Between Georgia And Crimea:  
The Social Dimensions Of War For The Russian Military

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Note on Transliterations:

In this paper, I use the Library on Congress transliteration system without diametrics for all words and acronyms originally in Russian and Ukrainian. For all names of people and media outlets, such as Shoigu or Rossiiskaya Gazeta, I use the commonly used English spelling that may differ from the Library of Congress system.
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Acronyms

*Note: I use transliterated Russian acronyms, rather than direct English translations for terms originally in Russian.

FSU- Former Soviet Union
GLONASS- Global Navigation Satellite System (Global’naia Navigatsionnaia Sputnikovaia Sistema)
GPV: State Armament Program to 2020 (Gosudarstvennaia programma vooruzheniiia)
GRU- Main Intelligence Directorate (Glavnoe razvedyvatel'noe upravlenie)
GS: General Staff
MD: Military District
MoD- Ministry of Defense
NATO- North Atlantic Treaty Alliance
OSK: Joint Strategic Command (Obieedinennyi Strategicheskoe Komandovanie)
PGM- Precision Guided Munitions
SAM- Surface to Air Missile
SOF: Special Operations Forces
SV- Ground Forces of the Russian Federation (Sukhoputnye Voiska)
UAV- Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
USSR- Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VDV: Airborne Forces of the Russian Federation (Vozdushno-desantnye voiska)
VKO: Aerospace Defense Forces (Voiska Vozdushno-kosmicheskoi Oborony)
VMF- Naval Forces of the Russian Federation (Voenno-morskoi flot)
VS: Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (Vooruzhennye Sily)
VVS- Air Force of the Russian Federation (Voenno-Vozdushnyi Sily)
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In 1939, Winston Churchill called Russia “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma,” and Russia continues to be a security and military puzzle in the 21st century. Most recently we have seen Russia display its military strength in its two conflicts in the post-Soviet space, with widely differing results of the operations in the Republic of Georgia, and Ukraine.¹

In August 2008, the Russian military conducted its first operation outside of its national borders since the fall of the Soviet Union, committing its military to a five-day war in Georgia over the disputed regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev ordered a full military operation (although it was never officially referred to as a war by Russian officials) in order to aid Russian peacekeepers on the ground and “ensure peace” in the breakaway regions and Georgia proper. As world leaders scrambled to end the war amidst the Beijing Olympics, international relations and Russia scholars began analyzing the military engagement and Russia’s conventional military capabilities. The war is largely considered to be a Russian strategic victory; since August 2008, Abkhazia and South Ossetia are de facto independent and Georgia has made no further concrete progress towards joining the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO).² However, despite Russia’s strategic success, the military experienced severe operational failures, prompting questions about the technological abilities of the Russian military.

After an internationally criticized war in 2008, the Russian Armed Forces (VS) was subjected to pressure to reform and modernize for future military engagements and mitigate operational failures in later wars. Russia’s tactical military performance in 2008 was

uncoordinated and unsophisticated for a country with such a strong military legacy. The war prompted an internal review of the Armed Forces, culminating in then-President Medvedev’s announcement of a comprehensive military reform program, referred to as the “new look” of the VS. The reform program targeted all aspects of the military, transitioning the decrepit Soviet model of sheer manpower to a mobile, highly technical military capable of engaging in smaller wars in the periphery.

Since October 2008 and the initiation of the modernization program, the Armed Forces have been engaged in only one other operation in the Former Soviet Union (FSU) space, in Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula in March 2014. The March incursion was shrouded in speculation about the “little green men,” armed and coordinated fighters who were critical in securing the peninsula through a covert operation and were believed to be Russian elite forces. The “little green men” were able to effectively siege and secure the peninsula and end the Ukrainian central government’s ability to maintain a political and military presence in Crimea. Following official governmental acknowledgement of the operation in Crimea in 2015, analysts have referred to the operation as a military success due to the short timeframe, highly covert activity, and successful capture of sovereign Ukrainian territory with limited military contestation from Ukraine.

The wide-sweeping reform program has been offered as the primary reason for Russia’s operational success in Crimea; the reformed and modernized military would not have succeeded in Crimea without its improved command and control and technical capabilities. Many analysts have drawn a clear line between Russia’s military reforms on the one hand, and success in

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4 I define peripheral warfare for Russia as armed conflicts in the former Soviet space. These wars (real and hypothetical) can also be defined as asymmetrical, as none of the former Soviet states posses a conventional military capability equal to that of Russia.

5 I do not include the war in Donbas, Ukraine, given the speculative nature of the conflict and Russia’s lack of outright admittance of involvement.
Crimea on the other. Russian scholars postulate that Russia’s military and technological reforms have been vital in the success of these operations. They define the reforms as the critical moment for Russia’s power projection capabilities in the last decade, and while the reforms have not been perfect and many of these scholars are critical of the reforms’ progress, they note that the modernization efforts are the most important distinction between the Georgian and Crimean operations.

Upon a closer look at the two engagements, we see inadequate analyses of which conditions create operational success in these cases, and which conditions need to be present for Russia to conduct any future military operations in the near-abroad. Attributing the modernization process as the key to Russia’s operational success in its military operation in Crimea disregards other social and political factors and overemphasizes the importance of technological innovation in operational success.

To analyze the extent to which a modernized military or extensive and successful social networks in a target country matter to the success of Russia’s military operations, I build on a broader literature of technological determinism and peripheral conquest to identify the components of a successful operation. The technological determinist school argues that a modern, technically advanced military is critical in operational victories. The social structures and network theorists argue conversely that a superior military doesn’t guarantee victories over weaker opponents, but rather, having local collaborators and intelligence networks is crucial; even a militarily superior state with inadequate social networks can lose against a weaker adversary. These theories explain why we see a mix of operational victories and failures in Georgia despite a flawed armed forces performance, and a successful operation in Crimea.
Why do we care about what conditions create operational success for Russia? In 2015, Russia committed its military to the fight against the Islamic State in Syria and in support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s forces in the country’s civil war. In early 2016, the RAND Corporation published a report stating that in a hypothetical military entanglement in the Baltics, Russia could easily overtake the Baltic states, and a NATO victory would be difficult to achieve. The Russian military is taking an increasingly active role in global politics and the West is paying closer attention. When trying to predict where and how Russia’s military may move next, it is critical to understand under what conditions the military operates most successfully, as this can also inform NATO and U.S. defense policy towards Russia.

**Literature Review**

The goal of this thesis is to assess the extent to which Russia’s military modernization determined operational success in Crimea, and the implications of that for potential future operations in Russia’s near abroad. For this analysis, I use operational success as my dependent variable, defining operations as interconnected battles and tactical maneuvers conducted under an overarching military plan. I do not attempt to measure the strategic or political success of these wars, but rather solely focus on the military components within the order of battle. Given the particular cases of military engagements relevant to this thesis, I also confine my theoretical analysis to small and peripheral wars, as Georgia and Ukraine are not militarily equal to Russia. Russia’s modernization program has been accompanied by a shift in doctrine towards “ambiguous warfare,” which, as discussed later in Chapter Three, is another title for small, hybrid wars, or in Kaldor’s terms, “fourth-generation warfare.”

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To explain operational success, many scholars offer a technological determinist explanation of warfare. The technological determinist school of political science states that in cases of interstate war, the state with a larger, more technologically advanced military can dominate the smaller state. An effective and superior military leads to successful military operations, which results in strategic and political success. Following the logic of this theory, Russia should be able to dominate any of the FSU states based on the sheer size of its military in comparison to FSU militaries.

The technological determinist literature is largely defined by Daniel Headrick and William Thompson, who write specifically about the importance of military technology in colonial and imperial expansion. Headrick argues that imperialism and expansion have been, and continue to be, reliant on technological innovation; inventions such as the steamship enabled European colonizers to successfully conquer territory in the periphery. European colonizers were more effective and efficient in adapting and modernizing their armies to peripheral conquests instead of conventional, major power warfare, and were able to overwhelm the lesser-prepared adversaries by force. Similarly, Thompson establishes the “military superiority thesis,” which asserts that without a superior military apparatus, European states would have been unable to

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colonize and conquer in the periphery, though he does note the role that local actors in the colonized countries play in conquest.\textsuperscript{8}

Theorist Geoffrey Parker also writes on the importance of technology in the ability of a state to expand and conduct conquest operations. Along with theorist Williamson Murray, Parker argues, through a series of historical cases, that when confronted with asymmetrical conflicts, great powers were successful when their militaries were superior in technology, training, organization, and discipline.\textsuperscript{9} Parker ends his analysis with a policy prescription for 21\textsuperscript{st} century wars, in a world in the midst of a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). Powers engaged in asymmetrical and peripheral conflicts should invest in research and technology in order to “offset marked numerical inferiority.”\textsuperscript{10} This investment requires a powerhouse economy that can sustain the innovation of new technologies that adapt to the changing nature of warfare and the new demands on Armed Forces; the government’s ability to adapt its military to these new challenges determines whether the power will be successful in its operations.\textsuperscript{11} The most successful historical examples have been European and other Western powers that have managed great innovations in military technology during periods of conquest and peripheral warfare, creating the “first global hegemony in history.”\textsuperscript{12}

Using more contemporary case studies, Stephen Biddle discusses technical superiority in peripheral conflicts for the United States and which conditions create victory in modern warfare, and this has general theoretical underpinnings relevant to the case of Russia. Biddle defines modern warfare in a similar line to the Russian Ministry of Defense (MoD), as will be discussed


\textsuperscript{10} Parker (2005), page 419.


\textsuperscript{12} Parker (1996) pages 132, 154.
in later chapters. Modern warfare is characterized by “cover, concealment, dispersion, suppression, small-unit independent maneuver, and combined arms at the tactical level, and depth, reserves, and differential concentration at the operational level of war.”\textsuperscript{13} The goal of modern warfare and technological adaptation to these wars is to mitigate the casualties that modern weapons are capable of inducing. The mark of a successful military is one that can implement this style of armed forces, which Biddle notes is a difficult and expensive endeavor, especially in terms of political cost. Biddle argues that technology is important, but the handling and training of a military is key, which was one of the primary goals of Russia’s reforms. A “preponderant military” is not guaranteed to be the victor in operations if the military is not handled correctly.\textsuperscript{14}

These arguments fail to take into account factors outside of the military itself that may impact operational success. Technological innovation and successful command of an army overlooks several conditions, especially social and political factors that exist within the peripheral state itself. For example some scholars have pointed to various political factors that explain why technologically-advanced states lose peripheral wars. Ivan Arreguin-Toft, Robert Cassidy, and Andrew Mack establish a series of factors that explain why strong states and great powers often lose in these small, peripheral wars, where fourth generation warfare is often preferred, despite their overwhelming military and technological superiority. Mack focuses on domestic factors, noting the importance of authoritarianism in a state, which allows for greater control over popular dissent about these conflicts.\textsuperscript{15} An authoritarian government is able to legitimate the war to its population while simultaneously controlling any dissent that may arise.

\textsuperscript{14} Biddle, page 3.
especially over high casualty rates. Cassidy supports this theory, noting that any great power engaged in a war with a smaller adversary is difficult to sell to the public and coincides with a lack of political will to fight on behalf of the conquering nation.\textsuperscript{16}

Arreguin-Toft turns towards the conditions necessary in the target country for military operations to be successful. To compensate for a lack of political will in comparison to the local adversary, the great power must access and mobilize a “network of social support for intelligence, logistical assistance, and replacements.”\textsuperscript{17} In other words, the conquering state must have more than a strong military to win. It must have local collaborators.

Other scholars argue that social and political factors determine operation success more than technological factors. In contemporary warfare, reliance on local resources may be even more important than the sheer military power a state possesses. Militaries should take into account factors such as engaging local collaborators and establishing reliable networks of local intelligence. When fighting abroad, a state’s military hardware cannot compensate for local networks of intelligence, resources that may help the military survive, and the support of local communities, which adds to the military’s legitimacy.

Many of the theories of local collaboration networks are built on the assumptions of a fourth generation of warfare, that is, a new form of warfare where “the state loses its monopoly on war” and unconventional methods of war are favored over conventional engagements.\textsuperscript{18} Fourth generation theorists such as Kaldor and Hammes posture that states with powerful conventional armies are weaker in these scenarios and must rely on “integrating troops as much

as possible with the local people,” as a tactic to even the playing field.  
Throughout this paper, this type of war is referred to as modern war, hybrid warfare, and ambiguous warfare, though all have the same definition.  

Paul MacDonald expands on the necessity of engaging local collaborators to establish successful lines of communication and intelligence, as sheer force and superiority in numbers and technology is not the determining factor to colonial conquests in the periphery.  
MacDonald argues that theories of technological determinism are inadequate in explaining state success in peripheral conquest; social factors in the target countries “can shape peripheral conquest” and are a key factor in determining whether the more powerful state will conduct successful operations.  
Militaries engaging in peripheral conquest need to work with local collaborators in order to access reliable intelligence, work with local military forces, and increase the armed forces’ legitimacy and authority within that territory. In order for these local collaborators to be constructive to the conquest, local elites should be politically fragmented and “lack social ties with one another.” Greater social fractures enable the conquering power to take advantage of power vacuums and create environments where local resistance is much harder to coordinate and mobilize against the power.  
Local collaborators also provide logistical support to the conquering military, often providing critical supplies that the militaries.  
Military conquests are therefore more successful when states have existing local ties and are able to take advantage of local collaborators to increase the probability of successful operations and decrease the probability of local resistance.

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21 MacDonald, page 5.
22 MacDonald, pages 6,7.
23 MacDonald, page 30.
Theories explaining the difficulties a state may have in peripheral conquest also discuss variables of geography and distance, which will be of less importance in this analysis given the close proximity of Russia to the target states, namely Georgia and Ukraine. Kenneth Boulding created the “loss-of-strength gradient,” which states that a military’s power will decrease the further it gets away from home, as the state’s supply and intelligence lines are stretched to their limits. Given this theory, in the case of Russia, we should not see a substantial decrease in military operation success, despite the fact that the conflicts occur in another territory outside of Russia. In this line of thought, foreign military bases, such as Russia’s naval base in Sevastopol, Ukraine, should also mitigate the “loss-of-strength gradient,” by providing resources to the military in the conflict area. A base should also foster existing local relationships and authority with the local population, necessary conditions for establishing local collaborators.

These theories have broader implications for the study of Russia and its military engagements in the near abroad, given the historical social, cultural, political, and economic connections between Russia and the FSU states. In the remainder of this thesis, I argue that the existing literature on technological determinism ultimately fails to account for the conditions that

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have to be present in both the conquering country with the superior military and the target of the conquest for military operations to be successful. For this paper, I refer to Russia as the militarily superior state and Georgia and Ukraine as the target states. These case studies are the two examples of Russia’s military power projection in the last decade; with the Georgian War occurring before reforms, and the Crimean operations occurring after the reforms, these cases present an opportunity to analyze the effect of reforms and social factors and collaborators in the success of these operations, and make predictions about the feasibility of future operations in the near-aboard.

**The Social Conditions of Peripheral Warfare**

I hypothesize that the reforms and modernization of the VS were beneficial in improving the VS’ effectiveness, but have not been the deciding factor of success in operations, when comparing the cases of Georgia and Ukraine. The theories of military superiority and technological determinism do not account for factors within the target country that impact the success of Russia’s military operations. Success is instead dependent on the existence, cultivation, and mobilization of local collaborators, as well as favorable conditions such as geography and the existence of military bases in close proximity to the conflict zone. I argue that the following three conditions are necessary to the success of military operations.

1. *Within the target country, there must exist a lack of ethnic or national cohesion, which can exist in the form of an ethno-linguistic enclave, physically isolated from other regions of the target country.* These enclaves and aggrieved groups of people in a politically fractured country are vulnerable populations that can be easily targeted and organized into a coherent group of collaborators. Russia has pursued a strong policy of protecting
its “compatriots” abroad, so an enclave specifically of ethnic Russians is at particular risk of being used as collaborators by Russia.

2. **There must exist sympathy or ambivalence towards Russia, either within the target country, or especially in the isolated enclave.** This will increase incentives of local collaborators to work with Russia, especially if they have existing ethnic or linguistic ties to Russia, as point 1 stipulates. Incentives to work with Russia and sympathize with Russia can range from historical ties to favorable economic conditions, or passports from Russia. This sympathy can feed into domestic political fractures and contribute to isolating the enclave from the central government, limiting the government’s ability to respond and have intelligence in the region.

3. **Russia must be able to access, utilize, and mobilize networks of local collaborators who are able to provide intelligence, logistical support, and legitimacy to Russian operations.** The enclaves and groups of Russian sympathizers are not useful unless they agree to cooperate with Russia and provide useful information and support in the case of a conflict.

If this hypothesis is true and these conditions are the defining factor of operational success over a superior and technologically advanced military, we should see, in addition to military tactical and technological failures in Georgia, a lack of collaboration with locals in the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In Crimea, we should see locals willing to work with Russia and accommodate the “little green men” by providing logistical support and intelligence. We may also see tactical and technological failures in the midst of the Crimean operations, which diminish the importance of the reform program in this operation.
If this hypothesis is false, and there were significant local collaborators in play in Georgia, we are left to determine why some operations in Georgia were unsuccessful. Additionally, the Crimean operations, if proven unconnected and not reliant upon social networks of collaborators, could also be explained by overwhelming and superior military force against a weaker enemy.

**Research Design**

The primary goal of this paper is to measure operational success and determine whether components from the military reforms program or preexisting social conditions were more determinant of that success. In order to make these conclusions and test my hypothesis, I will first establish what operational success means. Every operation is attached to a goal or an objective. If the operation achieves that goal, I classify it as a success. In some cases, the objective of operations is not clearly defined, given a lack of transparent information from the government and the military. In these cases, I will synthesize available information on the order of battle and the general objectives of that branch of military to make a guess of what the operation’s objectives were. I will not seek to measure whether the operation was successful in terms of the broader political strategy.

Furthermore, I will measure what factors were most important in determining the operation’s success. Based on my literature review and preliminary theory, I will use the three main conditions listed above as testing points. For both case studies, I will analyze the existence and success of each of these conditions through the order of battle in the operations.

**Conclusion**
Based on the existing literature on success of military operations and my hypothesis on the necessary conditions for Russia’s military engagements in the periphery, I move to two case studies of Russia’s military in its neighboring states. Chapter Two contains an analysis of the war in Georgia in 2008, and explanations for Russia’s operational failures. Chapter Three discusses the reform and modernization program, and Russia’s turn towards a smaller, professional army focused on fighting small wars, particularly in the “near-abroad.” Chapter Four continues with an analysis of the operations in Crimea, and an analysis of the importance of local collaborators and intelligence networks in military operations. I end with thoughts on where Russia may get militarily involved next, and how NATO and the U.S. should engage with Russia in the future given my conclusion on the role of technology versus local collaborators in military operations.
CHAPTER 2: THE RUSSO-GEORGIAN WAR OF 2008

Introduction

The 2008 War in the Republic of Georgia’s semi-autonomous regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia was relatively predictable, given the history of conflict and separatism in the oblasts, as well as a previous war from 1991-93, in which Russia was involved militarily. After a shaky ceasefire and agreement to a Russian peacekeeping presence in the two regions, Tbilisi began to lose control over the region, as Russia deepened its control over the territory. When the conflict escalated on August 8th, the first full-blown war between Russia and one of the former Soviet republics began. This chapter will address the background of Russia’s military presence in Georgia, Russia’s local collaborators in the separatist regions, and conclude with an analysis of the military aspects of the conflict with Georgia, looking at the various successes and failures of the Russian military, as well as the immediate response by Russia.

Background of the Conflict

South Ossetia and Abkhazia have been relatively free from the central Georgian state traditionally, enjoying federalized autonomy from Georgia during the Soviet period due to the regions’ distinct ethnic, linguistic, and historical characteristics. Ossetian and Abkhaz people make up the ethnic majority of their respective regions; in 2012, Ossetians comprised 89% of South Ossetia, while Abkhaz made up 50% of Abkhazia. In 1990 and 1992, amidst the breakup of the Soviet Union, leaders in South Ossetia and Abkhazia engaged in a violent attempt at

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independence against Georgia; in 1992, South Ossetia and Abkhazia both declared their secession from Georgia and the creation of two new states. By 1994, an uneasy stalemate was reached between the autonomous regions, Georgia, and Russia. The conflict centered primarily around Abkhazia, but the UN negotiated ceasefire covered both autonomous regions. The United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) set up a contingent of peacekeeping troops from all sides of the conflict.\textsuperscript{29} The shaky ceasefire was also reinforced by an agreement between Georgia, Russia, North Ossetia, and South Ossetia; the parties created a Joint Conflict Commission (JCC) to monitor the hostilities in South Ossetia, though the coalition was clearly tilted in Russia’s advantage.\textsuperscript{30}

The conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia remained quiet until 2001, when following the 9-11 attacks on the United States, Russia began to redefine and increase its counterterrorism strategy in the Eurasian region. Anticipating a conflict between Russia and Georgia in the future and taking advantage of the Georgia’s proximity to the Middle East, the United States established the Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP), which provided military and financial assistance for Georgia’s counterterrorism capabilities.\textsuperscript{31} After the country’s Rose Revolution of 2004, with the ascent of Mikheil Saakashvili to the presidency, the central Georgian government pursued an active policy of territorial integration, making it clear that the de facto autonomy of South Ossetia and Abkhazia would not be a long-term solution.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{31} Cornell, Starr, page 43.
\textsuperscript{32} Cornell, Starr, page 91.
violence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which ended in the negotiation of a new ceasefire agreement.\textsuperscript{33}

Militarily, Russia maintained a strong presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia since the 1994 ceasefire negotiations. Russia inherited a base from the Soviet era in the Abkhaz city of Gudauta, out of which Russia based its peacekeeping presence in Abkhazia.\textsuperscript{34} In 2001, as part of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), Russia agreed to turn the base over to Georgia.\textsuperscript{35} No such action was taken, and Russia continued to operate the base for its peacekeeping contingent of 400 troops and equipment. However, in 2005, Russia finally agreed to remove its troops from bases in Georgia by 2008. The removal was completed by November 2007, but the bases were reinstated following the war in 2008.\textsuperscript{36} Russia also inherited a base in Batumi, Georgia’s Adjara region, where approximately 1000 troops were stationed. The Batumi base was also turned over to Georgia in 2007.\textsuperscript{37}

However, Russia continued to be involved by providing military equipment to the two separatist regions. In February 2003, Russia began supplying the South Ossetian militia with twelve T-55 tanks, and in 2004, with five T-72 tanks and ammunition.\textsuperscript{38} In 2006, South Ossetia received 75 more T-72 tanks, and numerous anti-aircraft weapons.
Immediately before the conflict on July 15, 2008, Russia began a series of large-scale antiterrorism military exercises, *Kavkaz 2008* (Caucasus 2008). *Kavkaz 2008* involved the North Caucasus Military District of Russia, and included over 8,000 troops from all services, 700 armored services, air support, the Caspian Flotilla, and the Black Sea Fleet. Russia’s 58th Army played the central role in the exercises, setting up multiple encampments between the Russian city of Vladikavkaz and the Roki Tunnel, which connects Russia to Georgia. The 7th Mountain Division of the Airborne Forces, the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division from Chechnya, mountain brigades from Dagestan, and subunits from Pskov’s 76th Airborne Division all took part in the exercises. *Kavkaz 2008* focused on training troops to meet adversaries in mountainous and wooded areas, such as in the Southern Caucasus in South Ossetia, and the mandate of the exercises included an invasion of a fictitious neighboring nation. The fictitious country’s listed manpower and equipment matched Georgia’s characteristics, inciting suspicions that *Kavkaz 2008* was a front to prepare for war. Former Putin advisor Andrei Illarionov stated following the war that *Kavkaz 2008* was part of an elaborate and well-executed plan to conduct a war in Georgia; the five-day war was far from spontaneous.

**Timeline of the Georgian War**

To assess the success or failure of the operations, it is important to understand the initial plans and intents of Russian military leaders; whether or not these objectives were met is an indication of how successful the operations were. Russia’s primary operational goal was to

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39 These numbers represent the official reports; analysts suspect over 15,000 troops could have taken part in the exercises. Svante, Starr, page 71.


41 Cohen, page 19.

prevent Georgian troops from entering and securing South Ossetia, and this needed to be completed before Georgians in South Ossetia could mobilize or connect with the central government. Russia’s additional operational goals were engaging Georgian forces in “decisive battles,” and isolating Georgia from any type of foreign aid or intervention by closing off borders and controlling transportation (especially airfields). Russia anticipated a mobilization time of 24-48 hours for its troops in the oblast of North Ossetia to enter into South Ossetia. Georgia’s western semi-autonomous republic, Abkhazia, was not the primary military concern for Russia, despite a more pronounced history of separatism and Russian military involvement.

In analyzing the war, most analysts agree that Russia enjoyed a strategic advantage and was more prepared and successful in terms of its military’s strategic choices. Given Russia’s conventional strength, Russia should have been able to militarily overtake Tbilisi. However, the strategic advantages call into focus the broader geopolitical and historical underpinnings of the conflict, and I will not extrapolate these in this chapter. It is within the tactical and operational levels that problems are more visible in Russia’s conduct during the war.

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43 In understanding the timeline of operations in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, I consult primarily “The Tanks of August,” the most comprehensive, unbiased (non-governmental) account of the war, based on a compilation of media sources and first hand accounts of the war. For similar scholarly accounts, see: Cohen 2011. For the official Georgian account, see: “Timeline by 12th of August.” Georgan Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
44 Pavel Felgenhaur, “Russian Military Chief Accuses Georgia of Preparing Aggression,” Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 6, No. 117, June 18, 2009,
http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35140&no_cache=1#.VsZrnnQrlzU.
(Figure 1: Map from August 11, 2008)\textsuperscript{45}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{lcc}
\hline
 & Russia & Georgia \\
\hline
Manpower (total Defense Ministry troops) & 107,000 & 21,150 \\
Main battle tanks & 800 & 128 \\
Armored infantry fighting vehicles and personnel carriers & 2,000+ & 135 \\
Artillery & 900 & 109 \\
Short-range ballistic missiles (SS-21, SS-26) & 36+ & 0 \\
Military aircraft (fixed-wing, all types) & 400+ & 17 \\
Helicopters (Army and Air Force) & 147 & 35 \\
Naval vessels (total) & 122 (Black Sea fleet) & 8 \\
South Ossetian militias & 1,500 & – \\
Abkhazian militias & 23,000 (including reserves) & – \\
Cossacks & Several hundred & – \\
Chechen “East” Battalion & 800–1,500 & – \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Comparison of Forces in Georgian War Theater}
\end{table}

(Figure 2: Comparison of Forces in Georgian War Theater, 2008)\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{45} “War in Georgia- Maps.” Perry-Castenada Library Map Collection, University of Texas at Austin. Retrieved from: \url{http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/georgia_war_2008.html}.
Russian Operational and Tactical Strategy

Russia was rumored to have planned its operations in Georgia for years leading up to August 2008 according to former Ambassador John Teff, and had a distinct operational strategy going into the war. Russia entered into its operations with Georgia with the same strategies and mindset that it had from the ill-fated Chechen Wars. In both cases, the military was determined to cordon the region off from outside help to secure the territory militarily and then politically. Tactically, the military relied on brute force and its overwhelming numbers, rather than try to conduct bloodless operations.

Order of Battle

On the morning of August 8th, 2008, Georgian troops began an offensive into South Ossetia. In response to Georgia shelling South Ossetian towns, the Russian General Staff (GS) mobilized the 19th Motorized Rifle Division’s 693rd and 135th Regiments. One hour later, the first Russian tactical-sized group crossed into South Ossetia. This initial movement was meant to secure the road from the Roki Tunnel to the Ossetian capital Tskhinvali, which connects Russia and Georgia and would serve as the road for Russian military supplies and troops to enter into the country for the duration of the war. If these roads were not secured, Georgian military units...
could block Russian reinforcements moving into South Ossetia. Russian units stationed in Chechnya were placed on high alert and tactical groups of the Pskov Airborne Assault Division were ordered to begin moving towards Georgia.

On the morning of the 8th, Georgian Su-25 bombing aircraft fired upon the 693rd Division in an attempt to destroy a bridge that was strategic for Russian troop movement. The Russian forces had no prior intelligence about the attack or an attached anti-air division yet, but due to a lack of accuracy in the Georgian bombs, sustained no casualties. The lack of Russian anti-air capabilities meant that the Georgian aircraft also were unharmed. The VVS began their first bombing campaign of the war, hitting Georgian troops advancing towards Tskhinvali and military targets deeper into Georgia, such as the military base for reserves in Vaziani and the Independent Combined Tank Battalion base in Gori. Su-22s raided Georgian columns on the outskirts of Tskhinvali, killing dozens and successfully destroying military equipment. The loss forced the Georgian army to retreat, thus giving up approximately 30% of the South Ossetian territory that Georgia had previously secured.

Russian and South Ossetian attacks and air raids ultimately caused a retreat to the city of Eredvi, and Russian bombers continued to target military infrastructure within Georgia proper. Russian Su-24M bombers attacked the main Georgian airbase at Marneuli. During these air raids, a Russian Su-25 came under friendly fire from a portable SAM (Surface-to-Air Missile); the plane was destroyed but the pilot ejected to safety.

During these operations, the South Ossetian militias also carried out their own operations, occasionally assisted by Russian North Ossetian troops. The South Ossetian militia guarded the

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50 Barabanov et. al., page 51.
51 This was the only operation by Georgian Su-25s for the remainder of the war. Barabanov et. al., page 52.
52 Barabanov et. al., page 54.
53 Barabanov et. al., page 55.
Russian peacekeeping base in Tskhinvali on August 8th, while simultaneously successfully targeting advancing Georgian T-72 tanks with RPG-7 anti-tank rockets. These operations however, appear to have been separate from Russia’s GS direction.

South Ossetia was the primary location of battle on the first day; it was not until later in the afternoon that the Russian GS approved mobilization of the 108th Airborne Assault Regiment to Abkhazia. The troops were put on large tank landing ships (LTS) from the Black Sea stationed in Sevastopol, Ukraine. The Fleet’s flagship guided missile cruiser, the Moskva, was also ordered to prepare for battle.

Throughout the day, Russia amassed 3,000-3,500 troops, with at least 30 attached tanks and other artillery pieces. 63 sorties were flown to protect peacekeepers, cover advancing troops, and target Georgian assets. Though this initial operation clearly halted Georgia’s offensive, Russian forces were unable to begin their own counter-offensive, which had been one of the operational goals at the onset of the war.

When Georgian troops began shelling Tskhinvali again, the main Russian battalion was not in its tactical position and during its attempts to rejoin the fight and stop Georgian shelling, the Army lost a BMP infantry fighting vehicle and three GAZ-66 trucks. The VVS also suffered, and after the multiple losses of the day, Russia only flew 28 combat sorties on the 9th.

In response to the Georgian attacks upon Tskhinvali against the ill-prepared Motorized Rifle Battalion, Spetsnaz units and a company of the Vostok Battalion (both previously deployed in the Chechen War) moved towards the city to join the battle. Russia suffered multiple artillery losses during this battle, and several Sergeants and a Deputy Commander were killed in action.

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54 Barabanov et. al., page 54.  
55 Barabanov et. al., page 58.  
56 Barabanov et. al., page 61.  
57 Barabanov et. al., page 64.
Russia improved its intelligence and signals gathering abilities during this battle however, successfully setting up artillery spotters who improved the accuracy of artillery batteries.\textsuperscript{58} By the evening of the 9th, Georgian troops had almost all left Tskhinvali, marking an artillery success for Russia, and the end of the blockade on the Russian peacekeepers’ compound. Russian forces targeted the retreating Georgians, preventing any further Georgian incursions into South Ossetia for the remainder of the war.\textsuperscript{59} The Russian battalion charged with holding Tskhinvali was relieved of duty that night as well, after suffering losses of life and material during the battles, leaving the city to be controlled by local South Ossetian militiamen.

On the 9th in Abkhazia, the VMF launched two Tochka-U Short Range Ballistic Missiles (SRBMs) at the Georgian Naval Base of Poti, effectively ending Georgia’s naval endeavors during the war. The VVS also successfully targeted military targets (and a civilian railway station) in Abkhazia. Simultaneously, the Russian GS authorized Abkhaz units to begin a ground offensive in the Kodori Gorge, using artillery fire and helicopter support. By the afternoon of the 9th, the VMF announced it was closing the Abkhazia port to all shipping and would begin patrolling the waters exclusively. Several Georgian boats defied the warning, and upon reaching the VMF’s patrol barrier, were attacked with anti-ship missiles. No clear information has been released about the fate of the ships; Georgia denies the ships were lost, while Russian official MOD sources cite the destruction of at least one ship.\textsuperscript{60}

Russia and Georgia continued to exchange artillery fire throughout the early morning of the 10th, with Russian forces attempting to secure uninterrupted transportation for its incoming troops. Later in the day, multiple Motorized Rifle Regiments and tactical groups from the 76th Airborne Assault Division arrived, doubling Russian forces to over 10,000 (comparable in

\textsuperscript{58} Barabanov et. al., page 62.
\textsuperscript{59} Barabanov et. al., page 63.
\textsuperscript{60} Barabanov et. al., page 64-66.
numbers to Georgian forces deployed in South Ossetia during the war).\textsuperscript{61} Russian forces continued to raid Gori and targets in north-central Georgia, including the Tbilisi International Airport’s radar towers and landing strips. Georgian forces resumed shelling Tskhinvali in response, killing three Russian soldiers in the process, but failing to make any progress forward.

In Abkhazia, Airborne Assault Brigades began shelling targets in Western Georgia and worked with Abkhaz artillery troops, now numbering up to 9,000. By the afternoon of the 10th, the ground troops received further support when the \textit{Moskva} guided missile cruiser dropped anchor off the coast of Georgia.\textsuperscript{62}

Russia’s primary objective on the 11th was to disable Georgian anti-air and air-defense capabilities and infrastructure. An anti-radar missile was fired successfully against a Georgian radar station near Gori, which had previously controlled the air space over the conflict area. A civilian radar system was also targeted, as was the Georgian Air Force Command Center. In order to deflect Russian raids, the Georgia shut down its mobile air defenses, crippling its defense capabilities against Russian aircraft.

Russia began preparing for a strong counterattack against Georgian forces amassed on the Georgian side of the border to South Ossetia, with the goal of creating a buffer zone for the region. A battalion sized tactical group of the 76th Airborne Assault Division and a regiment from the 42nd Motorized Rifle Division assembled outside of Tskhinvali for the attack. The 693rd Motorized Rifle Regiment led the attack, as it had been in action in Georgia the longest and had suffered minimal casualties.\textsuperscript{63} As the group moved, they came under fire from Georgian forces, but were able to maneuver away to safety and reach its target location. At the same time, the 693rd Motorized Rifle Division was ambushed by Georgian troops; a tank and infantry

\textsuperscript{61} Barabanov et. al., page 67.
\textsuperscript{62} Barabanov et. al., page 68.
\textsuperscript{63} Barabanov et. al., page 69.
fighting vehicles were lost during the short battle. Additionally, five Russian servicemen were killed in action.

Later in the afternoon, Russia suffered another friendly fire accident when an Su-25 accidentally attacked a Russian convoy, exploding a fuel tank. The convoy and soldiers from an Airborne Assault Regiment continued forward however, and were able to seize a Georgian logistics base. Another operation was conducted in the evening near Shindisi. Georgian troops unknowingly happened upon Russian paratroopers who had been unable to move forward due to an engine failure. The following firefight resulted in 17 Georgian deaths.\textsuperscript{64}

In Abkhazia, Russian and local troops succeeded in seizing a Georgian base nearby Senaki. The Russian units blew up multiple T-72 tanks and seized Georgian BUK-1 SAM vehicles. Local militiamen continued to move against Georgian troops, quickly gaining territory up to the border with Georgia proper. Russia launched its own operation against the port of Poti; the attack blew up six of the Georgian Navy’s primary, although at this time, abandoned ships.\textsuperscript{65} Another group of Russian paratroopers maneuvered to finally block the Kodori Gorge, encircling the Georgian troops and forcing surrender.\textsuperscript{66}

By morning, Russian troops had control over the area around Gori (though troops did not enter into the city) and the road between Gori and Tskhinvali. Medvedev issued a statement that the war was officially over; Russian troops had achieved their objectives to “force Georgia to peace,” and were no longer needed on the ground. The following days were devoted to the negotiation of a peace treaty, led by former President Nicolas Sarkozy of France. By the end of

\textsuperscript{64} Barabanov et. al., page 71.
\textsuperscript{65} Barabanov et. al., page 75.
\textsuperscript{66} Barabanov et. al., page 73.
the war, Russia reported its official losses as 71 dead, five prisoners of war, and 365 wounded, though these figures do not include Ossetian and local volunteer loses.67

**Analysis of Russia’s Military Performance**

The immediate response to the Georgian conflict was praise for Russia’s lightning offensive and overwhelming show of force against its weaker opponent; a Russian victory was widely agreed on by outside observers.68 However, analysts and the Russian government itself noted the widespread failures of the VS despite a strategic victory. All pointed to the unnecessary casualties and frequent failings of Russian equipment during the war, in other words, operational failures. For all of its proclaimed power, the Russian military had performed poorly and hardly at the standards of a former world superpower.

Analyst Ariel Cohen argues that Russia’s strategic superiority undercuts scholars’ ability to interpret and identify operational failures, though these failures still exist and should not be undervalued.69 As a result, most analyses point to the technological and tactical failings of the military, which we can see from the order of battle, but forgo the operational level.

Operationally, Russia also faced issues of joint force coordination and command. The command changes occurring in the military prior to the war culminated in a physical movement of the Russian GS in 2008; as the war began, the members of the GS were in the process of moving headquarter buildings and were absent from the decision making during the first few days of combat of the war.70 The GS also lacked a Director of the Main Intelligence Directorate

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68 For an initial positive analysis of Russia’s performance, see Carafano et. al.
69 Cohen, page 30.
(GRU), someone to control and streamline intelligence operations. Consequently, the North Caucasus Military District Commander, General Sergey Makarov, exercised a significant amount of control over the war operations. However, reports suggest that the Makarov had no direct authority over any VVS operations, having to defer instead to the Commander of the Air Force, Aleksandr Zelin, who directed the air power operations from VVS headquarters in Moscow. Zelin was far removed from the field of operations and the communication between his office and Makarov was disjointed at best, impacting the two branches’ ability to coordinate operations.

The VVS also experienced a lack of readiness among troops service-wide. High ranking commanders in the VVS were in short supply, as were professional, well trained pilots underneath them. Russian generals admitted after the war that only five regiments of the VVS were permanently combat ready at the outbreak of the war, limiting Russia’s ability to quickly deploy a well trained, well equipped Air Force during the conflict. The VVS Regiments in the NCMD had a higher number of professional pilots at combat ready status compared to other districts, since pilots were in high demand in the NCMD in response to the Chechen conflict. However, in total, only an estimated 70% of Russian soldiers were professionals; the other 30% were conscripts who were ill-trained and prepared for the war.

The Russian military also identified immediate problems in technology and weapons platforms. Many of the failures on the tactical level for Russia can be attributed to malfunctioning and decrepit equipment; an estimated 80% of the hardware used by Russia

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72 McDermott (2009) page 73.
74 Out of 150 regiments total. McDermott (2009), page 69.
75 Brabanov et. al., page 41
76 Cohen, page 31.
during the war had not been updated since Soviet times. In comparison, Georgia under Saakashvili’s direction had pursued a military modernization program, purchasing new and updated weapons systems from countries such as Ukraine and Israel.

The out of date equipment did not allow for the use of modern tactics; instead, Russia had to rely on the Soviet style of fighting that depends on a massive show of numerical force, rather than precision targeting. In general, the SV was deployed in column formation, with little established fire position support, and no attempt to flank the Georgian forces. The column formation of the VS was also problematic because it did not conform to the nature of Georgia’s geography, nor did the commanders anticipate needing to change their physical structure of movement. The sheer number of Russian troops marching into Georgia made it impossible move efficiently through the roads in South Ossetia and were delayed due to “traffic jams” on the narrow mountain roads.

At the intersection of communication and technological failures was the issue of GLONASS, the Russian satellite system, which should have enabled the bulk of intelligence operations and precision strikes in 2008. GLONASS was created to be Russia’s answer to the GPS, a satellite program capable of providing real time intelligence and positioning information for the VS. Prior to the war, Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Ivanov promised a fully functioning GLONASS by mid-2008, but the satellites were far from operational in August.

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79 Barabanov et. al., page 67


GLONASS satellites in orbit did not function properly, crippling the intelligence gathering of the VS, the ability to use Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) for reconnaissance, and the use of precision guided munitions (PGMs) in raids.\(^{82}\) PGMs would have allowed for a more effective use of power, with fewer casualties and more accurate targeting. Russia also did not make use of PGMs, which was surprising for a country purported to be a great military power and contributed to the high amount of civilian casualties inflicted by Russia.\(^{83}\) The VVS had not previously successfully integrated PGMs into its operations despite the official Military Doctrine in 2000 labeling “precision mobile non-nuclear weapons” as a priority for the military.\(^{84}\)

Without GLONASS and UAVs, the VVS had also little to no reliable intelligence about Georgia air defense system locations from satellites and no way to use PGMs to target the sites.\(^{85}\) Despite having de facto control of the air after the first day of combat, the VVS was unable to achieve Suppression of Enemy Air Defenses (SEAD) until the fourth day of combat when the Georgian General Staff ordered their air defense systems to be shut down to avoid further damage. In the years leading up to the war, the Georgian government had prioritized the modernization of their anti-aircraft capabilities, purchasing a Spyder air defense system from Israel, and BUK-M1 rockets from Ukraine.\(^{86}\) This posed more of an obstacle for the VVS than anticipated, and VVS “was not very effective in suppressing the Georgian air-defenses.”\(^{87}\)

Georgian air defenses successfully shot down a Russian Tu-22 bomber after the aircraft dropped to a lower altitude while conducting a reconnaissance mission. The VVS was unable to use

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\(^{83}\) Cohen, pages 38, 39.


\(^{85}\) McDermott (2009), page 70.


satellite guided UAVs to carry out important reconnaissance missions, and resorted to using a low flying, bulky, and loud Tu-22 bomber, which was vulnerable to Georgian anti-air systems and accessible by the Buk-1 SAMs.\(^8\)

Additionally, despite ground reinforcements, the VVS lost three aircraft in operations in one day. A Tu-22M3 bomber and an Su-24M were shot down by Georgian SAM anti-air defenses. An Su-25 was also reportedly hit by friendly fire following a raid on Georgian forces, although Russian officials deny this loss. Tu-22M3 bombers targeted a military facility in the city of Gori, but missed their targets, killing 14 Georgian civilians.\(^9\) These losses have been attributed to malfunctioning targeting equipment and a severe lack of intelligence regarding friendly aircraft.

The VVS had acquired modern Kh-555 air-launched cruise missiles that would have been critical in bringing down Georgian air defenses at the beginning of the war, but were only operational with satellite guidance. The VVS instead had to rely on, older technology for guided strikes, resulting in stray munitions and decreased targeting accuracy.\(^9\) The VS allegedly attempted to access commercial satellite information to rectify the failure of GLONASS, but US satellite imagery and maps over Georgia were inaccessible for 48 hours during the war and were an insufficient replacement for GLONASS’ military capabilities.\(^9\)

Russian inability to conduct SEAD operations successfully caused unnecessary Russian losses, losing multiple aircraft to the Georgian air defenses as the VVS struggled to target the Georgian anti-air systems. In evaluating the VVS’ performance post-war, Russian generals determined that the VVS should have focused on SEAD operations from the onset of the war to

\(^8\) Cohen, page 34.
\(^9\) Barabanov et. al., page 60.
\(^9\) McDermott (2009), page 70.
prevent Russian casualties and allow for more successful VVS tactical bombing raids for the duration of the war. It is worth restating however, that without a properly functioning GLONASS and PGM capabilities, the VVS’ ability to locate and destroy Georgian air defenses was significantly restrained, regardless of whether Russian command structures prioritized SEAD.

Conclusion

Any strategic success enjoyed by Russia in 2008 is clearly marred its military’s multiple shortcomings during the five days of operations in Georgia. Russia’s military, while objectively stronger than Georgia’s at full conventional strength, failed to perform at the level of a modern and effective military. The basic failings of the VS’s technology and operational strategies were that of the Soviet Red Army, not a military capable of engaging in “fourth-generational” warfare. The initial focus on the technological and structural failings of the military gave way to a politically convenient moment to push through a series of military reforms and modernization measures in Russia, aimed at improving the peripheral war capabilities of the military for any future engagements.

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92 McDermott (2009), page 73,
CHAPTER 3: MILITARY MODERNIZATION AND REFORM PROGRAM

Introduction

Russia’s political and military leaders in 2008 reacted to the Georgian War with a complete overhaul of the VS. This chapter addresses the history of military reforms attempts in Russia, the reform and modernization efforts beginning in 2008, and how these reforms have created a new military capable of operational success in places such as Crimea. To say that widespread military reforms were brought around solely as a result of the 2008 Georgian War however, would ignore a history of attempts at reform and partial successes, particularly under the Putin regime. Putin himself understood the failings of the military leading up to 2008, saying that “the Army has 1.4 million men, and yet there is no one to wage the war.”  

History of Military Reforms in Russia (1991-2008)

The struggle to reform Russia’s military has been ongoing since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Top military and political leaders realized that the Soviet style of warfare, that is, preparation for international conventional warfare, was outdated and unlikely. Despite a strong political desire to reform the outdated Armed Forces in 1991, Boris Yeltsin and his top advisors were not willing to force the military generals to submit to any broad changes.

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The VS in the post-Soviet transition period was characterized by its dismal performance in Chechnya, during which the MoD and the GS regularly disagreed over operational and tactical decisions, and had the power to cancel each other out. The GS fought to preserve their role in military decision-making, and were successful in doing so, at the expense of service-wide confusion and ineffective command and control over the military in both the First and Second Chechen Wars (1994-1996, 1999-2009). The Chechen Wars also contributed to the inefficient use of the military budget and inability to move away from a mass Soviet style army. In the midst of a war, no major changes could occur without severely disrupting the VS’ performance, and the state was compelled to keep spending to fund the war, despite the fact that the military’s budget failed to improve equipment and contributed to growing corruption in the ranks of the military.

In 1997, Yeltsin submitted a draft law to the Russian Duma, stating that radical changes needed to occur in the VS in order to address the unreasonably high priority given to Russia’s nuclear forces and the threat of a conventional war with NATO. The law proposed cutting the 1.7 million strong army by 500,000 troops, and offered a wider array of social benefits to improve the low morale of the troops and the issue of draft evasion. However, the law was not passed as a result of political infighting over the role of the military and its place in the budget; the Duma war hawks had no desire to cut military spending in the midst of the Chechen Wars. Yeltsin’s

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95 Marta Carlsson, “The Structure of Power: An Insight Into the Russian Ministry of Defense,” *FOI*, November 2012, page 10. [http://foi.se/Global/V%C3%A5r%20kunskap/S%C3%A4kerhetspolitiska%20studier/Ryssland%C3%96vriga%20filer/foir_3571.pdf](http://foi.se/Global/V%C3%A5r%20kunskap/S%C3%A4kerhetspolitiska%20studier/Ryssland%C3%96vriga%20filer/foir_3571.pdf)

96 Golts and Putnam, page 138.


one success in terms of military reform was the reduction of the size of the military; the 3 million strong Soviet military was reduced to 1.4 million by 2000.\textsuperscript{99}

Under Putin, more civilian control was asserted over the military, ensuring that the GS become subordinate to the MoD and be more receptive to reform programs. The government additionally tried to address the issue of obsolete weaponry through a state armament program (GPV), but between 1996 and 2005, the secretive program only achieved 20\% of its modernization target, given the unfavorable economic conditions in Russia.\textsuperscript{100} In 2002, Putin approved a GPV through 2010 and later to 2015 to extend the rearmament program’s mandate, but both GPVs only progressed by 2\% per year, rather than the projected 5.5\%.\textsuperscript{101}

Despite the lack of reforms until 2008, there was a recognition that the type of war Russia would face in the future was changing, and the military needed to adjust as such. In a 2003 Defense White Paper (DWP), then-Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov outlined the primary characteristics of war facing the Russian military. He noted that conflicts are asymmetrical, and the population will continue to play a vital role in the outcome of a war. Ivanov also noted the increasing importance of elite and special forces and information warfare, both of which are dependent upon a “unified command and control system” and inter-branch coordination.\textsuperscript{102} Ivanov pointed to the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Yugoslavia as representations of modern warfare and the benefits of using of PGMs instead of relying upon overwhelming numbers. None of these issues were formally addressed until after the war in 2008.

\textsuperscript{101} de Haas, page 18.
\textsuperscript{102} de Haas, page 19.
Overview of the VS Modernization and Reform Program (2008-present)

On October 14, 2008, less than two months after the questionable performance of the VS in Georgia, Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov (2007-2011) announced a radical, comprehensive reform program to modernize and improve the Russian military that some argue is the most change the military has seen since the inception of the Red Army.103 With approval from President Dmitry Medvedev (2008-2012), Prime Minister Putin (2008-2012), and then-Chairman of the Chief of the General Staff Nikolai Makarov (2008-2012), the Defense Ministry embarked on a comprehensive reform process that is still ongoing. The reform program aimed to dramatically change the performance capabilities of the VS following the lackluster performance in Georgia and a widely publicized 2007 financial audit of the Ministry of Defense that suggested that 20% of MoD funds were lost to corruption.104 Serdyukov, a civilian with no priorities to the Armed Forces, and Makarov, a progressive and popular general, shocked the Armed Forces with their successful push to modernize Russia’s war fighting capabilities and adapt for future conflicts after two decades of no reforms.105

The reform process was possible after the war with Georgia due to the heightened scrutiny of the VS (internally and externally), and the removal of key generals in the GS who had opposed military reforms throughout Putin’s tenure.106 The will among politicians to reform the

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military was also stronger than in previous years, given Medvedev and Putin’s expressed desire to return Russia to a place of military prestige among the other great powers.  

The leadership was most immediately concerned with addressing the old, Soviet structure of the military, insufficient command and control, and the obsolete weaponry and technology. I detail the reforms as they were intended to be implemented, followed by an evaluation of the progress that has been made in actuality and what these reforms mean for future conflicts Russia may engage in.

**Goals of the Reform Program: Network Centric Warfare**

The doctrinal goal of the first stage of the reform program was to transition to a network-centric approach of warfare, wherein the military focuses on superior command, control, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR), quick moving units, and operations that connect the civilian and military segments. This goal was created in light of the conflict in Georgia and encompasses Russia’s changing definition of how warfare will be conducted in the future. The military needed to have a small, flexible, and lethal force, capable of fighting short-term conflicts with little to no notice. The series of reforms shows us this is the direction Russia is moving its military towards, a direction that potentially has serious implications for other nations in the region.

**Structural and Personnel Changes**

One of the most important reform components was that of structure and command over the military, in direct response to the command, control, and communication failures experienced

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107 deHaas, page 23.
109 Herspring, page 151.
in Georgia. The VS was traditionally divided into six geographical military districts; the reforms consolidated these into four Joint Strategic Commands (OSK), West, South, Center, and East.\footnote{“Russia Sets Up Four Strategic Commands,” \textit{Sputnik International}, July 14, 2010, http://sputniknews.com/military/20100714/159810197.html.}\footnote{Barabanov, Makienko, Pukhov, page 20.}
The reforms during the Georgian war, the North Caucasus Military District played the central role, but was limited in its abilities to coordinate with other Districts, as well as make unilateral decisions during the war.\footnote{deHaas, page 29.}\footnote{Barabanov, Makienko, Pukhov, page 20.} The smaller number of districts streamlines communication between the MoD, GS, and OSK leaders, and makes each branch of the VS subordinate to the OSK, rather than the previous structure, when branch commanders could bypass District commanders to make operational decisions. Consolidated districts makes it possible to streamline planning and execution of operations, by cutting out the number of bureaucrats and military leaders needed to make decisions of any caliber. In relationship to the Georgian conflict, the new system places the North Caucasus Military District, Black Sea Fleet, and Caspian Flotilla under the same OSK (South), making coordination of operations between branches significantly easier.\footnote{“Reform of the Russian Armed Forces,” \textit{Sputnik International}, April 12, 2009, http://sputniknews.com/infographics/20091204/157098191.html.}

One of the most serious issues from the Georgian war was the severe lack of readiness of the VS. Skeleton units (units that were unprepared during peacetime to be deployed) needed to be eliminated to ensure higher readiness and end Russia’s expensive and unwise policy of mass mobilization in a crisis. Serdyukov’s initial proposal of reforms also included the hotly debated reduction of the Armed Forces, with the ultimate goal of lowering the total number of personnel to under a million by 2012, an estimated loss of 16.6%.\footnote{Barabanov, Makienko, Pukhov, page 20.} The proposal specifically targeted the officer class, calling for cuts of over 200,000 officers from the VS, which is a 57.7% decrease and a dramatic change from the Soviet structure of overwhelming manpower.
General Staff was required to reduce its office personnel by 50% by 2009. By 2011, only three officers from the top 34 positions in the VS retained their posts. This series of officer cuts moved Russia slowly away from its previous top-heavy 3:1 officer-to-enlisted soldier ratio.\textsuperscript{115} The Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) was also subjected to controversial cuts, and was decreased by 40%.\textsuperscript{116} The cuts in the office corps were modeled on Western militaries, with the goal of reducing military spending, as officers earn higher wages than lower recruits, and created a professional army less dependent on the unpopular conscription.\textsuperscript{117}

The reduction of the Armed Forces and specifically the officer corps was accompanied by the creation of a professional noncommissioned officer corps (NCO) in order to address the issue of retention and low morale of enlisted troops. NCOs are required to serve for a minimum of five years, and are an attempt to professionalize the VS and cut back on hazing traditions and low retention rates of lower ranking officers.\textsuperscript{118} In a survey in 2010, Russian citizens cited hazing practices as the problem in the VS that concerned them the most, which has been directly linked to both the general morale of Russian troops, as well as the VS’ inability to retain troops.\textsuperscript{119} In connection with the move to a more professionalized VS, the reforms changed the term of conscription from two years to one year.\textsuperscript{120} The VS will ultimately aim to reduce the amount of conscripts to 10-15% of the total strength.\textsuperscript{121}

Furthermore, the modernization program has transformed the VS into a brigade structure, consolidating the current command structure from a Soviet four tier (district, army, division,
regiment) to a three-tier structure (district, operational command, brigade) to streamline communication, command efficiency, and tactical mobility. The new structure would also help the Army move to permanent readiness and respond to a conflict on short notice. Divisions typically contain 8-14,000 servicemen, whereas brigades contain 4,500 to 6,500, which are easier to coordinate and maneuver in a broader range of military conflicts. During the Georgian war, troops were moved in division and column structure, leading to issues as simple as fitting all of the troops within the width of the roads. The brigade system is also more appropriate for asymmetrical warfare and gives commanders more flexibility and decision making power in the deployment of troops. The change to brigades was introduced in mid 2008 in the first round of reforms, and by 2009, the VS was consolidated from 203 divisions to 83 brigades.

One of the more pervasive issues faced by the SV was consistent and effective training and education. The reform program reduces the military educational institutions from 65 to 10 in order to streamline education and training. In addition to improving the education of troops, the reforms also focused on the improvement of morale and living conditions of the servicemen through increased salaries and benefits; Medvedev promised a 60% increase in pensions in 2011 and a VS-wide pay raise in 2012. Before 2008, conscripted troops suffered from incredibly low morale and most did not stay in the VS beyond their mandated term of service. Many eligible men also dodged the draft, citing fear of hazing as a primary reason for wanting to avoid conscription. A renewed education program and greater social benefits would attract more

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122 Barabanov et. al., page 67.
123 Bryce-Rogers, page 357.
124 Barabanov, Makienko, Pukhov, page 15.
126 Bryce-Rogers, page 360.
volunteers to the army and reduce Russia’s reliance on the draft for manpower and increase the number of professional and well trained soldiers.

*Modernization and the State Rearmament Program (GPV) to 2020*

By 2010, the MoD conducted an evaluation of the reform process and determined that improvement. The second phase of reforms was built upon the previous measures of structure and composition but targeted the systematic problems of technology and weaponry in the VS with the implementation of the new GPV to 2020.\(^{127}\) The military still primarily contained outdated and ill-functioning weaponry and hardware, an endemic problem that had not been addressed under previous reform efforts. Only 15 tanks were replaced (out of 23,000) between 2000 and 2004, and the VVS saw no new aircraft acquisitions between 1995 and 2008.\(^{128}\) Only 20% of the total hardware was up to modern standards.

The GPV now aims to equip the VS with 70% new military weapons and equipment at a rate of 11% per year, with an estimated cost of $616 billion.\(^{129}\) Experts estimate that the GPV would have to devote a total of $1.2 trillion in order to modernize the entire military, including Russia’s militarized satellite program GLONASS.\(^{130}\) As of 2013, weapons procurement was 70% of this budget, while research and development only accounted for 16%, and repairs and upgrades were 14%.\(^{131}\) The GPV’s projected expenditures would increase Russia’s annual defense spending from 2.9% of GDP to 3.5-4%. Given the declining power of the ruble and low


\(^{129}\) Based on the 2011 USD exchange rate.


\(^{131}\) Barbanov, Makienko, Pukhov, page 30.
international oil prices however, a continued increase in defense spending is uncertain for Russia.

The GPV has been a top priority among politicians in Russia, particularly Putin. In an article to Russian newspaper Rossiyskaya Gazeta, Putin stated that modernizing Russia’s forces cannot be delayed, as it must meet new and modern military threats. Putin noted that the threat of nuclear war has diminished, and although some of the GPV will go towards refurbishing Russia’s nuclear arsenal, the GPV should be directed towards the development of forward thinking technological solutions to military problems.

Reforms in the Ground Forces (SV)

Serdyukov’s reforms addressed individual branches of the VS, given that each branch had experienced particular failures in Georgia. The new brigade structure particularly affects the Ground Forces (SV), by creating motorized rifle brigades capable of high mobility and maneuverability. The goal of the brigade structure is to make units light and mobile within 24 hours notice, but capable of conducting operations without external support. Brigade units will receive support from unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Within a year of the initial reform announcement, 23 divisions had been disbanded and replaced with 40 brigade formations. By 2010, 85 brigades existed, and by 2015, all brigades will be further classified into “heavy,” “medium,” and “light” brigades to delineate between permanent combat readiness brigades and rapid deployment brigades. Prior to the reforms, the SV only had 17% of its units at combat

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133 Barabanov (2011), page 23.
readiness level, which diminished the military’s ability to conduct successful operations with little advanced warning.\textsuperscript{136}

Despite the changes in structure and force composition, the SV was relatively low priority for weapons modernization in the initial reform package. The Army has signed a contract to procure Armata and T-90 tanks by 2020, though this has been a slower transition than expected.\textsuperscript{137} The Army will also procure Iskander tactical ballistic missile systems as an upgrade.\textsuperscript{138} The primary improvement for the SV will be the modernization of GLONASS, which failed to operate during the Georgian War and crippled the SV’s ability to use UAVs, PGMs, and conduct reliable intelligence gathering operations.\textsuperscript{139}

*Reforms of the Army’s Airborne Troops (VDV)*

The Army’s Airborne Assault Troops (VDV) played a critical role in the Georgian War, given that many elite VDV units are stationed in the Caucasus and were rapidly mobilized in August 2008. The VDV paratroopers constituted the bulk of Russia’s forces in Abkhazia, though VDV divisions were plagued with “obsolete weaponry…inherited from the Soviet Union.”\textsuperscript{140} The VDV also suffered from inadequate reconnaissance and intelligence during the five-day war, owing in part to failed reconnaissance technology.

The reform program aims to equip every VDV division with light tactical UAVs, and although not yet implemented, the MoD has suggested equipping VDV divisions with more than

\textsuperscript{136} Barbanov, Makienko, Pukhov, page 5.  
\textsuperscript{137} Dmitry Gorenberg, “Capabilities of the Russian Ground Forces,” *Russian Military Reform*, January 5, 2015, [https://russiamil.wordpress.com/2015/01/05/capabilities-of-the-russian-ground-forces/](https://russiamil.wordpress.com/2015/01/05/capabilities-of-the-russian-ground-forces/).  
\textsuperscript{138} DeHaas, page 23.  
\textsuperscript{140} Barabanov (2011), page 37.
one reconnaissance battalion each.\textsuperscript{141} This addition would improve the VDV’s ability to conduct full operations without engaging other branches of the military and relying on troops outside of the VDV for intelligence. On a smaller scale, every soldier in a VDV formation will be required to carry a radio set to improve communication during operations. The VDV serves as one of the most elite, rapid-response forces of the military; granting more autonomy and providing functioning equipment to the VDV enables the branch to engage in small, short term operations on very little notice.

\textit{Reforms of the Air Force (VVS)}

The Air Force (VVS) was one of Russia’s weakest points in the war with Georgia and has been subjected to the most criticism in the years following. During the 2008 War, the VVS suffered from communication failures, losing multiple aircraft to friendly fire (the exact number is disputed by source), and technical tactical failures, as the VVS did not employ precision guided munitions (PGMs) in targeting. The VVS was structurally affected by the reforms, like all other branches, and moved to the three tier system of command- airbase (brigade)- squadron (regiment). The new Airbase formation makes all VVS airbases contain airfield logistics, communication, and radar battalions, which had previously operated independently.\textsuperscript{142} All airbases are permanent combat readiness units. The VVS was also subjected to a more streamlined and consolidated education system for officers.

The VVS’ most critical reform has been the modernization of aircraft and weaponry. The VVS has faced a severe weaponry and technology problem; in 2008, the VVS’ newest aircraft

\textsuperscript{141} Barabanov (2011), page 38.  
\textsuperscript{142} Barabanov (2011), page 55.
were 15-20 years old and only an estimated 45-50% of military equipment was functional.\textsuperscript{143}

Pilots were not clocking in enough training hours since so few aircraft were usable for long training times.\textsuperscript{144} The MoD has signed contracts for new Su-27SM3 aircraft, with improved electronics and weapons systems, as well as advanced MiG-29SMT fighters. In 2009, the MoD also made a purchase for 48 fifth-generation Sukhoi 35S jets, the last of which will be delivered in 2015.\textsuperscript{145} Sukhoi is also in the process of developing new combat drones, which will be able to strike stationary targets and will be operational by 2018.\textsuperscript{146} In addition to new fighter jets, the VVS is also being equipped with new countermeasures for SAMs, which caused significant losses for the VVS in Georgia; the MoD ordered Yak-130s in 2011 to address this issue. Attack helicopters were upgraded for the VVS to Mi-35M, with another contract for Mi-35Ms in the works for a 2020 delivery date.\textsuperscript{147}

Additionally, the VVS oversees the Surface-to-Air-Missile (SAM) troops, which are also undergoing serious reforms. Many SAM regiments were equipped with obsolete weaponry and technology, which were retired by 2009. S-400 systems will replace all old hardware systems in SAM units by 2016. The VVS was also tasked with new inter-branch responsibilities as part of the reform package. Air Force pilots now bear the responsibility to train the pilots of the Army Aviation service, especially with their newly acquired Mi-28N attack helicopters. The Army Aviation will also benefit from one of the MoD’s largest purchases in the modernization efforts—Mi-8 transport and assault helicopters.\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{143} Barbanov, Makienko, Pukhov, page 6.
\textsuperscript{144} Barabanov (2011), page 53.
\textsuperscript{145} Barabanov (2011), page 63.
\textsuperscript{147} Barabanov (2011), page 72.
\textsuperscript{148} Barabanov (2011), page 73.
Both the SV and the VVS are also slated to receive new automated control systems to address the issue of command and control and intra-branch coordination. As of 2015, the Andromeda D platform has been used successfully in military exercises, but has not been officially deployed in the Armed Forces.\textsuperscript{149}

Reforms of the Navy (VMF)

The Russian Navy (VMF) has been subjected to the reform process too, despite playing the smallest role of all the branches in Georgia in 2008. The Black Sea Fleet’s operations in Georgia can be considered a success, but were not representative of the VMF’s capabilities, given the lack of resistance presented by Georgia’s Navy and Coast Guard; the Black Sea Fleet was shown to have extremely outdated equipment during the 2008 war.\textsuperscript{150} The Black Sea Fleet, headquartered in Sevastopol, has received the bulk of the Navy’s rearmament, with 18 new ships slated to enter the Fleet by 2020. In total, the VMF anticipates receiving 100 new ships by 2020 under the GPV, including 20 submarines and 15 frigates.\textsuperscript{151} The GPV has officially allocated 20\% of its funding to shipbuilding; naval shipbuilding within Russia has boomed since 2010, with domestic production of frigates and nuclear submarines.\textsuperscript{152} The VMF also began negotiations with France for two Mistral-class amphibious assault ships, which would have aided the VMF’s brown-water power projection abilities in the Eastern Military District. The sale was cancelled in 2015 after pressure from the EU in response to Russia’s annexation of Crimea, but still suggests Russia’s interest in moving away from a navy centered on nuclear power.\textsuperscript{153}

\textsuperscript{149} Mazitans, page 36, and “Military Defense Industry Technology: Andromeda D,” \textit{Army Recognition}, October 24, 2015, \url{http://www.armyrecognition.com/weapons_defence_industry_military_technology_uk/russian_andromeda-d_automatic_control_system_has_successfully_passed_tests_in_arctic_conditions_tass_12410151.html}.

\textsuperscript{150} Barabanov, Makienko, Pukhov, page 29.

\textsuperscript{151} Barabanov (2011), page 82.


\textsuperscript{153} Barabanov (2011), page 96.
Creation of New Military Branches

Serdyukov and the MoD spearheaded the creation of a new branch of the VS as part of the reform efforts— the Russian Aerospace Defense Forces (VKO) in December 2011. The VKO, in charge of Russian military programs in space and missile control and defense, answers directly to the General Staff and is not divided among the regional OSKs. An estimated 20% of the GPV funds will go towards the armament of the VKO. The creation of the VKO and its priority status in rearmament offer a small puzzle in the midst of the reform program. While many of the reforms (and analyses of the reforms) point to a departure from conventional warfare and a move towards smaller, highly technical wars, the VKO suggests that conventional warfare and Russia’s nuclear forces are still a critical component and a priority of the VS and will remain as such despite the reform program’s trends.

The military also reformed and upgraded the Spetsnaz (Voyska Spetsialnogo Naznacheniya), elite forces under the GRU’s Military Intelligence unit until 2010. The Spetsnaz brigades were targeted for structural reforms, given their relatively minimal impact on the Georgian war; only the success of preventing the Georgians from destroying the strategic Roki Tunnel was attributed to the Spetsnaz. On the whole, Spetsnaz troops lacked proper night vision equipment and had “cumbersome” armor, making stealthy movement difficult. The General Staff directly controlled the Spetsnaz until the MoD announced Spetsnaz would be overhauled and subordinated to the SV’s operational-strategic command. GRU and Spetsnaz commanders

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156 Roger McDermott, “Bat or Mouse? The Strange Case of Reforming Spetsnaz,” Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 7, No. 198, November 2, 2010, http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=37119&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=484&no_cache=1#.Vtsv7HQrJhB.
were allegedly furious at the changes, which occurred at the highest levels of MoD decision-
making, expressing concern that the Spetsnaz would lose their parachute training and other
functions outside the scope of the SV. The Spetsnaz reforms essentially eliminated the
intelligence capabilities of the GRU and cut Russia’s elite operations force out of the military.

Following the structural reforms of the Spetsnaz, in 2012, the Russian GS decided to
create a new Special Operations Force (SOF) to fill the void that Spetsnaz under the GRU
fulfilled. The GS had petitioned Serdykov in 2011 to create a new elite force, but Serdykov
deprecated the request; in 2012, Shoigu made the rehabilitation of a Spetsnaz-like force a reality. A GRU veteran stated in an interview that the development of a new SOF was in direct response
to the United States’ desire to increase their elite special operations brigades, as well as Russia’s
desire to meet the standards of modern and Western militaries.

The new SOF will perform force multiplier duties, such as tactical reconnaissance, target
marking, sabotage operations, targeting of enemy commanders, and capture strategic
infrastructure facilities, all exclusively in foreign territory. The primary difference between the
Spetsnaz and the SOF are the duties; the Spetsnaz focused primarily on reconnaissance missions,
while the SOF has mandates for direct engagement. The new SOF report directly to the
General Staff, rather than the GRU, Minister of Defense, or a specific branch of the Armed
Forces, increasing their purview of actions. The new SOF forces combine the old functions of
the Spetsnaz, as well as the VDV and Russia’s small contingent of Marine troops. Its creation

157 There is no official name for the SOF; some articles refer to the new structure as SOCOM, SOC, or simply as the new Spetsnaz. For consistency, I will use SOF for this paper.
160 Litovkin
was coupled with a new training center, helicopters, and attached air transportation squadrons to make the brigades mobile and functional. The SOF is speculated to be similar to the United States’ Delta Force, a unit primarily charged with counterterrorism and reconnaissance missions in foreign nations.

The new SOF is yet another example of Russia’s push towards network centric warfare through the modernization and reform programs. Elite forces have been a central part of insurgencies and small wars for the U.S. and NATO, and naturally, Russia has pursued such a force. Upon announcing the existence of the SOF in 2013, Chief of the GS Valery Gerasimov stated that the GS has observed leading foreign states and modeled the new SOF based off these states’ abilities to conduct 21st century warfare.

The reforms have all been followed by the creation of the new Russian National Defense Control Center (NDCC), a coordinated command and control center in the Ministry of Defense that makes continuous analyses of military events possible. The NDCC’s command and control operating system allegedly contains three times more computer storage space than the Pentagon and provides an integrated platform for the General Staff to make instant decisions during war games or actual military operations. The new command and control system, operationalized in 2014, is the latest effort to streamline communication and facilitate many of the new reforms, which rely on the branches of the VS having improved command and control.

Reform Progress Under Sergei Shoigu

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163 Howard and Pukhov, page 126.
The original intent of the reform program was to modernize the VS and improve Russia’s war-fighting capabilities, particularly in peripheral and small warfare situations. However, there have been multiple changes in actuality and progress has not been made in line with the MoD’s projected timeline, especially regarding rearmament. The ambitious reform program has changed over the years to conform to reality, and has also been affected by the appointment in 2012 of a new Minister of Defense, Sergei Shoigu, who, some argue, is attempting to undo Serdyukov’s progress. Shoigu amended the MoD’s policy on troop reduction, moving back to a policy to increase the number of contract and low-level officers in the military.\footnote{Dmitry Gorenburg, “Rossiiskie voyoruzhenniye sily pri Sergee Shoigu: Prodolzhatsia li reforma?” PONARS Eurasia, Memo 253, 2013. http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pepm_253_russ_gorenburg_june2013.pdf.}

However, general analyses of the reform process view Shoigu’s presence in the MoD as congruent with reforms, and do not anticipate him deviating radically from Serdyukov’s initial goals. Shoigu has instead focused on repairing many of the tense relationships between the military leaders and the MoD after Serdykov’s tenure, and restoring more military control over the MoD, rather than civilian. Shoigu returned to the tradition of promoting generals with combat experience to top MoD positions, including the Chief of the General Staff, which Serdyukov had resisted.\footnote{Baev, page 7.} During Shoigu’s tenure, the military has also received a significant budget increase, with the defense industry receiving 4.1% of Russia’s GDP in 2014, in comparison to 3.2% in 2013, and 1.5% in 2010.\footnote{Baev, page 8.}

**Measuring Progress in the Reform and Modernization Programs**

By 2012, Russian analysts had begun to conduct reviews of the GPV and reform program to determine its success thus far and theorize about the possibility of the goals being realized in
the future. In order to measure how successful the reforms have been so far, I rely upon scholarly analyses and reports (both Russian and Western). I also look at Russian military doctrine, to judge the adoption of these reforms and modernization on the policy level.

**Analyses of the GPV’s Progress**

Analysts Kier Giles and Andrew Monaghan note the removal of several key officers and generals in 2012 who were opposed to the reforms, as a sign of the political success of the modernization process. By removing the old thinkers in the military, the military is now a more effective tool of policy, capable of being twisted into the shape that politicians see the military in, that is, smaller, regional conflicts dependent on elite forces rather than sheer numbers. Giles and Monaghan also note the difficulty of the SV in pursuing the NCO program and completing the shift to a professional army, as less than 200 NCOs graduated in 2012, insufficient to make any structural change in the SV.

A similar analysis commissioned by the European Parliament in 2015 addresses the specific progress made under the GPV. The report notes that the SV has reached 32% modernization, while the Navy has made minimal progress and is unable to construct an aircraft carrier before 2027. The Air Force has continued to procure stealth fighter jets and improved lightweight reconnaissance drones, but has not improved the quality of its PGM technology.

Martin Russell reports that between 2013 and 2015, the percent of the defense budget allocated to modernization and procurement of equipment increased from 37% to over 50%, though an increase above 50% after 2015 is unlikely. In addition, regardless of the willingness

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170 Giles and Monaghan, page 32.
171 Russell 14.
172 Russell 16.
of the MoD to spend to procure modern weapons and technology, sanctions by the West in retaliation for the crisis in Ukraine have limited Russia’s capability to import from foreign defense contractors, and the country’s domestic defense industry is still lagging.

**Implications for the Future of Russian Military Operations**

Most analysts viewed the VS’ subpar performance in Georgia as evidence of Russia’s lagging technology and weapons capabilities, and have since presented the reform and modernization programs as a new stage in Russia’s military and a way for Russia to successfully conduct operations in network centric warfare, similar to the counter-terrorism scenarios of the military exercises. Similarly, many analysts identify the modernization and reform program, despite some of its shortcomings and its unsteady progress, as the turning point of the Russian military; Russia will be less likely to face complications as it did in Georgia due to these radical reforms. This technologically determinist analysis has dominated the discussions of the modernization and reform program since 2008, attributing the “New Look” of the Russian military to its reformed structure, operational capabilities, and technology. If we view Russia’s reforms and modernization programs in a technological determinist lense as a way to increase its ability to conquer and engage in peripheral war, technological and structural improvements are the logical next step.

Analyst Dmitry Trenin argues that “[the VS] was able to stop its own rot and neglect” through the comprehensive reform program.\(^{173}\) He argues that as a direct result of improved staffing and training, and armed with new and improved technology, the VS was able to astound the world through its seamless operation in Crimea. Trenin lauds the operations of Russia’s

special operations forces, the “little green men,” though no mention is made of conditions outside of Russia’s control in the success of the Crimea operation, such as the political conditions of Crimea or existing social links and sympathies to Russia.

Gressel’s analysis of the VS’ operations in Crimea arrives at the same conclusion that the military reforms have been critical to recent operational success, though Gressel also notes the flaws of the reforms.\textsuperscript{174} Russia’s underappreciated military reform program makes it possible for Russia to “overwhelm any of the countries in the post-Soviet sphere,” though systematic problems in the reforms ultimately hinder Russia’s ability to sustain long-term operations.\textsuperscript{175} Furthermore, Gressel states that not only has the Crimean operation been influenced directly by failures in Georgia, but Russia has been preparing for such an operations since 2008, by initiating the modernization efforts and cultivating local intelligence networks in Crimea.\textsuperscript{176}

In contrast to the previously “decaying, insignificant force…so consumed by corruption,” Russia’s post-reform military is a formidable force based upon the successful acquisition of new weaponry and improvement in professionalism and readiness.\textsuperscript{177} Russia’s most recent military engagements have been solely successful as a result of the reforms according to this line of thinking; these reforms have catapulted Russia into the great power military club.

\textbf{Conclusion}

Russia’s reform program fits succinctly into the literature on the importance of technological superiority in winning wars, but its strategic underpinnings point to an

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{175} Gressel, page 6.
\end{itemize}
understanding that “modern” warfare, wars on the periphery, may not be won by technology alone. Modern warfare is characterized by “cover, concealment, dispersion, suppression, small-unit independent maneuver, and combined arms at the tactical level, and depth, reserves, and differential concentration at the operational level of war,” as defined by Stephen Biddle, and the Russian Military Doctrine of 2014 reflects this view. The goal of modern warfare and technological adaptation to these wars is to mitigate the casualties that modern weapons are capable of inducing. The mark of a successful military is one that can implement this style of armed forces, which Biddle notes is a difficult and expensive endeavor, especially in terms of political cost. Technology is important, but the handling, training, and structure of a military is key, and all three were primary goals of Russia’s reforms. A “preponderant military” is not guaranteed to be the victor in operations if the military is not handled correctly.

178 Biddle, page 3.
179 Biddle, page 3.
CHAPTER 4: THE ANNEXATION OF CRIMEA AND USE OF COLLABORATORS IN “AMBIGUOUS WARFARE”

Introduction

Following the military incursion into Georgia and the reform and modernization programs, there has only been other military adventure by Russia in an FSU state. The annexation of Crimea in March 2014 is considered a military victory for Russia, given the lack of casualties and resistance from the Ukrainian side. Crimea has been presented as a direct foil to the war in Georgia, and the reforms prove a distinct improvement in the military's performance, particularly in the areas of intelligence and special operations.\(^{180}\)

However, Crimea was not fought in the same style as in Georgia, which had relied on conventional warfare and sheer numbers to overwhelm the opponent. The annexation of Crimea was carried out by primarily Russian Special Operations Forces (SOF) with help from local Crimean self defense forces. Conventional tactics were scarcely used, and the peninsula was secured with minimal casualties.

I will address the background and timeline of the subsequent annexation of Crimea, noting the differences in operations between Georgia and Crimea, and conclude with an analysis of why the two operations were so distinct and why local collaborators are critical to the success of the annexation of Crimea and general small wars.

Background of the Conflict

The annexation of Crimea is rooted in centuries of Russian imperial expansion and a complex relationship between Russia and Ukraine. The peninsula of Crimea existed under both the Ottoman Empire and the Russian Empire, before being named an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (under the governance of the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic) in 1921. Under Josef Stalin, most of the peninsula’s ethnic Tatar population was deported to Uzbekistan, after Moscow’s claim that the Tatars had been collaborating with Nazi Germany during WWII. In 1954, Nikita Khrushchev signed away the peninsula to Ukraine in a bilateral treaty, a decision that has since been called into question by Russian politicians. Upon Ukraine’s independence from the Soviet Union in 1990, Crimea remained part of Ukraine under a special semi-autonomous status.181

Crimea’s politics are tied to the ethnic and linguistic makeup of the peninsula; out of a population of two million, 58% are ethnically Russian, while approximately 25% are ethnically Ukrainian, and 12% Tatar.182 All three major languages are spoken, but the priority and protection of these languages has been a cause for tension since the 1998 Crimean Constitution, which officially protects Russian and Tatar as regional languages. Russian and Crimean leaders allege that Ukraine has taken steps to “de-Russify” Crimea, particularly through language laws that prioritize Ukrainian over Russian.183

A further issue regarding the status of Crimea has been the existence of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet and the controversial base-leasing agreements signed between Russia and Ukraine from 1993 to 2010. Russia’s interest in Crimea is largely strategic; the port of Sevastopol serves

as the base for the Black Sea Fleet and is a point of Russian power projection in the Black Sea and Caucasus regions, as well as around Turkey and the Middle East, as evidenced by the Fleet’s involvement in the Georgian War and the Syrian Civil War in 2015.

In 1993, the two countries agreed to keep the Black Sea Fleet’s base in Sevastopol, and the final treaty was ratified in 1997. The VS could house up to 25,000 troops in Crimea as part of the treaty, but had to get approval for any military hardware updates or replacements with the Ukrainian government. An initial 20-year lease was agreed to, extending the base through 2017. Ukraine agreed to relinquish its nuclear weapons in return for a guarantee from Russia that its national sovereignty would be respected. Most recently, the lease agreement was extended in 2010 by Medvedev and Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych; Moscow would continue to pay $100 million per year to keep the base, and would offer Ukraine a 30% discount in natural gas prices in exchange for the 25 year extension.

The Fleet has been an integral part of Crimea’s local economy and culture, and is viewed as a completely legitimate entity by citizens, just as valid as the Ukrainian Navy, which also has a small base in Crimea.\(^1\) The base has kept Crimea tied to Russia, and offers a particularly positive view of living and serving in Russia, as Black Sea Fleet employees are often paid up to five times more than their counterparts in the Ukrainian Navy.\(^2\)

The underlying conflict between Ukraine and the semi-autonomous Crimea came to a head during the Maidan protests of 2014, where local Crimean leaders asserted their support for independence from Ukraine. The political fractures within the Ukrainian government were

\(^{1}\) Author’s interview with Michael Kofman, Center for Naval Analysis, Washington D.C., January 15, 2016.
\(^{2}\) Howard and Pukhov, eds., page 16.
critical in Kiev’s lack of response to initial unrest and violence in Crimea, and later played a role in paralyzing the government from responding to Russia’s annexation of the peninsula.  

**Timeline of the Crimean Annexation Operation**

Given the covert nature of the military operation in Crimea, there is limited confirmed information regarding the timeline of the annexation and the order of battle. I have consulted multiple primary accounts and open sources accounts of the events in order to piece together a full timeline. It is also important to note that there was very little Ukrainian resistance against the invasion, so I refer to any movement of troops as a battle, rather than an active clash between two sides. As a note of technicality, I refer to the main participants in the operation as Russian troops, even though the primary materials refer to these people as “little green men” or unmarked soldiers. Since Russia later admitted to sending in the troops, I refer to them as such.

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186 Author’s interview with a senior official of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, speaking on the terms of anonymity. January 15, 2016, Washington D.C.
Anton Lavrov of Moscow’s Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies identifies the 22nd of February as the earliest possible start date of Russia’s operations in Crimea. As protests continued in Kiev’s Maidan Square, armed militiamen were seen in the Crimean capital of Simferopol during anti-Maidan protests, while Russian troops already stationed legally in Crimea at the Black Sea Fleet’s base were put on high alert due to Ukraine’s internal unrest. As the protests continued, pro-Russian Crimeans began organizing in larger numbers (between 200-
700) and began demanding independence from Ukraine. A YouTube video surfaced on the 22nd, reportedly showing Russian Special Operations Forces (SOF) conducting an operation in Crimea.

Tensions continued to escalate in Crimea, particularly between pro-Russian demonstrators and Crimean Tatars who supported the Maidan movement on February 26th. The Russian troops (self-identified at the time as local volunteer militiamen) took control of an 80-kilometer road between Simferopol and Sevastopol, the city home to Russia’s Black Sea Fleet base. Multiple media outlets reported that the men at these checkpoints were armed and controlling traffic into Sevastopol; additionally, two APCs were spotted in the city center.

Simultaneously, Shoigu and Putin announced that Russia would commence an unplanned series of military readiness exercises for the Western and Central OSKs in response to the clashes. The exercises put the military on combat readiness alert, and Shoigu stated the exercises were to test the military’s ability to respond a “crisis situation.” The exercises would test readiness of all units, followed by operational and tactical training between the St. Petersburg based 6th Army, the 2nd Army is Samara (near Kazakhstan), and the 20th Army in Voronezh (located 200 miles from Ukraine’s border). Although military exercises without warning are not unusual, most analysts of Russia’s military have noted the role the exercises played in covering up Russia’s movement into Crimea by allowing for movement of troops to the

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Ukrainian border under a “smokescreen.” During the exercises, 40 Il-76 military transport vehicles left the exercise field; a few were spotted later in Crimea. These exercises were remarkably similar to the exercises conducted at the onset of the Georgian war in 2008, which also allowed Russia to hide its amassing of troops on the border.

In the morning of the 27th, armed, approximately 60 Russian speaking gunmen (self-identified as local self-defense forces) seized Crimea’s Parliament building in Simferopol, replacing Ukrainian flags with Russian flags at the top of the building. Additionally, based on CCTV coverage, the gunmen carried new Pecheneg machine guns, night vision sights mounted on their helmets, and a few automatic grenade launchers, all weaponry and equipment that local forces would not have had access to and suggest involvement of Russia’s SOF. The local law enforcement officers stationed in the Parliament building were unable to present any type of challenge to the armed men. The takeover of the Parliament building enabled an uninterrupted meeting of Members of Parliament, who voted to replace the current Crimean Prime Minister with pro-Russian Sergei Aksyonov, and set a date for a referendum for March 25.

In the evening, Ukrainian secret service units in Crimea (which had been recently disbanded by Kiev after the Maidan protests) mobilized to secure various checkpoints throughout the peninsula, ensuring complete control over land, air and seaports. 119 troops successfully seized control of the Simferopol International Airport in the early morning of the 28th, all armed and wearing unmarked camouflage uniforms, and later seized the Sevastopol Airport in a similar

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193 See: Howard and Pukhov (2014), Gorenburg (2014)
194 Howard and Pukhov, page 163.
196 Howard and Pukhov, page 164.
197 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SmKHoztxuco
manner. The Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine stated that the troops were unmarked troops from Russia’s Black Sea Fleet. Media outlets in the region reported that members of Russia’s GRU had flown into the Black Sea port that day, citing their specially marked aircraft seen in local airfields. At the same time as the capture of the civilian airports, unmarked soldiers in APCs overtook the Belbek airfield through an unguarded entrance, blocking the runways and making any operations by Ukraine’s Air Defense units in Crimea impossible.

A missile ship from the Black Sea Fleet moved into the Balaklava Harbor, close to the Sevastopol port, blocking any movement from the Ukrainian Sea Guard stationed there. Russian military helicopters were also spotted over the peninsula, sparking rumors that the aircraft were to take the deposed Yanukovych to asylum in Russia. An additional three Mi-8 transport and Mi-35M attack helicopters entered Ukrainian airspace without warning or authorization. These maneuvers were unmatched by a Ukrainian response and brought Russia’s first attack aircraft into play. A Ukrainian politician announced that the helicopters were accompanied by an additional 13 IL-76 aircraft carrying Russian paratroopers, the same aircraft that had left Russia’s snap military exercises a few days prior. Following the influx of aircraft, Ukraine scrambled two Russian jets and threatened to shoot down any more unauthorized aircraft, effectively deterring any other Russian airlifts into Crimea.

201 Howard and Pukhov, page 164.
203 Howard and Pukhov, page 165.
Amid condemnations of the escalation in Crimea by Ukrainian and Western leaders, Putin formally asked Russia’s Federation Council on March 1st to approve the use of force if necessary in Crimea to protect Russian compatriots; the Council approved the request unanimously. With more troops and supplies, Russia was then able to secure targets such as media outlets, administrative infrastructure, and communication infrastructure, thereby cutting off Crimea from Kiev. The Black Sea Fleet also continued to patrol the Crimean waters, blockading the Ukrainian Navy and ensuring that no Ukrainian ship left its port in Crimea for the remainder of the conflict.

On March 2, Russian soldiers stormed the headquarters of the Ukrainian Border Service in Crimea, destroying the Service’s communication hub and computers, but failed to capture any weapons in the process. Ukrainian media also reported that the Naval Headquarters in Sevastopol continued to be under siege. In order to coordinate the increased number of troops, Russia set up its command center at the Lazarevsky Barracks in Sevastopol, creating a unified command center and a central location for the movement of troops and equipment.

On March 4th, the self-proclaimed Crimean Navy, with the support of the local government, gave an ultimatum to Ukrainian forces in the region: they were ordered to abandon their posts and swear allegiance to Crimea or be stormed by force. Despite few responses to the ultimatum, the Russian GS decided not to initiate escalated operations to take the peninsula by increased force and likely civilian casualties. By March 5th, the remaining Ukrainian troops in Crimea had been locked in their bases, unable to fight back against the thousands of Russian troops equipped with small arms.

206 Howard and Pukhov, page 167.
208 Howard and Pukhov, page 168.
March 6th marked the peninsula’s referendum to request to become part of the Russian Federation. The Russian troops tempered their activity in light of this political development, through a series of Ukrainian TV broadcasting buildings were stormed by troops who then switched broadcasting to Russian channels only. Additionally, in order to ensure that the Ukrainian Navy would not attempt any incursion into Crimea, Russian troops sunk their own decommissioned Ochakov Kara-class cruiser. The maneuver blocked Ukrainian naval movement, but without the direct threat of force from the Black Sea Fleet. The BSF however did increase its presence in the Sea by positioning several Bation-P Costal Defense Anti Ship Missile Systems near Sevastopol, giving the Fleet the ability to target any part of the Black Sea, should the Ukrainian Navy attempt to advance.

On March 12, Russia’s first motorized rifle brigade advanced to Crimea on the Kerch Strait ferry and a battery of SAMs were deployed to Crimea on the 15th to boost Russia’s air defense capabilities. On March 13th, Russia announced its second wave of domestic military exercises, again, dangerously close to its western border with Ukraine. Russian troops were sent to Kursk, Belgorod, and Rostov, all points that would make further military movement into Crimea or Eastern Ukraine feasible.

March 18th marked the official accession of Crimea to the Russian Federation. The same day, both sides suffered their only casualties of the entire conflict, when a Ukrainian Naval

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211 Howard and Pukhov, page 171.
officer and a Cossack volunteer soldier died from what has been called a sniper attack trying to provoke escalation. The event did not provoke any escalation; instead a joint funeral was held.

On the 19th, Russian troops (SOF units) began taking over the rest of Ukraine’s military bases and ships on the peninsula, including the Naval Headquarters. In order to mitigate casualties, Putin signed into law a decree guaranteeing the rank and education credentials for Ukrainian servicemen if they switched sides and pledged allegiance to Russia. Shortly after this decree, on March 20th, three Ukrainian ships docked in Sevastopol (Donbas, Kremenets, and the Borshchov) raised the Russian flag. At least two ships did not defect and were taken by force (although the Ukrainians did not offer any resistance) by a small Spetsnaz squad. In total, 54 Ukrainian Navy ships defected in less than two days.

Russian troops were left with very little remaining resistance on the peninsula, and on the 22nd, ended resistance from Ukraine’s 204th Tactical Aviation Brigade by storming their compound. The last Ukrainian ship still flying its national flag, the Slavutich, was similarly stormed on the morning of the 23rd. On the 24th, the last Ukrainian Marine outpost, home to the elite 1st Marines Regiment, was captured by sheer force. The Marines had barricaded themselves inside the compound, refusing to surrender. The Russian Spetsnaz units cordoned off the compound, landed two Mi-8 helicopters with troops inside, and had two Mi-35M attack helicopters above providing air support. The Marines were taken two hours later, though there were no casualties from the firefight.

213 Howard and Pukhov, page 174.
215 Howard and Pukhov, page 175.
217 Howard and Pukhov, page 176.
On March 25, Russian troops took the last remaining Ukrainian ship, the *Cherkassy* with no resistance from the Ukrainian soldiers aboard. With the capture of the *Cherkassy*, Russia officially gained complete control over Crimea, completing a successful series of operations with minimal casualties and mistakes, only a week after the official incorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation.

**Explanations of Operational Success**

*Gerasimov Doctrine of Ambiguous Warfare*

Russian military leaders themselves have explained why Crimea was a successful operation, even before it occurred, and their explanations do not focus on Russia’s superior technology and reformed structure. Russia’s aspirations for its military have been eloquently outlined in a 2013 article in Russia’s *Military Industrial Courier*, penned by Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov. The Doctrine is now known as the Gerasimov Doctrine of Ambiguous Warfare, and was later transposed directly into Russia’s 2014 Military Doctrine.218 This type of warfare has also been referred to as “hybrid warfare,” irregular warfare, or fourth generation warfare. Gerasimov identified changes in the style of war to 21st century warfare, wherein states must utilize non-traditional military means to win a conflict.219 He notes specifically the importance of using elite special operations forces, as well as advanced information technology to improve intelligence capabilities. This move away from conventional military thinking among military leaders has been integrated into official policy; the 2014 Military Doctrine labeled modern warfare as the “complex usage [integration] of military force and political, economic,


information, and other non-military means, accomplished [in part] through the extensive exploitation of the potential of popular protest and special operations forces."\textsuperscript{220}

Gerasimov identifies the stages necessary to reach in the process of ambiguous warfare.\textsuperscript{221} First, Russia must access and mobilize the “5th column” of ethnic Russians and sympathizers in the target country, inciting protests and social movements that will gradually escalate the political tensions in the country. The second phase consists of a sophisticated use of economic and political pressure from Russia to further weaken the state in question. Third, Russians infiltrate the country’s military, intelligence and political ranks, and access local criminal networks. In the fourth stage, the Russian military itself gets involved, seizing key territory and preventing the target country from utilizing its security and military forces effectively. The fifth stage is a campaign by the Russian government to deny its involvement in the conflict and sway international observers to its side, while the sixth and final stage is de-escalation and the instillation of a pro-Russian government in the target country.

This form of warfare is not successful based on technological advances of weaponry or a revision of command-control. Rather, ambiguous warfare relies on the cultivation of social structures and networks, something that cannot be easily put into a military reform program. Despite the reform and modernization efforts not addressing these steps directly, we can see the integration of Gerasimov’s Doctrine into the operations in Crimea from the timeline previously outlined. Hybrid, or ambiguous, warfare provides Russia a “smokescreen” for its actions in


Crimea; its indirect and non lethal components hide Russia’s militaristic intentions and delay a response from the opponent, in this case, Ukraine.\(^{222}\)

Arguably the most important part of Gerasimov’s Doctrine that was present in Crimea and not in Georgia was the presence and utilization of local collaborators and networks of intelligence. The first stage of accessing and mobilizing a “fifth column” of co-ethnics and Russian sympathizers is the critical element to the success of the Crimean operations, and is not dependent upon the extensive reforms. While Russia’s new and modernized military is no doubt an improvement from the previous state of the VS, its success in Crimea was due to its use of local collaborators in Ukraine, rather than the SOF’s new weaponry or night vision equipment.

*Theories of Collaborators and Co-Ethnics*

Political science theorists Andrew Mack and Ivan Arreguin-Toft propone similar ideas to Gerasimov’s Doctrine, noting the importance of using non-conventional methods in order to win modern wars. Kaldor offers her theory of “new wars,” that are fought asymmetrically, while William Lind states that countries wishing to win this type of asymmetric conflict must “integrate troops as much as possible with the local people.”\(^{223}\) The use of the local population allows the state to conduct these unconventional operations and achieve their operational objectives without a costly conventional war. Arreguin-Toft argues that a state access and mobilize a “network of social support for intelligence, logistical assistance, and replacements.”\(^{224}\) In other words, the conquering state must have more than a strong military to win, it must have local collaborators.

\(^{222}\) Author’s interview with a senior official of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, speaking on the terms of anonymity. January 15, 2016, Washington D.C.

\(^{223}\) Kaldor and Lind, page 15.

\(^{224}\) Arreguin-Toft, page 109.
In small military conflicts that specifically involve conquering territory, superior technology and sheer numbers will not make a state successful; rather, the state needs to harness its local collaborators to create reliable intelligence networks, work with local militias, and increase the state’s authority and legitimacy in the targeted area.\textsuperscript{225} Greater social fractures enable the conquering power to take advantage of power vacuums and create environments where local resistance is much harder to coordinate and mobilize against the power.\textsuperscript{226} Local collaborators also provide logistical support to the conquering military, often providing critical supplies that the militaries.

Russia must be able to access, utilize, and mobilize networks of local collaborators who are able to provide intelligence, logistical support, and legitimacy to Russian operations. This hypothesized condition of success is the critical difference between Georgia and Crimea. As explained in the timeline of events in Georgia and Crimea, both target countries had severe ethnic tensions, with distinct ethno-linguistic enclaves of people who sympathized with Russia. Russia itself cultivated these areas by engaging in media propaganda campaigns, distributing Russian passports to local citizens, and by funding cultural organizations that increased the influence of Russian culture and politics in the area.\textsuperscript{227} The collaborators in both wars however, have one primary difference that may explain why they were more critical in Ukraine than in Georgia. The collaborators in Georgia were largely direct transplants from Russian military and intelligence bureaucracies, whereas the collaborators in Crimea were established Crimean citizens who had existing ties to their population. Another critical difference in the two cases is

\textsuperscript{225} MacDonald
\textsuperscript{226} MacDonald, pages 6, 7.
how the Russian military anticipated the use of collaborators, and how collaborators are seen on a doctrinal and strategic level in the operations of the military.

**Collaborators in Georgia**

Russia was able to place and access a group of high level collaborators during the war with Georgia. In their book analyzing the 2008 war, Cornell and Starr traced numerous high ranking Russians who were installed in various positions of the South Ossetian military and government prior to the war. The difference in Georgia was the lack of local collaborators who contributed to the success of Russian operations and provided intelligence and logistical support to the military during its operations. The collaborators during the Georgian war were largely in the upper echelons of South Ossetia’s political and military bureaucracies, and were unable to minimize the gap of local intelligence for the Russian military.

Russian collaborators were embedded lower positions of the South Ossetian government and bureaucracies, particularly in positions relating to military affairs. Anatoly Yarovoy, previously the head of the FSB in the Russian region of Mordvinia, was appointed as the Chairman of South Ossetia’s KGB (January 17, 2005-March 2, 2006). Mikhael Mindzaev served in Russia in the Interior Ministry of North Ossetia, and was also an FSB Lieutenant General and Commander of an Alpha Group; he later served in South Ossetia as the Minister of the Interior (2005-2006).

Georgian officials published a statement immediately before the war identifying Russian military collaborators in the South Ossetian military structure. Oleg Chebotarev worked for the

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FSB, Vladimir Plutoev served as a colonel in the Russian Army, and Boris Atoyev (Chairman of the South Ossetian KGB since 2006) served in multiple positions in the Soviet KGB and the FSB’s directorate in Moscow.\(^{230}\) Similarly Illarionov published a list of Russian collaborators in the opposition paper *Novaya Gazeta*: Zelim Muldarov (South Ossetian Minister of Defense, 2003-2004) who was previously the Deputy Commander of the 58th Army of the North Caucasus Military District, Yuri Morozov (Prime Minister of South Ossetia, 2005-2008) worked in Kursk, Russia, in the oil industry, and Nikolai Dogolopov (Chairman of South Ossetia’s KGB, 2006-2008) was an FSB Major General and Chief of the FSB’s Directorate.\(^{231}\)

South Ossetia’s later Ministers of Defense have all had distinct ties to Russia. Andrei Laptev (2006-2008), Vasiliy Lunev (2008), and Yuri Tanaev (2008-present) all served in the Russian military and Tanaev also held positions in military intelligence.\(^{232}\) Anatoly Konstantinovich Barankevich is a retired Russian Lieutenant General, who served in both Chechen Wars, and the War in Afghanistan. In South Ossetia, he was appointed as Minister of Defense (2004-2008) and Secretary of the South Ossetian Security Council (2006-2008).

Kokoity personally invited Barankevich to his post, and appointed him Lieutenant General of the South Ossetian military as well.\(^{233}\)

In Abkhazia, a former officer in the Transbaikal Military District, Anatoly Zaytsev, served as the Chief of the General Staff of Abkhazia (2003-2010), and later as the Prime Minister of Abkhazia (2010-2011).\(^{234}\) Ties to Abkhazia have continued after the war, as the

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\(^{232}\) Illarionov, “Kak Gotovilas Voina.”


former Commander of the 58th Army of the North Caucasus Military District during the 2008 War, Raul Khajimba, was appointed Chief of the Abkhaz Army in 2015.235

However, these collaborators did not extend into the actual operations of the war and had little impact, negative or positive, on Russia’s ability to conduct operations. Given that most of these political and military leaders are originally from Russia, with no prior connections to South Ossetia or Abkhazia, their influence and role during the conflict was minimal, though they have been more important in keeping Russian ties to and control over the de-facto independent states.

The Russian military itself also did not emphasize and fully utilize local collaborators during the Georgia war, with the exception of working with the local militias in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, as stated in Chapter Two, the local militias were poorly integrated into the Russian military’s broad operations, and were largely operating independently, rather than in coordinated operations. Strategically, collaborators were less important to the Russian military in 2008 as well; the Russian Military Doctrine of 2003 (the last Doctrine preceding the Georgian war), also known as the Ivanov Doctrine, did not address the issue of non-military elements of war like the Gerasimov Doctrine. Instead, the Ivanov Doctrine, in reference to then Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov, asserted that Russia needs to keep a mass conscript army on its borders, and theorized that long distance air power and superior technology will win the wars of the future.236 This doctrine changed dramatically with the Gerasimov Doctrine and the 2014 Military Doctrine, which acknowledged the importance of cultivating local collaborators to boost legitimacy and carry out intelligence and covert operations.

Collaborators in Crimea

According to a senior official in the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, Russia has been cultivating and organizing local networks of intelligence and support since the Orange Revolution of 2004. Russian political leaders were nervous that the budding democratic movement would threaten Russia’s influence in Ukraine and limit Russia’s potential for future military operations.237 The Russkiy Mir Foundation, led by Putin, for example, was created in 2007 to “promote the Russian language [and] national heritage.”238 By 2011, Russkiy Mir had established seven Russian centers in Ukraine, including one in Simferopol, Crimea, and these Centers served as a way to propagate Russian culture among the Ukrainian population.239 By 2014, there were fourteen Centers in Ukraine and the organization’s total budget per year exceeded $30 million.240

Another vital organization for Russia’s cultivation of compatriots abroad has been the Federal Agency for Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation (referred to as Rossotrudnichestvo). Rossotrudnichestvo was founded by the Kremlin in 2008 and has since created offices in Kiev and Odessa, among over 80 other nations.241 The organization has a budget of approximately $174 million, after Putin increased its funding via executive action in 2013.242 In a similar style to the Russkiy Mir Foundation, Rossotrudnichestvo funds local cultural centers that foster Russian cultural and language, as well as establish politically salient relationships among co-

237 Author’s interview with a senior official of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, speaking on the terms of anonymity. January 15, 2016, Washington D.C.
242 Grigas, page 38.
ethnics abroad. The cultural centers in Crimea were largely responsible for hosting pro-Russian events, such as the Day of Russia, and the Day of the Reunion of Crimea with Russia, and allegedly, the cultural centers have been involved in the election of pro-Russian candidates to political and influential church offices.\textsuperscript{243}

Pro-Russian Members of Parliament in the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada have been cultivated by Russia, including the high-profile Vadim Kolesnichenko from Sevastopol (MP Party of the Regions 2006-2014). During his tenure in Parliament, Kolesnichenko was a proponent of making the Russian language a second national language of Ukraine. In 2014, during the Maidan protests, he stated that the protests were funded by the United States and labeled the protests as a violent coup against the government.\textsuperscript{244} The protests, Kolesnichenko argued, were aimed at eradicating the Russian heritage and language from Ukraine, and called on the citizens of Crimea to take up arms to defend themselves from the central Ukrainian authorities. Public figures like Kolesnichenko have been tools of Russia, via organizations like Russkiy Mir Foundation, to promote the divisions within Ukraine and mobilize the population in Crimea in favor of the Russian military.\textsuperscript{245} Having local politicians, rather than direct transplants from Russia, increased the legitimacy of Kolesnichenko’s position, whereas the political collaborators in Georgia were both confined to local and regional governance, rather than national, and had limited previous ties to the region, limiting their credibility.

Additionally, Sergei Aksyuonov, the current Prime Minister of Crimea, served as a vital ally for Russia during the annexation of the peninsula. Aksyuonov was rumored to have ties to the Crimean mafia, and has amassed a large number of business assets, in addition to serving in

\textsuperscript{243} Grigas, pages 111, 112.
\textsuperscript{244} Vadim Kolesnichenko, “Eto ne bunt, eto voina,” \textit{Lenta}, February 28, 2014, \url{http://lenta.ru/articles/2014/02/28/kolesnichenko/}.
the local Crimean parliament. As the Maidan protests carried on in Kiev, Aksyonov made a televised address, asking Russia to save Crimea, and calling upon his fellow Crimeans to organize in a paramilitary group. Over 700 people from Crimea’s local Russia Unity political party joined right away, and by February 21st, several thousand people were under Aksyonov’s command in makeshift battalions. When Russian troops secured the Crimean Parliament building on February 27th, Aksyonov was officially installed as the leader of the peninsula, and was recognized as legitimate by Putin shortly after. Aksyonov, like Kolesnichenko, is not a Russian implant, never having lived in Russia before. Rather, he simply has harbored pro-Russian sentiments and worked directly with the invading Russian forces during the annexation to coordinate the military operations with the political independence process.

In addition to the Russian cultural and societal influence in Ukraine that was stronger than it was in Georgia, the Russian army was more thoroughly and effectively able to work with and use the collaborators for intelligence and military purposes during the annexation. Unlike the South Ossetian militia (which had only gathered 3,000 forces during the 2008 war), the city of Sevastopol alone mobilized 10,000 people to its self-organized defense forces, some of whom allegedly answered directly to Aksyonov. The involvement in such high numbers of local forces increased Russia’s deniability in the initial stages of the Crimean operations; the troops on

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the peninsula were referred to as “little green men” or Crimean self-defense forces, but the concrete proof that the troops were Russian did not emerge until later.\footnote{Maksym Bugriy, “The Crimean Operation: Russian Force and Tactics,” \textit{Eurasia Daily Monitor}, Vol. 11, No. 61, April 1, 2014, \url{http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42164&no_cache=1#.VvLlfGQrJhB}.}

During the annexation itself, the local Crimean defense forces and the existing Ukrainian military establishments on the Crimean peninsula served as important collaborators for the Russian military, and mitigated the Ukrainian Armed Forces’ incursion into Crimea. Ukraine suffered one of its biggest public embarrassments of the crisis, with the defection of Rear Admiral Denis Berezovsky. Berezovsky publically announced his allegiance to the people of Crimea, just one day following his appointment as the Commander of the Ukrainian Navy.\footnote{“Crimea Forms its Own Fleet as Ukraine Navy Chief Sides with Region,” \textit{RT}, 2 March, 2014, \url{https://www.rt.com/news/navy-chief-ukraine-crimea-485/}.} Although none of Berezovsky’s subordinate officers followed his lead and defected, the event garnered substantial international press and caused severe confusion and command delays for the Ukrainian military. Berezovksy cooperated with Aksyuonov and created a new and independently functioning Crimean Navy, which worked directly with the Black Sea Fleet.\footnote{“Crime Forms its Own Fleet, as Ukraine Navy Chief Sides With Region,” \textit{RT}, March 2, 2014, \url{https://www.rt.com/news/navy-chief-ukraine-crimea-485/}.}

\textit{Conclusion}

It is indisputable that Russia’s military has improved since its reform program and has acquired better technology and weaponry, as seen on a limited scale in the Crimean annexation. However, the defining difference between the two military engagements has been the successful change in doctrine and a shift towards integrating “ambiguous warfare” into the VS’ operations. The VS successfully accessed, cultivated, and mobilized local collaborators in Crimea, instead of relying on Russian transplants to serve as intelligence help, as it did in Georgia. The use of
collaborators increased the SOF’s ability to conduct undetected operations and cut off the peninsula without resistance from the Ukrainian military.

The question we are left with after Crimea is whether or not Russia can duplicate this operational style in other places? Has the adoption of an ambiguous warfare doctrine and the successful use of local collaborators changed how effective the Russian military can be in the future?
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The Russian Military After Crimea

The success of Russia’s military operations in its periphery is linked to its ability to foster and utilize local collaborators, as evidenced by the success in Crimea and lack thereof in Georgia. What does this mean looking forward? As Russia continues to conduct large-scale military exercises on its borders with the Baltic countries, and conducts its “limited” military operations in Syria, policy makers in the West should critically analyze when and why the Russian military is successfully operating.

Immediately following the annexation of Crimea, Western scholars and pundits began drawing parallels between Georgia, the annexation of Crimea, and an openly aggressive and foreign policy towards neighboring states. Articles flooded the Internet, claiming that Russia is not stopping at Ukraine, and the rest of Eastern Europe, especially the Baltics, should fear for their security in the wake of the Ukraine crisis. Stephen Blank, renowned Russia scholar, points to the high number of Russian “compatriots” in the vulnerable Baltic states, and the multiple small enclaves of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers, particularly in Latvia and Estonia. The small region of Narva in Estonia, bordering Russia, has been of particular concern as an area prone to an incursion by the Russian VS. Over 80% of its citizens are ethnic Russian speakers. 36% hold Russian passports, and another 16% have neither Russian nor Estonian citizenship, but are primarily ethnically Russian.²⁵²

Since the annexation of Crimea, Estonian political and military leaders have increasingly feared for their security and sought military reassurances from NATO allies. Lieutenant General

Riho Terras, Commander-in-Chief of the Estonian Defense Forces, expressed concern over the adoption of the Gerasimov Doctrine and Russia’s newfound use of hybrid warfare, as well as the continual improvement of the Russian military on Estonia’s borders. Since the annexation of Crimea, Estonia has acquired multiple M1A2 Abrams tanks from the United States in an effort to bolster its defense capabilities in the case of a Russian incursion into Narva. However, the Lt. General noted that national cohesion and a united front against Russian aggression is just as important as conventional defense capabilities. Additionally, Estonia’s primary concern is creating favorable economic conditions to deter any uprising in Russia’s favor, though the consensus among political and military elites in Estonia is that Narva will not be targeted imminently by Russia, given Estonia’s membership in NATO.

Furthermore, the presence of Russia’s Baltic Fleet base in the special administrative region of Kaliningrad also provides Russia with quick access to the Baltic countries in the case of any military activity. The port of Kaliningrad, located between Lithuania and Poland, has recently had new anti-aircraft missiles, including Iskander Missiles, installed under the GPV. Kaliningrad is Russia’s outpost into Central Europe, and analysts fear the region may be used as a building-up point for Russian aggression in the Baltics, or that Russia will move against the Baltic states to ensure an uninterrupted connection to Kaliningrad.

Based on the precedent set by Russia’s military action in Georgia and Ukraine, there is also a concern about Moldova, which is home to the semi-autonomous and ethnically homogenous region of Transnistria. The region, caught between Moldova and Ukraine, fought

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a small war between 1991 and 1992 over the region’s independence and is currently considered a frozen conflict. Over 40% of the region’s citizens identify Russian as their primary language, and Transnistria has been subject to Russian economic and cultural influence through organizations such as Russkiy Mir. With Russia’s vocal intent to intervene internationally on behalf of Russian compatriots, top U.S. and NATO commanders have been concerned that Transnistria may be the next place where Russia’s military moves.

In addition to the fear that Russia will move against the Baltics, or in the disputed region of Transnistria, Russia has also shown off its revamped military hardware in its involvement in Syria. The performance of particularly the VS and the VMF have been praised by Western analysts, who see the sorties flown in Syria as a vast improvement on any previous Russian military activity, as well as a statement of military might towards the West. Analysts have been particularly impressed with the coordination between the two branches, the sheer amount of sorties conducted per day by the VVS, and the successful use of new strike fighters and sophisticated cruise missiles.

Where Should NATO Look Next?

The War in Georgia and the annexation of Crimea, coupled with Russia’s military reforms and modernizations, have prompted the question of where NATO and the U.S. should focus their attention in the case of future movement by the Russian military. In order to make any predications on where NATO might anticipate involvement of the Russian military, we need to make use of the Georgian and Crimean cases and the lessons from these two conflicts.

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259 Myers and Schmitt
Given my conclusion that the integral piece to Russia’s operational success in peripheral warfare is the existence and mobilization of local collaborators, NATO should turn from a strategy based on militarized deterrence to include a focus on securing the local populations. If Russian operational success was dependent on better technology and a more efficiently and effectively structured military, NATO would benefit from bolstering its military capabilities in comparison to the VS.

One option is that NATO can increase its military cooperation with the Scandinavian countries, particularly Sweden and Finland, which would both be in integral in the region’s balance of power.\textsuperscript{260} NATO and the U.S. have publically ramped up their military activity in the Baltics, notably with a growing number of military exercises. In late 2015, NATO ran the Trident exercise, its largest military exercise in over a decade. Trident simulated a Crimea-like situation, wherein hybrid means of warfare would be necessary on both sides for victory. Chief of the U.S. Army’s General Staff Mark Milley stated that NATO exercises in the Baltics were scheduled to show Putin NATO’s capabilities and deter Russia from any further military action in its periphery.\textsuperscript{261} Military exercises and a greater regional military commitment would boost NATO’s credibility, as many member states have shown hesitancy towards an intervention in the Baltics in the case of a Russian attack.\textsuperscript{262}

In early 2016, the RAND Corporation published a report war-gamming a hypothetical Russian invasion of the Baltics, and NATO’s possible responses. The report found that Russia could reach Tallin and Riga, the capitals of Estonia and Latvia, respectively, in 60 hours.\textsuperscript{263} As it currently stands, NATO does not have adequate troops in the region to provide a swift and

\textsuperscript{260} Blank (2016)
\textsuperscript{263} Shlapak and Johnson
effective response; in this scenario, NATO would be left with limited and expensive options of retaliation. The report therefore suggests that NATO adopt a stronger posture of deterrence and build up its force in and around the Baltics to increase its flexibility and ability to respond with minimal casualties if Russia moves towards the Baltics. In order to avoid the war-gammed scenario, NATO should add a force of seven brigades and proper air support in the Baltics, Poland, or Germany, which RAND estimates would cost Alliance members $2.7 billion annually.\footnote{Shlapak and Johnson, page 2.}

Furthermore, NATO states have used Russia’s intervention in Syria to justify a military-based posture towards Russia, with many scholars citing the VVS’ sorties in Syria as evidence of the new and improved Russian military. Estimates vary, but the European Council on Foreign Relations’ report estimates that Russia has flown approximately 1000 sorties per month, which calls for an incredibly short turn around time and coordination between VVS squadrons.\footnote{Gustav Gressel, “Lessons from Russia’s Interventions in Syria,” \textit{European Council on Foreign Relations}, February 5, 2016, \url{http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_lessons_from_russias_intervention_in_syria5085}.} The report suggests that the VVS’ squadrons of Su-34s has been particularly impressive, using laser and GLONASS guided munitions.

However, other research suggests that Russia has rather continued to deploy “dumb bombs” as it did in Georgia, choosing indiscriminate targeting and destruction over precision.\footnote{Rowan Scarborough, “Putin’s Modern Air Force Choosing Devastating Dumb Bombs Over Precision Strikes,” \textit{Washington Times}, February 21, 2016, \url{http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2016/feb/21/russia-dropping-dumb-bombs-in-syria-indiscriminate/?page=all}.} Additionally, the VVS has been significantly more successful because of its lack of opponent. Unlike in Georgia, there are no anti-aircraft weapons being used against Russia in Syria currently. The number of sorties is also called into question, with U.S. military sources
estimating that Russia can only actually fly approximately 600-800 sorties per month (20-30 per day). 267

These tactics of the VVS in Syria offer evidence that the VS has not fully developed into the modern army, and may not be the powerhouse military some media outlets have portrayed it to be during the Syria operations. Given the evidence that the Russian military still has questionable technological issues during its operations, we are led once again to the question of why the military was so successful in Crimea. We can hypothesize from Russian operations in Syria that full military might is not all that is needed to be conduct successful operations; instead, we turn again to the social and political conditions that make operations feasible.

Based on my research and conclusions about the role of local and social collaborators, NATO states should look more critically towards what aspects of countries, particularly on the border of Russia, are vulnerable to a Russian invasion or military incursion. Different analyses offer a more positive outlook for the Baltics, particularly because of the lack of cultivated social collaborators and the stronger national cohesion within the Baltics that was not seen in Ukraine or Georgia. Despite having similarly aggrieved populations, the same dynamics that made Crimeans more willing to cooperate with the Russian military do not so readily exist in the Baltics. The Baltic states, for example, have better economic conditions that those of Ukraine and Georgia, making it more appealing for the Russian population or compatriot population in these countries to stay with the Baltics, rather than turn to Russia. While the salaries in the Ukrainian Navy paled in comparison to Russian naval salaries, the Baltics offer no such situation

for Russia to take advantage of. Pensioners in the Baltics on average receive 370 Euros per month, whereas Russian towns in the border of Estonia offer a pension of 100 Euros.  

Russia analyst Olga Oliker argues that NATO should instead take a more active role in engaging with these vulnerable populations to ensure that they do not turn towards seeing Russia as a more favorable partner. Increasing NATO’s military strength completely disregards the role these populations can play in a possible military conflict over Baltic territory. While Oliker notes the possibility of a NATO buildup to deter Russia, she argues instead that NATO should adopt a strategy of “resilience and engagement,” which will ultimately be more effective and less costly. NATO should engage with countries’ governments to help solve the grievances that, in Ukraine and Georgia, prompted separatism and collaboration with Russia. Countries like Latvia and Estonia should increase their cooperation with NATO to ensure that their respective enclaves do not turn towards Russia, by engaging the population culturally, economically, and politically and taking steps to “improve the status of Russian minorities.”

A comprehensive strategy for NATO in the case of Russian aggression or another military incursion into its neighboring states must then take the factors contingent for operational success into account. A massive military buildup is not the answer if Russia itself is changing the way its military operates to maximize operational success. If NATO anticipates that the Russian military will not stop its military interventions in the region, NATO must focus on solving political grievances that have caused domestic fractures and ensure that the various states currently worried about Russia have the capacity to address these concerns.

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270 Oliker, McNerney, Davis, page 12, 16.
Conclusion

War is not only fought with weapons. It is not fought in a vacuum where the most technologically powerful and well-structured military returns the victor. War instead exists within the context of social and political issues, and these contexts have become a tool of war, especially in smaller, peripheral wars with mismatched opponents. Russia has become increasingly aggressive, asserting itself in the periphery and reaffirming its right to intervene on behalf of ethnic Russians and Russian citizens using military force if necessary.

In order to develop a strategy towards Russia, NATO and the United States must use the previous examples of Georgia and Ukraine to understand how the Russian military operates and is changing. Russia is no longer relying on its overwhelming numbers to win wars, but is instead transitioning its military to one capable of “ambiguous warfare,” which is more dependent on local communities for operational success. An appropriate policy moving forwards and looking towards where Russia may get involved next must take into account the role that local collaborators play not only into broader strategic victories, but in operational successes as well.
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