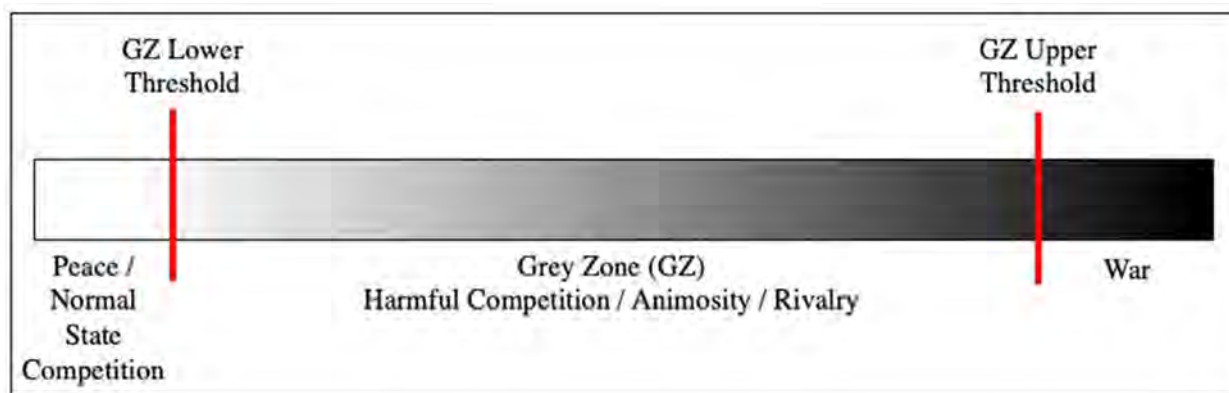
Figure 3.2 – Two-dimensional representation of the grey zone.
Source: Author.

This model identifies two thresholds instead of only one, a lower threshold and an upper threshold. The lower grey zone threshold gets crossed when competitive activities *exceed* the ordinary harmless competition. Those activities aim, by design, to cause harm, although not

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[105] Rupert Smith. *The Utility of Force…*, 188.
[106] Ibrahim G. Aoudé, "Turkey and its Immediate Arab Neighbors in the Twenty-First Century", *Arab Studies Quarterly*, vol. 42, issue 1-2 (2020), 94.

through the use of force. This said, they remain below the level of large-scale direct military

conflict (war), represented by the upper threshold. As per the traditional understanding of war,

the upper threshold would be crossed when overt violence is used (or threat to be used) as a

primary means to an end.[107] Understandingly, some could argue at this point that while the

trigger for the upper threshold is clear (open war), the same cannot be said for the lower

threshold where the situation is far more complexed. Indeed, how is it possible, concretely, to

differentiate the harmless from the harmful competition? This acute observation carries some

inevitable truth: defining the legal threshold for "aggressions" always has been a rather difficult

task. The League of Nations, for instance, has found the task quite frustrating, and some could

even argue that they never truly succeeded to do it.[108] Yet, this challenge should not stop nations

to keep trying to develop better assessment tools, as their ability to detect and attribute

aggressions is directly linked to their ability to respond.

A Strategic Choice

The second defining aspect of the grey zone refers to motivation: *operating in the grey*

zone is a strategic choice. The exact reasons why some nations decide to "go grey" is a question

of contention in scholarly and military circles. The first explanation is *feasibility*. While using

hybrid tactics to achieve policy goals is undeniably as old as conflict itself, it arguably only

became a strategic option recently due to the latest technological developments.[109] Indeed, the

emergence of new technologies in the field of communication, computer science and robotization

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[107] It must be clarified here that contrary to the perception that the illustration in Figure 3.2 may convey, the grey zone is nothing but linear. The grey zone is a place characterized by non-linearity where one nation can be at peace, in competition, at war all at the same time, and can move from one state to another in a short period, many times over. This two-dimensional representation of the grey zone is used here solely to best represent the notion of having two thresholds instead of one.

[108] Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma…*, 176.

[109] Belinda Bragg, *Gray Zone Conflicts, Challenges, and Opportunities: Integration Report*, 8; Bruno Tremblay, *Assessing the Consequences of Globalisation and Liberalisation on the Western Understanding of War and Warfare*, 18-23.

have made the leveraging of non-military instruments of power easier, more beneficial and less costly, both financially and in human lives, than the conventional use of force.[110] For instance, the Internet and social media have become perfect weapon systems for paralyzing a rival's political decision-making centre by amplifying social division, resentment, and fear within its society.[111] In the grey zone, information has notably become "a strategic weapon to deny adversaries the use of force as a political option".[112]

Beside feasibility, another explanation is *strategy*. Contrary to the previous conflict framework where it is assumed that nations seek to resolve their conflict quickly – albeit in more favourable terms, actors who decide to operate in the grey zone seek to maintain a conflictual relationship as long as necessary. Such actors are "revisionists" in the sense that they want to revise the balance of power to their advantage, but in a way that will avoid entering into an open military conflict.[113] The object is not to wait for a strategic opportunity to strike militarily, but to create the strategic and operational conditions required to achieve their policy goals.[114] This type of strategy requires strategic patience; it is about disruption, not momentum, as it is generally the case in conventional conflicts.

A third explanation is *practicality*. The grey zone allows some nations to better pit their strengths against their rivals' weaknesses, therefore providing a net strategic advantage over direct military confrontations. Some analysts, however, tend to dismiss this argument contending

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[110] *Ibid*.

[111] Dean Jackson, *Issue Brief: How Disinformation Impacts Politics and Publics*, National Endowment for Democracy, 2018, https://www.ned.org/issue-brief-how-disinformation-impacts-politics-and-publics/

[112] Bruno Tremblay, *Assessing the Consequences of Globalisation and Liberalisation on the Western Understanding of War and Warfare*, 27. This topic of how to define weapons in the grey zone will also be discussed in Chapter 5.

[113] Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone…*, 28; Christian Malis, "Unconventional Forms of War", 10; Hal Brands and Charles Edel, "A Grand Strategy of Democratic Solidarity", 31. Hence the symbiosis relationship between the notions of grey zone and durable disorder.

[114] Elinor C. Sloan, *Modern Military Strategy: An Introduction* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 22.

that operating in the grey zone is not a true choice but rather the "option for the weak", the only way to offset irreconcilable imbalances between decisive military capabilities.[115] Biddle even suggests that, given the right military resources and adequate training, any actors will prefer the fight a conventional war over any other type of war.[116] This point of view is undeniably enshrined in the Western way of war where the use of blunt force is considered a primacy to solve conflicts.[117] Other analysts have voiced a different opinion, arguing that the choice of strategy has more to do with strategic culture and strategic thinking than a pure "rational calculus of war", an opinion supported by the evidence presented in this paper.[118]

To sum up this section, operating in the grey zone remains arguably a strategic choice, irreverently of the reason, whether it is because of feasibility, strategic culture or practicality.

Preference for Gradualism

The third defining aspect of grey zone strategies is the *preference for gradualism* over decisiveness. Instead of imposing change through quick and decisive actions, campaigns in the grey zone favour a long series of interconnected actions implemented gradually and strategically.[119] Some have argued that a gradual approach to international affairs is nothing new; if one knows the escalation threshold of a competitor, it is just common sense to operate below that threshold to avoid suffering consequences.[120] While this observation remains true, gradualism in the grey zone arbores a different aspect than in a traditional threshold analysis. In

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[115] Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone...*, 58; Rob De Wijk, "Hybrid Conflict and the Changing Nature of Actors", 1; Elinor C. Sloan, *Modern Military Strategy: An Introduction,* 20.

[116] Stephen Biddle, "The determinants of nonstate military methods", *The Pacific Review*, vol. 31, no. 6 (2018), 734-735; Also discussed in Chiyuki Aoi, Madoka Futamura and Alessio Patalano, "Introduction to hybrid warfare in Asia…", 705.

[117] Belinda Bragg, *Gray Zone Conflicts, Challenges, and Opportunities: Integration Report*, 8; Stephen Biddle, "The determinants of nonstate military methods", 718-720.

[118] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, 367. The "rational calculus of war" is a Clausewitzian concept suggesting that no one shall engage in a war without first being certain of what is to be gained and how to conduct the war.

[119] Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone…*, 33; J. Lyle Morris *et al.*, *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone…*, 9.

[120] Adam Elkus, *50 shades of gray…*

using gradualism as a strategy, aggressors achieve decisiveness not by wining through a series of rapid battles, but by accumulating *faits accompli* over a long period of time.[121] The implementation of such strategy implies the *will* and *capacity* at the state level to *orchestrate* a gradual approach using all instruments of national power at one's disposal.

The concept of gradualism entails two assumptions. First, actions in the grey zone are not linear, as perceived in the traditional spectrum of conflict, but rather scalable and contingent on circumstances. Grey zone aggressors will constantly adapt their tactics depending on which ones can best achieve the desired effects. For instance, a grey zone aggressor may use force (the Military) when it makes sense to do so, not necessarily in a "last resort" situation. Second, actions in the grey zone deliberately avoid threatening one's vital or existential interests, as any direct challenge to them would increase the risks of provoking a strong reaction, one that could easily cross the upper grey zone threshold into war.[122] Consequently, the ability to restrain becomes a core feature of grey zone operations, not in the traditional moral or legal sense, but in the optic to avoid detection and escalation.

Greater Use of Unconventional Tools

The fourth characteristic of the grey zone involves the *greater use of unconventional tools of statecraft*. Since the use of conventional means, especially the use of force, is inherently associated with war in classical strategic thought, opting for unconventional means allows grey zone aggressors to scale their action avoiding triggering an open war. Consequently, grey zone strategies tend to focus on hybrid modes of warfare. For instance, the Russian doctrine refers to the use of 80-90 percent of non-military means over military means.[123] This is not to say that

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[121] Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone…*, 34-37. *Faits accomplis* are actions designed to obtain a limited gain while leaving the defender with the dilemma of giving in or risking a larger conflict.

[122] J. Lyle Morris *et al.*, *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone…*, 10.

[123] Timothy Thomas, "The Evolving Nature of Russia's Way of War", 36.

hard military power is not used anymore, but the scale of force used is more limited both in time and size, and more heavily supported by non-violent instruments of power.[124] Also, force is often used in a covert manner or through proxies to avoid direct attributability. For these reasons, there seems to be a preference for the use of Special Forces which are, by design, nimbler and have greater agility to ingress, egress, and re-supply quickly and covertly than conventional forces.[125]

Plausible Deniability

The combination of gradualism, the preference for unconventional means and a lack of attributability leads to the fifth defining aspect of the grey zone: *plausible deniability*.[126] By avoiding decisive actions and using unconventional means, grey zone aggressors can more easily disguise their role in grey zone activities, gaining plausible deniability in the process.[127] Plausible deniability becomes a force enabler in two ways. Firstly, it allows the perpetrator to continue to operate in the grey zone unimpeded by international norms and rules. Indeed, the framework of international law is dependent on the ability to attribute responsibility. Without attributability, it becomes almost impossible to legitimize an action against another state. In this sense, as some observers have noted previously, plausible deniability has proven to be more effective in terms of strategic effects than actual raw firepower.[128] The lack of attributability also pushes the upper grey zone threshold more and more to the right of the spectrum of conflict as the legal attribution of responsibility is one of the most important triggers required for declaring war (in the

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[124] Eugene Rumer, *The Primakov (Not Gerasimov) Doctrine in Action*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 5 June 2019, https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/06/05/primakov-not-gerasimov-doctrine-in-action-pub-79254

[125] Canadian Special Forces Command, *Future Operating Concept Handbook* (Ottawa Minister of National Defence, 2019), 14. Conventional forces can still play a significant role in grey zone strategies, albeit in different capabilities. A point that will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

[126] J. Lyle Morris *et al.*, *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone…*, 9.

[127] Jonathan B. Bong, "Redefining the Spectrum of Conflict", *Marine Corps Gazette*, vol. 101, no. 8 (2017), 49.

[128] Sean McFate, *The New Rules of War…*, 19; Veronika Stoilova, "The Art of Achieving Political Goals without use of Force: War by Non-Military Means", *Information & Security*, vol. 39, no. 2 (2018), 140.

traditional sense that is). In doing so, it creates a larger "arena" for grey zone aggressors to exploit. Secondly, it allows to possibility to use conventional weapons in new ways, weakening traditional deterrence. While biological and nuclear weapons are tightly controlled by international treaties in conventional wars (where they can be clearly attributed to one side), deniable plausibility increases the risks of them being used unsparingly.[129]

These five defining aspects of the grey zone – the space between war and peace, strategic choice, gradualism, unconventional tools and plausible deniability – form altogether the philosophy underlying operations in the grey zone. At this stage, before providing a comprehensive definition of the grey zone as a strategic concept, one question still needs to be addressed: are grey zone actors only states or could it include non-state actors too?

Grey Zone Actors

Whereas much of the discussion about the grey zone tends to be around state actors as primary grey zone aggressors, some scholars do not exclude the possibility for non-state actors to be recognized as grey zone actors.[130] First, it must be recognized that non-state actors can participate in grey zone aggressions either as independent actors or as proxies. Mazarr and Paul contend that there is value in considering non-state actors being used as proxies as active actors in the grey zone since they are, for all intents and purposes, part of a rival's means to an end.[131] However, Hoffman would dismiss this argument reasoning that these proxies are normally chosen for their obvious violent penchants, operating in ways that show little concern for escalation or crossing lines. Consequently, they would be far from operating as legitimate "grey

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[129] UK Ministry of Defence, *The Integrated Operating Concept 2025* (2020), 5.

[130] George Popp and Sarah Canna, *The Characterization and Conditions of the Gray Zone: A Virtual Think Tank Analysis* (Arlington, VA: National Security Innovation, 2016), 9; J. Lyle Morris *et al.*, *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone…*, 13-41; Rob De Wijk, "Hybrid Conflict and the Changing Nature of Actors", 11-14.

[131] George Popp and Sarah Canna, *The Characterization and Conditions of the Gray Zone…*, 11.

zone actors".[132] Still, accepting the premise that non-state actors who act as proxies shall be considered as grey zone actors, the follow-on question is then whether or not non-state actors can operate in the grey zone *independently* of external support. Here, Kapusta claims that non-states and proto-states organizations, such as Daesh and al-Qaeda, are effective grey zone actors since they operate in that space between war and peace similarly to revisionist states.[133] This opinion, however, remains difficult to justify considering that operating in the grey zone consists of designing campaigns using different instruments of national powers, then for non-state actors to be recognized as grey zone actors they would need to have such instruments in the first place, which very few non-state actors have.[134] If some, like Kapusta, consider that it is possible for non-state actors to operate independently in the grey zone, others refute this idea altogether. For instance, Gratzke considers that state and non-state actors have different strategic objectives, as such considering non-state actors as full-fledge grey zone aggressors brings the risk of "mischaracterizing the objectives of the adversary", which could lead to making wrongful threat assessments, opting for inadequate responses, or conflict escalation.[135]

To settle the question, it seems that a two-step formula could be used to determine whether or not a non-state actor should be considered as a legitimate grey zone actor, and as such avoiding strategic miscalculations. The first step would be to determine whether a non-state actor is acting as a proxy or independently. If it is the former, then there is value for considering the

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[132] Frank G. Hoffman, "Examining Complex Forms of Conflict: Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges", *Prism: A Journal of the Center for Complex Operations*, vol. 7, no. 4 (2018), 36; Frank G. Hoffman, "The Contemporary Spectrum of Conflict…", 26-27.

[133] Philip Kapusta, "The Gray Zone", 20. For more information on proto-state or quasi-state, see Pål Kolstø, "The Sustainability and Future of Unrecognized Quasi-States", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 43, no. 6 (2006), 723-740.

[134] George Popp and Sarah Canna, *The Characterization and Conditions of the Gray Zone…*, 12.

[135] George Popp and Sarah Canna, *The Characterization and Conditions of the Gray Zone…*, 12; Janina Dill, "Towards a Moral Division of Labour between IHL and IHRL during the Conduct of Hostilities", in Ziv Bohrer, Janina Dill and Helen Duffy, *Law Applicable to Armed Conflict* (Max Planck Trialogues, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 239-240. For instance, the act of state-sponsoring a non-state actor (by proxy) to fuel a conflict in another state can be considered is, in the eyes of international law, an act of war.

non-state actor as being a grey zone actor, but under the understanding that this actor acts as an extension of a sponsor-state. If it is the latter, then the next step is to determine whether this non-state actor has both the *intent* of entering in competition with states and the *means* to achieve that intent. Non-state actors would then be considered as independent players in the grey zone only if they meet both criteria. A negative answer to any of the two criteria would then suggests that the non-state actor should be considered as a "traditional" security threat.

GREY ZONE DEFINITIONS

The Nature of the Grey Zone

If scholars and analysts agree on what the main defining aspects of the grey zone are, they do not agree on how to define it. As Hoffman observes, grey zone definitions often "remain both expansive and elusive" and "lack of analytic coherence … , overlooking different historical contexts, methods, and best practices".[136] At the core of the problem lies the difficulty to name the true nature of the grey zone. Is it a type of conflict? A strategic environment? A challenge? The reason for this may reside in the fact that each scholar focuses on different aspects of the grey zone. For instance, Hoffman defines grey zone *conflicts* as the "… deliberate multidimensional activities by a state actor just below the threshold of aggressive use of military forces"[137], but goes on defining grey zone *tactics* as:

> Those covert or illegal activities of non-traditional statecraft that are below the threshold of armed organized violence; including disruption of order, political subversion of government or non-governmental organizations, psychological operations, abuse of legal processes, and financial corruption as part of an integrated design to achieve strategic advantage.[138]

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[136] Frank G. Hoffman, "Examining Complex Forms of Conflict…", 36.
[137] Frank G. Hoffman, "The Contemporary Spectrum of Conflict", 26.
[138] Frank G. Hoffman, "Examining Complex Forms of Conflict…", 36.

Albeit highlighting true elements regarding the grey zone, the difficulty with those definitions is that they suffer from what Gray would call the "tacticization of strategy".[139] In other words, these definitions focus too much on *activities* (tactical thinking) rather than on *ends* (strategic thinking). As Kapusta points out, "tactical brilliance … is meaningless or even counterproductive absent an overarching strategy".[140] For this reason, Kapusta prefers to look at the grey zone as creating first and foremost *security challenges*. His definition of grey zone security challenges is as follow:

> … competitive interactions among and within state and non-state actors that fall between the traditional distinctions between war and peace duality, are characterized by ambiguity about the nature of the conflict, opacity of the parties involved, or uncertainty about the relevant policy and legal frameworks.[141]

Contrary to Hoffman's proposal, this definition better describes the nature of the grey zone, especially the notion of "competitive interactions". Yet, not all forms of competitive interactions fall into the grey zone. If so, then this definition would echo one of the most common critiques against the grey zone as a strategic concept, as if to mean everything is to mean nothing.[142] What this definition is missing are the elements of *thresholds* as well as *intent*. Competitive interactions become grey zone activities when they rise above the normal, everyday geopolitical competition by their *intent to cause harm*, while purposely remaining under the upper threshold leading to war. The US Department of Defence's definition, on the other hand, successfully convey those notions of thresholds and intent while still avoiding the trap of tacticization:

> … a conceptual space between peace and war, occurring when actors purposefully use multiple elements of power to achieve political security

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[139] Colin S. Gray, *Categorical Confusion?...*, 48.

[140] Philip Kapusta, "The Gray Zone", 24; Also quoted in Meghan Fitzpatrick, *Cutting Through the Fog...*, 7.

[141] Philip Kapusta, "The Gray Zone", 20.

[142] George Popp and Sarah Canna, *The Characterization and Conditions of the Gray Zone...*, 6.

objectives with activities that are ambiguous or cloud attribution and exceed the threshold of ordinary competition, yet fall below the level of large-scale direct military conflict, and threaten US and allied interests by challenging, undermining, or violating international customs, norms, or laws.[143]

Despite being US-centric, this definition still best encompasses the characteristics of the grey zone as discussed thus far in this study, at one exception: grey zone activities do not just concern political security objectives, but all forms of political objectives. Thus, a more neutral and broader version would be: *The grey zone refers to the conceptual space between peace and war, occurring when actors purposefully use multiple instruments of national power to achieve political objectives with activities that are ambiguous or cloud attribution and exceed the threshold of ordinary harmless competition, yet fall below the level of large-scale direct military conflict, and threaten the nation and allied interests by challenging, undermining, or violating international customs, norms, or laws.*

Grey Zone Strategies and Activities

As previously argued, actors decide to operate in the grey zone by choice. Nonetheless, entering the grey zone and successfully staying "in the grey", within the lower and upper thresholds, is not an easy feat. To that end, grey zone aggressors need to devise and execute fit-for-purpose strategies and activities. In the field of international relations and security studies, the word "strategy" generally refers to the execution of national power to achieve political objectives.[144] Thus, grey zone strategies would refer to *plans of action purposely designed to exploit the grey zone.*[145] As with any other strategies, grey zone strategies detail what needs to be

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[143] *Ibid.*, 2.

[144] John Baylis and James J. Wirtz, "Introduction: Strategy in the Contemporary World", in John Baylis *et al.* (eds), *Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, 6th Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 5.

[145] *Ibid.*, 4-5.

achieved, by what means and how it will be evaluated.[146] Contrary to normal security strategies that focus almost solely on military power, grey zone strategies seek to employ all forms of instruments of national power, with primacy on non-violent means. For instance, China's strategy in the South China Sea forcefully uses strategic narratives to bolts its plan in cultural references; tries to seduce the other regional states with offers of economic assistance while harassing them through cyber means; conducts maritime and drilling operations using the covert of civilian fishing vessels; and tasks civilian companies, escorted by military vessels, to build man-made islands.[147] In this context, grey zone activities refer to the *actions being committed and coordinated by the mean of the strategy to gain an advantage over another rival in the grey zone*.

Determining whether an activity is grey or not can be a significant challenge. In brief, grey zone activities should be designated "grey" as long as they are ambiguous or non-attributable and above the lower threshold of ordinary competition, while not committing an act of war. As soon as the ambiguity is lifted, this activity transitions toward the realm of the traditional spectrum of peace or war activity.[148]

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This third chapter sought to bring clarity to the concept of "the grey zone" as a contested strategic concept. It presented five core characteristics of the grey zone, that is the conceptual space between war and peace, operating in the grey zone as a strategic choice, the preference for gradualism, the use of unconventional tools and the exploitation of plausible deniability.

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[146] *Ibid*.

[147] Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone…*, 43-44.

[148] Belinda Bragg, *Gray Zone Conflicts, Challenges, and Opportunities: Integration Report*, 4.

The concept of the grey zone has been defined as the conceptual space between peace and war, occurring when actors purposefully use multiple instruments of national power to achieve political objectives with activities that are ambiguous or cloud attribution and exceed the threshold of ordinary harmless competition, yet fall below the level of large-scale direct military conflict, and threaten the nation and allied interests by challenging, undermining, or violating international customs, norms, or laws. *Contra* to the traditional paradigm of conflict and war, activities in the grey zone seek to last as long as necessary, the justification for the use of force is one of necessity not one of last resort, and non-state actors can be recognized as grey zone actors. Finally, it was discussed that, because of the presence of the lower and upper grey zone thresholds, grey zone aggressors – whether they are state or non-state actors – must support their ambitions with a strategy purposely designed to exploit the advantages presented by the grey zone. This "grey zone strategy" aims at coordinating, synchronizing and measuring the different activities selected across all of the instruments of national power available.

CHAPTER 4 – NON-WESTERN PERSPECTIVES

A wise man learns from his experience; a wiser man learns from the experience of others.
— Confucius

In face of grey zone competition and conflicts, no one nation reacts the same. While the West is generally reported as struggling with the concept of the grey zone due to its specific strategic culture, non-Wester nations, such as Russia and China, seem to thrive in this new security environment. For them, the grey zone represents a strategic opportunity that both nations intend to exploit to its fullest potential. This strategic choice, this dissertation contends, is justified by their unique strategic cultures. In this context, this chapter aims at demonstrating why the strategic cultures of Russia and China are more conducive to grey zone operations than in the West, and at identifying what lessons can be learnt from their successes in the grey zone, if any.

RUSSIA

Since Russia's seizure of Crimea in 2014, Russian grey zone strategies and tactics have been at the centre of attention of Western security analysts.[149] As Renz observed, the campaign has been rather swift and effective in any military standard:

> Throughout much of the post-Soviet period the idea that the Russian military was outdated and stuck in Cold war thinking about the utility of military force had dominated Western perceptions, so the pursuit of an approach that relied heavily on non-military armed force and instruments, such as the use of information and disinformation, was particularly unexpected.[150]

Today, there is no doubt that Russia has the will and the capabilities to effectively exploit the grey zone to achieve both defensive and offensive gains. Still, Russia's success in exploiting the grey zone, whether it is in Crimea, Ukraine, or the Baltics, is no surprise for specialists of

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[149] Eugene Rumer, *The Primakov (Not Gerasimov) Doctrine in Action*, 1; Weichong Ong, "The rise of hybrid actors in the Asia-Pacific", *The Pacific Review*, vol. 31, no. 6 (2018), 743.

[150] Bettina Renz, "Russia and 'hybrid warfare'", *Contemporary Politics*, vol. 22, no. 3 (2016), 283.

Russian strategic thought. Indeed, Russia has always been uniquely poised to become an effectual grey zone operator: it fits both its policy goals and its strategic culture.

The Continuation of Policy by (All) Other Means

Since the end of the Cold War, the Russian foreign policy revolved mostly around the "Primakov doctrine", named after the former foreign and prime minister Yevgeny Primakov, which advocates that a unipolar world dominated by the US is unacceptable in any term.[151] As such, Russia kept striving to counterbalance US power by any means necessary, and even oppose it when possible. Notwithstanding these ambitions, internal, economical and structural challenges left Russia too weak at the time to oppose the West in meaningful ways. This situation limited Russia's policy options to mainly one: biding their time by cooperating with the West, while developing new warfighting capabilities.[152] It is in this context that Russia endeavoured to find modern ways to better exert power beyond its borders.

According to Rumer and Renz, Russia's first experimentation with the grey zone started in 2008, when the Russian military defeated the Georgian army in South Ossetia as a means to counter NATO's influence in Georgia.[153] Through the combination of all national means available, violent and non-violent, from cyber-attacks, disinformation, the use of proxies and the deployment of conventional forces, Russia succeeded in asserting regional primacy while leaving the West unable to react militarily.[154] Although the war achieved its strategic goal, it also highlighted many shortcomings in the Russian military in support of this style of operation: too hierarchical, lack of coordination, obsolete equipment, poor strategy and excessive use of

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[151] Eugene Rumer, *The Primakov (Not Gerasimov) Doctrine in Action*, 4.
[152] Eugene Rumer, *The Primakov (Not Gerasimov) Doctrine in Action*, 6; Benjamin J. Fernandes and Nathan K. Finney, *The Myth of Russian Aggression and NATO Expansion*, The Strategy Bridge, 16 December 2016, https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2016/12/16/the-myth-of-russian-aggression-and-nato-expansion
[153] Eugene Rumer, *The Primakov (Not Gerasimov) Doctrine in Action*, 8; Bettina Renz, "Russia and 'hybrid warfare'", 283.
[154] Eugene Rumer, *The Primakov (Not Gerasimov) Doctrine in Action*, 8.

force.[155] What Russia learned from this first experiment is that if there can be high payoffs to operate in the grey zone, there are also high risks, and having the right capability is critical to minimize those risks. For instance, Russia knew that, if NATO was triggered to intervene, Russia would be unlikely to win a conventional war against Western armies. Therefore, Russia needed a more agile military, one that can adapt its ways to gradual thinking, and be used while avoiding escalation and detection. This conclusion led to a massive military reform in terms of doctrine, organization and capabilities.

Russian strategists spent the following years analyzing contemporary wars and methods of warfare, from the two Gulf Wars to the Arab Spring, to NATO's intervention in Libya.[156] Based on this analysis, they developed a new doctrine, called "New-Type Warfare" (NTW) today, to better prepared the Russian military to be victorious.[157] The reform also included a complete restructuring of the military, the purchase of modern-day equipment, the development of new capabilities and the creation of new training methods.[158] The results of this military reform manifested themselves in 2014, when the Russian swiftly annexed Crimea, launched an undeclared war in eastern Ukraine, inflicted substantial losses on the Ukrainian military, and threatened a massive invasion beyond eastern Ukraine. Whereas the 2008 war with Georgia demonstrated the shortcomings of the Russian military, the 2014 aggression against Ukraine was both a strategic and operational success.

The year 2015 marked another milestone in the development of Russian sharp power. For the first time since the end of the Cold War, Russia engaged in a major military operation beyond

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[155] Bettina Renz, "Russia and 'hybrid warfare'", 283.
[156] *Ibid*., 286.
[157] Timothy Thomas, "The Evolving Nature of Russia's Way of War", 33. Also referred to as "New-Generation Warfare" or NGW.
[158] Timothy Thomas, "The Evolving Nature of Russia's Way of War", 36; Eugene Rumer, *The Primakov (Not Gerasimov) Doctrine in Action*, 8-9.

its periphery by intervening in the Syrian war. An operation that can also be interpreted at the strategic level as a "show of force", a message to tell the world that "Russia is back".[159]

A Strategic Culture Fit

Russia's NTW is born from the careful observation of how wars are fought today and how Russia can win them. Since the Second World War, Russian strategic thought has been founded on the notions of *holism*, *uniqueness* and *asymmetric thinking*, creating the perfect strategic and operational conditions for effective grey zone thinking.[160] Holism refers to the Russian preference to approach every aspect of strategic thought as one single enterprise. As Adamsky describes it:

> an all-embracing view that grasps a big picture and describes every element of reality as being in constant interplay with others in frames of a metasystem, views issues in different dimensions as interconnected, has a generalised frame of reference and perceives every move of any element of the system as a complexity of measures.[161]

Within the Russian holism construct, there are no boundaries between strategic, operational and tactical levels of war, between national and foreign affairs policies, between domestic and expeditionary operations, and there is no peacetime or wartime periods, but only one continual state of competition. As a result, there are no silos between the DIMEFIL domains; every strategy is at the same time offensive and defensive, directed toward internal and external audiences and involves as many instruments of national power as necessary. Additionally, Russian holism is not just a philosophy, a way to perceive the world, it is also a strategic and an operational *mindset*. It is in this spirit that Russia has established a modern command and control

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[159] Sean McFate, *The New Rules of War...*, 105.

[160] Dmitry Adamsky, "Russian campaign in Syria – change and continuity in strategic culture", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2020), 107; Stephen R. Covington, *The Culture of Strategic Thought Behind Russia's Modern Approaches to Warfare* (Harvard Kennedy School: Belfer Center for Sciences and International Affairs, 2016), 7-12.

[161] Dmitry Adamsky, "From Moscow with coercion: Russian deterrence theory and strategic culture", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 41, no. 1-2 (2018), 51.

(C2) centre in Moscow, a modern version of the Second World War Stavka concept, albeit established at the governmental level.[162] Under the direct leadership of the Russian President, the role of this C2 centre is to harmonize and coordinate nationwide decisions and actions across all governmental organizations. For example, the strategic command staff exercise "Caucasus 2016" involved different organizations from the Russian armed forces, ministries and governmental agencies, including even representatives from Russia's Central Bank.[163] This C2 centre also allows the Kremlin to better identify and exploit opportunities across its government.

The second characteristic of Russian strategic thought is *uniqueness*. Uniqueness in the sense that Russia favours strategies that "advance Russia's strengths and exploits the weaknesses of others".[164] While one could retort that this could also be said for any other nation, Russian uniqueness goes beyond that mere generalization. It is the core belief that what works for others cannot work for Russia, because Russia is unique politically, economically, militarily, geographically, and intellectually – so Russians believe.[165] This quest for uniqueness transcends strategic thought in everything Russians do, from military doctrine to technological research, to political affairs. It involves a constant cost and risks analysis, comparing Russia's strengths and weaknesses against the ones of others. In military affairs, this quest for uniqueness also produces

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[162] The Stavka, or Stavka Verkhovnogo Glavnokomandovaniia, was the Supreme High Command created by Stalin during the Second World War to control all aspects of military tasks for the war effort, including strategic planning, deployment of forces, distribution of material, formation and utilization of reserves, and for sending special emissaries to supervise and control the armed forces in the field. While the Stavka itself was a wartime headquarter, past analyses have demonstrated that functionally, the Stavka-like mentality has endured and it still characterizes Russian modern strategic thinking. See Stephen R. Covington, *The Culture of Strategic Thought Behind Russia's Modern Approaches to Warfare* (Harvard Kennedy School: Belfer Center for Sciences and International Affairs, 2016), 15; and Ross Jr. O'Donohue, *A Viability Analysis of the Stavka via Function* (Washington, D.C.: Defence Intelligence School, 1977), 6-11, 57.

[163] Stephen R. Covington, *The Culture of Strategic Thought Behind Russia's Modern Approaches to Warfare*, 15.

[164] *Ibid.*, 7.

[165] *Ibid.*, 7-8.

what the Russians called "an asymmetric approach", the third characteristic of Russian strategic thought.[166]

The Russian concept of asymmetry bears a different meaning than it does in the West. Russians do not categorize warfare in neat "black and white" categories. For them, debates about "conventional/unconventional" means and modes of warfare are futile; it only contributes to limit creativity and effectiveness.[167] Like Adamsky notes:

> … asymmetry expressed in the form of 'cunning, indirectness, operational ingenuity, addressing weaknesses and avoiding strengths' have been a central component of Tsarist, Soviet and Russian Federation military traditions.[168]

Russian morality is inherently different than the Western Just War Theory. Simply put, whatever actions can contribute to advance Russia's strategic goals is "just" or "right", where the opposites are not.[169] For instance, the main reason why Russians are better at leveraging information in war is a simple question of doctrinal and cultural perspective: they just do not see information as a subcomponent of warfare, like in the West. For them, it is warfare.[170] The same could be said about the use of unmarked militia groups and Special Forces soldiers – the so-called "Little Green Men" – to foment secession movements in Ukraine.[171] There is nothing "wrong" with such tactics as long as it supports Russia's objectives.

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[166] *Ibid.*, 7.

[167] Timothy Thomas, "The Evolving Nature of Russia's Way of War", 35.

[168] Dmitry Adamsky, *Cross-Domain Coercion: The Current Russian Art of Strategy*, French Institute of International Relations (2015), 25.

[169] David M. Glantz, *Soviet Military Deception in the Second World War* (London: Cass, 1989), 4.

[170] Clint Watts, *Influence and Information in the Social Media Era*, War on the Rocks, 19 June 2018, https://warontherocks.com/2018/06/wotr-podcast-a-conversation-with-clint-watts-on-influence-and-information-in-the-social-media-era/

[171] Alexander Lanoszka, "Russian hybrid warfare and extended deterrence in eastern Europe", *International Affairs*, vol. 92, no. 1 (2016), 175.

CHINA

China is also uniquely poised to be an effectual grey zone actor, potentially even more so than Russia. Its strategic culture favours the exploitation of the grey zone, preferring unorthodox means, stratagems and "strategic detours" to achieve victory. The Chinese strategic culture has a propensity for a multidimensional approach to conflict which pre-dates Russian or Soviet influences and modern China; it is centuries old. It is ingrained in everything Chinese do from social structures to language, to political and military affairs, and so forth. The Chinese have a very unique "Way of war", one centred on subduing the enemy through influence rather than the brute use of force.

The Chinese Strategic Mind

The Chinese strategic thinking is utterly different that in the West. First, it is embedded in Chinese classical teachings from Lu Shang, Sun Tzu, Zhuge Liang, Liu Bowen to Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. Still today, the centuries-old Chinese principles of "know your enemy and know yourself, and in one hundred battles you will never be in peril", "to win one hundred wars is not the height of skill, to subdue the enemy without fighting is", and "avoid what is strong, attack what is weak" are greatly influencing every aspect of Chinese society.[172] Second, it stems from traditional Chinese philosophical concepts, such as *Tao* and *Shi* where the world is perceived holistically, and where Time and Space are integrated into a single concept (and not separated like in the West).[173] Lastly, Chinese cognition is shaped by the unique structure of its language, where synthesis and comprehensiveness are paramount, creating holistic thinking and a frame of mind that favours practicality over abstract thinking.[174]

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[172] Timothy L. Faulkner, "Contemporary China", *Military Review*, vol. 99, no. 5 (September 2019), 52.
[173] See Table 4.1 at pages 47-48 for a short description of both concepts.
[174] Hong Liu, *The Chinese Strategic Mind*, 60-61.

In *The Chinese Strategic Mind*, Hong Liu contends that the Chinese strategic mind can be represented in six idiosyncrasies: *Tao*, Stratagems, *Shi*, Dialectic Thinking, Competitor Orientation and Agility. Table 4.1 summarizes Liu's idiosyncrasies.

Table 4.1 Idiosyncrasies of the Chinese strategic mind.

Tao	*Tao*, or "the Way of the Universe", is a convoluted Chinese concept describing the universal principle regulating all things in life, from nature's essential order to moral law. At its core is the notion that all things consist of contradictions or are a unity of opposites. The symbols *yin* and *yang* are the most common illustration of *Tao*. *Tao* is still today behind the strategy-making of Chinese leaders.
Stratagems	The Chinese strategic mind prefers stratagems to fairness or justice. Trickery and cunningness are the attributes of a great general or strategist. Victory is about outwitting your opponents, especially by using unorthodox ways. "An effective stratagem takes a panoramic and holistic view of the situation and prioritises the utilisation of wisdom/stratagem to neutralise or subjugate the opponent."[175]
Shi	*Shi* is a Chinese term which translates to "situation", "potential" and "power". In brief, *Shi* refers to the ability of an individual or a collective to act based on the advantageous or disadvantageous nature of any given situation.
Dialectic Thinking	Chinese dialectic is embedded in the *yin* and *yang* mode of thinking. It can be summarized in the three following principles: • *Principle of Change:* Nothing stays the same. Change is everywhere and happens all the time. As a result, status quos are abnormal. • *Principle of Contradiction:* Reality is full of contradictions. Nothing is cut-and-dried. There cannot be successes without failures, nor failures without successes. • *Principle of Holism:* Everything is interconnected. To understand a situation, one must look at how it connects with the context in which it occurs, and how it is influenced or is influencing this context.
Competitor Orientation	Being competitor-oriented means that decision-making is driven by the desire to beat the competition and that any strategy designed to achieve this goal will be reviewed and refined as many times as necessary to achieve the desired end-state. This said, Chinese culture does not confuse competitiveness with haste. The Chinese strategic culture favours "the Middle Way" philosophy where one must avoid doing too little or too much. Success will come in due time.

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[175] *Ibid*., 87.

Agility	The Chinese understanding of agility is two-fold. First, it implies that everything being equal, with strategic patience and *Shi*, everyone has an equal chance of success in life. The "strong" can be defeated by the "weak", "soft" can subdue "hard", and so forth. Second, it means "the ability to adapt to, steer, direct or control an emerging situation in such a way that it is dealt with swiftly and rapidly, and, most importantly, ahead of the opponents".[176]

Source: Hong Liu, *The Chinese Strategic Mind*, 78-126.

When comparing the idiosyncrasies of the Chinese strategic mind to the characteristics of the grey zone, it is a near-perfect match. Chinese culture does not see the world in a binary view like in the West. Through the concepts of *Tao* and dialectic thinking, there are no boundaries between war and peace, which are, for the Chinese, the two sides of the same coin. Chinese consider competition, confrontation and rivalries as part of the everyday life. For them, every aspect of life represents a form of competition, and they truly *embrace* that competition, accepting all the risks that come with it. In Chinese society, all areas of existence, whether it is the global marketplace, sports, social life, diplomacy or politics, are considered being battlefields to which they apply military-like strategies and tactics.[177] In this context, "war" describes this everyday life competition for survival; it is not good or bad, it just is, and victory goes to the most cunning of them all. For China, competition *is* war.

This holistic view of conflict and war has three consequences on the Chinese approach to great power competition. First, being in a constant state of competition (or war) means that time is a resource, not a hindrance.[178] The Chinese strategist does not haste to secure victory like it is in the West. He or she articulates a vision to which all efforts are directed to. This said the Chinese strategist does not plan a direct path toward victory. Through *Shi*, he or she values

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[176] *Ibid.*, 117.
[177] *Ibid.*, 3.
[178] Laure Paquette, "Strategy and Time in Clausewitz's *on War* and in Sun Tzu's the *Art of War*", *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1991), 46.

strategic patience, "sensing" situations to see how it can be best exploited or mitigated, considering the advantages and disadvantages of every opportunity. In order words, the "path" to victory (or the strategy) is uncovered along the journey.[179] Only the vision remains strong and steady, guiding decisions, like a lighthouse in the night.

Second, competition and war are "unrestricted", in the sense that every tool in the toolbox, every means available to them, represents a valid option. There is no notion of "cheating" or "being dishonest" by being cunning or using trickery. From a Chinese cultural perspective, there are no legal or moral limitations imposed to conflict, war and warfare as in the West; the Western Just War Theory with its binary concepts of moral/immoral, ethical/unethical, legal/illegal is unfathomable: it hampers creativity, thus the path to victory.[180] Any technology or systems that can affect the enemy (or competitor), whether it is socially, psychologically, economically or physically, is for the intent of policy a weapon and is considered as such.[181] For example, Table 4.2 shows all the different legitimate forms of warfare based on Chinese strategic thought.

Table 4.2 – Methods of operation in twenty-first-century conflicts.

Military	Trans-military	Non-military
Atomic warfare	Diplomatic warfare	Financial warfare
Conventional warfare	Network warfare	Trade warfare
Bio-chemical warfare	Intelligence warfare	Resources warfare
Ecological warfare	Psychological warfare	Economic aid warfare
Space warfare	Tactical warfare	Regulatory warfare
Electronic warfare	Smuggling warfare	Sanction warfare
Guerrilla warfare	Drug warfare	Media warfare
Terrorist warfare	Virtual warfare (deterrence)	Ideological warfare

Source: Qiao Liang and Xiangsui Wang, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 146.

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[179] Hong Liu, *The Chinese Strategic Mind*, 81-84.
[180] *Ibid*., 107.
[181] Qiao Liang and Xiangsui Wang, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 25.

In terms of means to an end, the Chinese have a unique and distinct dislike for the use of force as a primary means to an end. Firstly, they believe that the excessive use of military power at the wrong moment only contributes to escalation, a situation that serves no one. Secondly, Sun Tzu's famous "to subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill" is still central to Chinese strategic thought today. The use of stratagems has evolved over four millennia to become canon in every walks of life. Its usage is "the first choice of action in order to achieve competitive advantage".[182] The American expert of Chinese Warfare, Ralph Sawyer, summarizes the Chinese preference for unorthodox means as such:

> The primary objective should be to subjugate other states without actually engaging in armed combat … through diplomatic coercion, thwarting the enemy's plans and alliances, and frustrating their strategy to achieve the idealized form of complete victory.[183]

Notwithstanding this preference for the avoidance of violence as a primary means to an end, it does not signify that the Chinese will be reluctant to use force with purpose when required. If the use of force is deemed unavoidable, Chinese strategic culture "encourages quick pre-emptive operations, arguably in the hope of inflicting sufficient damage to the enemy to make it desist from continuing the confrontation".[184] As such, the current Chinese military strategy is driven by the prospect of winning quickly and decisively, wanting armed conflicts to end as early and as bloodlessly as possible.[185] It is in this spirit, for instance, that the Chinese have chosen to focus on the development of anti-access/anti-denial (A2/AD) weapon systems instead of other types of long-range weapons systems. First, A2/AD weapon systems offer an effective deterrent effect which can greatly contribute to avoiding resulting to force in the first

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[182] Hong Liu, *The Chinese Strategic Mind*, 140.

[183] Ralph D. Sawyer, *Strategies for the Human Realm: Crux of the T'ai-pai Yin-ching* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012), 50.

[184] Andrea Ghiselli, "Revising China's Strategic Culture: Contemporary Cherry-Picking of Ancient Strategic Thought", *The China Quarterly*, vol. 233 (March 2018), 181.

[185] Timothy L. Faulkner, "Contemporary China", 52.

place. Second, in their calculus, one single missile strike on a valuable target – like sinking an aircraft carrier – can create the strategic choc required to stop any war in its track, making such weapon worthwhile. In other words, it is better to kill *few* thousand in one engagement and avoid war than killing *many* thousands over a protracted war.

Finally, China's strategic thinking favours non-linearity and immateriality. The Chinese strategic mind is by nature non-linear, always being ready to exploit the potential of any given situation, both in terms of defensive and offensive opportunities, adapting the rules, means and ways as time flies. Linearity eventually leads to predictability, which is exactly what one needs to avoid in the path to victory. Linearity also limits creativity, agility and adaptability. Lastly, while the West focus on "material forces", the Chinese strategist are adept at combining material and immaterial features in both their analysis and solutions.[186] The Chinese believe that the mind – or strategic thinking – provides the superior advantage, not technology, and it is why they invest massively in the education of their military personnel. They truly embrace the famous saying: "knowledge is power".[187]

Influence as *The* Decisive Weapon

In the context of Chinese strategic culture, the publication of *Unrestricted Warfare* in 1999 is the quintessence of Chinese traditional thinking applied to contemporary challenges. Written by the Colonels Qiao Liang and Xiangsui Wang of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), *Unrestricted Warfare* essentially argued that the character of war has changed beyond recognition and that to best the West (or any enemy for that matter), China must focus on strategy rather than on brute force, exploiting all means at their disposal, especially non-military means which are today bound to achieve greater effects than the use of force will ever do. Liang

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[186] Hong Liu, *The Chinese Strategic Mind*, 42-43.
[187] Qiao Liang and Xiangsui Wang, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 177.

and Wang illustrate, for instance, that when one simple missile test or the seizure of one

suspected cargo ship at sea create financial havoc around the world in a matter of hours, it is

undeniable that non-violent engagements are more relevant to bring the enemy on its knees than

killing soldiers on the battlefield.[188] Consequentially, they conclude that, more than ever, war in

the twenty-first century is not about the "use of force to do one's will", but rather the

> use all means whatsoever–means that involve the force of arms and means
> that do not involve the force of arms, means that involve military power
> and means that do not involve military power, means that entail casualties
> and means that do not entail casualties–to force the enemy to serve one's
> own interests.[189]

Liang and Wang's main argument is straightforward and perfectly matching traditional

Chinese strategic thinking. Future conflicts, they write, will transcend "all boundaries and

limits", the battlefield "is everywhere" and that "many of the current principles of combat will be

modified, and even that the rules of war may need to be rewritten".[190] Table 4.3 summarizes their

proposed review of the principles of war in the postmodern security environment.

Table 4.3 – Principles of war in the postmodern security environment.

Principles	Description
Omnidirectionality	Competition, conflict and war is a whole-of-government enterprise requiring the design of strategies that uses all domains, means and methods available to one (military and non-military) on equal footing and across all potential battlefields (physical, technological and cognitive). Strategies shall focus on supra-national, supra-domains and supra-means combinations.
Synchrony	Conducting actions in different spaces within the same period of time.
Limited objectives	Pursue feasible limited objectives and eliminate objectives that are beyond one's abilities.
Unlimited measures	To achieve limited objectives, consider the use of all means (measures) available. Do not self-imposed boundaries.
Asymmetry	Asymmetry is the ultimate creator of power. From force disposition and employment, selection of the main combat axis and the center of

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[188] *Ibid.*, 12, 51-52.
[189] *Ibid.*, 58-59.
[190] *Ibid.*, 12.

	gravity for the attack, all the way to the allocation of weapons (military and non-military), maximize the use of asymmetrical factors.
Minimal consumption	In a scarce resources' environment, use the least amount of combat resources sufficient to accomplish the objective. "Mass" is achieved by the combination of minimal resources instead of using the maximum of resources available at once.
Multidimensional coordination	Coordination and cooperation of all instruments of national power in order to accomplish policy objectives. Requires a central command and control to allocate and direct assigned means across all DIMEFIL domains.
Adjustment and control of the entire process	Leaders must constantly acquire information, assess progress, adjust action accordingly and maintain control of the situation. Requires a non-linear planning and evaluation process.

Source: Qiao Liang and Xiangsui Wang, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 206-215.

From the perspective of the two Chinese scholar-warriors, nations who limit warfare to military means only is lacking strategic thinking and, in a sense, are committing a form of "strategic suicide". "He who wants to win today's wars, or those of tomorrow, to have victory firmly in his grasp, must 'combine' all of the resources of war which he has at his disposal and use them as means to prosecute the war", they wrote.[191] To achieve such goal, the Chinese military officers suggest the creation of a "grand warfare method" or "War Plan", which combines all military and non-military means into one integrated and coherent strategy.[192] In Western parlance, they advocate for the development of a "Grand Strategy" to guide the decision-making of all national actions.[193]

Not surprisingly, the logic of *Unrestricted Warfare* is antithetical to the Western martial tradition. Many Westerners have expressed their content toward it, claiming that such "dirty wars" promote perfidy and atrocity in the name of policy.[194] In contrast, *Unrestricted Warfare*

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[191] *Ibid.*, 181.
[192] *Ibid.*, 119 and 197.
[193] The concept of Grand Strategy will be further addressed in Chapter 6.
[194] Jeffrey W. Bolander, "The Dragon's New Claws", *Marine Corps Gazette*, vol. 85, no 2 (Quantico: Marine Corps Association, 2001), 58.

elicited immediate praise in China by both the political and military leadership. Many consider the book as being the road map to the rise of China to the rank of global power.[195] Four years after its publication in 1999, the book led to the release of a supra-national policy by the Chinese Government called "Three Warfare" (TW).

TW essentially combines the three modes of warfare that the Chinese consider to be the most decisive ones in winning future conflicts (or wars): psychological warfare, legal warfare and media warfare (also referred to as public opinion warfare in some translations).[196] In brief, psychological warfare has two objectives. First, attacking the opponent's decision-making cycle to force its leadership to make blunt mistakes. Second, protecting Chinese' cognition against foreign psychological attacks.[197] Methods of psychological warfare know no limits and can include deterrence, coercion, deception, instigation, seduction, bribery, inducement and confusion.[198] Through legal warfare, China aims at bending – if not entirely rewriting – the rules of the international order in its favour. Like one scholar commented, international law is what binds the society of states together, by subserving it, "China wants new rules in its image".[199] Finally, as for China's media warfare, it seeks to manipulate public opinion in favour of China's views, through the exploitation of the mass media industry (film, television and books), the Internet and news media. Methods can include guidance, control, alteration, suppression and management of information/disinformation.[200]

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[195] Jeffrey W. Bolander, "The Dragon's New Claws", 59; Sangkuk Lee, "China's 'Three Warfares': Origins, Applications, and Organizations", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2 (2014), 201.

[196] Sangkuk Lee, "China's 'Three Warfares'…", 199; Weichong Ong, "The rise of hybrid actors in the Asia-Pacific", 749-750; Sean McFate, *The New Rules of War...*, 65-68.

[197] Sangkuk Lee, "China's 'Three Warfares'…", 203.

[198] *Ibid.*

[199] Sean McFate, *The New Rules of War...*, 68.

[200] *Ibid.*

TW is in reality a comprehensive "War Plan" that leads all aspects of the Chinese government, from foreign policy to military doctrine, to diplomacy, to economic policy, to cultural policy, and so forth.[201] On the military side, TW is leading a reform of the PLA to make sure that China has the right strategic mind, agile processes and appropriate capabilities to execute its strategy.[202] This transformation runs deep into the PLA touching every aspect of the military, from force generation to capabilities acquisition, to operations. It includes new cyber, electronic and space capabilities, foreign and strategic studies, language and cultural training, joint and combined seamless operations, intelligence training, and much more. The meet its goals, the PLA has even reduced its troop numbers to prioritize quality (strategic mind) over quantity (war of attrition).[203]

COMMON LESSONS IDENTIFIED

The study of how Russia and China have come to make the strategic choice to operate in the grey zone is enlightening in many regards. Through NWT or TW, both Russia and China have recognized the true essence of today's security and operating environment and have taken the steps to win wars in this environment. These concepts are rooted in their strategic culture. As Confucius said thousands of years ago, the West can learn from the experience of Russia and China before deciding how to best respond to grey zone aggressions. To that end, Table 4.4 lists the key lessons that the West can learn from Russia's and China's experience in the grey zone.

Table 4.4 – Key lessons from Russia's and China's approach to grey zone activities.

State Level	Provide national-level vision through a long-term Grand Strategy. Establish a national command and control apparatus across the DIMEFIL domains. Learn to operate in a context of permanent information confrontation.

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[201] Sangkuk Lee, "China's 'Three Warfares'…", 205.
[202] Timothy L. Faulkner, "Contemporary China", 46-48.
[203] Jacqueline Newmyer, "The Revolution in Military Affairs with Chinese Characteristics", *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 33, no. 4 (2010), 499.

	Acquire non-military capabilities relevant for grey zone operations.
Military Level	Adapt military structure, training and doctrines.
	Acquire military capabilities relevant for grey zone operations.
	Use of force when necessary, albeit mostly covertly. If necessary, use force with purpose.
	Focus on Joint/Combined Operations.
	Invest in people (minds), not just weapons.
To Both	Use of all means (military and non-military) available, with a primacy on non-violent means.
	Remove the boundaries separating the levels of war, the foreign and domestic fronts and the DIMEFIL dimensions.
	Favour limited and achievable objectives.
	Focus on asymmetric and non-linear approaches to conflict.
	Consider time as a strategic resource, not a hindrance.

Source: Author.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter aimed at demonstrating why the strategic cultures of Russia and China are more conducive to grey zone operations than the Western strategic culture, and at identifying what lessons can be learned from their successes in the grey zone, if any.

First of all, in terms of strategic thinking, both Russia and China benefit from a strategic culture that facilitates grey zone strategies and activities; to a point where it can be concluded that their preference for operating in the grey zone is more cultural – if not emotional – than it is rational.[204] Operating in the space between war and peace plays on the countries' strengths, highlights their enemies' weaknesses, and fits their flexible mindset and their unique strategic culture. Russia's Stavka-like command and control and Chinese political system are perfect for a gradualism approach to operations and maximizing the use of unconventional tools.[205] Not only their unique strategic mind is perfectly adapted to the gradualism approach and unorthodox

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[204] At least "rational" has understood in Western culture.

[205] Hal Brands and Charles Edel, "A Grand Strategy of Democratic Solidarity", 34. With their autocratic discipline, authoritarian regimes are undoubtedly better predisposed than their democratic counterparts to have functional centralized command structures and act with purpose, especially in the information domain.

thinking required of grey zone conflicts, but they also have taken all the steps to master its exploitation and gain the advantage.

In terms of strategic coherence and strategic "ends", both nations are conceiving long-term security strategies that fit their political goals and vision; adapting their command and control to better coordinate all governmental actions under one authority, this way ensuring that they can best seize opportunities quickly and exert restraint when required.

Regarding "ways" and "means", both Russia and China have realized that, in today's operating environment, non-military means offer better strategic effects than military means alone. This realization is partly due to their own strategic culture, partly due to the thorough analysis they made of the postmodern security environment. Thus, they are developing approaches to conflict and warfare that consider all means available to the state as a valid means to an end, with a specific emphasis on the use of indirect, non-violent means. As Liang and Wang said, "there is now no domain which warfare cannot use, and there is almost no domain which does not have warfare's offensive pattern".[206] Finally, Russia and China have reformed their military structure to ensure that they are fit-for-purpose with less overhead, the right capabilities, smaller and more agile forces, and smarter troops.

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[206] Qiao Liang and Xiangsui Wang, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 189.

CHAPTER 5 – WESTERN COGNITIVE PARADOXES

One of the central challenges confronting international relations today is that we do not really know what is a war and what is not. The consequences of our confusion would seem absurd, were they not so profoundly dangerous.
                                                                — Dr. Hew Strachan, The Changing Character of War

The grey zone, this conceptual space between peace and war, occurring when actors purposefully use multiple instruments of national power to achieve political objectives with activities that are ambiguous or cloud attribution and exceed the threshold of ordinary harmless competition, yet fall below the level of large-scale direct military conflict, presents characteristics that are antithetical to Western strategic culture, creating cognitive, doctrinal and structural challenges for Western nations. By comparing the concept of the grey zone with the Western's traditional concept of war, this chapter argues that four cognitive paradoxes are impeding the ability of Western states to operate effectively in the grey zone. They are *inadequate taxonomy*, *use of violence*, *role of civilians and new battlespaces*, and *laws and customs of war*.

PARADOX 1: INADEQUATE TAXONOMY

The first paradox concerns the inadequacy of the traditional Western security taxonomy in the new security environment. The grey zone challenges the Western fundamental understanding of what war, conflict, peace, weapons, adversaries and victory are, therefore paralyzing Western nations' ability to respond to grey zone aggressions with relative reciprocity.

War and Peace

The Western conceptualization of war and peace becomes highly ineffectual in grey zone situations, where the use of force is justified by strategic needs, not by the mere failures of other means, and where war and peace can co-exist simultaneously. Figure 5.1 illustrates this issue.
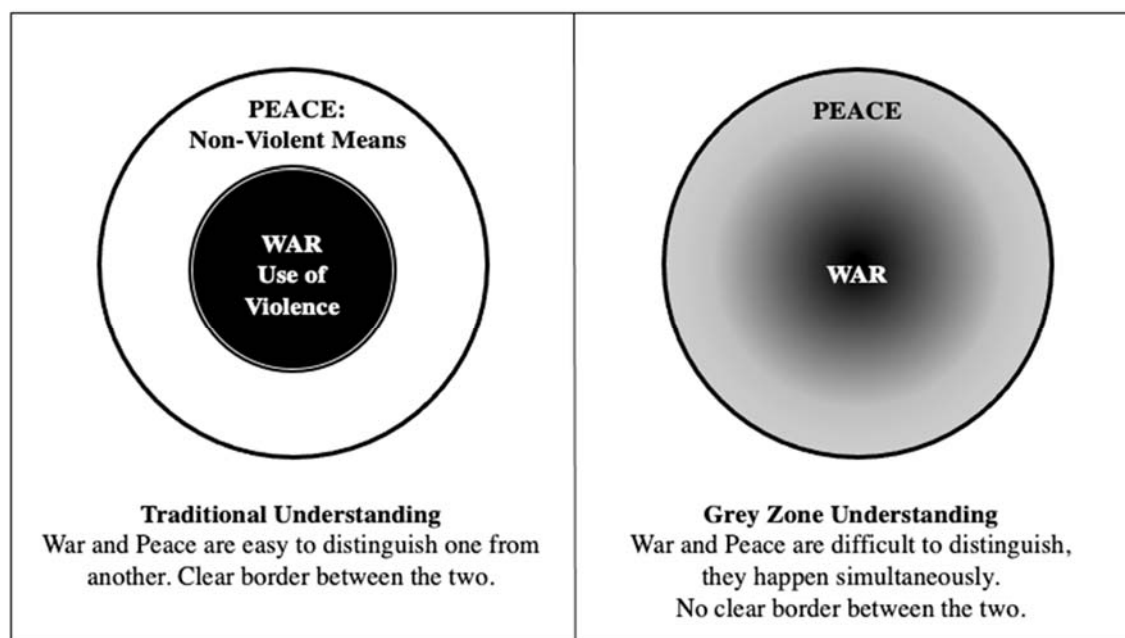
**Figure 5.1 – Comparative view of the traditional Western's
understanding of war and war in the grey zone.**
Source: Inspired from Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War…*, 34.

War in the grey zone is still Clausewitzian at its core, but it is applied to *all* instruments

of national power and not just to the Military. Indeed, if war is to "compel an opponent to do

one's will", therefore war must be performed with the whole of means available and with "the

utmost exertion of political will".[207] The same could be argued for great power competition.

After all, like many have highlighted before, in terms of scale and strategic consequences, social,

economic, financial and political traumas have today greater impact than "traditional wars".[208]

As demonstrated by the myriads of new theories of war that have been published over the

past twenty years, the Western world will have to come to terms with the idea that war is not an

immutable concept. It adapts its ways and means constantly, following social, technological,

political and economic trends (Clausewitz's comment about war being a chameleon comes to

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[207] Julian Stafford Corbett, *Principles of Maritime Strategy*, 25; Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, 104. According to Clausewitz, the "utmost exertion of powers" is the product of two factors, the *available means* and the *strength of the Will* to use it.

[208] Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science is in the Foresight", 24; Qiao Liang and Xiangsui Wang, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 6.

mind).[209] Arguably, the only constant feature of war is its nature, that is war being a political object. Consequently, the definition of the concept of war would benefit to be broadened, more align on its nature and its "essence", and less about the ways and means used to wage it. The nature of war is about *Will* and *Power*. As discussed previously, citing Clausewitz and Corbett, war is the expression of the will of the State to use all instruments of national power available to compel a rival to do its will. Similarly, the true essence of war, as Heuser reports, is best captured by its German etymological word "Wirren", meaning "chaos, disorder and confusion".[210] Thus, the definition of the grey zone fits both the objective nature and essence of war: it is chaos, disorder and confusion orchestrated purposely by a state or non-state actor with the intent to harm, not just physically, but also economically, socially and cognitively. However, a definition in strategic studies is worthless if it does not reflect reality. Therefore, more thoughts will have to be put in bringing nineteenth-century concepts and definitions of war, peace and conflicts in the twenty-first century in a meaningful way. Of note, there is already some promising work being done on the matter, especially in the field of cyber warfare.[211]

Weapons

Early realist theorist Arnold Wolfers argued – with good reason – that weapons are "ambiguous symbols", they find their meaning in the minds of the concerned actors.[212] In other words, weapons cannot be defined solely through the eyes of whom uses them, but also through the eyes of whom they are used against. The issue is that to be able to defend itself against an attack, a nation must first recognize what weapons are being used against itself, and in what

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[209] Beatrice Heuser, "Rethinking War", 42; Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War,* 121.
[210] Beatrice Heuser, "Rethinking War", 43.
[211] Michael N. Schmitt, "'Attack' as a Term of Art in International Law: The Cyber Operations Context", in C. Czosseck, R. Ottis and K. Ziolkowski (eds), *4th International Conference on Cyber Conflict*, NATO Cyber Centre of Excellence (2012); Jozef Valuch, Tomáš Gábriš and Ondrej Hamuľák, "Cyber Attacks, Information Attacks, and Postmodern Warfare", *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2017).
[212] Cited in Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma...*, 43.

capacity. For instance, Russians consider information being a legitimate weapon as much as a gun or a ballistic missile is, which is not the case for most Westerners, hence the difficulty in the West to counter Russian information attacks.[213] Weapons today cannot be understood solely by their lethal potentiality. After all, the official definition for weapons also includes any "means of contending against another".[214] As such, instead of considering weapons exclusively based on their lethal potentiality, the West would benefit from defining weapons based on their *usage*. As the Kranzberg's First Law postulates, any form of technology, whether is it material-, cyber- or cognitive-based, is neither good nor bad in itself; it is what human makes of it.[215]

Adversaries

When war is a clear concept, so is the term *adversaries*. In the traditional understanding of war, war being an overt activity, a declared state of hostilities between two or more belligerents, there is a clear understanding of who the enemy is. Such polarity is not that evident in the grey zone, where it becomes hardly difficult to differentiate friends from foes. The binary taxonomy of "friends and foes", therefore, needs reviewing to better take into consideration the greater nuances of postmodern relationships in grey zone contexts. To this end, Aoubé's proposed taxonomy of "competition, rivalry and animosity" is noteworthy and merit attention.[216] According to the scholar, the benign form of relationships between states would be one of "competition", acknowledging that in today's global environment, nations compete against one another for power, resources, strategic advantage, and so forth. Being competitors, however, does not mean being hostile to one another; competitors can still maintain friendly relationships

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[213] Bruno Tremblay, *Democracy Under Attack: The Threat of Information Disorder* (Joint Command and Staff Program Paper, Canadian Forces College, 2020), 15.

[214] Merriam-Webster Dictionary, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/weapon.

[215] Melvin Kranzberg, "Technology and History: 'Kranzberg's Laws'", in *Technology and Culture*, vol. 27, no. 3 (1986), 545-546

[216] Ibrahim G. Aoudé, "Turkey and its Immediate Arab Neighbors in the Twenty-First Century", 94-95.

between themselves. In reference to the grey zone concept, competitors would then operate below the lower grey zone threshold. However, when a nation starts working against another nations' interest in a harmful manner, either covertly or overtly, the ill-intended nation then becomes "a rival". While the relationship with the rival nation is not friendly anymore, the level of activities remains low, far away from the upper grey zone threshold. Animosity, on the other end, describes situations where nations are "engaged in an existential struggle against each other".[217] In such situations, competitors or rivals now transition to become adversaries, possibly crossing the upper grey zone threshold into an official state of war.

Victory

The last significant taxonomy issue regards the ability to define what "victory" looks like in the grey zone. In a traditional setting, the meaning of victory is self-evident: it is when the object of war is achieved, either when the aim is achieved or when the enemy has surrendered. When operating in the grey zone, however, the significance of victory is much more elusive since there is no clear object for war. Grey zone campaigns do not seek to "overthrow" the adversary's army. It rather aims at obtaining a "strategic relative advantage", either in the short or the long run. Furthermore, since there is no declaration of war, no clear objectives (either limited or unlimited), no well-defined time frame, no clear enemy and no "surrendering ceremonies", there is, therefore, no clear interpretive structure to define what "victory" looks like, leaving everyone to interpret the meaning of the term in their own ways.[218] An elusive common interpretive structure ultimately brings citizens to question the government's decision to spend the nation's treasure on something that they do not perceive as being necessary. This is specifically pernicious when it comes to military affairs where lives are at stake. Indeed, an elusive common

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[217] *Ibid.*, 95.
[218] Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground Up*, 57-61.

interpretive structure weakens the political utility of the Military as an instrument of national power, making it difficult for the State to justify the use of force in any case.[219]

Victory in the grey zone is not produced by a decisive engagement or a major event. It is rather the result of the accumulation of *faits accomplis*. This said, while the accumulation of *faits accomplis* leads to victory and shall not be confused for victory. Indeed, it would be misleading to consider these *faits accomplis* as small victories themselves, since they offer no guarantee that the desired political end state has been achieved, therefore, that the ultimate strategic victory has been realized. For instance, China may feel "victorious" in the South China Sea since it operates unimpededly. Yet, the only true victory for China would be to have the international community recognizing its claims. Thus, victory in the grey zone requires strategic patience, something that is more or less inexistent in the West today. As Mazarr stresses:

> [Western] societies are more comfortable with simple, traditional conflicts
> with well-defined objectives, a defined time frame, and a clear winner.
> Operating a changing, ambiguous, long-term campaign challenges the
> strategic personality of democracies.[220]

Nonetheless, the meaning of victory and defeat in the grey zone can only be found in political terms. As such, one way to avoid that the term victory continues to be an elusive concept in the twenty-first-century security environment (either from a defensive or offensive point of view) is to devise long-term strategies and plans; a necessity that will be further addressed in Chapter 6.

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[219] Bruno Tremblay, *Assessing the Consequences of Globalisation and Liberalisation on the Western Understanding of War and Warfare*, 36.
[220] Micheal J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone…*, 67.

PARADOX 2: USE OF VIOLENCE

The second paradox concerns the rules surrounding the use of violence as a means to a

political end. As described in the previous chapters, a traditional Western understanding of war

means that violence is only used in last resort, when all other non-violent means have failed, or if

the use of force is justified to be more effective to achieve the end sought. In those cases,

violence is used against a clear enemy (force-on-force), in a controlled manner, overtly and

decisively, aiming at resolving the issue as quickly as possible with the less suffering possible.[221]

The utility of the use of violence in the grey zone is of a different nature, leaving Western nations

baffled by both how to use force in grey zone contexts and how to defend oneself against grey

zone aggressions. Figure 5.2 summarizes how the use of force in the grey zone is different than

the use of force in a traditional war setting.

Traditional Warfare	Grey Zone Warfare
The use of military forces: • initiation of military operations *after strategic deployment* • *frontal clash of large groupings of line-units*, the basis of which consists of ground troops • the destruction of personnel and weaponry, and *the consequent possession of lines* and areas with the goal of the seizure of territories • *destruction of the en*emy, destruction of the economic potential and possession of his territories • the conduct of combat operations on the ground, in the air and at sea • the command-and-control of groupings of line units (forces) *within a framework of a strictly organized hierarchical* of command-and-control agencies	**The use of political, diplomatic, economic and other non-military measures in combination with the use of military forces:** • *Initiation of military operations* by groupings of line-units (forces) in peacetime • *highly maneuverable, non-contact* combat operations of interbranch groupings of line-units • reduction of the military-economic potential of the state by the *destruction of critically important facilities* of his military and civilian infrastructure in a short time • the *mass use of high-precision weaponry*, the large-scale use of *special operations forces*, as well as *robotic systems and weapons based on new physical principles* and the participation of a *civil-military component* in combat operations • *simultaneous effects* on line-units and enemy facilities throughout the entire depth of its territories • warfare simultaneously in *all physical environments, the cyber space and the information space* • the use of asymmetric and indirect operations • command-and-control of forces and assets in *a unified information space*

Figure 5.2 – Change in the utility of the use of force in grey zone contexts.
Source: Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science is in the Foresight", 25.

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[221] See also Paradox 4: Laws and Customs of War, page 68-71.

In the grey zone, violence can be used at any moment, even in "peacetime" – albeit in a limited and often covert fashion. Russia's "Little Green Men" in Crimea and China's "Little Blue Men" in the South China Sea – the use of civilian ships as part of military operations – are two prime examples of that. The object of the use of force is also different: it seeks force-on-will, not force-on-force.[222] The military no longer seeks to overthrow the enemy's military, but to bypass one's military all together to directly disrupt the entire rival's society, especially through the use of asymmetrical activities.[223] Furthermore, and more importantly, violence is no longer the sole mean to cause "harm". As explained earlier in this study, other modes of warfare, especially Political Warfare[224] and Information Warfare[225] can arguably cause more harm than the use of brute force.[226] As the Russian general Valery Gerasimov observed:

> The very "rules of war" have changed. The role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness. The focus of applied methods of conflict has altered in the direction of the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other nonmilitary measures...[227]

To protect their interests against grey zone aggressions and exert influence in the twenty-first-century security environment, Western nations must realize that the rules of war have

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[222] Graeme Lamb, *Sir Graeme Lamb*, The Western Way of War, Episode 2, RUSI, 11 June 2020, https://rusi.org/multimedia/western-way-war-sir-graeme-lamb

[223] Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science is in the Foresight", 24-25; Christian Malis, "Unconventional Forms of War", 17.

[224] Broadly defined, Political Warfare is "the employment of all the means at a nation's command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives". See George Kennan, "The Inauguration of Organized Political Warfare", in *Policy Planning Staff Memorandum*, 4 May 1948, http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/history/johnson/65ciafounding3.htm

[225] NATO defines Information Warfare as "an operation conducted in order to gain an information advantage over the opponent. It consists in controlling one's own information space, protecting access to one's own information, while acquiring and using the opponent's information, destroying their information systems and disrupting the information flow". See NATO Defence Education Enhancement Program, *What is Information Warfare?*, No Date, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/5/pdf/2005-deepportal4-information-warfare.pdf

[226] Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science is in the Foresight", 24-25; Christian Malis, "Unconventional Forms of War", 17.

[227] Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science is in the Foresight", 24.

changed, and that the winner may not be the one with the most bullets. Violence still has a role to play in grey zone conflicts, but it should be used in conjunction with other instruments of national power to exert force-on-will, not force-on-force. In the strategic grey zone context, lethality, as argued by Rivera and Arnel, is *influence*, not force.[228] This perspective on war, and by extension warfare, makes war a whole-of-government – if not a whole-of-society – endeavour, not just the function of the armed forces, which has significant impacts on the role of civilians and on how the battlefield is perceived.

PARADOX 3: THE ROLE OF CIVILIANS AND NEW BATTLESPACES

The third paradox concerns who fights and where in the grey zone. In his seminal work *The Utility of Force*, Rupert Smith presents the game-changing concept of "war amongst the people".[229] In brief, Smith argues that war as a battle in a field between men and machinery to gain control over territory no longer exists.[230] Instead, wars are waged *amongst people* with the intent to gain control over *people*.[231] As a result, the civilian population is today (often unknowingly) a significant actor in war (or great power competition), creating a fundamental cognitive dissonance in the Western way of war.[232]

The concept of war amongst the people is a predominant feature of grey zone conflicts. The strategic choice of prioritizing non-violent means aims at targeting the "will of the people" to influence their opinions and behaviours, or to instill fear, hatred and distrust, disrupting the

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[228] William A. Rivera and Arnel P. David, "Towards a More Comprehensive Understanding of Lethality", *Small Wars Journal*, 11 February 2019, https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/towards-more-comprehensive-understanding-lethality

[229] Rupert Smith. *The Utility of Force…*, 17, 278.

[230] *Ibid*., 1.

[231] Rupert Smith, "Foreword", in David Brown, *War Amongst the People: Critical Assessments* (Havant: Howgate Publishing, 2019), 15.

[232] Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, 175-180; Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force…*, 278-279.

target's society from within.[233] This goes along with the previously mentioned notions of force-on-will and lethality being influence at the strategic level.

Another consequence is that the People are not just a "target" of adversaries' disinformation campaigns, there are also fully participating in these war-like activities – often without their knowledge – potentially bending the traditional legal definitions for "lawful combatants", "military objects", "military necessity" and "military use". This phenomenon is referred to by Shoichi Takama as the "civilianization of warfare".[234] Arguably, if all instruments of national power – which are all but one managed and staffed by civilian personnel – are brought to bear in a conflict, participating civilians are therefore contributing to hostilities, losing their protection attributed by article 51 of the Geneva Convention.[235]

Lastly, the increasing role of civilians in conflicts and wars also accelerates the shift where fights happen, firstly from *battlefield* to *battlespace*[236], and secondly from *physical* to *technological* and *cognitive* battlespaces. The fighting in the grey zone is occurring simultaneously not just in the traditional physical warfighting domains (land, sea, air and space), but as well – and maybe more importantly so – in the technologically-created cyberspace and the human-based cognitive space.[237] This shift had already started with the development of many-to-

[233] Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone...*, 105.

[234] Shoichi Takama was a colonel in the Japanese Self-Defense Forces who argued in mid-1990s that the role of civilians in war will be an important characteristic of the twenty-first-century warfare, hence the term "civilianization" of warfare. See Qiao Liang and Xiangsui Wang, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 59.

[235] United Nations, *Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I)* (8 June 1977), 265. Article 51 stipulates that "[c]ivilians shall enjoy the protection afforded by this [Treaty], unless and for such time as they take a direct part in hostilities".

[236] Milan N. Vego, *Joint Operational Warfare: Theory and Practice* (United States of America: Naval War College Press, 2009), IV-9. Battlespace refers to the Time and Space where fighting is taking place and includes the three dimensions of the physical world (land, sea, air), plus the cyberspace and the information space. Battlefield, on the other hand, is inherently unidimensional and associated with the sole physical dimension of combat operations.

[237] Canadian Armed Forces, *The PAN-Domain Force Employment Concept...*, 7; NATO Innovation Hub, *Cognitive Warfare*, No Date, https://www.innovationhub-act.org/content/cognitive-warfare. Recognizing the importance of cognition in warfare today, NATO is currently exploring the concept of Cognitive Warfare as the third operational dimension (after Physical and Cyber).

many communication technologies about fifteen years ago and is now accelerating due to the civilianization of warfare. As a result, these battlespaces are today interconnected in real-time, compressing the notions of Time and Space in warfighting, and collapsing the idea of having separate domestic and foreign policies.[238] There is no "frontline" in grey zone conflicts; the fight is 360 degrees, and the nations' citizens get fully involved in the hostilities. Like Liang and Wang foresaw in 1999, the battlefield in contemporary warfare is omnipresent, it is "everywhere".[239] Such change complexifies greatly the ability of Western armies to create utility of force, as Smith argued, a difficult task for which they are not designed nor equipped for as it is. At the end of the day, Western governments and their militaries are by far culturally inclined to drop ordnances on a designated enemy on the battlefield than to employ "less-lethal, less-irreversible, and less-transparent" methods required by other forms of warfare, such as Political or Information Warfare.[240]

PARADOX 4: LAWS AND CUSTOMS OF WAR

The legal and moral imperatives that have guided Western governments and their armies over the past century and the traditional laws and customs of war that stemmed from them are arguably losing utility in grey zone contexts. At the core of the issue is the fact that those laws and customs were developed with the traditional conflict framework in mind where the use of force (the Military) is the primary means to an end.[241] Grey zone conflicts operate on a totally

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[238] Nick Brunetti-Lihach, *Information Warfare Past, Present, and Future*, Strategy Bridge, 14 November 2018, https://thestrategybridge.org/thebridge/2018/11/14/informationwarfare-past-present-and-future; Nick Reynolds, *Performing Information Manoeuvre Through Persistent Engagement* (RUSI, 2020), 1.

[239] Qiao Liang and Xiangsui Wang, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 43.

[240] Bradley L. Rees, "Dismantling Contemporary Military Thinking and Reconstructing Patterns of Information: Thinking Deeper About Future War and Warfighting", *Small Wars Journal*, 15 March 2018, http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/dismantling-contemporary-military-thinking-and-reconstructing-patterns-information

[241] Paul D. Williams, "War", 193; Jozef Valuch, Tomáš Gábriš and Ondrej Hamuľák, "Cyber Attacks, Information Attacks, and Postmodern Warfare", 67.

different mindset, as it has been discussed in length thus far. As scholars in security studies have observed before, war in such legal terms lacks relevance and is "fraught with … uncertainty", legal and otherwise.[242] After all, "… the international community and individual states are now facing various postmodern challenges and security threats that are different from those which were known at the time of the establishment of the UN".[243] The same could be said regarding the Geneva and Hague Conventions.

While it is true that the world has changed since the creation of these laws and customs of war, Morris will argue that there is a general tendency to underestimate the applicability or influence of international law in novel contexts, therefore, he argues, one should remain cautious in using this pretext to critic the usefulness of international law today.[244] According to Morris, the problem resides in the *interpretation* of the law, not in the law itself. Beyond the challenge of interpretation, however, remains the fact that international law is centred on the belief that war is illiberally violent.[245] Consequently, the legal terminology and normative frameworks contained in the International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and the International Human Rights Law (IHRL) are difficult to apply in grey zone activities where the use of non-violent means is the norm. For instance, these bodies of law prescribe actors to harm innocent people, but what does the term "harm" mean in a context where there is no overt violence? International law is not clear on this. Overall, the act of harming seems limited to *physical harm* in the context of an "armed attack".[246] But then, what does "armed" mean and what happens if a harmful act is committed outside of an

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[242] Christine Chinkin and Mary Kaldor, *International Law and New Wars*, 4-5; Christian Marxsen and Anne Peters, "Introduction: International Law Governing Armed Conflict", in Ziv Bohrer, Janina Dill and Helen Duffy, *Law Applicable to Armed Conflict* (Max Planck Trialogues, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 3.

[243] Jozef Valuch, Tomáš Gábriš and Ondrej Hamuľák, "Cyber Attacks, Information Attacks, and Postmodern Warfare", 71.

[244] Justin Morris, "Law, Politics, and the Use of Force", 109.

[245] Janina Dill, "Towards a Moral Division of Labour between IHL and IHRL…", 237.

[246] Michael N. Schmitt, "'Attack' as a Term of Art in International Law…", 284-285.

"armed attack"? To continue on the same line of thought, are cyberweapons "arms" in the eye of international law? If a cyber-attack caused a hospital to lose power for an elongated period, causing patients to die, can this event be considered as being an "armed attack"? Does this attack mean war? While being on the subject, what is an attack? Because of the lack of clarity in the matter, trying to find suitable answers to these questions is like turning in circles.

As a potential solution to this predicament, Valuch and Gábriš suggest looking at other related bodies of international law. For instance, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the issue of nuclear weapons stipulated that the law of armed conflict applies to any use of force, irrespective of the weapon.[247] From this view, the term "weapons" is less restrictive than "armed". Yet, it would still need to be defined outside of the notions of "use of force" and "causing harm". On a similar perspective, the Nicaragua v. USA, ICJ Judgment of 27 June 1986 argued that "the decisive factor in determining the existence of an armed conflict is the scope and scale of operations", an interpretation that opens to door to consider certain cyber or information attacks as constituting an "armed conflict".[248] Additionally, the recent legal argument proposing at looking at conflicts through the lens of the morality of the IHRL instead of the concept of military necessity of the IHL offers a potential solution to this legal predicament.[249] Notwithstanding these potential solutions, there is still clearly a requirement for a better legal lexicon to deal with activities in the grey zone.

Another legal challenge associated with the grey zone is the necessity to prove intent, a fundamental concept in the current laws and customs of war. Indeed, the ability to demonstrate intent is central to international law. Ambiguity, however, impedes the ability to determine the

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[247] Jozef Valuch, Tomáš Gábriš and Ondrej Hamuľák, "Cyber Attacks, Information Attacks, and Postmodern Warfare", 81.
[248] *Ibid*., 81-82.
[249] Janina Dill, "Towards a Moral Division of Labour between IHL and IHRL…", 199-200.

Jus ad Bellum principles of Just Cause, Right Intent and Prospect of Success. Additionally, without knowing the true intent and without clear attribution, there is no framework to articulate the principle of Proportionality.

Finally, it is worth asking what happens when originally non-violent actions committed by states lead to people committing violent acts as a second order of effect? Let's consider for instance situations where the harmful spread of disinformation by a foreign state would lead to violence and killing, does the principle of Discrimination apply in those circumstances?[250] These questions, and many more, have yet to be answered in a practical manner for Western nations to operate ethically, morally and legally in the grey zone. Such endeavour will have to be taken with great care, however, to not lose sight of the intent and necessity of international law. After all, the previous attempts to adapt international law to twenty-first-century conflicts – such as George W. Bush's claim of "pre-emptive self-defence" to justify the invasion of Iraq, or Putin's humanitarian arguments to defend Russian nationals outside of Russia – have arguably weakened the utility of international law, not reinforced it.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This fifth chapter aimed at demonstrating why the grey zone is antithetical to Western strategic and martial thinking. For centuries, wars for the West were defined by regular soldiers,

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[250] Studies and recent worldwide events have already proven the lethal potential of information, whether it is through misinformation (the unintentional spread of false information without the intent of causing harm), disinformation (the deliberate and intentional spread of false information intending to harm), or malinformation (the strategic use of factual information to cause harm). See Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making,* Report DGI(2017)09, (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2017), 19; Shayan Sardarizadeh and Jessica Lussenhop, "The 65 days that led to chaos at the Capitol", *BBC News*, 10 January 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-55592332; Daniel Funke and Susan Benkelman, "Misinformation is inciting violence around the world. And tech platforms don't seem to have a plan to stop it", *Poynter*, 4 April 2019, https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2019/misinformation-is-inciting-violence-around-the-world-and-tech-platforms-dont-have-a-plan-to-stop-it/; Lauren Frayer, "Viral WhatsApp Messages Are Triggering Mob Killings In India", *NPR*, 18 July 2018, https://www.npr.org/2018/07/18/629731693/fake-news-turns-deadly-in-india.

clearly defined battlefields and the use of lethal means.[251] The grey zone is deeply affecting this cognitive understanding of war and warfare. First, Western political, moral and legal imperatives have been created for binary situations, such as war and peace, combatants and non-combatants, and so forth. It is much more challenging to apply these imperatives in grey zone activities where attribution is a rather difficult endeavour. As such, conflicts in the grey zone require nations to interpret international law through a different lens. War, for instance, cannot be solely associated with the use of force or the Military. As described previously, war is an instrument of policy achieved through all means available. Second, the West favours direct, overt and decisive use of force to achieve its political goals. This preference has significant consequences on the understanding of what weapons, victory and defeat are. Moreover, Western governments are not structured for gradualism; the barriers erected between the different instruments of national power hamper cooperation and synergy. Lastly, Western martial culture makes it difficult to accept that influence possesses more decisive qualities today than brute force. In light of the arguments presented thus far, the conclusion is harsh but unequivocal: Western nations are undeniably culturally, doctrinally and structurally disadvantaged in face of grey zone competition and conflicts.

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[251] Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui. *Unrestricted Warfar*e, 36.

CHAPTER 6 – GAINING THE STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

Militaries are slow to evolve their thinking about warfare, and it gets soldiers killed; therefore, we have a moral obligation to do better.

— US General Joseph Dunford

Complacency cripples, hubris kills.

— Sir Graeme Lamb

In face of grey zone aggressions, Western nations are now facing a choice, one that contradicts centuries of Western martial believes and political culture: either to stay entrenched in their anachronistic ways and risk continuing losing power and influence in front of more agile opponents, or to face reality, acquire the right mindset, framework and capabilities to rectify the strategic imbalance created by the grey zone. To guide this decision, this chapter aims at answering four questions: What are the risks and limitations for Western nations to operate in the grey zone? What needs to change? What would be the obstacles to change? and Is such change even possible for Western nations? The chapter will finish with a discussion on how well Canada is positioned politically and militarily to embrace such change.

RISKS AND LIMITATIONS OF GREY ZONE OPERATIONS

Risks

Operating in the grey zone is not without risks, hence the necessity to understand them. First, grey zone strategies and activities are extremely volatile in nature and can dangerously complicate international relations. As Mazarr notes, they foster "a sense of relentless confrontation", a world "mired in perpetual chaos".[252] Such environment risks to force nations to consider being permanently "at war" with rivals and adversarial nations, leading to potential spirals of hostile aggressions, arms races and other nefarious outcomes.[253] In the words of Booth and Wheeler, a spiral of hostility tends to lead to a permanent *security paradox*, "a situation in

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[252] Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone…*, 108; See as well Sean McFate, *The New Rules of War…,* 18.
[253] Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone…*, 108.

which two or more actors, seeking only to improve their own security, provoke through their words or actions an increase in mutual tension, resulting in less security all round".[254] According to the concept of security dilemma in international relations theory, mistrust increases fear and uncertainty, two of the most important contributing factors to conflicts and wars.[255]

A second risk associated with the grey zone operations relates to the fact that the concepts of escalation and deterrence operate differently in the space between war and peace. While revisionist states choose to exploit the grey zone to avoid open and direct conflict, the covert and random use of violence can still inadvertently lead them to this undesired outcome. Indeed, the use of ambiguous actions makes it difficult to interpret one's true intentions, therefore increasing the risk of escalation. For instance, aggressors may underestimate the target's will to defend itself, or overestimate its own actions, thus escalating the conflict to full-scale war.[256] As Mazarr frames it, the threshold of war is in the eye of the beholder, "neither side has a very good sense of where precisely … thresholds are".[257] With regard to traditional deterrence, the indiscriminate and covert use of violence in grey zone activities obscures the process of signalling, therefore undermining its usefulness as a counter or preventive measure.[258] As part of the traditional diplomatic arsenal, signalling is an important device to reduce uncertainty and fear, resolve disputes or inform of intent where states do not have diplomatic relationships in place for dialogue.[259] The issue is that deterrence and signalling work best when both parties understand the rules of the game and can objectively situate the opponent's intentions and potential moves. When the other side hides its intentions behind grey zone strategies and tactics, it becomes

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[254] Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma…*, 9.
[255] *Ibid.*, 65-80.
[256] Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone…*, 109.
[257] *Ibid.*, 112.
[258] *Ibid.*, 115.
[259] Ronald Peter Barston, *Modern Diplomacy,* 5th edition (London: Routledge 2019), 45-46.

extremely difficult to properly interpret its goals, and this interpretation game dangerously increases the risks for the wrongful interpretation of intentions. Additionally, by generating a series of low-level actions that do not trigger a response, grey zone activities can gradually chip away one's credibility on the world stage, thus making traditional deterrence actions less credible.[260]

Finally, operating in the grey zone is a form of "strategic bet" where there is always a risk of incurring political backlash or negative impact on one's reputation on the international stage. Indeed, because revisionists states exploit the grey zone by rejecting international norms, laws and customs, grey zone strategies and tactics are generally considered as "dirty" by most on the international stage. As such, liberal democracies could refuse to operate in the grey zone by fear of being ostracized or condemned by the international community.

Despite those risks, this paper argues that operating in the grey zone is still desirable and advantageous for Western states for at least three reasons. First, to use the old saying: one does not bring a knife to a gunfight. In other words, if one needs to defend itself against grey zone aggressions, it needs grey zone policies, tools and means. Moreover, more and more studies demonstrate that the best way to counter gray zone aggressions is by fighting back with its own set of grey zone strategies, albeit with a different calibration and intention.[261]

Second, changes to international and Western norms over the past seventy-five years coupled with the stigma created by all the deaths caused by wars since the Second World War have deeply reduced the liberal democracies' appetite for the use of force as a means to an end.

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[260] Michael J. Mazarr, *Mastering the Gray Zone*…, 116. Of note, only conventional deterrence seems to be affected by grey zone activities. At this time, there is no evidence suggesting that nuclear deterrence would be affected by it.

[261] Hal Brands and Charles Edel, "A Grand Strategy of Democratic Solidarity", 39-40. A point that will be further discussed later in this chapter.

Liberal democracies show a clear preference today for non-violent means to settle international disputes.[262] With this in mind, working in the grey zone offers a valuable alternative to the use of violence as a primary means to an end. Moreover, the aversion of the West for casualties – although morally justified – has become the West's most important vulnerability: to defeat a more technological-advanced Western army, one just needs to inflict enough casualties for the citizens to pressure the government to end the war.[263] As Smith adroitly notes, the West today fights as not to lose the force rather than using the force to fight and win[264], which strategically makes no sense at all. Therefore, the prioritization of non-violent means does not just make more sense in terms of strategic effect – as addressed many times in this study – but it also makes sense from a domestic politics perspective. This, however, is only true under the premise that grey zone strategies and activities are well-thought and well-executed.

The final reason why it would be in the interest of the West to operate in the grey zone is to exploit the grey zone to ensure the survival of the global liberal order. Like Ikenberry contends, the liberal order may be in crisis, but it has not disappeared yet.[265] There is a way for the democratic liberal international project to survive although with some adjustments. By offering an opposition in the grey zone, Western nations can affect the cost-benefits calculus of grey zone aggressors enough to force them to abandon grey zone strategies in favour of "traditional" international rules, norms and customs. Despite being challenged right now, liberal internationalism still has a lot to offer. To quote Ikenberry: "It is not a blueprint for an ideal world order; it is a methodology or machinery for responding to the opportunities and dangers of

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[262] Azar Gat, "The Changing Character of War", in Hew Strachan and Sybille Scheipers (eds), *The Changing Character of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 32-33.

[263] Qiao Liang and Xiangsui Wang, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 93.

[264] Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force…*, 17.

[265] G. John Ikenberry, "The End of Liberal International Order", 7-8.

modernity".[266] As such, the future of the liberal order hinges on the ability of the West to defend – or better, promote democratic solidarity by, on the one hand, exposing grey zone aggressions in a way that will deter actors to use grey zone strategies in the first place and, on the other hand, by fostering cooperation with revisionist states rather than aggression.[267] This implies, however, the imposition of some limitations on Western grey zone strategies.

Limitations

A first limitation regards the importance of focusing efforts on defensive strategies and cooperation, rather than offensive activities and hostile competition. Currently, grey zone aggressors are, for the most part, revisionist states which reject the current world order and international norms and aim at affecting change more to their liking by exploiting the West's cultural and structural weaknesses in the grey zone. For Western nations, however, the logic of operating in the grey zone would be undeniably different. The intent would rather be to, first, defend themselves against grey zone aggressions and, second, persuade those rogue states to choose cooperation instead of bellicosity. However, as security studies have demonstrated, enticing cooperation and trust between states is not an easy endeavour. States must make sure they develop norms and rules of cooperative behaviour that are acceptable to others as well as to themselves.[268] It is why any grey zone strategy developed by Western nations shall focus on defence rather than on offence and shall incorporate the following elements to ensure a greater chance of success: empowering great power responsibility, strong signalling process, promotion of shared values, clear and direct communication, long term strategies to foster trust, and avoid ideological fundamentalism.[269]

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[266] *Ibid.*, 22.
[267] Hal Brands and Charles Edel, "A Grand Strategy of Democratic Solidarity", 33-34.
[268] Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma…*, 104.
[269] *Ibid.*, 131-136.

A second limitation is the need for a tight command and control over all grey zone actions. To mitigate the risk of creating spiralling security paradoxes, the ability to exert just the right amount of coercion through restraint – as part of a gradual approach – is critical, regardless of which instruments of national power coercion is exercised.[270] When it comes to the use of force, effective restraint is even more critical. Indeed, military practitioners know for well that the use of violence has "a life of its own", to use a Clausewitzian expression, and even just a little amount of force has the potential to derail quickly if not exercised without excellent discipline and training. As well, more often force is used, higher are the risks of escalation to a point where restrain becomes merely impossible. Consequentially, a tight command and control over military and non-military means is critical to keep coercion to the minimum level required to achieve a limited political gain while avoiding undesired escalation.

A final limitation is the necessity to act according to international norms. Liberal democratic states cannot obviously operate in the grey zone similarly to non-liberal democratic states. For them, the challenge is to find strategies and activities that will still reflect and respect liberal democratic values. For example, Iran, North Korea, China, Turkey, Libya and Russia are well-known for making massive use of disinformation campaigns to achieve their goals – an increasingly popular non-military grey zone tool for authoritarian regimes, while protecting their internal audiences against foreign influence.[271] Such tactics would not be unacceptable in Western liberal democracies where state-sponsored disinformation campaigns would play against

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[270] Erica D. Borghard, *Money and Influence: The Economic Aspects of Great Power Competition*, Modern War Institute, 12 February 2020, https://mwi.usma.edu/money-and-influence-the-economic-aspects-of-great-power-competition/. For instance, after having analyzed how the US is using its Economic and Financial powers to coerce other nations, Borghard has concluded that the superpower has pushed the targeted nations to decouple from the US- and Western-dominated global financial system instead of joining it, ultimately causing more harm to Western influence in the process.

[271] P.W. Singer and Emerson T. Brooking, *LikeWar: the Weaponization of Social Media* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing, 2018), 88-103.

the value of transparency, and the "control" of the Internet would be perceived as a violation of free speech and free press.[272] Indeed, democracies thrive on information and transparency. Secrets and operating in the shadow represent a strategic danger to democracy.[273]

WHAT NEEDS CHANGING

In short thus far, operating in the grey zone is not a zero-sum game: it is a risky business with potential high payoffs but also high costs. Consequently, to be able to operate effectively in the grey zone, maximizing opportunities while mitigating risks, this study has identified a series of pre-requisites in three domains: Mindset, Frameworks and Capabilities. The first domain, Mindset, refers to the cognitive changes required to enable grey zone operations. The second domain, Frameworks, concerns the structural and policy changes needed within governmental and military organizations. Lastly, the third area refers to the capabilities, both military and civilian, that must be created or sustained. Table 6.1 lists these pre-requisites by category.

Table 6.1 – List of pre-requisites for grey zone operations.

Mindset	Substantiative Remarks
Recognizing the insidious threat that grey zone aggressions represent and making the necessary decisions accordingly.	To be valid, such recognition must translate into tangible actions in terms of policies, resources allocations and capability development.
Considering grey zone competition *as* a form of war, but not necessarily being *at* war.	Like Liang and Wang said, the fact that there is no declaration of war, no huge numbers of troops deployed, no force-on-force fighting and killing, the destruction and casualties caused by grey zone activities in a globally interconnected world are in no way less harmful than those of military war.[274] This said, to avoid inadvertent escalation, one must remain careful to not portrait a hostile behaviour. It is about firmness, not hostility.

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[272] Anup Shah, *Democracy*, Global Issues, 28 January 2012, https://www.globalissues.org/article/761/democracy
[273] Sean McFate, *The New Rules of War…*, 212.
[274] Qiao Liang and Xiangsui Wang, *Unrestricted Warfare*, 132.

Aiming at accumulating *faits accomplis*.	The aim of grey zone operations is not to overthrow the enemy but to achieve political goals by accumulating *faits accomplis*. To be successful, one needs to develop strategic thinking models that are more aligned with the characteristics of the grey zone: agile, flexible, gradualist, non-linear, focusing on strategic influence rather than on brute force. These new models must also consider the battlespace as being everywhere, across Time and Space, removing once for all the fictional boundaries between strategic, operational and tactical levels of war, between national and foreign affairs policies, between domestic and operational operations, and between the DIMEFIL domains.
Considering time as a strategic resource, not a hindrance. Developing strategic patience and resilience.	Nations must favour long-term strategies based on a unifying vision. Effects in the grey zone are not immediate and are best achieved through accumulation. Strategic patience is a *sine qua non* criterion for success. The challenge is to devise a valuable Grand Strategy that sees beyond the short-term horizons of domestic politics, hence it must be detached from partisan political agendas, which is generally contrary to Western political practices.[275]
Conceiving lethality in terms of *strategic influence.*	Victory and defeat only have meaning in political terms. Therefore, the focus shall be on winning wars, not battles. In this context, being able to exert strategic influence provides a greater political utility than conventional tactical lethality (the killing of the enemy). As argued previously, it is not to say that violence is useless in the new security environment, rather that it does not represent automatically *the* decisive aspect of military operations.[276]
Learning to operate in a context of permanent information confrontation.	The weaponization of information and information disorders are now permanent features of international relations in the twenty-first century. In this context, nations must invest in cognitive security and strategic narrative capabilities to protect their citizens against foreign disinformation and assure a long-term resilience to disinformation and misinformation, which is the best defence against information confrontation tactics.[277]

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[275] Sean McFate, *The New Rules of War…*, 76.

[276] Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force…*, 186-188. As Smith reminds its readers, the sole application of military force (destruction) does not generate political utility anymore, unless it is linked to a tangible political intention of influencing strategic behaviours.

[277] Bruno Tremblay, *Democracy Under Attack…*, 3, 5. Cognitive security is best defined as the act of securitizing *social cognition*, which is the ability of a population to make informed decisions based on accurate,

Focussing on active defence rather than overwhelming offence.	Because of the risks of escalation and creating a permanent security paradox, grey zone strategies should primarily focus on active defence with clearly established red lines to determine when offensive actions are required. Offensive measures do not need to be violent or dangerously provocative, but they must be well-calibrated to achieve the desire effect.[278]
Frameworks	**Substantiative Remarks**
Investing in a long-term Grand Strategy.	Grand Strategies are not an end in themself, but guide nation-wide efforts in terms of prioritization, capability requirements, philosophical aspirations and so forth. A well-crafted Grand Strategies provide a clear long-term vision for the nation so national security practitioners understand what needs to be done and why. Grand Strategies shall not be rigid in order to be able to adapt to changing situations and to last many years. Similar to a rudder, it helps politicians and bureaucrats to navigate international relations, simplifies the chaos and clutter of the global scene, and national security organizations to orchestrate meaningful responses.[279] Additionally, Brands and Edel identify eight pillars that any Western grand strategy should have to respond to grey zone aggressions: Countering Coercion, Enhancing Technological Cooperation, Shaping International Institutions, Combating Corruption, Enhancing Collective Defence, Meeting Threats from Within, Taking the Offensive, and Negotiating from Strength.[280]
At the state level, establishing a national command and control apparatus across the DIMEFIL domains to coordinate all governmental actions in a unified manner.	The instruments of national power are too much intertwined nowadays to be kept separated. Moreover, the most decisive actions in the grey zone are the non-violent ones, supported by limited military operations. The point is that competition, regardless of its form, must be countered strategically, and the success lies in the ability to maintain the careful balance between doing too much and not doing enough, or at the wrong time. Hence the need for a national security apparatus that better

corroborable and trusted information, ensuring self-determination, accountable representation, and healthy public deliberation.

[278] Hal Brands and Charles Edel, "A Grand Strategy of Democratic Solidarity", 39-40. For instance, liberal democracies can wage political warfare efficiently against grey zone aggressors by championing their own ideals and values.

[279] Paul D. Miller, "On Strategy, Grand and Mundane", *Orbis* (Philadelphia), vol. 60, no. 2 (2016), 245; Sean McFate, *The New Rules of War…*, 77-78; Amitav Acharya and Jiajie He, "Strategic Studies: The West and the Rest", in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (eds), *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, 4th Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 330.

[280] Hal Brands and Charles Edel, "A Grand Strategy of Democratic Solidarity", 34.

	articulates the relationships between all the instruments of national power, similar to the Russian *Stavka* concept.[281] In terms of tasks and procedures, such central command and control organization could work along the lines of detecting potential threats, attributing responsibilities, assessing impacts and, if deemed necessary, responding using the right instrument(s) of national power.[282]
At the military level, integrating HQs and functions for advantage.	Grey zone characteristics call for an evolution of "jointness" that needs to go beyond the coordination of single domain activities *and* single instruments of national power. Future operations must seek the complete integration of all domains (sea, land, air, space, cyber and information) and across the DIMEFIL dimensions to deliver true pan-domain effects.[283]
Updating legacy concepts of the twentieth century to better reflect the reality of the twenty-first-century security environment.	As words shape thinking, naming concepts correctly is critical to address the grey zone challenge. Adapting the current taxonomy would be a first step in the right direction. The adoption of a new spectrum of conflict would also be a welcome update in terms of doctrine, one that is not linear and better convey the notions of harmless competition, harmful competition and war. In this regard, the model recently developed by Australia and Canada is promising, and merit to be further developed.[284] Finally, in the legal domain, it could be worthwhile to update the *Declaration of Minimum Humanitarian Standards* to include the nefarious consequences that cyber-attacks and information disorders can have on individuals. In many regards, they represent infringements to fundamental human rights.[285]

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[281] Philip Kapusta, "The Gray Zone", 23. While the control of all levers of power under one unified command in a democracy may seem anathema to some, it is a critical requirement for effective grey zone operations to ensure unity of command, unity of effort and swift coordination. Furthermore, having a centralized command and control is not anti-democratic in itself. What could be anti-democratic is how this system is used, an obstacle that can be easily mitigated through proper checks and balances are carried on in respect of democratic values.

[282] In terms of means and mechanisms to achieve these tasks, many scholars and security experts have offered different models that are worth investigating. Most notably: J. Lyle Morris *et al.*, *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone…*; Belinda Bragg, *Gray Zone Conflicts, Challenges, and Opportunities: Integration Report*; and Jonathan B. Bong, "Redefining the Spectrum of Conflict".

[283] Canadian Armed Forces, *The PAN-Domain Force Employment Concept…*, 17; US Army, *The US Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1 (6 December 2018), vii; Elizabeth Quintana, Joanne Macknowski and Adam Smith, *Cross-Domain Operations and Operability*, Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (2012), 11-12; UK Ministry of Defence, *The Integrated Operating Concept 2025*, 8. Many Western nations have already taken steps toward this integration of operational domains. The US prefers to use the expression "multi-domain operations", while the UK has chosen "cross-domain operations". Canada opted for the expression "pan-domain operations". Of note, only Canada considers Information as a separate operational domain.

[284] Canadian Armed Forces, *The PAN-Domain Force Employment Concept…*, 36.

[285] On the *Declaration of Minimum Humanitarian Standards*, see Asbjørn Eide, Allan Rosas and Theodor Meron, "Combating Lawlessness in Gray Zone Conflicts through Minimum Humanitarian Standards", *The*

Capabilities	Substantiative Remarks
Investing in people (minds).	In a highly competitive and uncertain strategic environment, such as the grey zone, strategic capabilities are critical. By definition, strategic capabilities should be valuable, rare and inimitable, which means that they ought to be human- and not technological-based since people are arguably the only national capability that cannot be imitated or copied easily.[286] As such, the most important investment that a nation can do to develop effective grey zone capabilities is to invest in developing knowledgeable, competent, creative and smart people. In this regard, education and training opportunities are essential, and even more so when happening in allied and mind-liked nations. At the officer level, developing warrior-scholars through high-end and rigorous Professional Military Education and Post-Graduate Education programs can make a significant difference. These programs shall focus more on developing agile, innovative and adaptive thinkers who are open to new ideas and innovation, rather than promoting uniformity of thinking.[287] In other words, in grey zone contexts, competent and smart people bring more to the fight than any technology or weapon system ever can.[288]
Developing military capabilities relevant for grey zone operations.	Force being used differently in the grey zone, the success of military operation will therefore hinge on the ability of military forces to "ingress, egress, and re-supply quickly, appropriately, and when required, covertly".[289] Moreover, with the current technological advancements in precision detection and weapon systems, the decisive advantage is not in *mass* anymore.[290] Smaller groups of light, agile and extremely mobile forces are to be privileged, and Western armies would benefit in force-generating and equipping such forces instead of the bulky conventional forces.

American Journal of International Law, vol. 89, no. 1 (1995); and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *The Declaration of Minimum Humanitarian Standards*, 2 December 1990, https://www.ifrc.org/Docs/idrl/I149EN.pdf

[286] William Scott-Jackson, *People as the Decisive Advantage*, The Western Way of War, Episode 26, RUSI, 26 November 2020. https://www.rusi.org/multimedia/people-decisive-advantage

[287] David Barno and Nora Bensahel, *Adaptation Under Fire: How Militaries Change in Wartime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 164; G. K. Cunningham, "Designing Effective Military Strategies Under Uncertainty", *Parameters* (Carlisle, PA) vol. 50, no. 2 (2020), 59.

[288] David Barno and Nora Bensahel, *Adaptation Under Fire…*, 74.

[289] Canadian Special Forces Command, *Future Operating Concept Handbook*, 14.

[290] This is not to say that numbers are not important. To generate enough deterrence effect, a nation still needs enough military professionals, ships, airplanes and vehicles to fight in a conventional manner. But those shall be deployed and employed in smaller groups than armies, fleets and air groups.

Developing descriptive military doctrines, and often.	Military doctrines play a key role in the planning and execution of efficient military operations. This said, useful doctrines are more descriptive than prescriptive. It is about helping to lift the fog generated by ambiguity to help with decision-making. As such, doctrines must be updated regularly to remain as current as possible and must be accessible to all.[291]
Building and investing in alliances.	As history showed us, making allies is probably the most effective way to counterbalance the ambitions of revisionist states and mitigate the risk for escalation.[292] Indeed, alliances encourage trust and cooperation. They are as well one of the most effective forms of signalling, helping to clarify intentions. Additionally, alliances between democratic nations can be quite useful in fighting off illiberalism and coercion exercised by rogue nations, like the West did during the Cold War.[293] Alliances that aim at exchanging intelligence, such as the Five Eyes, can also help Western nations with lifting the veil of ambiguity over opponents' actions in the grey zone, making these actions significantly less potent. Economic alliances are, as well, powerful tools to promote the status quo over revisionism. One might respond, however, that large alliances, especially military alliances, can only contribute to escalation by forming too big of a threat, and forcing a threaten power to seek more power to counterbalance the perceived power ratio. It is, after all, the argument put forward by Russia against NATO enlargement. While this risk is always present, resorting to alliances is still arguably less risky than the alternative to alliances, which is self-help in total isolation. Indeed, in an isolated self-help construct, states "have no choice but to put their own interests ahead of the interests of other states" and the international community, leading to continuous escalation.[294] Alliances do not preclude self-help for nations under a specific existential threat, but efforts to support fellow liberal democracies should remain a global commitment to strengthening liberalism and democracy.[295]

[291] David Barno and Nora Bensahel, *Adaptation Under Fire…*, 30-31.

[292] John J. Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism", in Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (eds), *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity,* 4th Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 51-52; Matthew Flynn, *What Napoleon Can Teach Us About The South China Sea*, War on the Rocks, 12 April 2021, https://warontherocks.com/2021/04/what-napoleon-can-teach-us-about-the-south-china-sea/; Hal Brands and Charles Edel, "A Grand Strategy of Democratic Solidarity", 30-32.

[293] Hal Brands and Charles Edel, "A Grand Strategy of Democratic Solidarity", 30-33.

[294] John J. Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism", 54.

[295] Hal Brands and Charles Edel, "A Grand Strategy of Democratic Solidarity", 39.

Being everywhere enables action.	In grey zone operations, one must be able to seize opportunities as they come, and time is the essence. Therefore, having personnel already deployed around the world in sensitive or strategic areas enables action. On the military side, this translates in having as many warships deployed as possible; having smaller contingents of forces deployed on different missions, either independently or as part of coalitions; having key staff employed in different allied and coalition headquarters, and better levering the influential potential of the Defence Attachés network.
Ensuring strategic and tactical mobility.	Strategic and tactical mobility can be found in the physical, technological and cognitive realms. In the physical domain, mobility is expressed by having the necessary strategic and tactical airlift and sealift to move forces or assets quickly in and out of zones of operations independently, wherever they need to go around the globe. Although nations can count on allies to provide mobility support when required, being independent offers greater agility and fewer constraints, especially when speed and secrecy are a premium. In the technological domain, mobility is expressed by the ability to conduct defensive and offensive cyber operations at will. Finally, mobility in the cognitive space refers to the ability of nations to use informational means, laws and doctrines to protect one's social cognition and influence the one of an adversary.

Source: Author.

WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES TO CHANGE?

So far, this paper has argued that change is necessary and has presented arguments regarding what needs to be changed, and how. Inevitably, however, like friction in war, change happens rarely without having to overcome some obstacles. Therefore, such analysis would not be complete without asking: is change as presented here even possible in a Western context?

The first obstacle to change in the domain of security and defence is the strategic culture itself. Indeed, as Echevarria, Strachan and Scheipers have observed, strategic culture tends to favour continuity over evolution[296], which leads the scholars to conclude that

> … strategic behaviour is not so much guided by changing security environments and threats but by enduring cultural features within the military (military culture) or in the security institutions of a state (strategic culture). States and their armed forces thus tend to engage in strategic and operational actions that are largely prescribed by their cultures, in spite of the fact that the threats they face are likely to vary.[297]

There is undeniably an element of truth in this argument. As Barno and Bensahel note, bureaucracies always prefer incremental change to deep change and most Western armies are undeniably bureaucratic beasts.[298] For instance, the new warfighting model currently being developed by the US Army to replace the Air-Land Battle Doctrine, the so-called Multi-Domains Operations Concept, is still highly centred on the use of advanced technologies to gain the relative advantage – a constant feature of the US way of war – instead of advocating for new approaches. Hollenbeck, David and Jensen would echo this concern after having observed that many members of US military institutions are resisting change under the belief that the traditional US warfighting competencies and strategies have permanent features.[299] This said, although strategic culture does have inherent inertia, it does not necessarily imply that a specific "way of war" cannot change to meet new threats. After all, military historians have already documented the fact that societies have constantly evolved their ways of war over time following political, economic, technological and social changes.[300] What may be needed, unfortunately, is a

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[296] Antulio J. Echevarria II, "American Strategic Culture: Problems and Prospects", 433.

[297] Hew Strachan and Sybille Scheipers, "Introduction: The Changing Character of War", in Hew Strachan and Sybille Scheipers (eds), *The Changing Character of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 19-20.

[298] David Barno and Nora Bensahel, *Adaptation Under Fire…*, 231.

[299] Neil Hollenbeck, Arnel P. David and Benjamin Jensen, "Thinking Differently about the Business of War", *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 92 (2019), 50-51.

[300] Anatol Rapoport, "Introduction", 17.

big enough "strategic choc" to initiate the required momentum to create deep changes; and one hopes that the current level of uncertainty generated by the grey zone is sufficient enough in this regard.

A second obstacle is the issue of doing more in terms of defence and security with less: less money, fewer people and less time. The nature of the security and defence business in the twenty-first-century security environment has become more complexed over the past twenty years. The traditional domains of operations (sea, land, air) have expanded to include space, cyber and even – in the case of Canada – the information environment, requiring investments in new capabilities, training and infrastructures. The pace at which technology is developing is so fast that it requires a constant inject of capital just to keep up with updates; nothing comes cheap anymore. As well, armed forces are being more and more involved in domestic security situations, affecting readiness and availability for expeditionary missions. Combined, these circumstances create greater financial and human resources pressures on governments, in a context where resources are limited. Unfortunately, capabilities are not a zero-sum game. The need to invest in new capabilities does not necessarily nullify the necessity of maintaining traditional capabilities. As discussed previously, a certain level of hard military capability must be maintained to offer a realistic deterrence effect. The issue of limited resources is further compounded by the fact that the majority of citizens in the West are generally reluctant to invest too much of the national treasure in Defence, which is especially true for Canada, and cringe at the idea of more resources being injected in defence.[301] Lastly, the non-linear and gradualist

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[301] Peter Armstrong, "Sure, we could spend 4% of GDP on the military – with huge cuts or tax hikes", *CBC News*, Last Update 13 July 2018, https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/armstrong-military-spending-trump-1.4743967; Frank Newport, "Americans Not Convinced U.S. Needs to Spend More on Defense", *Newsgallup.com*, 21 February 2018, https://news.gallup.com/poll/228137/americans-not-convinced-needs-spend-defense.aspx; Simon Jenkins, "The amount the UK spends on defence can't be justified – so we rely on piffle", *The Guardian*, 15 March 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/mar/15/uk-spend-defence-money-wasted; Margaret Beavis,

character of the grey zone means that nations must be able to adapt quickly, and often. Because there is less time to adapt, it, therefore, creates an even higher demand for capital and people. In this context, Defence Departments and Armed Forces must be able to do more and quicker with the same number of resources, if not less. This conundrum leads to more difficult dilemmas, where trade-offs are inevitable, and who says trade-offs also imply risks. For instance, for conventional deterrence to keep working in the grey zone, the aggressor must believe that the targeted nation will react if pushed too far and it must believe that the cost to pay will clearly outweigh the expected gains.[302] In this context, if a nation depletes too much its conventional capabilities to the benefit of grey zone capabilities, it risks appearing "weaker" and, consequently, attract conventional aggressions. Still, those hard decisions are ought to be made by governments. It is another reason why Grand Strategies are so important: they represent for the states one of the best tools to facilitate both decision-making and risk mitigation.

IS CHANGE POSSIBLE?

Despite these obstacles and *contra* to whom believes that the West is unlikely to overcome its structural and cultural weaknesses[303], this paper opts for a more positivist view on the matter and argues that yes, it is feasible for Western nations to adapt their mindset, frameworks and capabilities to grey zone operations. "The proof is in the pudding", as the British like to say. Indeed, some Western nations have already started tangible work in the matter demonstrating that with political courage and vision, adaptation is possible.[304] The results, however, vary largely from one nation to another. Amongst those nations, the UK takes a

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"Defence spending isn't the way to make Australians more secure", *Canberra Times*, 25 July 2020, https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6841178/defence-spending-isnt-the-way-to-make-australians-more-secure/
   [302] Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*…, 43.
   [303] Rob De Wijk, "Hybrid Conflict and the Changing Nature of Actors", 14.
   [304] Most notably Australia, the US and the UK. At this time, changes are coming in the form of new policies. Only time will tell how much of the new policies will affect deep change in the long run.

preeminent place having recently released new national policies which indicate the desire of the

UK to become an effectual grey zone actor.[305]

The UK and the Grey Zone: A Brief Case-Study

In March 2021, Her Majesty's Government (HMG) released a new Strategic Framework

titled *Global Britain in a Competitive Age – The Integrated Review of Security, Defence,*

Development and Foreign Policy aiming at making the UK a "match-fit for a more competitive

world".[306] Meanwhile, the UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) also released its companion policy,

Defence in a Competitive Age, to explain how the UK Armed Forces will reform themselves to

move from being a conventional warfighting force to a force fit for "permanent and persistent

global engagement".[307] Overall, both documents are a clear signal of how much Britain takes the

grey zone threat seriously, and the British are ready to make the hard decisions accordingly.

In terms of mindset, Britain is officially acknowledging that great power competition is a

far greater threat to national interests than the previously feared great power war.[308] This

recognition also addresses the vital need to protect the UK's economy, intellectual property,

democratic institutions and way of life against grey zone aggressions.[309] At the Armed Forces

level, the military is fully considered as being an instrument for strategic influence on top of

being a warfighting force:

> [The UK] recognises that changes in the information and political
> environments now impact not just the context but conduct of military
> operations. The notion of war and peace as binary states has given way to a
> continuum of conflict, requiring us to prepare our forces for more persistent

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[305] Other than the threat posed by the grey zone, the UK probably had other particular strategic reasons to release these new policies in 2021, BREXIT probably being the main one. Yet, those policies are still addressing grey zone threats to a degree never seen before.

[306] Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age – The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* (March 2021), 3.

[307] UK Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age* (March 2021), 64.

[308] Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age...*, 3.

[309] *Ibid*., 11, 20, 26-27.

global engagement and constant campaigning, moving seamlessly from operating to war fighting.[310]

Some measures, like the creation of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the creation of a new Secretary of State's Office for Net Assessment and Challenge (SONAC)[311], and the revitalization of the British Defence Attachés Network, are aiming at making better use of the Military as a strategic influence tool to achieve UK goals worldwide.[312] These measures will also help with removing the barriers between the DIMEFIL domains. In itself, the Strategic Framework has all the markings of a Grand Strategy, providing context, vision and guidance.

In terms of frameworks, three initiatives show excellent potential to make HMG and the British Armed Forces more fit-for-purpose for grey zone operations. First, at the governmental level, the Situation Centre of the Cabinet Office will be improved to better monitor, assess and respond to crises across all governmental affairs.[313] Second, at the military level, the national Strategic Command is now tasked to make "the whole force more than the sum of its parts" by integrating all warfighting domains (sea, land, air, space and cyber) under one strategic level command.[314] Finally, the creation of the SONAC will bring greater agility and flexibility in Defence.[315]

Lastly, in terms of capabilities, HGM demonstrates an increased commitment to security and resilience at home and abroad, with billions of pounds in investment in collective security,

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[310] UK Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 1.

[311] *Ibid*., 65. By bringing together experts from the civil service, the armed forces, the academia and the business world, the SONAC aims at providing strategic analysis, guidance and advice to senior government officials, to ensure that the MoD and the Armed Forces remain ready for the fight.

[312] Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age…*, 5; UK Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 28.

[313] *Ibid*., 89.

[314] UK Ministry of Defence, *Defence in a Competitive Age*, 43.

[315] Assuming that they will have the resources to accomplish their mission that is.

research and developments, multilateral governance, climate change and health risks mitigation, conflict resolution and poverty reduction.[316] On the military slide, the most important change, as far as this paper is concerned, is not the increased budget and significant investment in new capabilities[317] – which are undeniably significant in themselves, but rather how the military will be employed in the future, recognizing the notions that to counter grey zone aggressions, the military is not a tool of the last resort and that "being everywhere enables action":

> The armed forces, working with the rest of government, must think and act differently. They will no longer be held as a force of last resort, but become more present and active around the world, operating below the threshold of open conflict to uphold our values and secure our interests, partner or friends and enable our allies, whether they are in the Euro-Atlantic, the Indo-Pacific, or beyond[318].

To that end, the British Armed Forces will have larger "permanently deployed personnel" to focus on defence diplomacy and will increase by a third the Defence Attachés Network.[319] As well, the British Armed Forces activities will be organized around a scalable framework to increase agility and flexibility in force employment, this way being better positioned between missions and threats.[320]

Interestingly, despite having received a capital increase, the MoD will reduce the size of the Army by around 4,5%, from 76,000 to 72,500 troops.[321] According to commentators, the goal

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[316] Her Majesty's Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age...*, 11.

[317] *Ibid.*, 1, 8, 11, 52. HGM will increase the Defence budget by 14% to cope with the "over-ambitious, under-funded previous policies". Regarding new capabilities, the Royal Navy will have new warships and missiles while the Royal Air Force will receive new fighter aircraft and sensors. The British Army will also receive significant investment to become leaner, more agile, fully integrated, more lethal and expeditionary. Other investments will also be done in Cyber Defence, Research and Development, Counter-Terrorism, decision-making tools, forces integration and overall modernization of the workforce.

[318] *Ibid*.

[319] *Ibid.*, 14.

[320] *Ibid.*, 14, 15.

[321] This reduction of personnel seems to only concern the British Army. There is no mention of similar reductions in the other services.

behind these cuts would be to divert money from force generation to force employment.[322] For some, HMG is taking some risks in deciding to cut in the number of troops since any reduction of mass, even a small one, could negatively affect conventional deterrence.[323] Such argument, however, does not take into account two important facts. First, numbers alone do not guarantee effectiveness: training and equipment also play a key influential role, one in which HGM has decided to further invest. Second, Britain remains a nuclear power, and this is in itself sufficient to offer enough deterrence. Moreover, one could also argue that by creating more agile, high-tech, flexible and politically engaged forces, the UK military has significantly increased its ability to exert power and influence beyond the simple value of mass.

Table 6.2 summarizes the UK's overall readiness for grey zone operations based on the discussion above and the evidence provided by the new policies. Four categories are used: "No Evidence" means no evidence has been found regarding this requirement. "Limited" means limited evidence has been observed, or little progress has been made on this topic. "Moderate" refers to substantial progress being currently made or to being seriously considered. Finally, "Advanced" implies that this pre-requisite is being fully considered or is currently being implemented.

Table 6.2 – Assessment of the UK's readiness for grey zone operations.

Mindset	Assessment
Recognizing the insidious threat that grey zone aggressions represent and make the necessary decisions accordingly.	Advanced
Considering grey zone competition *as* a form of war, but not necessarily being *at* war.	Advanced
Aiming at accumulating *faits accomplis.*	Moderate

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[322] Jack Watling, *British Army of the Future*, War on the Rocks, 23 March 2021, https://warontherocks.com/episode/warcast/24596/british-army-of-the-future/
[323] *Ibid*.

Considering time as a strategic resource, not a hindrance. Developing strategic patience and resilience.	Moderate
Conceiving lethality in terms of *strategic influence*.	Moderate
Learning to operate in a context of permanent information confrontation.	Advanced
Focusing on active defence rather than overwhelming offence.	Moderate
Frameworks	**Assessment**
Investing in a long-term Grand Strategy.	Moderate
At the state level, establishing a national command and control apparatus across the DIMEFIL domains to coordinate all governmental actions in a unified manner.	Moderate
At the military level, integrating HQs and functions for advantage.	Advanced
Updating legacy concepts of the twentieth century, such as the spectrum of conflict and the Laws of Armed Conflict, to better reflect the reality of the twenty-first-century security environment.	Limited
Capabilities	**Assessment**
Investing in people (minds).	Moderate
Developing military capabilities relevant for grey zone operations.	Moderate
Developing descriptive military doctrines, and often.	Limited
Building and investing in alliances.	Advanced
Being everywhere enables action.	Advanced
Ensuring strategic and tactical mobility.	Moderate

Source: Author.

As demonstrated by the UK, adapting its ways to grey zone realities is possible for Western nations. Assuredly, it requires political courage, vision and long-term commitment as well as the adoption of a different mindset, the development of an adequate and agile strategic framework, and investments in new capabilities, which inevitably also means, in a resources-limited environment, that hard political decisions must be made. These policies are far from perfect, as several critics were quick to point out, but they are, with regards to the grey zone

challenge, at least a step toward the right direction.[324] Considering the interdependencies existing today between Western nations, one can only hope that other like-minded nations will follow suit sooner rather than later.

IS CANADA READY?

Canada has been characterized in the past as being ill-equipped to face grey zone aggressions.[325] By comparing the evidence put forward in this study with publicly available evidence on the matter[326], this paper agrees with this assessment. Table 6.3 summarizes this study's assessment of Canada's overall readiness for grey zone operations.

Table 6.3 – Assessment of Canada's readiness for grey zone operations.

Mindset	Assessment	Substantiative Remarks
Recognizing the insidious threat that grey zone aggressions represent and make the necessary decisions accordingly.	Limited	Canada is just starting to realize that global power competition is like being at war, and only in the periphery of important decision-making bodies. The Government of Canada's national security website shows little to no mention of the current threats stemming from the grey zone.[327] The 2017 Defence Policy *Strong. Secured. Engage* makes a small mention of grey zone conflicts as part of a changing global order, without providing further explanation or strategies to address this threat.[328] Thus far, only the Canadian
Considering grey zone competition *as* a form of war, but not necessarily being *at* war.		

[324] Therese Raphael, "Boris Johnson Finally Tells Us What "Global Britain" Means", *Bloomberg*, 17 March 2021, https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2021-03-17/integrated-review-what-s-really-driving-britain-s-indo-pacific-tilt; Martin Kettle, "Like Brexit, Boris Johnson's vision for 'global Britain' is an idea not a policy", The Guardian, 17 March 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/mar/17/brexit-boris-johnson-global-britain-defence-review; Jeremy Shapiro and Nick Witney, "The Delusions of Global Britain", Foreign Affairs, 23 March 2021, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2021-03-23/delusions-global-britainhttps://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2021-03-23/delusions-global-britain; Ryan Evans, *Britain's New Strategic Outlook: The View from Washington*, The War on the Rocks, 16 April 2021, https://warontherocks.com/2021/04/britains-new-strategic-outlook-the-view-from-washington/;

[325] Adam Petrin, *Operationalizing the Gray Zone…*, 22; Caleb De Boer, *Canada in Conflict: Regaining the Initiative* (Joint Command and Staff Program Paper, Canadian Forces College, 2020), 2.

[326] That is information available on Canadian official websites, unclassified publications and military doctrines.

[327] Government of Canada, *National Security*, Last Modified 26 November 2020, https://www.canada.ca/en/services/defence/nationalsecurity.html. There are only some mentions of an increase of threat in the cyberspace.

[328] Department of National Defence, *Strong. Secured. Engaged.*, 53.

		Armed Forces (CAF) have issued official publications on the matter, mostly within single services and in the last three years.[329] There seems to be no formal doctrine in the CAF about how to deal with or operate in the grey zone.
Aiming at accumulating *faits accomplis.*	No Evidence	
Considering time as a strategic resource, not a hindrance. Developing strategic patience and resilience.	No Evidence	
Conceiving lethality in terms of *strategic influence*.	Limited	While most CAF publications related to the grey zone refer to the importance of greater influence in a highly competitive environment, none truly addressed the issue of how violence serves policy, and how non-violent better contribute to achieve political utility.
Learning to operate in a context of permanent information confrontation.	Limited	Only Special Operations Forces (SOF) publications address the issue enough to warrant attention. Although *The PAN-Domain Force Employment Concept* claims that "[t]he information domain has become the decisive domain in contemporary operations", there seems to be no actual plans to action this claim.[330] Moreover, the modernization plan to equip the CAF with strategic narrative capabilities has been recently rescinded by the Chief of the Defence Staff because of misperceptions in the media.[331]
Focusing on active defence rather than overwhelming offence.	No Evidence	
Frameworks	**Assessment**	**Substantiative Remarks**

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[329] Canadian Armed Forces, *The PAN-Domain Force Employment Concept...*; Royal Canadian Navy, *Strategic Plan 2017-2022* (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 2017); Canadian Special Forces Command, *Beyond the Horizon...*; Canadian Army, *Advancing with Purpose: the Canadian Army Modernization Strategy* (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 2020); and Canadian Special Forces Command, *Future Operating Concept Handbook*.

[330] Canadian Armed Forces, *The PAN-Domain Force Employment Concept...,* 12, 16.

[331] David Pugliese, "Canadians shouldn't be viewed as "targets" – Military initiative to aim propaganda at public is shut down", *Ottawa Citizen*, 13 November 2020, https://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/canadians-shouldnt-be-viewed-as-targets-military-initiative-to-aim-propaganda-at-public-is-shut-down

Investing in a long-term Grand Strategy.	No Evidence	There is no Grand Strategy in Canada. There is not even a valid National Security Strategy, and there is no indication that this situation will improve.
At the state level, establishing a national command and control apparatus across the DIMEFIL domains to coordinate all governmental actions in a unified manner.	No Evidence	
At the military level, integrating HQs and functions for advantage.	Limited	*The PAN-Domain Force Employment Concept* talks about the necessity to integrate, but no actual action has been undertaken yet.
Updating legacy concepts of the twentieth century, such as the spectrum of conflict and the Laws of Armed Conflict, to better reflect the reality of the twenty-first-century security environment.	Limited	Current doctrines still only refer to the traditional spectrum of conflict. Some other publications have proposed concepts, but no evidence was found that these concepts were officially approved. For instance, the two-dimensional matrix of conflict types proposed in *The PAN-Domain Force Employment Concept* is promising and would merit further consideration.[332]
Capabilities	**Assessment**	**Substantiative Remarks**
Investing in people (minds).	No Evidence	While the CAF aims at offering competitive pay and benefits for its members, it has seriously cut the financing of educational programs.[333]

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[332] Canadian Armed Forces, *The PAN-Domain Force Employment Concept...,* 36.

[333] Canadian Armed Forces, *Changes to CAF Regular Force Education Reimbursement (ER) Program*, CANFORGEN 046/19 - CMP 028/19 041536Z APR 19.

Developing military capabilities relevant for grey zone operations.	Limited	SOF is currently developing capabilities for grey zone operations. While the Army recognizes that "[t]o succeed in [the grey zone], the Army we have is not the Army we need", the proposed changes are more incremental than deep. The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) is thinking about how the current shift in the balance of power is affecting them but without making commitments toward a real change. The Canadian Joint Operations Command (CJOC) also makes reference to the need to adapt while no actual change visible being implemented. No evidence was found for the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF).
Developing descriptive military doctrines, and often.	Limited	Current doctrine, when existing, is mostly out of date. The RCN does not even have doctrines.
Building and investing in alliances.	Advanced	As a medium power nation, Canada always has found extreme values in alliances and continues to invest in them. Nonetheless, the CAF should further expand their military network within allied nations, deploying more personnel abroad. As well, the Canadian Defence Attachés Network should be further leveraged in support not only to defence diplomacy but to operations as well.
Being everywhere enables action.	Moderate	
Ensuring strategic and tactical mobility.	Limited	The RCAF CC117 and CC130 aircraft provide Canada with strategic airlift capabilities, while CC147 and CC146 provide tactical airlift where they are deployed. This said, Canada has very few of these capabilities. Furthermore, Canada has no ship-to-shore tactical sealift capabilities. In the cyber domain, Canada has only limited defensive means. In the information domain, Canada has no plan to protect its social cognition, nor the means to do it efficiently.

Source: Author.

In brief, the few initiatives taken by Canada to deal with grey zone aggressions have been solely on the CAF side, while the real solution space, as one commentator has justly noted, "rests with the Government of Canada".[334] While the average Canadian may not see it, Canada is being constantly attacked by foreign nations in the economic, financial, information and cyber domains.[335] The imprisonment of the two Michaels in China, the Chinese attempts to take over of Nunavut gold mine project, Russia's overarching claims in the arctics, and Russia's and China's call for a summit of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council to protest against some of the sanctions taken by Western nations against them are all, in fact, a form of grey zone aggressions.[336] Yet, without a Grand Strategy and a National Security Policy, Canada continues to treat all situations as independent acts. The nation should not wait for a substantive "strategic choc" before contemplating change. With the right political will, vision and commitment, actions can be taken now, similarly to how the British did.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Like the adage says: being forewarned is being forearmed. It is in this spirit that this chapter aimed at addressing the risks and limitations, required changes and obstacles associated with grey zone operations in order to determine the ability of Western nations to overcome the

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[334] Caleb De Boer, *Canada in Conflict: Regaining the Initiative*, 2.

[335] Jonathan Manthorpe, *Claws of the Panda: Beijing's Campaign of Influence and Intimidation in Canada*, 1st edition (Toronto, Ontario: Cormorant Books, 2019), 23-26; National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, *Annual Report 2018* (Ottawa: Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2019), 55-77; Canadian Security Intelligence Service, *CSIS Public Report 2019* (Ottawa: Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, 2020), 15-18.

[336] Catharine Tunney, "Trudeau says China invented charges for Canadian detainees after Meng's arrest", *CBC News*, 03 March 2021, https://www.cbc.ca/news/SOMNIA-1.5934917; Catharine Tunney, "State actors have done 'significant harm' to Canadian companies, says head of spy agency", *CBC News*, 9 February 2021, https://www.cbc.ca/news/SOMNIA-1.5906665; Walter Strong, "Ottawa blocks Chinese takeover of Nunavut gold mine project after national security review", *CBC News*, 22 December 2020, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/canada-china-tmac-1.5851305; Emma Tranter, "'You cannot claim any more': Russia seeks bigger piece of Arctic", *CBC News*, 11 April 2021, https://www.cbc.ca/news/SOMNIA-1.5983289; Stella Qiu and Andrew Osborn, "Russia, China push for U.N. Security Council summit, lash out at West", *Reuters*, 23 March 2021, https://www.reuters.com/article/SOMNIA-idUSKBN2BF0GO

grey zone challenge. In short, it was determined that operating in the grey zone is not a zero-sum game: it is a risky business with potential high payoffs but also potential high costs. It is why operating in the grey zone requires the right mindset, frameworks and capabilities, demanding nations to make hard decisions on where to invest their limited resources, to what end and to what effects. Effectual grey zone strategies require having smart people at the right place at the right time. It needs a long-term Grand Strategy to provide the vision necessary to success, and adequate doctrines to frame its execution. The government must develop an agile framework to detect and attribute threats, assess their hostility, and respond when necessary. Military capabilities must be adapted to be relevant for the future fight, and not yesterday's fight, being able to egress, regress and be resupply quickly and, if necessary, covertly. To this regard, mobility and speed are critical. Lastly, nations must resist to revert to self-help and continue to invest in alliance building and diplomatic networks. This is one of the best ways to counter grey zone aggressions while defending the liberal order.

Contrary to the UK, which has embraced the grey zone challenge, Canada is not well-positioned at this time to counter grey zone aggressions. Indeed, Canada is severely lacking the necessary mindset, frameworks and capabilities for grey zone operations. If the Canadian military has demonstrated thus far a certain willingness to detect, deter, attribute and respond to grey zone aggressions within its area of responsibilities, it has done so independently of overarching guidance and direction from the Government of Canada. As such, the ball is therefore within the hands of the federal government and its elected officials which have yet to show a real interest in addressing the grey zone threat in a meaningful way.

CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION

Only the dead have seen the end of war.

— Plato

The responsibility of statesmen … is to resolve complexity rather than to contemplate it.
— Henry Kissinger

A key trend in international affairs today is the global power shift toward a new but uncertain configuration of global power.[337] This ongoing transformation of the world order is creating a different strategic and security environment where nothing is black nor white anymore, and where strategic competition has replaced *status quo* as the hallmark of international relations. As Acharya and He have adroitly pointed out, the genuine question raised by this power shift is to determine whose concept of strategy and security will dominate at the end.[338] It is in the filigree of this clash between liberalism and illiberalism that the grey zone takes all its importance for Western nations.

As this analysis has established, the grey zone is this conceptual space between war and peace, occurring when actors purposefully use multiple instruments of national power to achieve political objectives with activities that are ambiguous or cloud attribution and exceed the threshold of ordinary harmless competition, yet fall below the level of large-scale direct military conflict, and threaten the nation and allied interests by challenging, undermining, or violating international customs, norms, or laws.

After having analyzed the characteristics of the grey zone and compared it with the strategic culture of non-Western and Western nations, this paper concluded that not all nations are equally equipped to deal with the grey zone threat. The strategic culture of non-Western

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[337] Amitav Acharya and Jiajie He, "Strategic Studies: The West and the Rest"…, 337-338; G. John Ikenberry, "The End of Liberal International Order?"…, 1; Hal Brands and Charles Edel, "A Grand Strategy of Democratic Solidarity", 31-32.
[338] Amitav Acharya and Jiajie He, "Strategic Studies: The West and the Rest"…, 337-338.

nations, such as Russia and China, is extremely conducive to grey zone operations, whereas the grey zone presents characteristics that are antithetical to the Western strategic culture, creating severe cognitive, doctrinal and structural challenges for Western nations. For centuries, the West defined wars by the employment of regular soldiers, clearly defined battlefields and the use of lethal means. By favouring non-violent means, ambiguity, proxies and covert troops, and the disrespect of international law, customs of war and norms, the grey zone is deeply affecting this understanding of war and warfare. In other words, the grey zone plays on the non-Western nations' strengths and highlights the West's weaknesses.

In the words of Sir Graeme Lamb, former British warrior turned scholar, "complacency cripples, hubris kills", and the West is on the verge of being guilty on both accounts.[339] Every Western nation is now facing the choice to either make the prerequisite hard decisions and overcome the grey zone challenge or to stay entrenched in its anachronistic ways and continue losing power and influence. Arguably, there is an urgency to act; the longer Western nations' leaders wait, the more they will have to lose. For all intents and purposes, the West's most aggressive competitors are considering themselves at war with the West; a war in which only one side is playing, and it is not the West. As Sun Tzu stipulated thousands of years ago, "if one party is at war with another, and the other party does not realize it is at war, the party who knows it's at war almost always has the advantage and usually wins".[340]

Yet, the situation may not be as desperate as it first appears. As Brands and Edel notes, Western nations may be culturally disadvantaged in face of grey zone competition and conflicts, but they are not powerless:

> … although the balance of power has shifted capable democracies
> interested in upholding the international order still outnumber and

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[339] *Ibid.*
[340] Quoted in Graeme Lamb, *Sir Graeme Lamb.*

outweigh, economically and geopolitically, the autocracies menacing that order.[341]

To correct the strategic imbalance, Western nations must take immediate and concrete actions in three critical areas: mindset, frameworks and capabilities. In terms of mindset, Western nations must first and foremost recognize the insidious threat of grey zone aggressions and make the necessary decisions accordingly. To be valid, such recognition must translate into tangible actions in terms of policies, resources allocations and capability development. Other measures in the domain of mindset include considering grey zone competition *as* a form of war, but not necessarily being *at* war; aiming at accumulating *faits accomplis*; considering time as a strategic resource, not a hindrance, and developing strategic patience and resilience; and, lastly, conceiving lethality in terms of *strategic influence*, the only way to achieve victory in the grey zone.

In terms of frameworks, grey zone strategies and activities have limited utility if they are not developed to support a Grand Strategy. Although Grand Strategies are not an end in themselves, they are critical to increasing chances of success by guiding nationwide efforts in terms of prioritization, capability requirements, philosophical aspirations, and so forth. A well-crafted Grand Strategy provides a clear long-term vision for the nation so national security practitioners understand what needs to be done and why. To that end, Brands and Edel's suggestion for a Democratic Solidary Grand Strategy offers an excellent starting point.[342] The other frameworks' pre-requisites are as follows. At the state level, governments must establish a national command and control apparatus across the DIMEFIL domains to coordinate all governmental actions in a unified manner. Lastly, at the military level, armed forces need first to

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[341] Hal Brands and Charles Edel, "A Grand Strategy of Democratic Solidarity", 34.
[342] *Ibid.*

integrate headquarters and functions for advantage, and, second, they need to update legacy concepts of the twentieth century to better reflect the reality of the twenty-first-century security environment. This last recommendation includes the adoption of a more befitting taxonomy and spectrum of conflict, as well as looking at developing a better legal lexicon and frameworks to deal with grey zone aggressions, which are occurring outside of the current legal agenda focussed solely on declared armed conflicts.

Finally, in terms of capabilities, Western nations shall seek to gain the strategic advantage by further investing in people and not just technology; developing military capabilities relevant for grey zone operations, focussing on smaller groups of light, agile and extremely mobile forces that can ingress, egress and re-supply quickly, appropriately, and when required, covertly; developing descriptive military doctrines, and often; ensuring strategic and tactical mobility; being *everywhere* to enable swift action; and investing in alliances. When it comes to promoting liberalism, the latter is vital. Building alliances is, without a doubt, one of the most effective strategies to counter revisionist states' aggressions, mitigate the risks of escalation, and fight off illiberalism and coercion. By seeking cooperation, alliances also increase trust and diminish uncertainty and fear. Additionally, they send strong signals, helping to clarify intentions and counter dilemmas of interpretation.

Notwithstanding the need for change, Western nations must keep in mind that operating in the grey zone is not a zero-sum game. If it has the potential for high payoffs, it also includes important risks and limitations. A first limitation is the necessity to focus on defensive strategies and cooperation, rather than offensive actions and hostile competition. A second limitation concerns the need for a tight command and control over all grey zone actions. Lastly, the obligation to act according to international norms forms a third limitation.

With change also comes friction, which means that certain obstacles may impede the Western nations' ability to adapt to grey zone operations. A first obstacle to change is the strategic culture itself, as the strategic culture in the West tends to resist change and favour the *status quo*. A second obstacle is doing more with less. In a resources-limited environment inherent to all governments, hard political decisions must be made, especially in terms of prioritization and capability development.

Despite these obstacles, this paper contended that with the right political courage, vision and long-term commitment change is possible. After all, some Western nations have already accomplished tangible work in the matter. Amongst those, the UK has taken the lead by devising new national policies aiming at tackling the grey zone challenge front and centre. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said yet about other Western nations, especially Canada, which is not well-positioned at this time to counter grey zone aggressions. Indeed, Canada is severely lacking the necessary mindset, frameworks and capabilities required for grey zone operations. If the Canadian military has demonstrated thus far a certain willingness to detect, deter, attribute and respond to grey zone aggressions within its area of responsibilities, it has done so independently of overarching guidance and direction from the Government of Canada. The ball is therefore within the hands of the federal government and its elected officials which have yet to show a real interest in addressing the grey zone threat in a meaningful way.

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