Universiteit Leiden

BY *FAIT ACCOMPLI:* THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On 27 February 2014, unmarked soldiers referred to as 'little green men' invaded and occupied Crimea without starting a war. It was presumed from the beginning that these 'little green men' were Russian soldiers who were instructed by the Kremlin to occupy Crimea (Karagiannis 2014, 408). But the Kremlin did not order the Russian army to invade and occupy the peninsula through brute force. Nor did the Kremlin issue an ultimatum and coerce the Ukrainian government to relinquish Crimea. Instead, Russia unilaterally invaded without overtly attacking, gambling that it could annex Crimea without starting a war. Once mobilized, the Russian 'little green men' surrounded Ukrainian troops, blockaded the naval base and airport, and seized government buildings. The 'little green men' gradually took control of Crimea, using local separatist forces to give the operation the veneer of a people's uprising (Colby & Pukhov 2014, VICE, 2014; Altman 2018, 59).

The Kremlin, perhaps emboldened by its earlier success in Crimea, tried to replicate the Crimean model in the Donbas region of Ukraine in April later that year (Czuperski *et al* 2015, 2). Yet this time the strategy failed as Ukrainian militias and volunteers retaliated against the Donbas separatists and its Russian handlers. Worried that the Ukrainian army would regain control of the Donbas, the Russian army decided to discard any form of plausible deniability and marched hundreds of Russian soldiers across the border to push back the Ukrainian troops (Käihkö, 2018).Thus far, the Russo-Ukrainian War has claimed the lives of over 13,000 people and has injured an additional 30,000 (OHCHR, 2019). Currently, there is little hope that a political solution can end this frozen conflict.

Strategists and policymakers were at first somewhat perturbed by Russia's initial success, with some suggesting that Russia had invented a novel type of limited warfare (Pomerantsev, 2015; Gibbons-Neff, 2015; Stoltenberg, 2015). How was Russia able to seize such a large chunk of territory without starting a war and how should states react to similar incursions that blur the line between war and peace in the future? But Russia's strategy in Ukraine was nothing new. Throughout history, states have tried to make territorial gains without unmistakably attacking,

gambling that they could take what they want and get away with it (Hoffman, 2007; Murray & Mansoor, 2012). Yet despite its historical significance, this strategy called the *fait accompli* has received surprisingly little scholarly attention (Altman 2018, 58-9).

This deficiency is in part due to the tendency of policymakers, scholars, think tanks, and military personnel to see the *fait accompli* as another instance of hybrid warfare. This stems not only from a misunderstanding of the *fait accompli* as a distinct concept but also from a more general failure among scholars to narrow the scope of hybrid warfare (Jacobs and Lasconjarias 2015, 259; Johnson, 2018 141-144). In addition, it has been argued that scholars have generally assumed that states make gains through coercion and that the *fait accompli* is a comparative rarity. If this is the case then Russia's *faits accomplis* in Ukraine are deviations from what we should normally observe in international relations (Altman 2015, 7).

A recent study has made this latter view suspect. Empirical research done by political scientist Dan Altman has indicated that in the period from 1918 to 2016, there were 112 land-grab *faits accomplis* compared to only thirteen successfully coerced territorial transfers (Altman 2017, 886-7). What Altman's research indicates is that the *fait accompli* is actually far more prevalent than is generally believed to be the case. Indeed, some of the most important political conflicts of the present-day relate to Russia's *faits accomplis* in Ukraine, China's *faits accomplis* in Hong Kong and the South China Sea, and India's *fait accompli* in Kashmir. The relative inability of states to address these issues further suggests that the *fait accompli* is a poorly understood concept that could benefit from further research.

Recently, Altman developed a theoretic framework that explains the conditions under which *faits accomplis* are more likely to occur and succeed – that is, taking something without starting a war. Looking in detail at the Berlin Blockade Crisis of 1948-49, Altman offers an original interpretation that states make gains by outmaneuvering their adversaries, circumventing high-salience red lines to take what they want without crossing the threshold of conventional justifications for war (Altman, 2018). Altman makes a convincing argument about the relevance of the *fait accompli* strategy and its implications for prevailing views on crisis management and statecraft. However, with the exception of the Berlin Blockade Crisis, the model lacks empirical

support and needs to be substantiated with additional case-analyses in order to discern the utility of Altman's model and the *fait accompli* strategy.

This paper begins by reviewing the literature on the established view on crisis management. The advancing without attacking framework is then explained in relation to since-neglected insights from Thomas C. Schelling's seminal work on statecraft and strategy (Schelling 1960; 1966). The paper then proceeds with a case study of the Russo-Ukrainian War to test the validity of the advancing without attacking framework and reevaluate the causes of war in Ukraine.

The Russo-Ukrainian War is a particularly valuable case-study due to the abundance of observable implications that can be used to evaluate the advancing without attacking framework. What is more, the two *faits accomplis* differed substantially in their outcome. This provides us with the opportunity to understand when and how *faits accomplis* tend to succeed and fail given the similarity of the independent variables between the two cases. In addition, there has been a tendency among scholars to analyze the Russo-Ukrainian War from a system-levels-of-analysis perspective and as a tug-of-war between Russia and the West (Menon & Rumer, 2015; Sakwa, 2015; Cohen, 2019). This view presents Ukraine as an actor with limited agency and as a pawn in the power play of major political actors. What this paper presents is an analysis into the Ukrainian response in an attempt to understand the conditions under which states are more likely to acquiesce or retaliate against *faits accomplis*. As the Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz explained, "[t]he aggressor is always peace loving […]; he would prefer to take over our country unopposed. To prevent his doing so one must be willing to make war and be prepared for it (Clausewitz 1976, 566)." It is therefore important to discern the political considerations that led the Ukrainian government to inaction in Crimea but to a more forceful response in the Donbas.

The aspirations of this piece are twofold. Broadly it will offer a reassessment of the causes of war in the Russo-Ukrainian War, a topic that, as explained above, could benefit from further analysis by focusing on the *fait accompli* strategy and the Ukrainian perspective. More specifically, this paper seeks to test and scrutinize the advancing without attacking model in the

Russo-Ukrainian War case. Beyond its contemporary significance, the Russo-Ukrainian War offers the potential to extrapolate Altman's theoretical model to the benefit or detriment of the model itself. A single case-study cannot present a definitive test of a general theory nor suggest that the case is universally applicable across cases. Still, the advancing without attacking model provides a set of visible predictions that can be checked against evidence in order to discern the validity of the advancing without attacking model and the conditions under which *faits accomplis* are more likely to fail and succeed (Van Evera 1977, 30-35; Eckstein 1975, 118-20). In view of all of this, the research question that this paper attempts to answer is:

Why did Russia's fait accompli succeed in Crimea but fail in the Donbas region of Ukraine later that year?

1.1. Definition of the fait accompli

The term *fait accompli* comes from the French language and indicates something that has been accomplished but is presumed irreversible (Merriam-webster.com, 2019). In the literature on crisis management, Rogers explains that the *fait accompli* is a "quick, decisive transformation of the situation that achieves the challenger's objectives and avoids the risk of unwanted escalation (George 1991, 383)." In the literature on the causes of war we find similar descriptions. Snyder and Diesing argued that the *fait accompli* is a risky strategy that seeks to resolve an issue swiftly and summarily by giving the defender no time to respond to the revised status quo. In their estimation, the *fait accompli* is a unilateral strategy with the aim of preventing a costly war (Snyder and Diesing 1977, 227). The *fait accompli* is therefore considered to be a calculated risk. States gamble that they can take what they want without provoking a violent response. This is why Schelling and Cable emphasized the 'limited' character of the *fait accompli*, contrasting it with the maximalist aims of brute force (Schelling 1966, 44-45; Cable 1994, 22-30).

There has been some tension in the provided definitions concerning the celerity of the *fait accompli* strategy. Johnson defined *faits accomplis* as "the seizure of territory and its reinforcement, usually in small incremental steps, before others' can react or remaining below a threshold that would provoke retaliation (Johnson 2018, 149)." This definition is similar to

Schelling's idea of 'salami tactics' which is a series of limited increments with the intent to eventually complete a larger objective (Schelling 1966, 66, 77). I define the *fait accompli* here more narrowly as a single act rather than a series of repeated *faits accomplis*.

The aforementioned descriptions are fruitful but they fall short of a more concrete definition that makes sense of it. In a recent study, Altman presents a description of the *fait accompli* that highlights the limited and unilateral character of the concept:

> "Suppose a criminal armed with a handgun encounters a wealthy man holding his wallet. The criminal can acquire that wallet in three basic ways. First, the criminal can shoot the victim, then take it. The strategy: brute force. Second, the criminal can brandish the gun, threaten to shoot, and intimidate the man into surrendering his wallet. The strategy: coercion. Or, third, the criminal can reach out and grab the wallet, calculating that the victim will not attack an armed man to regain it. The strategy: *fait accompli* (Altman 2017, 882)."

Altman thus defines the *fait accompli* as "making a limited unilateral gain at an adversary's expense in an attempt to get away with that gain when the adversary chooses to relent rather than escalate in retaliation (Altman 2015, 21)."

This definition of the *fait accompli* will be used for a number of reasons. The first is that it defines the *fait accompli* as a limited strategy. It is different from brute force because the *fait accompli* does not pursue maximalist aims. States pursue a *fait accompli* strategy to grab a limited piece of territory from the adversary through various means.[1] The second important quality is the unilateral character of the *fait accompli*. Contrary to coercion, the *fait accompli* is an undiplomatic strategy that seeks to make gains without the adversary's consent (Altman, 2017). Third, the *fait accompli* is a calculated gamble because it is the defender who, analytically speaking, starts the war (Clausewitz 1976, 566; Milevski, 2018). Fourth, the *fait accompli* – as it is defined here – is an attempt by the state to make limited *territorial* gains. In this paper, the focus on territorial disputes is derived from an assumption that territorial

[1] These measures will be explained in the 'advancing without attacking' section.

disputes have historically been one of the primary catalysts for crises and the onset of war (Vasquez and Hehehan, 2001). Finally, the definition of the *fait accompli*, as it is used here, excludes the element of surprise as a fundamental characteristic. It is correct that surprise is a typical feature of many – but not all – *faits accomplis*. In general, most territorial conquests – and even ultimatums – carry an element of surprise (Wohlstetter 1961, Betts, 1982). Take for example China's *faits accomplis* in the South China Sea. At first, the international community was somewhat perturbed at China's island-reclamation policy. But gradually, the international community came to understand that that this was a staple in China's strategy to gain a favorable position in the South China Sea (Beech, 2018).

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter begins with a literature review on the conventional view of crisis management and continues with the literature on the *fait accompli* more specifically. Here, the *fait accompli* as a third distinct way in how states make gains in international relations will be explained. This paper continues with a disquisition on Altman's advancing without attacking framework and its relation to the established view on crisis management.

2.1. The established view on crisis management

Prior to Altman's research, the *fait accompli* was paradoxically seen as a type of brute force and/or coercion. The primacy of the distinction between brute force and coercion was popularized in the 1960s when economist Thomas C. Schelling published his seminal works on statecraft and strategy. In his 1966 book *Arms and Influence*, Schelling argued that advancements in weapons technology had changed the character of war. Historically speaking, states would send their armies to the battlefield where they would engage in a decisive battle (Schelling, 1966). Whoever won that engagement was able to dictate terms and obtain concessions from the enemy since no further resistance could be mustered. The defeated could either acquiesce to the victors' demands or perish (Pape 1996, 13). Yet, Schelling argued that "victory was no longer a prerequisite for hurting the enemy. One need not wait until he has won

the war before inflicting 'unendurable' damages [to] his enemy." Advancements in weapons technology – notably the atomic bomb – enabled states to hurt the enemy without the need of a conventional battle (Schelling 1966, 22).

Schelling therefore believed that military strategy could no longer be viewed as the 'science of military victory'. Conflicts would take on a more punitive rather than acquisitive character as coercion, deterrence, and intimidation became increasingly important tools of statecraft and strategy. This is why Schelling believed that the conflicts of the nuclear era would be defined as bargaining situations. Military strategy would gradually become the 'diplomacy of violence' (Schelling 1966, 33-34).

Important to Schelling's conceptual framework is his distinction between brute force and coercion. To Schelling, brute force is the "unilateral and undiplomatic recourse to strength (Schelling 1960, 3)." Once an enemy is defeated militarily, the victor may dictate terms and obtain concessions from the conquered adversary. By contrast, coercion is "the exploitation of potential force (Schelling 1966, 3)." In 1938, for example, Germany was able to obtain Sudetenland through coercion. In effect, Germany set an ultimatum, threatening Czechoslovakia that if it did not hand over Sudetenland, Germany would respond with its superior military force.

This distinction between brute force and coercion is therefore not as obvious as it first seems. Wars begin with an escalation of violence but often end through (coercive) diplomacy. Take for example the Battle of Allia in 390 B.C. Although winning the decisive battle, the Gaulish chieftain Brennus could not defeat the Roman army entirely as a small contingent of Roman soldiers were still defending the city from within the Temple of Jupiter. Brennus could have finished the Romans but not without suffering heavy losses. Then, when famine spread among the camps, the Gauls and Romans were hard-pressed to negotiate an end to the conflict. They eventually agreed on a ransom of a thousand pounds of gold in exchange for the withdrawal of Gaulish forces. Yet, when the coins were weighed, the Romans accused the Gauls of foul-play upon which Brennus tossed his sword into the weighing scale saying "woe to the vanquished (Livy 1960, 420-425)

What this example illustrates is that brute force is often used to leverage a favorable bargaining position. Indeed, defining war as a bargaining situation did not begin with Schelling. Clausewitz wrote in his magnum opus *On War* that war is a means to realize specific political goals which cannot be disjointed from its intended purposes: "[the] political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose (Clausewitz 1976, 87)." What was unique to Schelling was that he identified the foundational concepts of coercion and its important role for the nuclear age. In Schelling's words: "the twentieth is not the first century in which 'retaliation' has been part of our strategy, but it is the first in which we have systematically recognized it (Schelling 1966, 15)."

Schelling's work has been highly influential for the ways in which the field of international relations views crisis management today. Generally speaking, crisis management is understood as securing one's key interests while simultaneously avoiding a costly war. In the Cold War, this concept had some semblance to what is called 'coercive diplomacy' (Freedman 2014a, 10). Coercive diplomacy is "getting the adversary to act in a certain way via anything short of brute force; the adversary must still have the capacity of organized violence but choose not to exercise it (Pape 1996, 13; Byman and Waxman 2002, 3)."

Crisis management assumes that states seek common ground because an *ex ante* settlement is preferable to a costly war (Fearon 1995; Wagner 2000; Milevski 2014, 25). To leverage their bargaining position, states signal their readiness to defend their interests. Thus, credible threats need to be constructed in order to effectively deter or compel the enemy. The most aggressive form of this type of signaling is called brinkmanship. With brinkmanship, states push the confrontation to its limit in an attempt to incur concessions from the enemy (Freedman 2014a, 10-11). Crisis management, therefore, is a clash of wills as much as it is a game of chicken (Schelling 1966, 116). War ensues when states fail to reach a war-averting bargain (Fearon 1995; Schelling 1996, 116). The three pillars of crisis management, then, are coercion, signals of resolve, and brinkmanship (Altman 2018, 61). Here, the role of information is crucial because states have an incentive to leverage their bargaining position by exaggerating their actual capabilities (Reiter 2003, 29-30).

Schelling's work was pivotal to later scholars such as James Fearon who took Schelling's key ideas and developed a scientific model that made sense of it. Since Fearon's seminal article "Rationalist Explanations for War", the bargaining model of war has been used to predict and analyze the causes, termination, and conduct of war (Fearon, 1995). The bargaining model of war provides a dyadic model of the causes of war that discerns between micro motivations and macro behavior (Levy & Thompson 2010, 64; Cashman 2014, 335-6). However, as mentioned in the introduction, its longstanding prioritization of coercion as the primary means by which states make gains in international relations has recently been challenged. Through empirical analysis, Altman has shown that from 1918 to 2016 land-grab *faits accomplis* were far more commonplace than successfully coerced territorial transfers were.

2.2. The conceptual logic of the *fait accompli*

With notable exceptions from Tarar and Altman, there has been very little scholarly attention on the *fait accompli* as an exclusive concept (Tarar 2016, Altman, 2017). What has been written about the *fait accompli* has been in relation to some other phenomena or has only been mentioned in passing. Schelling writes about so-called 'salami tactics' which are essentially a series of repeated *faits accomplis* (Schelling 1966, 66, 77). Fearon, too, recognized that the *fait accompli* is a possible bargaining strategy (Fearon 1995, 394). However, Schelling and Fearon, as well as many other scholars, have failed to recognize the *fait accompli* as a distinct concept. In Schelling's case, this is due to his narrow focus on only the most aggressive types of brute force. This follows because the *fait accompli* – like brute force - is a unilateral and undiplomatic approach to taking something without asking. Yet, the *fait accompli* differs from brute force in that it takes place on a much smaller scale and that it seeks to make gains without starting a war. The limited aims of the *fait accompli* do not correspond with the maximalist aims of brute force (Altman 2017, 882).

By contrast, the *fait accompli* is conceptually distinct from coercion because the *fait accompli* seeks to make gains without the adversary's consent. However, the *fait accompli* has a coercive element because it presents the enemy with two difficult options: acquiesce to the revised status quo or risk war by resorting to violence to take back what was lost (Altman 2017,

882). This is what Schelling referred to as the 'last-mover disadvantage' (Schelling 1966, 44-47). Yet, the *fait accompli* unilaterally imposes a revision of the status quo upon the enemy whereas coercive diplomacy seeks to make an *ex ante* settlement that precedes the use of force (Altman 2017, 882).

Thus, from a certain perspective, the *fait accompli* resembles both brute force and coercion. It is similar to brute force because it is a unilateral and undiplomatic attempt to make gains. Alternatively, the *fait accompli* resembles coercion because it threatens the enemy with further costs if it does not accede to the new situation (Pape 1996, 13). Since Schelling, brute force and coercion have been seen as distinct alternatives and the *fait accompli* as either brute force and/or coercion. To Altman, this paradoxical view confirms that the *fait accompli* is a concept that falls in-between the two categories and should therefore be treated as a distinct concept (Altman 2017, 882).

2.3. The *fait accompli* as a cause of war

The most critical discussions on the *fait accompli* have appeared amid the causes of war literature. Here, most scholars view the *fait accompli* as a perilous tactic because it amplifies the likelihood for war (Snyder and Diesing 1977, 227; Van Evera 1998, 10). Van Evera and Freedman, for example, argued that the *fait accompli* is a "halfway step to war" because it commits the aggressor to a violent conflict if the defender decides to retaliate (Van Evera 1998, 10; Freedman, 2014b). George and Smoke explained that a *fait accompli* strategy can only succeed when the defender has no interest in defending that particular territory. Only in those circumstances can a *fait accompli* be considered as a rational strategy (George and Smoke 1974, 537).

Rogers wrote that the *fait accompli* is similar to a game of poker. States that commit a *fait accompli* gamble that the opposing side will not respond militarily. Strong and dramatic coercive action is preferable to a *fait accompli* because it is likely that the defender will respond forcefully when its sovereign territory is being violated (Rogers 1996, 416). Tarar integrated the *fait accompli* strategy into the framework of the bargaining model of war to explain how and when

faits accomplis occur (Tarar, 2016). Like Tarar, most scholars have discussed the rational of the *fait accompli* but have insufficiently explained how and when *faits accomplis* lead to war.

Mearsheimer incorporated the *fait accompli* in his military strategy of 'limited aims'. Like the *fait accompli*, a limited aims strategy seeks to seize a specific piece of territory while trying to avoid a costly confrontation with the enemy (Mearsheimer 1983, 53). The strategy is to take what you want and hope that the enemy accepts the revised status quo. Mearsheimer argued that such strategies are ill-considered because they likely lead to lengthy wars of attrition if the enemy decides to retaliate. This is likely because states fear that an apathetic attitude will incentivize the aggressor to commit further *faits accomplis*. Simultaneously, the aggressor does not want to cow away from the challenge in fear of being seen as a pushover. States may view this as a weakness which they can exploit. What is more, the aggressor will likely reciprocate violence because it seeks a quick and decisive victory. The last thing the aggressor wants is to get bogged down in a costly and lengthy limited war of attrition (Mearsheimer 1983, 56).

Yet, Altman's research has indicated that most land-grab *faits accomplis* do not start wars and that fewer still lead to lengthy and costly wars of attrition. From the time period of 1918 to 2007, only 27 of the 88 identified land-grab *faits accomplis* resulted in war and only a handful to lengthy wars of attrition (Altman 2015, 61). Altman therefore concludes that the *fait accompli* should be viewed as a political strategy that aspires not to become a military one (Altman 2017, 883).

But Altman's conclusion reveals his fundamental misunderstanding of the classical strategic literature. Clausewitz noted centuries ago that war is not an end in itself but a means of accomplishing a specific political goal: "the political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose (Clausewitz 1976, 87)." It is true that the *fait accompli*, as understood in this paper, is designed with the explicit intent to avoid a war. But it is the defender who, analytically speaking, starts the war (Milevski 2018, 15).

To assume that strategy is inherently interactive overlooks some of the potentially insular characteristics of strategy, that is, actions that happen independently due to a lack of knowledge about the enemy or because the state pursues greater security independent of its relation to a particular adversary (Echevarria II 2018, 11). Those who commit *faits accomplis* must always be aware that war may ensue. As Milevski explains, the choice of strategy reflects the actors' determination to settle the issue in one's favor and that the involved parties will be unable or unwilling to find acceptable degrees of compromise (Milevski 2018, 16). Following Clausewitz: "the first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature (Clausewitz 1976, 88)."

This is why the *fait accompli* has been seen as a limited form of warfare for the purpose of unlimited war (Corbett 1911, 46-65; Clausewitz 1976, 577-617). The British naval historian Julian S. Corbett, for example, explained that a *fait accompli* can be a useful strategy when trying to overextend the enemy. During the Spanish Ulcer, the British forces opened an additional theater of war to draw French troops in. The goal was to thin out French forces elsewhere by duping Napoleon into believing that this was the vanguard of a much larger British invasion (Corbett 1915, 51).

Altman would argue that this is a military operation for the purpose of unlimited war and therefore *not* a *fait accompli*. Altman provides no explanation why that must be the case. He does not explore the conceptual difference between these two types of *faits accomplis*. It is possible that this is the result of Altman's misunderstanding of the classical strategic literature and his overemphasis on Schelling and the bargaining model of war as building-blocks for his theoretical framework. Altman nevertheless acknowledges that the *fait accompli* strategy can lead to war, as was the case during the Falklands War of 1982 (Altman 2015, 29).

2.4. Advancing without attacking

Altman's advancing without attacking model attempts to explain how and when *fait accomplis* succeed – that is, taking something without starting a wider war. Fundamental to advancing without attacking is that "states cannot abide an enemy that is unconstrained from using force against them." States therefore draw use-of-force red lines to deter unwanted revisionist behavior (Altman 2018, 62). For example, Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty is a clear use-of-force red line because it states that "the Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all (NATO, 1949)." But does a cyber-attack, for example, rise to the level of an armed attack that it should trigger Article 5 (Burkadze 2018, 215)? Advancing without attacking explores this ambiguity to understand how states circumvent use-of-force red lines to make gains without overtly or unmistakably attacking.

Altman uses the term red line rather than deterrence to make this point clear. Red lines differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Crossing a red line is therefore considered as a "limit past which safety can no longer be guaranteed (Zimmer, 2013)." States circumvent or exploit plausible ambiguity to make gains without unmistakably or overtly attacking. Thus, *faits accomplis* are more likely to succeed when the aggressor correctly calculates that the operation does not (clearly) violate the enemy's red lines. Again, we see the difficulty of disentangling purpose from effect. Did the defender choose to relent rather than retaliate because it was unclear whether any use-of-force red lines were being violated? Or did the defender capitulate because it did not want to trigger a costly war by retaliating?

Red lines come in many variations, including violations of territorial sovereignty, developing nuclear weapons capabilities, or the (excessive) use of force. But use-of-force red lines are perhaps the most pervasive and salient types of red lines (Altman 2018, 63). This is because a violation of a use-of-force red line tends to invite tit-for-tat behavior that leads to an escalatory spiral of violence. Schelling explains that states seek to avoid this instability by emphasizing focal-point characteristics that qualitatively differentiates excessive behavior from other alternatives:

> "[A] focal point for agreement often owes its focal character to the fact that small concessions would be impossible, that small encroachments would lead to more and larger ones. One draws a line at some conspicuous boundary or rests his case on some conspicuous principle that is supported mainly by the rhetorical question, 'If not here, where (Schelling 1960, 111-2)?'"

But then how do states outmaneuver use-of-force red lines? Altman explains that red lines are similar to medieval suits of armor because they contain weaknesses that can be exploited by a skillful strike. These vulnerabilities can be exploited in two ways. The first is that states can circumvent red lines by finding ways to make gains while bypassing enemy forces. Second, states can exploit ambiguity by targeting gray areas to create uncertainty as to who is committing the attack and if the attack itself violates use-of-force red lines (Altman 2018, 63). To illustrate, China's island-building and militarization in the South China Sea is a clear example of circumventing red lines by bypassing enemy forces (Breech, 2018). In addition, the shoving match between Chinese and Indian soldiers during the 2017 Doklam standoff is an example of states manipulating use-of-force red lines to make gains without using excessive force that could trigger a wider war (Miglani & Bukhari, 2017). To conclude, in 2014, Russia used local separatist proxies and unmarked soldiers to give the operation in Crimea the veneer of a people's uprising with the intent to deny Russia's involvement in the operation. Although the international community highly suspected Russia's role in the affair, the use of plausible deniability provided Russia with the means to make gains without crossing the line of unmistakably attacking (Kofman, 2016; Altman 2018, 78).

Despite its significance, any small transgression of use-of-force red lines does not mean that war is inevitable. Instead, Altman provides three scenarios that are likely to follow after use-of-force red lines are violated. The first is a higher risk of escalation and greater uncertainty since "the most salient line constraining further violence is gone." Second, that states will resort to dicey alternatives, such as brinkmanship, because advancing without attacking is no longer a viable option. Third, the defender feels compelled to retaliate because it wants to discourage further transgressions. Like Mearsheimer and Freedman, Altman believes that this will fuel tit-

for-tat behavior that leads to an escalatory spiral of violence (Mearsheimer 1983, 56; Freedman, 2014b, Altman 2018, 72).

Advancing without attacking presents a distinct conceptual framework for understanding crisis management that deviates from – but also adds to – the conventional emphasis on brinkmanship, signaling resolve, and coercion. Both are theoretically unique but share similar aspects that clarify the conditions under which states make gains in international relations. As explained above, *faits accomplis* contain an element of coercion because they signal the aggressor's readiness to use force; "*faits accomplis* – like any action or inaction in a crisis – signal something to the adversary (Altman 2018, 72-3)." This presents a challenge to empirical analysis because it is difficult to disentangle what types of signals or information lead to what types of responses. However, the Russo-Ukrainian War case presents a rich array of observable implications that can be used to test the relevance of the advancing without attacking model against evidence.

2.4.1. Critique

Advancing without attacking developed from the conventional view on crisis management and therefore shares some of its main assumptions. The first is that it assumes that wars are inherently costly and that states generally agree that an *ex ante* settlement is preferable to a costly war (Fearon 1995, 380). Second, the model assumes that states are unitary actors that rationally pursue their self-interests. Third, that a key characteristic of political life can be described as the "allocation of scarce resources among unlimited and competing uses (Sills 1968, 472; Reiter 2003, 28; Altman, 2015)." To summarize, the advancing without attacking model presumes that the world is made out of matter, not *what* matters. The advancing without attacking model therefore clashes with at least three sets of ideas.

The first critique derives from the field of cognitive psychology that disputes the idea that humans are strictly rational. Humans tend to be emotional and intuitive decision-makers with distinct personalities, values, and belief-systems that steers their behavior in different and unique ways (Kecskemeti 1958, 19-20; Iklé 1991, 96-7). Some political leaders may view a certain *fait*

accompli as a violation of use-of-force red lines whereas others may be inclined to react less resolutely. This connects with another critique that has been level against positivist doctrines more generally. Altman, like Schelling, assumes that there are a set of definitive causes that lead to certain outcomes. Both oversimplify strategy by neglecting the role that the people and friction play in (the steps to) war (Clausewitz 1976, 89; Echevarria II, 2018, 10). In Altman's defense, he acknowledges that advancing without attacking should be viewed as "part of a broader strategy that integrates elements from multiple approaches to crisis interaction (Altman 2018, 73)." Altman understands that *faits accomplis* may fail, even when all conditions for its success are provided; the model seeks to instruct rather than prescribe policy (Altman 2015, 80-9).

The second challenge comes from the theory of constructivism that posits the idea that war is best understood as a social construction that is shaped by norms, culture, and ideas (Wendt, 1992). Constructivist theory posits that war is not a cost-benefit analysis in the material sense of the word but plays an important role in the formation of group identity and the creation of 'self' and 'other' (Kaldor, 2012). Thus, in the event of a *fait accompli*, states may respond violently not because of a cost-benefit analysis but because the war itself generates and strengthens national identity (Schmitt, 1996; Wendt 1999, 274-7; Snyder, 2002). Advancing without attacking predicts that war is more likely when the matter is indivisible. But even small and inconsequential territories may have large sentimental value (Reiter 2003, 36-7). It explains why the Indian government, for example, responded militarily when Pakistan committed a *fait accompli* in a small and unoccupied part of the Kashmir region in 1999. Because Kashmir is seen as indivisible, even small incursions are seen as clear breaches of use-of-force red lines (Goddard, 2002).

The third challenge comes from the role that domestic politics play in international conflict. How can domestic political factors fit into the advancing without attacking model? Advancing without attacking treats states as rational and unitary actors but makes no distinction in terms of how different types of regimes may respond to *faits accomplis*. Will an emerging

democracy respond differently to a *fait accompli* than a dictatorship, for example (Reiter 2003, 35)?

Chapter 3: Research design

The research objective of this paper is to conduct a *theory test* of the advancing without attacking framework in the Russo-Ukrainian War case to discern the validity of the model and to reevaluate the causes of war in Ukraine. This will be achieved through the method of process-tracing which offers a comprehensive approach to conducting within-case analyses by observing series of events in a predetermined manner to discern causality (Mahoney 2015, 200-1). This requires a series of observable implications that can be identified and tested against evidence to verify or debunk the theory in question (George and Bennett 2005, 274).

It is thus imperative that that researcher has a solid historical understanding of the case and is able to combine facts with more general knowledge to conduct a thorough logical analysis of the tested theory (Mahoney 2015, 202). This requires that sufficient information about the case is available. This poses a problem in the Russo-Ukrainian War case insofar that official government documents have not been published yet. However, ample journalistic and scholarly work has been conducted that enables researchers to make sound causal inferences. Here, it is important to keep in mind that the war in Ukraine is still being waged. Respective outlets and individuals may have vested interests to disseminate certain types of narratives that correspond with their biased views. Analysts must be careful to disseminate fact from fiction and this is made all the more difficult due to the complexity of the case and the tribalism involved. Nonetheless, it is felt that there is ample material that allows the researcher to conduct a sound analysis of the case.

3.1 Observable implications: advancing without attacking

A series of observable implications need to be tested against evidence to substantiate or dispute the theory in question (George and Bennett 2005, 274). This means that the first step is to define the key concepts and the hypothesized causal mechanisms that lead from the independent to the

dependent variable. Second, that the theorized causal mechanism is "operationalized, translating theoretical expectations into case-specific predictions of what observable manifestations each of the parts of the mechanisms should have if the mechanisms are present in the case." The third and final step is to collect empirical evidence that illustrates "(1) whether the hypothesized mechanism was present in the case and (2) whether the mechanism functioned as predicted or only some parts of the mechanism were present (Beach & Pedersen 2013, 14)." Here, observable implications are defined as unique visible predictions that other theories fail to recognize (Van Evera 1997, 30-35). Note that the Russo-Ukrainian War case cannot serve as a determinate test of the advancing without attacking model nor can it be used to generalize across cases. The utility of this research lies primarily in its ability to inform the reader about the conditions under which *faits accomplis* tend to succeed and the implications it has for the ways in which we view crisis management and how states make gains in international relations.

3.2 Conceptualizing causal mechanisms

Let us consider the presence of strong use-of-force red lines as the key causal mechanism in advancing without attacking. Altman argues that *faits accomplis* are more likely to fail when use-of-force red lines are clearly being violated. Strong red lines, then, are defined as key focal points that "encapsulate smaller units into one larger unit that states can more credibly threaten to defend, and do so without leaving any of several types of openings for *faits accompli* (Altman 2015, 15)." Such strong red lines signal the defender's commitment to respond with military force. By contrast, weak red lines suffer from one or more vulnerabilities. These are arbitrariness, imprecision, unverifiability, and incompleteness:

> "First, arbitrary red lines are those that are not set on focal points. These focal points are unique, conspicuous, and clearly different from nearby alternatives. Second, imprecise red lines leave gray areas in which it is ambiguous whether certain actions would or would not violate them. Third, unverifiable red lines are set such that it will not be immediately clear whether or not they have been violated. Fourth, incomplete red lines are those that can be bypassed, the object they aim to secure taken without violating the red line meant to protect it (Altman 2015, 15)."

The presence of these four vulnerabilities – also referred to as gray areas – increase the likelihood of a (successful) *fait accompli* strategy. It is thus expected that the aggressor will make a limited gain if it correctly calculates that the *fait accompli* does not transgress use-of-force red lines. By contrast, if the aggressor miscalculates, the likelihood for war increases. However, as explained above, any small violation of use-of-force red lines does not mean that war is imminent.

States can exploit these gray areas in two ways. First, states can seize disputed territories unilaterally but refrain from using excessive amounts of force that justify war, China's island-grab in the South China Sea is a clear example of a state seizing territory without unmistakably attacking. Because the territory in the South China Sea is contested, China pursues a series of *faits accomplis* in the area to achieve a larger strategic goal. China exploits ambiguity to pursue this policy. Is China clearly the violating the law and if so what should be done to prevent future altercations? In addition, China's military capability allows it to effectively leverage the coercive effect of its *faits accomplis* in the South China Sea. Thus far, China has correctly calculated that its actions do not justify a costly war.

Second, states exploit gray areas by using deniable forces to make limited gains. Generally speaking, deniable forces are units whose identity cannot be discerned easily. States utilize deniable forces to deny their involvement and give the operation the veneer of a local uprising. For example, in 1919 a set of Finnish volunteers invaded parts of Russian Karelia with the aim of annexing the territory. These 'volunteers' were actually instructed by the Finnish government to seize Karelia while Russia was in political turmoil (Tepora & Roselius, 2014; Altman, 2016). In addition, states use local proxies to give the *fait accompli* the veneer of a local rebellion against an oppressive government. The aggressor then mobilizes its forces to leverage the coercive effect of the *fait accompli*. Here, states often refer to international norms and principles such as the Responsibility to Protect or the principle of self-determination to justify their actions (Wood *et al* 2016, 9-10).

3.3 Visible predictions

If advancing without attacking corresponds to the pattern of strategic interaction and its outcomes in the Russo-Ukrainian War case, we should expect to observe the following visible predictions. First, both sides should eschew the use or threat of force if their initial demands are unmet. Second, both sides should attempt to outflank the adversary's use-of-force red lines by occupying territory where enemy forces are absent. Third, exploit plausible ambiguity by utilizing deniable forces and local proxies to make gains without unmistakably attacking. Fourth, use-of-force red line violations should result in tit-for-tat behavior that leads to reciprocal spirals of violence. Fifth, the differences in outcome can be explained by the differences in use-of-force violations. In the Donbas, use-of-force red lines were violated in contrast to Russia's *fait accompli* in Crimea. Sixth, Russia was unable to leverage the coercive effect of its *fait accompli* in the Donbas. In Crimea, the presence of large standing army was sufficient to coerce the Ukrainian government into submission. In general, Ukraine's policy in Crimea and the Donbas has to be made clear via statements made by the Ukrainian government and top officials.

Some evidence that would critique the advancing without attacking model would indicate the following. The first is the initial element of surprise. One could argue that the Ukrainian government was overwhelmed and surprised by Russia's initial *fait accompli* in Crimea. When Russia committed a *fait accompli* in the Donbas, the Ukrainian government knew what the result of inaction could be and therefore decided to retaliate. Alternatively, the government did not act as a rational unitary actor due to the political instability that followed in the wake of the Euromaidan Revolution. Third, the *fait accompli* in the Donbas failed due to a lack of support among the local population whereas in Crimea the opposite was the case. Fourth, that it is easier to impose control over the Crimean peninsula than the vast territory of the Donbas. In the Donbas, it was easier to retake control due to the absence of a large Russian military presence and the fact that the Donbas is more easily accessible. Finally, it is important to take into consideration the role of information and how media, propaganda, and disinformation may have been used to subvert the adversary state to achieve strategic goals.

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Chapter 4: Case analysis

This chapter begins with a short overview of the historic relations between Russia and Ukraine and the 2014 Ukrainian revolution. This provides a better understanding of the political and historic fault-lines driving the Russo-Ukrainian War. This chapter then proceeds with a case analysis of the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas.

4.1 Historical overview

For centuries, European powers coveted the Crimean Peninsula for its strategic location. In east-Ukraine, the *oblasts* (provinces) of Donetsk and Luhansk were instrumental to the Ukrainian economy given its extensive coal reserves (D'Anieri, Kravchuk, Kuzio 1999, 134). This region was once part of the Russian Empire and was known as *Novorossiya* (New Russia). The President of Russia Vladimir Putin still tends to refer to this area as *Novorossiya* in his public statements and speeches (O' Loughlin, Toal, Kolosov, 2017). At its height, *Novorossiya* spanned the entire northern Black Sea region and included Odessa, Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk (Magocsi 1996, 270). Ukraine and Russia have been closely interlinked since the Pereyaslav Agreement of 1654 when Ukraine became a protectorate of the Muscovite Czar. Since then, Ukraine has only enjoyed brief moments of independence (Bodie 2017, 269-270).

The modern borders of Ukraine are thus the result of Russia's imperial expansion during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. In this period, the Russian Empire warred continuously with the Ottoman Empire for control of the northern part of the Black Sea region (Magocsi, 1996). The Crimean Peninsula was particularly important to the naval ambitions of the Czar who needed a warm-water port from which it could operate its navy year-round. With a port in Sevastopol, the Czar could secure lucrative trade-routes and project its power in the region (Delman, 2015).In 1783, the Russian Empress Catherine the Great annexed the Crimean Peninsula under the pretext that she was saving the local ethnic Russian population from Ottoman invasion (Fisher 1978, 67-69). Almost the entire local Muslim population was removed to secure Russia's foothold on the peninsula (Bodie 2017, 270).

This process of ethnic cleansing continued in the following centuries and reached its zenith during the reign of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. Under his watch, some 200,000 Crimean Tatars were removed from Crimea and replaced with millions of ethnic Russians who migrated to the *Novorossiya* region (Bodie 2017, 272-4). Crimea and the Donbas are therefore largely Russian in terms of ethnic, cultural, historic, and political ties. Thus, when the Ukrainian-born leader Nikita Krushnev transferred Crimea to Ukraine in 1954, it was difficult to imagine that Ukraine would ever become a state independent from Russia. Indeed, the 1954 transfer of Crimea was in commemoration of the 1654 Pereyaslav Agreement and served to revivify the myth of Ukraine's reunification with Russia from which it has once been forcibly separated (Magocsi 1996, 216).

But the unthinkable did indeed happen. In 1991, the Ukrainian parliament voted for independence in the wake of Soviet dissolution. This was a difficult process given the political and historic ties between the two nations. The western faction of Ukraine looked towards the west whereas the eastern faction desired a revivification with the Russian world (Yekelchyk 2014, 18-21). These internal divisions were most obvious in Crimea when in 1992 the local population voted for its independence. Tensions between Ukraine and Crimea sored but were temporarily diffused when both parties signed the Act of Division of Power between Authorities of Ukraine and the Republic of Crimea (Karagiannis 2014, 207).

In the beginning, Ukraine suffered from political and economic turmoil as competing factions vied for political control. A watershed moment occurred in 2004 when the pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovych won Ukraine's presidential elections. However, reports of extensive election fraud and pervasive corruption led to large protests in major Ukrainian cities. The results of the original election were eventually annulled after the Orange Revolution of 2004. After snap elections, the pro-European candidate Viktor Yushenko was sworn into office. But Yushchenko was unable to continue his success as Yanukovych was re-elected as President of Ukraine in 2010 (Yekelchyk 2014, 89-93).

Under Yanukovych's watch, a series of events transpired that would lead to the invasion of Crimea and the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian War. In late November 2013, it became clear

that large segments of the Ukrainian population were fed up with Yanukovychs' longstanding history of rampant corruption, repression, and anti-democratic policies (Bodie 2017, 274). The final straw was Yanukovych's last-minute decision to withdraw from the Association Agreement with the European Union. This event triggered a series of protests and civil unrest as demonstrators flocked to Kiev's main square to demand political reforms. Violence escalated between protestors and police forces on 20 February 2014. Two days later, President Yanukovych fled the country leading to a power vacuum in Ukraine (Yekelchyk 2014, 109).

Many books and articles have been written as to why the Kremlin decided to invade Crimea on 27 February 2014.[2] It is not within the scope of this paper to explain all of them. Suffice to say that Putin explained his motives in a press conference on 4 March 2014. Here, Putin argued that the overthrow of the Yanukovych administration was an "anti-constitutional takeover, an armed seizure of power" whose "reactionary, nationalist and anti-Semitic forces" posed a direct threat to the lives of ethnic Russians in Ukraine. Russia's intervention in Crimea was a direct response to the appeal of the legitimate president of Ukraine to "protect the lives, freedom, and health of the citizens of Ukraine (Rawlings 2014; Karagiannis 2014, 410)." But what has generally been omitted in the literature is Ukraine's response to Russia's *fait accompli* in Crimea.

4.2 Crimea

On 27 February 2014, pro-Russian forces wearing unmarked green uniforms moved into Crimea and occupied a series of key buildings including the Crimean parliament, governmental headquarters and telecommunication centers. Initially, the 'little green men', also referred to as 'polite people', surrounded Ukrainian troops and agreed with their superiors that neither side would open fire. Gradually, the 'little green men' pushed the Ukrainian troops into a corner,

[2] See, for example: Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West* (Yale University Press, 2014); Rajan Menon & Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order* (MIT Press, 2015); Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands* (I.B. Tauris, 2015); Serhy Yekelchyk, *The Conflict in Ukraine: What Everyone Needs To Know* (Oxford University Press, 2015); Elizabeth Wood *et al*, *Roots of Ukraine's War in Crimea* (Columbia University Press, 2016); Chris Kaspar de Ploeg, *Ukraine in the Crossfire* (Clarity Press, 2017), and Stephen S. Cohen, *War With Russia? From Putin & Ukraine to Trump & Russiagate* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2019).

relying on their superior numbers and firepower to coerce the Ukrainians into submission. Essentially, these 'little green men' risked their lives by gambling that Ukrainian soldiers would not open fire and escalate the situation. To that effect, Russia was gradually able to take control of Crimea without firing a shot (Lavrov, 2014; Socor, 2014; Altman 2018, 58-59). A referendum was then issued by local proxies on the status of Crimea. After favorable results, Russia formally annexed Crimea on 21 March 2014 (Karagiannis 2014, 408).

For the conventional view of crisis management to make sense there would have to be clear signals of resolve that precipitated the invasion of Crimea. It has been argued that Western governments have failed in their understanding of how their tentative approaches to Ukraine may have been perceived by the Kremlin. As Putin explained to the Duma in March 2014: "if you compress the spring all the way to its limit it will snap back hard (Freedman, 2014a; Kendall, 2014; Novak, 2015)" The Russian Federation has argus-eyed any further encroachment into its near-abroad since U.S. Secretary of State James Baker promised Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that "there would be no extension of NATO's jurisdiction for forces of NATO one inch to the east (Goldgeier, 2016)." It is debatable whether or not the West was actually interested in wresting Ukraine from Russia's sphere of influence, but it is evident that Putin responded to the political developments that were unfolding in Ukraine and the larger geopolitical context in which it was embedded (Shandra & Seely, 2019).

The evidence presented here below contradicts the conventional view on crisis management in several ways. The first is that Rusia did not utilize coercive bargaining or set an ultimatum to wrest Crimea from Ukraine. Ukraine and the West did use coercive diplomacy in an attempt to regain control of Crimea but these attempts had failed. Second, the Ukrainian government never signaled its willingness to defend its territory but acquiesced to the revised status quo. Third, the Wests' verbal red lines and appeals to international norms, rules, and the law could not restrict adversarial behavior nor forcibly remove Russian troops from Crimea. Fourth, there was no crisis-avoiding bargain that preceded the invasion of Crimea and failed attempts to find common ground thereafter did not result in war.

By contrast, Russia's *fait accompli* in Crimea resembles the advancing without attacking model to some extent. The Russian army tiptoed around use-of-force red lines and used plausible ambiguity to push as far as it could without overtly attacking. However, one could argue how decisive plausible ambiguity and (the exploitation of) use-of-force red lines were. For example, it was apparent from the beginning that the 'little green men' were Russian soldiers supported by local insurgents. On the morning of 28 February 2014, Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Asakov stated that Russian soldiers had arrived in Sevastopol without Ukrainian consent thereby violating the 1994 Budapest Memorandum (Saul, 2014). Other experts also quickly concluded that the gear and apparel of these 'little green men' were issued exclusively by the Russian army (Pulkki, 2014; Karagiannis 2014, 408). Several videos had also been posted on YouTube where little green men – in what may have been a slip of the tongue – confessed that they were Russian soldiers (Najbullah, 2014). Despite mounted evidence, Putin argued that these 'little green men' were actually Crimean self-defense forces that wanted to protect themselves from Ukrainian ultranationalists that, according to Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergrey Lavrov, had threatened "the lives and interests of Russians and the entire Russian speaking population (Schreck, 2019)." But this narrative was quickly suspended when, on 28 March 2014, Putin praised the performance of Russian armed forces in Crimea (AFP News Agency, 2014).

Even though the Ukrainian government knew, or at least highly suspected that these were Russian soldiers, they ordered their troops to stand down (VICE, 2014). This is in part due to the discipline and professionalism that the Russian soldiers maintained throughout the operation. It is true that Russia violated the principle of non-intervention and the 1994 Budapest Memorandum. Indeed, Asakov posted on the morning of 28 February 2014 that this was an "armed invasion and occupation in violation of all international agreements and norms (Walker, Salem, MacAskill, 2014)." However, the 'little green men' craftily circumvented use-of-force red lines by taking control of Crimea without firing a shot (Lavrov, 2014). In general, there was no reciprocal escalation of violence that could lead to war.

But there were other major factors that contributed to the 'peaceful' annexation of Crimea as well. The first is that the Ukrainian government was completely surprised and

overtaken by the celerity of the event. Although the Ukrainian government had expected some political instability in Ukraine, it was unimaginable that a full-fledged invasion would occur in Crimea (Wood *et al* 2016, 16). Second, the Russian Black Sea fleet was permitted to station a maximum of 25,000 Russian troops in Sevastopol which meant that Ukrainian soldiers had no reason to be circumspect about the presence of Russian soldiers in Crimea. The Russians were able to leverage the coercive effect of the *fait accompli* due to its large military presence in Crimea (Wood *et al* 2016, 16-7). Third, the Ukrainian government was still recovering from Euromaidan. As Interim President Oleksandr Turchynov explained: "our country had neither the government system, nor the defense system back then [to counter the invasion] (Hladka 2017, 30; Käihkö 2018, 151)." Indeed, much of the Ukrainian navy was in disarray when on 1 March 2014, Rear Admiral Denys Berezovsky defected to the Russian side. What is more, Yanukovych-loyalists were not yet weeded out from Ukraine's intelligence and security services (Kofman *et al*, 2017). One source close to the Russian military even claimed that "the seizure of Ukrainian military units in Crimea was just a show (Polityu & Zverev, 2017)."

Another observable implication in advancing without attacking is the presence of territorially ambiguous red lines. As discussed in the historical overview, Crimea has close ties to Russia and there has been some support for Russian annexation in the past (Khotin, Khalilov & Coalson, 2018). In 2008, the Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political studies conducted a poll that found that 63.8% of the Crimean population was in favor of seceding from Ukraine and joining Russia (Razumkov Centre, 2008). Another poll conducted by Gallup in 2013 revealed far less support for secession with only 23% favoring Russian annexation. This was down from 33% that was observed two years earlier when the same poll was conducted (Gallup, 2013).

In Crimea, one separatist group in particular played a key role during the invasion. In November 2000, the Russian Community of Crimea (*Russkaia Obshchina Kryma*) asked Putin to "come to the defense of our Russian societies". One of its most prominent members, Sergei Aksyonov, would become head of the Crimean government on the day of the invasion (Wood *et al* 2016, 8-9). On 1 March 2014, the same Aksyonov asked Putin to "provide assistance in ensuring peace and tranquility (Socor. 2014)" Putin continuously justified his policy in Crimea

by referring to the principle of self-determination and the historic precedent of Kosovo. Why, Putin argued, were the Kosovo Albanians permitted to do what the Russians, Ukrainians, and Crimean Tartars in Crimea could not (Kendall, 2014)? But Putin's arguments fell on deaf ears when, in 2014, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution calling all members not to recognize any changes to the status of Crimea (United Nations, 2014).

Advancing without attacking corresponds to the Crimean case in some aspects but not in others. The first is the use of deniable forces. From the beginning, it was clear that the 'little green men' were Russian soldiers who were instructed by the Kremlin to occupy Crimea. In addition, the international community discarded the idea that this was a local uprising and analogous to the situation in Kosovo some fifteen years earlier. However, the professionalism and discipline maintained by Russian forces allowed Russia to take Crimea without starting a war. In addition, one could argue that Crimea was an ambiguous red line considering the local support for Russian annexation. This, however, is not an argument Altman makes since he does not explore the role of the people for the success or failure of a *fait accompli*. Still, Crimea is internationally recognized as Ukraine's sovereign territory and any infringement thereof violates the principle of non-intervention. Indeed, Asakov himself stated that this was an armed invasion and occupation that violated all international agreements and norms. Thus, the advancing without attacking framework corresponds to the case in Crimea insofar that Russia was able to circumvent use-of-force red lines by advancing without overtly attacking. Although this is a core argument in Altman's thesis, it is debatable whether or not the exploitation of use-of-force red lines was the decisive factor in Russia's successful *fait accompli* in Crimea.

The evidence presented here above suggests that this may not have been the case. The Ukrainian government was mostly surprised and overtaken by the invasion. In addition, the government was still in disarray after Euromaidan. Turchynov himself confessed that the Ukrainian government had neither the government nor defense system back then to counter the invasion. This has one important implication for Altman's model, namely that he presumes that states are rational and unitary actors who pursue their self-interests. There is no mention or consideration in the advancing without attacking model for different types of regimes and how

they may respond to a *fait accompli* strategy. In addition, advancing without attacking does not explore subversion as a tactic that can improve the likelihood of a *fait accompli* success. Evidence suggests that Russia uses propaganda, provocateurs, and infiltrators to destabilize enemy regimes by manipulating them to make decisions that serve the Russian interests (Shandray & Sheely, 2019).

But the biggest factor contributing to the Russia's success in Crimea stems from Ukraine's decision not to retaliate militarily. As explained above, this decision was made based on a number of assumptions. The Ukrainian government thus resorted to coercive diplomacy and called on its allies and the international community to compel Russia. But it is dubious whether Russia would have surrendered Crimea by any means short of force. By annexing Crimea, Russia already signaled its resolve to pursue its self-interests through military means.

4.3 The Donbas

In early April 2014, a few weeks after the annexation of Crimea, local pro-Russian separatists along with public relations experts, propagandists, and Spetsnaz and FSB forces, established a series of breakaway 'People's Republics' in the Donbas region (Shandra & Seely 2019, 25-35).'Like Crimea, pro-Russian forces occupied key government buildings and established a number of checkpoints in an attempt to take control of the area (Czuperski *et al* 2015, 3). Again, the operation was portrayed as an uprising against the Ukrainian government.

Russia's *fait accompli* in the Donbas ultimately failed because the Ukrainian government responded by military force to push back separatist forces. This process began on 13 April 2014, when the interim-government of Ukraine organized an anti-terror operation. The deployment, however, was limited and failed to achieve its desired effect. The Ukrainian soldiers refused to attack their fellow citizens who – in their eyes – were peaceful protestors that had invoked their right to demonstrate. To that end, demonstrators surrounded Ukrainian soldiers demanding them to give up their arms and equipment (VICE, 2014; Malyarenko and Galbreath 2016, 123).

Disappointed by the government's failure to retake the Donbas, a group of Ukrainian volunteers decided to take matters into their own hands and formed a series of militias. This was

a multifarious group of patriotic Ukrainian nationals with different political goals in mind (Cohen 2019, 179). Initially, these volunteer battalions were able to push back separatist forces in the Donbas. After new elections in late May 2014, the Ukrainian government gradually incorporated these volunteer battalions into the National Guard of Ukraine and pursued a successful offensive against separatist positions in the summer of 2014 (Pond 2017, 144-8). Ukraine's initial success compelled Russia to send in additional weapons, ammunitions, and soldiers to push back the offensive. In August 2014, this strategy was no longer tenable as Ukrainian forces continued to make gains in the Donbas. In response, Russia sent in regular troops to deal with the situation, discarding any pretense that Russia was not involved in the region (Wilson 2016, 633). This decision effectively turned the armed conflict into a war between Ukraine and Russia.

The conventional view on crisis management suggests that the war in the Donbas was the result of a failure to reach a war-avoiding bargain. Both sides signaled their resolve to pursue their national interests. In the case of Russia, this was made clear with the invasion and annexation of Crimea where the Kremlin signaled its resolve to pursue military means to obtain its strategic goals. Russia tried to achieve a similar feat as it had in Crimea by mobilizing some 40,000 troops along the Ukrainian border (Sakwa 2015, 200). However, in Crimea, a large Russian force was already present on the peninsula. The mobilization of Russian troops along the border with Ukraine was meant to coerce the Ukrainian government to relent to the situation that was unfolding in the Donbas. Similarly, the Ukrainian government signaled its dissatisfaction by appealing to international norms, rules, and standards. But this could hardly compel the Russians who, in the wake of Crimea, felt emboldened by their initial success. The same applied to the West who consistently changed red lines when faced with Russian aggression. Both Ukraine and the West were under the misapprehension that verbal signaling could deter Russia from invading the Donbas – even when Russia had *de facto* already done so. It was improbable that anything short of force could have deterred the pro-Russian forces (Wilson 2014, 129).

But again, like in Crimea, there was no bargaining process that preceded the Donbas crisis. The Kremlin did not issue an ultimatum in an attempt to seize the Donbas. Like Crimea, it

used a mixture of deniable forces, local proxies, propaganda, and covert and conventional measures to take control of east-Ukraine. Advancing without attacking corresponds with Russia's strategy insofar that it used deniable forces and attacks by proxy to circumvent use-of-force red lines. The stark difference between the two operations, when considering the advancing without attacking framework, is that Russia did not unilaterally occupy a chunk of territory with a considerable military force that could leverage the coercive effect of the *fait accompli* effectively. Instead, Russia mobilized troops along the Russo-Ukrainian border in an attempt to achieve a similar effect. Russia's primary strategy was to achieve political influence by utilizing local proxies who – under the guise of self-determination – would establish a series of breakaway republics (Shandra & Sheely, 2019). This failed due to a number of reasons that will be discussed below.

One prevalent interpretation is that the war in the Donbas was the result of historic fault-lines and identity politics. To quote Nicolai Petro: "the peremptory removal of President Yanukovych violated a delicate balance of interest forged between Galicia and the Donbas. It was thus seen as a direct threat to the core interest of Russophone Ukrainians (Petro 2015, 31; Wilson 2016, 632). The argument goes that Russia exploited the prevalent dissatisfaction among the Donbas population to incite a rebellion. A watershed moment occurred on 23 February 2014 when the Ukrainian parliament repealed the law on regional languages. Yurchynov ultimately did not sign the document, but news that the 'fascist junta' in Kiev was oppressing the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine had already spread. Russian and separatist politicians fabricated and disseminated the idea that a US-led fascist coupe had seized control of the government and that the separatists were the only ones defending them from the ultranationalists in Kiev (Katchanovski 2016, 476, 482).

Scholars such as Giuliano and Zhukov placed more emphasis on economic factors but generally agree that a sense of alienation and helplessness helped spark the rebellion. They suggest that the Donbas population felt threatened by the new government in Kiev and the impact this would have on the economic ties between Russia and Ukraine on which the Donbas was highly dependent (Giuliano, 2015; Zhukov, 2015). By extension, Kudelia suggests that a

period of anarchy followed in the wake of Euromaidan. This was exploited by the separatists to spread fear and hatred and rally the Donbas population to the separatist cause (Kudelia, 2014).

Finally, analysts like Czuperski and Wilson argue that Russia was the main force driving the separatist cause (Czuperski *et al* 2015, Wilson 2016). In the beginning, Russian 'little green men' along with public relations experts and FSB officials spearheaded the separatist movement. The Surkov leaks confirm that both Aleksander Borodai, who was the proclaimed President of the Donetsk People's Republic, and his Defense Minister Igor Girkin, were recommended by the Kremlin to fill important posts in the Donetsk People's Republic (Czuperski *et al* 2015, 4; Shandra & Seely 2019, 27-30). Russia manipulated the Ukrainian political landscape, bribed local officials, and paid crisis actors to create a fake reality that turned a marginal movement into a considerable uprising (Shandra & Sheely 2019, 25).

But by May 2014 it became evident that Russia's strategy in the Donbas was failing. As stated by the Atlantic Council, Russia bought into its own propaganda, believing that the provision of leadership, money, and weapons, were enough to spark and sustain a rebellion (Czuperski *et al*, 4-5). But it became apparent that the local population was largely indifferent to the political situation in the Donbas. A national survey conducted by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology indicated in 2014 that roughly 26.5% of Donetsk citizens supported Russian annexation. That same poll concluded that 34.9% was completely opposed to the idea (KIIS, 2014). This number corresponds with similar polls that were conducted by two other agencies (International Republican Institute, 2014; Reiting, 2014). Indeed, Girkin repeatedly urged Moscow to send additional manpower, complaining that he could not even muster "a thousand volunteers to fight at the front (Yekelchyk 2015, 147; Wilson 2016, 645-7)."

The primary difference between Crimea and the Donbas were the means with which Russia pursued its *fait accompli*. In the Donbas, Russia relied on Kremlin-instructed leadership, the provision of money and weapons, and the dissemination of propaganda to rally the local population to the separatist cause and establish a series of breakaway republics in east-Ukraine. This eventually failed due to a number of reasons. The first is that the Donbas is much harder to control than Crimea. Crimea is a peninsula whereas the Donbas is a vast land-mass that is easily

accessible. Second, in the Donbas, there was less support among the populace for the separatist movement. In Crimea, Russia at least had a proper marionette in the form of Aksyonov, something Russia lacked in the Donbas. Consequentially, Russia had a much more difficult time managing its local proxies. In Crimea, Russia had already stationed some 25,000 troops as part of its Black Sea fleet. In the Donbas, there were no Russian military bases that could be used to achieve a similar effect. Instead, Russia mobilized some 40,000 troops along the Ukrainian border. This worked insofar that the Ukrainian government feared an escalation of violence if it intervened military in the Donbas (Wilson 2015, 134-140; Bodie 2017, 297; Käihkö 2018, 161)..

However, it has been debated what Russia's exact end-goal was in the Donbas. Did Russia want to replicate the Crimean model and annex east-Ukraine? If so, why did the Kremlin sit back when the results of the referenda in Donetsk and Luhansk indicated the wish for Russian accession? The Kremlin did not express its desire to annex the self-proclaimed republics in the Donbas. Instead, the Kremlin demanded that the Ukrainian authorities recognized the legitimacy of the separatist cause without deserting its responsibility towards the Donbas people. By playing the long-game, Russia had effectively derailed the Crimean scenario of a swift annexation (Yekelchyk 2015, 145-6). However, a 'frozen conflict' could still be in the Russian interest. A recent report by the Royal United Services Institute seems to confirm this suspicion. From the leaked Surkov e-mails, the report indicates that Russia's strategy in Ukraine since 2013 was to "achieve political influence there, and ostensibly, to halt the country's movement westward – which could ultimately result in accession to NATO." The leaked e-mails also confirm that the breakaway republics in east-Ukraine were, from the outset, Russian entities (Shandra & Seely 2019, 1, 79).

But Russia's strategy in the Donbas indicates that it did not want to start an armed conflict. Putin himself boasted that he could take Kiev in two weeks if he wanted to (Farmer & Squires, 2014). Yet, Russia refrained from brute force and pursued a *fait accompli* similar to the Crimean model. But unlike Crimea, Russia's *fait accompli* in the Donbas escalated into a bloody war. Curiously enough, it was neither the Ukrainian nor the Russian army that started firing. The Ukrainian government was still in disarray after Euromaidan and – given the Georgian precedent

of 2008 – unwilling to aggravate the Kremlin and incite a wider war. In an attempt to regain control, then Acting President Turchynov established an Anti-Terror Operation (ATO) on 13 April 2014. The strategic goal of ATO and the means to achieve it were never made clear. In a speech announcing ATO, Turchynov addresses those that want to defend Ukraine and explains that "the main thing is not to destabilize the situation in Ukraine, and not to play to the hands of the enemy and its agents, whose aim is not only to prevent elections, but also topple the government and create chaos and instability (BBC, 2014)."

The operation fell short of a declaration of war sowing doubt about the strategic utility of ATO. While this ambiguity allowed the Ukrainian government to use deniable forces to minimize the potential threat of escalation between Russia and Ukraine, it failed to achieve any significant effect (Käihkö 2018, 153-7). Indeed, on 16 April 2014, ATO units entered Slavyansk but were stopped in their tracks by pro-Russian supporters who convinced ATO forces to drop their weapons. In general, these ATO forces were apprehensive about attacking their fellow citizens absent legal justifications to do so (Malyarenko and Galbreath 2016, 123). In the end, the interim government of Ukraine failed to reach a significant strategic success against the breakaway republics in April and May of 2014.

This inability of the Ukrainian government to adequately address the crisis in the Donbas led patriotic Ukrainian citizens to form their own militias. Essentially, these volunteer battalions dragged the Ukrainian government into the conflict since they "were the first to start firing (Hladka *et al* 2017, 105)." As Pond explains: "there were some people who cared even more passionately about Ukraine than Putin did – the Ukrainians themselves (Pond, 2017 146)." In April and May 2014, these volunteer battalions managed to push back the separatists and reclaim lost territory. In response, Girkin appealed to the "citizens of the People's Republic" to support the separatist cause and to push back the invaders. This had little to no effect in the Donbas but gradually more soldiers from Russia were moving into the combat zone to defend the Russian cause (Mitrokhin 2015, 232).

By late May 2014, Ukraine's government started to recognize that it, too, could use volunteers as deniable forces. The turning-point came on 7 June 2014 when the newly-elected

President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko was sworn into office. With a more stable government in place, Poroshenko started an offensive against separatist positions in the summer of 2014. Gradually, the volunteer battalions were incorporated into the National Guard of Ukraine and were besieging the last remaining separatist enclaves in Luhansk and Donetsk (Fisher, 2014; Bodie 2017, 298; Käihkö, 2018). The Kremlin could no longer depend on the provision of arms and munitions to sustain the rebellion and had to resort to conventional measures to stop the attack. To that effect, some 30 tanks and 1,200 Russian troops crossed the border to push back the Ukrainian forces. This act could no longer be concealed effectively turning the armed conflict into a war between Russia and Ukraine (Fisher, 2014).

5. Summary of observations

Having considered the events and perceived causes of war in the Russo-Ukrainian War case, it is now possible to present an explanatory model that makes sense of it. It is evident that both Russia and Ukraine used elements of advancing without attacking in an attempt to make gains by outflanking the opponent's use-of-force red lines. In both cases, Russia used deniable forces and attacks by proxy to make gains without unmistakably attacking. The deniability of forces was also used by the Ukrainian government in the form of volunteer battalions who were gradually incorporated into the National Guard of Ukraine. The deniability of forces enabled both parties to make gains by circumventing use-of-force red lines. Attacks on pro-Russian separatists or Ukrainian militias did not carry the same weight as attacks on Russian or Ukrainian soldiers by the opposing state would. To that effect, Russia and Ukraine attempted to make gains without crossing use-of-force red lines that justified a declaration of war.

But why did Russia's *fait accompli* succeed in Crimea but fail in the Donbas later that year? One important observable implication is the element of surprise. In both cases, the Ukrainian government was surprised and overtaken by Russia's *faits accomplis*. However, even when the Ukrainian government knew what the result of inaction could be, it still decided not to intervene in the Donbas. The element of surprise therefore fails to explain the differences in outcome.

The second observable implication is the differences in geography between Crimea and the Donbas. The Donbas is a vast landmass that is easier to access and therefore harder to defend. Crimea, on the other hand, is easier to control due to its smaller size and because it is a peninsula with limited connections to the mainland. Russia only needed to control three important chokepoints in Crimea. In the Donbas, effective control was much harder to achieve due to easy accessibility between the Donbas and the rest of Ukraine.

However, and this leads to the third important observable implication, the defender has to decide whether to relent or retaliate against the adversary's *fait accompli*. To that effect, states leverage the coercive effect of a *fait accompli* by occupying territory with a significant military presence. In Crimea, 25,000 Russian soldiers were already stationed on the Crimean Peninsula which allowed Russia to leverage the coercive effect of its *fait accompli* more effectively. Their military and numeric superiority enabled Russia to effectively pursue advancing without attacking. Since there were no Russian military bases in the Donbas, Russia had to choose a different tactic to leverage the coercive effect of its *fait accompli*. To that effect, Russia mobilized some 40,000 troops along the Ukrainian border.

This initially worked. The Ukrainian government was, again, apprehensive of using military force to reestablish control over lost territory. Fears of a Georgian scenario led to haphazard measures such as the formation of an anti-terror operation with the paradoxical intent of deescalating the situation while pushing back pro-Russian fighters. However, advancing without attacking presumes that states are rational and unitary actors. In the Russo-Ukrainian War, a period of political instability followed in the wake of Euromaidan. The Ukrainian government had neither the state nor military apparatus to respond to the Russian/separatist threat. What is more, major Ukrainian political and security institutions were infiltrated by Russian loyalists. This severely undermined the Ukrainian position to act as a unitary actor. It was only after Poroshenko was sworn into office in early June 2014 that political stability somewhat returned to Ukraine. Indeed, once Poroshenko assumed office, the Ukrainian government started an offensive to regain control of the Donbas.

However, it should be noted that the political instability in Ukraine had partly been the result of Russian efforts. Since 2013, Russia used covert means in an attempt to achieve political influence in Ukraine and halt its movement westwards. To that effect, Russian loyalists occupied and infiltrated key positions in Ukraine's political and security institutions. In addition, Russia used its vast media apparatus to disseminate pro-Russia narratives that destabilized the legitimacy and policy of the Ukrainian government. What is more, Russian state-owned media used identity politics to sow a climate of enmity and fear among the Russian and Ukrainian speaking populations of southeast-Ukraine. Thus, Russia utilized subversion to erode Ukraine's civil society and its political and military institutions to increase the effectiveness of its *fait accompli* strategies. What is notable, here, is that advancing without attacking does not take these factors into consideration.

Yet, the use of subversion and propaganda cannot explain the differences in outcome between Crimea and the Donbas. In both scenarios, Russia tried to appeal to the hearts and minds of the local population. In addition, it used local proxies and the veneer of a people's uprising to justify its actions in Ukraine. This arguably succeeded in Crimea but failed in the Donbas because Russia overestimated the local support for secession and Russian annexation. One could argue that Russia did not do enough in persuading the local population to join the separatist cause. This is difficult to prove, however, since emotion and passion are difficult to quantify and manipulate. Generally speaking, it is more plausible to assume that Russia relied too extensively on local proxies in the Donbas. In Crimea, Russia's large military presence allowed Russia to take control more effectively. Russia did not rely as extensively on local support given the presence of the Black Sea fleet. The use or threat of force was enough to effectively gain control of Crimea.

However, perhaps the most important observable implication is the role that the people played in the Russo-Ukrainian War. To re-emphasize, the population in Crimea looked more favorably towards Russian annexation than had been the case in the Donbas. What is more, if it were not for the Ukrainian volunteer battalions, the Ukrainian government would have not been dragged into the war. Russia was now hard-pressed to resort to more conventional measures to

strengthen the separatist forces. The provision of leadership, money, and ammunition was not enough to sustain the rebellion. Thus, when push came to shove and the volunteer battalions encircled separatist positions, Russia had no choice but to send in conventional forces if it wanted to continue its operation in the Donbas.

Although the advancing without attacking model explains the causes of war in the Russo-Ukrainian War to some extent, it fails to provide answers to three major observable implications: the role of subversion, the role of geography, and – perhaps most importantly – the role of the people. In addition, the advancing without attacking model could benefit from further analysis into the coercive element of the *fait accompli* strategy. Occupying territory with a large military force seems to be more effective in leveraging the coercive effect of a *fait accompli*. By contrast, mobilizing a sizeable military force along the border to leverage the coercive effect of local proxies/separatist forces seems to be less effective.

6. Conclusion

An overriding issue that this paper encountered was the difficulty in disentangling bottom-up support for secession with top-down fabrication of separatism. In Crimea this was less difficult to deduce considering the local support for Russian annexation. By contrast, it was more difficult to deduce Russian actions from genuine dissatisfaction among the local populace towards the Ukrainian government in the Donbas. Although Russia garnered some support for secession in the Donbas, it had placed too much confidence on its ability to lead and sustain the insurgency. Russia overestimated local support for the rebellion which created the conditions under which the crisis in the Donbas would eventually escalate.

This paper set out to reassess the causes of war in the Russo-Ukrainian War case and the conditions under which *faits accomplis* tend to fail or succeed. The necessity for such a reevaluation was prompted by the recent appearance of Altman's advancing without attacking model. The premise of his research is that states outmaneuver their opponent's red lines to make gains without violating the line of unambiguously using (excessive) force. In addition, the *fait*

accompli has seen wide usage among revisionist states in recent years. Apart from Russia, China and India have also adopted similar strategies to make gains without inadvertently attacking. The relative inability of the international community to address and curtail these strategies furthermore suggests that the field of international relations could benefit from additional research into the *fait accompli* strategy. But beyond this initial affirmation, the employment of a process-tracing methodology both affirms and contests Altman's theoretical model.

In the Russo-Ukrainian War case, both sides utilized aspects of advancing without attacking to make gains by outflanking the opponent's use-of-force red lines. However, the model could not satisfactorily explain the differences in outcome between Crimea and the Donbas. First, Altman's model presumes that states are unitary actors who pursue their rational self-interest. But in the wake of Euromaidan, Ukraine was too politically and institutionally fragmented to act as a unified actor against Russian incursions in southeast-Ukraine. What is pivotal, here, is that the political instability in Ukraine was exacerbated by Russian covert actions designed to subvert the Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian civil society. Russia created the conditions under which its *faits accomplis* in Ukraine were more likely to succeed. Since Altman's model does not explore these scenarios, it is unable to provide a satisfactory theoretical model to explain the differences in outcome between Russia's *faits accomplis* in southeast-Ukraine. In addition, advancing without attacking does not explore the differences in regimes and how they may react differently to a *fait accompli* strategy. This question requires further consideration to improve the advancing without attacking model and our understanding of the *fait accompli* concept.

Second, advancing without attacking does not take the role of geography into consideration. One logical explanation is that a *fait accompli* is more likely to succeed when targeted at a peninsula like Crimea than a vast land-mass connected to the rest of the country such as the Donbas. It is interesting that Altman explores this distinction in his dissertation but not in his article where he outlines his advancing without attacking model (Altman 2015, 11). Advancing without attacking could certainly benefit from a further corroboration on the role that

geography plays – particularly when aligned with his more general hypothesis of gray zone areas.

Third, an important difference between Crimea and the Donbas was the use of deniable forces. In Crimea, the presence of Russia's Black Sea fleet leveraged the coercive effect of its *fait accompli*. In the Donbas, Russia mobilized some 40,000 troops along the Ukrainian border to achieve a similar effect. Again, the Ukrainian government was compelled to relent rather than retaliate in the Donbas. However, one could argue that it was more difficult for Russia to ascertain control over the Donbas because it relied primarily on local proxies rather than a large occupying force. In general, advancing without attacking could benefit from further research in terms of how *faits accomplis* leverage their coercive effect to make gains without unmistakably attacking. In addition, if the occupying force was decisive for the successful *fait accompli* in Crimea, one could argue how viable the *fait accompli* strategy is for military inferior states. Is the *fait accompli* strictly a strategy that military superior or equal states can pursue to make gains without unmistakably attacking? Was Ukraine's military inferiority an important or perhaps even decisive consideration in choosing to relent rather than retaliate?

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, advancing without attacking overlooks the role of the people. As explained above, the role of the people was fundamental in the outcome of both crises. In Crimea, there was more support for the annexation whereas in the Donbas, the separatist could not even muster enough support to sustain the rebellion. Moreover, after the failed Anti-Terror Operation, the Ukrainians themselves formed volunteer battalions to defeat the separatists. By their actions, the volunteers eventually dragged the Ukrainian government into the conflict. As Pond explained, "there were some people who cared about Ukraine more passionately than Putin did – the Ukrainians themselves (Pond 2017, 146)." Russia could infiltrate and destabilize the Ukrainian government, occupy southeast-Ukraine, and disseminate propaganda to disrupt Ukrainian civic society, but it could not prevent the "primordial violence, hatred, and enmity, which are to be regarded as a blind natural force" that is inherent to the people (Clausewitz 1976, 89). The way in which the war panned out in eastern Ukraine raises additional questions about the character of war in the 21st century. The role of the people and the

causes of war remain an important topic for future research given the continued frozen conflict in Ukraine.

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