

# Redefining Hybrid Warfare: Russia's Non-linear War against the West

Tad A. Schnauffer II  
New York University, [tschnauf@gmail.com](mailto:tschnauf@gmail.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss>  
pp. 17-31

---

## Recommended Citation

Schnauffer, Tad A. II. "Redefining Hybrid Warfare: Russia's Non-linear War against the West." *Journal of Strategic Security* 10, no. 1 (2017) : 17-31.

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.10.1.1538>

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol10/iss1/3>

---

# Redefining Hybrid Warfare: Russia's Non-linear War against the West

## **Author Biography**

Tad Andrew Schnauffer II currently serves as a United States Army Infantry Officer. He has interned at the Office for Disarmament Affairs' Strategic Planning Unit at the United Nations, where his research focused on nuclear proliferation, terrorism, urban combat, along with UN military operations. He has conducted research in conjunction with New York University and independently on unconventional warfare. His research has taken him to the war front in Ukraine, across Eastern Europe, and East Africa. He has earned a M.S. in Global Affairs from New York University and a B.A. with dual majors in Geography and History from the University of Florida. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, any other government agency, or the U.S. Government.

## **Abstract**

The term hybrid warfare fails to properly describe Russian operations in Ukraine and elsewhere. Russia has undertaken unconventional techniques to build its influence and test the boundaries of a shaken international system. Notably, Russia's actions in Ukraine display an evolved style of warfare that goes beyond its initial label of hybrid warfare. The term non-linear war (NLW) will be defined in this article to encompass Russia's actions and allow policymakers the correct framework to discuss and respond to Russia. NLW plays to the advantage of countries like Russia and constitute the future of warfare.

## **Acknowledgements**

Acknowledgements to Mary Beth Altier and Mark Galeotti for the support leading up to this article

## Introduction

Pure conventional wars have lost value as a measure to complete political goals. This has created a discourse around warfare introducing a litany of terms. These terms include Fourth Generation Warfare, Full Spectrum Warfare, and Hybrid Warfare. Most of these terms lack a generally accepted definition. Thus, without universally accepted definitions, media and academic sources used these terms to describe how Russian military forces conducted operations in Ukraine in 2014 and Syria a year later. Terms like Hybrid Warfare have been used to describe conventional and non-conventional conflicts. Though conceptualized to explain how conventional forces fight an insurgency engaged in a combination of conventional and unconventional tactics, hybrid warfare quickly came into use for Russia's actions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. This adaptation of the term fails to account for the drastic differences in methods and capabilities of non-state compared to state actors. Though recent definitions of hybrid warfare have incorporated the actions of both state and non-state actors, this extends the term past the type of conflicts it originally defined and explained. The principles of state-on-state conflict have advanced and evolved by technology and the current geopolitical situation. A need remains to operationalize a term to provide the foundation for the rising strategies and tactics of state actors on the world stage. This article will discuss how the current Western understanding of hybrid warfare does not encompass Russia's actions. Then the paper will define the term non-linear warfare to fill the academic and military void that hybrid warfare fails to cover. Next, a review Russia's development of non-linear tactics and its application of them in relation to Ukraine and the broader conflict with the West will contract non-linear operations to those of hybrid.

Russia's incursion into Crimea and Eastern Ukraine in the spring of 2014 challenged the concept of hybrid warfare. Media and government sources labeled Russia's actions as hybrid warfare, yet failed to define or explain what the term meant.<sup>1</sup> This was likely due, in part, to the absence of a precise and widely accepted definition for hybrid warfare, hybrid threat, hybrid adversary, etc. The term carries scholarly baggage that makes it a poor fit for Russia's

---

<sup>1</sup> "Ukrainian NSDC Secretary: Russia Waging Hybrid Warfare on EU," *The Baltic Times*, February 2, 2016, available at: [http://www.baltictimes.com/ukrainian\\_nsdc\\_secretary\\_\\_russia\\_waging\\_hybrid\\_on\\_eu](http://www.baltictimes.com/ukrainian_nsdc_secretary__russia_waging_hybrid_on_eu).

actions in Ukraine.<sup>2</sup> Initially, deliberation around the term hybrid warfare heightened following the aftermath of the 2006 Israeli war in Lebanon against Hezbollah. This marked a dramatic increase of conventional, modern armies combating insurgents capable of certain conventional tactics and supported in many cases by state actors. Additionally, these insurgents employed further measures playing to their strengths including criminal activities. Soldiers and the media noted the different fighting techniques used against the Israeli Army during the conflict with Hezbollah. Hezbollah fielded well-trained soldiers with modern equipment, but still did not have the full strength of a conventional force.<sup>3</sup> The United States Military Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan faced similar threats and methods of warfighting. Insurgents in all of these conflicts typically fought in an unconventional or irregular manner while employing some conventional and criminal tactics that played to their strengths all while dodging any pitched battles with modern armies.<sup>4</sup>

The American Armed Forces came up with a number of definitions for hybrid warfare. In a 2008 article, the Army Chief of Staff General Casey characterized a hybrid threat as an adversary that incorporates “Diverse and dynamic combinations of conventional, irregular, terrorist, and criminal capabilities.”<sup>5</sup> Generally, hybrid warfare encompasses the application of criminal, conventional, irregular, and terrorist measures to attain the advantage in a war zone against a conventional foe.<sup>6</sup> To further, support this point, the U.S. Army codified the term in its 2011 operations doctrine as, “The diverse and dynamic combination of regular forces, irregular forces, criminal elements, or a combination of these forces and elements all unified to achieve

---

<sup>2</sup> David L. Raugh, “Is the Hybrid Threat a True Threat,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 9:2 (Summer 2016), available at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol9/iss2/2/>.

<sup>3</sup> Steven Erlanger, and Richard A. Oppel Jr, “A Disciplined Hezbollah Surprises Israel with Its Training, Tactics and Weapons,” *The New York Times*, August 07, 2006, available at:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/07/world/middleeast/07hezbollah.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, “Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars,” *Potomac Institute for Policy Studies*, December 2007, available at:

[http://www.potomac institute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac\\_hybridwar\\_0108.pdf](http://www.potomac institute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac_hybridwar_0108.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> George C. Casey, “America’s Army in an Era of Persistent Conflict,” *Army Magazine* (October 2008): 28, available at:

[https://www.ausa.org/sites/default/files/Casey\\_1008.pdf](https://www.ausa.org/sites/default/files/Casey_1008.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Craisor-Constantin Ionita, “Is Hybrid Warfare Something New?” *Strategic Impact* (2014): 61-71, available at:

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=url,cookie,ip&db=tsh&AN=108750555&site=ehost-live&scope=sit>.

mutually benefitting effects.”<sup>7</sup> This amalgamation of four key modes of operations came to set the closest thing to a generally accepted definition of hybrid warfare for the United States Military up until Russia’s actions in 2014.

The term hybrid warfare started primarily with non-state actors fighting states and their methods, this precludes Russia’s recent tactics from falling under the terminology of hybrid war. Russia’s status as a state means that it holds international recognition, has signed on to international law, has a large trade network, a ready supply of natural resources, a legitimate government, and functions in a capacity to have diplomatic ties to a level incomparable to non-state actors. Russia also carries the ability for larger expeditionary capabilities and possesses soft power. In addition, most definitions of hybrid warfare do not include the information, economic, social, and political aspects of warfare that states can apply on a much larger scale compared to non-state actors and for a much different intent. Though Russia has used what would typically be referred to as hybrid warfare techniques, they have superseded those methods through the broader geopolitical objectives of their implementation. Nothing in any of the explanations of hybrid warfare accounts for a broader geopolitical strategy. Truly, to have the term hybrid warfare encompass this broader geopolitical strategy would change its previous meaning and the concept it originally sought to examine. Thus, the actions of Russia leaves the term Hybrid Warfare wanting.

Thus, there is a need to operationalize a new term to incorporate portions of hybrid warfare and other methods that fall into a grand scheme of operations perpetrated by states. Russia has surpassed the four means of hybrid warfare highlighted above—conventional, irregular, terrorist, and criminal—and has added information, cyber, and economic, diplomatic, political, and social means to their strategy. For this reason, some scholars, including Mark Galeotti, Michael Kofman, and Matt Rojansky, have stated that Russia’s methods have entered a realm not yet defined by scholars or defense officials.<sup>8</sup> The following section will argue that this next realm of warfare should be termed non-linear warfare.

---

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Army, Field Manual 3-0 Operations C-1 (GPO, Washington, DC: February 2011): 1-5.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Kofman, and Matthew Rojansky, “A Closer Look at Russia’s ‘Hybrid War,’” *Kennan Institute*, April 2015, available at: <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?ots591=0c54e3b3-1e9c-be1e-2c24-a6a8c7060233&lng=en&id=190090>; Mark Galeotti, “Hybrid War as a War on Governance,” Interview by Octavian Manea, *Small Wars Journal*, August 19, 2015, available at:

## Defining Non-linear Warfare: Term and Concept

The term non-linear warfare (NLW) appeared at least as far back as the mid 1990's without any clear definition or distinction. The major injection for its use today comes from Russian General Gerasimov's February 27, 2013 article in the Military-Industrial Kurier.<sup>9</sup> That article describes the foundation of nonlinear warfare, "As a means to reach desired strategic orientation and geopolitical outcomes primarily using non-military approaches."<sup>10</sup> Though no accepted definition of non-linear warfare exists, this paper hopes to introduce based on how the West has reacted to Russian actions. Little novelty exists in Russia's actions; rather the novelty rests in the manner in which they carried out these actions. Advances in technology and the global political climate have set the stage for non-linear warfare to be very advantageous to states in a situation like Russia.

General Gerasimov's article lays the groundwork for principles behind NLW as mentioned. He concludes,

"In the 21st 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."<sup>11</sup>

Russia has carried out this unfamiliar template in Ukraine, Syria, across Europe, and elsewhere. Russia has conducted multiple non-linear actions to observe the response of the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). General Gerasimov further declared, "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

---

[http://r.search.yahoo.com/\\_ylt=AoLEVrVwDnRX6OkACwAnnIlQ;\\_ylu=X3oDMTEyM2dldThoBGNvbG8DYmYxBHBvcwMxBHZoaWQDQjIxNzJfMQRzZWMDc3I-](http://r.search.yahoo.com/_ylt=AoLEVrVwDnRX6OkACwAnnIlQ;_ylu=X3oDMTEyM2dldThoBGNvbG8DYmYxBHBvcwMxBHZoaWQDQjIxNzJfMQRzZWMDc3I-)

<sup>9</sup> Robert Coalson, "Top Russian General Lays Bare Putin's Plan for Ukraine," *The Huffington Post*, September 2, 2014, available at:

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-coalson/valery-gerasimov-putin-ukraine\\_b\\_5748480.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-coalson/valery-gerasimov-putin-ukraine_b_5748480.html).

<sup>10</sup> Victor Morris, "Grading Gerasimov: Evaluating Russian Nonlinear War through Modern Chinese Doctrine," *Small Wars Journal*, September 17, 2015, available at: [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUK EwiiqfWg7ILMAhXH2yYKHV9JBvAQFggdMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fsmallwarsjournal.com%2Fprintpdf%2F30157&usq=AFQjCNFMiRaC3KT\\_zsBPZ\\_3VwMVI9CdR9w&sig2=-gYQhmw546IOrXDNRkkBuQ](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUK EwiiqfWg7ILMAhXH2yYKHV9JBvAQFggdMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fsmallwarsjournal.com%2Fprintpdf%2F30157&usq=AFQjCNFMiRaC3KT_zsBPZ_3VwMVI9CdR9w&sig2=-gYQhmw546IOrXDNRkkBuQ).

<sup>11</sup> Coalson, *Top Russian General*."

power of force of weapons in their effectiveness.”<sup>12</sup> Any military planner looks to play to their own strengths and Russia has done just that. Unable to compete with the conventional strength of the NATO Alliance, Russia has invested its efforts on divisions within the alliance, gray areas within the international arena and law, and blurring the line between peace and war.

The concept of “non-linear” describes that the conflict does not have clear front lines or district friendly/enemy areas. Non-linear warfare relies on the subversion and division of the enemy’s social and political structure allowing the aggressor to do their will by any means, not just brute force. The idea of NLW comes from the approach that it has no bounds and sometimes functions with limited planning, thus allowing a state to exploit an opportunity. Non-linear warfare employs many measures that would not seem like warfare although the goal, as in all war, is to force the enemy to do your will. In NLW, instead of tanks doing all the work, propaganda, political and social agitators, and cyberattacks do most of the forcing. This does not mean kinetic action or hard tactics remain unutilized. Russia’s “little green men” in Crimea or Russian military support for the pro-Russian combatants in Eastern Ukraine provide prime example of these hard tactics. The key in using these approaches in NLW revolves around making it unclear what is going on. Again, when the “little green men” first appeared, no one could confirm what they were there to do or who sent them.

Non-linear warfare also applies pressures on an enemy to weaken their resolve against any forceful contestation and to make any decision to act impossible because of the heightened state of unknowns. Non-linear operations vary in scale and time. Generally, the pressures focus on the core vital functions of a society and look to undermine them. This includes all measures taken to undermine a nation’s government to cause it to lose the general support of the people. Non-linear warfare by principle means that international law and diplomatic integrity have lost all value because neither supports the aggressor’s position. Additionally, opportunities provide a critical factor in the use of non-linear operations. These operations tend not to have an established plan of attacks; rather, they compose a form of warfare where offensives only take place if a chance of success exists. In NLW, one side tends to be constantly reacting (as seen with the West in relation to Russia’s actions). It is near impossible to plan for every type of non-linear operation and thus a state must stand ever watchful and ready to react quickly

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

not only to military threats, but also in other arenas such as cyber, economic, information, social, etc.

Non-linear warfare differs from hybrid warfare in its methods, but also because it utilizes a grand strategy approach to warfare, where force on force conflict plays only a part of a larger subversive and indirect weakening of the enemy. The grand strategy approach constitutes, “the collection of plans and policies that comprise the state’s deliberate effort to harness political, military, diplomatic, and economic tools together to advance that state’s national interest. Grand strategy is the art of reconciling ends and means.”<sup>13</sup> This grand strategy has no mention or comparison in hybrid warfare.

While undertaking this non-linear grand strategy, the lines between war and peace are blurred. It causes states to act without a clear declaration of war. It brings Clausewitz’s concept of the “Fog of War” on the battlefield to a larger scale. Russia’s targets or enemies in this non-linear strategy are not Ukrainian nationalist or Syrian rebels alone, but the West as a whole. If Russia wanted to take Ukraine by force, it could, but if the West became involved, Russia would likely lose a conventional war. For Russia to enact its will, it must counter Western conventional strength with non-linear operations set on a grand strategy basis. Actors must consider the big picture in non-linear warfare.

Over time, non-linear methods try to put the aggressor in a position of strength, not necessarily with military buildup, but rather by a campaign that undermines the other state’s legitimacy to its population and decreases the morale of its armed forces. In time, this may internally fracture the state facing the non-linear campaign without the need for large-scale military operations by the aggressor. It also aims at the decision making process of a country’s government and looks to delay it or incapacitate it. Non-linear warfare methods try to delay any smoking gun, until a proper reaction to the events seems too late. Take Russia’s “little green men” in Crimea. Once it became clear what had taken place no clear reaction remained. Measures like these elicit no clear response and leave the other side full of questions and uncertainties.

Furthermore, non-linear warfare tends to lead to the poisoning of the political environment. When trust on the international system comes into question, it

---

<sup>13</sup> Peter Feaver, “What is Grand Strategy and Why Do We Need It,” *Foreign Policy*, April 8, 2009, available at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/04/08/what-is-grand-strategy-and-why-do-we-need-it/>.



opens the door for possible non-linear operations. Hence, states using non-linear techniques tend not to have the capabilities to forcefully win, but instead must wait for an occasion of weakness or an overlooked security gap to exploit. Again, the chaos surrounding the Euromaidan protests opened a door for Russia to take aggressive non-linear action in Ukraine. If opportunities like the Euromaidan do not materialize on their own to provide the setting for non-linear operations, then aggressors may apply other NLW measures over time to create the setting for more forceful tactics.

The overall objective of a state engaging in NLW is the wearing down of the enemy socially, politically, and militarily. A successful non-linear campaign will leave the defending state in one of the following conditions. First, they will not have the political will to fight and thus leave the aggressor to do their will. Second, the conventional forces have been diminished and alliances divided to a point where the defensive state could be defeated on the battlefield. Third, the defensive state simply acquiesced to just the threat of force. Finally, the defensive state becomes indifferent to the aggressor's operations and allows them to act at their will without interference. That is the end game in NLW - conducting operations to allow you to have the freedom of maneuver to undertake your plan. For example, Russia would like to have a free hand in it is near abroad without Western interference. So far, NLW has advanced Russia's ability to do so noting that the only major ramifications have been sanctions and loss of some soft power abroad.

Moreover, the geopolitical situation and the lack of global stability have allowed non-linear warfare to thrive. Globalization and the interconnected nature of markets have also played a critical role. Much like the method itself, the advent of non-linear operations came from opportunity and the lack of an effective deterrent and social will. When an opportunity for NLW appears and a state engages in such actions, the defending state must enact an immediate and strong response. Considering that attribution for a non-linear act typically is not clear, a strong response maybe hard to direct.

The terminology within NLW strays away from the standard terms to describe missions and operations. When armies discuss operations, their missions include words such as assault, breach, clear, control, secure, seize, etc. In NLW, these terms have a place, but not a primary role as in conventional or even irregular warfare.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, the term is applied to missions include persuade, deny, confuse, disenfranchise, lie, conceal, misrepresent, fund,

---

<sup>14</sup> United States Army, "Ranger Handbook," February, 2011.

destabilize, erode, etc. This terminology shows the drastically different methods employed to obtain an objective.

Based on the above discussion of the concept of NLW, the definition would read as follows; non-linear warfare is the application of collective subversive measures on a state(s) by another state actor, targeting its government, population, and vital social functions, in order to fulfill a grand strategy and to do the latter is will without a clear declaration of war.

## Russian Operations beyond the Hybrid Definition

With Non-linear warfare defined, one must examine what action Russia has taken that differs from the hybrid warfare definition. Non-linear warfare incorporates many different manners and methods of warfare along with some purely non-linear operations to achieve its objectives. This article will focus on the primarily new methods of NLW such as the “little green men” and internet trolls that do not fall into the hybrid concept. These are not the only possible non-linear operations, but also some of the ones used most common by Russia. Non-linear warfare is still developing and new operations have evolved and will continue to evolve.

Before reviewing the recent status of Russia’s non-linear war, one must note how Russia has developed its NLW methods. Some scholars have noted that the assassination of Alexander Litvinenko in 2006 signaled the beginning of Russia’s overt policy change.<sup>15</sup> This assassination of a British citizen in London proved that Russia was willing to test the boundaries of the established order, even though Litvinenko, had defected to the British and was highly critical of Russian President Vladimir Putin. It was not so much that the Russian government likely had him assassinated, but the method of the assassination. Russian agents put rare radioactive material in his tea and he died a slow painful death garnering plenty of media coverage. This public display of assassination fit into NLW techniques by testing the response of the West and showing that Russia will reach out and touch individuals regardless of citizenship or location. This topic has resurfaced recently as new evidence shows that Putin likely ordered the assassination, as experts previously thought, and that Russian agents carried it out.<sup>16</sup> The use of assassination and the desired political goal accomplished goes beyond the four key concepts

---

<sup>15</sup> Brian Whitmore, “Podcast: A Toxic Trail,” *The Power Vertical*, January 22, 2016, available at: <http://www.rferl.org/content/podcast-a-toxic-trail/27504206.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

of hybrid warfare. It plays into the grand strategy of showing the strength of Russia.

Another example of NLW materialized in 2007, when the Russian Government allegedly carried out a cyber-attack on Estonia in response to the Estonian Government's discrimination against its Russian population and its order to remove a Soviet statue from Tallinn.<sup>17</sup> Governments cannot trace the actors that commit cyber-attacks or confirm their intention, but a number of scholars pin the attack in Estonia on Russia.<sup>18</sup> That is the beauty of non-linear warfare: who did the action and why? Cyber-attacks constitute a perfect non-linear method as a cyber-attack cannot be traced easily and even if the country of origin is known, the actor cannot be identified. In addition, cyber-attacks create a sense of uncertainty that plays so well in NLW, adding to the "Fog of War." Can the government protect the banks and other institutions from cyberattacks? These attacks have lost companies money and business bringing into question the ability of the government to protect them.<sup>19</sup> One of these events blamed on Russia was the cyberattack on the Polish stock market.<sup>20</sup> Even if a government sponsored such an attack, they have easy deniability. Cyber-warfare sponsored by states allows them to be used within the NLW definition. Cyber-terrorism for example would place cyber-attacks more with the hybrid warfare concept. Cyber-attacks help to define the terms and the role that the geopolitical ramifications fit into the definitions. In NLW, there is a larger geopolitical intent for an attack, while hybrid warfare constrains its definition to a more finite propose on a smaller scale.

A year after the cyber-attack in Estonia, Russia was at war with the small country of Georgia. The war in Georgia comprised of conventional fighting with the aftermath composed of non-linear factors including the establishment of a frozen conflict. Some of Russia's NLW methods before and during the war later would be reused and refined in Ukraine, notably the issuing of Russian passports to Georgian citizens in contested areas before the

---

<sup>17</sup> "A Cyber-riot." *The Economist*. May 10, 2007, available at: <http://www.economist.com/node/9163598>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> "Cyber Attacks: Effects on UK Companies," *Oxford Economics*, July 2014, available at: <http://www.oxfordeconomics.com/my-oxford/projects/276032>.

<sup>20</sup> Micheal Riley, and Jordan Robertson, "Cyberspace Becomes Second Front in Russia's Clash With NATO," *Bloomberg*, October 14, 2015, available at: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-10-14/cyberspace-becomes-second-front-in-russia-s-clash-with-nato>.

conflict.<sup>21</sup> Russia found the issuing of passports to Ukrainian citizens in Crimea a useful tactic, especially in Sevastopol (home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet). President Putin used the passports as part of the justification for the invasion of Ukraine, similar to Georgia 6 years earlier. Of course, these excuses used by Russia do little on the international stage to justify its invasion, but they do generate some confusion. Nevertheless, these actions may play a bigger role at home in Russia having generated support for the war. All of these examples play into the main goal of NLW—the uncertainty of the truth and the division of the enemy from within to the point where they are unable to act.

On February 28, 2014, another operation enters the NLW playbook with the phenomena known as the “little green men” who appeared around Crimea. They were armed men wearing Russian style military uniforms without any markings, flags, or insignia. They occupied key objectives around Crimea including the Simferopol Airport.<sup>22</sup> With the confusion following the collapse of the government in Kiev, Russia easily denied that those armed men had any ties to Russia. Russia had counted on the probability that the Ukrainian military stationed in Crimea would not resist. News reports speculated who the “little green men” were and what their mission entailed. Some rumors that they came to protect the Russian population as part of local militia groups. When reporters questioned the uniformed men about their origin and mission, they just stated they were volunteers. Before Kiev or the West could respond militarily, Crimea fell to Russian control.

In addition to the more forceful act of the “little green men,” Russia historically has used propaganda as a tactic of non-linear war, but the evolution of misinformation as a weapon reveals the potential potency of non-linear operations. Russia has expanded its misinformation campaign by increasing the funding of some media outlets it owns, like RT (originally Russia Today), and expanding its coverage of countries in Western Europe and North America. Russia forecasted large increases in the funding of RT in the last few years allowing fast and effective expansion, but that has slowed funding because of sanctions and low oil prices.<sup>23</sup> RT's mission is to generate

---

<sup>21</sup> “Europe: The Blame Game; the Russia-Georgia War,” *The Economist*, October 3, 2009: 65-6, available at: <http://www.economist.com/node/14560958>.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 102-106.

<sup>23</sup> Josh Halliday, “BBC World Service Fears Losing Information War as Russia Today Ramps up Pressure,” *The Guardian*, December 21, 2014, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/dec/21/bbc-world-service-information-war-russia-today>.

a sense of questioning in the audience making it seem as if there is tremendous speculation around an event. Their propaganda varies by country and audience. RT usually frames its stories in such a way as to generate the most support for their likely audience. In Russia for example, the Russian media has supposedly pushed the idea that there is no truth, so you might as well believe the one of your homeland Russia.<sup>24</sup> In Germany, the propaganda has a softer goal of just persuading the German population to support lifting sanctions on Russia. The propaganda commonly makes up numbers to show the German people the economic benefits of lifting sanctions and the harmful strains that the sanctions continue to hold on the German economy.<sup>25</sup> In addition, Russia has continued to try to divide the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), by showing that the economic crisis with Greece damages the hard work of the German people.<sup>26</sup> In Czech Republic and Slovakia, pro-Russian militia groups have formed partly because of Russian propaganda in the region spinning events to show the need for the formation of such groups. Though the groups are not outwardly pro-Russia, they have caused concern for the government and threatened to break laws.<sup>27</sup> These subversion and propaganda tactics fall clearly into the definition of NLW, but have no place in hybrid warfare.

Another more recent form of misinformation comes from Russian trolls on the Internet. Trolls are individuals spread false information online to create doubt or fear. They do this mainly through the comment section of websites. Russian trolls have been observed commenting on social media or media sites.<sup>28</sup> This misinformation campaign has the same goal of non-linear warfare, to blur the truth to a point where it seems none exists.<sup>29</sup> They also seek to spread chaos and fear. In some cases, they report on events that never happened and hope other legitimate news agencies pick it up and print the story. Thanks to the lack of fact checking in Western media, trolls have been able to push complete lies. A story reporting on a chemical fire in LA and a story about an outbreak of Ebola in Atlanta both show how far these false

---

<sup>24</sup> Tetyana Matychak, conversation with author in Kiev, Ukraine, July 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ivana Smolenova, "Is Pro-Russian Propaganda Fueling Czech and Slovak Paramilitary Groups?" *StopFake.org*, December 20, 2015, available at: <http://www.stopfake.org/en/is-pro-russian-propaganda-fueling-czech-and-slovak-paramilitary-groups/>.

<sup>28</sup> Adrian Chen, "The Agency," *The New York Times*, June 2, 2015, available at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/07/magazine/the-agency.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/07/magazine/the-agency.html?_r=0).

<sup>29</sup> Adrian Chen, interview by Audie Cornish. *NPR*, June 04, 2015.

reports can reach the public.<sup>30</sup> The trolls even create fake websites, images, and videos to add legitimacy to their falsified stories.<sup>31</sup> This non-linear tactic has proven to be a great way to spread misinformation and to confuse enemy populations. It has a low financial and political cost with easy deniability. In NLW, internet troll help to break down the decision-making abilities of a government. In addition, they hinder the government's ability to build public support for issues. They can also cause distrust in the host government.<sup>32</sup> All allow the state employing NLW tactics to have more influence and freedom of movement in the area.

Another non-linear method is to support groups in enemy countries that cause unrest or problems for the governments. Russia has supported the right wing group, the National Front, led by Jean-Marie Le Pen in France and similar groups in and throughout Europe, notably in Poland.<sup>33</sup> The refugee crisis in Europe resulting from the civil war in Syria has provided these right wing parties more support over the last year.<sup>34</sup> The refugee crisis offers another opportunity for Russia to spread emotionally charged misinformation on an issue that has and will continue to divide the West. For example, the Russian media broadcasted a story from Germany about a Russian girl who was abducted and raped in Germany by refugees even though German officials stated that refugees neither raped, nor abducted her. Either way, it plays to the Russian's advantage to show no clear facts and continue to play into the growing disdain toward refugees.<sup>35</sup> The anti-refugee movement in Germany has looked for any story like this to support their argument. Even though it maybe made it, they can use it as speculation.

Furthermore, Russia's bombing in Syria may be creating more refugees and further heightening the problem for Europe. Russia leveling cities in Syria to cause more refugees to flee to Europe, if true, would be a non-linear warfare technique though there has not been enough evidence to prove that is their primary intention. The world is demanding answers and Russia can point a

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Norman Hermant, "Russian Troll Factory Manipulates News for Kremlin Bosses," *ABC News*, August 12, 2015, available at: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-08-12/inside-russia-s-troll-factory-internet-forums-social-media/6692318>.

<sup>33</sup> Alina Polyakova, "Putinism and the European Far Right," *Institute of Modern Russia*, January 9, 2016, available at: <http://imrussia.org/en/analysis/world/2500-putinism-and-the-european-far-right>.

<sup>34</sup> Gustav Gressel, "Russia's Hybrid Interference in Germany's Refugee Policy," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, February 4, 2016, available at: [http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_russias\\_hybrid\\_interference\\_in\\_germanys\\_refugee\\_policy5084](http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_russias_hybrid_interference_in_germanys_refugee_policy5084).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

finger at Europe and say how cruel they are for not taking more refugees, while at the same time funding political parties in Europe that call for their removal, thereby reducing Western soft power.

Additionally, Russia has supported NGOs and think tanks in the West that cause unrest or opposition. These groups have included environmental groups, extreme left and right wing parties, and organizations lead by ethnic Russian citizens.<sup>36</sup> All of these methods support subversive measure and the grand strategy to divide the West and make Russia look strong. The four key warfighting techniques in hybrid warfare fail to address the above operations, thus the need for the NLW definition.

Moreover, in 2014, Russia tempted chance with the arrest of an Estonian agent on their respective border. This caused great concern in NATO. Would the arrest of the agent be enough for NATO to act in defense of one of its members? That is again the beauty of non-linear conflict, out of principle there should never be a clear smoking gun until it is too late. Russia and Estonia ended up conducting a spy swap and Russia came away without major penalty.<sup>37</sup> Incidents like these allow Russia to see the limits of its NLW campaign. Along the same lines, Russian military aircraft have conducted air missions close to and in NATO airspace eliciting a NATO response in the form of scrambled jets to meet the Russian aircraft. In 2014 alone, NATO documented over 140 of such interceptions.<sup>38</sup> To scramble two jets to intercept aircraft can cost over \$175,000 each time.<sup>39</sup> Clearly, this is costly for Russia as well, but it allows them to keep NATO in a reactionary mindset. The downing of a Russian fighter over Turkey in late 2015 finally showed Russia a clear boundary for its non-linear operations.

---

<sup>36</sup> Sanita Jemberga, Mikk Salu, and Šarūnas Černiauskas, “Kremlin's Millions: How Russia Funds NGOs in Baltics,” *The Lithuanian Tribune*, September 4, 2015, available at: <http://en.delfi.lt/nordic-baltic/kremlins-millions-how-russia-funds-ngos-in-baltics.d?id=68908408%5D>.

<sup>37</sup> Mark Galeotti, “Estonian Kidnap Is Russia's Latest Provocation,” *The Moscow Times*, September 11, 2014, available at: <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/estonian-kidnap-is-russia-s-latest-provocation/506874.html>.

<sup>38</sup> “NATO Tracks Large-Scale Russian Air Activity in Europe,” Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, October 29, 2014, available at: <http://www.aco.nato.int/nato-tracks-largescale-russian-air-activity-in-europe>.

<sup>39</sup> Mark Duell, “RAF Fighter Jets scrambled to intercept,” *Daily Mail*, April 28, 2016, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2316131/RAF-fighter-jets-scrambled-intercept-passenger-plane-heading-Birmingham-terrorist-fears.html>.

Finally, Russia also has used private security companies (PSC) to carry out some of its military operations.<sup>40</sup> How does a state react to the actions of a PSC? Does the defensive state consider PSCs the same as an opposing state's military? Even so, they offer the deniability that they never received orders from a government. This will be an area of future struggle—how to deal with PSCs and their use by legitimate governments—and exemplifies non-linear tactics. The United Nations and other observers of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have seen this issue with American companies like Blackwater. Do the Laws of War apply to PSCs? This has yet to be completely resolved and leaves an opening for states to leverage NLW techniques.

### Conclusion: The Future of Non-linear War

The general success of Russia's non-linear campaign in Ukraine has bolstered the validity of this method of warfare. Defining non-linear warfare as unconventional operations carried out by states—and recognizing that it is distinct from hybrid warfare, which are operations carried out primarily by insurgents with state support—is critical as it will push the limits of what is considered warfare. It has been over two years and Russia still controls Crimea and has a frozen conflict in Eastern Ukraine. It continues to probe its neighbors without much interference other than Turkey shooting down Russian aircraft as mentioned.

The world can see that NLW will play a large part in the future. China has adapted a number of Russia's non-linear methods and created a few of its own to expand its influence and force its will upon its neighbors throughout the South China Sea. China has started to build artificial islands and claim them as Chinese territory. Additionally, they have built airstrips on some of these artificial islands and militarized others.<sup>41</sup> These islands lay in an area with claims by multiple countries while others lay in international waters. China was able to build these islands by exploiting relations in the region and because of the limited ability or willingness of any state(s) to challenge directly China in its actions. This method of creating islands falls into a gray area within international law. In addition, there have been reports of the Chinese navy using merchant and fishing boats to intimidate and circle

---

<sup>40</sup> Alexey Eremenko, "Blackwater.ru: The Future of Russian Private Military Companies," *The Moscow Times*, November 12, 2014, available at: <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/blackwater-ru-the-future-of-russian-private-military-companies/511056.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Alex Lockie, Armin Rosen, and Reuters, "China just made yet another provocative move in the disputed South China Sea," *Business Insider*, January 4, 2016, available at: <http://www.businessinsider.com/china-just-landed-its-first-plane-on-an-airstrip-in-the-disputed-south-china-sea-2016-1>.



foreign warships close to these artificial islands. One source called this maritime militia part of China's "little blue men" in reference to Russia's "little green men" used in Crimea.<sup>42</sup> All of these actions carried out by China fall outside the term hybrid warfare. Clearly, nonlinear warfare will play a major role in geopolitical and military interactions around the globe.

The non-linear efforts reviewed here only graze the innumerable amount of possible non-linear operations. They also display that the term of hybrid warfare does not encompass such operations. The longer that states like Russia can challenge the international order and pursue non-linear methods without being checked, the more they will encourage other states to do the same. This threat will only continue to expand in the coming years and can only be countered with a strong and active deterrence. Military experts and world leaders alike need to realize severity of these threats and respond accordingly.

Notably, if Russia tries a non-linear action in a NATO member country will it be clear enough to evoke Article 5? If a Russian citizen fosters unrest among the ethnic Russian populations of the Baltic States, is it an act of war? Military and political leaders need to review their understanding of warfare and frame it with proper terminology. Calling Russia's operations in Ukraine hybrid warfare starts the whole decision making process on a faulty foundation and will lead to poor policy in response. This paper has defined and highlighted NLW so that a solid foundation may be built upon during the analytical procedures for strategic decisions. Non-linear warfare will have devastating effects if not addressed; the problem is the war is already underway.

---

<sup>42</sup> Christopher Cavas, "China's 'Little Blue Men' Take Navy's Place in Disputes," *Defense News*, November 2, 2015, available at: <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/naval/2015/11/02/china-lassen-destroyer-sprately-islands-south-china-sea-andrew-erickson-naval-war-college-militia-coast-guard-navy-confrontation-territorial-dispute/75070058/>.