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The Conventuality of Russia's Unconventional Warfare

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ABSTRACT: This article outlines the progression of Russia's use of unconventional warfare. This perspective provides strategists and policymakers with insights into the actions leading up to and extending from Russia's annexation and occupation of Ukrainian territory since 2014.

Russia has engaged in unconventional warfare by supporting insurgencies into the twenty-first century. When discussing the concept of unconventional warfare, this paper refers to a specific subset of irregular warfare, which American doctrine defines “as a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations.”¹ Under US law, unconventional warfare includes “activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, or guerrilla force in a denied area.”² The US response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, when America supported opposition fighters in Afghanistan, provides an example of unconventional warfare. In Afghanistan, US Special Forces worked with the Northern Alliance, a guerilla group, to overthrow the Taliban, a radical Islamic regime that had collaborated with and harbored Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda terrorist organization.³

Chinese Communist leader Mao Zedong wrote the eponymous book on guerilla warfare during 1937, in the midst of war with the Japanese empire. When speaking of guerilla warfare and insurgency, Mao separated such warfare into three phases. The first focused on training, organization, and consolidating forces in a hard-to-reach safe haven. From there, “direct action” increases, weakening the enemy forces through sabotage and terrorism as well as ambushing them when they are vulnerable—all while gathering weapons and supplies as well as working politically to indoctrinate and to educate the populace. Only in the third, decisive phase does the guerilla force finally transition into a traditional, conventional military force, attacking and destroying the enemy in a final campaign.⁴ As will be demonstrated, however, Russia appears to spurn Mao's oft-referenced guidance on guerilla warfare.

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1 US Department of Defense (DoD), *Irregular Warfare (IW) Joint Operating Concept (JOC)*, version 1.0 (Washington, DC: DoD, 2007), 1.

2 National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016, Pub. L. No. 114-92, 129 Stat. 1021 (2015).

3 Steve Balestrieri, “Battle of Mazar e Sharif, Special Forces Troops Mount Horseback Assault,” Special Operations, November 8, 2017.

4 Samuel B. Griffith, trans., *Mao Tse-tung on Guerrilla Warfare*, Fleet Marine Force Reference Publication 12-18 (Washington, DC: Headquarters, US Marine Corps, 1989), 20–22.

Unconventional warfare stands in direct contrast to conventional, or traditional, warfare. According to the Department of Defense, “Traditional warfare is characterized as a violent struggle for domination between nation-states or coalitions and alliances of nation-states . . . [and] typically involves force-on-force military operations in which adversaries employ a variety of conventional forces and special operations forces (SOF) against each other in all physical domains.”⁵ When picturing modern conventional warfare, major twentieth-century conflicts from World War II through Operation Desert Storm come to mind, with large professional armies engaging in a war of maneuver. In unconventional warfare, Russia shows a tendency for skipping Mao’s first two phases in favor of building guerillas into a conventional force. The Russian military lexicon even appears to lack terminology directly comparable to the American terms of irregular or unconventional warfare. Historically and currently, the Russian military thinks about unconventional warfare in a decidedly conventional way.

Russian Unconventional Warfare

Russia’s modern approach to unconventional warfare has its roots in Soviet partisan fighting against Nazi Germany during World War II. Indeed, that experience had a strong influence on Soviet thinking through the end of the Cold War. Writing on the relevance of the Soviet partisan movement to contemporary guerilla movements in the 1980s, Soviet Major General Viktor N. Andrianov characterized the development of partisan bands as a natural evolution into larger, more conventionally equipped and organized military units that could even have the capability to become offensive formations moving into other occupied countries and aiding other partisan bands. In drawing parallels between the Soviet partisan movement and the contemporary Russian movements, Andrianov’s main observation was that a key component of Soviet-supported national liberation wars was the guerilla force growing and taking on a conventional army organization as people’s liberation armies.⁶ From the beginning, the Soviet desire for waging insurgencies made the unconventional, conventional, as soon as possible.

Prime examples of this conventional attitude toward unconventional warfare can be found throughout Soviet support of unconventional conflicts in Africa during the 1970s and 1980s. During the internal conflict against the white-minority government of Rhodesia, which is now Zimbabwe, the Soviet Union backed the left-wing Zimbabwe African People’s Union, and its military arm, the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA). In the final years of the Rhodesian Bush War, from 1977 to 1979, ZIPRA received logistical guidance and training from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and Cuba, operating out of neighboring Zambia. This support had a role in ZIPRA shifting its overall strategy towards a conventional war in Rhodesia during that period. This effort contrasted with the Zimbabwe African National Union, and its military arm, the Zimbabwe African National

5 US Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, Joint Publication 1 (Washington, DC: JCS, 2013), ix–x.

6 Graham Hall Turbiville Jr., *Logistic Support and Insurgency: Guerrilla Sustainment and Applied Lessons of Soviet Insurgent Warfare: Why It Should Still Be Studied*, Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) Report 05-4 (Hurlburt Field, FL: JSOU Press, 2005), 13–15.

Liberation Army, which was backed by China through Mozambique and adhered to Maoist inspired strategies of insurgency, mobilization, and revolutionary guerilla warfare.⁷

Additional examples of this Soviet tendency occurred due west of Zimbabwe—in Angola, Zaire, and Namibia—during the same period. One of these examples is the Shaba conflicts (1977–78) in Zaire—now the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Angolan and Cuban forces, which were backed and supplied by the Soviet Union, provided training and support in Angola to the Congolese National Liberation Front (FLNC), a rebel group, as it launched an invasion into the southern Shaba province of Zaire. Despite being an unconventional conflict in theory, the organization, tactics, and equipment of the FLNC's invasion was largely conventional—as was Zaire's response that included foreign support from 1,200 Moroccan troops with artillery.⁸ Namibia provides another case of a Soviet-backed revolution. In this instance, the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) fought for independence from apartheid South Africa. Operating out of southern Angola, with support from the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Angola, the thousands of liberation troops were joined by an elite, conventionally trained and organized brigade of 1,500 to 2,000 men that consisted of motorized infantry battalions and a detachment of Soviet BRDM armored cars.⁹

Aside from a desire to forge allied unconventional forces into conventional ones, there was also an occasional tendency for the Soviets to intervene directly, forcibly transforming an unconventional conflict into a conventional one. Initially, the Soviet Union's support of national proliberation movements and recently liberated Third World states was largely limited to supplying some weapons, training, and political support. This approach began to change after the mid-1960s, as the United States began to disengage, and eventually withdrew, from the Vietnam War. Taking advantage of post-Vietnam US disengagement, the Soviet Union became more directly involved militarily in multiple Third World conflicts. One clear example is the Soviet intervention leading up to Angola's independence from Portugal. From 1974 to 1975, the Soviets not only supplied weaponry to its preferred faction, the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola, but also provided direct logistical support and transportation. The Soviet Union also supported thousands of conventional troops sent by Communist Cuba to strengthen the faction, which led to the Angolan civil war.¹⁰

Although Moscow was able to provide significant support to the guerillas in the Angola case, it also serves as an example of how direct Soviet intervention in unconventional conflicts far away from the USSR's periphery was still fairly limited during the Cold War. Even at the height of its military power, and after having made significant improvements to its ability to undertake force projection via air and

7 Sue Onslow and Anna-Mart van Wyk, eds., *Southern Africa in the Cold War, Post-1974* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2013), 165.

8 Malutama di Malu, *The Shaba Invasions* (thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, 1981), 22–32, 46; and Thomas P. Odom, *Shaba II: The French and Belgian Intervention in Zaire in 1978* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 1993), 16–20.

9 Office of African and Latin American Analysis, *Namibia: SWAPO's Army—Organization, Tactics, and Prospects* (Washington, DC: US Central Intelligence Agency, 1984), 1–7.

10 Roger E. Kanet, "The Superpower Quest for Empire: The Cold War and Soviet Support for 'Wars of National Liberation,'" *Cold War History* 6, no. 3 (2006): 335–38.

sea at long distances, the Soviet Union had “only a limited capability to project military power into distant areas in the face of substantial local or rival power armed opposition.”¹¹ Whenever possible, the Soviets encouraged proxy forces and allies to undertake military interventions as a more economical and practical method of sowing discord. This strategy was seen on the Arabian Peninsula during 1973 when Soviet ships were used to transport troops from Communist-aligned South Yemen to fight in an insurgency against the Sultan of Oman who was supported by the Iranian shah.¹² And as already shown with the Angola case, Moscow also relied heavily on Cuban forces throughout Africa, not only to assist with training guerillas but also to engage in direct, conventional-style military interventions in which the unconventional force would clash with the conventional military and allies of apartheid South Africa.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia’s ability and willingness to become directly involved in unconventional warfare appears to have increased. This interest may be due in large part to the internal conflicts largely arising on Russia’s periphery in the newly independent states. One clear example occurred in Moldova, where largely ethnic Russian separatist forces attempting to gain autonomy in the border region of Transdnistria clashed with Moldovan forces. One of the key factors behind Russian-backed Transdnistria’s eventual victory over Moldova was the presence of conventional elements of Russia’s 14th Army, which offered significant support and even direct firepower to the separatist’s cause, ensuring the enclave’s ongoing pseudo-independence.¹³

A similar situation occurred in the separatist region of Abkhazia, which attempted to break away from Georgia in 1992 following the Soviet Union’s dissolution. Initially, Moscow’s involvement in the conflict was confused: some elements of Russia’s government and military supported Georgia while others supported the separatists. But Moscow’s unofficial policy eventually shifted in support of Abkhazia. Regional Russian commanders eventually supplied Abkhazian fighters with large quantities of Russian weapons, intelligence, and operational planning. The Kremlin’s direct involvement went further with aircraft bombing the region’s capital of Sokhumi as Abkhazian separatist forces attempted to retake it from Georgian forces in 1993.¹⁴ Russia’s geographical proximity to Abkhazia and military presence, with bases and troops in the region, made direct involvement more feasible and achievable. This element played a key role in Russia’s decision and ability to take similar action in Ukraine years later.

Case Study: Donbas since 2014

The origins of the current military conflict in Ukraine’s eastern Donbas region are found in the overthrow of pro-Russian President

11 Edward L. Warner III, *The Defense Policy of the Soviet Union* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1989), 94–95.

12 Alex P. Schmid, *Soviet Military Interventions since 1945: With a Summary in Russian*, with case studies by Ellen Berends (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1985), 98.

13 US Army, Special Operations Command (SOC), “Little Green Men”: *A Primer on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014* (Fort Bragg, NC: SOC, 2016), 10.

14 Alexandros Petersen, “The 1992–93 Georgia-Abkhazia War: A Forgotten Conflict,” *Caucasian Review of International Affairs* 2, no. 4 (2008): 194–98.

Viktor Yanukovich by an opposition protest movement in early 2014. The controversy resulted from Yanukovich's suspension of talks on closer ties with the European Union. In the aftermath of Yanukovich's flight from the Ukrainian capital of Kiev in February, Russia took military action by seizing control of the strategic Crimean Peninsula, utilizing forces stationed at the Sevastopol naval base, which is home to the Russian Black Sea Fleet. Russia then annexed the region after holding a disputed referendum the following month. This vote further deteriorated relations with the West and with Ukraine's new, pro-Western government. Around this time, antigovernment, pro-Russian protests intensified in the eastern half of Ukraine where Yanukovich's political base was located. Eventually, pro-Russian groups stormed key government buildings throughout the provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk in the Donbas region. These provinces were declared independent republics in April. The Ukrainian government then ordered an "antiterrorist operation" to restore order in the region, leading to the first military confrontations with separatist militia forces.¹⁵

Evidence suggests Russia was encouraging separatist sentiments and supporting separatist and pro-Russian groups in the Donbas region through its intelligence services and third-party provocateurs before hostilities broke out.¹⁶ Moscow's support continued and intensified during the initial fighting, though Soviet involvement was ad hoc and indirect, with little or no use of official military forces. Instead, Russia used an informal network of mercenaries and volunteer fighters who had served in other conflicts across the former Soviet Union and who possessed a pro-Russian or Russian-nationalist outlook. A significant amount of this indirect support namely, arms and funding, also came through third-party Russian or pro-Russian elites rather than the Kremlin itself, most likely to maintain plausible deniability regarding the Russian government's involvement.¹⁷

In these early stages of Russia's support of unconventional warfare in Donbas, efforts by the Russian-backed separatists to organize themselves along conventional lines, rather than strictly as insurgents, were already visible. In addition to the foreign fighters from throughout the former Soviet Union, several thousand Ukrainian soldiers joined the separatist forces—3,000 of them by August 2015—along with 5,000 local police from the rebelling oblasts. Units of fighters were often raised as conventionally-styled units, such as battalions. These forces used armored vehicles captured from the Ukrainian military with additional armored vehicles later provided by Russia. These forces, supported by local civilian groups, foiled the Ukrainian military's initial attempts to reestablish control over separatist areas. But these early separatist victories against Ukraine may have largely been due to the poor state of its military at the start of the conflict. Among other issues, only 6,000 combat ready troops were available, and they were led by a Russophone leadership reluctant to harm other Russians.¹⁸

15 "The Ukraine Crisis Timeline: The Battle in the Donbass Begins: Ukraine Invites UN Peacekeepers, Tacitly Supports Nationwide Referendum," Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 14, 2014.

16 Michael Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017), 33–35.

17 Kofman et al., *Lessons*, 55–60.

18 Kofman et al., *Lessons*, 40–42.

The separatist militias also initially suffered from key institutional weaknesses that hindered their effectiveness as conventional forces. The separatist units did, however, include some experienced and battle-hardened troops, mainly the defectors or some of the volunteers from Russia or the former USSR. A prominent example is the Vostok Battalion—a unit of predominately veteran pro-Russian fighters from Chechnya, the pseudoindependent states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and elsewhere in the Caucasus.¹⁹ The homegrown Ukrainian separatist forces in the Donbas, however, were less effective and less disciplined, allegedly engaging in looting and other illicit activities that hurt their support among the locals. This lack of local support contributed another factor as, despite poor popular opinions of the post-revolution government in Kiev, most locals declined to become involved in the conflict, contributing to a shortage in separatist troops.²⁰ Overall, coordination and cooperation among the separatists was either poor or lacking completely.²¹ This was true not only among high-ranking leaders at the theater and strategic levels but also among unit leaders at the tactical level. During the battle for Donetsk airport in May 2014, for example, Russian volunteers fighting for the separatists came under friendly fire from the Vostok Battalion after apparently being confused for a Ukrainian unit.²²

As the conflict continued, the Ukrainian military enacted large-scale mobilization, calling up thousands of reserves and reinstating conscription as well as beginning extensive restructuring, reform, and modernization efforts.²³ In the face of renewed Ukrainian military vigor and superior firepower and airpower, the weaknesses among the separatist forces became more apparent. This vulnerability culminated in the Ukrainian military capturing the strategic Donetsk airport on May 26, 2014, inflicting mass casualties on separatist forces in the process.²⁴

Russia tried to remedy this defeat from June to August by providing separatist forces with increasing amounts of heavy conventional weapons, including armored vehicles and tanks, surface-to-air missiles, and other advanced systems and munitions. Despite this build up, the Ukrainian military gained ground against the separatists in what had become a siege campaign that capitalized on the significant advantage in troops and firepower to encircle and push separatist forces from populated areas. By August, the Donetsk and Luhansk regions were in danger of being isolated from one another and overrun by Ukrainian forces pushing towards the Russian border.²⁵ Russia and the separatists had successfully turned an unconventional conflict into a conventional one, but they were losing that conflict in the face of overwhelming force as the mass support that had been expected from the populace for an independent eastern Ukraine failed to materialize.

19 Kofman et al., *Lessons*, 58–60.

20 “Russians Take Charge of Ukrainian Separatists,” Stratfor, August 7, 2014.

21 Lawrence Freedman, “Ukraine and the Art of Limited War,” *Survival* 56, no. 6 (2014), 16.

22 Kofman et al., *Lessons*, 43.

23 Valeriy Akimenko, “Ukraine’s Toughest Fight: The Challenge of Military Reform,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 22, 2018.

24 Freedman, “Ukraine,” 15–17.

25 Kofman et al., *Lessons*, 44–45.

In August 2014, to prevent the possible defeat of the separatist forces in Donbas, Russia's conventional forces crossed the border into Ukraine, through separatist-held territory, to help launch a large-scale counterattack against Ukrainian government forces.²⁶ Evidence of these incursions in NATO satellite imagery shows heavy Russian units moving through Ukraine. Additional intelligence reported enemy forces using advanced Russian weapons and vehicles that were not present in the Ukrainian military arsenal. These weapons included the hallmarks of large-scale conventional warfare, such as tanks and armored vehicles, long-range surface-to-air missiles, rocket artillery, and other weapons systems.²⁷ This counterattack managed to recapture multiple locations that had been seized by Ukraine in its offensive, recovering the separatists' initiative as the Ukrainian military suffered heavy personnel and equipment losses.²⁸ This escalation led to a series of peace talks and cease-fires negotiated in the Belarusian capital of Minsk in 2014 and 2015.

Although the frontline has remained stable since then, fighting in early 2018 continued in violation of the two 2015 Minsk agreements. Russo-Ukrainian tensions remain high, and Ukraine's parliament officially declared Russia an "aggressor" and the Donbas territories "under temporary occupation."²⁹

Russia's escalation of the conflict involved not only committing its own troops to the war but also embarking on new efforts to improve the fighting capabilities of the proxy separatist forces that remained within the oblast. After saving the separatists from destruction in August 2014, Russia reportedly began paying the salaries, benefits, and pensions of separatist political and military leaders in Donbas during 2015.³⁰ With the direct Russian involvement, the separatist forces have also taken on an increasingly conventional structure and organization.³¹ Russia's military provides supplies, training, and personnel—through both active duty soldiers and volunteers—as well as reconnaissance, special operations, and other military capabilities.

Moscow's forces deployed behind separatist lines in Ukraine and directly across the border in Russia also provide reserve forces to protect the separatists from large-scale Ukrainian counterattacks like that of Summer 2014. This reinforcement allows separatist forces to focus more energy and resources on frontline units and engaging in offensive operations. This arrangement is similar to the FLNC or SWAPO in Angola during the 1970s operating with a safety net of support from the Soviet Union and its proxies.

Despite the rescue and the increased support from the Kremlin, the separatist forces still have many fundamental weaknesses. Franklin Holcomb notes the "artificially capable force" is almost entirely dependent

26 Marek Menkiszak, Rafal Sadowski, and Piotr Żochowski, "The Russian Military Intervention in Eastern Ukraine," Centre for Eastern Studies, September 3, 2014.

27 Victoria Butenko, Laura Smith-Spark, and Diana Magnay, "U.S. Official Says 1,000 Russian Troops Have Entered Ukraine," CNN, August 29, 2014.

28 Menkiszak, Sadowski, and Żochowski, "Russian Military Intervention."

29 "Ukraine Declares Russian 'Occupation' in Eastern Region," Al Jazeera, January 18, 2018.

30 "Russia and the Separatists in Eastern Ukraine, Briefing 79," International Crisis Group, February 5, 2016.

31 Franklin Holcomb, *The Kremlin's Irregular Army: Ukrainian Separatist Order of Battle*, Russia and Ukraine Security Report 3 (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, 2017), 17–27.

on Russia for its survival and effectiveness. The military capabilities have either remained static or even degraded over four years of conflict, while the Ukrainian military has continued to upgrade its capabilities and armaments over time. Many separatist units are still disorganized and fail to communicate and to work with one another efficiently in combat. Leadership at the top levels of the separatist republics remains an issue. Russia resorts to purges by force in order to keep its proxy separatist entities in line. To that end, separatist forces have effectively been reduced to a buffer and a screening force for regular Russian forces in the Donbas, keeping Russian troops separated from the Ukrainians and acting as scouts and skirmishers for conventional Russian units.³²

An analysis of the Ukrainian conflict shows how Russia's use of unconventional warfare has followed its behavior during and after the Cold War. From the beginning of the conflict, Russian support was indirect. Efforts to create a conventional separatist military force in the Donbas region, however, were already evident. Separatist forces were organized along largely conventional lines, stealing and deploying heavy weapons and vehicles, and endeavoring to take and to hold territory for their nascent pseudostates rather than launching guerilla style hit-and-run attacks or blending in with the populace. When these forces began to struggle against the Ukrainian military, who countered them with conventional tactics of siege and overwhelming size and firepower, Russia's first instinct was to increase its conventional strength through more heavy weapons and armor. In Ukraine, as with past cases, Russia proceeded directly to phase three of Mao's phases of insurgency and tried to create a conventional force to do battle with the government.

Second, when conventional separatist proxy forces suffered military setbacks against the government's troops despite increased support, Russia resorted to sending its own military into combat. This involvement saved the separatists and continued to put pressure on the Ukrainian government. This strategy superseded Russia's first choice of supporting the separatists indirectly through intelligence services and third-party benefactors. But when the widespread local support for *Novorossiya* ("New Russia") in eastern Ukraine failed to materialize as Moscow hoped it would, this situation changed. The separatists faced defeat, and Moscow possessed the ability to intervene quickly in force. Russia took that opportunity to preserve the separatist forces as a means of exerting influence on and undermining Kiev. This logic followed that used in Angola in the 1970s but with Russia able to apply much more force.

Third, the ability and extent to which Russia could project power by directly intervening to save its insurgent allies was facilitated by its proximity to the combat zone. During the Cold War, this contingency limited Soviet intervention, as well as the quality of any support provided to unconventional forces, in proxy conflicts far from Eurasia. In Angola, supporting the opposition force turned out to be easier, politically and militarily, for the Cubans with Soviet assistance than it was for the Soviets to become directly involved. But eastern Ukraine's shared border with Russia's heartland substantially elevated Russia's ability to support the separatists, like in Abkhazia. This position provides Russia the ability to

32 Holcomb, *Kremlin's Irregular Army*, 9–11.

augment the separatists with thousands of troops equipped with heavy weaponry and vehicles. Ukraine may be the greatest extent of Russian intervention on the behalf of an unconventional ally since the birth of unconventional warfare in World War II.

In supporting such efforts in Ukraine, Russia appears to have followed an established pattern of behavior: intervene after a potential ally is threatened and prepare the pro-Russian force for conventional conflict. That said, Russia's continued adherence to this model has not produced substantial results thus far. While fruitful in the smaller separatist conflicts prior to Ukraine, success has not been replicated there, in a far larger conflict involving a much more valuable territory to Russia.

The Ukrainian government, for all its flaws, remains in power, and continues to gain it relative to separatist forces. As the political and military situation in Ukraine stands now, Russia's current strategy lacks a clear, obvious path to victory, absent escalation into a full-scale war with Ukraine. This prospect carries the risk of greater confrontation with the West, which reinforces the necessity of understanding Russia's concept of and uses for unconventional warfare as well as its understanding of that concept in comparison to the United States and its Western allies.

Conclusions and Implications

The ongoing pattern of behavior established here explains how Russia and its military became involved in unconventional warfare and how Moscow chose to support irregular forces in such conflicts. This pattern revolves heavily around the use of conventional warfare, regardless of other, current narratives. The concept of "hybrid warfare" used by Western analysts and experts discussing the Ukraine conflict generally touts the mix of military and nonmilitary means as key to Russia's approach. But the political influence, information warfare, and propaganda associated with this term were not able to conceive most of the people in eastern Ukraine to support the independent *Novorossiya* that Moscow wanted. Russia's conventional warfare saved the separatist forces in 2014. As a result, conventional escalation, by proxies or direct intervention, remains central to Russia's unconventional warfare.

Future research should examine Russia's interest in and ambition for the behaviors associated with unconventional warfare: Is it a conscious choice based on what policymakers and military leaders know are Russia's strong and weak points in a conflict? Is it a more subconscious choice based on experiences taken for granted? Does Russia simply lack awareness of Western notions of unconventional warfare? In the meantime, the pattern presented in this article can help allied strategists and policymakers anticipate Russia's actions in burgeoning and future unconventional warfare environments and identify strategies to counter or contain these activities—if and when, they present a threat.