

# A DEFINITION OF CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN CONFLICT: HOW DOES THE KREMLIN WAGE WAR?

BOB SEELY MP



DEMOCRACY | FREEDOM | HUMAN RIGHTS

**RUSSIA &  
EURASIA  
STUDIES  
CENTRE**

June 2018

# Summary

---

- The West faces a new kind of conflict. It is one in which military and non-military tools are combined in a dynamic, efficient, and integrated way to achieve political aims. This conflict is currently being waged by Russia, but its tools are also being used by other authoritarian states, such as China and Iran. It is a conflict that tests the resilience and deterrence of open societies in many difficult ways.
- One of the critical problems we face, however, is that there is no common agreement on what we are fighting. This is because we lack a common definition.
- ‘Hybrid war’ (*gibridnaya voina*) is one of the many terms that has been used to describe Russia’s ‘new’ form of warfare. Others include ‘asymmetric warfare’, ‘grey-zone war’, and ‘covert war’. This paper proposes to use the general term ‘Contemporary Russian Conflict’ in describing the covert and overt forms of malign influence used by the Kremlin. The following definition is offered:

Contemporary Russian Conflict is a sophisticated and integrated form of state influence closely linked to political objectives. It has, at its core, the KGB toolkit of ‘Active Measures’ – political warfare – around which has been wrapped a full spectrum of state tools. Such tools are overt and covert, conventional and non-conventional, and are used in a coordinated, efficient and, often, coercive fashion. It is holistic, opportunistic, and flexible. It is a strategic art, not purely a military art.

In waging this form of conflict, Russia makes use of at least 50 tools of state power. These can be grouped into seven elements: Political Conflict; Culture and Governance; Economics and Energy; Military Power; Diplomacy and Public Outreach; and, Information and Narrative Warfare. At its heart is the seventh element: Command and Control (C2).

- Contemporary Russian Conflict is underpinned by concepts of ‘asymmetry’. These are tactics to counter the imbalance between itself and NATO – both in conventional and non-conventional conflict. Russia seeks to mitigate its weaknesses in order to be able to fight and win in conflicts. These tactics have, since 2013, been influenced by the writings of Chief of the Russian General Staff Valerii Gerasimov, but in reality they date back many years and elements were visible in the Baltic States, Ukraine, and elsewhere in the late 1980s and early 1990s.
- Russia’s belief in the multi-faceted nature of war is reflected in successive iterations of its major security documents; the Military Doctrine, Foreign Policy Concept, and National Security Strategy. The 2015 Military Doctrine, for example, identifies the first characteristic of ‘contemporary military conflict’ as the “integrated employment of military force and political, economic, informational or other non-military measures implemented with a wide use of the protest potential of the population and of special operations forces”.<sup>1</sup> Although these doctrines – and other documents – are public, there are questions over how they are interpreted, hence the need for this definition.

---

<sup>1</sup> Russian Federation, *Voennaya Doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], approved by the president of the Russian Federation on 25 December 2014, Moscow.

---

- Contemporary Russian Conflict appears to follow a common, six-stage sequencing framework for both military and non-military elements. The ‘hybrid’ and ‘covert’ elements of Contemporary Russian Conflict are *not*, therefore, a separate form of warfare. This sequencing process is strikingly similar to the sequencing process used in ‘Active Measures’, the subversive, political warfare employed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. This should be seen as evidence that Contemporary Russian Conflict is built around ‘Active Measures’.
- The Armed Forces take a secondary role in most of the phases of Contemporary Russian Conflict. This suggests that Russia’s conflict strategies, whilst subversive and aggressive, are not primarily military, or at least not in the traditional sense of military operations. ‘War’ may be run by the Armed Forces, but ‘conflict’ is not. In this context, hackers, trolls, assassins, politically-connected business executives, spin doctors, paid-for protestors and street thugs are often more useful and more usable than the tools of conventional war, such as planes, tanks and artillery. Nevertheless, all have their place in Russia’s full spectrum form of conflict.
- This ‘Matryoshka Doll’ of conflict is one of the forms of conflict that the West will face for the foreseeable future.

# 1. Introduction

---

The West faces a new kind of conflict. It is one in which military and non-military tools are combined in a dynamic, efficient, and integrated way to achieve its political aims. It is a form of conflict that Russia has been waging with increasing sophistication for at least the last two decades. During this period, Russia has: launched cyberattacks against Estonia; been to war with Georgia and Ukraine; conducted extrajudicial assassinations; engaged in information warfare (propaganda); conducted military sabre-rattling; and used energy, economic coercion, and subversion as weapons of foreign policy.<sup>2</sup>

These should not be seen as individual acts, but part of this new kind of conflict. It is a conflict that is highly political in two ways. First, it is geared toward achieving political outcomes. It is, to quote the founder of military theory Carl von Clausewitz, “politics by other means.”<sup>3</sup> Second, the tools used to achieve these outcomes are designed, again to quote von Clausewitz, to compel others to fulfil one’s will.<sup>4</sup> It is a form of conflict that allows the aggressor to play to its strengths and which is not dependent on conventional military force.

Although this conflict is currently being waged most comprehensively by Russia, some of its tools are being used by other authoritarian states, including China and Iran. It is a conflict that tests our resilience and deterrence in many difficult ways. One the greatest challenges that open societies face is how to deal with authoritarian states that use the West’s democratic norms and institutions against itself, attempting to take advantage of, and undermine, open societies.

One of the critical problems we face, however, is that there is no common agreement on what we are fighting. One of the reasons for this is that we lack a common definition of what we face.<sup>5</sup>

Since the beginning of the Ukraine crisis in 2014, many names have been given to this ‘new’ form of ‘warfare’. ‘Hybrid war’ (*gibridnaya voina*) is one of the most popular to have been used, while others include ‘asymmetrical war’, ‘grey-zone war’, and ‘covert war’. This paper suggests that ‘Contemporary Russian Conflict’ is a more appropriate term as it covers both military and non-military tools of warfare, and covert and overt forms of influence. It can be defined thus:

Contemporary Russian Conflict is a sophisticated and integrated form of state influence closely linked to political objectives. It has, at its core, the KGB toolkit of ‘Active Measures’ – political warfare – around which has been wrapped a full spectrum of state tools. Such tools are overt and covert, conventional and non-conventional, and are used in a coordinated, efficient and, often, coercive fashion. It is holistic, opportunistic, and flexible. It is a strategic art, not purely a military art.

---

<sup>2</sup> Lucas, E., *The New Cold War: How the Kremlin Menaces Both Russia and the West* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> von Clausewitz, C., *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), Kindle Loc. 1814.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, Kindle Loc. 1539.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Kofman, M., ‘Russian Hybrid Warfare and Other Dark Arts’, *War on the Rocks*, 11 March 2016, available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2016/03/russian-hybrid-warfare-and-other-dark-arts/>, last visited: 13 May 2018.

---

In waging this form of conflict, Russia makes use of at least 50 tools of state power. These can be grouped into seven elements: Political Conflict; Culture and Governance; Economics and Energy; Military Power; Diplomacy and Public Outreach; and, Information and Narrative Warfare. At its heart is the seventh element: Command and Control (C2).

In this new kind of conflict, hackers, trolls, assassins, politically connected business executives, spin doctors, paid-for protestors and street thugs are often more useful and more usable than conventional tools of warfare, such as planes, tanks, and artillery. Nevertheless, all have their place in this full spectrum of warfare.

Many, but not all, of the tools in Contemporary Russian Conflict are below the threshold of conventional warfare that would otherwise, if used against a NATO member state, invite an overwhelming and decisive armed response. Individually, these tools are often weak, ineffective, and easy to counter. Used in coordination, however, they pose serious threats to Western security and societies.

In emphasising information and non-military forms of warfare, Contemporary Russian Conflict builds upon a set of tools and techniques developed during the Soviet period by the KGB and known as 'Active Measures'. Definitions of 'Active Measures' varied during the Cold War,<sup>6</sup> but it was broadly seen as the intervention in the politics of another country using a range of subversive, covert, and coercive tools.<sup>7</sup>

These included: the establishment and manipulation of political 'front groups' and armed proxy groups; the use of agents of influence; the use of compromise and blackmail (so-called *kompromat*); as well as traditional tools such as espionage and, sometimes, assassination. Information and disinformation (*dezinformatsiya*) were critical elements. One of the most well-known Soviet disinformation campaigns was *Operation Infektion*, which attempted to persuade Western audiences that the US military had created the AIDS virus.<sup>8</sup>

This paper is divided into six sections. After this section, the second section outlines the tools and methods of Contemporary Russian Conflict. The third explains why Russia has adopted this form of warfare, and the fourth describes its characteristics. The fifth section outlines the phasing of Contemporary Russian Conflict (i.e., how Russia goes to war), and the sixth summarises the key points made.

---

<sup>6</sup> See, for example: 'Soviet Influence Activities, A Report on Active Measures and Propaganda, 1986-87', US Department of State (1987), <http://jmw.typepad.com/files/state-department---a-report-on-active-measures-and-propaganda.pdf>, last visited: 27 August 2015, p. viii; and Snegovaya, M., 'Putin's Information Warfare in Ukraine: Soviet Origins of Russia's Hybrid Warfare', Institute for the Study of War (2015), available at: [www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20Report%201%20Putin's%20Information%20Warfare%20in%20Ukraine-%20Soviet%20Origins%20of%20Russias%20Hybrid%20Warfare.pdf](http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20Report%201%20Putin's%20Information%20Warfare%20in%20Ukraine-%20Soviet%20Origins%20of%20Russias%20Hybrid%20Warfare.pdf), last visited: 13 May 2018.

<sup>7</sup> For more information about the KGB and its activities in the West, see: Andrews, C. and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West* (London: Penguin Press, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> See, Boghardt, T., 'Operation Infektion, Soviet Bloc Intelligence and Its AIDS Disinformation Campaign', *Studies in Intelligence* 53.4 (2009), available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol53no4/pdf/U-%20Boghardt-AIDS-Made%20in%20the%20USA-17Dec.pdf>, last visited: 31 January 2014.

---



## 2. What Are the Tools and Elements of Contemporary Russian Conflict?

---

Although many of the tools and elements of Contemporary Russian Conflict are perceived as being 'new', many are – in fact – old.<sup>9</sup> They are 'new' only because the West ignored them (or was not paying attention) for so long, or because the West belittled those individuals – not least in the Baltic States and elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe – who pointed them out.

The concept of an integrated strategy using all the tools of state power dates back at least to Vladimir Lenin, who held von Clausewitz in high regard and who saw revolutionary war and politics as indivisible.<sup>10</sup> This holistic sense of struggle was a long-term goal of the USSR. Some tools, such as cyber, clearly reflect advances in technology, although the theory behind them – using information as a weapon against the enemy to divide and demoralise – is not new.<sup>11</sup> What is different now is the emphasis on information warfare and the belief that consciousness is the key aim of conflict<sup>12</sup> – in military parlance, *the Centre of Gravity*.

What is also new is the achievement of a Command and Control structure which, in appearance at least, is significantly more seamless than in Soviet days. Where command is concerned, there appear to be fewer intermediate stages than in the West. For example, the Surkov Leaks, a tranche of documents leaked in October 2016 that allegedly belonged to Russian political operative and senior Kremlin official Vladislav Surkov, suggest that political elements of the conflict in eastern Ukraine appeared to have been run from the Kremlin by the presidential administration.<sup>13</sup>

In Russia's holistic and coordinated approach to warfare, at least 50 tools of state power are used (see Figure 1).<sup>14</sup> These can be grouped into seven elements, although they are by no means mutually exclusive: Political Conflict; Culture and Governance; Economics and Energy; Military Power; Diplomacy and Public Outreach; and Information and Narrative Warfare. At the heart of this is the seventh element: Command and Control (C2).

---

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Giles, K., 'Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West: Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power', Chatham House (2016), available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/2016-03-russia-new-tools-giles.pdf>, last visited: 13 May 2018; See also, Galeotti, M., 'Hybrid, ambiguous, and non-linear? How new is Russia's 'new way of war'?', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 27.2 (2016): pp. 282-301.

<sup>10</sup> For example, see Lenin, V.I., 'Socialism and War', Pamphlet, first published 1918, written in 1915, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1915/s+w/pref02.htm#v21f170h-298>, last visited: 31 March 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Pomerantsev, P. and Edward Lucas, 'Winning the Information War', Centre for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) and the Legatum Institute (2016), available at: [https://cepa.ecms.pl/files/?id\\_plik=2706](https://cepa.ecms.pl/files/?id_plik=2706), last visited: 13 May 2018; See also, Pomerantsev, P. and Michael Weiss, 'The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money', The Institute of Modern Russia (2014), [http://www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The\\_Menace\\_of\\_Unreality\\_Final.pdf](http://www.interpretermag.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Menace_of_Unreality_Final.pdf), last visited: 13 May 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Adamsky, D. (Dima), 'Cross-Domain Coercion: the Current Russian Art of Strategy', Institut Français des Relations Internationales, Paris and Brussels, *Proliferation Papers* 54 (2015): p. 26; See also, Nimmo, B., 'Anatomy of an Info-War: How Russia's Propaganda Machine Works, and How to Counter It', *StopFake.org*, 19 May 2015, available at: <https://www.stopfake.org/en/anatomy-of-an-info-war-how-russia-s-propaganda-machine-works-and-how-to-counter-it/>, last visited: 13 May 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Shandra, A. and Robert Seely, *The Kremlin Leaks*, Royal United Services Institute, forthcoming in Spring 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Seely, R. and Alya Shandra, 'The Toolkit for Kremlin's New Warfare', *The Times* online, 2 April 2018, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-toolkit-for-kremlin-s-new-warfare-6kthqgd7t>, last visited: 14 April 2018.

---

Fundamentally, Contemporary Russian Conflict is not so much a military art as it is a strategic art, in which all the tools of national power are woven together. Other states, including the US, the UK, Iran, and China, have attempted to do this – and are trying to do so now.<sup>15</sup> But Russia has gone significantly further in the development of theory and practice, and has included a much broader range of tools. In this context, armed conflict – whether overt, covert or via proxy forces – is but one part of a full spectrum of tools used in the pursuit of political aims. The role of the Armed Forces in this definition – again to use military terminology – is *supporting*, not *supported*; that is, military power is used to bolster the wider political conflict being waged. Again, this emphasises the highly political – Clausewitzian – nature of Russian conflict.

**Figure 1: A Framework for Understanding the Tools and Methods of Contemporary Russian Conflict, with examples of each.**



The targets of such conflict are NATO, the North Atlantic alliance, the states of Europe and North America, the former Soviet republics, and even the Russian people.<sup>16</sup> Different tools are used in different combinations in different areas, depending on the rules Russia assesses apply in those areas. It applies different levers against the West, in the Baltics, in Ukraine and in Syria: *different tools for different rules*. As David Clark and Andrew Foxall wrote in 2014, in the context of the role Russia plays in the Balkans: “the strength of Russia’s approach is that it does not rely too heavily on a single policy instrument to achieve its goals; different instruments are combined and their mix is adapted to the requirements of each national market”.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> On the US and Iranian use of hybrid warfare see, for example: Robinson, L. et al., *Modern Political Warfare: Current Practices and Possible Responses*, RAND Corporation (2018). On Chinese information warfare, see: Yoshihara, T., ‘Chinese Information Warfare: A Phantom Menace or Emerging Threat?’, Strategic Studies Institute (2001), available at: <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/00059.pdf>, last visited: 13 May 2018.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Galeotti, M., ‘Controlling Chaos: How Russia manages its political war in Europe’, European Council on Foreign Relations (2017), available at: [http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/controlling\\_chaos\\_how\\_russia\\_manages\\_its\\_political\\_war\\_in\\_europe](http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/controlling_chaos_how_russia_manages_its_political_war_in_europe), last visited: 13 May 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Clark, D. and Andrew Foxall, ‘Russia’s Role in the Balkans – Cause for Concern?’, The Henry Jackson Society, (2014), available at: <http://www.henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Russias-Role-in-the-Balkans.pdf>, last visited: 14 April 2018, p. 7.

### 3. Why Has Russia Adopted this?

---

In a much-referenced 2013 article in the *Voenno-Promyshlennyi Kur'er* (Military-Industrial Courier) newspaper, Gerasimov explained the Kremlin's take on the 'Arab Spring' uprisings and the 'Colour Revolutions' against pro-Moscow regimes in the post-Soviet states. For Russia, these were not genuine protests against brutal and corrupt governments, but instead were regime changes orchestrated by the West, and the US in particular.<sup>18</sup> They demonstrated that the lines between war and peace had been blurred and the rules of war had changed.

Unconventional conflicts built around popular uprisings, Gerasimov argued, might become the standard form of conflict of the 21st century. In such conflicts, non-military tools could be more powerful than military tools. He delineated those non-military tools into five categories: "political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military measures", supported by coordinated popular protest and information warfare.<sup>19</sup> These in turn were supported by covert military operations and Special Forces operations.<sup>20</sup>

Writing a year earlier in *Moskovskie Novosti* newspaper, President Vladimir Putin also reflected on how, in his opinion, the West uses non-lethal forms of power to undermine states and societies.<sup>21</sup> He described soft power (*myagkaya sila*) as a "complex of tools and methods to achieve foreign policy goals without the use of forces, through information and other means of influence".<sup>22</sup> The term, which had been gaining prominence in Russia since the mid-2000s, was subsequently included in the 2013 iteration of the country's Foreign Policy Concept.

Putin's description reveals a manipulative and coercive understanding of the concept of 'soft power' in which information is used instrumentally and aggressively; it has been called "violence against the mind".<sup>23</sup> This contrasts sharply with Western definitions and understandings of the concept, which is built on the power of attraction and prioritises co-option rather than coercion.<sup>24</sup>

Both Gerasimov's and Putin's writings were underpinned by ideas surrounding 'asymmetry'.<sup>25</sup> In the West, asymmetry is overwhelmingly seen as something done by small groups – violent non-state actors – against major nations. For Russia, asymmetric conflict is

---

<sup>18</sup> Gerasimov, V., 'Tsennost Nauki v Predvidenii', *Voenno-Promishlennii Kur'er* online, 27 February to 5 March 2013, available at: [http://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK\\_08\\_476.pdf](http://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf), last visited: 1 May 2018.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Putin, V., 'Rossiya I Menyaushchiysya Mir', *Moskovski Novosti* online, 27 February 2012, available at: <http://www.mn.ru/politics/78738>, last visited: 9 May 2016.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Kadri Liik, quoted in McGreal, C., 'Vladimir Putin's 'Misinformation' Offensive Prompts US to Deploy its Cold War Propaganda Tools', *The Guardian* online, available at: [http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/25/us-set-to-revive-propaganda-war-as-putin-pr-machine-undermines-baltic-states?CMP=share\\_btn\\_link](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/25/us-set-to-revive-propaganda-war-as-putin-pr-machine-undermines-baltic-states?CMP=share_btn_link), last visited: 26 April 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Nye, J.S., *Soft Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), p. x.

<sup>25</sup> For further reading on Russia's asymmetric warfare, see: Thornton, R., 'The Russian Military's New 'Main Emphasis': Asymmetric Warfare', RUSI (2017), available at: <https://rusi.org/publication/rusi-journal/russian-military%E2%80%99s-new-%E2%80%98main-emphasis%E2%80%99-asymmetric-warfare>, last visited: 13 May 2018.

---



something primarily done *by* the West *to* Russia. Because of this, it is something that should also be done *by* Russia *to* the West, in both conventional and non-conventional warfare.

Russia has developed asymmetric tactics to counter the imbalance between itself and NATO, which it recognises is a formidable opponent. Russia's military is weak, despite its expensive and much-heralded modernisation program launched in 2008. This weakness, however, is offset by dynamism, inventiveness, surprise, and unity of purpose. In the contemporary world, with its reliance on internet links and instant information, there are a great many opportunities to use such tactics.

The debate about 'asymmetry' in Russia is not new. It has been ongoing since the 1990s and has its origins in Russia's attempts to reduce the imbalance of hard power between itself and the United States and its allies. This debate has two aspects; asymmetry in *conventional* war and asymmetry in *non-conventional* conflict. In conventional terms, Russia seeks to develop battle-winning equipment in critical areas, such as air defence.<sup>26</sup> Its National Security Strategy allows it to use nuclear weapons in the event of an attack on it with conventional forces, as part of a so-called 'nuclear de-escalation doctrine'. In non-conventional terms, Russia uses non-violent tools of conflict - including, psychological warfare, informational warfare, and political violence - in its attempts to close the gap in conventional superiority that the West has over it.

---

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Tor Bukkvoll quoting a former presidential adviser for military policy, General Alexander Burutin, in Bukkvoll, T., 'Iron Cannot Fight - The Role of Technology in Current Russian Military Theory', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 34.5 (2011): p. 690.

---

## 4. Characteristics of Contemporary Russian Conflict

---

The 2015 iteration of Russia's Military Doctrine identifies the first characteristic of 'contemporary military conflict' as the integration of military and non-military tools, combined with 'people power' and special operations forces.<sup>27</sup> The Doctrine refers to this as the "*integrated* [author italics] use of military force, political, economic, informational and other measures of non-military character implemented with a wide use of the protest potential of the population and of Special Operations forces."<sup>28</sup>

Beyond this, the Doctrine identifies the characteristics of modern warfare as a mix of the highly technical (for example, precision strikes, networked information systems, and coordinated air/sea/land battles) and the highly political (for example, psychologically driven information operations, cyber warfare, and the use of indirect and asymmetric forms of warfare).<sup>29</sup> In addition, other important characteristics include:

- Detailed use of intelligence to understand targets, both individuals and societies;
- Deniability of some activities, such as social media campaigns, front groups, and, coups;
- The use of tools that are below the threshold of conventional warfare;
- Flexibility as to the tools used and a creative approach to conflict;
- Deception and the hiding of intent (*maskirovka*);
- The use of information to confuse, divide and demoralise;
- Short and quick Command and Control chains to senior political levels;
- The creation, manipulation and control of chaos in managed conflicts - so-called 'managed chaos'<sup>30</sup> - and with it the use of scalable violence - the ability to inflame or calm conflict;
- The use of soft power in an aggressive and instrumental way.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to the Military Doctrine, two other documents provide important context for understanding Contemporary Russian Conflict through the way they position Russia *vis-à-vis* the West.

The first document is the 2016 iteration of the Foreign Policy Concept, which echoes the findings of the Military Doctrine. It voices specific hostility to the concept of Responsibility to Protect, a commitment endorsed by UN members at the World Summit in September

---

<sup>27</sup> Russian Federation, *Voennaya Doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], approved by the president of the Russian Federation on 25 December 2014, Moscow.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Horbulin, V., *The World Hybrid War: Ukrainian Forefront* (Kharkiv: Folio, 2017), p. 28.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, Foxall, A., 'The Kremlin's Sleight of Hand: Russia's Soft Power Offensive in the UK', The Henry Jackson Society (2015), available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/The-Kremlins-Sleight-of-Hand.pdf>, last visited: 13 May 2018.

---

2005;<sup>32</sup> states that the world has become more complex<sup>33</sup> and the use of force more dominant;<sup>34</sup> and endorses Moscow's right to protect Russians abroad, to promote unity of Slavs and to counter "neo-Nazism".<sup>35</sup> Each of these has been used to justify Russia's 'managed conflicts'.

The second document is Russia's National Security Strategy, adopted in 2017. It argues that the West is responsible for destabilising the world, is waging a global information war, and has attempted to contain Russia using military, political, and economic tools.<sup>36</sup> It states that an "entire spectrum" of political, financial and economic, and information tools is being used by the West against Russia, each of which is backed by "special services".<sup>37</sup> In addition, the Strategy states that global confrontation is intensifying because actors are manipulating consciousness and falsifying history in order to achieve political objectives.

These documents reflect the view, present in all recent Russian doctrine, that the West is an adversary - not a partner - of Russia, and that Russia is a victim of Western action. Moscow's presentation of itself as a victim rather than perpetrator is part of the gulf of understanding between the Kremlin and the West.

More broadly, President Putin and the security clique around him believe that Western system, based on the rule of law and universal human rights, is antithetical to Russia. They believe that the West was responsible for the so-called 'Colour Revolutions' - in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan in 2003, 2004 and 2005, respectively - and Putin has based his 18 years in power, to a large extent, on preventing any similar popular protests taking place in Russia.<sup>38</sup> Putin wants to undermine NATO, the EU, and other Western institutions and wishes to use disinformation campaigns and the tools of subversive warfare to undermine trust in our values, leaders, and way of life.

---

<sup>32</sup> Russian Federation, 'Foreign Policy Concept', Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Moscow (2016), available at: [http://www.mid.ru/foreign\\_policy/news/-/asset\\_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2542248](http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2542248), last visited: 14 September 2017, Paragraph 26, clause 3.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, Paragraph 4.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, Paragraph 6.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, Paragraph 45.

<sup>36</sup> Russian Federation, 'Национальной Безопасности Российской Федерации', Moscow (2017), available at: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/l8iXkR8XLAtxeiIX7JK3XXy6Y0AsHD5v.pdf>, last visited: 16 September 2017, Article 12, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Oliphant, R., 'Vladimir Putin: we must stop a Ukraine-style 'coloured revolution' in Russia', *Daily Telegraph* online, 20 November 2014, available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/11243521/Vladimir-Putin-we-must-stop-a-Ukraine-style-coloured-revolution-in-Russia.html>, last visited: 16 March 2016.

## 5. How Does Russia Go to War?

There is no denying that the West is facing a full spectrum conflict of military and non-military, conventional and non-conventional tools waged by Russia. But there has been much discussion as to whether there is a single agency orchestrating this conflict, or to what extent the covert and hybrid elements of Contemporary Russian Conflict (such as cyber, information operations, and espionage) are separate forms of conflict in their own right. These are critical questions not only for military planners but also for those who wish to observe and understand how Russia manages conflict.

In his 2013 article, Gerasimov identified a single sequencing framework for all tools, both military and non-military.<sup>39</sup> This strongly suggests that the hybrid elements of Contemporary Russian Conflict are *not* a separate form of warfare. Instead, the conflict is full spectrum and the hybrid and covert elements of warfare are parts of a larger whole. This is also confirmed in the Military Doctrine’s first characteristic of warfare: the integration of military and non-military tools. The sequencing process outlined by Gerasimov contains six phases. It is strikingly similar with the four phases of the KGB’s ‘Active Measures’ framework.<sup>40</sup> (See, Figure 2).

‘Active Measures’ was, in the words of KGB defector Yuri Bezmenov, a “destructive, aggressive activity, aimed to destroy the country or geographical area of your enemy”.<sup>41</sup> Its purpose was to change the perception of reality to the point where, despite the abundance of information, targeted individuals or audiences allowed their perception of reality to be manipulated in a way favourable to the Soviet Union. Former KGB Major General Oleg Kalugin described this subversion as “the heart and soul of Soviet intelligence”.<sup>42</sup>

**Figure 2: A Typology Showing the Sequencing of Contemporary Russian Conflict, KGB Active Measures, and the UK Military**

<b>Phasing</b>				
<b>KGB ‘Active Measures’</b>	Demoralise	Destabilise	Bring to Crisis	Renormalise
<b>Contemporary Russian Conflict</b>	Hidden Genesis, Escalation	Beginning of Conflict Actions	Crisis	Resolution, Restoration
<b>Approximate comparison in UK military phasing</b>	Shaping	Shaping	Decisive	Sustaining

<sup>39</sup> Gerasimov, V., ‘Tsennost Nauki v Predvidenii’, *Voенno-Promishlennii Kur’er* online, 27 February to 5 March 2013, available at: [http://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK\\_08\\_476.pdf](http://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf), last visited: 1 June 2015.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> ‘Yuri Bezmenov: Full 1983 Lecture’, *YouTube*, 19 August 2017, available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSz\\_nks0Yuk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LSz_nks0Yuk), last visited: 23 February 2018, approx. 1.35.10 on.

<sup>42</sup> ‘Inside the KGB: An Interview with Maj. Gen. Oleg Kalugin’, *CNN*, January 1998, available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20070206020316/http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/21/interviews/kalugin/>, last visited: 24 April 2018.

Despite their different names, Gerasimov's six phases (Hidden Genesis, Escalation, Beginning of Conflict Actions, Crisis, Resolution and finally, Restoration) share significant similarities with the four phases of 'Active Measures' (long-term *Demoralization*, medium term *Destabilization*, immediate *Bringing to Crisis* and sustaining *Renormalization*).<sup>43</sup> In both frameworks, emphasis is placed on long-term preparation, on non-military means and on the role of the military supporting rather than leading.

In most of Gerasimov's six phases, the Armed Forces takes a secondary role, evidencing that Russia's conflict strategies, whilst subversive and aggressive, are not primarily military, or at least not in the traditional sense of military operations. 'War' is run by the Armed Forces, but 'conflict' is not. Because this sequencing model can be interpreted as an update of 'Active Measures', it shows the enduring influence of the secret services on Russian strategic planning. It also supports the idea that Contemporary Russian Conflict is based on the 'Active Measures' KGB toolkit around which a full spectrum of state tools are mobilised.

In 'Active Measures', the 'demoralise' phase can last years. Indeed, demoralisation was seen through the lens of Soviet ideology as part of the generational struggle against capitalism. Even in the sequencing of Contemporary Russian Conflict, 'hidden genesis' and 'escalation' are a combination of methods and tools that can happen over months and years. Indeed, against the West, the 'demoralisation' and 'destabilisation' were both complete operations in their own right, as well as being potential shaping operations for 'crisis'. As with other aspects of the frameworks, this is not 'either/or', but 'either/and'. Russia sees duality in much of what it does.<sup>44</sup> In this context, the 'hybrid' war Russia is conducting against the West should be seen both as a stand-alone *phase* and as a potential shaping operation for crisis, whilst being part of the full spectrum of tools.

The full spectrum nature of Contemporary Russian Conflict includes the use of nuclear weapons. The evidence for this lies in military exercises undertaken by Russia over the last decade, including the *Vostok* (east) and *Zapad* (west) exercises which take place regularly. These exercises test the full range of state capabilities, from counter insurgency and informational warfare at one end to the use of nuclear weapons at the other. In the *Zapad-2009* exercise, Russia simulated a nuclear attack on the Polish capital Warsaw.<sup>45</sup> The *Vostok-2010* exercise involved simulations of a nuclear strike. In 2013, Russia simulated a nuclear attack on Sweden, including its capital Stockholm.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> 'Yuri Bezmenov: Full 1983 Lecture', *YouTube*.

<sup>44</sup> A point argued by James Sherr, in 'Russia: Managing Contradictions', in *America and a Changed World*, (ed.) Robin Niblett (London: Chatham House/Wiley Blackwell, 2010) p. 162.

<sup>45</sup> Applebaum, A., 'War in Europe', *Slate.com*, 29 August 2014, available at: [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/foreigners/2014/08/vladimir\\_putin\\_s\\_troops\\_have\\_invaded\\_ukraine\\_should\\_we\\_prepare\\_for\\_war\\_with.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2014/08/vladimir_putin_s_troops_have_invaded_ukraine_should_we_prepare_for_war_with.html), last visited: 15 April 2018.

<sup>46</sup> NATO, 'The Secretary General's Annual Report 2015', 28 January 2015, available at: [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2016\\_01/20160128\\_SG\\_AnnualReport\\_2015\\_en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_01/20160128_SG_AnnualReport_2015_en.pdf), last visited: 16 April 2018.

---



## 6. Summary

---

Contemporary Russian Conflict seeks to divide and demoralise the West. It utilises the full spectrum of state power, integrating military and non-military power. It is flexible, dynamic and creative. It is centralised around the presidential administration, although there are a number of influencing agencies. This conflict is not primarily military and uses violence and force economically. It also uses psychologically-based information operations as both a prelude to war, an alternative to war, and a handmaiden in war. It builds on the KGB framework of 'Active Measures' political warfare.

This 'Matryoshka Doll' of conflict is one of the forms of conflict that the West will face for the foreseeable future. How we understand this conflict frames our thinking about how to respond to it. Hence we need a definition and this is what the document proposes.

## About the Author

---

Bob Seely is Conservative MP for the Isle of Wight, a member of the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, and writes on forms of conventional and unconventional conflict. He tweets at @IoWBobSeely, and is on Instagram on: bobseelymp. His academic work is available at: <https://robertseely.academia.edu>, and his website is at: <http://bobseely.org.uk>.

## Acknowledgements

---

I should like to thank Andrew Foxall and two reviewers for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper. All mistakes remain, of course, my own.

## About the Russia and Eurasia Studies Centre

---

**The Russia and Eurasia Studies Centre** undertakes in-depth, analytically-focussed research into domestic and foreign policy issues in Russia and the other post-Soviet states. Established in 2010 as the Russia Studies Centre, the programme's geographical scope has widened since 2014, mirroring the high level of importance attached to the region.

## About The Henry Jackson Society

---

**The Henry Jackson Society** is a think-tank and policy-shaping force that fights for the principles and alliances which keep societies free, working across borders and party lines to combat extremism, advance democracy and real human rights, and make a stand in an increasingly uncertain world.

---