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**NAVAL
POSTGRADUATE
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MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

THESIS

**SOF'S TASK DURING PEACETIME:
OPERATIONALIZING A LEGAL RESISTANCE FORCE**

by

Sevastian-Madalin Baban

March 2023

Thesis Advisor:

Second Reader:

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**SOF'S TASK DURING PEACETIME:
OPERATIONALIZING A LEGAL RESISTANCE FORCE**

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ABSTRACT

Vulnerable small countries may choose a Comprehensive Defense strategy with an Asymmetric Defense Component (ADC) to deter or repel a more powerful invading force by becoming an “indigestible” nation. Analyzing the most recent case studies of Russia waging war on all fronts, this thesis attempts to discover what specific role Romanian Special Operations Forces (ROU SOF) should play in operationalizing a national resistance force. It identifies five factors that most significantly influenced the outcome of the analyzed conflicts. Furthermore, it emphasizes four implications for Romanian political and military decision makers in order to increase ROU SOF’s performance in operationalizing a capable ADC during peacetime. The three main recommendations for ROU SOFs are to change its previous fighting mindset, properly educate all the other organizations that comprise the national defense layer, and constantly exercise and evaluate the performance of all components, especially that of the ADC.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADC	Asymmetric Defense Component
AJP	Allied Joint Publication
CDH	Comprehensive Defense Handbook
DA	Direct Action
DDoS	Distributed Denial of Service
DNR	Donetsk People’s Republic (Donetskaya Narodnaya Respublika)
EU	European Union
GWOT	Global War on Terrorism
IED	Improvised explosive device
IO	Information operations
JMTG-U	Joint Multinational Training Group – Ukraine
LNR	Lugansk People’s Republic (Luganskaya Narodnaya Respublika)
MA	Military Assistance
MLRS	Multiple launch rocket system
MOD	Ministry of Defense
MOUT	Military Operations in Urban Terrain
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	Noncommissioned officer
NSO	NATO Standardization Office
PSYOP	Psychological operations
ROC	Resistance Operating Concept
ROU SOF	Romanian Special Operation Forces
RPG	Rocket-propelled grenade launcher
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SOCEUR	Special Operations Command – Europe
SOF	Special Operations Forces
SR	Special Reconnaissance
TDB	Territorial Defense Battalion
UKR SOF	Ukrainian Special Operation Forces
U.S. SOF	United States Special Operations Forces

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In a 2005 address to his country, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated: “The collapse of the Soviet Union was the biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.”¹ Since 2005, increasingly aggressive Russian military and hybrid activities have been used to maintain Moscow’s influence over neighboring nations, compelling small European countries to seek proper defensive strategies against more demanding Russian threats. When threatened by a vastly larger Russian force capable of projecting power in the near abroad with a great focus on hybrid tools in support of its military actions, Romania, a small European country with a very complex geopolitical role and position, must explore all available options to defend against a possible invasion by allegedly one of the Great Powers.

This thesis investigates the role the Romanian Special Operations Forces (ROU SOF) should play in operationalizing the Asymmetric Defense Component (ADC) by establishing an organized and controlled resistance capability to deter or repel possible Russian aggression. The thesis examines the most recent case studies in which Russia engaged in hybrid warfare to explain why, in the 2008 Georgian-Russian and 2014 Russo-Ukrainian wars, the defenders’ lack of a strong resistance force favored the Russian invading forces. By contrast, it also seeks to explain why the capable Chechen resistance force repelled the Russian forces during the First Russian-Chechen War and how Ukraine’s asymmetric strategic approach prevented Moscow from achieving a quick victory in the ongoing 2022 conflict.

The case studies analyses provide five important findings that might increase the defender’s prospects of success. First, an organized, properly equipped, and well-trained pre-conflict ADC has a higher chance of success than if these actions and activities are prepared in peacetime ahead of wartime conditions. Given its force multiplier attribute and

¹ Heidi Blake, *From Russia with Blood: The Kremlin’s Ruthless Assassination Program and Vladimir Putin’s Secret War on the West* (New York: Mulholland Books, 2019), 139.

unique capabilities, SOF can have a significant impact during this pre-conflict phase. Second, the weak defending nation has to choose or adapt its defense strategy taking into account the opposite strategic interactions during the conflict. Third, the superiority of psychological and information capabilities may significantly improve the success of military operations. Fourth, the amount of outside military support that the defender's forces receive improves their odds of defeating the invading forces, since the defender might have access to more resources, intelligence, or advanced training, all of which will increase the defender's capacity to resist and fight. Finally, high morale and strong popular support can serve as balancing factors in the relative power difference and improve troops' combat performance and their sense of winning chances.

It is recommended that Romanian political and military decision makers as well as ROU SOF leaders choose "asymmetry" as the appropriate strategy for enhancing territorial defense capabilities, which should only complement the conventional capabilities. This moment might be critical for taking the right decisions to operationalize an ADC to support Romania's aspiration to become a regional hub security provider. Specific recommendations are:

- Legislation needs updating to recognize and designate ROU SOF as the leading actor in operationalizing a competent ADC.
- By shifting toward a national defense mindset in which hybrid and conventional threats are employed by a technologically superior opponent, ROU SOF should specialize in conducting unconventional operations and implement CDH and Resistance Operating Concept (ROC) principles in order to increase Romania's national resistance and resilience capabilities.
- ROU SOF should change its previous fighting mindset, properly educate all the other organizations that comprise the national defense layer, and constantly exercise and evaluate the performance of all components, especially that of the ADC.

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I. INTRODUCTION

“The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.”

—Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*¹

Russia’s invasion of Georgia in 2008 warned the international community that the Kremlin had started applying a new strategy. This alert about Moscow’s new strategy was followed by other indicators, including multiple exercises on its western border, which involved many capabilities, numerous troops, and different types of equipment. Then, in 2014, Russia culminated its campaign with the invasion of Ukraine’s eastern territory and the annexation of Crimea. This illegal annexation of Crimea symbolizes “hybrid warfare,” a term that has been overused for almost every state or non-state actor’s action that can be complex, different, unusual, or new in relation to other actors. This moment created lots of concerns among NATO countries from the eastern flank and forced NATO and its allies to develop an effective strategy to deter Russia. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) responded with the *Comprehensive Defense Handbook* (CDH) as a possible strategy that can be implemented by small countries to resist Russian hybrid aggression and maintain their territorial integrity.²

Nonetheless, since 2014, Russia has continued to direct destabilizing hybrid actions toward the European countries and develop its hybrid capabilities, culminating with a full invasion of Ukraine at the beginning of 2022.

This thesis explores the idea of operationalizing the Asymmetric Defense Component (ADC) before a conflict or a crisis as an important layer of the whole-of-society national defense layer. A legal and government-led ADC can enhance the nation’s capacity to resist in the event of armed aggression and contribute to the preservation of its independence and autonomy by supporting the whole-of-society resistance efforts and

¹ Popular quote from Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*. See, for example, <http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1771>.

² NATO Special Operations Headquarters, *Comprehensive Defense Handbook* (Shape, Belgium: Quartier General, 2020), vol. 1.

leveraging the resistance force’s elements (leadership, combat forces, support elements, and political component).³ While a trained and capable ADC is relying upon the nation’s population, the CDH notes that this “indigestible” attribute of a nation “serves as a strong deterrent to even the most powerful potential adversary.”⁴

A. RESEARCH QUESTION

Although Russian hybrid actions are expected to be countered by NATO, policymakers in general and Romanian decision makers in particular designate SOF as the most affordable tool to counter the potential Russian hybrid actions. The reason for this view is that SOF are trained to employ unconventional tactics and procedures within gray zone areas where hybrid warfare is expected. Even though existing studies have clearly established different strategies to increase states’ societal resilience levels and a whole-government approach to effectively counter hybrid actions,⁵ they have not addressed specifically what role SOF should play during peacetime in selecting, training, and organizing a capable and credible resistance force.

Hence, this thesis addresses the following question: “What role should Romanian Special Operation Forces (ROU SOF) play in operationalizing the Asymmetric Defense Component (ADC) as an integrated Romanian effort to implement NATO’s CDH by establishing an organized and controlled resistance capability to deter the Russian aggression?”

The present research tries to explain why a legal, organized, and controlled national resistance capability that is integrated with allies and strategically signaled becomes a

³ Otto C. Fiala, *Resistance Operating Concept* (MacDill Air Force Base, Florida: Joint Special Operations University Press, 2020).

⁴ NATO Special Operations Headquarters, *Comprehensive Defense Handbook*, vol. 1.

⁵ Sean Monaghan, “Countering Hybrid Warfare: So What for the Future Joint Force?,” *PRISM: A Journal of the Center for Complex Operations* 8, no. 2 (2018): 91; Michael Rühle and Clare Roberts, “NATO Review – Enlarging NATO’s Toolbox to Counter Hybrid Threats,” *NATO Review*, March 19, 2021, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2021/03/19/enlarging-natos-toolbox-to-counter-hybrid-threats/index.html>; Mikael Wigell, Harri Mikkola, and Tapio Juntunen, “Best Practices in the Whole-of-Society Approach in Countering Hybrid Threats,” *Think Tank – European Parliament*, May 6, 2021, 19–22.

strong deterrent message against a potential adversary. Instead of weapons or technology, the source of national resistance's deterrent power is based on people and civil society.

B. APPROACH

This thesis uses a qualitative approach to examine what role Romanian SOF should play in operationalizing the ADC as an integrated Romanian effort of implementing NATO's Comprehensive Defense doctrine. During peacetime, a credible and capable ADC that is effectively signaled through strategic communication channels can serve as a strong supporting effort in the conventional deterrence strategy against potential Russian aggression. The thesis assesses how unique ROU SOF capabilities, gained after the completion of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), should be best applied or adapted to effectively select, organize, train, and integrate the ADC forces into the Romanian National Defense strategy.

This thesis begins by outlining the essence and main attributes of the Russian hybrid threats employed in Georgia in 2008, Crimea and Eastern Ukraine in 2014, and most recently in Ukraine in 2022. These three case studies were chosen because they represent the most recent illustrations of Russia waging hybrid warfare and the most evocative and emblematic employments of Russian forces' current capabilities as tasked within their specific doctrine. In addition, it is worthwhile to examine the First Chechen War as the fourth case study since it might also reveal vital lessons about how a weaker state can repel an invasion by a more powerful one.

Second, each case study's analysis begins with a brief contextual history of the conflict before delving deeply into an analysis of five different variables related to the defender's forces: pre-conflict preparations, organization, tactics, weapons, and communications during the conflict, psychological and information operations, external support received, and troops' morale and the support of the local populace. The Strategic Interaction theory, developed by U.S. Army veteran and professor Ivan Arreguín-Toft, serves as the analytical framework to evaluate the defenders' actions throughout the conflicts in order to better understand how their actions have impacted the conflicts' outcomes against invading Russian forces. According to Professor Arreguín-Toft's theory,

when two nations of different strengths are engaged in an asymmetric conflict, the weaker actor can defeat the stronger opponent by using an opposing strategic interaction (direct-indirect, indirect-direct), whereas the same strategic interactions (direct-direct, indirect-indirect) always favor the strong actor.⁶ This analytical framework enables the assessment of Russia as the strong actor who initiated the conflict to achieve its grand strategy by employing either a direct attack or barbarism approach, while the defenders (weak actors) employed a direct defense or guerrilla warfare as their defensive strategies.⁷ Each case study analysis concludes with a concise summary of the most significant lessons learned.

Third, the thesis tries to explain why a strong resistance force might be an effective approach against a stronger Russian invader. To support this, the thesis explains why a fierce Chechen resistance effort in Grozny during almost two years of heavy fighting throughout the First Russian-Chechen war (December 9, 1994–August 31, 1996) defeated Russian forces. Additionally, this thesis assesses the role of the Ukrainian SOF along with the Territorial Defense Forces as part of the national resistance force that was successful in preventing Russian troops from achieving a quick victory in the 2022 conflict.

In the end, based on the important capabilities ROU SOF developed during GWOT, this thesis identifies the fields where ROU SOF should play crucial functions in operationalizing the ADC during peacetime. Operationalizing the ADC requires the use of ROU SOF's skills, such as their joint technical expertise, accumulated counterterrorism and counterinsurgency knowledge, and unique law enforcement operating procedures. While ADC forces are strongly based on the Resistance Operating Concept (ROC),⁸ the resistance force has a higher chance of success when ADC forces are recruited, organized, equipped, and trained pre-conflict rather than during an invasion. Since NATO's Comprehensive Defense strategy addresses hybrid threats in an integrated way, Romanian political and military decision makers' way of thinking should shift beyond the employment of ROU SOF into counterterrorism missions and look deep into the past, as

⁶ Ivan Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict," *International Security* 26, no. 1 (2001): 93–128, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3092079>.

⁷ Arreguín-Toft, 100–104.

⁸ Fiala, *Resistance Operating Concept*.

SOF offer a more innovative and indirect approach to solve important security problems. This approach requires more critical thinking skills and conceptually expands the traditional deterrence of denial and punishment strategies to the irregular deterrence field, which is seen as a part of the integrated deterrence concept. The irregular deterrence field is where ROU SOF can be effectively employed, while SOF's utility can be optimized to support a strong and legal resistance capability during peacetime. Moreover, this approach poses a great challenge for the legislative apparatus which needs to establish irregular warfare as a legal tool for deterring an opponent acting within a gray zone environment.

Therefore, by juxtaposing the Russian hybrid characteristics with the reasons and capabilities of successful resistance movements against different Russian invasions, and the ROU SOF capabilities and authorities needed to counter the threats, this thesis examines the common points where the effective employment of ROU SOF could signal a capable and credible deterrent message or repel a possible Russian invasion.

In conclusion, the thesis presents steps and recommendations for Romanian political and military leaders that could help to implement NATO's Comprehensive Defense strategy, including ideas on increasing Romanian resilience and resistance (in this order) when facing Russian hybrid threats. Furthermore, important knowledge and discrete capabilities should be shared among all NATO SOF entities in order to increase an integrated deterrence and a common and comprehensive defense.

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. UNDERSTANDING THE RUSSIAN HYBRID THREAT

1. Conceptual Delimitation

Drawing on the strategic interactions paradigm established by Professor Arreguin-Toft, this section of the thesis endeavors to contextualize and explicate the phenomenon of Russian hybrid warfare, which has emerged as Moscow's prevailing contemporary strategy. In his study, Professor Arreguin-Toft was able to condense the range of possible actor-initiated strategies to just two major categories: direct and indirect.⁹ The direct approach targets an adversary's military forces in order to render them unable to fight. This strategy is often characterized by the use of conventional military forces employing traditional tactics such as military strikes and direct engagements in open combat. On the other hand, the indirect approach focuses on undermining an adversary's will to fight, with the aim of weakening their determination and will to fight. Such strategies often involve non-military means such as propaganda, diplomacy, economic pressure, or paramilitary groups using guerrilla warfare tactics.

Looking through the strategic interactions lens, it is possible to see the Russian hybrid warfare strategy as a mixture of both indirect and direct approaches, where the former is predominantly emphasized prior to the commencement of any conflict, while the latter gains prominence during actual combat. While in the early stages of a conflict, an indirect strategy might be supported by threats to use conventional military force as a form of coercion, the blurring shift to the following stages where non-military means are supporting conventional troop efforts creates significant difficulties in determining precisely when a conflict began.

The properties of hybrid warfare are still not clearly and completely understood; consequently, some countries, including Romania, do not effectively employ the right countermeasures. To better understand what hybrid actions are, it is necessary to define

⁹ Arreguin-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars," 105.

some specific concepts that will be used in this thesis. Clearly understanding these terms is important to avoid confusing the main concepts used for our future analysis. Consequently, this conceptual delimitation sets clear conditions for the research methodology and prevents possible misinterpretation of the results. Even if hybrid warfare, unconventional warfare, and gray-zone conflicts are somehow acknowledged as being part of the same domain, there are significant differences among these terms.

The first comprehensive and probably the most widely accepted definition of hybrid warfare was offered by Distinguished Research Fellow Frank Hoffman, who in 2007 stated that “Hybrid threats incorporate a full range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder.”¹⁰ Most broadly, hybrid warfare implies an inventive combination of both military and civilian ways and means that are synchronously employed within the same battlespace. Hoffman argues that, within a decisive confrontation, the regular forces’ ability to fight is highly facilitated by the support offered by the irregular component.¹¹ In his perspective, within hybrid warfare, while the multi-domain irregular activities can be performed by either the same conventional force or by a separate entity, these activities are coordinated by a centralized command. While there is no rule saying that an irregular domain has to be the objective of a totally different entity, the most important aspect is the synchronization between the entities.

Diverse actors choose hybrid warfare as their primary strategy, attempting to win by using a mix of political warfare and military actions blended with economic, social, and informational methods in different ways where conventional tactics meet irregular tools and terrorist behaviors. Thus, we may concede that both state actors and non-state actors use hybrid warfare as the primary method to achieve their goals, which can be either

¹⁰ Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* (Arlington, Virginia: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007), https://www.potomacinstitute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac_hybridwar_0108.pdf.

¹¹ Hoffman.

maximizing their strategic options within international relations or creating non-democratic regimes within their area of interest.

There is a need to disambiguate between two common concepts: hybrid warfare and unconventional warfare. Even if they are frequently used in the same context to express the same ideas or sometimes have the same meaning, the two concepts are different. The concept of unconventional warfare became known because of its usage mainly under the special operations forces' operational umbrella. Generally speaking, in U.S. military doctrine unconventional warfare emphasizes the support provided to a resistance movement or a foreign insurgency. More specifically for U.S. SOF, unconventional warfare is one of the core missions encompassing the “actions to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power.”¹² For NATO countries, this concept can be identified as another version of the military assistance (MA) mission, one of the NATO SOF core missions. Additionally, NATO doctrine AJP-3.5 defines special operations as “military activities conducted by specially designated, organized, trained, and equipped forces, manned with selected personnel, using unconventional tactics, techniques, and modes of employment.”¹³ While unconventional warfare can be analyzed only through the military lens, evaluation of hybrid warfare demands both civil and military lenses.

2. Relation of Hybrid Warfare to the Gray Zone

Even if hybrid warfare and gray-zone conflict concepts are closely related, there are significant differences between them. The main difference acknowledges that hybrid warfare is actually a tactical subset of gray-zone conflict. Based on case studies of different state actors, international affairs professor David Carment and doctoral student Dani Belo endorsed this claim in a 2018 article by recognizing “hybrid warfare as a subset of gray-zone conflicts, in which conventional and unconventional tools and tactics are used in

¹² United States Special Operations Command, “SOF Core Activities,” accessed February 16, 2022, <https://www.socom.mil/about/core-activities>.

¹³ NATO Standardization Office (NSO), *Allied Joint Doctrine for Special Operations, AJP 3.5*, Edition B Version 1 (Brussels, Belgium, 2019), 1.

tandem.”¹⁴ Furthermore, they argued that based on its tactical or strategic objective, each investigated state actor chose a different balance between conventional and unconventional tactics and operations as part of the decision regarding hybrid warfare or gray-zone conflict. In other words, different states can be engaged in a gray-zone conflict where they can employ different types of hybrid tactics.

On the other hand, other scholars have explained the concept of gray-zone conflict as the space between peace and war and argued that this concept should not even be accepted within the strategic vocabulary. Instead of bringing more clarity to the analysis of wars, strategy and policy professor Donald Stoker and national security affairs professor Craig Whiteside have argued that there is a mix of conventional and irregular forces in all warfare and that such a gray zone does not exist, creating more confusion among the strategists.¹⁵

Undoubtedly, there will be a continuous debate over the uniqueness of the hybrid warfare concept. One category of scholars considers the hybrid warfare concept as a new form of war. This view emerged immediately after numerous analysts and scholars had acknowledged Russia’s “new way of waging war,”¹⁶ emphasizing the innovative Russian way of combining conventional and unconventional forces, including using (SOF as provocateurs, together with cyber and disinformation campaigns or economic pressure based on oil and gas resources. Among this group, the historian and Russian politics and security analyst Mark Galeotti claimed in an article in 2016 that the “uniqueness of the hybrid war” has been characterized by three main aspects: Russian “willingness to give

¹⁴ David Carment and Dani Belo, “War’s Future: The Risks and Rewards of Grey Zone Conflict and Hybrid Warfare,” October 1, 2018, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Dani-Belo/publication/334959464_War’s_Future_The_Risks_and_Rewards_of_Grey_Zone_Conflict_and_Hybrid_Warfare/links/5e0e3f85a6fdcc2837527cd3/Wars-Future-The-Risks-and-Rewards-of-Grey-Zone-Conflict-and-Hybrid-Warfare.pdf.

¹⁵ Donald Stoker and Craig Whiteside, “Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking,” *Naval War College Review* 73, no. 1 (2020): 38, https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol73/iss1/4/?utm_source=digital-commons.usnwc.edu%2Fnwc-review%2Fvol73%2Fiss1%2F4&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages.

¹⁶ Sascha Dov Bachmann and Håkan Gunneriusson, “Russia’s Hybrid Warfare in the East: The Integral Nature of the Information Sphere,” *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 16 (Special Issue) (2015): 199.

primacy to non-kinetic operations, especially information warfare, [its] density and institutionalized nature of connections with, and use of, non-state actors, even those with no clear affinity to Russia, and the extent to which a single command structure coheres and coordinates political and military operations.”¹⁷

On the other hand, some military analysts criticize the existence of this new concept. This group, consisting of military representatives and academics, emphasizes that the hybrid concept is just a new label for a new way of applying the fundamental principles of war, just new tools and means and the innovative way that they are combined.¹⁸ Similarly, according to Stoker and Whiteside, while hybrid warfare describes new tactical means and methods employed within a confrontation, this concept is not enough for creating a new form of war.¹⁹ Likewise, Professor Emeritus of History Williamson Murray and the Ohio State University’s Chair of Military History, Professor Peter R. Mansoor claim that through the historical lens, hybrid warfare, as a combination of regular and irregular forces, has been used by different opponents throughout history to fight against great powers that have the advantage of possessing more superior conventional military strength.²⁰

3. Russian Doctrine Development Evolved to the Level of Art

While NATO, its allies, and partners were fully involved in the GWOT) for so many years, Russia developed a new doctrine and effectively employed “a new art of war” enabling it to achieve the annexation of Crimea in 2014.²¹ After 2013, Russia publicly

¹⁷ Mark Galeotti, “Hybrid, Ambiguous, and Non-Linear? How New Is Russia’s ‘New Way of War’?,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, no. 2 (March 21, 2016): 282–301, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2015.1129170>.

¹⁸ Murat Caliskan and Michel Liégeois, “The Concept of ‘Hybrid Warfare’ Undermines NATO’s Strategic Thinking: Insights from Interviews with NATO Officials,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 32, no. 2 (February 17, 2021): 295–319, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2020.1860374>.

¹⁹ Stoker and Whiteside, “Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking.”

²⁰ Williamson Murray and Peter R. Mansoor, *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 2.

²¹ Sam Jones, “Ukraine: Russia’s New Art of War,” *Financial Times*, August 28, 2014, <https://www.ft.com/content/ea5e82fa-2e0c-11e4-b760-00144feabdc0>.

acknowledged its hybrid strategy developed by the chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, General Valery Vasilyevich Gerasimov, commonly known as “the Gerasimov doctrine.” This only occurred following the publication of an article by General Gerasimov in which he claimed that “the role of non-military means (political, economic, information, humanitarian) of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and in many cases, they have exceeded the power of weapons in their effectiveness.”²² By emphasizing the importance of non-military means to cultivate a supportive population in the target area, along with a new perspective for conducting military actions in peacetime, Gerasimov introduced in his article the “New Generation Warfare.”²³ Even if Russian hybrid strategies are not completely new and Gerasimov did not use the term “hybrid” in his article, the Kremlin’s strategy is updated for the 21st century.²⁴ Russia realized that the current wars cannot be fought with the old weapons. Applying this strategy in 2014, Russia succeeded in surprising the international community by controlling Crimea without violence by waging multiple disinformation campaigns easily facilitated by the worldwide consumption of social media and internet content. It combined these campaigns with a non-traditional mixture of irregular militia, volunteers, private security organizations, special forces, and intelligence officers.

B. WHY SOF MIGHT BE A VIABLE SOLUTION TO PREVENT RUSSIAN AGGRESSION

Besides the critics of the hybrid warfare concept and the continuous debate among scholars and academics regarding the uniqueness of the term, NATO has understood the growing threat from this concept and has adopted it within its strategic and operational documents. Immediately after Crimea’s annexation, NATO began to develop specific tools to deter and defend against any possible adversary waging hybrid warfare. However, after

²² Mark Galeotti, “The ‘Gerasimov Doctrine’ and Russian Non-Linear War,” *In Moscow’s Shadows* (blog), July 6, 2014, <https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/>.

²³ Valery Gerasimov, “Value of Science in Anticipation: New Challenges Require Rethinking of the Forms and Methods of Warfare,” *Military Industrial Courier*, February 27, 2013, <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/14632>.

²⁴ Christopher Chivvis, *Understanding Russian “Hybrid Warfare”: And What Can Be Done About It* (Santa Monica, California: Rand Corporation, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.7249/CT468>.

evaluations of their internal vulnerabilities, NATO countries realized that this development process would be burdensome because the “centre of gravity” in hybrid warfare is a target population.²⁵ Hybrid activities include a combination of diverse information means, including disinformation, unconventional, and destabilization operations, all of them targeting a target population and its political-military leaders. Adversaries employ this hybrid approach to achieve their political objectives by creating a specific operational environment that does not cross the threshold of collective defense, as explained in NATO Article V.²⁶

NATO has drawn several criticisms for being a powerful and rigid military organization and for having an allegedly limited capacity to adapt to the new environmental challenges that required countering the Russian hybrid strategy. As Galeotti claimed in 2014, NATO’s kinetic capabilities (*Direct SOF* employments, precision weapons, or a solid command and communication infrastructure) might not be the adapted response to counter hybrid actions.²⁷ Moreover, in a 2016 article, NPS Defense Analysis professor Leo Blanken argued that NATO was unable to effectively respond at the time because the “Russian threats fall outside of NATO’s strategic habit”²⁸ of being a rigid military organization capable to operate exclusively inside a specific given environment.

During the NATO Military Committee Conference in Warsaw 2018, the then U.S. European Command Commander, Army Gen. Curtis M. Scaparrotti addressed the topic of Russian hybrid warfare and the difficulty of countering it by applying a whole-of-

²⁵ Peter Pindják, “NATO Review – Deterring Hybrid Warfare: A Chance for NATO and the EU to Work Together?,” NATO Review, November 18, 2014, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2014/11/18/deterring-hybrid-warfare-a-chance-for-nato-and-the-eu-to-work-together/index.html>.

²⁶ NATO, “Collective Defence – Article 5,” November 23, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_110496.htm.

²⁷ Mark Galeotti, “NATO and the New War: Dealing with Asymmetric Threats before They Become Kinetic,” *In Moscow’s Shadows* (blog). April 26, 2014, <https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/04/26/nato-and-the-new-war-dealing-with-asymmetric-threats-before-they-become-kinetic/>.

²⁸ Leo J. Blanken, “Is It All Just a Bad Habit? Explaining NATO’s Difficulty in Deterring Russian Aggression,” *Combating Terrorism Exchange* 6, no. 4 (November 2016): 54.

government approach among all European and NATO state members.²⁹ Nevertheless, each NATO member state has the responsibility to increase its societal resilience against current and future hybrid threats. Moreover, each nation has a unique capability—SOF—which, if properly employed, can strongly contribute to mitigating hybrid threats. Since 2018 when Army Gen. Scaparrotti stated that “We have special operations troops, and this is their business,”³⁰ the SOF’s unique capability to counter Russian hybrid activities has been fiercely advocated within the military.

The exceptional adaptability and flexibility of SOF, as evidenced by their proficiency in executing special operations, unique combat tactics, and overwhelming superiority in cost-benefit analyses for achieving strategic and operational objectives, make SOF the best national asset for defending against potential Russian aggression. Applying the strategic interactions analytical framework, SOF can be employed in the early stages of a conflict to counter the Russian indirect approach by launching potential direct preemptive attacks against Russian armed forces positioned across the international border while still maintaining plausible deniability. In addition, SOF can be employed to counter the Russian direct approach by conducting guerrilla warfare-style attacks, accompanied by previously trained resistance elements aimed at Russian conventional forces deployed throughout the subsequent stages of the conflict.

When analyzing SOF through the lens of hybrid warfare, it is recognized that SOF’s employment can expand the range of options for waging both military and non-military elements that can be creatively engaged during conflicts. Within this extended range of options, SOF may contribute to enhancing the national resilience, increasing the power of irregular deterrence, or integrating asymmetric approaches into a defensive *modus operandi*.³¹ Furthermore, by employing SOF within a realm where the usage of conventional military forces may be escalatory or inappropriate, a significant force

²⁹ Jim Garamone, “NATO Moves to Combat Russian Hybrid Warfare,” Defense Media Activity, Joint Chiefs of Staff, September 30, 2018, <https://www.jcs.mil/Media/News/News-Display/Article/1649683/nato-moves-to-combat-russian-hybrid-warfare/>.

³⁰ Garamone.

³¹ NATO Special Operations Headquarters, *Comprehensive Defense Handbook*.

economy can be attained along with greater results. All of these are possible because precision, discretion, and well-mitigated risk distinguish the activities in which SOF are directly involved. While these forces operate with a small footprint, they employ robust features like creativity, maturity, experience, flexibility, and unique technical expertise, and their employment within a gray zone environment may decrease political risk and offer a greater return on investment.

Thus, in this case, it is important to first recognize the force multiplier contribution that is unique to SOF. While the MA mission has been strongly tested and exercised with local security forces throughout GWOT theatres of operations, SOF as a force multiplier can also effectively achieve great effects by, with, and through the civilian population. SOF are able to work with the civilian population because they operate within a small footprint, are a highly adaptable force, and possess a great appreciation for local culture. These unique traits qualify SOF to be the viable solution for recruiting, assessing, and training the ADC elements during peacetime while accompanying or leading them in non-violent and violent operations after an enemy occupation has started.³²

Second, SOF have another unique trait that is common and relevant across all NATO countries. Typically comprehensive in their structure, SOF can easily interconnect with a variety of non-ministry of defense (MOD) organizations and other governmental and non-governmental entities alike. Proving its unique role as a catalyst between different entities, SOF can strongly contribute to the whole-of-society integration. Even if the integration process is difficult, this does not inevitably imply that SOF control the entire integration process. Practically, SOF can help the cooperation between different entities by appraising their strengths and weaknesses. This is why SOF can contribute to increasing the connectivity between people and the synergy between multiple agencies. Additionally, because of their unique expertise and requisite leadership skills, while being in charge of planning and building the asymmetric defense capability, SOF may be tasked to guide more realms of the comprehensive defense strategy.

³² NATO Special Operations Headquarters.

C. WHY IS THIS TIME CRITICAL FOR ROMANIA?

Once Russia invaded Ukraine at the beginning of 2022, the security environment dramatically changed with significant consequences for the regional and world security order. This invasion has also impacted the economic sector. The negative effects of the invasion on European COVID-19 economic recovery and the security situation have introduced more challenges for all neighboring countries as well. Beyond the significant negative effects on the food, gas, and energy markets, Romania is also impacted by the Ukrainian refugee crisis, which intensified at a rapid rate immediately after the Russian invasion. Moreover, this entire situation has created reasonable concerns among the Romanian population. This is why Romanian political and military leaders have to make the right decisions and employ the right tools to mitigate this crisis's effects.

Because of ROU SOF's combat experience in Afghanistan and Iraq and their high level of training in relation to conventional forces, the Romanian political and military decision makers will almost always tend to assign ROU SOF as the main counterforce against Russian hybrid warfare. This is the right moment for the Romanian political and military leaders to fully exploit the ROU SOF's experience gained throughout the last 15 years of combat deployments in support of GWOT. Up to this moment, ROU SOF tactics, techniques, and procedures have been tested, updated, and consolidated during multiple combat deployments against counterterrorism actions. Even if all current ROU SOF capabilities were employed, ROU SOF could not effectively counter all Russian actions packed under the hybrid spectrum.

Therefore, this is the critical moment when ROU SOF should be tasked to operationalize the ADC forces to effectively increase the national resilience level and the ROU irregular deterrent power. If this decision is not taken promptly, this skilled ROU SOF generation will retire, and this important opportunity to completely exploit its experience will be missed.

At the same time, ROU SOF must continue to grow its current capabilities and also develop new ones in order to serve as a sound counter-strategy against the Russian hybrid strategy. Going back to the strategic interactions analytical framework, ROU SOF should

first adopt a different mindset, focusing its main efforts on developing skills required for conducting more unconventional operations within an environment dominated by a numerically and technologically superior opponent force. The power ratio against the adversary's numerically superior but less well-trained conventional forces employing a direct approach can be changed by well-trained small SOF elements using unconventional tactics and enhanced by a few minor technical advancements with substantial support from civil resistance.

Even if the right decision regarding ROU SOF's role in operationalizing the ADC is taken immediately, the establishment of an organized and controlled resistance capability as a deterrent mechanism requires a significant amount of time and resources. The current Eastern European security situation serves as a warning to Romania's political decision makers to act quickly and wisely.

Furthermore, since 2007 when conscription service was suspended, Romania took ten years to create a legal framework for the establishment of volunteer reservists as a military operational reserve force.³³ Besides the initial legal obstacles, other conditions have led to failures to meet the recruitment target established each year for the volunteer reservist program since 2017. The long period of time necessary to create a favorable legal framework corresponded with a partially efficient volunteer reservist program and confirms the need to initiate the development of the resistance capability as soon as possible.

A resilient population involved in national defense pushes a possible aggressor to recalculate its cost-benefit plans. An actor is less likely to spend a lot of resources against a state in which the population is highly perceptive, which is likely to have a neutralizing effect on various hybrid actions. As stated by the CDH, this is why political leaders should create favorable conditions and initiatives to "educate, inform and enable the population to defend against malicious attacks."³⁴

³³ Romanian General Staff, "Rezerviști Voluntari," [Volunteer reservists] accessed March 12, 2022, <https://www.defense.ro/rezervisti>.

³⁴ NATO Special Operations Headquarters, *Comprehensive Defense Handbook*.

The Romanian National Defense Strategy for 2020–2024 mentions the need for a resilient population,³⁵ but national resilience starts with the individual. If more and more individuals are well organized and trained to resist, they will most likely become eager to be part of the whole-of-society efforts to defend their country. This proves the criticality of the starting process for a resilient population and explains why this is needed for increasing the deterrence power against any potential aggressor.

³⁵ Presidential Administration, *National Defence Strategy 2020–2024* (Bucharest, Romania: Romania Presidential Administration, 2020), https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/National_Defence_Strategy_2020_2024.pdf.

III. CASE STUDY OF THE FIRST RUSSIAN-CHECHEN WAR

During the First Chechen War (1994–1996), why was Chechen resistance successful against a more powerful Russian armed force? What factors can be exploited by a resident resistance force to prove a significant advantage over a technically and numerically superior foreign aggressor?

A. UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT OF THE CHECHEN RESISTANCE

The First Chechen War can illuminate some important aspects that explain how a weak actor, such as a national resistance force, can survive and win against a stronger and militarized invader, such as the traditional Russian Army. First, we have to understand the context of the Chechen resistance whose tribal and clan social structures represent its main combat capabilities. For multiple generations, when outside forces threatened the low-lying lands and the inhabited mountainous areas, the Chechens generated an efficient intertribal fusion force to fight fiercely against the invaders. This also happened when Russian infantry fighting vehicles and tanks flooded the streets of Grozny on New Year's Eve in 1994, and the Chechen resistance forces started a new war against the stronger invader.

In order to comprehend why Russian Forces lost the First Chechen War, it is crucial to keep in mind that Muslim Chechens have fought against Russia for generations. An important precursor to the First Chechen War happened at the end of World War II when more than 500,000 Chechens were deported from their living areas after Russian leadership accused them of collaboration with German forces. Another event shaping the Chechen resistance mindset happened in the early 1980s, when because of multiple years of communist mismanagement, the living conditions in Chechnya became unbearable, with a high unemployment rate and rising economic and social inequality. Later, when the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, Dzhokhar Dudayev and his National Congress of the Chechen People came to power in Chechnya, with Dudayev becoming the first President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. As a former Soviet bomber pilot who gained his combat experience during the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, Dzhokhar Dudayev was able to eject the communist regime from Chechnya and prepare to fight for independence from

Russia. At the end of 1991, the National Guard of the Chechen National Congress, the first Chechen military formation, was established. Russia could not afford to lose control over the area and sent the regular Russian Army to dispose of the Dudayev regime. Acting more like various armed groups under different field commanders and warlords, the National Guards constituted the base of the various Chechen resistance groups against the Russian invasion.³⁶ In the absence of a standard military organization, the various Chechen resistance groups might be seen as the ADC that fought against the invader's conventional army.

B. PRE-CONFLICT CHECHEN PREPARATIONS

Knowing the Russian tactics and the operational environment, Chechens were able to make important preparations that assured them tactical and operational advantages. According to some Russian sources, Chechen forces had been preparing to defend their capital for at least three to four months before the Russian invasion. These combat preparations included planning and developing battle plans, subdividing zones of responsibility, training the fighting militia forces, and establishing effective means of communication.³⁷ Most of the lessons were learned and identified by the Russians during World War II, especially those related to urban warfare. These lessons were put into practice by the Chechen leaders. The implementation of urban warfare lessons corresponded with the fact that most Chechen troops were veterans of the Soviet military, had good combat experience from Abkhazia, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, and knowledge of the Russian weapon system and fighting equipment.³⁸ Based on these aspects, Chechens were able to choose the right defensive approach and the right weapon systems in relation to a known opponent's tactics and fighting systems, as well as a known battlefield.

³⁶ Syed Adnan Ali Shah, "Genesis of the Chechen Resistance Movement," *Strategic Studies* 24, no. 4 (2004): 85–86, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45242553>.

³⁷ Bakar Taysumov, "On the Eve of a Metropolitan Clash (in Russian)," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 6, 1997.

³⁸ Theodore Karasik, "Chechen Clan Military Tactics and Russian Warfare," *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, March 15, 2000, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/7250-analytical-articles-caci-analyst-2000-3-15-art-7250.html>.

The Chechens, instead of concentrating their defense position in the Grozny city center, surprised Russian forces by implementing a “three-rings” defense system inside the city, with the Presidential Palace in the center.³⁹ Throughout these defensive rings, the Chechens, who knew exactly the upper elevation limits of the Russian tanks’ cannons, carefully designated, sandbagged, and reinforced specific fighting positions on the lower and upper floors of buildings that were above the tanks’ effective range. Furthermore, the buildings chosen as firing positions were connected through multiple underground passages that allowed Chechen fighters unlimited freedom of movement, especially during nighttime, and increased the confusion among Russian troops.⁴⁰ Defensive positions were set up as part of the second defense ring at key chokepoints, such as bridges across rivers and main squares around the city. Because Russian equipment was familiar to the Chechens, the weapon systems used to target the Russian armored vehicles’ fuel cells and engines ended up having a high killing ratio. Chechens were also hitting the top, rear, and sides of the Russian tanks because they knew that most Russian tanks were using reactive armor only in the front. These pre-conflict preparations were directly related to the efficiency of the Chechens’ sniper and anti-tank teams in drastically diminishing the mutual support of Russian armored vehicles and infantrymen.

C. DURING THE CONFLICT: CHECHENS’ ORGANIZATION, TACTICS, WEAPONS, AND COMMUNICATIONS

The Chechen resistance forces’ non-military organization, their tactics that involved a high level of mobility, and the weapon systems and communication methods adapted to their tactics were by far the basis of the Chechen resistance’s success against the Russian forces during the Battle of Grozny. A non-standard squad of six to eight fighters represented the backbone of the resistance organization. A Chechen squad might be composed of two men with rocket-propelled grenade launchers (RPG), two men carrying machine guns, a sniper who could also use RPGs, and sometimes a medic or one to two automatic riflemen. Each highly mobile Chechen team was assisted by a dedicated

³⁹ Olga Olikier, *Russia’s Chechen Wars, 1994–2000: Lessons from Urban Combat* (Santa Monica, California: Rand Corporation, 2001), 18.

⁴⁰ Olikier, 18.

support team that included three ammunition carriers, two extra medics, and two extra Dragunov snipers. Furthermore, three of such 25-men groups received one mortar crew support team which in total built an approximately 75-man unit.⁴¹

Because many members of the Chechen resistance had served in the Soviet Army, they were able to make good use of Soviet Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT) lessons derived from Russia's World War II experience.⁴² Adopting these small team tactics with a high degree of mobility within an urban area allowed Chechen resistance forces to conduct "hit-and-run" attacks against the more rigid and heavily weaponized Russian assault force. Instead of multiple defensive strong points on all possible Russian avenues of approach, the Chechens implemented the urban warfare key lessons learned from World War II: high urban mobility and ambushes by immobilizing the first and last vehicles of Russian armored convoys. Additionally, Chechen fighters acting like civilians were very willing to help Russian troops by providing them with specific directions into the city and sending them directly into the pre-planned ambush locations.

The best weapons systems for such guerrilla tactics were the RPGs that were effective against Russian armored personnel carrier vehicles and sniper systems used from high buildings against Russian infantrymen supporting the armored carriers. The usage of multiple RPG teams against the same target created huge confusion among the Russian soldiers who could not properly react to contact. The light weapon systems (portable anti-tank weapons, automatic and sniper rifles) in addition to the well-known battlefield boosted the central aspect of the Chechen tactics: the mobility of the troops. This aspect was very well exploited by both mortar crews and anti-tank teams who moved constantly using modified civilian cars.⁴³

While Chechen forces used Western and Asian-made hand-held Motorola radios to communicate easily within an urban battlefield, the Russian big antenna radio

⁴¹ Timothy Thomas, "The Battle of Grozny: Deadly Classroom for Urban Combat," *The U.S. Army War College Quarterly: Parameters* 29, no. 2 (May 25, 1999): 87–102, <https://doi.org/10.55540/0031-1723.1935>.

⁴² Olikier, *Russia's Chechen Wars, 1994–2000*.

⁴³ Thomas, "The Battle of Grozny."

communication systems were inefficient in such an environment.⁴⁴ In addition to that, the Russian communication system was also heavily affected by the fact that the Russian soldiers carrying radio equipment were the first targeted by the Chechen snipers. Moreover, Chechen fighters had some Russian-made radios and were familiar with them, which gave them an advantage, as did the fact that at the beginning of the war Russian soldiers used clear voice messaging to communicate. As a result, Chechens who could easily understand the Russian language were able to intercept Russian messaging and immediately adjust their tactical movements. That was not the case for the other side, where Chechens could use their native language and keep their communication secured because the Chechen language was not common for the Russian soldiers.

D. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND INFORMATION OPERATIONS

Deception, electronic warfare, and perception management were fruitfully employed by Chechen forces as part of their psychological line of effort. As a deceptive action, Chechen fighters wearing Russian uniforms succeeded in easily infiltrating and conducting attacks behind Russian enemy lines. In addition, Chechens used Russian wounded soldiers as human shields in front of their fortified positions, forcing Russian soldiers to shoot their fellows in order to engage Chechen resistance forces.⁴⁵ Moreover, rumors and reports circulated mentioning U.S. Stingers coming from Afghanistan, which were more likely an efficient Chechen deception to affect Russian air operations. From the technical perspective, by having access to the Russian communication systems, Chechens were able to transmit multiple disinformation messages. Some of the messages were meant to send Russian troops directly into designated kill zones while others were intended merely to create confusion among the Russian forces. Furthermore, mobile and small television platforms with television and radio equipment were efficiently used by Chechens to override the Russian TV programs and send short messages over the entire battlefield area.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Olikier, *Russia's Chechen Wars, 1994–2000*, 18.

⁴⁵ Karasik, “Chechen Clan Military Tactics and Russian Warfare.”

⁴⁶ Karasik.

The Chechens were able to influence both Russian and international public opinion in their favor. During the Battle of Grozny, the huge number of reporters available in the fighting arena was efficiently exploited by the Chechen troops. In the context of the first war after the USSR's dissolution, many reporters, including Russians from both private and state companies were able to move around Grozny freely and cover the fighting in "a remarkable achievement of Russian democratic journalism."⁴⁷ While Chechen fighters were totally open to being interviewed by the local journalists and international reporters, Russian forces did not put enough effort into limiting the correspondents' freedom of movement. Therefore, this context was creatively exploited by the Chechen fighters posing as innocent victims when videos with civilian casualties from locations used by resistance forces were recorded and published in Russian and international media.⁴⁸

E. EXTERNAL SUPPORT FOR THE CHECHEN DEFENDER FORCES

External support for the Chechen resistance during the First Chechen War was minimal. There were only some Islamic countries whose few volunteers helped the Chechen fighters by providing knowledge or weapons during the conflict. Few difficult-to-credit reports mentioned Afghan volunteers who supported the Chechen cause and even provided some portable anti-aircraft missiles, including U.S.-manufactured Stinger missile systems. This Chechen capability was not confirmed and was not proven by an increased hitting ratio of Russian air assets. However, some "unintentional support" was provided before the conflict when a few countries like Pakistan, Azerbaijan, and Turkey provided specific training in their countries for a good number of inexperienced Chechen soldiers.⁴⁹

After studying several asymmetric wars between insurgencies and stronger counterinsurgencies' forces, professor of strategy Jeffrey Record revealed that insurgent victories were more closely related to receiving external support, concluding that "external assistance is a common enabler of victorious insurgent wars, though certainly no guarantee

⁴⁷ Kaarle Nordenstreng, Elena Vartanova, and Yassen N. Zassoursky, eds., *Russian Media Challenge*, Kikumora Publications 20 (Helsinki, Finland: Aleksanteri Institute, 2001), 161.

⁴⁸ Olikier, *Russia's Chechen Wars, 1994–2000*, 22.

⁴⁹ Olikier, 17.

of success.”⁵⁰ Even though external assistance is important, it cannot guarantee victory and might be insufficient for insurgent forces to prevail in a conflict against stronger governmental or even foreign occupier forces, because they also need to maintain high morale, have a sound strategy, be well-organized, and maintain strict discipline among their soldiers.⁵¹

Although the international community did not support the Chechen resistance, it did not strongly condemn the Russian actions either. There was no forceful reaction from the international community or a single powerful state to call for a unified effort to impose powerful sanctions against the Russian invasion of Chechnya in 1994.

F. MORALE OF THE CHECHEN FIGHTERS AND PUBLIC SUPPORT

The Chechens had high morale and a strong will to fight while the Russian Army had low morale during the First Chechen War.⁵² Based on the Russian political leaders’ and military commanders’ analysis and planning assumptions, the invasion was supposed to be a quick and easy win for the Russian troops with little to no Chechen resistance against an overwhelming force.⁵³ The young Russian soldiers’ morale was quickly struck by the Chechens’ willingness to fight and their combat capabilities. One of the most important determinants of morale is the great cause that fighters and soldiers fight for. There was a great difference between the Chechen cause to defend their soil and the Russian troops who were not fully convinced about the justification for the war.

Additionally, the status of equipment and the level of training are elements that can bolster or weaken the morale of troops, by increasing or decreasing the perception of the

⁵⁰ Jeffrey Record, *Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books Inc., 2009), 133.

⁵¹ Jeffrey Record, “External Assistance: Enabler of Insurgent Success,” *The U.S. Army War College Quarterly: Parameters* 36, no. 3 (August 1, 2006): 48, <https://doi.org/10.55540/0031-1723.2321>.

⁵² Pjer Simunovic, “The Russian Military in Chechnya — A Case Study of Morale in War,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 11, no. 1 (March 1998): 63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518049808430329>.

⁵³ Gregory J. Celestan, *Wounded Bear: The Ongoing Russian Military Operation in Chechnya*, 4th ed. (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Foreign Military Studies Office Publications, 1996), https://www.glscott.org/uploads/2/1/3/3/21330938/wounded_bear_the_ongoing_russian_military_operations_in_chechnya_6.pdf.

chances for success. Not only were most Russian weapons and equipment unsuitable for urban warfare, but their troops' urban training was non-existent. On the other side, the small-unit tactics and efficient guerrilla attacks against Russian capabilities were definitely bolstering the Chechens' morale. This aspect is also related to the cohesion of small units which can increase the effectiveness of their combat performance. The Russian troops' cohesion was relatively low because of the influx of fresh recruits into the armed forces as a consequence of the conscription law.

The physical needs for food, shelter, and rest can also influence the fighters' motivations and morale. Whereas there were situations when Russian soldiers were entering local houses to ask for food, the Chechen fighters were receiving a lot of support from the local populace, including Russian ethnics.⁵⁴ Since Russian forces produced a large number of civilian casualties, they were not able to win the hearts and minds of the local population to support them in their ongoing combat missions. This element can be related to poor Russian leadership at all levels. The top Russian leadership's performance was problematic as their policies and resource tailoring were not able to provide a common purpose and understanding of the overall activities of the troops deployed in Chechnya.⁵⁵ At the lowest levels, the lack of a skilled and committed corps of noncommissioned officers (NCO) and the rotation of the most officers every three months severely hampered the face-to-face command and control style.

G. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a pre-conflict well-trained and prepared resistance force that has a strong will to defend, chooses the right strategy, tactics, and weapons, and employs a superior information operation campaign can stand against a more powerful invader. The battlefield was known very well by the Chechens who exhibited a strong will to defend their cities. The Chechen forces successfully leveraged their knowledge of enemy weapons and tactics, as well as their prior combat experience, to achieve a strategic advantage. Specifically, they adopted an indirect approach by implementing small-unit organizing

⁵⁴ Simunovic, "The Russian Military in Chechnya — A Case Study of Morale in War," 76.

⁵⁵ Simunovic, 82.

principles and guerrilla warfare tactics, which enabled them to maximize the advantages that come with defending in an urban environment. All these aspects were intelligently promoted by a Chechen professional media campaign to gain local and global support for their cause against the invader.

Analyzing this conflict through the lens of Arreguín-Toft's strategic interactions framework, it is possible to understand how the Chechen troops, as the weaker actor, were favored to prevail against the stronger Russian forces because they purposefully chose the right opposing strategy. Russia, as the stronger actor, pursued a direct approach by deploying conventional forces and employing direct attack tactics against the Chechen forces that were not conform to standard military organization. Conversely, the Chechen forces deliberately opted for an indirect strategy by implementing guerrilla warfare tactics to defend against the Russian invasion.

The Russian forces planned for a quick win and took the conventional approach to eliminate the Chechen forces. Even though the Russian Army was able to easily "invade" the area occupied by the Chechen forces, their troops failed to sustain control of the battlefield over time. Further, Russian forces attacked the Chechen fighting resistance forces, but the Russians did not work by, with, and through the local population. The local population strongly supported the resistance fighters with all their resources, including people, guns, and money. While the invader had the force advantage, the defense forces maximized the information advantage. By doing so, Chechen forces were able to know where the Russian forces were and had the initiative to engage them efficiently. Ultimately, Russian forces were unable to use their superior force because they could not easily identify their targets, who were mixed among and strongly supported by the local population.

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IV. CASE STUDY OF THE 2008 GEORGIAN-RUSSIAN WAR

After the First and Second Chechen Wars, Russia learned important lessons and decided to update its approach to handling future conflicts. Georgia, a bordering country, lacked the capabilities and capacities to stand up to a stronger state like Russia. Why did Georgia's army not effectively resist the Russian military force? What circumstances were successfully exploited by Russian forces in August 2008 to enable them to easily win the "Five-Day War"? The analysis in this chapter reveals that not employing important aspects like a pre-conflict trained asymmetric force, failing to choose an indirect approach (irregular tactics) against a powerful conventional force, and lacking a good psychological and information operations strategy that correlate with high morale and the will to defend diminished the weaker actor's chances to win against a stronger opponent.

A. UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT OF THE 2008 GEORGIAN CONFLICT

Although few at the time realized it, this five-day conflict marked a significant change in global politics when Moscow demonstrated its willingness and capacity to oppose NATO expansion in its neighborhood, exercise its veto over U.S. plans related to European security, and keep the small country's affairs under the influence of Russia.

A better understanding of the events that occurred during the August 2008 War will be made easier by taking a close look at Georgia's road to war. After the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991, the newly established state of Georgia was engaged in an armed conflict against the ethnic minority groups in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, two territories in the Caucasus region. After several ethnic clashes when Abkhazian militants forcibly displaced Georgian nationals, the fighting concluded with the peace agreement signed on June 24, 1992 in Sochi.⁵⁶ Although Russia imposed its role as the security guarantee for South Ossetia and Abkhazia by stationing peacekeepers in South Ossetia and Abkhazia

⁵⁶ United Nations, "Agreement on Principles of Settlement of the Georgian – Ossetian Conflict (Sochi Agreement)," UN Peacemaker, accessed August 16, 2022, <https://peacemaker.un.org/georgia-sochi-agreement92>.

through specific policies like passportization,⁵⁷ it continued to solidify its influence over the two regions to deter Georgia from regaining sovereignty over these territories. Following the 2003 bloody “Rose Revolution” and immediately after Mikheil Saakashvili assumed office as the president in January 2004, he made regaining the sovereignty of Abkhazia and South Ossetia separatist areas one of his priorities.⁵⁸ As journalist and war correspondent Jean-Christophe Peuch noted, intense violence resumed in South Ossetia when Georgian police forces attempted to retake the province by force in an effort to officially “combat smugglers operating from Russia.”⁵⁹

In early March 2008, Abkhazia and South Ossetia officially requested recognition from Russia’s parliament. This occurred soon after the United States and most European Union nations acknowledged Kosovo’s independence by mid-February 2008.⁶⁰ The recognition by the Russian Duma in late March 2008 was followed by a Russian presidential decree in April 2008 enabling direct official relations between the Russian government entities and the secessionist authorities from Abkhazia and South Ossetia.⁶¹ Supporting the secessionist authorities from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Russian troops invaded Georgia at the beginning of August 2008.

B. PRE-CONFLICT GEORGIAN PREPARATIONS

In order to meet the requirements for NATO membership, at the beginning of 2002 the Georgian Armed Forces began deemphasizing territorial defense and instead focused their training on counterterrorism and peacekeeping tactics, techniques, and procedures.

⁵⁷ Toru Nagashima, “Russia’s Passportization Policy toward Unrecognized Republics: Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 66, no. 3 (May 4, 2019): 186–99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2017.1388182>.

⁵⁸ Charles King, “Tbilisi Blues,” August 25, 2004, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2004-08-25/tbilisi-blues>.

⁵⁹ Jean-Christophe Peuch, “Deadliest Fighting In Years Erupts In South Ossetia,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 12, 2004, sec. Georgia, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1054281.html>.

⁶⁰ New York Times (Online), “U.S. and Most of the EU Recognize Kosovo,” *The New York Times*, February 18, 2008, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/18/world/europe/18iht-kosovo.3.10148493.html>.

⁶¹ Vladimir Socor, “Russia Moves toward Open Annexation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia,” The Jamestown Foundation, 2008, <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-moves-toward-open-annexation-of-abkhazia-south-ossetia/>.

Shortly after the start of the GWOT, the U.S. Army Special Forces started a two-year training program in response to the Government of Georgia's request for assistance to help the Georgian Army deal with the potential presence of Al-Qaeda militants in the Pankisi Gorge area.⁶² The training was a component of a wider counterterrorism effort focused on nearby central and south Asian countries. Later, the U.S. Marine Corps, in conjunction with the British Army, assumed responsibility for training Georgian forces to develop the skills necessary for future deployment in Iraq as part of the GWOT. This Georgian endeavor, considered an effort that would improve the nation's chances of joining NATO, placed Georgia behind the United States and Great Britain as the third-largest force of the international coalition presence in Iraq in 2007.⁶³ In order to eliminate any potential perception that training received by the Georgian forces could pose a security threat to Moscow, the American training was specifically created to concentrate on counterterrorism and peacekeeping tactics and not on territorial defense.

Moreover, the IMMEDIATE RESPONSE 2008 exercise, an annual bilateral security cooperation exercise involving the United States, NATO, and coalition partners, was reportedly carried out jointly by the United States and Georgian Armed Forces in the second half of July 2008 near Tbilisi, without any apparent connection to a standoff between Moscow and Tbilisi over the two Russian-backed separatist regions of Georgia.⁶⁴ On the other side, nearly simultaneously, Russian troops from the North Caucasus Military District, the Interior Ministry, and border guards simulated assisting Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia and South Ossetia during Russia's own military exercise called CAUCASUS FRONTIER 2008, held in the region of the north Caucasus, including North Ossetia.⁶⁵ To

⁶² Associated Press, "Green Berets Land in Georgia For 2-Year Training Program," *The New York Times*, May 20, 2002, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/05/20/world/green-berets-land-in-georgia-for-2-year-training-program.html>.

⁶³ Liklikadze Koba, "Iraq: As Third-Largest Contingent, Georgia Hopes To Show Its Worth," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, September 10, 2007, sec. Georgia, koba, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1078614.html>.

⁶⁴ Reuters, "U.S. Troops Start Training Exercise in Georgia," Reuters, July 15, 2008, sec. Editor's Picks, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-georgia-usa-exercises-idUSL1556589920080715>.

⁶⁵ North Caucasus Weekly, "Russia Holds Military Exercises in the North Caucasus," Jamestown Foundation, July 17, 2008, <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-holds-military-exercises-in-the-north-caucasus/>.

support the efforts just mentioned, the Georgian government had to increase its defense expenditure, which became a reality between 2004 and 2008 when a variety of weaponry and weapon systems were purchased. Israel, Turkey, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and Ukraine were among the countries from which Georgia purchased a variety of weapons, along with small guns and supporting technologies from other nations. Data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) demonstrates that Georgian defense expenditure increased from 1.1% of GDP in 2003 to a maximum of 9.2% of GDP in 2007.⁶⁶ Although Georgia had limited access to Western weapons, its investments in military equipment were also made in the hope of addressing the Abkhazian and South Ossetian militias' situation with better-equipped and trained Georgian security forces while deterring Russia by imposing high costs in the case of a war.

C. DURING THE CONFLICT: GEORGIAN ORGANIZATION, TACTICS, WEAPONS, AND COMMUNICATIONS

The Georgian strategy was composed of a purely conventional approach that included a Russian deterrent component, whereas Moscow used its conventional military strength in support of the irregular warfare element represented by Russian proxy and militia forces from the Georgian territories. Although it is difficult to determine the degree to which Ossetian decision makers were tactically controlled by Moscow, the militia forces' actions were crucial in intensifying the violence prior to the start of the conflict. Poor planning, insufficient intelligence support, weak leadership, inexperience in combat, and inadequate troop mobility in comparison to Russian forces were all contributing factors to the overall low-level performance of the Georgian Armed Forces.

A short review of the orders of battle of the two belligerents is also instructive. On one hand, the Georgian troops included a part of the 1st and the 4th Infantry Brigades without the 1st Brigade's premiere elements, which were deployed in Iraq. These brigades were located at bases in central and eastern Georgia, being focused on South Ossetia. The 2nd and 3rd Infantry Brigades were located in western Georgia and were responsible for

⁶⁶ World Bank, "Military Expenditure (% of GDP) – Georgia," Data, accessed August 18, 2022, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?locations=GE>.

Abkhazia area.⁶⁷ One Artillery Brigade, one Tank Battalion, and special forces soldiers from the Ministry of Internal Affairs supported Georgia's main ground infantry forces, totaling no more than 11,000 soldiers.⁶⁸

On the other hand, the Russian 58th Army, one of Russia's top military units with recent combat experience from the Second Chechen War (1999), composed the vast majority of the professional soldiers, employing an overwhelming number of tanks, armored personnel vehicles, and armored personnel carriers.⁶⁹ Airborne troops and *Spetsnaz* (special operations forces) were also included in the Russian ground forces, which were all supported by air force assets engaged in close air support operations and bombing strategic Georgian targets (like air and military bases), as well as navy assets engaged in strategic guided-missile bombing and amphibious troop transport, particularly to Abkhazia.⁷⁰

The Georgian operational plan was based on wrong assumptions. It did not take into consideration the Russian forces of the North Caucasus Military District, their short response time, and the possibility of fighting on two different fronts. As a result, Georgian forces had to deal with one of the biggest surprises when, by the third day of the conflict, Moscow had been able to send 14,000 troops into South Ossetia and another 9,000 into Abkhazia.⁷¹ The Georgian military was unable to match the speed and sheer size of the Russian deployment of equipment and forces into Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The Georgian Ministry of the Interior's inexperienced forces supported by artillery units were easily slowed down by the South Ossetian militia forces just enough for the

⁶⁷ Robert E. Hamilton, "A Resolute Strategy on Georgia," CSIS, September 4, 2008, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/resolute-strategy-georgia>.

⁶⁸ Heidi Tagliavini, *Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia*, vol. II (Council of the European Union, 2009), https://www.mpil.de/files/pdf4/IIFFMCG_Volume_II1.pdf.

⁶⁹ Ariel Cohen, James Carafano, and Lajos F. Szaszdi, "Russian Forces in the Georgian War: Preliminary Assessment and Recommendations," The Heritage Foundation, August 20, 2008, <https://www.heritage.org/europe/report/russian-forces-the-georgian-war-preliminary-assessment-and-recommendations>.

⁷⁰ Cohen, Carafano, and Szaszdi.

⁷¹ Michael Kofman, "Russian Performance in the Russo-Georgian War Revisited," War on the Rocks, September 4, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/09/russian-performance-in-the-russo-georgian-war-revisited/>.

Russian conventional forces to arrive on the battlefield. Moreover, the Russian combat experience from the previous Chechen wars immediately provided a huge difference in the high-intensity conflict's front line. In combat, Georgian forces destroyed only three Russian tanks, approximately 20 armored vehicles of various types, and a larger number of utility vehicles.⁷² The anticipated impact of new Georgian military technologies was quickly negated in this rapid and high-intensity combat, where Russian forces quickly encircled the Georgian forces operating new pieces of equipment on the front line. Moreover, Russia was not deterred by these technologies. The Russian air force was able to conduct air raids against airfields and military bases deep inside Georgian territory because Georgian air defenses were unable to stop them. As noted by American military analyst Michael Kofman in a 2018 article, "despite Georgian investments in air defense, radar, and battle space management, the Russian air force had a generally free operating environment."⁷³ Only two of the six Russian aircraft lost in Georgia appeared to be losses to Georgian air defense systems.⁷⁴ With more than 2,000 of its troops and police officers killed or hurt, Georgia had suffered a severe loss during the Five Days' August War.⁷⁵ The Georgian army lost a lot of equipment after the conflict, which made the defeat even worse because a lot of that equipment was either abandoned on the battlefield or easily captured from military bases by the Russian forces.

D. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND INFORMATION OPERATIONS

The rapidity with which Moscow deployed its forces on two different fronts psychologically overwhelmed the Georgian forces, especially since the South Ossetian attack was not anticipated at all. On one hand, the quick development of operations during the five days of conflict did not allow Georgian leaders time to develop a sustainable PSYOP campaign against the invading forces. On the other hand, the Georgian leadership

⁷² Kofman.

⁷³ Kofman.

⁷⁴ Anton Lavrov. "Russian Air Losses in the Five Day War Against Georgia." *The Tanks of August*. Moscow: Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (2010): 104–105.

⁷⁵ Anton Lavrov. "Timeline of Russian-Georgian Hostilities in August 2008." *The Tanks of August*. Moscow: Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (2010): 75.

was having difficulty explaining their view of the conflict to the international community due to effective Russian cyberattacks against Georgia's external communication capabilities. Furthermore, the Russian forces were able to exploit all components of the information environment to their advantage, particularly those Georgian atrocities that supported and justified the invasion.

The main drawback for the Georgian defender forces was the lack of media coverage of the events from the Georgian perspective, whereas Moscow's media extensively covered all details. This information superiority was made possible by the surprise arrival in Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, of roughly 50 Russian reporters just two days before the conflict broke out.⁷⁶ In addition, non-Russian journalists were not permitted in South Ossetian territory. The Russian viewpoint presenting the Georgian atrocities against Russian citizens and peacekeepers was the only one offered, and both domestically and internationally, the Georgian authorities were unable to contest it.

Additionally, Russian journalists were moving in the convoys alongside Russian soldiers. While on one hand, they were reporting on the Russian troops' successful operations, on the other hand, they were exploiting the Georgian forces' supposed atrocities for propaganda effects, such as a particular ambush against a Russian convoy which resulted in wounding the 58th Russian Army's commander Gen. Khrulev.⁷⁷

E. EXTERNAL SUPPORT FOR THE GEORGIAN DEFENDER FORCES

Outside of diplomatic efforts and humanitarian relief, the international community made minimal attempts to end the conflict or to support the Georgians. The possibility of escalating into a future direct conflict between Washington and Moscow made a U.S. military intervention in the crisis an impractical option; therefore, U.S. support was restricted to diplomatic efforts to stop the fighting and prevent a potential regime change in Georgia. In addition to diplomatic efforts, the United States provided urgent re-

⁷⁶ Andrei Illarionov, "The Russian Leadership's Preparation for War, 1999–2008." In *The Guns of August 2008: Russia's War in Georgia*, Studies of Central Asia and the Caucasus (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2009), 83–84.

⁷⁷ Lavrov, "Timeline of Russian-Georgian Hostilities in August 2008," 61.

deployment of 2,000 Georgian troops from Iraq to their home country.⁷⁸ Even though the Georgian leadership demanded a stronger U.S. engagement in terms of a deterrent U.S. military presence and particular support in the form of cutting-edge weapons (such as Stinger weapon systems), the United States did not desire a unilateral intervention and opted to encourage international condemnation of Russian actions in Georgia.⁷⁹ Further, there was no consistent external military support for Georgia against the Russian invasion besides the peace plan between Moscow and Tbilisi brokered by the French President and EU presidency holder Nicolas Sarkozy. At that time, American foreign policy aimed to make the best possible use of Medvedev's presidency and could not risk that by going to war for Georgia.

A general explanation for the absence of external support could be that Western nations were unwilling to fund Georgia's defense efforts because their general foreign policy was to avoid any provocation against Moscow. Nevertheless, the Georgian leadership did not consider this factor at the outset of the conflict.

F. MORALE OF THE GEORGIAN FIGHTERS AND PUBLIC SUPPORT

The low morale of Georgian active and reserve forces had an impact on both their combat effectiveness and performance. First, when reserve forces were mobilized to counter the larger number of Russian forces, their morale was strongly impacted by their poor training level and the lack of experienced commanders to lead them. Second, a lack of accurate information, the propagation of numerous rumors, and successful Russian fire strikes against civilians and Georgian military bases were all factors contributing to the low morale.

Due to Russian cyber capabilities, the local populace and Georgian military forces were unable to acquire accurate information. The severe, sophisticated, and well-

⁷⁸ John J. Kruzel, "U.S. Helps Redeploy Georgian Forces," U.S. Army, August 12, 2008, https://www.army.mil/article/11603/u_s_helps_redeploy_georgian_forces.

⁷⁹ Ronald D. Asmus, *A Little War That Shook the World: Georgia, Russia, and the Future of the West*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 186.

coordinated denial-of-service Russian cyberattacks that were successful in taking down crucial Georgian websites had a significant impact on Tbilisi's internal and external communication capabilities.⁸⁰ Rumors about a large number of Russian troops heading into Georgia to overthrow the government in Tbilisi, along with numerous speculations about thousands of both Georgian regular and reservist soldiers being killed, were spreading quickly.⁸¹

The Georgian air defense systems also performed poorly, giving the Russian air force tremendous freedom of maneuver and the ability to hit military targets effortlessly all around the country. The effective Russian airstrikes utilizing attack helicopters caused the Georgian troops' morale to rapidly deteriorate.⁸² Moreover, the intensity of the air strikes in such a short period of time prevented any potential morale-boosting operations for the Georgian forces. At the same time, many Georgian nationals started to flee the country.

G. CONCLUSION

To summarize, several aspects of the August 2008 War in Georgia are relevant to the ADC of a weak defender against a strong opponent. Unfortunately, Georgia, as the weaker actor did not have a trained and prepared resistance force that could have been employed once the conflict began. In fact, it was Russia, the stronger opponent, that used an unconventional approach in the beginning to justify the use of the larger number of conventional forces. The superior information operation of the stronger actor eroded the Georgian soldiers' morale and their will to fight. Because of this, the president of Georgia decided to reach a peace agreement rather than risk the lives of his people by fighting a war that they had little chance of winning.

⁸⁰ Ariel Cohen and Robert E. Hamilton, "The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications" (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2011), 73, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11808>.

⁸¹ Lavrov, "State of the Georgian Army by the End of Hostilities," 109–110.

⁸² Lavrov, 110.

The Georgian leadership's failure to run a competent media campaign contributed to the lack of international military support for the weaker actor's cause against the stronger opponent. All the previously mentioned aspects were consistent with Georgian forces choosing the wrong fighting strategy. Even if Georgia's leaders were trapped at the beginning of the conflict into choosing a conventional approach, their continued use of the same direct approach against a stronger actor had no chance to win. As professor and U.S. Army veteran Arreguín-Toft has concluded, the same strategic interactions approach (in this case a direct-direct one) will always favor the strong actor.⁸³

Since Russia did not take over the entire state of Georgia and both actors competed over a restricted pro-Russian territory (South Ossetia and Abkhazia), it might also be concluded that both parties waged a "limited war" strategy. According to international relations professor Andrew Mack, the power asymmetry repeatedly translates into interest asymmetry, and the survivability capability over an extended time of a weaker actor waging a "total war" approach against a stronger actor using a "limited war" strategy increases the stronger actor's political vulnerability and the latter's chances of being defeated by the weaker.⁸⁴ Since Georgia, the weaker actor, did not shift its strategy to a prolonged "total war" approach against Russian troops, which may have maximized its prospects of success, this aspect was also of importance in the outcome of the Russo-Georgian War.

⁸³ Arreguín-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars."

⁸⁴ Andrew Mack, "Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars: The Politics of Asymmetric Conflict," *World Politics* 27, no. 2 (January 1975): 175–200, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009880>.

V. CASE STUDY OF THE 2014 RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR

When Ukraine opted to pursue a Western orientation, Russian officials waged war to reassert Moscow's influence over its neighbor and maintain control over Ukraine's strategic orientation. Why was Ukraine not able to defend its territorial integrity and provide a solid response to Russia's hybrid warfare approach in 2014? Why were both the Ukrainian security forces' lack of resistance in Crimea and their ineffectiveness in the Eastern separatist areas significant factors for the outcome of the first Russo-Ukrainian war? The analysis in this chapter reveals that the weaker actor's chances of prevailing over a more powerful foe are significantly reduced by the following: the absence of a pre-conflict asymmetric-capable force, poor leadership, a weak strategy, the absence of popular support that directly relates to a low level of morale, the inability to effectively counter the adversary's strong psychological and informational campaign, and limited external military support.

A. UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT OF THE 2014 UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

Since Ukraine's declaration of independence in 1991, the country's society had become increasingly divided into two main groups: a pro-Russian group and another one consisting of those supporting the West. Through peaceful mass demonstrations, the "Orange Revolution" of 2004 was successful in overthrowing the pro-Russian administration and installing the Viktor Yushchenko-led opposition party, whose policies steered the nation toward the EU and NATO. When NATO decided to admit ex-Soviet countries Ukraine and Georgia as membership candidates in April 2008, Russia declared that it would use all necessary measures to prevent those countries' allegiance to NATO.⁸⁵

In 2010 a pro-Russian regime led by Viktor Yanukovich came to power and decided to stop the process of NATO membership. Since the "Orange Revolution" failed

⁸⁵ NATO, "Bucharest Summit Declaration Issued by NATO Heads of State and Government (2008)," accessed November 5, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_8443.htm; Reuters Staff, "Russia Army Vows Steps If Georgia and Ukraine Join NATO," Reuters, April 11, 2008, sec. World News, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-nato-steps-idUSL1143027920080411>.

to unify Ukrainian society and solve its underlying issues, it just served as a prologue to the “Maidan Revolution” in 2013–2014,⁸⁶ when violent and bloody clashes occurred between government forces and people protesting against then-president Viktor Yanukovich’s refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union (EU). In the end, prolonged demonstrations and violent confrontations led to the president’s ouster, resulting in a pro-Western interim government being installed in charge of the nation’s capital and Western regions while the country’s South-Eastern regions continued to support Viktor Yanukovich’s policies.

These circumstances were immediately exploited by Russia, which seized the opportunity to regain influence and control over Ukraine and prevent a geopolitical disaster brought on by one of Russia’s most important neighbors’ inclinations towards the West. Therefore, according to American military analyst and researcher Michael Kofman, the Russian reaction took the form of two distinct and concomitant military operations: the invasion and annexation of Crimea (February–March 2014) and the instigation of a political protest movement that swiftly evolved into a violent insurgency in Eastern Ukraine (February–May 2014).⁸⁷

Although society’s opposition to the pro-Russian government’s policies first caused an internal political crisis in Ukraine, this internal conflict eventually metamorphosed into one in which a young and weaker Ukrainian state had to defend its territorial integrity against a more powerful actor.

B. PRE-CONFLICT UKRAINIAN PREPARATIONS

Beginning with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukrainian Armed Forces began to shrink in numbers and resources with no significant reform being conducted. As argued by Mark Galeotti, a historian and expert on Russian security affairs,

⁸⁶ Alexander Khodunov, “The Orange Revolution in Ukraine,” in *Handbook of Revolutions in the 21st Century: The New Waves of Revolutions, and the Causes and Effects of Disruptive Political Change*, ed. Jack A. Goldstone, Leonid Grinin, and Andrey Korotayev, Societies and Political Orders in Transition (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2022), 501–15, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-86468-2_19.

⁸⁷ Michael Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia’s Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, Research Report, RR-1498-A (Santa Monica, California: Rand Corporation, 2017), 1.

the Ukrainian Armed Forces were under increased strain as a result of the global financial crisis in 2008, and their strength fell from 295,000 personnel in 2003 to just 200,000 in 2010, of whom 41,000 were civilian employees.⁸⁸ This reduction trend continued under pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich who ended the conscription in 2013 when the Ukrainian Armed Forces' strength was composed of 60% professionals and 40% conscripts.⁸⁹ Although various outcomes were achieved by Ukrainian troops serving in a few international peacekeeping missions (such as those in Yugoslavia and Kosovo), the budget for training and exercises dramatically decreased, which had a severe impact on Ukrainian troops' level of combat readiness.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's economic problems forced its Minister of Defense to plan for and try to maintain its combined-arms brigades at 70% of their full strength during peacetime. According to military experts and war correspondents Alexey Ramm and Alexey Nikolsky, at the beginning of the fighting in the East, only a few Ukrainian army units were manned to more than 50% of their nominal strength, with an even lower percentage for combat support and supply units.⁹⁰

Since successive Ukrainian administrations believed there was very little chance of a conflict on Ukrainian territory, all of the aforementioned policies had a direct impact on the Ukrainian Armed Forces' strength, resulting in its general unpreparedness to begin combat operations. Additionally, the pro-Western Ukrainian interim government made some crisis management errors that contributed to the conflict escalating and took some decisions that clearly favored Russia.

First, Ukraine's interim administration created on February 27, 2014, in the wake of the Maidan Revolution was shocked to discover how powerless it was to prevent any

⁸⁸ Mark Galeotti, *Armies of Russia's War in Ukraine*, Illustrated edition (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2019), 44–45.

⁸⁹ United Press International, "Ukraine to End Military Conscription after Autumn Call-Ups," UPI, October 3, 2013, https://www.upi.com/Top_News/Special/2013/10/03/Ukraine-to-end-military-conscription-after-autumn-call-ups/95521380772920/.

⁹⁰ Alexey Ramm and Alexey Nikolsky, "Reorganization Under Crisis: Development of Ukraine's Defense and Security Agencies" in *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*, 2nd edition (Minneapolis, Minnesota: East View Press, 2015), 315–20.

Russian reinforcements from arriving in Crimea. According to researchers of the European Council on Foreign Relations think tank, the impossibility to amend the transit agreement between Ukraine and Russia was an effect of the Kharkov Accords, a pact signed on April 21, 2010, “whereby the Russian lease on naval facilities in Crimea would be extended beyond 2017 by 25 years, with an additional five year renewal option.”⁹¹ As a result of the Kharkov Accords, Moscow had the tactical and strategic edge to first send its special forces into Crimea without arousing suspicion, and then to send in all the capabilities required to carry out the invasion of the peninsula.

The second mistake was made on February 23, 2014, when the inexperienced Rada, the Ukrainian Parliament, revoked a law that had protected and given official status to the Russian language, which significantly contributed to Russian-speaking Crimeans supporting Moscow’s side against the country’s administration. The third mistake was the Ukrainian government’s inability to keep post-revolutionary forces under control and to properly respond when, on February 24, 2014, the leader of a far-right political party publicly threatened to send his paramilitary troops to Crimea to restore public order. As stated by American military expert Kofman, because of the Ukrainian government’s poor reaction, Moscow was able to convince its home audience through propaganda that Russian-speaking residents of Crimea were in serious danger and that Russian intervention in Crimea was necessary and justified.⁹²

Immediately after, on February 25, 2014, the Ukrainian government made its fourth huge mistake when the Minister of Interior disbanded the Crimean Berkut riot police, known as the “Golden Eagle,” after suppressing protests in Kyiv. Although being perceived as a humiliating act that forced the security forces to search for new jobs, the Berkut riot police forces were received at Sevastopol as heroes, where they were immediately issued

⁹¹ Jana Kobzova, Nicu Popescu, and Andrew Wilson, “Russia and EU’s Competitive Neighbourhood,” in *The Great Power (Mis)Management: The Russian–Georgian War and Its Implications for Global Political Order*, 1st edition (Farnham, England: Routledge, 2011), 82.

⁹² Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia’s Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, 21.

Russian passports and served as auxiliary units for Russian forces during the initial operations in Crimea.⁹³

Overall, although pre-conflict preparations of the conventional troops were scarce, there were no plans or preparations made for the Ukrainian asymmetric force, which may have been crucial during the conflict. Inadequate preparation resulted from poor leadership choices which had a significant and persistently negative impact on the effectiveness of both conventional and asymmetric Ukrainian security forces.

C. DURING THE CONFLICT: UKRAINIAN ORGANIZATION, TACTICS, WEAPONS, AND COMMUNICATIONS

According to independent military analysts, Anton Lavrov and Alexey Nikolsky, an important factor enabling the annexation of Crimea with minimal bloodshed was the overall weakness of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and especially their inability to react quickly to emerging military threats.⁹⁴ As historian and expert on Russian security affairs Galeotti has noted, Ukraine had a total of 22,000 military troops based in Crimea with the naval forces having small infantry mechanized capacity and minimal air support serving as its primary defensive/counter-offensive force.⁹⁵ In addition to the Navy's assets, Ukraine also deployed a tactical Air Force Group with air defense capabilities and 2,500 men from several Ministry of Internal Security units whose primary duty had never been to defend against a military invasion.⁹⁶

The lack of clear orders and confusion in the Ukrainian chain of command by some officers hostile to the new pro-Western government, along with mass protests by separatists, favored the success of a well-executed seizure of territory operation.

⁹³ Kofman et al., 21; Colby Howard and Ruslan Pukhov, eds., *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*, 2nd edition (Minneapolis, Minnesota: East View Press, 2015), 160–62.

⁹⁴ Anton Lavrov and Alexey Nikolsky, "Neglect and Rot: Degradation of Ukraine's Military in the Interim Period," in *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine*, ed. Colby Howard and Ruslan Pukhov, 2nd edition (Minneapolis, Minnesota: East View Press, 2015), 73.

⁹⁵ Mark Galeotti, *Putin's Wars: From Chechnya to Ukraine* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2022), 171.

⁹⁶ Anton Lavrov, "Russian Again: The Military Operation for Crimea." in *Brothers Armed: Military Aspects of the Crisis in Ukraine* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: East View Press, 2014): 157–60.

Additionally, Ukraine did not have an acting Minister of Defense when Russian actions began in Crimea. According to military analyst Lavrov, Adm. Igor Tenyukh was appointed to that position only on the afternoon of February 27, 2014, after having spent the preceding four years in retirement.⁹⁷ In contrast, according to experienced foreign correspondents C. J. Chivers and David M. Herszenhorn, the Russian operation involved tactical and operational deception, high mobility provided by air and sea transportation capabilities, and speed of action by well-trained soldiers who could use encrypted communication at the level of small units.⁹⁸

As a result of Moscow's ability to easily disrupt the communication systems between Crimea and Kyiv, the command and control over Ukrainian troops based in Crimea were rapidly lost. Furthermore, Ukrainian forces did not offer a sound response to the asymmetric employment of Russian soldiers (also referred to as "Green Men" or "Polite Green Men") who took control of the main administrative buildings in Crimea while using only light weapons, driving vehicles without plates, and bearing no insignia. Because Russia mobilized a massive number of troops with heavy weapons and firepower at Ukraine's border under a pattern of unannounced units readiness checks, the Ukrainians' lack of military response and resistance may have been explained by fear of further escalation at a time when the 2008 Georgia case was still fairly fresh in leaders' minds.

The Russian forces immediately exploited Ukraine's lack of reaction and, with the help of recently deployed reinforcements and newly established local self-defense squads, were able to blockade Ukrainian military units and critical infrastructure facilities, including TV broadcasting stations and communication service providers.⁹⁹ After a few weeks of blockades and siege, more than 9,000 Ukrainian military personnel opted to join the Russians due to a lack of confidence in the interim Ukrainian government as a result of its inability to clearly coordinate the actions of the units in Crimea and the public defection

⁹⁷ Lavrov, 165–66.

⁹⁸ C. J. Chivers and David M. Herszenhorn, "In Crimea, Russia Showcases a Rebooted Army," *The New York Times*, April 2, 2014, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/03/world/europe/crimea-offers-showcase-for-russias-rebooted-military.html>.

⁹⁹ Lavrov, "Russian Again: The Military Operation for Crimea," 169–70.

of Rear Adm. Denis Berezovsky, commander of the Ukrainian Navy to the “Autonomous Republic of Crimea.”¹⁰⁰

According to historian Galeotti, the bloodless seizure of Crimea boosted Moscow’s appetite for a limited and deniable military operation in the ethnically Russian East of Ukraine, aiming to convince Kyiv that Moscow could and would punish it for any moves towards closer integration with the West and force Ukraine to accept that it will remain part of Russia’s sphere of influence.¹⁰¹ Because of the actors involved, the conflict’s early phase was more irregular: on one side there was a mixture of separatist militias, Russian-speaking locals, Ukrainian defectors, and mercenaries and volunteers from Russia, while on the other side were the Ukrainian forces and a few private armies commanded by powerful Ukrainian oligarchs.¹⁰²

The Ukrainian government initially launched a counterterrorism operation to isolate and then retake the rebel-held regions after the leaders of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR, Donetskaya Narodnaya Respublika) and Lugansk People’s Republic (LNR, Luganskaya Narodnaya Respublika) declared their independence from Ukraine. Since the first partial mobilization of reservists was triggered by events in Crimea rather than the Eastern regions, as part of a larger counterinsurgency operation in the East, Kyiv reintroduced conscription starting on May 1, 2014, and launched the second wave of partial mobilization of reservists, with more than 80% of them being assigned to the MOD’s territorial defense battalions (TDB) which were immediately deployed to reinforce regular fighting units.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Galeotti, *Putin’s Wars*, 177; “Ukrainian Navy Commander Defects to Crimean Authorities,” Euronews, 2014, video, 1:08, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1DddCrO0vU>.

¹⁰¹ Galeotti, *Armies of Russia’s War in Ukraine*, 14.

¹⁰² Mark Galeotti, “Hybrid, Ambiguous, and Non-Linear? How New Is Russia’s ‘New Way of War’?,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, no. 2 (March 3, 2016): 285, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2015.1129170>.

¹⁰³ BBC, “Ukraine Reinstates Conscription as Crisis Deepens,” *BBC News*, May 1, 2014, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27247428>; Ramm and Nikolsky, “Reorganization Under Crisis: Development of Ukraine’s Defense and Security Agencies,” 322–25.

After a few small gains, the lightly armed Ukrainian TBDs failed to put up any serious resistance in the face of the rebel offensive and sustained heavy losses against Russian-backed separatists who were substantially supported with tanks, heavy armor, air defense systems, heavy artillery, and multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS). This was partly a result of the TBDs' members' lack of prior combat basic training and the inadequacy of the equipment that was provided to them. The downing by rebels of the Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 over the Donbas region, who presumably believed their target was a Ukrainian AN-26 transport plane, is an unintended consequence strongly proving that Russia had difficulties in properly controlling the rebels' actions.¹⁰⁴ At this point, as historian Galeotti noted in 2022, the conflict evolved from an "irregular or hybrid war" to a more limited "undeclared" conventional war in which Russian forces were more overtly active, compelling Kyiv to accept the Minsk I and Minsk II ceasefire Protocols and stalemating the conflict into a frozen phase.¹⁰⁵

D. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND INFORMATION OPERATIONS

The Ukrainian interim government was not able to successfully counter the operational and tactical Russian *maskirovka*, broadly understood as the Russian deception built into every level of their military art. At the operational level, as military analyst Kofman noted in 2017, the Ukrainian leaders were unsure of what Russia's actual goals were in Crimea and postponed taking any decisive military action out of caution for fear of further escalation.¹⁰⁶ This psychological restraint decreased the morale of Ukrainian forces stationed in Crimea while increasing the freedom of movement of the pro-Russian separatist forces. At the tactical level, Ukrainian authorities were successfully deceived because they were unable to establish the true identity of the "no insignia forces" deployed to Crimea, while these "Polite Green Men" were successful in persuading the local

¹⁰⁴ Gerard Toal, John O'Loughlin, and Kristin M. Bakke, "Analysis:| Flight MH17 Crashed Six Years Ago. Ukrainians Have Very Different Views on Who's to Blame," *Washington Post*, July 16, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/07/16/flight-mh17-crashed-six-years-ago-ukrainians-have-very-different-views-whos-blame/>; Galeotti, *Putin's Wars*, 186.

¹⁰⁵ Galeotti, *Putin's Wars*, 188–91; BBC, "Ukraine Crisis: Leaders Agree Peace Roadmap," *BBC News*, February 12, 2015, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31435812>.

¹⁰⁶ Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, 48.

population that they were not hostile by leading them to believe that they might be local police or self-defense forces.¹⁰⁷

As a result of Kyiv's inability to defend against Moscow's employment of a wide variety of tools and techniques supporting the kinetic, cyber, and informational realms in 2014, Russia was able to outperform Ukraine in terms of informational superiority. According to information warfare and cyberspace researcher, Margarita Jaitner and senior professor Dr. Peter A. Mattsson from Swedish Defense University, in support of all Russian military actions in Crimea, from seizing administrative buildings to setting up a referendum for annexation, Moscow made intense efforts to attack the physical, logical, and social levels of the communication domain.¹⁰⁸

As cybersecurity and privacy experts, Tim Maurer and Scott Janz noted in 2014, Russian efforts from physically damaging Ukrainian companies' fiber optic cables and seizing their offices in Crimea to jamming Ukrainian naval communication systems, conducting Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks against the government and news websites, and spreading social media propaganda by an organized network of trolls, all contributed to Russian information superiority against Ukraine and easily disconnected Crimea from the mainland.¹⁰⁹ The local Crimean population was forced to rely on Moscow-controlled news sources as a result of Russian physical attacks on Ukraine's media infrastructure, while effective social media campaigns helped to boost domestic support for Russia by disseminating significant disinformation about the intentions of the Ukrainian interim government.

Even though Russia strongly denied having any control over the pro-Russian separatists and hacker groups responsible for the attacks, the lessons learned from the 2008 conflict in Georgia and the exact timing between kinetic operations and cyberattacks show,

¹⁰⁷ Kofman et al., 48.

¹⁰⁸ Margarita Jaitner and Peter A. Mattsson, "Russian Information Warfare of 2014" (7th International Conference on Cyber Conflict: Architectures in Cyberspace (CyCon), Tallinn, Estonia: IEEE, 2015), 45, <https://doi.org/10.1109/CYCON.2015.7158467>.

¹⁰⁹ Tim Maurer and Scott Janz, "The Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Cyber and Information Warfare in a Regional Context," *ISN Security Watch*, October 17, 2014, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/187945/ISN_184345_en.pdf; Jaitner and Mattsson, "Russian Information Warfare of 2014."

at the very least, some level of coordination and oversight from Russian agencies. Strong Russian propaganda combined with quick blockades of Ukrainian military bases and ships as a consequence of the rapid deployment by air and sea of Russian reinforcements and resources created severe psychological pressure on Ukraine's troops whose combat readiness level was low. After Ukraine's highest ranking military member defected, many Ukrainian forces were unable to resist the huge psychological pressure and joined the Russians, who were willing to acknowledge the defectors' current ranks. As historian Galeotti noted in 2022, probably the best example is the 501st Independent Battalion from Kerch, which surrendered on March 20, 2014, with two-thirds of its soldiers accepting this deal and joining the other side.¹¹⁰

E. EXTERNAL SUPPORT FOR THE UKRAINIAN DEFENDER'S FORCES

In response to Russia's actions, many Western countries offered support to Ukraine in order to help them defend against the aggression. Overall, the nature and extent of the external assistance provided to Ukraine during the conflict were limited, and the military support did not give Ukrainian forces a strategic advantage that may have changed the conflict's direction. To ensure that external support is provided in a way that is both effective and does not put either party at risk, substantial negotiations, agreements, and coordination between the two parties are necessary. All of these activities take time, and ideally, they need to be done before a conflict breaks out. Completing these activities before a potential conflict breaks out allows for more flexibility in how the military support is provided by allowing the parties involved to tailor the support to the specific needs of the country receiving it and to adapt to changing circumstances or overcome potential obstacles that may arise.

The international condemnation of Russia's actions were largely joined by supportive declarations of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity as well as encouragement for peace talks designed to conclude with a political solution to the crisis. Furthermore, the several rounds of tough economic sanctions that the West imposed on

¹¹⁰ Galeotti, *Putin's Wars*, 176.

Russia were also designed to put pressure on Moscow to stop supporting the separatists, but they were insufficient to compel Moscow to remove all of its soldiers from and around Ukraine.

The military support provided by Western countries to Ukraine in the 2014 conflict was not as direct or extensive as some may have hoped, being limited to non-lethal equipment, humanitarian aid, and training. As noted by journalists Jeffrey Sparshott and Philip Shishkin in 2014, this happened because many believed that the Ukrainian politico-military system was highly corrupt and that by providing lethal weapons to Ukrainian forces, the conflict could escalate into a proxy war between the West and Russia, especially between Washington and Moscow.¹¹¹

The U.S. Army Special Forces (Green Berets) along with other special forces' instructors from NATO countries took on a critical role in training Ukrainian forces, particularly in resistance tactics and techniques, enhancing their performance as force multipliers that could wage guerrilla warfare against invading Russian troops.¹¹² However, this resistance training aspect is time-consuming in the first place, and its effectiveness cannot be recognized right away in an ongoing conflict. If pre-conflict planning and coordination for external military support had been done in advance with specific points of contact, transportation routes, and cross-border procedures being established, the Ukrainian troops might have had greater success.

F. MORALE OF THE UKRAINIAN FIGHTERS AND PUBLIC SUPPORT

In 2014, the Ukrainian interim government's lack of legitimacy and its leaders' poor decisions were the key causes of the low morale of the Ukrainian military and security forces. The Ukrainian military and security forces from Eastern Ukraine, but particularly Ukrainian Navy forces stationed in Crimea, were demoralized and not receptive to the

¹¹¹ Jeffrey Sparshott and Philip Shishkin, "Ukraine to Get More U.S. Aid, but Not Weapons," *Wall Street Journal*, September 18, 2014, sec. Europe, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-leader-calls-for-more-western-military-aid-1411055160>.

¹¹² Michael Lee, "The U.S. Army's Green Berets Quietly Helped Tilt the Battlefield a Little Bit More toward Ukraine," Text, Article, Fox News (Fox News, March 21, 2022), <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/us-armys-green-berets-have-lasting-impact-on-fight-in-ukraine>.

decisions made by the interim administration in Kyiv. It is also important to keep in mind that when Russian activities in Crimea started, Ukraine did not have an acting minister of defense.

These aspects followed a blow to the Ukrainian Army's morale when President Yanukovich chose to use the Army during the final stages of the confrontation with protesters in central Kyiv, which according to military analysts Lavrov and Nikolsky led to numerous attempts by protestors to blockade military convoys and troops at their bases in order to prevent them from reaching the capital.¹¹³ This forced the Ukrainian Armed Forces to adopt a wait-and-see approach, which facilitated Russian troops' blockading Ukrainian troops from Crimea inside their bases or ships. The lack of any real support from the Kyiv government for Ukrainian troops who had been blockaded for several weeks led to a very low morale level and very low resistance in the end. All these were bolstered by the lack of proper equipment and the impressive number of Ukrainian Navy military personnel who defected, starting with Rear Adm. Denis Berezovsky, the highest-ranking Ukrainian officer in Crimea.¹¹⁴

In 2014, Ukraine was divided more or less evenly between Ukrainians who saw the country as part of Europe and those who saw it as intrinsically linked to Russia. The centuries-long history of Russian domination over Ukrainian territories, especially Crimea, the prevalence of the Russian language in the East, and the strong economic ties to Russia were the main factors that reduced the likelihood of popular resistance and implicitly led to the lack of popular support for the Ukrainian forces. Furthermore, the leaders of the interim Ukrainian government made the poor decision to revoke the law that protected and granted official status to the Russian language and reacted ineffectively when the leader of a far-right political party threatened to send paramilitary troops to Crimea to control the protestors. These actions sowed fear and discord among the local population, highly contributing to the lack of public support for the Ukrainian cause.

¹¹³ Lavrov and Nikolsky, "Neglect and Rot: Degradation of Ukraine's Military in the Interim Period," 68–69.

¹¹⁴ Navy of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, "Deserters and Traitors of the Navy of Ukraine," Navy of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, accessed December 11, 2022, <https://vms-ukraine.info/zradniki/>; *Ukrainian Navy Commander Defects to Crimean Authorities*.

G. CONCLUSION

To summarize, while a vulnerable Ukraine may be viewed more as a target of opportunity, the 2014 Russo-Ukrainian War may provide significant features and characteristics related to the asymmetrical defensive component from the perspective of a weaker defender. Unfortunately, Ukraine, as the weaker actor, lacked a prepared and trained asymmetrical defensive force that might have been used in support of its conventional defense forces throughout the conflict. In reality, Russia, the stronger opponent, chose an asymmetric strategic approach, first deploying its well-trained special forces to achieve operational and strategic goals against the defense forces of a relatively weak and vulnerable nation followed by significant military support and threats of a full-scale conventional invasion.

Analyzing the 2014 Russo-Ukrainian War through the lens of strategic interactions theory developed by Brown University professor and U.S. Army veteran Ivan Arreguín-Toft, it is evident that both actors chose the same direct approach, even if Russia asymmetrically employed its forces. In such a case, Arreguín-Toft argues that because power implies victory in war, relative power should explain the outcome of the conflict where the strong actor with a greater military capability will almost always win.¹¹⁵

Even though Russia initially denied any involvement in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, by employing the full range of military tactics and strategies, Russia was able to provide covert military support to both its SOF units deployed in Crimea and separatist rebels in Eastern Ukraine, resulting in a significant gap of relative power against Ukraine's weak defense forces. This relative power gap was further facilitated by the Ukrainian political and military leaders' poor performance, as seen by bad decisions that resulted in a severe lack of public support and low morale, both of which had a detrimental effect on the effectiveness of Ukraine's conventional and asymmetric security forces. Poor leadership decisions along with several unfavorable linguistic, geographic, and historical

¹¹⁵ Ivan Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*, Illustrated edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 18.

factors did not allow Ukraine to swiftly change its strategy toward an indirect approach in order to maximize its prospects of success.

Furthermore, poor Ukrainian leadership decisions and Ukraine's inability to effectively counter the adversary's strong psychological and informational campaign resulted in a lack of popular support for both Ukrainian security forces and trust in their politico-military leaders. Additionally, under some unfavorable geopolitical conditions, the Ukrainian leadership's poor decisions and lack of credibility resulted in minimal military assistance from the international community. As a result of the lack of access to advanced technologies, Ukrainian forces did not instantly receive any lethal weapons that might have altered the course of the conflict.

Later Ukrainian attempts to reclaim control of separatist-held territories failed, resulting in a protracted war in the Donbas region, while additional peace agreements between Ukraine and Russia were never fully implemented. This "limited war" type of conflict saw a major escalation in February 2022 when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

A preliminary assessment of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine suggests that Ukraine has learned and applied critical lessons from the 2014 conflict, revealing that allegedly more powerful Russian forces are confronted by a better-prepared Ukrainian asymmetric defense and conventional security forces employing asymmetric military tactics as part of their strong indirect approach to defending national territorial integrity. Ukraine's asymmetric strategic approach characterized by a mixture of insurgency tactics, civil resistance, diverse military operations carried out by its security forces, and strong external support received from the international community might explain Moscow's failure to achieve a quick victory.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After 2014, a consensus among some military analysts and planners developed that small nations do not have a realistic chance of defending themselves against more powerful invaders in conventional fighting and that their only viable alternative is, in fact, the indirect approach of becoming an indigestible nation by building a modern resistance force. This consensus emerged when a full-scale invasion by a powerful Russian force against a weaker Ukrainian defender occurred in February 2022, a moment in time when most leaders believed that such an action was unthinkable in the 21st century. Although the indirect approach of building a strong government-organized resistance force demands a lot of time and resources even before the conflict arises, it may also have a deterrent effect by increasing the calculated costs of the invading army's force.

The assessments of the most current case studies that investigate Russia's use of hybrid warfare are summarized in Table 1. The summary focuses on highlighting the key factors that had the most substantial impact on the outcome of conflicts where a weaker nation was defending itself against a stronger aggressor. Since, at the writing of this paper, the 2022 conflict in Ukraine is still ongoing, a preliminary assessment of the same factors might reveal similar aspects.

Foremost among the conclusions drawn from the case studies analyses are the following.

First, an organized, properly equipped, and well-trained pre-conflict resistance force has a higher chance of success than if these actions and activities are carried out under wartime conditions. Pre-conflict preparations of the defender's ADC can provide both tactical and operational advantages over the invading forces.

This conclusion is strongly supported by the analysis of the First Russian-Chechen War (1994–1996), where, based on the invader's well-known capabilities, tactics, techniques, and procedures, the Chechen defender's forces were able to defeat the Russian invader's forces as a result of extensive pre-conflict preparations of a force package equivalent to an asymmetric defense component. On the other hand, both the 2008

Georgian-Russian War and the 2014 Russo-Ukrainian War case studies show that there were limited to no pre-conflict preparations of any territorial defense force because defenders were mainly focused on different capabilities like counterterrorism or peacekeeping and acquisition of modern weapon systems for their conventional forces. In these two cases, there were no plans for any asymmetric defense force, which may have been crucial during the conflicts and might have altered both outcomes.

Table 1. Case Studies Analyses Summary.

Case study / Analyzed Factors	First Russian-Chechen War (1994–1996)	2008 Georgian-Russian War	2014 Russo-Ukrainian War
Pre-conflict preparation of defender’s forces	strong preparation of the asymmetric forces	limited preparation	no preparation
Defender’s forces organization, tactics, weapons, and communication during conflict (strategic interactions approach)	indirect–direct interaction, guerrilla modus operandi	direct–direct interaction, conventional defense	direct–direct interaction, conventional defense
Psychological and information operations	defender’s superiority	invader’s superiority	invader’s superiority
External support for defender’s forces	minimal	minimal	minimal
Defender forces’ morale and the local populace’s support	high morale and strong support	low morale and limited support	low morale and limited support
Conflict’s outcome	defender’s victory	invader’s victory	invader’s victory

A preliminary assessment of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine that started in 2022 reveals that pre-conflict preparations of the ADC strongly contributed to Moscow’s failure to achieve a quick victory in Ukraine. This is just one factor that contributed to Ukraine’s early “success.” Initially designed as an asymmetrical response to hybrid threats, the Ukrainian Territorial Defense Forces achieved a variety of outstanding results, including assisting the National Guard, National Police, or military forces in their tasks, guarding traffic checkpoints, or even being first engaged in combat hostilities defending critical

infrastructure objectives, small and large cities.¹¹⁶ Since all aspects related to the establishment, organization, and training of these asymmetric defense forces have to comply with the legal status of defense organizations formed by civilians, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signed the “On the Foundations of National Resistance” law on July 29, 2021.¹¹⁷ According to Article 5 of this law, the Special Operations Forces of the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UKR SOF) were in charge of organizing, planning, supporting, and directing the Resistance Movement. Operationalizing a competent and reliable ADC is the proper task for the SOF to fulfill during peacetime.

Research for this project further suggests that military preparations must begin as soon as possible because this process usually takes a long period. According to the Special Operations Command – Europe (SOCEUR) command team, in the case of Ukraine, military preparations began right away following Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea, when through the Joint Multinational Training Group – Ukraine (JMTG-U) SOF instructors from the United States and other allies and partners focused their Ukrainian forces’ training on making UKR SOF NATO compatible and assisting them in establishing fighting units capable of employing guerrilla tactics against occupying forces.¹¹⁸ Some journalists have remarked that the UKR SOF were able to maximize their force multiplier attribute by operationalizing a competent ADC force prior to the Russian invasion.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Maksym Butchenko, “Ukraine’s Territorial Defence on a War Footing,” International Center for Defence and Security – Estonia, April 13, 2022, <https://icds.ee/en/ukraines-territorial-defence-on-a-war-footing/>.

¹¹⁷ Rada of Ukraine, “On the Foundations of National Resistance,” Official web-portal of the Parliament of Ukraine, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/go/1702-20>.

¹¹⁸ “What Is the Role of Special Operations Forces in Ukraine? Signaling the Future,” September 13, 2022, Think JSOU, video, 53:35, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHm8E3o0Z2I&ab_channel=ThinkJSOU; Stavros Atlamazoglou, “Ukrainian Special Operators May Soon Be Putting Years of Secretive Training from the U.S. to Use against Russia,” Business Insider, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/ukraine-could-soon-be-using-us-provided-unconventional-warfare-skills-2022-3>.

¹¹⁹ Hari Sreenivasan, “Ukrainians Are Training in Civil Defense, Just in Case,” PBS NewsHour, February 12, 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/ukrainians-are-training-in-civil-defense-just-in-case>; Eleanor Beardsley, “Thousands of Ukrainians Are Training to Protect Their Cities in Case Russia Invades,” WGCU PBS & NPR for Southwest Florida, January 19, 2022, <https://news.wgcu.org/2022-01-19/thousands-of-ukrainians-are-training-to-protect-their-cities-in-case-russia-invades>.

The second conclusion drawn from this research emphasizes that the defender's strategic approach is crucial, since it might increase the defender's prospects of success. As mentioned by professor and U.S. Army veteran Ivan Arreguín-Toft, opposite strategic interactions (indirect-direct and direct-indirect) will favor the weaker actor regardless of the attacker's material preponderance.¹²⁰ The analysis of the First Russian-Chechen War (1994–1996) case study highlights the importance of the indirect strategic approach of the defender's forces, characterized by non-standard organization, guerrilla tactics, and weapons and communication systems adapted to this *modus operandi*, which ultimately undermined the power advantage of the stronger Russian invader. By contrast, the analyses of the other two case studies show that the stronger actor ultimately succeeded because of the defender's same strategic interaction method and its failure to switch to an indirect strategy, mainly because of poor leadership decisions.

A preliminary analysis of the ongoing combat in Ukraine, which began in February 2022, indicates that Ukraine decided to use an indirect strategic approach against Russian forces from the outset. The Ukrainian troops were able to achieve outstanding successes by utilizing small, mobile units equipped with anti-tank missiles and hit-and-run tactics to slow Russia's armored forces, forcing Moscow to substantially downgrade its initial objectives.¹²¹ Moreover, equipment innovations adapted to their guerrilla tactics assured Ukrainian forces tactical and operational advantages. Commercial air drones have evolved from their original purpose of locating Russian armor locations and adjusting indirect fire to carrying fragmentation grenades, small high-explosive anti-tank charges, or even improvised explosive devices (IED) that detonate when they strike Russian strongholds.¹²²

¹²⁰ Arreguín-Toft, *How the Weak Win Wars*, 204.

¹²¹ Christopher Woody, "Ukraine's 'Indirect Methods' Help It Avoid Fighting a War It Can't Win with Russia, Top British Commanders Say," *Business Insider*, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/ukraine-indirect-methods-help-it-avoid-symmetric-fight-with-russia-2022-10>; David M. Herszenhorn and Paul McLeary, "Ukraine's 'Iron General' Is a Hero, but He's No Star," *Politico*, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/04/08/ukraines-iron-general-zaluzhnyy-00023901>.

¹²² James Marson, "The Ragtag Army That Won the Battle of Kyiv and Saved Ukraine," *Wall Street Journal*, September 20, 2022, sec. World, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/russian-invasion-ukraine-battle-of-kyiv-ragtag-army-11663683336>.

Third, the superiority of psychological and information operations can provide strong support for combat activities and boost domestic support in an effort to legitimate the defender's actions. In the First Russian-Chechen War (1994–1996), the Chechen defender's forces were able to efficiently employ deception and disinformation messages to create confusion among the Russian forces while using information operations to better coordinate Chechen combat activities and influence both Russian and international public opinion to support the Chechen cause. Conversely, both Georgian and Ukrainian defenders' forces were not able to successfully counter the operational and tactical Russian *maskirovka* that was heavily supported by cyber and information operations. As a consequence, the defenders' combat operations suffered significantly while popular support for their politico-military leaders and security forces declined.

Preliminary analysis of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, which began in 2022, indicates that Ukraine has successfully applied important lessons learned from the 2014 conflict, countering Russian propaganda and successfully gaining strong domestic and international support because of its leaders' ability to communicate the defender's perspective on the war. According to Moran Yarchi, an expert in political communication, media coverage of conflicts, and public diplomacy, after the Russian invasion, the Ukrainian leadership, most notably President Volodymyr Zelensky, successfully used Imagefare (the use of images through the media) as their main tactic in the conflict to rally Ukrainian fighters and win the support of the international community.¹²³ From a strategic messaging perspective, an unofficial consensus among military analysts sees no better messenger than President Zelensky because of his efforts to share information and updates on various social media platforms, to interact directly with the public (both domestically and internationally), reach out to world leaders on a daily basis to solicit their support, and speak before parliaments around the world to urge decision makers to support the Ukrainian people.¹²⁴ Serving as a measure of the effectiveness of his efforts, a raw initial

¹²³ Moran Yarchi, "The Image War as a Significant Fighting Arena – Evidence from the Ukrainian Battle over Perceptions during the 2022 Russian Invasion," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, April 26, 2022, 10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2022.2066525>.

¹²⁴ Yarchi, 5–6.

estimation suggests that between 1,000 and 3,000 active foreign fighters answered President Zelensky's request for volunteers to join his army in resisting Russia's invading forces.¹²⁵

Fourth, the degree of outside support the defender's forces receive improves their odds of defeating the invading forces, since the defender might have access to more resources, intelligence, or advanced training, all of which will increase its capacity to resist and fight. Even a minimal degree of external support in terms of weapons and knowledge coming from some Islamic countries helped the Chechen defender's forces to resist the Russian invaders' forces more successfully. However, limited external support will not be sufficient to guarantee the defender's victory. External support in the 2008 Georgian-Russian War and the 2014 Russo-Ukrainian War was limited to diplomatic efforts and humanitarian relief, with no specific military support that could have provided defenders' forces a strategic advantage to potentially alter the outcomes of those conflicts.

In a 2019 monograph, former U.S. SOF officer, defense analyst, and historian, Will Irwin found that, of all the case studies of the U.S. government's support for resistance throughout history, in just over a third the external support was performed in support of a military campaign, with around two out of three of these cases being successful.¹²⁶ To ensure that the external support is provided in a way that is both effective and does not put either party at risk, substantial negotiations, agreements, and coordination between the two parties should ideally be conducted before a conflict breaks out. The amount of external military assistance for the defender's troops is highly correlated with the legal standing of the ADC since democratic nations are typically reluctant to offer military support to dubious paramilitary organizations.

The initial evaluation of the external assistance Kyiv received before and during the 2022 conflict reveals both extensive military support from NATO, the United States,

¹²⁵ Jeff Stein, "Democracy Defenders and Rambo Wannabes: Ukraine's Volunteer Foreign Fighters," *Washington Post*, January 18, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/01/18/foreign-fighters-war-ukraine-volunteers/>.

¹²⁶ Will Irwin, *Support to Resistance: Strategic Purpose and Effectiveness* (Tampa, Florida: Joint Special Operations University Press (JSOU), 2019), 182.

the European Union, and other Western nations, as well as the imposition of draconian political and economic sanctions intended to weaken Moscow's fighting capabilities.¹²⁷ The lethal weapon systems and intensive specialized training received by the Ukrainian forces as part of several external military support packages significantly improved their ability to conduct military operations that resulted in the regaining of control over significant territories that had been taken over by Russian forces during the initial phases of the invasion.¹²⁸

Fifth, high morale and strong popular support can serve as balancing factors in the relative power difference and improve troops' combat performance and their sense of winning chances. Although morale may be impacted by a variety of factors and circumstances, the Chechen's combat readiness status, their strong will to fight, and the outcomes of their military actions along with strong support from the local populace all played an essential role in defeating the invader's forces during the First Russian-Chechen War (1994–1996). On the other hand, during the 2008 Georgian and 2014 Ukrainian conflicts, the defenders' inadequate training and leadership's poor decisions weakened troop morale, which, combined with limited or no popular support resulting from previous decisions affecting the local populace and the invader's successful propaganda, favored the invader's victory.

In 2022, Moscow's invading forces faced Ukrainian fighters who possessed high morale, a strong will to defend, and huge support from the local populace. While Russian forces received significant support from the local populace during the 2014 conflict,

¹²⁷ Bureau of Political Military Affairs, "U.S. Security Cooperation with Ukraine," *United States Department of State* (blog), accessed January 21, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-ukraine/>; European Council of the European Union, "Ukraine: EU Sets up a Military Assistance Mission to Further Support the Ukrainian Armed Forces," accessed January 21, 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/10/17/ukraine-eu-sets-up-a-military-assistance-mission-to-further-support-the-ukrainian-armed-forces/>; Vladimir Milov, "The Sanctions on Russia Are Working," *Foreign Affairs*, January 18, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/russian-federation/sanctions-russia-are-working>.

¹²⁸ Paul McLeary, Erin Banco, and Lara Seligman, "First Javelins. Then HIMARS. Now Patriot. What's Next?," *Politico*, accessed January 21, 2023, <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/12/29/himars-patriot-russia-ukraine-biden-00075708>.

including a significant number of defectors possessing high military ranks,¹²⁹ the preliminary assessment of the 2022 conflict shows a high degree of civil resistance against the invader's forces and a surprisingly low number of Ukrainian collaborators.¹³⁰ As posted on different media platforms, the "Polite Green Men" of 2014 have been replaced in 2022 with rude aggressors stealing food and other objects from people's houses and committing atrocities against civilians, while Ukrainian forces received important morale boosts and support after freeing cities and villages from Russian control.

Ukraine's pre-conflict preparation of its resistance force, the asymmetric strategic approach characterized by a mixture of insurgency tactics, civil resistance, and military operations, combined with great PSYOP and IO results, consistent external support, and high morale and popular support might explain Moscow's failure to achieve a quick victory in the 2022 Ukrainian conflict. Although a preliminary analysis of the factors just mentioned may provide some insights into the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian war, a more thorough analysis will be needed after the war's completion because significant information and details of a crisis that is still ongoing at the time of this thesis's publication may be available.

While some small Nordic nations, such as Sweden and Estonia, have already embraced this total-defense strategy with a strong emphasis on the ADC, for others, this moment might be critical since appropriate decisions made too late might not produce the desired results. This is also the situation for Romania when it comes to making the right decisions during these critical moments.

¹²⁹ Navy of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, "Deserters and Traitors of the Navy of Ukraine"; Euronews, "Ukrainian Navy Commander Defects to Crimean Authorities."

¹³⁰ Nick Craven, "Put Sunflower Seeds in Your Pockets so They Grow on Ukraine Soil When You DIE': Moment Defiant Woman Bravely Confronts Heavily Armed Russian Troops," Daily Mail Online, February 24, 2022, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10548649/Put-sunflower-seeds-pockets-grow-Ukraine-soil-Woman-confronts-Russian-troops.html>; David Patrikarakos, "Inside the Ukrainian Resistance," UnHerd, July 8, 2022, <https://unherd.com/2022/07/inside-the-ukrainian-resistance/>.

A. IMPLICATIONS FOR ROMANIAN POLITICO-MILITARY DECISION MAKERS

This thesis began by addressing the following research question: “What role should ROU SOF play in operationalizing the Asymmetric Defense Component (ADC) as an integrated Romanian effort to implement NATO’s CDH by establishing an organized and controlled resistance capability to deter Russian aggression?” This research has drawn four conclusions.

First, the case analyses emphasize the necessity of a mindset change in order for a unified political will to embrace “asymmetry” as the appropriate strategy to increase territorial defense capabilities and strengthen national security. The political decision to operationalize a legal ADC as an important layer of the whole-of-society national defense strategy should be made in enough time before a crisis to ensure proper selection, organization, training, and resources allocation for those forces. Since the current Romanian law does not allow the existence of a military or paramilitary force outside of the state’s authority, a legal ADC requires important legislative updates. Within democratic countries, the legal aspect of training and arming civil organizations may be exceedingly difficult, and only a strong and united political determination and commitment can overcome these procedural challenges.

Second, embracing this asymmetric strategy should not replace or deemphasize the importance of conventional defense capabilities, but rather be used as a complement to them. By complementing conventional defense capabilities with a competent ADC, Romania should be able to counter both hybrid and conventional threats by employing both ADC forces and military means while sending strong deterrent signals of an “indigestible” nation.

Third, Romanian decision makers should recognize and designate ROU SOF as the leading actor in operationalizing a competent ADC, due to their unconventional mindset and capabilities as well as cross-cultural skills developed through more than a decade of combat deployments to counter multiple extremist organizations as part of GWOT efforts. The irregular deterrence field is where ROU SOF can be effectively employed, while

SOF's unique utility can be optimized to operationalize and support a competent and legal ADC during peacetime.

Finally, Romanian political and military leaders should amend the current doctrinal and normative legislation to ensure ROU SOF are adequately supported with specialized equipment, appropriate acquisition protocols, and necessary funds to achieve the ADC operationalizing task.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ROMANIAN SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

First, both the ROU SOF action arm and the command-and-control structure must shift from an Afghanistan direct-action mindset, in which a coalition effort and a technologically inferior opponent dominated the fighting environment, to a national defense mindset in which hybrid threats, cyber and IO operations, and a technologically superior opponent must be countered. This shift in thinking implies a greater emphasis on decentralized operations in which low-level commanders are given more decision-making authority, allowing them to adapt more swiftly to changing battlefield situations.

Furthermore, this approach also implies a significant ROU SOF specialization in conducting unconventional operations, which should not jeopardize Romania's previous international and regional commitments wherein ROU SOF are mainly part of various NATO force packages. This approach should only complement ROU SOF's main capabilities in conducting special reconnaissance (SR), direct action (DA), and military assistance (MA).

Second, after assuming the leading role in selecting, training, and organizing a capable and credible ADC, ROU SOF should effectively educate all the other organizations that comprise the national defense layer, since strong inter-agency cooperation is paramount for achieving great results on the battlefield.

Third, ROU SOF should develop and implement a national exercise to review, evaluate, and constantly update the approach for operationalizing a capable ADC in which all actors and organizations should actively engage, even if the exercise is designed and led by ROU SOF. Since all aspects of operationalizing a capable ADC during peacetime

should remain classified, a classified platform at the national level should be established to allow the national exercise to efficiently take place.

C. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Since deterrence effects are difficult to evaluate and measure, further research may focus on explaining how strategic communication and signaling capabilities of a competent ADC during peacetime should be combined to maximize the deterrent outcomes without serving as triggers for the potential aggressor to initiate hostilities. Furthermore, this aspect might be directly linked to the negative impact that comes from signaling a prepared ADC that might backfire on the civilian population, such as when deterrence has failed and invading forces commit atrocities against any civilians they treat as potential ADC members.

For a small nation defender to make the most of choosing the resistance approach for defense, the capable government-organized resistance force must also be able to carry out specific operations within the invader's own territory. Additional research should go into the SOF's role in the planning phase regarding the development of specific plans to either connect resistance forces with anti-government groups within the invader's nation or infiltrate well-trained resistance fighters—possibly from a third-party nation—into the invader's territory to harm the invader within its own borders and increase the cost of the invasion. When and how should SOF be able to create or extend the ADC capabilities in order for them to be able to operate within the invader's borders and hit strategic and operational objectives? As the integrator of comprehensive defense and military resistance layer, should SOF start thinking about training potential resistance fighters able to infiltrate into the invader's territory just before the invasion, or should this become a later phase within the overall defense strategy?

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