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"An exploration of Russia's military approach during the Ukrainian crisis (2013-2015)"

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Abstract

In the end of 2013, and the beginning of 2014, Russia launched an unprecedented, unconventional military campaign in Ukraine. In less than a month Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula and sparked a bloody civil war in the Eastern regions of Ukraine. The new Russian military approach shocked the whole World, yet there was no term that can describe it. The media soon filled this gap with the "label" "hybrid warfare", an almost forgotten concept developed in the early 2000s in the United States professional military literature. This appellation quickly gained popularity and started to appear not only in news articles but also in official governmental and intergovernmental documents. In academia, however, a debate that is still continuing arose. On one side, there are scholars who argue that the new Russian military approach can be examined as an instance of hybrid warfare but on the other, many disagree. The main problems are that there is no generally accepted definition of hybrid warfare, the literature is fragmented and, often researchers use the term simply because is "catchy". This master thesis engaged in the above-mentioned discussion. First an appropriate theoretical framework which was developed before the debate had started was selected, then it was applied to the Ukrainian case, with the prime goal to test if the Russian actions in the Ukrainian crisis (2013-2015) can be conceptualized as an exemplification of a hybrid war. In doing so a knowledge gap was filled, because prior to this work, there was no extensive exploration of the Ukrainian crisis through the lens of a hybrid war theory. The analysis proved that Russian military approach, exposed during the Ukrainian crisis, can be conceptualized as an instance of a hybrid war, yet it is not certain if the selected theory is the most appropriate analytical tool.

Key words: hybrid warfare, Ukrainian crisis, Russia, Ukraine, military approach, physical domains of operations, non-physical domain of operations.

Foreword

A number of factors contributed to the decision to write my master thesis on Russia and particularly its involvement in the Ukrainian crisis. First and foremost, I speak Russian and I was capable to follow the crisis while it was developing. There was a significant discrepancy in the way the Russian and Western media represented the events. This ambiguity has ever since puzzled me and I always wanted to explore in detail what actually happened in Ukraine. Second, I am a Bulgarian and my country lays in an important "geopolitical crossroad", where a number of foreign interest meet. The expansionist Russian actions have strong implications not only for my country's security but also, for Europe's in general.

I hope that my thesis makes a small step towards the attainment of a better understanding of the new Russian military approach. The analysis is organized in a way where information is derived from a variety of different sources. In doing so this work may be used as a foundation for future research not only on the Ukrainian crisis but also on the new Russian warfare.

Herewith, I would like to thank my supervisor Stef Wittendorp for the demonstrated respect, help and support during the conduction of this research. I also would like to thank Mr. Sergei Boeke, for his advice and helpful contributions.

Aleksandar Taskov

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross domestic product
HCNM	High Commissioner on National Minorities
MVnR	Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MZS	Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OUN	Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists
PT	Process Tracing
RT	Russia Today
TASS	Russian News Agency
UN	United Nations
UNIAN	Ukrainian Independent Information Agency of News
US(A)	United States (of America)
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WW2	World War Two

1.Introduction

1.1. Russia's military approach in the 21st century

"[The] collapse of the Soviet Union was the largest geopolitical catastrophe of the [20ᵗʰ] century" Vladimir Putin, 2005 (Putin, 2005)

Since the beginning of the 21ˢᵗ century, the Russian Federation is being increasingly proactive on the international arena (Melkonyan, 2017). Under the presidency of Vladimir Putin, the country's economic and demographic indicators have been gradually improving (Bank, 2015). However, during the last four years, Russia's relations with the West have deteriorated to a point where authors and policy makers have expressed opinions that the world is entering into a second Cold War (Johnston, 2014), (Monaghan, 2015). One of the key catalysts for these developments was the Russian involvement in the Ukrainian crisis (2013-present), particularly the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the support to the separatist in the eastern regions of the country (Ray, Ukraine crisis, 2016). The crisis served as a showcase of the modern Russian military approach but, there was a lack of a term that described the new way Russia conducted its operations (Bērziņš, 2015, p. 42). This gap was soon filled in the media, by the appellation "hybrid war", a concept developed in the early 2000s in the United States professional military literature (Kendall, 2014), (Boffey, 2016), (Nemeth, 2002). Quickly the term gained popularity.

Governmental officials started using it. In November 2015, the Bulgarian President, Rosen Plevneliev, asserted that Russia plans a hybrid war on the Balkans, aiming to destabilize Europe (Independent, 2015). It also began to appear in official documents. For example, the United Kingdom's 2015 National Security Strategy, examines the new Russian "hybrid tactics" as a security threat (Government, 2015, p. 18). Even intergovernmental organizations acknowledged the term. The European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are developing a "Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats a European Union response" (Commission, 2016). In a recent European Parliament briefing paper which examines the achievements of EU-NATO cooperation, it is noted: "The concept of hybrid threat has gained

traction in relation to Russia's actions in Ukraine" (Pawlak, 2017). It can be seen that in the public sphere hybrid wars are becoming officially accepted.

Yet, in academia there is an ongoing debate regarding the appropriateness and novelty of the hybrid war theory, to describe the new Russian military approach. There are two dominant lines of discussion. The first one examines the uniqueness of hybrid wars as a new form of conflict. Bettina Renz argues that hybrid wars are nothing new because "indirect approaches and unconventional tactics" have been part of the toolkit "of most states for many years" (Renz, 2016, p. 284). She continues by stating that the term, "does not adequately reflect the direction of ongoing Russian military modernisation" and that the effectiveness of the Russian operation in Crimea was a result not of the application of a "new war-winning formula" but of "extremely favorable circumstances" (Renz, 2016, p. 284). Oscar Jonsson and Robert Seely, express a similar opinion. They argue that events in Crimea "reflected a failure of imagination, rather than novel Russian military capabilities" (Seely, 2015, p. 4). They describe the Russian military approach as "old wine in new bottles" (Seely, 2015, p. 4). Nicu Popescu follows the same line of thought. He argues that hybrid tactics are not only not new but also, they are not exclusively Russian, "they are as old as war itself, and Western states have often used elements of it quite effectively" (Popescu, 2015).

The second dominant line of discussion examines the problems related to the usage of hybrid wars as an analytical tool. There are a number of works which study the Ukrainian crisis from the perspective of hybrid wars (Korybko, 2015), (Stoyanov, 2016) (Vlasiuk, 2015). However, the fact that there is no generally accepted definition and theoretical framework of hybrid warfare creates ambiguity. Many authors have used the concept in their studies, but have focused on specific aspects of the crisis. Vitalii Vlasiuk and Outi Korhonen have observed only the legal challenges that the hybrid war in Ukraine has created, Maria Snegovaya has studied only the information warfare as part of the hybrid war, Liisa Past has examined only cyber warfare as part of the hybrid conflict, Maciej Bartkowski has investigated only non-violent civil defense as a means to counter the Russian hybrid warfare. (Vlasiuk, 2015), (Korhonen, 2015), (Snegovaya, 2015), (Geers, 2015, pp. 95-103), (Bartkowski, 2015). Mark Galeotti notes the problem: "the word hybrid is catchy, since it may represent a mix of anything" (Galeotti, 2016). Many scholars have used the term hybrid warfare to present their research on the Ukrainian crisis, but the literature is fragmented. As consequence, the theory of hybrid wars has been widely criticized. In relation to the Ukrainian crisis, authors have suggested other conceptualizations of the conflict. Robert

Heinsch, examines the conflict as a proxy war, Janis Berzins, argues that it is an instance of a new generation warfare, Timothy Thomas notes that it is indirect and asymmetric conflict, Oscar Jonsson and Robert Seely, on the other hand study it as a full-spectrum conflict (Heinsch, 2015), (Bērziņš, 2015), (Thomas, 2015), (Seely, 2015).

It is evident that there is a discrepancy between the public acceptance of hybrid warfare as the new Russian military approach and the academic debate regarding the appropriateness of such a classification. The lack of a comprehensive work which examines all aspects of the Ukrainian crisis through the lens of the hybrid war theory has increased the need for such an analysis. Is the Ukrainian crisis a hybrid conflict or not? This work will address that knowledge gap. It will present the key academic achievements in the field of hybrid warfare, argue why the theoretical framework developed by Timothy McCulloch is an appropriate analytical tool (Johnson, 2013). Then his theory will be applied to the Ukrainian case, which will show if the Russian actions during the crisis can be conceptualized as an instance of a hybrid war or not. Thus, the findings of the thesis will present valuable knowledge, which will contribute to the debate regarding the appropriateness and novelty of the hybrid war theory as a conceptualizing tool for the assessment of the new Russian military approach manifested during the Ukrainian crisis.

1.2. Research question

To what extent can the Russian actions in the Ukrainian crisis (2013-2015) be conceptualized as an exemplification of a hybrid war according to the theory of McCulloh?

1.3 Sub research questions

1. What are hybrid wars?
2. How can the Ukrainian crisis (2013-2015) be studied through the lens of the hybrid war theory?
3. Which expressions of hybrid warfare in the physical domains of operations can be identified in the Ukrainian crisis?
4. Which expressions of hybrid warfare in the non-physical domain of operations can be identified in the Ukrainian crisis?

1.4. Societal and Academic relevance

The Russo-Georgian War from August 2008, exposed some of the problems in the Russian Army (BBC, 2008). Although psychological and cyber operations were conducted, the conflict resembled a classic invasion, that relied mostly on regular land forces with heavy weaponry, supported by the air forces and the Black Sea fleet (Minasyan, 2015, p. 5), (Geers, 2015, pp. 70-77). As a consequence, Russia had suffered high equipment losses (McDermott, 2009, pp. 70-73). One month after the end of the five-day war, during a session of the collegium of the Russian Defense Ministry, the Minister Anatoliy Serdyukov, declared the beginning of a major military reform (Gazmanov, 2011, p. 35). It was announced that the reform will be divided into three stages, during which the number of military personnel will be decreased, a new command and control structure will be developed, the military education system will be modernized, militaries will be trained for the execution of new tasks and the military equipment will be updated to the most modern weapons systems by at least 30% by 2015 and by 100% by 2020 (Gazmanov, 2011, p. 36). In 2013, the Russian magazine "Voenno-promishlenii Kurier" published an overview of a report titled: "Main trends and developments of forms and methods of using the Armed Forces, current tasks of military science and its improvement" which was prepared by General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the Russian General Staff (Gerasimov, 2013). In the overview, it is noted that "in the 21st century the line between state of war and peace is blurred" and that "rules of war have changed significantly" (Gerasimov, 2013). Gerasimov argues that "asymmetric actions, allow to level the superiority of the enemy in an armed struggle" (Gerasimov, 2013). He continues by stating that the importance of "information confrontation" (information warfare) has risen. Overall, it can be seen that the Russian military is undergoing significant transformations.

During the Ukrainian crisis, Russia managed to annex Crimea in less than a month with no casualties (OHCHR, 2014).[1] Compared to the actions in Georgia, it is evident that something has changed. In May 2016, the President of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik, stated: "We need a credible deterrence policy in the Baltic region to influence the Russian calculus to make the costs of interference too high" (Solovjova, 2016). With the increased concerns in NATO Eastern European countries regarding potential Russian aggression in this region, it is essential for policymakers and

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[1] It needs to be noted that according to news reports, two Ukrainian soldiers were killed, however in the United Nations (UN) report there in no such data (Reuters, 2014).

strategy planners to have a better understanding of the new Russian military approach (Independent, 2015), (Solovjova, 2016). However, Richard Sokolsky notes another problem. He argues that an exaggeration of "the new Russian threat" may "increases the likelihood of reaching incorrect conclusions that could work to Russia's advantage" (Sokolsky, 2017). Therefore, the examination of the appropriateness of the conceptualization of the Russian actions in Ukrainian as hybrid warfare will serve a clear societal purpose. Because once a unified understanding is obtained, then suitable defense measures can be developed.

In crisis management literature, an extensively examined notion is the "resilient society" concept. Edwin Bakker and Beatrice de Graaf present a broad definition of resilience: "the capacity of materials, persons or biotopes to resist sudden changes or stress, as well as the capacity to recover and return to the situation as before" (Graaf, 2014, p. 6). Rudolph Giuliani, a former mayor of New York City, argues that "a resilient society depends on active, engaged citizens" (Giuliani, 2008). In that respect, academia (especially in the field of security studies) should have an important role for the overall security of a state. Because the more a specific phenomenon is studied, the better control a society would have over it.

As is was presented in section 1.1. there is an ongoing academic debate regarding the representation of the new Russian military approach, revealed during the Ukrainian crisis, as hybrid warfare. On one side, there are scholars who argue that this is the most appropriate way to describe the new Russian military approach in the 21st century and on the other side, there are researchers who claim that the hybrid war theory is not suitable. This lack of cohesion in academia creates ambiguity. The fact that there is no exhaustive study that applies the hybrid war theory to the Ukrainian crisis, increases the academic relevance of this work. This research will shed light on the debate. It will apply the theory of hybrid warfare to the Ukrainian case, thus demonstrating if the Russian actions during the crisis can be described as hybrid warfare or not. As consequence, this work will make one step towards the establishment of a common framework for the analysis of the 21st century Russian military approach. Once this is achieved, the overall resilience of the societies that feel threatened by Russia will be improved.

1.5. Initial remarks on hybrid warfare

Before structure of the thesis is presented it is important that the reader is acquainted with the differences between conventional wars and hybrid wars. What follows is a short description of the academic developments on this topic.

1.5.1. Body of knowledge

The new hybrid form of conflict differs from conventional wars in a number of aspects. If in the past wars were an official and opened confrontation between states that use their national armies for the fulfillment of specific goals, today there are certain constraints such as nuclear parity, military alliances, and international law, which deter countries from declaring war as the costs (including: economic, human, political, social, developmental and, strategical) of such a decision would exceed the benefits (economic, strategic and, geostrategic) (Korybko, 2015, p. 9). Instead, military and strategic planners are developing new unconventional and indirect strategies that overcome the aforementioned "barriers" (Korybko, 2015, p. 9). Hybrid wars resemble this new approach in military planning.

As it was noted in section 1.1., hybrid warfare emerged as a term in the early 2000s in the United States professional military literature (Nemeth, 2002). However, it was theorized in 2007 by Frank Hoffman in his work "Conflict in the 21st century: The rise of hybrid wars" (Hoffman, 2007). By examining the 2006 Israel–Hezbollah War, he argues that "Hybrid Wars incorporate a range of different models of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formation, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder" (Hoffman, 2007, p. 14). His insights are criticized by Timothy McCulloch for being too narrow and connected only to the Israel–Hezbollah case (Johnson, 2013, pp. 9-10). McCulloch's understandings will be presented more extensively in chapter two.

Since the publication of Hoffman's work, one of the two dominant lines of research connected to this form of warfare was the inability of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to respond to such conflicts. The main argument is that the capabilities of the alliance are predominantly conventional (military personnel, conventional weapons), whereas the new

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potential adversaries will use unconventional tactics and irregular means to avoid direct confrontation and target the alliance's weaknesses (Blum, 2015), (Bachmann, 2015), (Michael Aaronson, 2011), (Gunneriusson, 2012). Take for instance the 2007 cyber-attacks on Estonia. The country, a member state of NATO, suffered from a series of cyber-attacks, that blocked both public and private websites (Traynor, 2007). Although this was an act of aggression, NATO was incapable of initiating actions according to Article 5 (NATO, 2016) (the key section of the Washington Treaty that presents the principle for Collective defense) since there was no evidence of the perpetrators of the attack. This clearly illustrates that there are specific situations where an adversary may initiate offensive actions and cover the traces leading to him/her.

However, after the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, the alliance acknowledged the risks connected to hybrid warfare (NATO, 2014). In 2014, after the September Wales Summit, the Heads of State signed a declaration in which it was stated: "We will ensure that NATO is able to effectively address the specific challenges posed by hybrid warfare threats" (NATO, 2014). In December 2015 NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs approved a new strategy on hybrid warfare threats (NATO, 2015). Also, NATO and the EU are working together on a "Joint Framework on countering hybrid threats a European Union response" (Commission, 2016). Yet, there is no officially accepted classification of hybrid warfare but the threats that this form of conflict poses are defined as "a wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures employed in a highly integrated design." (NATO, Wales Summit Declaration, 2014).

The second dominant line of research in hybrid warfare literature is the classification of the Ukrainian crisis as an example of a hybrid war. [2] As it was noted in section 1.1., the literature is fragmented and there is a variety of different focuses (legal challenges, information warfare, cyber warfare, civil defense etc.) (Vlasiuk, 2015), (Korhonen, 2015), (Snegovaya, 2015), (Geers, 2015, pp. 95-103), (Bartkowski, 2015). A different approach can be observed in the work of the Russian scholar Andrew Korybko (Korybko, 2015). The author examines the role of "Color Revolutions", which in other words is a civil unrest against the government of a specific country, and the first step in an offensive hybrid war strategy. By exploring contemporary protest movements in Europe (Ukraine, Hungary, Serbia, Macedonia, Greece, Turkey), Asia (Armenia, Iran, Turkmenistan,

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[2] It has to be noted that not all works focus only on Ukraine as a case study. See (Lasconjarias, 2015), (Hoffman, 2007), (Moreland, 2016)

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Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan), and the Middle East (the Arab spring in general and focusing on Syria), he argues that specific patterns can be found and that such crises are deliberately triggered (Korybko, 2015, pp. 11-115). Korybko notes that these protest movements, including the one in Ukraine, serve as a foreign policy instrument of the United States (US) (Korybko, 2015, pp. 25-32). Although the pro-Russian perspective of Korybko's works, his insights would be useful for the thesis because the author explains how citizens can be influenced by propaganda and organized through social media in order to carry out a hybrid attack. His work also shows the Russians understanding of hybrid warfare (Kasapoglu, 2015, p. 2).

From this section, it can be seen that hybrid war literature is not cohesive. Although this form of conflict can easily be distinguished from conventional wars, and NATO has recognized it, there is no generally accepted theoretical framework.

1.6. Structure of this thesis

The thesis consists of six chapters. The following part will present key aspects in the academic understandings of the evolution of warfare and then will outline the theoretical framework through which the Ukrainian crisis will be studied. This chapter will give an answer to the first sub research question "What are hybrid wars?". The third chapter will introduce the research design of the thesis. In it the methods and units of analysis will be presented, following an operationalization of the theory of hybrid warfare in clear indicators, answering the question "How can the Ukrainian crisis (2013-2015) be studied through the lens of the hybrid war theory?". The qualitative exploratory case study of the Ukrainian crisis will be divided into two chapters. The fourth chapter will focus on elements of hybrid warfare in the physical domains while in the fifth, the non-physical (cognitive) domain will be discussed. Thus, the questions "Which expressions of hybrid warfare in the physical domains of operations can be identified in the Ukrainian crisis?" and "Which expressions of hybrid warfare in the non-physical domain of operations can be identified in the Ukrainian crisis?" will be answered in these chapters. The final sixth chapter will present the conclusions of the thesis. In it the central research question "To what extent can the Russian actions in the Ukrainian crisis (2013-2015) be conceptualized as an

exemplification of a hybrid war?" will be answered. Also, the limitations of the study will be highlighted and suggestions for future research will be presented.

2. Theoretical framework

"Everything is very simple in war, but the simplest thing is difficult"

Carl von Clausewitz, 1873 (Clausewitz, 1873, p. 40)

In this chapter, the theoretical framework on which the study will be built will be presented and also an answer to the first sub research question "What are hybrid wars?" will be suggested.

2.1. Evolution of the theories of warfare - hybrid conflict origins

The theory of hybrid wars represented a step in the evolution of warfare. However, it is not especially new, as it is built upon other warfare theories (Johnson, 2013, p. 6). The rationale behind the term hybrid[3] warfare is the combination of different forms of conflict. First Frank Hoffman, then Timothy McCulloh and Richard Johnson base their works on previous studies which illustrate the changing nature of war (Johnson, 2013, p. 3), (Hoffman, 2007, p. 30). To a significant degree, the authors to whom they refer overlap. Therefore, it is important that the reader is acquainted with them. According to McCulloh, the origins of hybrid warfare can be found in two well-acknowledged theories - fourth generation warfare and compound wars.

2.1.1. Fourth Generation Warfare

The generation theory of modern warfare, proposed by Thomas Hammes in his book "The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century", examines the transformations in military technology and its effects on the tactical, strategic and social levels (Hammes, 2004). The starting point of Hammes's research is 1648 (a key year in international relations – the end of the Thirty Years' war and the establishment of Westphalian sovereignty (Kissinger, 1994, pp. 65-66)). He argues that during the first three generations of modern warfare (the period between the 17th and the late 20th centuries), war was an activity strongly linked to state actors, and the differences between these generations came from to the application of new military technologies and tactics (Hammes, 2004, p. 7). However, since the mid to late 20th century Hammes reasons, that a fourth generation of warfare has emerged (Hammes, 2004, p. 7). The key difference between this

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[3] The word hybrid can be defined as a "a thing made by combining two [or more] different elements" (Oxford, 2017).

generation and the other three is the rise of non-state actors that call into question the legitimacy of the state (Hammes, 2004, p. 7). The fourth generation is characterized by the use of conventional and unconventional means, including guerrilla warfare, insurgency, influencing tactics which are applied in order to neutralize the conventional military capabilities of an enemy (Hammes, 2004, p. 7). From this theory, McCulloh adopts the idea that in modern military conflicts, by the combination of conventional and unconventional means, non-state actors are capable to effectively fight against a regular military forces (Johnson, 2013, pp. 7-8).

2.1.2. Compound Wars

In his book "Compound Warfare: That Fatal Knot" Thomas Huber expresses similar observations as Hammes (Huber, 2002). The author describes this form of conflict as the use of both regular and irregular forces that are coordinated under the same command (Huber, 2002, p. 8). The effectiveness of this form of conflict emanates from the exploitation of the advantages of both types of forces which reinforce each other (Huber, 2002, p. 8). The regular forces benefit from the speed, intelligence, and counterintelligence of the irregular militaries, while they on the other hand benefit from the operational pressure that the conventional forces put on the adversary and also their military logistics and strategic intelligence assets (Huber, 2002, p. 8). From the theory of compound wars, McCulloh accepts the complementary effect of the combination of both conventional and unconventional forces which operate under a unified command (Johnson, 2013).

2.1.3. Hybrid Wars

The monograph "Hybrid Warfare" by Major Timothy McCulloch and Major Richard Johnson, from the US Armed Forces, resembles an exhaustive research in the field of hybrid wars. The work is divided into two sections. The first part "The Inadequacy of Definition and the Utility of a Theory of Hybrid Conflict: Is the 'Hybrid Threat' New?", written by McCulloch, presents a complete theoretical framework through which this form of conflict can be studied. The second section "Operational Approaches to Hybrid Warfare" by Richard Johnson suggests measures on the operational and strategic level on how the US Army can respond to this form of conflict.

In the first part, after presenting the predating theoretical achievements which express the transformative nature of modern conflicts (see section 2.1.1. and 2.1.2.), McCulloch continues his analysis by focusing on the "newest" concept – hybrid warfare. He describes Frank Hoffman's "Conflict in the 21st century: The rise of hybrid wars" as a "benchmark" that has influenced the majority of works in hybrid warfare (Hoffman, 2013, p. 9). McCulloch argues that Hoffman's

postulates build upon the above-mentioned theories[4] by suggesting that not only the new wars will be waged by state and non-state, by the use of both conventional and nonconventional means, but also that social disruptive actions (including terrorism and criminal disorder) will be applied in order to generate a synergetic effect (Hoffman, 2013, p. 9).

The author also explores other works that discuss hybrid warfare. He refers to Colonel Jeffrey Cowan, who argues that globalization and the proliferation of information and technology create a situation where a non-state actor can gain access to knowledge and means, that were previously only under the control of state actors (Johnson, 2013, p. 11). Moreover, McCulloch discusses Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Lasica's insights on hybrid warfare, who considers that actors that wage hybrid wars will deliberately exploit the cognitive and moral domains, by taking advantage of the enemy's mistakes (Johnson, 2013, p. 12). Lasica deliberates that hybrid warfare is both strategy and tactic and that the hybrid actor can be much faster than a conventional one (Johnson, 2013). Israeli military specialists advance this idea and suggest that the hybrid actor will have a network organizational structure, which compared to hierarchies is much more flexible and prompt in terms of actions on the battlefield (Johnson, 2013, p. 10). Not only McCulloch's understandings of hybrid warfare are influenced by the described above literature, but also, he borrows ideas from the discussed authors and specialist. However, his approach is different.

2.2. McCulloh's theory

Taking into account the works described in the previous section, McCulloch argues that hybrid warfare literature is predominantly descriptive and fails to grasp the underlying logic of a hybrid actor. He also criticizes Frank Hoffman's widely accepted work, for being connected only to the Israel–Hezbollah case (Johnson, 2013, pp. 9-14). He states that Hoffman's paper "does not capture a concise form, function, and logic to explain a hybrid organization that conducts hybrid warfare" (Johnson, 2013, p. 9). The author argues that a theory of hybrid warfare should be composed of principles that will facilitate "a broad understanding or rationale for hybrid organizations' existence", thus enabling prediction (Johnson, 2013, p. 9).

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[4] In his work, Hoffman also uses the concept of "Unrestricted Warfare" or "war beyond limits" developed by two Colonels from the Chinese People's Liberation Army, which is not mentioned by McCulloh; see in (Hoffman, 2007, pp. 22-25)

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McCulloch asserts that countries with developed armies are trained for offensive, defensive and stabilizing operations yet, their forces are "not prepared for a specific employment context, but rather optimizes to best meet a broad array of scenarios for employment[5]" (Johnson, 2013, p. 15). Meaning that the means and strategies of conventional armed forces are developed to serve specific pre-planned military scenarios. However, these plans often fail to acknowledge the unique characteristics of the specific conflict situation. The author reasons that such "optimization", creates situations where the effectiveness of a military operation can be altered by unforeseen developments, resulting from the unique context. On the other hand, McCulloch affirms that actors with lower capacities will increase their effectiveness against a stronger, conventional force by utilizing unconventional means and by taking full advantage of the unique operational environment. (Johnson, 2013, p. 15). Thus, a hybrid organization can effectively and efficiently fight a stronger conventional opponent. McCulloch defines hybrid wars as an: "optimized form of warfare that allows a combatant to attempt to utilize all available resources—both conventional and unconventional—in a unique cultural context to produce specific effects against a conventional opponent" (Johnson, 2013, p. 16). By conducting a historical analysis of the Israel-Hezbollah War (2006) and the Second World War (1941-1945), particularly the Eastern Front and the Soviet Partisan Network, he validates his theory and proves that both Hezbollah and the Soviet Partisan can be examined as hybrid entities that have successfully fought stronger adversaries (Johnson, 2013, pp. 19-39).

His theory comprises seven principles which enable a broader understanding of this form of conflict. He describes them as follows:

The first principle of hybrid war […] is that a hybrid force's composition, capabilities, and effects are unique to the force's own specific context. This context relates to the temporal, geographic, socio-cultural, and historical setting in which the given conflict takes place.

The second principle is that there exists a specific ideology within the hybrid force that creates an internal narrative to the organization. This ideology is inherently linked to the strategic context and is grounded within the socio-cultural, religious identity of the

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[5] To employ (US military term) - integrating ends, ways, and means (Gortney, 2010, p. 175)

hybrid force. The resulting narrative serves to redefine the extant rules within the strategic context.

The third principle is that a hybrid force perceives an existential threat by a potential adversary. This perceived threat drives the hybrid force to abandon conventional military wisdom to achieve long-term survival.

The fourth principle is that a capability overmatch between the hybrid force and a potential adversary exists. The hybrid force contains less conventional military capability in comparison to its adversary and therefore must seek a way to offset this apparent advantage in military capability.

The fifth principle is that a hybrid force contains both conventional and unconventional elements. These elements often comprise "accepted" military technology and nonmilitary, guerrilla type technology. The elements may also include the use of terrorist or other criminal tactics. These combined capabilities create an asymmetric advantage for the hybrid force.

The sixth principle proposes that hybrid organizations rely on inherently defensive type operations. The hybrid force seeks to defend its existence and employs an overall strategy of defensive operations. These operations will often include offensive components, but the overarching intent is still one of defense.

The seventh principle is that hybrid organizations use attritional tactics in the employment of the hybrid force. These tactics manifest in both the physical and the cognitive domains in order to continually whittle away the adversary's forces and his will to use them (Johnson, 2013, pp. 16-17).

McCulloch argues that these principles can serve as a "predictive template that can be used to baseline the analysis of a hybrid threat", and defines his hybrid warfare theory as a "form of warfare in which one of the combatants bases its optimized force structure on the combination of all available resources—both conventional and unconventional—in a unique cultural context to produce specific, synergistic effects against a conventionally-based opponent" (Johnson, 2013, p. 37), (Johnson, 2013, p. 17).

It can be seen that McCulloch's theoretical framework is exhaustive. It moves beyond the predominantly descriptive hybrid warfare literature. He not only acknowledges the importance of

the cognitive domain, but also enables the exploration of the rationale of the hybrid actor. Compared to other works, McCulloch's framework is more specific and systematic. The seven principles of hybrid warfare will be easily transformed into observable indicators, which will facilitate the exploration of the new Russian military approach, exposed during the crisis in Ukraine. Therefore, McCulloch's theory is an appropriate guideline for this particular study.

2.2.1. Justification of the choice

Although Frank Hoffman's pioneering theoretical framework has been applied in a number of studies on hybrid warfare and it is widely acknowledged, this research will use the less popular framework developed by Timothy McCulloh. This decision can be justified by three main reasons.

Firstly, Hoffman does not explicitly suggest that an actor that wages a hybrid war will exploit the cognitive domain. He argues that "terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder" will be used as a "shock and awe" tools that will distort the will to fight of the conventional opponent, however he does not argue that the hybrid actor can exploit the cognitive domain, through other means (Hoffman, 2007, pp. 29-30). On the other hand, McCulloh has explored this matter in his seventh principle (Johnson, 2013, p. 17).

Secondly, Hoffman's framework does not examine the underlying logic of a hybrid actor (why the hybrid actor has emerged, why he fights, what are their objectives), in other words as McCulloh states, the "rationale for hybrid organizations' existence", which he addresses in the first tree principles (Johnson, 2013, p. 9).

Thirdly, and maybe most importantly Hoffman's work is largely descriptive and does not provide concrete guidance for the application of the theory. In contrast, McCulloh's framework is future orientated and it is intentionally developed to serve as an analytical tool, that enables an in-depth understanding of the characteristics of the hybrid adversary (Johnson, 2013, p. 35).

Therefore, for the exploration of the Ukrainian crisis, McCulloh's framework will be used. The suggested seven principles will allow an exhaustive investigation of the logical basis of the hybrid actor also, they will facilitate the analysis, by serving as a template.

2.3. Theoretical framework – conclusions

From the previous sections, it can be concluded that hybrid wars are not only a form of conflict, but also a strategy and a tactic. Such conflicts can be initiated by both state and non-state actors. Their effectiveness and efficiency derive from the exploitation of the unique context of the conflict and the optimization of the hybrid entity's force structure by the utilization of both conventional and unconventional resources, that are simultaneously applied in both the physical and cognitive domains, thus producing a synergistic effect. This allows the hybrid entity to overcome a more powerful (in terms of resources and equipment) conventional actor.

The theoretical framework developed by Timothy McCulloh is an appropriate tool for the exploration of the Ukrainian crisis, which will enable to investigate if the new Russian military approach can be conceptualized as an instance of a hybrid war.

3. Research Design

"It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts"
Arthur Conan Doyle, 1892 (Doyle, 1892, p. 7)

In this chapter, the research design of the thesis will be presented, along with the methodology that is going to be used and an operationalization of McCulloh's hybrid warfare theory. In doing so, the second sub-research question: "How can the Ukrainian crisis (2013-2015) be studied through the lens of the hybrid war theory?" will be answered.

3.1. Research Design

The investigation of the central research question (see section 1.2.) needs to be carefully organized in order to allow an in-depth exploration of the new Russian military approach, expressed in the Ukrainian crisis.

In his book "Case study research: Design and methods", Robert Yin argues that when a researcher is trying to understand a complex real life social phenomenon, a suitable strategy would be the development of a case study (Yin, 2003, pp. 1-2). He defines it as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used" (Yin, 2003, p. 13).

The Ukrainian crisis is a present-day problem, which exposes the multiplex nature of the modern Russian military approach. Therefore, an appropriate way to study it would be the conduction of a case study.

Yin notes that case studies can be divided into three groups: explanatory, exploratory and descriptive, depending on the objective of the research (Yin, 2003, p. 1). Since the primary focus of this thesis is to investigate if the new Russian military approach, revealed during the Ukrainian crisis, can be conceptualized as an example of a hybrid war, it can be reasoned that the case study that is going to be developed should be exploratory. However, the three categories of case studies are not mutually exclusive, and the thesis will also have an explanatory focus.

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As already presented in chapter two, hybrid warfare resembles a multi-aspect form of conflict that incorporates a number of different elements including different actors (state and non-state), means (conventional unconventional), tactics (direct and indirect) that are applied in both the physical and cognitive domains. In order to facilitate the analysis, the aspects of hybrid warfare need to be operationalized. This will be achieved by the suggestion of two units of analysis (in section 3.3.2. justification of this choice is presented). The first will focus on expressions of hybrid warfare in the physical domains of operations and the second, on expressions of hybrid warfare in the non-physical domain of operations. Also, the Ukrainian conflict is an ongoing crisis (since 2013), therefore a time boundary needs to be set. The case study will cover the period from November 2013 to February 2015 because this was the active phase of the conflict.[6] The design of the case study is presented in figure one.

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[6] On the 12th of February, a truce was signed between representatives from Ukraine, Russia, OSCE, Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk People's Republic (OSCE, 2015). Although almost every day since the signing of the ceasefire there are reports, marking violations from both sides, February 2015 is an appropriate time boundary because since then, there have not been any heavy fights in Donbass (OSCE, 2017). It has to be noted that in some occasions, the analysis may go beyond the time boundary, yet the dominant focus will be on the period November 2013 to February 2015.

Figure 1: Single-case Design

Embedded

(multiple units of analysis)

3.2. Methodology

In order to increase the validity of the of the study, two analytical approaches will be used. The main method of analysis - process tracing (PT) will be supplemented by the conduction of discourse analysis.

3.2.1. Process Tracing

This research method is defined by Alexander George and Andrew Bennett as:

the use of histories, archival documents, interview transcripts, and other sources to see whether the causal process a theory hypothesizes or implies in a case is in fact evident in the sequence and values of the intervening variables in that case (Bennett, 2012, p. 8).

Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun argue that "in qualitative in-depth single case studies using PT enables the researcher to make strong within-case inferences" (Brun, 2011, p. 4). They continue by noting that process tracing incorporates three distinct variants of analysis which are theory-testing, theory-building, and explaining outcomes (Brun, 2011, p. 6). In relation to the first one (theory-testing), the authors reason that it "deduces a theory from the existing literature and then tests whether there is evidence that a hypothesized causal mechanism is actually present in a given case" (Brun, 2011, p. 6). They suggest a three-step model which encompasses the analysis (it will be extensively examined in section 3.3.).

Since the key goal of the thesis is to explore if the hybrid warfare theory is a suitable analytical tool for the conceptualization of the new Russian military approach (exposed during the Ukrainian crisis), process tracing will serve as an appropriate technique for the analysis of the two units suggested in section 3.2.

3.2.2. Discourse Analysis

Nelson Phillips and Cynthia Hardy define discourse as: "an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception, that brings an object into being" (Hardy, 2002, p. 4). They continue by noting that discourse analysis explores the relation between discourse and reality and how they affect each other (Hardy, 2002, p. 4). By referring to Jacques Derrida, Lene Hansen argues that "meaning is established not by the essence of a thing itself but through a series of juxtapositions, where one element is valued over its opposite" (Derrida, 2006, p. 19). These ideas also correspond to Rein and Schön's policy issue's framing approach, where the focus

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is on the language used in policy discourse, which involves specific metaphors, stories, and categories that are used to frame a specific phenomenon (Rein, 2013, p. 229).

This method will be used as a tool for the exploration of expressions of hybrid warfare in the non-physical domain of operations. Because some of the aspects of Russia's information warfare in Ukraine are connected to the unique setting of the conflict. Discourse analysis will allow these nuanced characteristics to be studied.

3.3. Theory-testing Process Tracing

In section 3.2.1., it was noted that three different variants of process tracing analysis exist. The first one – theory testing PT, fits the objective of this particular work. Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun argue that for its execution a researcher needs to follow three distinct steps (Brun, 2011, p. 10).

3.3.1. Conceptualization of a causal mechanism

At the core of theory-testing PT is the exploration of an assumed causal mechanism[7], or how X causes Y (Brun, 2011, p. 7). In other words, the scholar searches for actual evidence that will support the predictions of a theory within a specific case (Brun, 2011, pp. 5-7). Beach and Brun state that often, within the theory that is being examined, X and Y are present, yet the causal mechanism between them is not explicitly conceptualized (Brun, 2011, pp. 7-8). Therefore, the first step in theory-testing PT is to is to "conceptualize a causal mechanism between X and Y based upon existing theorization" (Brun, 2011, p. 9).

In Timothy McCulloh's hybrid war theory, X can be identified as the actor (that "bases its optimized force structure on the combination of all available resources—both conventional and unconventional—in a unique cultural context to produce specific, synergistic effects against a conventionally-based opponent" (Johnson, 2013, p. 17)) and Y is the effect – hybrid warfare. Yet, his theory does not clearly express causality. This can be surmounted by a reformulation of McCulloh's definition of the hybrid war theory (see original definition in section 2.2.). For example, as: If during a conflict one of the combatants – X bases its optimized force structure on the combination of all available resources - both conventional and unconventional - in a unique

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[7] One of the definitions of a causal mechanism is "a complex system, which produces an outcome by the interaction of a number of parts" (Brun, 2011, p. 4)

cultural context to produce specific, synergistic effects against a conventionally-based opponent, then this entity is waging a hybrid war - Y. When this causal mechanism is applied to the particular focus of this case study, then X becomes the Russian Federation, Y - hybrid warfare, and the characteristics of this form of conflict described by Timothy McCulloh, resemble the relation between X and Y. To clarify, if during the Ukrainian crisis, Russia's actions meet the characterization of hybrid warfare (as presented by Timothy McCulloh) then their new military approach can be conceptualized as an exemplification of a hybrid war.

3.3.2. Operationalization

According to Beach and Brun, the second step in theory-testing PT is to transform the theoretical expectations into observable indicators of the causal mechanism (Brun, 2011, pp. 8-10).

The theoretical framework, which was extensively examined in chapter two, offers a number of conditions that need to be met in order to classify a conflict as a hybrid one. Particularly the seven principles of hybrid wars and the definitions of both this form of conflict and the theory describing it, which are suggested by Timothy McCulloh, will be especially useful.

However, if all of the characteristics of hybrid warfare are simultaneously used for the research of the Russian military approach in Ukraine, the analysis will become too broad and confusing. Therefore, in order to avoid an "information overload", two units of analysis were suggested. The features of hybrid warfare will be divided into two groups in consonance with the units. It has to be noted that two of McCulloh's seven principles (the first and seventh) of hybrid warfare affect both the physical and non-physical domains, thereof they will be used twice.

The first unit is expressions of hybrid warfare in the physical domains of operations. Which include actions taking place on land, also in air, sea, and space (Thibault, 2005). In other words, where all matter interacts (Veritas, 2005). Five of the principles fall into this group.

According to the first principle developed by McCulloh, an actor that is initiating a hybrid war will build one's forces composition and capabilities in relation to the unique context of the conflict. Hence, the hybrid actor takes full advantage of the conflict situation. The author describes the context as the "temporal, geographic, socio-cultural, and historical setting" (Johnson, 2013, p. 16). The exploitation of the context characteristics, deriving from the unique temporal, geographic, socio-cultural, and historical setting, that affect the physical domains will be used as indicators for the analysis.

The fourth principle entails that the conventional opponent has more power in terms of military capabilities, therefore the hybrid actor seeks ways to offset this disadvantage. A relevant indicator for this principle can be the use of light weapons[8] by the hybrid actor, for the neutralization of heavy weaponry systems[9] of the conventional opponent.

The fifth principle is also connected to the physical domains. McCulloh states that the hybrid actor holds both conventional and unconventional elements which create an asymmetrical advantage. In this instance, appropriate indicators will be the use of conventional military technology along with unconventional tactics and means, including irregular militaries, terrorism, sabotage and criminal disorder.

McCulloh's sixth principle states that the hybrid actor will rely mostly on a defensive strategy and operations. The author however, does not exclude offensive action. The indicator for this principle is self-evident – predominantly defensive strategy and actions.

The last principle developed by McCulloh points that an actor that is waging a hybrid war will use attritional tactics in both the physical and cognitive domains in order to not only undermine the morale of the conventional forces, but also to diminish their capabilities. A stalemate situation of the conflict is a suitable indicator for this principle.

The second unit of analysis within the Ukraine case study will explore expressions of hybrid warfare in the non-physical (cognitive[10]) domain of operations. Four of McCulloh's principles can be related to this group.

According to the first principle, the effectiveness of a hybrid actor is connected to the exploitation of the unique context of the conflict (the characteristics of which are described above). The exploitation of the context characteristics (in the non-physical domain) will be used as indicators for the analysis.

The second principle entails that a hybrid actor will develop a specific ideology which supports and justify one's actions. It is linked to the unique context of the conflict (including the

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[8] According to the UN classification light weapons are: "weapons designed for use by two or three persons serving as a crew, although some may be carried and used by a single person. They include, inter alia, heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems, portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars of a calibre of less than 100 millimetres" (UN, 2008, p. 19)

[9] According to the UN classification major conventional arms include: battle tanks, armored combat vehicles, large-calibre artillery systems, combat aircraft and unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAV), attack helicopters, warships, missiles and missile launchers (UN, 2017)

[10] The cognitive domain can be defined as: "the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses" (Dictionaries, 2017)

socio-cultural setting and the religious identity of the hybrid force). The presence of a specific set of beliefs, developed by the hybrid actor will serve as an indicator for this principle.

McCulloh's third principle suggests that the hybrid actor has abandoned "conventional military wisdom" as a result of a perceived "existential threat by a potential adversary" and the will to ensure their long-term survival. The indicator for this principle will be the presence of an existential threat for the hybrid actor.

The seventh principle states that the hybrid actor will use both the physical and cognitive domains in order to prolong the conflict, weaken the conventional forces' morale and, undermine their capabilities. Relevant indicators for this principle would be the use of propaganda and disinformation (by the hybrid actor), as tools that trigger an emotional response of the targeted audiences.

McCulloh notes that the effectiveness of a hybrid war depends on the simultaneous application of all of the principles described above, which produces a synergistic effect.

3.3.3. Collection of evidence

The third step in theory-testing PT is to collect evidence that will either support or disprove the proposed causal mechanism (Brun, 2011, p. 10).

Two main sources for collecting information will be used. First, primary sources: official governmental documents (both Ukrainian and Russian), official reports by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine and the UN's Reports on Human Rights Situation in Ukraine. Also, a variety of secondary sources of information will be used including: news media reports (during the crisis both sides used disinformation tactics therefore, news reports will be retrieved from a number of news agencies: "The Ukrainian News Agency", "Russian News Agency TASS", "Reuters", "Associated Press", as well as online newspapers in Russian, Ukrainian, English, and Bulgarian), academic works (there is a significant number of researches of the Ukrainian crisis that will facilitate the analysis), reports from non-governmental organizations (NGO's), videos and photographs may also be used. The diversity of data sources will result in an in-depth investigation of the two units of analysis.

3.4. Limitations

3.4.1. External validity

Zaidah Zainal, argues that the key disadvantage of using a single-case design, is "its inability to provide a generalising conclusion, in particular when the events are rare" (Zainal, 2007, p. 2). However, she notes that this disadvantage can be surmounted by the combination of different methods of analysis (Zainal, 2007, p. 2). Therefore, the composition of theory-testing process tracing, along with discourse analysis will increase the external validity of the work. Also, the research is will explore only the Ukrainian crisis, and universal conclusions regarding the new Russian military approach will not be suggested. Yet, this narrow focus will allow the work to engage in the debate regarding the conceptualization of the Russian actions during the Ukraine crisis. Therefore, it can be argued that although only one case will be explored, the thesis will have a moderately high external validity.

3.4.2. Internal validity

The combination of two methods of analysis will result in an exhaustive investigation of the suggested case. However, the methods have specific disadvantages that need to be noted.

Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun argue that theory-testing PT "cannot be used to make cross-case inferences beyond the single case" (Brun, 2011, p. 14). However, this disadvantage of the method would not affect the thesis, because as presented in the previous section, the focus is limited only to the Russian actions during the Ukrainian crisis.

One of the key critiques of discourse analysis is that it "does not provide definite answers", it is "not a hard science" and "meaning is never fixed […] everything is always open to interpretation and negotiation" (Mogashoa, 2014, pp. 111-112). These weaknesses of the method will be mitigated through its use only as a supplement analytical tool. Also, extensive justifications, regarding the findings obtained by it will be presented.

However, another potential pitfall, which may affect the whole study, has to be noted. It is connected to the reliability of the data sources. One of the key aspects of the Ukrainian crisis are

the information-psychological operations. In Russia, a significant part of the media is either state-owned or it is in the possession of "Kremlin-friendly businessmen" (Seely, 2015, p. 12). Also, the UN Human Rights Committee has expressed strong concerns regarding the freedom of expression in the Russian Federation (Committee, 2009). Therefore, the authenticity of Russia media materials is questionable. This disadvantage will be surmounted by the provision of verification (when possible) from other sources.

Despite the described above, the internal validity of the work will be moderately high because first, the suggested two research methods reinforce each other second, data will be derived from a number of sources and third, the potential shortcomings are acknowledged.

3.5. Research Design – conclusions

In this chapter, a suggestion of how the Ukrainian crisis (2013-2015) can be studied through the lens of the hybrid war theory was presented. The investigation will be organized as an exploratory case study with two units of analysis. Within the case study, two research methods will be used - theory testing PT and discourse analysis. The first two steps in theory testing PT, were carried out. As a result, Timothy McCulloh's hybrid war theory was reformulated in order to express causality and the seven principles of hybrid warfare were transformed into observable indicators which will direct the research. Evidence will be collected through analysis of both the discourse and a variety of documents. This would allow an in-depth investigation of the crisis. Although this research design has specific limitations, the overall validity of the work will be moderately high.

4. Expressions of hybrid warfare in the physical domains of operations during the Ukrainian crisis

"If I want to, I can take Kiev in two weeks"

Vladimir Putin, 2014 (Squires, 2014)

This chapter will address the first unit of analysis of the case study, which was presented in chapter three. The theoretical framework of hybrid warfare, developed by Timothy McCulloch, will be applied to the Ukrainian case. The analysis will be focused on the Russian actions in the physical domains of operations. In doing so, the third sub research question "Which expressions of hybrid warfare in the physical domains of operations can be identified in the Ukrainian crisis?" will be answered. Also, the findings from this chapter will make a step towards the explanation of the central research question. However, before that, the reader needs to be acquainted with the key developments during the Ukrainian crisis, as they are important for the whole case study.

4.1. Ukrainian crisis - overview

4.1.1. Inception

The Ukraine crisis (2013-present) begun as a civilian demonstration against the pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych (BBC, 2015). In November 2013, the President decided to cancel the signing of an Association Agreement with the European Union, and turned the country towards a closer relationship with the Russian Federation (BBC, 2013). Soon after the announcement of his decision, in the capital Kiev, thousands of Ukrainians took to the streets in a peaceful protest. The government responded by sending riot police in order to disperse the protesters. During the following months, violence in Kiev started escalating. In the front lines of the demonstrations, a group called Right Sector "a motley confederation of football hooligans and far-right nationalists", begun intense fights with the police forces (Economist, 2014). On the 20th of February 2014, more than fifty people were killed, in Kiev's Maidan square (Gatehouse, 2015). The next day, under the mediation of the European Union and Russia, President Yanukovych and representatives from the opposition met and signed an "Agreement on the Settlement of Crisis in Ukraine" (Guardian, 2014). However, the agreement did not last because, on the 22nd of February

2014, the Rada (Ukraine's Parliament) voted to dismiss President Viktor Yanukovych from his powers (Sindelar, 2014).[11] A new provisional government took the power and Oleksandr Turchynov, was appointed as an interim president (Kyivpost, 2014), (BBC, 2014). The next day (the 23rd of February 2014), the Parliament canceled the law "On State Language Policy" which gave an official status of the Russian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Tatarian and Hungarian languages (MVnR, 2014), (Tchuzakov, 2014). In response, ethnic Russians which comprise the biggest minority group in Ukraine, 17.3% of the total population (CIA, 2017) started opposing the new government in Kiev. From that point, the crisis started to transform from a political upheaval against corruption, with demands for a new constitution and government, to a low-intensity ethnic conflict. As powerful international actors backed both opposing sides in Ukraine (Russia supported the Russian minority in Ukraine while, the US, the EU, and other the new Ukrainian government) the crisis took the form of a civil war with two main geographical areas of action (Secretary, 2014) (BBC, 2014) (Europe, 2014).

4.1.2. Crimea

The first one is the Crimean Peninsula, which is a historically contested area. Once part of the Russian Empire, then an autonomous republic within the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, in 1954 it was transferred to Ukraine but it remained in the Soviet Union (USSR) (Britannica, 2017). After 1991, the peninsula became a part of the newly independent Ukrainian state (Britannica, 2017). For the Russian Federation Crimea has a high geopolitical importance. During Soviet times in the peninsula was situated a significant part of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union the faith of the fleet was uncertain. In 1997 Russia and Ukraine signed three agreements which governed the status of the former Soviet Black Sea Fleet (Kimball, 2014). Russia was allowed to station no more than 25.000 troops, 132 armored combat vehicles and 24 pieces of artillery at its military facilities in Crimea, until 2017 (Kimball, 2014). In 2010 under the presidency of Viktor Yanukovych, agreements were renewed with an expiry date in 2042 (Kimball, 2014). As part of the deal, Russia offered a 30% discount on the price of natural gas exported to Ukraine (Pan, 2014).

The population of the peninsula is predominantly Russian. According to a census conducted in 2001, 58.3 percent of the people are ethnic Russian (RT, 2014). The same day Oleksandr

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[11] An act which is not specified in Ukraine's constitution (Sindelar, 2014)

Turchynov became Ukraine's new president and the Parliament cancelled the law "On State Language Policy", in the city of Sevastopol (the biggest city on the peninsula), thousands of people went on the streets in order to protest against the new regime in Kiev and to express their willingness to join the Russian Federation (Guardian, 2014). The following days masked and armed men, carrying the latest Russian military equipment occupied key governmental buildings on the peninsula (Shevchenko, 2014). The pro-Russian protests continued and on the 6th of March, the Crimea Parliament voted to join the Russian Federation (Jazeera, 2014). On the 16th of March, a referendum was held and 97 percent of the Crimean people voted for separate from Ukraine and to join Russia (BBC, 2014). Two days later the Russian president signed laws according to which the Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol became part of the Russian Federation (TASS, 2014).

The second geographical area of action is the Donbass[12] region.

4.1.3. Donbass

In the beginning of March 2014 pro-Russian protest also broke out in other South-Eastern regions of Ukraine. Including Odessaka, Zaporizhska, Kharkivska, Mykolaivska, Dnipropetrovska, Khersonska oblasts (regions) (RT, 2014), (Roth, 2014). However, the strongest unrests took place in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, where the majority of people are native Russian speakers (Krasnozhon, 2014).

On the first of March, in the city of Donetsk thousands of people went on a protest against the new government in Kiev (RT, 2014). They demanded for federalization of Ukraine, more power for their local government and closer ties with Russia (RT, 2014). The following days the protesters occupied governmental buildings and the demonstrations continued. After the Crimean Parliament voted to join Russia the manifestations intensified. On the 13th of March, a pro-Russian and a pro-Ukrainian protest collided leaving fifty people injured and two dead (Valeiskaq, 2014) (Donbasa, 2014). Three days later people started erecting picket lines on bridges and key junctures in the city in order to prevent Ukrainian authorities to send military personnel to the town (Dubovaq, 2014).

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[12] From Russian Donetsky Basseyn, a historical, cultural, and economic region in eastern Ukraine (Ray, 2014)

In the city of Lugansk, the events unfolded in a similar manner. The first big anti-governmental demonstration was held on the first of March (Ray, 2016). The following days people started opposing the local authorities and occupied governmental buildings (Ray, 2016).

April 2014, can be regarded as a turning point of the crisis. The separatists in both Donetsk and Lugansk started taking control over the regions. On April, the 7th the rebels occupied the local government building and proclaimed the establishment of the Donetsk People's Republic (Ray, 2016). In Lugansk, the protesters continued to oppose the legitimacy of the local authorities and called for a people's government. Fearing that the country will disintegrate, on the 15th of April Ukraine's acting President, Olexander Turchynov, announces the start of an "anti-terrorist operation" against pro-Russian separatists (BBC, 2014). On April, the 28th the rebels declared the establishment of the Lugansk People's Republic (Lenta, 2014). On the 11th of May referendums for independence were held both in Donetsk and Lugansk, where the majority of people voted to live Ukraine (Ray, 2016).

During the following months, the sporadic clashes between the Ukrainian forces and the separatists in the South-Eastern regions of Ukraine started escalating. After heavy military weapons were sent to the regions the crisis was transformed into a full-scale war, with the hardest fights, in Mariupol and the Donetsk airport (BBC, 2015).

On July, the 17th the international community was shocked after the Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 traveling from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, was shot down in rebel-held territory (BBC, 2015). Everybody on board was killed (298 people), including 196 Dutch people (BBC, 2015).

4.1.4. Aftermath

The first attempt to establish a ceasefire in Donbass was on September the 5th 2014 (Walker S. , 2014). The protocol (known as Minsk One) was signed by representatives from the Russian Federation, Ukraine, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Donetsk and Lugansk regions and was followed by a second document which clarified the contracting parties commitments (MZS, 2014), (OSCE, 2014). The truce didn't hold up and in the beginning of 2015 heavy fights was renewed (BBC, 2015). The second attempt to deescalate the conflict was made in February 2015, with the signing of the second protocol (OSCE, 2015). However, two years after

the truce, sporadic clashes still occur and the situation in Ukraine is being described as froze conflict (Tudoroiu, 2016, p. 378).

In Crimea, according to the to the "Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Ukraine", from 21 November 2013 to 5 September 2014, human rights were violated however, there is no data for casualties during the annexation of the peninsula (OHCHR, 2014). In Donetsk and Lugansk, the picture is completely different. The UN "Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine 16 November 2016 to 15 February 2017" notes that from April 2014 till March 2017 approximately 9.940 people were killed (including approximately 2000 civilian casualties) and at least 23.455 were injured (OHCHR, 2017).

4.2. Exploitation of the unique conflict context

Ukraine is of high strategic importance to Russia for a number of reasons. First, from a geostrategic perspective, Ukraine acts as "as the last buffer" against the expansion of NATO (Waslander, 2014). Second, from an economic perspective, the country is the "gateway" for the Russian economic expansion towards Europe. Most importantly, the Russian gas and oil pipelines run through the country (Waslander, 2014). Third, (as it was pointed in section 4.1.2.) from a military perspective, the Crimean Peninsula is quite important for Russia, as a significant part of the Russian Black Sea Fleet is situated there (Bastion, 2017). Therefore, in February 2014, when the pro-West, anti-corruption Maidan protests escalated and the new, Western-oriented provisional government took the power in Kiev, Russia started taking decisive actions to keep Ukraine in its orbit of influence.

According to McCulloch's first principle of hybrid warfare, an actor that is initiating such a form of war will build one's forces composition and capabilities in relation to the unique context of the conflict. Which include the historical, socio-cultural, geographic and, temporal setting. In that sense, a number of circumstances enabled Russia to initiate hybrid actions against the Ukrainian state. As the conflict conditions are highly important for the entire analysis of Russia's actions in Ukraine, they will be exhaustively examined.

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4.2.1. Historical setting

To a significant degree, Russia and Ukraine share their history. Their relation dates back to the 9th century AD, when the first Russian state - Kievan Rus was formed (Enciklopediq, 2017). This country existed until the Mongol-Tatar invasions of 1240 and its capital was Kiev (Alekseyevich, 2017). The following centuries the territory of today's Ukraine was under the rule of Galicia-Volhynia, a country successor of the Kievan Rus (Alekseyevich, 2017). In the end of the 16th century Ukraine fell under the rule of Poland, then in the middle of the 17th century, it became part of a Cossack state (Alekseyevich, 2017). In 1686, the country was divided in two (Alekseyevich, 2017). The territories west to the bank of the Dnieper River became Polish and the eastern territories, including Kiev, Russian (Alekseyevich, 2017). After the October Revolution of 1917, when the Russian Empire started crumbling, Ukraine began its struggle for independence (Alekseyevich, 2017). However, the fights were chaotic and between 1917 – 1918 several Ukrainian states came into existence (Alekseyevich, 2017). In 1921, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic emerged, yet it soon became part of Soviet Russia (Alekseyevich, 2017). After the fall of the Soviet Union in December 1991, Ukraine gained independence (Alekseyevich, 2017).

The history of the Crimean Peninsula is also connected to Russia. In the 10th century, it became part of Kievan Rus (Britannica, 2017). Yet the following centuries the territory fell under the rule of the Kipchaks, later the Tatars, and then in 1475, it became a part of the Ottoman Empire (Britannica, 2017). Since the 15th century, Russia and the Ottoman Empire fought a series of wars for the control of the territory (Britannica, 2017). In 1783 Catherine the Great annexed the peninsula (Britannica, 2017). During the Russian Civil War (1917–1921), as in Ukraine, several fractions were fighting for the control over the peninsula (Britannica, 2017). In the end of the war (1921), the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was created and it became part of Soviet Russia (Britannica, 2017). In the end of the Second World War, the peninsula was "downgraded" to a province (oblast) of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (Britannica, 2017). In 1954, the province was transferred to Ukraine (Britannica, 2017). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, as the majority of the population were ethnic Russians, relations with Ukraine became tens (Britannica, 2017). The region had an autonomous status but, after struggles for independence, in 1994 it was abolished (Britannica, 2017).

From this brief historical overview, it is evident that Russia had strong presence in the territories of today's Ukraine, especially the lands east to the bank of the Dnieper River and the Crimean Peninsula. From the perspective of Russia's military and strategic planners, the fact that for more than a millennium Russians inhabited Ukraine is an important advantage, which has a number of implications. They are examined in the following sections.

4.2.2. Socio-cultural setting

The long standing historical connections with Russia, to a significant degree, have affected the socio-cultural setting in Ukraine. In his book "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order", Samuel Huntington divides the "post-1990s" world into nine "major civilizations" (Huntington, 1996, p. 26). He examines Russia and Ukraine as part of the Orthodox civilization.[13] However, he states that "Ukraine is divided between the Uniate nationalist Ukrainian-speaking west and the Orthodox Russian-speaking east" (Huntington, 1996, p. 138). As it was pointed in section 4.1.1., ethnic Russians comprise the biggest minority group in Ukraine, 17.3% of the total population (CIA, 2017). According to a 2001 census, in the nine South-Eastern regions of Ukraine, the people who use Russian as their first language, vary between 29.3% in Kherson oblast and 76.6% in Crimea (in Donetsk and Lugansk, the percentages are 74.9% and 68.8%). (Ukraina, 2001) (Europe, 2017). In the same regions, the percentage of people who perceive themselves as ethnic Russians is also high. It ranges between 14.1% in Kherson and Mykolaiv oblasts, and 58.3% in Crimea (Ukraina, 2001), (Europe, 2017). The ethnic Russians in Donetsk and Lugansk are 38.2% and 39%. This strong presence of Russian speakers and ethnic Russians is an important advantage for the Russian military and strategic planners. From a political perspective, they could use it as a source of justification and legitimization of their actions. As Vladimir Putin has stated, "The Russian Federation will always protect the out compatriots' abroad" (TASS, 2015). From a military perspective, the Russian minority (in some regions majority) in Ukraine can facilitate the operational effectiveness. This population can be used as a fifth column, which can provide manpower, intelligence, and shelter.

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[13] Including the countries from the former Soviet Union, the countries from the former Yugoslavia (except Croatia and Slovenia), Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Romania (Huntington, 1996, pp. 26-27)

4.2.3. Geographic setting

The Geographic setting is another advantage that the Russian state has in terms of their relations with Ukraine. First, as noted in section 4.1.2., the two countries have signed a contract allowing Russia to station up to 25.000 troops, 132 armored combat vehicles and 24 pieces of artillery at its military facilities in Crimea (Kimball, 2014). As this is classified information, one can only guess what were the exact number of personnel and heavy weaponry that Russia had at its disposal by 2014 in Ukraine. However, it can be argued that the Russian military capabilities in Crime may have overmatched the whole Ukrainian fleet. Because by 2014, before the annexation of the peninsula, Ukraine had a total of 15.470 navy troops and 113 combat vehicles (Sukhov, 2015). Russia can exploit this advantage in a number of ways. Not only their forces could be used openly or as a deterrence measure but also, the naval bases in Crimea could serve as logistic a hub that will facilitate a variety of different types of operations (including covert).

The second advantage that Russia has in relation to the geographic setting in Ukraine is that the two countries share a 2063.04 km border (including 1974.04 km by land and 321 km by sea) (Ukraini, 2007). This is a key factor in terms of military planning because Russian operations in Ukraine can be facilitated by an unlimited amount of supplies which can be easily transferred through the common border.

4.2.4. Temporal setting

By the time before the (Ukrainian) crisis had escalated (the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014), the Ukrainian state was in a disadvantageous position. According to a 2013 research, the country was one of the least stable states in Europe (Nate Haken, 2013). This means that if a potential adversary wanted to intervene in Ukraine, the timing was right. Because the opponent would not have meet strong resistance. It can be argued that Ukraine's instability to a significant degree, was a result of the powerful influence (both political and economic) that Russia had in the country's domestic affairs (Simao, 2016, pp. 498-502). According to a study carried by Transparency International, in 2013 Ukraine had the most corrupt public sector in Europe (International, 2013). The elite of the country including the President (in that time Viktor Yanukovych), his political party (The Party of Regions), and most of the oligarchs had strong connections with Russia (Matuszak, 2012, pp. 50-71). Russia also had (and still has) a solid economic presence in Ukraine because they are the country's main trade partner both in terms of

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import and export (Solutions, 2017). Therefore, when Ukraine started shifting towards the West, Russia had to act promptly, while they still had an advantageous position. Because hypothetically, the more they waited, the stronger Ukraine's ties with the West would have become. Meaning that the costs (including: economic, human, political, social, developmental and, strategical) for a Russia intervention would have risen in time.[14]

4.2.5. Analysis of the exploitation of the unique conflict context

From the previous sections, it can be seen that in the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014 Russia had strong influence in Ukraine. However, when the people of Ukraine decided that they prefer closer relations with the EU (and the West in general), and started protesting in Kiev, Russia's interests were under threat. Until the middle of February, there was still hope that the pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych will restore order in the country. Yet, when the Maidan protests escalated, leaving more than fifty killed in a single day, it was evident that Yanukovych was losing the grip over the country (Gatehouse, 2015). When on the 23rd of February, the Rada declared that Yanukovych is no longer president and that the position is taken by the Western-orientated Oleksandr Turchynov, Russia had to act (Kyivpost, 2014), (BBC, 2014). But, a number of factors (which will be extensively examined in the following chapter) deterred the Federation to openly take actions against the will of the Ukrainian people and the new provisional government. Still, Russian military and strategic planners had a number of advantages, deriving from the historical, socio-cultural, geographic and, temporal settings which they were able to exploit, in order to keep Ukraine under their influence. One of the first actions that the new Ukrainian government made was a mistake, which provided Russia with a strong expedience. The Rada canceled the law "On State Language Policy" which gave an official status of the Russian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Tatarian and Hungarian languages (MVnR, 2014), (Tchuzakov, 2014). Now Russia could use its strongest leverage – the "threatened" Russian-speaking minority. The following weeks anti-Maidan protests broke out in all nine South-Eastern regions of Ukraine, which have big Russian minorities (RT, 2014), (Roth, 2014). This was the start of Russia's hybrid operation in the physical domain. It is hard to determine to what extent did the people participating in the protest decided to so on their own or they had other incentives. Yet, there are a number of

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[14] In November 2014, the new government in Ukraine announced that membership in NATO is one of its main goals (Europe, 2014).

reports stating that some of the protesters received money for their participation (Miller, 2014), (Ukrainskaq Pravda, 2014). In a number of cities, the pro-Russian protesters started occupying governmental buildings which was the second step in Russia's hybrid operation (Ray, Ukraine crisis, 2016). This served as a legitimization of the actions because it was presented as a bottom-up initiative (the will of the people). After Ukraine initiated the "anti-terrorist operation" against the pro-Russian separatists and violence started escalating in Donetsk and Lugansk, the locals formed voluntary combat forces, that fought the official Ukrainian Army (Telegraph, 2014).

Russia also exploited the advantage deriving from the common border with Ukraine and its military presence in Crimea in a number of ways. In Eastern Ukraine, before the conflict had erupted, the OSCE Human Rights Assessment Mission to Ukraine reported that in many of the pro-Russian protests, locals have observed the presence of unknown Russian people, to whom they refer as "titushky", which is defined as, "as mercenary support agents of various groups, often posing as street hooligans, and ready to use violence for money" (HCNM, 2014). When the conflict in Donbass escalated, Russia used its common border with Ukraine, to supply the separatist with weapons, which was proven by the General Court of the European Union in January 2017 (Union, 2017). The close proximity to Ukraine also enabled Russia to send military personnel to the conflict zone. Daniel Baer the Ambassador of the United States to the OSCE, stated that the observer mission has documented, "more than 30,000 individuals in military-style dress", crossing only at two border checkpoints (OSCE, 2016).

During the crisis, Russia had repeatedly denied any involvement in Ukraine. Including that the masked and armed men in Crimea (often referred to as "little green man" or "polite people"), carrying the latest Russian military equipment, that occupied the Simferopol International Airport, the Ukrainian military bases situated on the peninsula and other key governmental buildings, along with the Parliament in Simferopol, were actually Russian forces (Shevchenko, 2014). However, a month after the annexation of the peninsula, Vladimir Putin personally admitted that "Russian servicemen did back the Crimean self-defence forces" (Putin, 2014). Seven months later President Putin stated, that in fact Russian forces, occupied buildings in Crimea and blocked the Ukrainian forces situated there (Novosti, 2014). One could not argue from where did the "little green man" came to Crimea, yet the fact that Vladimir Putin himself had admitted that they were Russian forces, point in the direction of the Russian military bases, situated on the peninsula.

In terms of the temporal setting, it can be argued that Russia, took full advantage of it. In the end of February 2014, Ukraine was in a state that can be described as a revolution. More than fifty people were killed in the Maidan square, and the protests were continuing to escalate (Gatehouse, 2015). In that time, the Ukrainian Rada dismissed President Yanukovych and appointed the Parliament speaker Oleksandr Turchynov at his place (BBC, 2014). The new Western-orientated political circle in Kiev, had the difficult task to consolidate their positions and restore order in the country. Russia took advantage of the political instability and chaos in Ukraine and launched its hybrid campaign. The timing was right, and the anti-Maidan protests overwhelmed Ukraine's officials. The promptness of Russia's response allowed them not only to achieved most of their goals[15] in Ukraine but also, they accomplished this before Ukraine had receive substantial help its new allays. Therefore, the costs for Russia's campaign were less, because they did not waste time in initiating it.

Overall, it can be seen that the Russian military and strategic planners had taken full advantage of the complex context of the Ukrainian crisis.

4.3. Capability overmatch

According to McCulloch's fourth principle, the conventional opponent, for this particular analysis Ukraine, has more power in terms of military capabilities, therefore the hybrid actor - in Crimea the little green men and in Donbass the separatists, seeks ways to offset this disadvantage. In chapter three as a relevant indicator for this principle, was suggested the use of light weapons by the little green men and the separatists, for the neutralization of heavy weaponry systems of the official Ukrainian forces. Since the conflict in Ukraine developed in two distinct lines, the analysis will focus first on Crimea and then on Donbass. It has to be noted that, only the forces that were actually used will be examined. Thus, the Russian Black Sea Fleet situated in Crimea, is not included in the analysis.

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[15] The goal in Crimea was annexation. In Donbass, however it was not clear what the objective was. A probable explanation is that Russia wanted to prolong the conflict, which has a double effect. Both exhaust the Ukrainian economy and increasing their dependence on Russia, and also spark political instability in the country which also would serve Russia's interests.

4.3.1. Capability overmatch in Crimea

In Crimea, as presented in the previous sections, there were no open fights between the Ukrainian security forces and the so called the little green men. By the beginning of March 2014, all of Ukraine's military bases situated in the peninsula were besieged by the lightly armed masked men (Igor Gujava, 2014). Their arsenal included: 7.62 mm PKP machine guns, 5,45 mm AK74M assault rifles, RPG-30 anti-tank grenade launchers, GAZ Tiger multipurpose, all-terrain infantry mobility vehicles and military trucks Kamaz models 4326, 4350, 6350 (Pulkki, 2014), (Shuster, 2014), (Meduza, 2014). Data on what weapons did the Ukrainian soldiers situated in Crimea had is unavailable as this is classified information. However, there is information on some of the military bases the Ukrainian Army had in Crimea by 2014, which include: Belbek military airport, Baherove air base, Yevpratoria airbase, Bzanchoi airbase Southern Naval Base, Feodosia naval base, Sevastopol naval base, Balaklava coast guard base, Bakchisary military base, Perevalne military base, Simferopol military base (KyivPost, 2014), (Reuters, 2014), (Oliphant, 2014), (BBC, 2014). It is hard for one not to suggest that in eleven military bases where approximately 20.000 soldiers were situated, there were no major conventional arms (Loiko, 2014), (Baczynska, 2014).

The question why the Ukrainian Army did not fight back, the lightly armed men, remains unanswered. A potential explanation can be that the Russian Black Sea Fleet situated in Crimea, deterred the Ukrainian government to order an offensive (Bastion, 2017). However, in that time, (March 2014) Russia had not admitted any involvement in the crisis and the only forces that were actually using for the annexation were the anti-Maidan protesters and the little green men. Therefore, it can be reasoned that there was a capability overmatch between the pro-Russian protesters supported by the little green men and the official Ukrainian military personnel, situated in Crimea.

In the end of March 2014, the Government in Kiev announced that it is evacuating its soldiers from the peninsula (Loiko, 2014), (Baczynska, 2014).

4.3.2. Capability overmatch in Donbass

Compared to Crimea, the situation in Donetsk and Lugansk regions was more complex because the violence in both areas escalated to a point where the conflict could be described as a civil war. In the beginning of the crisis, the separatists were armed with light Soviet and Russian weapons. When Ukraine announces on the 15th of April, the start of an "anti-terrorist operation" against the pro-Russian separatists (BBC, 2014). The regular Ukrainian Army was deployed to

retake control in the cities occupied by the separatist. When on the following day (16th of April) two Ukrainian military convoys were sent to the cities of Kramatorsk and Slavyansk, hundreds of locals surrounded them and captured their armored vehicles (Grove, 2014). According to a Russian organization, which monitors the destroyed and captured armored fighting vehicles during the conflict, between April and November 2014, the separatists captured more than 225 armored vehicles (Armor, 2016). A report developed by the private intelligence consultancy company Armament Research Services, shows what weapons did the separatist had in their possession by November 2014. The light weapons included: self-made small arms, pistols (Makarov, Stechkin), shotguns (Saiga 12, Armscor Model 30, Mosin M9), machineguns (AKS-74, PM, RGD-5, RPG-26, RPG-26, AKMS, RPG-26, AK-74, AKS), anti-materiel rifle[16] (PTRS-41 anti-tank rifle, PTRD, ASVK anti-materiel rifle),heavy machineguns (DShKM, NSV, NSVT, KPV, KPVT), grenade launchers (GP-25, 7P17 VOG-25, 7P24 VOG-25P, AGS-17 AGL), portable antitank systems (PG-7, PG-7L, PG-7M, PG-7S, OG-7), mortars (PG-9 type HEAT rockets, OG-9 HE-FRAG, O-832D HE-FRAG, OF-842 HE-FRAG and S-842), man-portable air defence systems and anti-aircraft guns (9K38 Igla, e SA-18 Grouse, 9K38 system, 9K32 Strela-2, ZPU-1, ZPU-2, ZPU-4) (Jones, 2014, pp. 18-63). It can be seen that the separatists were well equipped in terms of light weapons. However, their origin is unknown. In an interview in August 2014, when asked if Russia is supplying the separatist with arms, the Russian deputy Defense Minister Anatoli Antonov replied that "they have taken it from Ukrainian military storages or captured it from the Ukrainian security forces (Nabrejnov, 2014). Yet, as presented in section 4.2.5., in January 2017 the General Court of the European Union proved that Russia was sending arms to the separatist in Ukraine (Union, 2017).

In terms of heavy weaponry, the Armament Research Services report, presents a comparison between the major conventional arms of Ukrainian government forces and the separatist's forces. Yet, the report does not give information on the numbers of the weapons used by both sides (Jones, 2014, p. 65).

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[16] Arms used against military equipment, instead against combatants

Ukrainian government forces		Pro-Russian separatist forces
Main battle tanks		
T-64A		IS-3
T-64B		T-34-85
T-64B1M		T-64A
T-64BM		T-64B
T-64BV		T-64BM
		T-64BV
		T-72B
		T-72B3
		T-72BA
		T-72B Mod

Table 1 Ukrainian conflict main battle tanks, source: (Jones, 2014, p. 65)

Ukrainian government forces			Pro-Russian separatist forces
Self-propelled artillery			
Self-propelled artillery	2S1		2S1
	2S19		2S19
	2S3		2S3
	2S5		2S5
	2S9		2S9
Self-propelled anti-aircraft systems	2S6		2S6
	9K33		9K33

	9K35	9K35
		9K373
		Pantsir-S13
Self-propelled rocket artillery	9K51	9K51
	9K57	
	9K58	
	9K79	

Table 2 Ukrainian conflict self-propelled artillery, source: (Jones, 2014, p. 70)

From the tables, it is evident that half a year after the conflict had started there was no capability overmatch between the Ukrainian government forces and the separatist forces in terms of the types of weapons they were using.[17] The only advantage that the Ukrainian Army had was its air forces. Yet the separatist had anti-aircraft systems and managed to shoot down five battle helicopters and ten military airplanes (Jones, 2014, p. 77).

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[17] As already was noted there is no information on the numbers of heavy weapons used by both sides. According to the Russia monitoring organization Lost Armour, by February 2015, Ukraine had lost 827 pieces of armored vehicles, compared to 185 lost by the separatists. However, this data does not suggest how many major conventional arms, did both sides possessed during the given period (until February 2015).

4.4. Combination of conventional and unconventional elements

McCulloh's fifth principle of hybrid warfare, states that a hybrid actor needs to have both conventional and unconventional elements which create an asymmetrical advantage when fighting a conventionally-based opponent.

In a 2006 speech, President Vladimir Putin, addressed the problems in the Russian military, arguing that it needs a reform (which was initiated in 2008 see section1.4.), he stated: "Our responses should be based on intellectual superiority. They will be asymmetric [and] less costly" (Buckley, 2006). The Ukrainian crisis showed that these ideas had been implemented in Russia's military strategy. The most apparent unconventional element during of the Ukrainian crisis were the irregular fighters. The Russian military and strategic planners exploited the advantages diving from the unique conflict setting described in section 4.2. and used such forces in two distinct ways.

In Crimea, the conventional component in Russia's operation were the Russian Navy troops, situated on the Peninsula. Although they did not take any actions, these militaries were used as a deterrent measure. The most visible unconventional element used by Russia were the unmarked, masked and well equipped (with light weaponry), troopers deployed in Crimea. Some reports suggest that they were Spetsnaz (Russia's Special Forces) (Haines, 2014). Their main task was to safeguard the annexation of the peninsula, or as Vladimir Putin describes it: "to ensure the open, honest and decent way for people to express their opinion" (RT, 2014). They operated along with the well-organized and often armed demonstrators, which also can be examined as an unconventional force (Sindelar, 2014). The actions of the little green men and the demonstrators were well synchronized and they reinforce each other. The masked armed men provided protection, while the demonstrators were used as a "justification tool" that allowed the operation to be framed as an act of self-determination. Their swift actions caught by surprise Ukraine's officials. They fell into a situation where if they had ordered the Ukrainian militaries, station in the peninsula to engage in fights with the little green men and the protesters, not only they would have lost their international support (most notably the EU and US), because they would have to fight civilians (as Yanukovych's regime did in Kiev), but also this would have allowed Russia to openly engage in the crisis, and order its troops (stationed in Crimea) to actively protect the Russian population. In Crimea, the Russian officials were always one step ahead. The forces that Russia coordinated and used enabled them, to promptly execute their main objective – the annexation of the peninsula, at

very low costs, without taking any casualties. Such effective and efficient results cannot be achieved by the use of a conventional army.

In Donbass, until the middle of April 2014, the events unfolded in a similar manner (BBC, 2014). The pro-Russian protests escalated and governmental buildings were occupied. However, the demonstrators were not supported by armed Russian Special Forces as in Crimea. Civil units erected picket lines on bridges and key roads in order to prevent Ukrainian forces from coming to the regions of Donetsk and Lugansk (Dubovaq, 2014). After the Crimean Peninsula was annexed, in March 2014, Ukraine had ground to justify actions against the civil units in Donbass. However, when on the 16th of April 2014 (one day after the Ukrainian government had announced the start of start of an "anti-terrorist operation" against the pro-Russian separatists in the Eastern regions of the country) the first Ukrainian military convoys were sent to the cities of Kramatorsk and Slavyansk, unarmed local residents captured their armored vehicles (Grove, 2014), (BBC, 2014). As reported by Reuters "A Ukrainian officer said his men were not prepared to fire on fellow Ukrainians" (Grove, 2014). Until this point, the Russian presence was not as visible as in Crimea, although there were reports of "titushky", participating in the civil units (Minorities, 2014). Yet, the following weeks violence escalated and "voluntary groups" or in other words pro-Russian insurgents, started appearing in the eastern regions of Ukraine. The main combat groups included: Donbass People's Militia (commanded by Igor Girkin, a Russian citizen, among their ranks there were a number of veterans from Afghanistan), Army of the South-East (which included defectors from the disbanded Ukrainian Special Police Forces – Berkut), Russian Orthodox Army (commanded by Igor Strelkov, a Russian citizen and a veteran, later became the Minister of Defence of the Donetsk People's Republic), Vostok Battalion (commanded by Alexander Khodakovsky the former commander of the Alpha Anti-terrorism Special Unit of the Security Service of Ukraine) (Tsvetkova, 2014), (Arwa Damon, 2014), (Luhn, 2014), (Pravda, 2014), (Ukraina G. P., 2014), (Zverev, 2014). In September 2014, these fractions combined and formed the "United Armed Forces of Novorossiya" (Post, 2014).

All of the described above combat groups and the pro-Russian protestors can be regarded as irregular forces or guerrilla forces.[18] Also, according to the Ukrainian government they can be classified as terrorists (BBC, 2014). It is hard to determine to what extent did they operate

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[18] guerrilla force definition – "A group of irregular, predominantly indigenous personnel organized along military lines to conduct military and paramilitary operations in enemy-held, hostile, or denied territory" (Gortney, 2010, p. 100)

autonomously or they were controlled by Russia. However, there are a number of evidence that show clear connections with Russia. They include: OSCE reports, that more than 30.000 armed men have entered Ukraine from Russia, the conclusion of the General Court of the European Union, that Russia had supplied the insurgents with military equipment, the fact that two of the key pro-Russian combat groups were commanded by Russian citizens, and most importantly the fact that in December 2015, Vladimir Putin admitted that Russia had sent military intelligence officers to help the separatists in Eastern Ukraine (OSCE, 2016), (Union, 2017), (Walker S. , 2015), (Ukraina G. P., 2014), (Zverev, 2014). Therefore, the protesters and the pro-Russian paramilitary groups in Donbass can be examined as the unconventional element in Russia's strategy.

During the first months of fights (between April and September 2014), Russia also used a conventional component in its Donbass strategy - military exercises. Two of which (in April and August) along its' border with Ukraine (MacAskill, 2014), (Luhn, 2014). Exercises were also carried in June, in Kaliningrad (Russia's Baltic enclave) and in September, in the Russian Far East, which was "the biggest-ever post-Soviet drills" (Williams, 2014), (RT, 2014). This demonstration of military superiority was used as a deterrent measure. As it was pointed in the beginning of this chapter Vladimir Putin had declared that if he wants, he can take Kiev in two weeks (Squires, 2014).

Overall, both in Crimea and in Donbass, Russia used a combination of both conventional and unconventional elements. In Crimea, the objective was fulfilled. In Donbass however, it is not clear what the main goal was. A potential explanation is that Russia wanted to prolong the conflict, and exhaust the Ukrainian economy thus, increasing their dependence on Russia (the main trade partner of Ukraine both in import and export is Russia) or that Russia could not cope with the international pressure, yet this are only hypothesis (Solutions, 2017).

4.5. Defensive type operations

According to McCulloh's sixth principle, an actor that is waging a hybrid war will try to hold one's ground by developing a defensive strategy and relying mostly on defensive operations. Since in Crimea there were no direct battles between the Russian Spetsnaz (the so-called little green men) and the Ukrainian Army, the focus will be primarily on the events in Eastern Ukraine. However, it has to be noted that Russia's operations for the annexation of the peninsula, were

offensive because they involved an armed besiegement of official military forces which is a clear violation of Ukraine's sovereignty.[19]

In Eastern Ukraine, by the beginning of April 2014, the pro-Russian rebels had taken control over most of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions (BBC, 2015). As already noted, their strategy included the occupation of key governmental buildings and erection of picket lines (Dubovaq, 2014). In this regard from the rebel's perspective, their actions during the first weeks of the conflict were not offensive, because they did not try to push further into Ukrainian territory and they only wanted to exercise their right of self-determination.[20] Their goal was to establish and hold their control over the two regions.

In the middle of April (2014), after the Ukrainian military was sent to retake control over the two regions, and the first military convoys were captured by civilians (see section 4.3.1.), three key theaters of action were opened (Grove, 2014), (BBC, 2014). The first fights broke out near the city of Slavyansk, which is situated in the North-Western part of the Donetsk region (Whewell, 2014). By May 2014 two more battle lines were opened – in the city of Mariupol, which is situated in the South of the Donetsk region on the Azov Sea, and in the Donetsk Airport, which is in the Western outskirts of the city of Donetsk (Walker P. , 2014), (Tavernise, 2014). In the end of May and the beginning of July, governmental forces went on the offensive, and recaptured the cities of Slavyansk, Kramatorsk and Mariupol and the Donetsk Airport (all in the borders of previously rebel-held territory) (Stern, 2014), (Stern, 2014). By that time, the pro-Russian separatist had started withdrawing to the center of the territory they claimed. It can be argued that this was a defensive type strategy because they concentrated most of their capabilities in the capitals of the two regions – Donetsk and Lugansk and their main goal was to hold these cities. By the end of July and the beginning of August, the Ukrainian forces had besieged the two cities and were launching heavy artillery attacks on them (BBC, 2014), (BBC, 2014). The separatists were almost cut from the Eastern border with Russia and had lost a number of their strongholds in the North (near the Azov Sea) and in the West of Donetsk and Lugansk (Herszenhorn, 2014). However, in the end of

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[19] From the Russian perspective, the campaign for the annexation of Crime was a defensive operation because the Russian special forces intervened in order to protect the threatened Russian-speaking population. However, the approach that they used, compared to the one in Donbass was offensive because it included lightly armed, but well-trained soldiers, while in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, the initial phase of the operation was carried by civilians, the majority of which were unarmed (Kushch, 2014).

[20] However, from the Ukrainian perspective, these acts were clear violation of their sovereignty.

August, there were reports that a column of armored Russian vehicles has crossed into Ukraine from Russia (Hewitt, 2014). Soon after, the pro-Russian forces initiated their first major attack operation. The counter-offensive was relatively successful and the separatists managed to regain control over some of the territories that they had lost in the East and South (Farquhar, 2014). On the 5th of September, under international mediation, a ceasefire was established (Walker S. , 2014) which was followed by a memorandum signed on the 19th of September which outlined the geographical parameters of the truce and the establishment of a buffer zone (OSCE, 2014). The following months the Minsk Protocol was violated a number of times and low-intensity fights along the buffer zone were continuing (OHCHR, 2014). In January 2015, the separatist launched a second offensive (OSCE, 2015). On the 20th of January the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, accused Russia of sending "more than 9.000 troops and 500 tanks, heavy artillery and armored personnel carriers in eastern Ukraine" (BBC, 2015). By the end of the month, the separatists had recaptured the Donetsk Airport and had started fights along the buffer zone in the North, West, and South (Oliphant, 2015). On the 12th of February, a second Minsk Protocol was signed between representatives from Ukraine, Russia, OSCE, Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk People's Republic (OSCE, 2015). The key points of the document included: a full ceasefire by the 15th of February 2015, withdraw of heavy weapons systems from the conflict zone, reestablishment of the buffer zone (set in the Memorandum of 19th of September 2014), constitutional reform in Ukraine, and exchange of all hostages and prisoners (OSCE, 2015). Yet, heavy fights continued in the strategic city Debaltseve, which the Ukrainian Army fled on the 18th of February 2015 (Grytsenko, 2015). More than two years after the second Minsk Protocol was signed, the truce is still holding although, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine is reporting violations almost every day (OSCE, 2017).

Overall, the strategy used by Russia during the annexation of the Crimea Peninsula was offensive, while the actions of the Russian-backed separatist in Eastern Ukraine can be described as defensive. In the East, the separatist's main goal was to hold the capitals of the two regions Donetsk and Lugansk and gain legitimacy over as much territory they as they can (within the original borders of both regions). Although they did not manage to hold the lands which they claimed on the 11th of May 2014 (the date of their self-proclaimed independence) the separatists initiated two major offenses which were reportedly backed by the Russian military (BBC, 2014). According to McCulloh, the hybrid actor's strategy and operations "will often include offensive

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components, but the overarching intent is still one of defense" (Johnson, 2013, p. 17). Both of attacks were not prolonged and were followed by peace talks and the signing of peace protocols. Therefore, the pro-Russian separatists' operations in Eastern Ukraine fit the description of McCulloh's sixth principle, while the Russian actions in Crimea, does not.

4.6. Attritional tactics

McCulloh's seventh principle holds that a hybrid actor will use attritional tactics both in the physical and cognitive domains in order to undermine the morale of the conventional opponent and to diminish their capabilities. As this chapter explores the first unit of analysis of the case study, the focus will be only on the physical domains of operations. Attritional tactics in the cognitive domain will be explored in the following chapter.

In the first phase of the Ukrainian crisis (before April 2014), the key attritional tactic that the Russian forces in Crimea and the pro-Russian forces in Eastern Ukraine used was the occupation of governmental buildings. The participation of civilians during these operations, allowed Russia to frame these acts as a bottom-up initiative which corresponds to the principle of self-determination (RT, 2014). It can be argued that the Russian military and strategic planners deliberately used this approach because it did not involve escalation of violence which allowed the pro-Russian forces to consolidate their positions. If the anti-Maidan protesters (in Crimea supported by the little green men), had started heavy fights with Ukraine's security forces, this would have allowed the Ukrainian government to order the anti-terrorist operation, not in the middle of April 2014, but in the end of February (BBC, 2014). If this had happened, the crisis would have developed in a completely different manner and probably Russia would have involved openly. This, on the other hand, would not have served Russia's interest because the costs of a conventional intervention would have been much higher, compared to the unconventional one that they actually undertook (see section 5.3.3). Therefore, the occupation tactic can be seen as attritional, because on one hand, it allowed Russia to prolong the crisis and strengthen its irregular forces in Ukraine, and on the other it did not allow Ukraine to intervene because they would have lost the support of the US and the EU (see section 4.4). This also had a negative effect on the morale of the Ukrainian soldiers because they felt that they were let down by the new Ukrainian

government (this matter will be examined in the following chapter). In Crimea, this approach was successful and in the end of March 2014, the besieged (in their military bases) approximately 20.000 Ukrainian soldiers were ordered by their government to evacuate from the peninsula (Loiko, 2014), (Baczynska, 2014). In Donbass, the "occupation tactic" was effective until the first weeks after the Ukrainian government had announced the start of the anti-terrorist operation against the pro-Russian separatists (BBC, 2014).[21] By the time the first fights broke out, the pro-Russian separatist had managed to capture military equipment from the Ukrainian Army and had fortified their positions (Grove, 2014), (Whewell, 2014).

The second attritional tactic used by the separatists became apparent after violence escalated and the Ukrainian forces launched their first major attack. Instead of holding their ground, the separatist gradually retreated to their strongholds in the cities of Donetsk and Lugansk, thus averting a major battle which could have decided the outcome of the conflict (BBC, 2014).

The two main offenses that the pro-Russian insurgents initiated in August 2014 and in January 2015 exposed the third attritional tactic (Hewitt, 2014), (Telegraph, 2015). In both attacks, a specific pattern can be found. In August and January, the separatists reportedly received military support from Russia (Hewitt, 2014), (BBC, 2015). This caught by surprise the Ukrainian forces and the separatists quickly gained control over the battlefield. In August 2014, approximately 1.400 Ukrainian soldiers were encircled in the city of Ilovaisk (Peleschuk, 2014). During the second attack in January 2015, a similar scenario unfolded in Debaltseve, where nearly 6.000 Ukrainian troops were besieged (Vlasova, 2015). The swift successes of the separatist allowed them to enter into peace negotiations. Even though the Minsk Protocols were tripartite contractual agreements (between official representatives from OSCE, Ukraine, and Russia) both documents were also signed by representatives from Donetsk and Lugansk Peoples Republics (MZS, 2014), (OSCE, 2015). To a significant degree, the Minsk Protocols enabled the pro-Russian insurgents to consolidate their positions in Donetsk and Lugansk regions. The first Minsk Protocol envisaged only a law that Ukraine needs to adopt in order to ensure "Special Status" of the two regions, while the second protocol obliged Ukraine to carry out a constitutional reform[22] which will ensure political decentralization and allow more autonomy to Donetsk and Lugansk (see point three of the

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[21] The annexation of Crime, allowed the Ukrainian government to justify the operation
[22] The constitutional reform remains blocked in the Ukrainian Parliament (Carnegie, 2017)

first Minsk Protocol and points four and eleven of the second Minsk Protocol) (MZS, 2014), (OSCE, 2015). Therefore, it can be argued that to some extent these documents legitimized the self–governing structures of Donetsk and Lugansk Peoples Republics. The other important factor which derives from the Minsk agreements is that both documents obligated the adversaries to immediately implement a fill ceasefire (see points one of both Minsk Protocols) (MZS, 2014), (OSCE, 2015). Although the first truce lasted only four months before it was broken, the second one is still holding. As a result, the conflict in Ukraine is at a stalemate situation.

To summarize, the use of attritional tactics is one of the key components in Russia's military approach exposed during the Ukrainian crisis. In Crimea, the "occupation tactic" was effective and allowed Russia to annex the peninsula in less than a month (OHCHR, 2014). In Donbass, the operational environment was significantly different and more complex. This forced the pro-Russian separatist to use additional attritional tactics that reinforce each other. The most effective however, were the two swift attacks launched by the separatists in August 2014 and January 2015 (Telegraph, 2015). To a significant degree the peace talks that followed, especially the second Minsk agreement, enabled the pro-Russian insurgents to secure their positions in Donetsk and Lugansk regions. The deadlock situation in Eastern Ukraine serves the Russia's interests because as Jokull Johannesson argues, "Russia is to continue its hybrid warfare with the objective to slowly drain Ukraine of resources and the will to fight resulting in the collapse of the pro-western governments" (Johannesson, 2017, p. 70).

4.7 Conclusions

      In this chapter, the first unit of analysis of the case study was explored. Russia's acts in the physical domains of operations during the Ukrainian crisis were analyzed through Timothy McCulloch's hybrid warfare theoretical framework. From the study, it is evident that Russia used different strategies and tactics in Crimea and Donbass. Although on two occasions discrepancies between McCulloch's principles and the Russian actions were found, the overall military approach exposed during the crisis, to a significant degree fits the characteristics of hybrid warfare. A more detailed account of the findings will be presented in the final chapter.

5. Expressions of hybrid warfare in the non-physical domain of operations during the Ukrainian crisis

"If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles"

Sun Tzu 5th century BC (Tzu, 1910)

In this chapter, the second unit of analysis of the case study will be examined. McCulloch's theoretical framework will be applied to the Ukrainian case. The focus of the exploration will be on Russia's actions in the non-physical domain of operations. This would allow to suggest an answer to the fourth sub research question: "Which expressions of hybrid warfare in the non-physical domain of operations can be identified in the Ukrainian crisis?".

However, before the analysis begins an important remark needs to be made. There is a substantial body of literature that examines Russia's information warfare approach see: (Snegovaya, 2015), (Vladimir Sazonov, 2016), (Darczewska, 2014), (Thomas, 2004), (Pursiainen, 2017). Yet, the main objective of this work is to explore what extent can the Russian actions in the Ukrainian crisis be conceptualized as a hybrid war according to a specific theoretical framework. Therefore, some aspects of Russia's information warfare, may not be examined.

5.1. Exploitation of the unique conflict context

According to McCulloch's first principle of hybrid warfare, a hybrid actor will exploit all advantages deriving from the unique context of the conflict (the historical, socio-cultural, geographic and, temporal setting) and build one's forces composition and capabilities in relation to it. In the previous chapter, the conflict setting was extensively examined and it was proven that in the physical domains of operations Russia took full advantage of it (see sections 4.2. - 4.2.5.). One of the most important factors for the success of Russia's operations in Crimea and Donbass

resulted from the favoring socio-cultural setting.[23] The Russian-speaking minority living in these regions of Ukraine was mobilized and used in a number of different ways (see chapter four). However, the process of how these people were influenced and utilized to serve Russia's interests was not presented. This section will help to elucidate this matter.

One of the key characteristics of the Ukrainian crisis, especially during the period between its inception and the signing of the second Minsk agreement, were the information operations carried by both sides. Russian military and strategic planners examine such operations as one of the main components of modern-day conflicts. According to the Russian military doctrine from December 2014:

> An early conduction of information confrontation activities will allow the achievement of political goals without the use of military force, subsequently, this will facilitate the formation of a favorable response of the world community for the use of military force [if needed] (Rossii, 2014).

The Chief of the Russian General Staff General Valery Gerasimov, argues that "The focus of applied methods of conflict has altered in the direction of the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other nonmilitary measures – applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population" (Gerasimov, 2013). One of the main tools that Russia used in its information campaigns both in Crimea and Donbass was its the strongly centralized media (Seely, 2015, p. 12). The main target was the Russian-speaking minority.

In 2014, the global consulting company Gallup reported that television (TV) is the prime source for news information among 96.8% of Ukrainians (Gallup, 2014). As presented in section 4.2.4., Russia has a strong presence in Ukraine's economy. This includes the broadcasting industry. According to a 2014 article by Joanna Szostek, a significant portion of Ukraine's media market is owned by Russian companies. The top news providers which had Russian stakeholders or partners include: Pervyy Kanal, Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine, Izvestiya v Ukraine, Argumenty i Fakty v Ukraine, Kommersant-Ukraina (Szostek, 2014, p. 468). Also, by the time of the crisis, Russian

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[23] It has to be noted that all conflict characteristics (historical, socio-cultural, geographic and, temporal setting) are interconnected and affect each other. Yet, the historical and socio-cultural settings were the characteristics that Russia exploited the most, in relation to the cognitive domains of operations. The historical setting was used in a manner, that is connected with McCulloch's second principle. Therefore, prime focus in this section will be on the exploitation of the socio-cultural setting.

TV channels were more popular than Ukrainian among the Russian-speakers in Ukraine (Bērziņš, 2015, p. 7).

When the crisis in Ukraine escalated in February 2014, Russia used its media to launch a massive information attack (BBC, 2014). In his book "Hybrid Wars: The Indirect Adaptive Approach to Regime Change" Andrew Korybko presents a guideline for indirect regime change operations which he describes as "Color Revolutions" (Korybko, 2015). According to him, one of the most important factors for the success of such operations is the creation of a "hive mind"[24] of anti-government activists (Korybko, 2015, pp. 43-45). He states that:

> Effective information outreach campaigns and the construction of social networks over a period of time can lead to the development of a hive mind of anti-government activists. These individuals can then be guided […] into strategic swarms that work to overwhelm the authorities and initiate a soft coup (Korybko, 2015, p. 76).

It can be argued that the key goal of Russia's information campaign was to consolidate the Russian-speaking minority, trigger an emotional response and set these people against the Ukrainian government.

The Russian strategy in the cognitive domain was centered around the formation of fear among the Russian-speakers in Ukraine. The overall approach was multi-aspect and complex, yet two main lines of action can be identified. The first one is connected to the pro-European Maidan protest movement. The Russian media depicted the Maidan activist as "radicals" (Ishchenko, 2016, p. 466). The dominant focus of Russian news reports was on confrontation and violence during the protests (Ishchenko, 2016, p. 460). Even though among the Maidan protesters there was a variety of different groups, including "Kiev's intellectual elite and students", the most frequently mentioned organization were the far-right nationalists from Right Sector (Strovsky, 2015, p. 104), (Ishchenko, 2016, p. 460). Thus, Russia's media not only managed to "combine these people into one mass" but also, they succeeded in framing them as violent fascists (Strovsky, 2015, p. 104). When on the 22nd of February 2014 the Maidan protesters seized Ukraine president's office, the Ukrainian Parliament voted to dismiss the pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych, and a new provisional government took the power, fears of repressions amongst ethnic Russians in Ukraine

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[24] Korybko describes it as a "simplifying the mass thinking of the society during the onset of the Color Revolution coup attempt" (Korybko, 2015, p. 34)

rose (Kyivpost, 2014), (Coalson, 2014). These concerns were justified on the 23rd of February, when the Rada canceled the law "On State Language Policy" which gave an official status of the Russian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Tatarian and Hungarian languages (MVnR, 2014), (Tchuzakov, 2014). A turning point was reached. The improvident governmental act divided Ukraine's population. Russian-speaking groups in the South-Eastern regions of Ukraine united and anti-Maidan protests intensified (RT, 2014), (Roth, 2014).

The second line of action carried by the Russian state was to deepen the fears of the Russian speakers in Ukraine and impel them towards actions against the Ukrainian government. This was achieved again by framing. The official Russian position was that the new government in Kiev is illegitimate because the overthrow of President Yanukovych was unconstitutional and it had violated the "Agreement on the Settlement of Crisis in Ukraine" sighed in February 21st, 2014 (Guardian, 2014), (Kelley, 2014). In Russian media, this matter was taken a step further and the new Ukrainian government was often referred to as "junta" or "fascist junta" (Vladimir Sazonov, 2016, p. 69), (BBC, 2014). By the end of February 2014, Russia had managed to create a "hive mind" of anti-government and pro-Russian activists. What followed was the occupation of governmental buildings in the South-Eastern regions of Ukraine. In Crimea, (as presented in chapter four) the "occupation tactic", which was backed by the Russian special forces, was successful and the result, according to Andrew Korybko's classification, was a soft coup (Korybko, 2015, p. 76). In Donbass however, the situation was different and the "occupation tactic" was not enough, to separate the Donetsk and Lugansk regions from Ukraine. There the pro-Russian protesters took arms, formed voluntary combat forces and started fighting the official Ukrainian Army (Telegraph, 2014). Korybko notes that:

> Should the Color Revolution [soft coup] fail in overthrowing the government, then the transition to Unconventional Warfare occurs, whereby the social infrastructure of the Color Revolution becomes the foundation of the violent campaign being waged by the anti-government movement. It is at this point that the hard coup commences and all elements of the state are thrown into strategically engineered chaos (Korybko, 2015, p. 76).

What happened in Donbass according to Korybko's classification was a "hard coup".

Overall, Russia exploited the advantages deriving from the unique context of the conflict. They built their forces composition and capabilities in relation to it. In this section, the process of

how Russia used the favorable socio-cultural setting in Ukraine was presented. Russia utilized its centralized media and initiated a massive information attack, targeting the Russia-speaking population in Ukraine. This cognitive attack was successful in the creation of an environment of fear and discontent amongst the Russian minority in Ukraine. Once the hive mind was formed, these people were manipulated into serving Russia's own interest. It is important to note that a similar cognitive approach was described in the Russian military doctrine from December 2014. Also, Russia's information operation in Ukraine, to a significant degree, followed the guideline for indirect regime change operations created by the Russian scholar Andrew Korybko.

5.2. Ideology of the hybrid actor

In his second principle of hybrid warfare, McCulloch argues that a hybrid actor will develop a specific ideology which supports and justify one's actions. This ideology will be linked to the unique context of the conflict and create an internal narrative of the hybrid organization. The analysis will be focused on Russia's operation in Donbass because the one in Crimea lasted less than a month, and there was not enough time for the formation of a specific ideology there.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines ideology as: "a form of social or political philosophy in which practical elements are as prominent as theoretical ones. It is a system of ideas that aspires both to explain the world and to change it" (Cranston, 2014). In that sense, it can be argued that the leaders of separatists in Donbass (which received support from Russian intelligence officers, see section 4.4.), along with Russian officials and the Russian media used a specific discourse, that created a set of normative beliefs (ideology), amongst the insurgents. This ideology was centralized around two ideas. First, that the pro-Russian separatists are "heroic defenders of the motherland" and second, that they are the indigenous population within the lands they claimed. In this section, four terms will be extensively examined. The analysis of the discourse will show how the separatists identify themselves and how they perceive Ukrainian officials.

The separatist ideology was created through the use of historical analogies and myths. Andrew Wilson argues that elites (the potential leaders of ethno-nationalist movements and their ideologues) "often find that potential members of their target group are politically passive, isolated

from one another, and/or more interested in private goals, and therefore difficult to mobilize politically" (Wilson, 1995, p. 265). He continues by stating that historical myths are "an extremely effective means of firming up a target group's collective identity, encouraging group coalescence, and stimulating political mobilization" (Wilson, 1995, p. 265).

The first term that is going to be examined is the Russian word "opolcheniye". During the first year of the crisis, this word was widely used not only by the separatists but also in Russia's public discourse, for the portrayal of the pro-Russian forces fighting in Donbass (Krechetnikov, 2014). In English, opolcheniye can be translated as militia, or local defense volunteers. In Russian however, opolcheniye has a strong historical symbolism and it is much more than militia. According to the "Great Russian Encyclopedia" the term "opolcheniye" means an armed (military) formation, composed of citizens (mostly volunteers) that are generally not subject to conscription or mobilization; one of the forms of participation of the masses in the armed defense of the state (Verhovod, 2014). It is also described as a method and form of organization of an armed resistance against an external enemy (Verhovod, 2014). The first opolcheniye groups can be traced back to ancient times, and according to the Encyclopedia, different forms of opolcheniye can be found in the history of many Western European countries. However, "in Russia, opolcheniye had a much greater role than in the West countries" (Verhovod, 2014). In the 9-11 centuries opolcheniye formations stave off attacks of the hordes of nomads (Khazars, Pechenegs, Polovtsy), in 12-15 centuries the invasion of Mongol-Tatars, and the German Knights, opolcheniye was also formed during "The Great Patriotic War" - World War Two (WW2) (Verhovod, 2014). Opolcheniye describes a civilian participation in the defense of the country against the regular armies of external enemies. Therefore, in Russian, when a group of people are being referred to as opolcheniye this means that they are civilians that have united in order not to attack, but to defend their land against the regular forces of an external enemy. The word was also used in the official Russian public discourse, which reinforced the political mobilization effect amongst Russian-speakers in Donbass (by The President Vladimir Putin, in The State Duma (the Lower House of Russia's Parliament) and by Russia's international news agency RIA Novosti) (Novosti R. , 2014), (Putin, 2014), (Duma, 2015). This was a deliberate choice because in Russian, there are other words that could have been used. For example, militia (in Russian-militciya), rebels (in Russian-povstanci), or separatists, which do not the same connotation as opolchencii" (a person part of the opolcheniye). Yet they were not used, because these words do not trigger an emotional response in the public. Therefore,

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in Russia's both public and official discourse, the pro-Russian separatists in Donbass were illustrated as "heroic defenders of the motherland".

In May 2014 Donetsk and Lugansk Peoples Republics united and created the Novorossiya confederation (Biyatov, 2014).[25] The name of this quasi-state formation is the second term that is going to be investigated. Novorossiya has two distinct meanings. The first one is evident. When translated into English it means New Russia. Marlene Laruelle argues that "it announces the birth of a New Russia both geographically, in Eastern Ukraine, and metaphorically, in Russia itself" (Laruelle, 2015, p. 12). The second meaning is connected to the history of the Russian empire. After the Russo-Turkish wars of 1768– 1774, Catherine the Great won vast territories (a significant part of present-day Ukraine including the Donetsk and Lugansk regions) from the Ottoman Empire (Laruelle, 2015, p. 2). The lands North of the Black Sea were given the name Novorossiya (Laruelle, 2015, p. 2). New Russia was part of the of the Russian empire until the October Revolution of 1917 (Alekseyevich, 2017). According to Andrew Wilson, when elites create an ideology they often use historical myths that have strong resonance within the targeted population (Wilson, 1995, p. 266). He argues that such myths need to be linked with the popular memory of the population and locate them in time and space (Wilson, 1995, p. 266). Wilson states that "an association with a specific homeland" is and effective tool, for the creation of a successful ideology. He continues, "the ideologues of a given ethnic group will stake claim to their historic territory by the claim to be 'indigenous' - to have been historically the first group, or significant group, to occupy that particular land" (Wilson, 1995, p. 266). Therefore, the name Novorossiya was intentionally chosen because it symbolizes the idea that ethnic Russians are the native population of Donbass and they have the right to take these lands from Ukraine. Even though the fact that since the end of the 19th, throughout the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries the majority ethnic group in Donbass were Ukrainians (Wilson, 1995, p. 275),(Nacionalnii sostav naseleniq, grajdanstvo, 2001).

One of the most celebrated national holidays in Russia is Victory Day (9th of May), which commemorates the Soviet Union's victory in the Second World War. The success over fascism is one the deepest symbols of national pride in Russia. This can be seen in the term that Russians use

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[25] In May 2015, the leaders of the Donetsk and Lugansk Peoples Republics announced that they the Novorossiya project has been put on hold (until further notice) because it violated the Minsk agreements (Kirilov, 2015)

for WW2 - the Great Patriotic War. The second dominant line in Novorossiya's ideology is connected to the exploitation of the historical symbolism of WW2. The leaders of Donetsk and Lugansk Peoples Republics, with the help of the Russian media and Russian officials, created the feeling amongst the separatists that they are fighting a "holy war" against fascism (Whewell, 2014). Two terms, which dominated the Russian public discourse during the first year of the crisis, were used to facilitate this process of antagonization. The first one is linked to the Ukrainian political activists and leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) - Stepan Bandera (Vladimir Sazonov, 2016, p. 31). During WW2, the OUN split into two and Bandera and his followers formed the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (Vladimir Sazonov, 2016, p. 31). This paramilitary organization for a brief period of time collaborated with the Nazi forces in order to fight the Soviets in Ukraine (Vedeneev, 2002), (Vladimir Sazonov, 2016, p. 31). However, in 1941 Bandera was put into a German concentration camp because the same year his organization tried to establish an independent Ukrainian state (Vedeneev, 2002). In 1959, Bandera was killed by a Soviet secret agent in Munich, Germany (Mitrokhin, 1999, p. 362). For some Ukrainians, Bandera is a symbol for Ukraine's fight for independence, but in Soviet and Russian rhetoric he is a fascist and Nazi collaborator (Hyde, 2015). During the Ukrainian crisis, especially in 2014, the term "Banderivtsi" (in Russian followers of Bandera) was often used in the Russian public and official discourse as a synonym of the Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian Army (Riabchuk, 2016, pp. 81-82). For example, in 2014, during a speech, President Putin declared: "we can all clearly see the intentions of these ideological heirs of Bandera, Hitler's accomplice during World War II", referring to the Ukrainian authorities (Post T. W., 2014). The second popular epithet, which was often used in Russia's discourse to describe Ukrainian officials were "fascist junta" or simply "junta" (Vladimir Sazonov, 2016, p. 69), (BBC, 2014). In this respect, the message is clear. It can be argued that the specific Nazi discourse was used in order to reinforce the feeling of righteousness of the separatist's cause. The effectiveness of this operation is described by Maria Snegovaya "Unlike in the Soviet war in Afghanistan, many Russians volunteered to fight in Eastern Ukraine because they watched state television not because the military directly mobilized them" (Snegovaya, 2015, p. 15).

In conclusion, it can be seen that by using a specific terminology in the public and official discourse, the Russian military and strategic planners created an ideology which facilitated the hybrid operation in Ukraine. Historical myths and analogies were used for the development of an internal narrative of the separatists in Donbass. The Ukrainian officials were depicted as Nazis and

fascists, while the separatists as "heroic defenders of the motherland" hat are fighting a "holy war" against fascism. This had a mobilization effect not only amongst Russian-speakers in Donbass, but also amongst Russian citizens. As a result, many people volunteered to fight on the side of the separatists.

5.3. Existential threat to the hybrid actor

According to McCulloh's third principle, a hybrid actor will abandon "conventional military wisdom" as a result of a perceived "existential threat by a potential adversary" and their goal to achieve long-term survival.

Ukraine is one of the biggest countries in Europe. Throughout its history, it has always been under Russian influence (see section 4.2.1.). In February 2014, when the pro-European Maidan protests escalated and the pro-Russian Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych was dismissed from his position, Russia had a lot to lose (Kyivpost, 2014). This section will examine the key concerns of Russia's military and strategic planners (in relation to the Ukrainian crisis) and explain why they used an irregular and covert military approach, instead of openly engaging in a conflict.

5.3.1. Russia's geopolitical concerns in Ukraine

Between 1676 – 1878 Russia fought a number of wars with the Ottoman Empire (Chauhan, 2014). Russia's key goal during these wars was to take control over the Black Sea and the Dardanelles and Bosporus straits, thus potentially expanding its influence over the Mediterranean Sea (Chauhan, 2014). While they did not fully fulfill their objective (control over the straits), Russia managed to win the Northern coastline of the Black Sea and build warm-water ports (Chauhan, 2014). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the establishment of an independent Ukrainian state, a significant part of the Northern coastline of the Black Sea was no longer Russian. However, in 1997 and in 2010, Russia and Ukraine signed a series of agreements which allowed Russia to station up to 25.000 troops, 132 armored combat vehicles in the Crimean Peninsula (Kimball, 2014). It can be argued that from a military perspective, Crimea is an "unsinkable aircraft carrier" and though its military bases situated there Russia can exert control over the whole Black Sea region. Consequently, for Russia, it was vital to keep its control over this territory. Also, Ukraine

is one of the most important Russian neighbors in Europe because amongst Russian officials there is a "conviction that in order to protect its borders Russia must exert control far beyond them" (Geers, 2015, p. 19). As Zbigniew Brzezinski has described it: "Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an empire, but with Ukraine suborned and then subordinated, Russia automatically becomes an empire" (Economist, 2013). Therefore, it can be seen that Ukraine is of high geostrategic importance to Russia.

Russia's biggest concern is Ukraine becoming US ally and a member state of NATO because this undoubtedly would change the balance of power not only in Europe, but also globally. In 2007, during the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy, President Vladimir Putin openly criticized NATO's enlargement in the East, and he also rejected the unipolar system of international relations (Post T. W., 2007). He stated: "I consider that the unipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible in today's world" (Post T. W., 2007). The following year in Bucharest, NATO's heads of states declared that they are considering to admit Georgia and Ukraine to the alliance (NATO, 2008). Sergei Markov, (a political scientist and in that time a member of the Russian Parliament) commented: "Georgia's accession into NATO will be seen here as an attempt to trigger a war in the Caucasus, and NATO membership for Ukraine will be interpreted as an effort to foment a conflict with Russia" (Isachenkov, 2008). Four mounts later Russia invaded Georgia (BBC, 2008). A clear message was sent to Ukraine, the US and NATO. In March 2014, after the Western-orientated provisional government took the power in Kev, the acting Foreign Affairs Minister of Ukraine Andriy Deschytsia, stated that Ukraine has no intention to join NATO (Interfax-Ukraine, 2014). However, after eight mounts Russia's fear was justified when the Ukrainian government announced that its major goal is membership in NATO (Europe, 2014).

5.3.1. Russia's economic concerns in Ukraine

As presented in section 4.2.4., both countries have strong economic connections. Russia's economy is highly dependent on fossil fuels export (Barnato, 2016). In 2014, oil and gas comprised 66 percent, of the country's total exports (Bank W. , 2016, p. 55). According to the World Bank: "Russia's dependence on oil and gas exports is exacerbated by its focus on a single export market, the European Union" (Bank W. , 2016, p. 55). A substantial number of Russia's oil and gas pipelines pass through Ukrainian territory. They include: the Druzhba pipeline (the biggest oil pipeline in the World), the Trans-Siberian Pipeline, and Yamal - Europe pipeline (Chausovsky,

2013). Therefore, Russia's primary economic sector is to a significant degree is dependent on Ukraine.

Another important factor in the economic relations between Russia and Ukraine is the Eurasian Economic Union – a Moscow-led project for economic integration between the countries from the former Soviet Union (Soyuz, 2017). Some experts argue that the union is part of a grander strategy for "re-Sovietization" and restoration of the Russian Empire (Hassan, 2017, p. 226). Taking into account the words of Zbigniew Brzezinski, quoted in the previous section, the Union would not be a powerful factor in international relations (both economically and politically), if Ukraine does not become a part of it. Russia has continuously opposed EU's projects for integration with Ukraine (Balmforth, 2013). In the winter of 2013, the Ukrainian government was in a position where a choice between the Eurasian Economic Union and the EU had to be made (Walker S. , 2013). The scholar Vsevolod Samokhvalov describes it as the "zero-sum logic [for] the future of Ukraine" (Samokhvalov, 2015, p. 1373). In the beginning of November 2013, Ukraine officials were in favor of closer relations with the EU, yet on the 21st the same month, after discussions between the Russian and Ukrainian prime ministers, President Viktor Yanukovych, declared that he is suspending talks with Brussels (Grytsenko I. T., 2013). It can be argued that this decision, marked a turning point and because of it the Ukrainian crisis started.

5.3.3. Analysis of the existential threat of the hybrid actor

Overall, Russia's main concerns in relation to Ukraine can be summarized as: Ukraine becoming a strong US ally, a member of NATO and the EU. If the Russian elite wants to restore the "the largest geopolitical catastrophe of the [20th] century" (the collapse of the Soviet Union), Ukraine has to be under Russian control. When the Ukrainian Parliament dismissed the pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych in February 2014, Russian officials knew that the new Ukrainian government would not serve their interests (Kyivpost, 2014). Therefore, they had to intervene. A potential option was to officially engage in an open conflict. The Russian Army is much bigger and better equipped than the Ukrainian (Recknagel, 2014). As President Vladimir Putin had declared in September 2014, Russia could "take Kiev in two weeks" (Squires, 2014). In 2008, Russia used a similar approach during the Russo-Georgian War and fulfilled their objectives in five days (BBC, 2008). Yet during this conflict, Russia suffered high equipment losses from a country with a population of around 4.382 million (in 2008), and a defense budget of 1.09 billion dollars

(McDermott, 2009, pp. 70-73), (Georgia, 2008) (Bank W. , 2017). A conventional military operation in Ukraine, which is one of the biggest European countries with a population of approximately 45.553 million, and a military expenditure of 4.01 billion dollars (in 2014), would have been extremely expensive for Russia (Statistics, 2013), (Bank W. , 2017). Also, the Russian oil and gas pipelines which pass through Ukraine probably would have been the first target of the Ukrainian Army. If they have been destroyed this would have had an extremely negative effect on Russia's economy which as, already mentioned, is highly dependent on the export of fossil fuels to the EU (Bank W. , 2016, p. 55). Moreover, a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine would have had unforeseen international consequences, because when the crisis escalated, both the EU and the US repeatedly had demonstrated their support for Ukraine (Yuhas, 2014).

Therefore, it is easy to understand why Russia did not openly intervene in Ukraine. As President Putin had declared: "Our responses should be based on intellectual superiority. They will be asymmetric [and] less costly" (Buckley, 2006). Russia's military and strategic planners exploited the advantageous conflict setting (described in section 4.2.) and launched an irregular and covert military campaign in Ukraine. First, by annexing the Crimean Peninsula they guaranteed Russia's geostrategic domination in the Black Sea region. Second, by stimulating anti-Ukrainian sentiment among the Russian minority in the South-Eastern regions of the country, they triggered a civil war, which is continuously whittling away Ukraine's economic resources.[26] It can be argued that in the long term the conflict in Donbass may increase Ukraine's economic dependence on Russia. This military approach was much more efficient than a conventional intervention.

5.4. Attritional tactics

McCulloh's seventh principle holds that a hybrid actor will use attritional tactics in the cognitive domain in order to undermine the morale of the conventional opponent and to diminish their capabilities.

During the operations in Crimea and Donbass, Russia took advantage of the unique context of the conflict. Particularly the socio-cultural and temporal settings were exploited, with the prime

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[26] In 2013 the Ukrainian GDP was 183 billion dollars (Bank T. W., 2017). Today it is almost twice as less - 93 billion dollars (Bank T. W., 2017).

goal to weaken Ukraine's security forces will to fight. Different approaches were utilized during the distinct stages of the crisis. However, in many cases they overlapped.

When the crisis begun, in both theaters of action, the initial tactic included the mobilization of civilians (the creation of a hive mind, see section 5.1), which were directed to occupy government buildings. It can be argued that in this stage of the crisis, the Ukrainian government could have restored its control over the country. However, the local policeman did not intervene and in many occasions, they even cooperated with the protesters (Harding, 2014). Russia's massive information attack, which was successful in the creation of an environment of fear and discontent amongst the Russian minority in Ukraine had also affected Ukraine's security forces (see section 5.1). In an interview, a local Ukrainian officer from Donetsk explains why he remains passive while pro-Russian protesters take control over the city: "This situation is all Kiev's fault. They say we in the east are slaves, half-humans. They revere people like Stepan Bandera [the second world war Ukrainian nationalist leader] who shot our brothers. We are normal citizens like everyone else". Russia's information campaign was so successful that in June 2014, the Interior Minister of Ukraine Arsen Avakov, reported that approximately 20 000 policemen have joined the separatists in Donbass (Nedeli, 2014).

During the period when Russia was preparing for the annexation of Crimea, the messages that the Ukrainian government is an illegitimate "fascist junta", were reinforced by another cognitive operation which also had a ground component. The main target was the Ukrainian Navy. The first step in Russia's campaign was to besiege the Ukrainian solders station in the Peninsula. Next, Russia exploited the high levels of corruption in the country (see section 4.2.4.). On the 2nd of March, the commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian Navy Admiral Denis Berezovsky, who was appointed the previous day by the Interim President Oleksandr Turchynov, announced that he is defecting to the Russian-supported Crimean authorities (Walker S. , 2014). In his announcement, he declared his loyalty to the dismissed President Viktor Yanukovych and stated that: "The seizure of power in Kiev was orchestrated from abroad" (Walker S. , 2014). Three weeks afterward, Berezovsky became the Russian Black Sea Fleet deputy commander (Post K. , 2014). This act of treachery in the highest level of the Ukrainian Army, undoubtedly had demoralized the Ukrainian servicemen. In March 2014, they were in a position where their fate was put under question. Not only the soldiers were besieged by the Russian special forces but also, they were incapable to do

anything about it because they did not receive any orders from Kiev (Sengupta, 2014). The same month there were reports that Russian officers had offered the Ukrainian soldiers in Crimea, higher salaries, free flats and an "equal position in the armed forces of a future Crimean state" if they defect (Shuster, 2014), (Sengupta, 2014). A 26-year-old Ukrainian sergeant explains why he had joined the Russia side:

> I cannot see how the situation can change, Crimea will become a part of the Russian Federation. We as soldiers were not allowed to do anything; we were without direction. What is this government in Kiev doing? Nothing for us. We got no help from them. At the end, what choice do we have but to join the new army? We were let down, weren't we?

This Russia operation was quite successful. The result was that more than 50% of the Ukrainian Navy serviceman defected to Russia, 25% deserted and only 25% stayed in the Ukrainian Army (Bartkowski, 2015, p. 9).

In the end of March 2014, the Ukrainian government announced partial mobilization (Press, 2014). It included three subsequent waves (in the end of March, the beginning of May, and in the end of July), and by the end of 2014, approximately 104 thousand Ukrainians were mobilized (Sevodnya, 2016). When the fight in Donbass intensified, the Russian media reacted swiftly and launched an information campaign that targeted the men that had to be mobilized, their relatives and the Ukrainian society at large (Vladimir Sazonov, 2016, p. 110). The prime goal was to spread fear and discourage the people that had to go fight the separatists. One of the main tools that was used were news reports on Russian and linked to Russia Ukrainian media. They included news pieces on the poor conditions in the army, pictures and videos of bloodied and mutilated corpses of Ukrainian soldiers, also captured Ukrainian soldiers, that are being humiliated (Vladimir Sazonov, 2016, pp. 86-110). This Russian campaign was successful and in the summer of 2014, there was a wave of ant-mobilization protests in Ukraine (Ukraina R. N., 2014). By August 2014, more than 16 000 cases of desertion were reported (Reserch, 2015). The problem was so big that in the beginning of 2015, the Ukrainian government passed a law that allowed commanders to shoot deserters (RT, 2015) (Rada, 2015).

In conclusion, during the different stages of the Ukrainian crisis, Russia successfully used attritional tactics in the cognitive domain. A significant part of Ukraine's security forces were demoralized and as a result a great number of them either defected or deserted.

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5.5. Conclusions

In this chapter, Russia's actions in the non-physical domain of operations were analyzed through the theoretical framework of hybrid warfare, developed by Timothy McCulloch. Four of his seven principles were applied to the Ukrainian case. It can be concluded that Russia's military approach exposed during the crisis fits McCulloch's understandings of hybrid warfare.

6. General conclusions

"It's extremely dangerous to try to resolve political problems outside the framework of the law"

Vladimir Putin, 2004 (McLaughlin, 2004)

In this final chapter, the results of the research that explored Russia's military approach during the Ukrainian crisis (2013-2015) will be presented. First, the answers to the sub research questions will be summed up. Then, an answer to the central research question will be suggested, followed by a discussion regarding the limitations of Timothy McCulloh's hybrid warfare theoretical framework and this particular study as well. In the final section, recommendations for further research will be offered.

6.1. Answers to sub research questions

6.1.1. Sub research question number one

The first sub research question, "*what are hybrid wars?*", was discussed in the second chapter which presented McCulloh's theoretical framework. According to him, hybrid wars are: "an optimized form of warfare that allows a combatant to attempt to utilize all available resources—both conventional and unconventional—in a unique cultural context to produce specific effects against a conventional opponent" (Johnson, 2013, p. 16). After a review of the theoretical developments which examine this form of conflict, a more detailed explanation was suggested. According to it:

> hybrid wars are not only a form of conflict, but also a strategy and a tactic. Such conflicts can be initiated by both state and non-state actors. Their effectiveness and efficiency derive from the exploitation of the unique context of the conflict and the optimization of the hybrid entity's force structure by the utilization of both conventional and unconventional resources, that are simultaneously applied in both the physical and cognitive domains, thus producing a synergistic effect. This allows the hybrid entity to overcome a more powerful (in terms of resources and equipment) conventional actor. (see section 2.3.).

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6.1.2. Sub research question number two

In the third chapter, the research design of the thesis was presented. In doing so, the second sub research question "*how can the Ukrainian crisis (2013-2015) be studied through the lens of the hybrid war theory?*" was answered. The investigation was organized as an exploratory case study with two units of analysis. The focus of the first one was on expressions of hybrid warfare in the physical domains of operations, and the second, on expressions of hybrid warfare in the non-physical domain of operations. In order to facilitate the research, a time boundary was set. It covered the period from November 2013 to February 2015, because this was the active phase of the Ukrainian conflict. Within the case study, two research methods were used. Theory testing process tracing was selected as the main method of analysis, through which both units of the case study were examined. In chapter three, two of the three steps, in theory testing PT were performed. Thus, Timothy McCulloh's hybrid war theory was reformulated in order to express causality and his seven principles of hybrid warfare were operationalized and divided into two groups in consonance with the units of analysis. The third step in theory testing PT - the collection of evidence was carried throughout the fourth and fifth chapters. The second method that was used was discourse analysis. It enabled the exploration of the nuanced characteristics of Russia's military approach in the non-physical domain of operations. The employed research design allowed for a high validity of this work.

6.1.3. Sub research question number three

The third sub research question, "*which expressions of hybrid warfare in the physical domains of operations can be identified in the Ukrainian crisis?*" was examined in the fourth chapter. In doing so, the first unit of the case study was explored. Five of McCulloh's principles of hybrid warfare were applied to the Ukrainian case. It has to be noted that Russia's campaigns in Crimea and Donbass, were not exactly the same (probably because the objectives in both theaters of actions were different) however, important similarities were found. Within them, Russia's military approach in the physical domains of operations was exposed. The findings will be presented in detail, because the campaign was quite complex and involved many important components.

In the core of Russia's overall strategy was the exploitation of the unique conflict context which according to McCulloh's first principle, includes the historical, socio-cultural, geographic

and temporal settings. The historical overview showed that for more than a millennium Russia and Ukraine have shared their past, which has strong implications for the socio-cultural and geographic settings. First, in the South-Eastern regions of Ukraine, a significant part of the population is either ethnic Russians or Russian-speakers. These people were mobilized and organized into serving Russia's interest. They were used as a fifth column, which allowed Russia to present the crisis as a legitimate bottom-up initiative. Initially, in both theaters of action an anti-Ukrainian protest movement was formed, then these people were directed to occupy governmental buildings (in Crimea with the support of the Russian special forces). In Donbass. when violence escalated, they formed voluntary combat groups, that fought the Ukrainian Army. Second, Russia's military and strategic planners also took advantage of their common border with Ukraine and their military bases situated on the Crimean Peninsula.[27] In Donbass, Russia directly sent military personnel (with no insignia) and heavy military equipment to support the separatists, and in Crimea, the Russian military bases were used for the deployment of the little green men. Russia also exploited the temporal setting. They swiftly launched their operations in Crimea and Donbass (while they still had the advantage) at a time when Ukraine was in chaos and the new pro-Western political circle had not consolidated their positions and had not received substantial help from abroad.

According to McCulloh's theoretical framework, in order to classify a conflict as a hybrid one, there should be a capability overmatch between the more powerful (in terms of military posture) conventional opponent and the hybrid actor. The analysis proved that in Crimea the little green men had only light weapons, against the better equipped Ukrainian Army.[28] Thus, there was a capability overmatch. Whereas in Donbass, the separatists had in their possession major conventional arms and in terms of types of weapons used by both sides there we no differences. This was the first discrepancy that was found between McCulloh's hybrid warfare principles and the Russian military operation in Ukraine.

Both in Crimea and Donbass, Russia used a combination of conventional and unconventional elements, which is in consonance with McCulloh's fifth principle. During the operation for the annexation of the Peninsular, the unconventional forces included the pro-Russian

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[27] The geographic proximity between both countries and the Russian military bases in Crimea were also used as a deterrent measure.

[28] The focus of the analysis was on the actual forces that were used. As a result, the official Russian military personnel situated in Crimea was not included in the investigation because they did not openly participate in the annexation of the Peninsula, although they were used as a deterrent measure.

protesters, among which there were "titushky" and the little green men[29] (see section 4.2.5.). The Russian militaries stationed on the Peninsula were used as a deterrent measure which was the conventional component in this operation. In Donbass, Russia used a similar approach. During the initial phase of the crisis (before the Ukrainian Army was sent to fight the separatists) the irregular forces were comprised of pro-Russian protesters and "titushky". When violence escalated, a number of "voluntary groups" or in other words pro-Russian insurgents, appeared in Eastern Ukraine. These groups included both local protesters and tens of thousands guerrilla fighters which had entered into Ukraine from Russia. The operation in Donbass, as in Crimea had also a conventional element. Between April and September 2014, Russia carried a number of military exercises, two of which along its' border with Ukraine. These demonstrations of military superiority were used as a deterrent measure.

McCulloh argues, that an actor that is waging a hybrid war will develop a defensive strategy and rely mostly on defensive operations. In Crimea, although there were no fights, Russia's actions were examined as offensive because they involved an armed besiegement of official military forces, whereas in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions (during the initial phase), the protesters did not receive support from the Russian special forces – the little green men. This is the second discrepancy between McCulloh's hybrid warfare principles and the Russian military operation in Ukraine which was found. During the active phase of the conflict in Donbass, it was concluded that the overall strategy used by the separatist was defensive. Their goal was to establish and hold their control over the capitals of the two regions Donetsk and Lugansk and gain legitimacy over as much territory they as they can (within the original borders of both regions).

Russia's military approach also fit the description of McCulloh's last principle of hybrid warfare. Three attritional tactics were identified. The first one was used during the initial phase of the crisis (before April 2014), both in Crimea and Donbass. The occupation of governmental buildings by civilians (in Crimea supported by the little green men) was an effective and efficient approach that Russia used in order to take control over the South-Eastern regions of Ukraine. Within it, three interconnected components were identified. First, the participation of civilians allowed Russia to present its actions as a struggle for self-determination. Second, this approach did not involve an escalation of violence which enabled the pro-Russian forces to consolidate their

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[29] The little green men were examined as an irregular force because when they were executing their tasks they did not have any insignia on them. Only after Russia had fulfilled its objective in Crimea, President Putin admitted that they were actually Russian militaries.

positions. Third, the Ukrainian government was placed in a position where in they had used force against the protesters, they would have lost the support of the US and the EU. As a result, in Crimea the besieged Ukrainian soldiers felt that they were let down by their new government. The second attritional tactic was examined in Donbass after Russia had annexed the Crimea and the fights had broke out. During the period when Ukraine launched their massive attacks in the summer of 2014, the separatists successfully averted a major battle which could have decided the outcome of the conflict. They gradually retreated to their strongholds in the cities of Donetsk and Lugansk and waited for support from Russia. The third attritional tactic, became apparent when the Donbass separatist initiated their two major offenses in August 2014 and in January 2015. In both occasions, the separatists received military support from Russia, which allowed them to gain control over the battlefield. During both attacks, the separatist managed to encircle thousands of Ukrainian soldiers. Their swift successes made it possible for them to enter into peace negotiations. Thus, two documents were signed – the first and second Minsk Protocols. The result was that the separatists strengthened their positions and today the conflict in Ukraine is at a stalemate situation.

Overall these were the expressions of hybrid warfare identified in the physical domains of operations. It can be concluded that during the initial phase of the conflict the Russian military approach both in Crimea and Donbass to a significant degree overlapped, yet in Eastern Ukraine (Donetsk and Lugansk regions) once the violence had escalated, Russia used a more complex strategy.

6.1.4. Sub research question number four

In the fifth chapter, the second unit of analysis of the case study and the forth sub research question "*which expressions of hybrid warfare in the non-physical domain of operations can be identified in the Ukrainian crisis?*" were explored. Four of McCulloh's principles of hybrid warfare were applied to the Ukrainian case. As a result, key characteristics of Russia's military approach in the non-physical domain of operations were presented.

Russia's overall strategy in Ukraine was centered around exploitation of the unique conflict context (McCulloh's first principle). In chapter five it was shown how Russia managed to mobilize and utilized the Russian-speaking minority in Ukraine. This was achieved through a massive information attack, launched on the strongly centralized Russian media. The main tool that was used was fear, with the purpose to consolidate the Russian-speaking minority, trigger an emotional response and direct these people to carry actions against the Ukrainian government. These goals

were achieved by framing. The pro-European Maidan protesters were represented as violent radicals, and the new Ukrainian government, as an illegitimate fascist junta, which is threatening the rights of the Russian minority. It has to be noted that the way Russia conducted its information operation in Ukraine, "to a significant degree, followed the guideline for indirect regime change operations created by the Russian scholar Andrew Korybko" and the 2014 Russian military doctrine (see section 5.1.).

McCulloh's second principle was also explored. According to it, an actor that is waging a hybrid war will develop a specific ideology which is linked to the unique context of the conflict and supports and justify one's actions. Through the use of discourse analysis, which was focused on four specific terms (opolcheniye, Novorossiya, Banderivtsi and fascist junta) used in the Russian public and official rhetoric, it was proven that the leaders of separatists in Donbass, along with Russian officials and the Russian media, successfully exploited the unique historical setting. By the used historical myths and analogies, they managed to develop an internal narrative of the hybrid organization.[30] The result was that, the separatists were represented as heroic defenders of the motherland, that are fighting a "holy" war against fascism. This ideology had a mobilization effect. As consequence, many people volunteered to fight on the side of the separatists.

In relation to McCulloh's third principle, it was argued that Ukraine is of great importance to Russia's economy and geopolitics. The Federation's main concerns include: Ukraine becoming a strong US ally, a member of NATO and the EU. Therefore, when in February 2014, Western-orientated politicians took the power in Kiev, the Russian elite perceived this political shift as an existential threat (Kyivpost, 2014). The analysis showed that if Russia's military and strategic planners had decided to initiate a conventional war in Ukraine, this would have had not only a devastating effect on Russia's economy but also, unforeseen international consequences. The decision to use an irregular and covert military approach served Russia's interests because they managed to guarantee their geostrategic domination in the Black Sea region and whittle away Ukraine's economic resources (which will probably increase Ukraine's economic dependence on Russia in the future) at very low costs.

By exploiting the advantageous conflict setting, Russia successfully used attritional tactics in the cognitive domain of operations. This corresponds to McCulloh's last principle of hybrid

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[30] The focus of the analysis was on the separatists in Donbass, because in Crimea, there was not enough, time for the formation of an ideology.

warfare. Three tactics were identified. They were used during the different stages of the crisis, yet they also overlapped and reinforces each other. First, the massive information campaign described in the second paragraph of this section which targeted the Russian minority had also affected Ukraine's security forces. As a result, when the anti-Maidan protests escalated, a significant number of the local policemen did not fulfill their duty and in many cases, they started cooperating with the protesters because they felt fear and discontent for the new Ukrainian government. The second attritional cognitive tactic, which also had a ground component, was more complex and it targeted the Ukrainian Navy servicemen in Crimea. Within it three aspects were identified. Firstly, while the Russian media was continuously representing the Western-orientated Ukrainian government as an illegitimate fascist junta, the Ukrainian soldiers in Crimea were besieged by armed men. In that time, they could have broken the siege, yet they did not receive any orders from Kiev. Consequently, the Ukrainian Navy servicemen started feeling that they were left behind by their new government. Secondly, Russia exploited the high levels of corruption in the country, and commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian Navy Admiral Denis Berezovsky defected to the Russian-supported Crimean authorities, which had a demoralizing effect on the besieged soldiers. Thirdly, Russia again took advantage of the high levels of corruption, and the besieged and demoralized soldiers were offered higher salaries, free flats and an equal position in the Russian Navy, if they defect. This tactic was quite effective and in the end, Ukraine lost approximately 75% of its Navy servicemen (Bartkowski, 2015, p. 9). The third attritional tactic was launched after the armed conflict in Donbass had begun. The main target were the Ukrainian men that were mobilized, their families and the Ukrainian society at large. Russia again utilized its strongly centralized media, which repeatedly showed horrific pictures and videos of mutilated corpses of Ukrainian soldiers and captured Ukrainian servicemen that are being humiliated. Once more Russia was successful in the creation of an environment of fear. The results were that ant-mobilization protests spread across Ukraine and thousands of men deserted.

In sum, these were the expressions of hybrid warfare in the non-physical domain of operations which were identified in the Ukrainian crisis.

6.1. Answers to central research question

Before the central research question is answered, an important component of McCulloh's framework, which was not examined in chapters four and five has to be presented. According to him the efficiency and effectiveness of hybrid wars, derive from the synergistic effects which their integral parts produce (Johnson, 2013, p. 17). In this regard, it can be stated that Russia's hybrid operations in physical and non-physical domains were not separate initiatives. Instead, they were part of a whole and were carried out simultaneously, thus a grander strategy was exposed. At the core of Russia's intervention in Ukraine was the exploitation if the unique context of the conflict. In relation to it, the first step that Russia's military and strategic planners took, was to launch a massive information attack (in the non-physical domain), the main goal of which was to mobilize the Russian-speaking minority in Ukraine. Once the "cognitive environment" was right, the second step was to direct these people to carry out physical actions – first, to protest then, to occupy governmental buildings and, in Donbass to fight. If the non-physical operation had failed, the physical operation would not have started in the first place. The third step was to demoralize Ukraine's security forces. During the different stages of the crisis, distinct steps were taken. The attritional tactics, described in sections 4.6. and 5.4., reinforced each other. In the beginning of the crisis the occupation tactic was supplemented by the first and second cognitive attritional tactics (see previous section, paragraph five). During the fights in Donbass, the second and third physical attritional tactics (see section 6.1.3, paragraph six) were augmented by the third cognitive attritional tactic tactics (see previous section, paragraph five). Therefore, Russia's overall strategy in Ukraine, was based on the synergistic combination of operations both in physical and non-physical domains.

The main goal of this research was to answer the question, "*To what extent can the Russian actions in the Ukrainian crisis (2013-2015) be conceptualized as an exemplification of a hybrid war according to the theory of McCulloh?*". In chapter three McCulloh's definition of the theory of hybrid warfare was reformulated in order to express causality as:

> If during a conflict one of the combatants – X bases its optimized force structure on the combination of all available resources - both conventional and unconventional - in a unique cultural context to produce specific, synergistic effects against a conventionally-based opponent, then this entity is waging a hybrid war – Y (see section 3.3.1.).

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When applied to this particular study, the conflict is the Ukrainian crisis (2013-2015), X - the Russian Federation and, Y - hybrid warfare. If X is to produce Y, then McCulloh's characteristics of hybrid warfare need to be met. The analysis proved that the Russian actions in the Ukrainian crisis (2013-2015), with two exceptions (the lack of a capability overmatch in Donbass and offensive strategy used in Crimea), meet McCulloh's theorization. Therefore, it can be concluded that the military approach used by the Russian Federation, in Ukraine can be conceptualized as an exemplification of a hybrid war according to the theory of McCulloh.

6.3. Limitations of McCulloh's theoretical framework

During the analysis, specific limitations McCulloh's theory of hybrid warfare were found. The Russian military approach exposed during the Ukrainian crisis, was slightly more complex than the one described by McCulloh. His theory failed to account for three important aspects of the way Russia conducted its operations in Ukraine. The first one is related to the use of new technologies. During the crisis, a key aspect of the Russian overall strategy was the conduction of operations in the cyber domain (Geers, 2015). These operations facilitated Russia's actions both in the physical and non-physical domains (Geers, 2015, pp. 123-134). Diplomacy is the second aspect of the Russian grand strategy, that McCulloh's framework did not allow to be examined. During the crisis, Russian officials took different steps on the diplomatic level that increased the efficiency and effectiveness of their actions in Ukraine (Snegovaya, 2015, p. 18). The third important feature of Russia's strategy which was not examined is the use of economic coercion. Russia's officials exploited the advantages deriving from their country's strong economic connections with Ukraine and used it as an active means against them (Seely, 2015, pp. 15-17).

In conclusion, one could assert, that even though the Russian actions in the Ukrainian crisis (2013-2015) can be conceptualized as an instance of a hybrid war, according to McCulloh's work, it is not certain, if his theory is the most appropriate analytical tool for this particular case.

6.4. Limitations of the thesis and avenues for further research

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This study offered a detailed picture of the Russian actions in the Ukrainian crisis. Yet the analysis was guided only by McCulloh's framework. As a result, key aspects of the Russian overall strategy used in Ukraine was not fully explored (see previous section). In relation to this limitation, further research is needed. One could apply different theoretical frameworks for example, Janis Berzins's new generation warfare, and/or Oscar Jonsson's and Robert Seely's full-spectrum conflict, to the Ukrainian case and then compare the results (Bērziņš, 2015), (Seely, 2015). Such a work will show what is the most suitable analytical tool and the best way to conceptualize the new Russian military approach.

The second limitation is also connected to the narrow focus of the thesis. The ongoing Ukrainian crisis is an example of the new 21st century Russian military approach. However, one cannot draw complete conclusions regarding it only from this work because the unique conflict setting (as presented in the fourth and fifth chapters) was quite favorable. If the modern Russian warfare is to be fully studied, other cases need to be explored. A potential avenue for further research can be an investigation of Russia's involvement in the continuing Syrian Civil War (BBC, 2017). Once data is obtained one could investigate parallels between the Russian actions in Ukraine and Syria. The external validity of such a work would be high and the new Russian military approach, to a significant degree, would be exposed.

The presented analysis was also limited by the time boundary which was set in chapter three (from November 2013 to February 2015). Although this was the active phase of the crisis, it can be argued that the period after February 2015 is also important because the crisis has not been settled yet. A future research may focus on a wider time frame and explore what happened after the second Minsk agreement. Such a research may suggest an explanation of the actual Russian objectives in Donbass.

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