

RUSSIAN HYBRID WAR AGAINST UKRAINE: WERE RUSSIAN
UNCONVENTIONAL PARAMILITARY FORMATIONS A KEY
COMPONENT DURING THE CRIMEA ANNEXATION
AND WAR IN DONBASS?

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General Studies

by

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2019

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

RUSSIAN HYBRID WAR AGAINST UKRAINE: WERE RUSSIAN UNCONVENTIONAL PARAMILITARY FORMATIONS A KEY COMPONENT DURING THE CRIMEA ANNEXATION AND WAR IN DONBASS?, by Sergii Sundukov, Lieutenant Commander, 88 pages.

Ukraine is now on the front line of a new generation of hostilities, in which Russia is overshadowing the boundary between war and peace. For Ukraine the point of reference in this new generation of war has become the Kremlin's seizure and annexation of the Ukrainian Crimea in February-March 2014. Two months later, in April 2014, Russia began an armed conflict on the Eastern part of Ukraine, which continues to this day. The Kremlin says that the ethnic Russians in the Crimea used the international right to self-determination and armed conflict in the Donbas is the struggle of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people against the government in Kyiv, but as retired US Army generals Wesley Clark and John M. Keane highlight the "truth is that" it is a planned, guided and financed Russian new generation of hostilities which today could be consider as a hybrid war. This work analyzes two case studies assessing the role of Russian unconventional paramilitary formations during Russian Hybrid War against Ukraine. Finally, based on the findings presented in this research, the author provides recommendations which may help to develop an effective strategy of reforming and modifying the Ukrainian army for a successful counter-action in the future. Moreover, the material presented in this research can be useful for the European security experts since there is a threat of a repetition of the Ukrainian scenario in the Baltic States.

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ACRONYMS

BCP	Border Crossing Point
DIA	Donetsk International Airport
DPR	Donetsk People Republic
EU	European Union
GU	Glavnoe Upravlenie
LOC	Lines of Communication
LPR	Luhansk People Republic
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NP	National Police
PMC	Private Military Companies
RCF	Russian Conventional Forces
RSA	Regional State Administration
RUPF	Russian Unconventional Paramilitary Formation
SBU	Ukrainian State Security Service
SOF	Special Operations Forces
UAF	Ukrainian Armed Forces

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

War in general is not declared. It simply begins with already developed military forces. Mobilization and concentration is not part of the period after the onset of the state of war as was the case in 1914 but rather, unnoticed, proceeds long before that.

— Georgy Isserson, *The Evolution of Operational Art*¹

Problem Overview

Ukraine is now on the front line of a new generation of hostilities, in which Russia is overshadowing the boundary between war and peace. For Ukraine the point of reference in this new generation of war has become the Kremlin's seizure and annexation of the Ukrainian Crimea in February-March 2014. Two months later, in April 2014, Russia began an armed conflict on the Eastern part of Ukraine, which continues to this day. The Kremlin says that the ethnic Russians in the Crimea used the international right to self-determination embedded in the United Nations Charter and armed conflict in the Donbas is the struggle of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people against the government in Kyiv, but as retired US Army generals Wesley Clark and John M. Keane highlight the "truth is that" it is a planned, guided and financed Russian new generation of hostilities which today could be consider as a hybrid war.² By the end of summer

¹ Mark Galeotti, "The 'Gerasimov Doctrine' and Russian Non-Linear War," *In Moscow's Shadows Blog*, July 6, 2014, accessed March 17, 2019, <https://inmoscowsshadows.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/the-gerasimov-doctrine-and-russian-non-linear-war/>.

² Wesley Clark and Jack Keane, "Ukraine's Hybrid War," *The Washington Times*, March 6, 2018. accessed March 26, 2019, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/mar/6/ukraines-hybrid-war/>.

2014, paramilitary units under Russian control supported by thousands of covered regular Russian soldiers stopped attempts by Kyiv to return control of the Donbas region and thousands of Russian soldiers remain in the occupied territories.

Crimea was gifted to Ukraine in 1954 by Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev,³ but remained culturally and politically linked to Russia until the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics collapsed in December 1991. Ethnic Russians made up 65 percent of Crimea's total population at the beginning of 2014.⁴ The Russian annexation of Crimea from Ukraine occurred after the November 13, 2014 Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity. The decision of the Ukraine Government at that time to suspend the process of signing the Association Agreement with the European Union (EU) led to a protracted political crisis. On February 2014 a massive peaceful protest action in the center of Kyiv took on a sharply radical anti-presidential and anti-government character.⁵ Fearing for his life, President Victor Yanukovich escaped to Russia. After Yanukovich the state was headed at that time by the chairman of parliament, Alexander Turchinov. Later, as Russian President Vladimir Putin confessed in a documentary *Crimea. The Way Home*, after the November events in Ukraine he started working on returning Crimea to Russia because he could not leave ethnic Russians with Ukrainian Government. According to Putin's statement, self-proclaimed representatives of nationalists and pro-fascists organizations

³ Mark Kramer, "Why Did Russia Give Away Crimea Sixty Years Ago," Wilson Center, March 19, 2014, accessed March 17, 2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/why-did-russia-give-away-crimea-sixty-years-ago>.

⁴ Editorial Board, *Results of the Population Census in the Crimean Federal District Census* (Moscow: Federal Service of State Statistics, 2014).

⁵ Yuriy Shveda and Joung Ho Park, "Ukraine's Revolution Of Dignity: The Dynamics of Euromaidan," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 7, no. 1 (January 2016): 85-91.

came to power in Ukraine, who began the persecution of the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine.⁶

After President Yanukovych left the country, demonstrations arose in Crimea promoting the idea of Crimea re-joining Russia. The first demonstration, organized by Russia, occurred in Sevastopol on February 27, 2014.⁷ By March 2014 mass demonstrations were held in all major Crimean cities. Meanwhile in all major cities of Crimea there began to appear organized groups of armed men supported by the unrecognized armed forces units which started to blockade the Ukrainian military bases, demanding that the Ukrainian Military lay down their arms and surrender the bases. Russian political pressures led to a Crimean referendum where the majority of the Crimean population voted in favor of Crimea joining Russia Federation. As a result on March 18, 2014 Crimea became part of Russia.⁸

Anton Alex Bebler is a Slovenian professor of Political Science and Defence Sciences who studies the conflict between Russia and Ukraine identified several factors

⁶ Andrey Kondrashev, "Crimea. The Way Home," *You Tube* Documentary, March 17, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8nMhCMphYU&t=182s>.

⁷ BBC, "Ukrainian Crisis: Timeline," *BBC News*, November 13, 2014, accessed October 23, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27308526>.

⁸ Russian Federation, "The Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Crimea on the Accession of the Republic of Crimea in the Russian Federation and on Forming New Constituent Entities within the Russian Federation," March 18, 2014, accessed November 24, 2018, <https://precedent.crimea.ua/en/documents/the-treaty-between-the-russian-federation-and-the-republic-of-crimea-on-the-accession-of-the-republic-of-crimea-to-the-russian-federationand-on-forming-new-constituent-entities-within-the-russian-fe/>.

that influenced on the “bloodless success” of the three week-long operation.⁹ A major advantage for the Russians during the annexation was the number of Russian military personnel, which were stationed in Crimea. The Russian Naval Forces had been stationed in the region since 1997 as a part of agreement with the Ukrainian Government permitting them to have up to 25,000 troops in the Crimea.¹⁰ The second factor is the short distance to the strategic objects in the Crimea that allowed for the quick insertion and the acquisition of targets.¹¹ The third factor is; orders which were given by Kyiv to the Ukrainian Military not to resist.¹² There were objective reasons for that. According to the statement by Oleksandr Turchynov, who headed the government at the time, in February 2014 on the border with Ukraine, Russia had up to 200,000 Russian troops ready for an immediate invasion of Ukraine in the event the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) resisted or defended Crimea.¹³ Thus, about 20,000 Ukrainian military personnel gave up without any resistance and Russia managed to seize 189 Ukrainian military

⁹ Anton Bebler, “Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict,” *Romanian Journal of European Affairs* 15, no. 1 (March 2015): 35-54.

¹⁰ Russian Federation, “The Agreement between the Russian Federation and Ukraine on the Parameters of the Division of the Black Sea Fleet,” March 21, 2014, accessed December 12, 2018, https://web.archive.org/web/20140321072522/http://www.mid.ru/bdomp/spd_md.nsf/0/BBC88CF0F9DF3F9F44257C9800383F4D#.

¹¹ Bebler, “Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict,” 12-13.

¹² Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, “Oleksandr Turchynov Interview,” December 14, 2018, accessed February 14, 2019, <https://gordonua.com/ukr/publications/turchinov-koly-pochalysia-zakhoplennia-nashykh-chastyn-ya-namahavsia-na-vertoloti-vyletity-do-krymu-shchob-orhanizuvaty-oboronu-aerodromu-mene-vtrymav-avakov-239748.html>.

¹³ Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, “Oleksandr Turchynov Interview.”

establishments of various sizes in the Crimean Peninsula.¹⁴ Moreover, about 70 percent of those Crimea-stationed Ukrainian military members became turncoats including some Ukrainian Navy commanding admirals.

Twenty days later after the annexation of Crimea, armed groups of men took over the local police departments and city commission government buildings across Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine.¹⁵ The insurgents distributed the weapons taken from police armories to crowds of the local pro-Russian population who supported the insurgents' actions.¹⁶ Further, much like in the Crimea scenario, mass demonstrations were organized in the administrative centers of the regions to support the separation of two eastern regions from Ukraine, followed by a referendum. This was the beginning of destabilizing of the situation in the east of Ukraine, which later turned into a full armed conflict.¹⁷

Problem Statement

The Director of the Institute of National Security Problems at the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, Professor Volodymyr Horbulin, qualifies the Russian new generation of war as a hybrid war against Ukraine, started by Russia before

¹⁴ BBC, "Ukrainian Forces Withdraw from Crimea," *BBC News*, March 24, 2014, accessed October 23, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26713727>.

¹⁵ Taras Berezovets, *Annexation: The Island of Crimea. Chronicles of «Hybrid War»* (Kharkov: Bright Books, 2016), 17.

¹⁶ James Miller, Pierre Vaux, Catherine A. Fitzpatrick, and Michael Weiss, "An Invasion by Any Other Name: The Kremlin's Dirty War in Ukraine," *The Interpreter* (September 2015): 10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

the events of 2014.¹⁸ According to Horbulin, Crimean Peninsula annexation and the war in the east of Ukraine is an implementation of the active phase of the hybrid war where Russia applied military assets.¹⁹ The main components were Russian conventional forces (RCF) and unconventional paramilitary formations which are different by purpose and structure.²⁰ Ukraine today continues to face hybrid threats that create the current and future security situation in the state. Based on experience that Ukraine has gotten it is critical to develop an effective strategy for countering the Russian military assets in a hybrid war. In order to complete that task the first step will be correctly identify the key component of military assets which has led the Kremlin to achieving their desired intent.

Primary and Secondary Research Questions

The primary question of the thesis is: Were the Russian unconventional paramilitary formations a key component during Crimea annexation and war in Donbass as an element of Russian Hybrid War?

In order to answer the primary research question, other, more specific research questions need to be presented and answered. The secondary research questions are: What is Russian Hybrid War against Ukraine and its primary characteristics? (This question is required in order to help to apply different criteria in the analysis part. It also will provide understanding of the contemporary hybrid war environment which Ukraine faces today.) How Russia employed RUPF during Crimea annexation and war in

¹⁸ Volodymyr Horbulin, *The World Hybrid War: Ukrainian Forefront* (Kharkiv: National Institute for Strategic Studies, 2017), 89.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 196-198.

Donbass (their roles and actions)? How effective were application of RUPF military operations against Ukraine? Through answering these questions the author will be able to determine the specific criteria which will be used during analysis.

Significance of the Study

It has been almost five years since the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the war in Eastern Ukraine. A large number of scientists, military theorists and specialists of military sciences devoted their research work to the Russian Hybrid War against Ukraine. Among these works there is no definitive answer to the question which actors played a key role during the military operations on the annexation or in the east of Ukraine. Attempting an answer to this question will probably help to develop an effective strategy of reforming and modifying the Ukrainian Army for a successful counter-action in the future. Moreover, the material presented in this research can be useful for European security experts since there is a threat of a repetition of the Ukrainian scenario in the Baltic States.

Assumptions

Since Ukraine has changed the foreign policy vector toward joining the EU and The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Russia will keep the Donbass territory in a state of chaos and instability. The longer this situation exists, the longer Russia will attempt to negotiate a political solution favorable to itself. There is a possibility of escalation of conflict with the application of unconventional paramilitary formations.

Limitations

Three limitations currently exist. Research conducted in this thesis will be based on understanding and interpreting unclassified sources of information written in the English, Ukrainian, and Russian languages. This study focuses only on military activities conducted by the Russian Federation during Crimean annexation and war in Donbass. Study conducted in this thesis will be restricted to events that happened in Ukraine between 2014 and 2015.

Delimitation

The activities of RCF and RUPF during Crimean annexation and war in Donbass were accompanied by Information operations in support of Russian actions and aimed at discrediting Ukrainian authorities and UAF actions. In this research, the information operations component will not be considered.

The definition of Russian unconventional paramilitary formations (RUPF) would not entail the RCF, special operation forces, and Russian military advisers which took part during operations in Ukraine 2014 and 2015.

Definitions of Key Terms

Donbass: it is the industrial region of Ukraine covering most of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. The hostilities are taking place in this area from April 2014 to the present.



Figure 1. Map of the Donbass

Source: Rene Wadlow, “The Disintegrating Donbass: Is There a Future for a Confederal Ukraine?” SounterCurrent.org, December 4, 2017, accessed October 12, 2018, <https://countercurrents.org/2017/12/04/the-disintegrating-donbass-is-there-a-future-for-a-con-federal-ukraine/>.

General Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, Glavnoe Upravlenie (GU): formerly the Main Intelligence Directorate is a foreign intelligence unit of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation and the central intelligence unit of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation. Responsible for conducting operations in the military, military-political, military-technical, military-

economic spheres.²¹ The organizational structure of GU includes several units, such as spying bureaus, signal intelligence (also known as SIGINT) units and others.²²

The Special Operations Forces (SOF) of Russia under the Special Operations Forces Command of the GU was established in 2013. The organizational structure of SOF is kept secret but possibly includes Army special operation brigades and naval special operation brigades.²³

Russian Hybrid War: it is the combination of a variety of different modes of warfare applied simultaneously and adaptive use of closely integrated sets of conventional weapons, irregular tactics and formations, terrorism and criminal action on the battlefield to achieve the desired political and military goals.²⁴

Russian Unconventional Paramilitary Formations (RUPF): it is a variety of pro-Russian insurgent and militia organizations utilizing irregular tactics usually operating in cooperation with conventional forces on the principles of unity of control (headquarters) applied by Russia as exemplified during the Crimean annexation and war in Eastern Ukraine.

²¹ Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, “Military Districts,” accessed April 27, 2019, <http://eng.mil.ru/en/index.htm>.

²² Tor Bukkvoll, “Russian Special Operations Forces in Crimea and Donbas,” *Parameters* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 13-21.

²³ Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, “Military Districts.”

²⁴ Frank G. Hoffman, “Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars” (Research, Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, Arlington, VA, 2007).

Table 1. Russian Unconventional Paramilitary Formations	
Crimea Annexation	War in Donbass
Local Self-defense Units	Donbass People’s Militia
Russain Cossacks	“Vostok” Battalion
Ukrainian Collaborators	Russian Orthodox Army
	Army of the Southeast
	“Oplot” Battalion
	“Zarya” Battalion
	“Kalmius” Battalion
	Donsky Cossacks
	Chechen and volunteers from the Caucasus
	Cossacks National Guard
	“Somali” Battalion
	Russian Private Military Companies (PMC)

Source: Created by author. Information was taken from TRADOC G-2 Analysis and Control Element (ACE), *Threat Tactics Report. Russia* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: TRADOC G-2, October 2015).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this research is to determine the answer to the primary research question: Were Russian unconventional paramilitary formations a key component during Crimea annexation and war in Donbass? In order to answer the primary research question, other, more specific research questions need to be presented and answered. What is Russian Hybrid War against Ukraine and its primary characteristics? How Russia employed RUPF during Crimea annexation and war in Donbass (their roles and actions)? How effective were application of RUPF military operations against Ukraine?

This chapter will show and discuss the breadth and depth of materials and significance that relate to this research. Also in this chapter the author will examine the first supporting question: What is Russian Hybrid War against Ukraine and its primary characteristics.

There are sufficient numbers of available sources such as books, publications, journals, and monographs written on related topics. In order to avoid biases and provide a qualitative assessment, the paper uses Ukrainian, Russian, European and US sources.

The literature review consists of distinct blocks; the first refers to Russian Hybrid Strategy and Russian Hybrid War against Ukraine with its primary characteristics. The second block refers to Russian unconventional paramilitary formation and its characteristic application and activities, as an element of hybrid war.

Russian Hybrid War

The term hybrid war in the sense of a new type of conflict does not have an established common definition either in Ukraine or in other countries. We can determine what we understand as the Russia's Hybrid War against Ukraine, based on empirical data filling in the definition. Currently the theoretical definition of hybrid war has several meanings: a new conception of military operations with a combination of military and non-military funds; a new generation of warfare; and hybrid war as the newest form of global confrontation in today's unstable security environment.²⁵ The lack of a clear definition is associated with the fluid dynamics of this phenomenon and uniqueness in each particular case.

The Origins of the Term Hybrid War

The first definition of hybrid war was made by Frank G. Hoffman who has been dedicated to studying this phenomenon for more than 10 years. In his monograph "The conflict of 21st century: the rise of Hybrid Wars," he defined it as a combination of a variety of different modes of warfare, including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts in particular, non-selective violence, and criminal disorder.²⁶ Hoffman analyzed the changing nature of modern wars and considered the debate about the evolution of modern warfare. The author argues that in the future, countries will face opponents who use not only a regular army but also paramilitary units

²⁵ Horbulin, *The World Hybrid War*, 28-30.

²⁶ Hoffman, "Conflict in the 21st Century."

and terrorist acts. Thus, future opponents are capable and willing to use a combination of such capabilities.

In 2009 Hoffman published another article “Hybrid Warfare and Challenges” which identified that a hybrid war can be performed by state and non-state actors. Under the term non-state actors the author implies irregular forces and their activities. He agrees that non-state actors conducting hybrid wars in a modern operating environment can act with the lethality of state actors. The access to modern weapons, combined with modern forms of communication and interaction, makes non-state actors more capable of confronting the state.²⁷

Hoffman continued to study the phenomenon of hybrid war and in 2012, he clarified his definition of hybrid war, by adding “simultaneous” which refers to use of conventional and irregular military assets. Which makes the definition of the hybrid war adapted to its current manifestation.

Therefore, this study will use Hoffman’s definition of hybrid war which means a combination of a variety of different modes of warfare applied simultaneously and the adaptive use of closely integrated sets of conventional weapons, irregular tactics and formations, terrorism and criminal action on the battlefield, to achieve the desired political and military goals.

²⁷ Frank G. Hoffman, “Hybrid Warfare and Challenges,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 52 (1st Quarter 2009): 34-39, accessed April 17, 2016, <http://ndupress.ndu.edu/portals/68/Documents/jfq/jfq-52.pdf>.

Ukrainian Experts View on Hybrid War

A lot of articles, books and papers came to light about the idea of hybrid war, Hybrid threats, or warfare as a phenomenon of the recent modern world. It will be logical to consider the opinion of Ukrainian specialists about the modern phenomenon of hybrid war given their experiences. One of the leading Ukrainian specialists who is studying the question of Russian aggression against Ukraine is Volodymyr Horbulin. He is a Ukrainian politician, a member of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, and Director of the Institute of National Security Problems at the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine.²⁸ In his monograph “The World Hybrid war: Ukrainian forefront,” Horbulin argued that the term “hybrid war” became part of global political science terminology after the shock of the Munich Security Conference in 2007, where Putin was resorting to open nuclear threats. Under the concept of Russian Hybrid War he determined the application of methods used by Russia which included a combination of traditional military means, special operations and subversion methods, using separatist terrorist groups, as well as information, economic and diplomatic pressures against Ukraine. From the author’s point of view that term is theoretically and practically the most appropriate for determining the specifics of Russia’s actions against Ukraine.²⁹ The Ukrainian expert’s definition is very similar to the definition of hybrid war presented by Hoffman, but describes in more detail the specific means used by Russia against Ukraine.

²⁸ Ukrinform, “Volodymyr Horbulin, Director of the National Institute for Strategic Studies,” July 2, 2017, accessed November 6, 2018, <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-politics/2171244-volodymyr-horbulin-director-of-the-national-institute-for-strategic-studies.html>.

²⁹ Horbulin, *The World Hybrid War*, 19-22.

According to the Horbulin statement each specific element of Russian Hybrid War is not new in nature and has been used in almost all the wars of the past. In our case, the example is unique because Russia applies all elements in a coherent and interconnected manner. He examined in detail the causes and preconditions of Russian aggression against Ukraine, its strategic goals, as well as the peculiarities of conducting a hybrid war in various dimensions: military, political, economic, social, humanitarian, and information.³⁰ Besides Russian Hybrid War against Ukraine based on an example of the Ukrainian scenario, Horbulin gives an expert assessment of the possibilities of the emergence of hybrid conflicts in other states of the world, describing in detail the preconditions, possible indicators and methods of counteraction. At this time, Horbulin's monograph is the first and only publication in Ukraine covering issues of the Russian Hybrid War against Ukraine.

Strategic Goals of Russian Hybrid Aggression against Ukraine

After the Revolution of Dignity and escaping pro-Russian President Yanukovich the new Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko signed the economic part of the Ukraine–European Union Association Agreement and described this as Ukraine's “first but most decisive step” towards EU membership.³¹ At the same time, President Poroshenko initiated the discussing process for the accession of Ukraine to the NATO alliance with European and US partners. For the Kremlin, Ukrainian accession to the EU and North

³⁰ Horbulin, *The World Hybrid War*, 19-22.

³¹ European Union, “Ukraine Ratifies EU Association Agreement,” September 16, 2014, accessed November 6, 2018, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2014.161.01.0003.01.ENG&toc=OJ:L:2014:161:TOC.

Atlantic Alliance would mean the final and total loss of Ukraine and Kyiv's turn from the sphere of Russia's control. It would be a colossal defeat for the Kremlin in the international political arena. Moreover, in case if Ukraine would join NATO, Russia will appear surrounded by the Allied countries. From Russia's perspective, this would create a threat to its national security, and would change the balance of power in the region.³²

It could be concluded from the foregoing that the primary Russian strategic purpose is making it impossible for Ukraine to implement European and NATO integration by creating obstacles for Ukraine towards its Association with the EU and intensification of cooperation with NATO.³³

Primary Characteristics of Russian Hybrid War against Ukraine

Ukrainian Independent Analytical Center for Geopolitical Studies "Borysfen Intel" deals with the study of geopolitical research, analysis, evaluation and forecast of the development of the situation in the world as a whole, in Europe, as well as around Ukraine. Specialists of the Center, including former diplomats and representatives of special services of Ukraine, famous political scientists, economists, and lawyers conducted research on the characteristics of the Russian Hybrid War in general and its individual elements.

³² Horbulin, *The World Hybrid War*, 169-171.

³³ Ibid.

In the article “Strategy and Tactics of Hybrid Wars in the Context of Russia’s Military Aggression against Ukraine.”³⁴ Authors began their analysis by describing the general characteristics of the Russian Hybrid War which come to replace classical military aggressions when armed forces are used.³⁵ The new type of war has a hidden character and is observed mainly in the political, economic, informational and diplomatic spheres. The conventional force methods for solving individual problems are involved in a small number of cases. The authors’ overall view of hybrid wars makes clear distinctions of features of “hybrid wars” are as follows: aggression without an official declaration of war; concealment by the aggressor country of its participation in the conflict; widespread use of quasi-military armed groups (including under cover of a civilian population); neglect of the aggressor by international standards of conduct of hostilities and current agreements and agreements reached; mutual measures of political and economic pressure (for the formal preservation of ties between the two countries); widespread propaganda and counter-propaganda with the use of “dirty” information technology; confrontation in the cyberspace domain.³⁶

For the purpose of this study the characteristics of Russian Hybrid War against Ukraine will be defined by the following. In the same study the experts state that the typical hybrid war consists of three main phases: (1) shaping, (2) active, and (3) continuum phases (figure 2). In the case of Russian Hybrid War against Ukraine during

³⁴ Borysfen Intel, “Strategy and Tactics of Hybrid Wars in the Context of Russia’s Military against Ukraine,” November 24, 2014, accessed January 14, 2019, <http://bintel.com.ua/en/article/gibrid-war/>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

the shaping phase, Russia used informational, economic and political elements of influence, shaped the ideological, political and military (including unconventional methods) preconditions for their future aggression.³⁷ The purpose of the active phase was the occupation of the Crimea and the continuation of destabilization of the situation in Ukraine through the initiation of the armed conflict in the east of Ukraine. The implementation of the active phase became possible due to the synchronized use of military, quasi-military and informational elements of hybrid war. The result of the second phase of the hybrid war was the annexation of the Crimea and the formation in February 2015 of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics.³⁸ With the creation of self-proclaimed republics, Russia moved to the third phase of the hybrid war. During this phase the Russian Federation is trying to "freeze" the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, forcing the Ukrainian Government to recognize the separatists in a "negotiating process" and to start negotiations with separatists.

³⁷ Borysfen Intel, "Strategy and Tactics of Hybrid Wars in the Context of Russia's Military against Ukraine."

³⁸ Ibid.

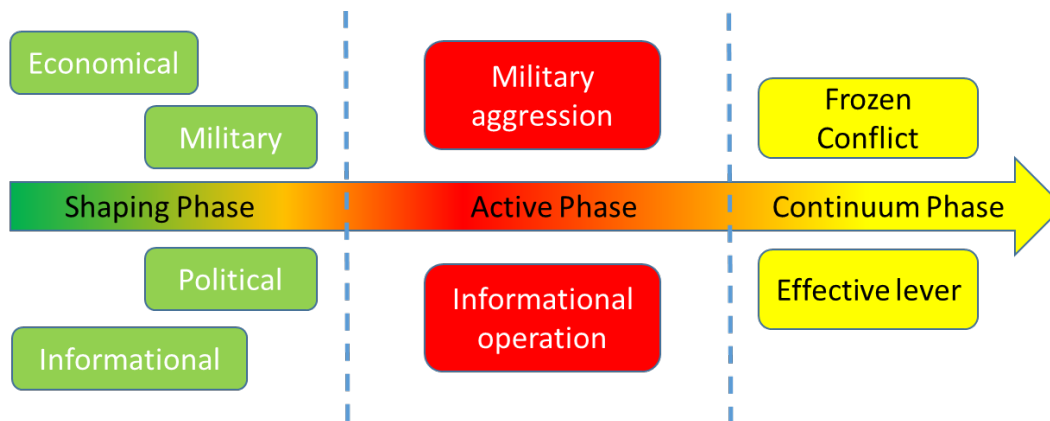


Figure 2. Characteristic of Russian Hybrid War Against Ukraine

Source: Created by author.

To this end, Russia continues to use all elements of the hybrid war to increase pressure on Ukraine, including increasing its troop presence near Ukrainian borders. Russia denies its participation in the conflict and at the same time conducts a large-scale information campaign against Ukraine’s orientation. This article provides a lot of insight into conceptualization and understanding of Russian Hybrid War and for the purpose of this study will be used for describing the characteristic of Russian Hybrid War.

Russian View on Modern Type of War

In February 2013 the Chief of General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, Army General Valery Gerasimov, published in the weekly Russian newspaper *Military Industrial Courier* an article entitled “The value of science in the foresight. New challenges demand rethinking the forms and methods of carrying out combat operations” which he based on the Soviet Union’s military tactics of strategic management and

developed a new theory of modern war.³⁹ In his article, Gerasimov wrote that “In the XXI century there is a tendency to erase the differences between the state of war and peace. Wars are no longer announced, but beginning, they do not follow the usual template.”⁴⁰ According to Gerasimov, in modern wars, the methods of confrontation used by the parties to the conflict are shifted towards a widespread use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian and other non-military measures. He suggests that as a result of the application of new methods of warfare, a prosperous state in a few months can turn into an “arena of fierce armed struggle, become a victim of foreign intervention, plunge into the abyss of chaos, humanitarian catastrophe, and civil war.”⁴¹

Gerasimov emphasizes that the ratio of used non-military methods and military is four to one (4:1). Contrary to the traditional perspectives, Gerasimov considers the non-military measures like economic sanctions, political and diplomatic pressure and disruption of diplomatic ties, as ways of war (figure 3). Gerasimov says, “Each war does present itself as a unique case, demanding the comprehension of its particular logic, its uniqueness.”⁴² Therefore, it is hard to predict conditions of war.

It should be noted that in the article Gerasimov never used the word hybrid war and only referred three times to “asymmetric” forms of conflict. However, his analysis of

³⁹ Valery Gerasimov, “The Value of Science Is in the Foresight New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying Out Combat Operations,” *Military Review* (January-February 2016): 23-29, accessed March 26, 2019, <https://www.joomag.com/magazine/military-review-english-edition-january-february-2016/0967230001451491844?page=6>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

the current and future security environment, challenges and capabilities of the Russian Armed Forces gives a better understanding of the methods and approaches that Russia uses against Ukraine.

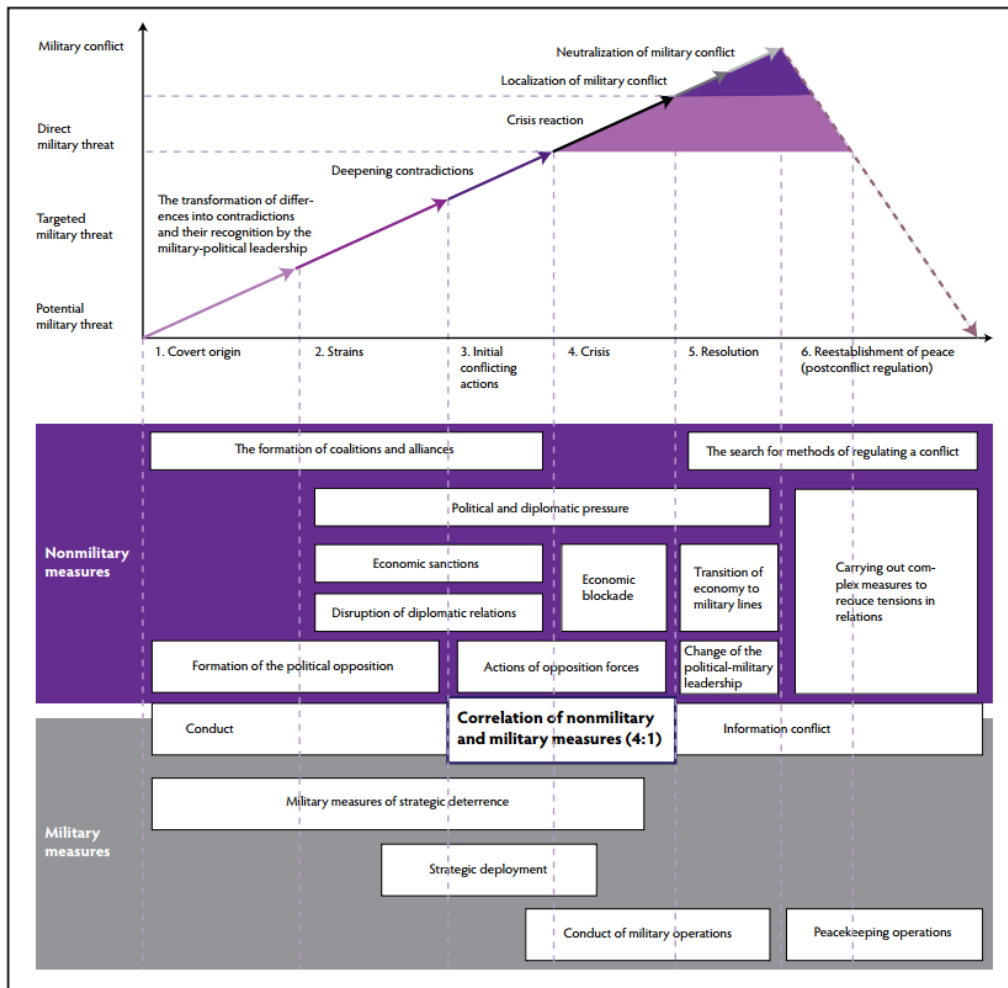


Figure 3. The Role of Non-Military Methods

Source: Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations," *Military Review* (January-February 2016): 24, accessed March 26, 2019, <https://www.joomag.com/magazine/military-review-english-edition-january-february-2016/0967230001451491844?page=6>.

The chart above is taken from Gerasimov's article. It highlights the Russian Hybrid War definition as a combination of traditional military means as well as information, political, economic and diplomatic pressures. During Initial conflicting actions and "crisis" phases Russia implements political and diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, economic blockade, conducts an informational campaign and military operations. Gerasimov states that the correlation of non-kinetic to kinetic methods is 4 to 1.

Russian Unconventional Paramilitary Formation

The main purpose of this study is to answer the question of: Were the Russian unconventional paramilitary formations a key component during Crimea annexation and war in Donbass as an element of Russian Hybrid War? There are a lot of available sources about the Russian military component, its composition, and activities used during Crimea annexation and the war on Donbass. Western and domestic sources supplement information about this question, giving prospects for gaining insight from different points of view. Despite this, the expert's point of view is different in regards to which units played a key role in those case studies whether it was conventional forces or an unconventional component. In the present study under RUPF will be considered a variety of pro-Russian insurgent and militia organizations utilizing irregular tactics usually operating in cooperation with conventional forces on the principles of unity of control (headquarters) applied by Russia as exemplified during the Crimean annexation and war at Eastern Ukraine.

Volodymyr Horbulin's View on Russian Unconventional Paramilitary Formations

Volodymyr Horbulin's monograph "The World Hybrid War: Ukrainian Forefront," provides insights into the utilization of military components which included conventional and unconventional paramilitary formations during the Crimean occupation and conflict on Donbass. The analysis is based on official information, with reference to sources such as the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense and testimony of direct participants in the operation. The author focuses on the application of pro-Russian militias and Insurgent Organizations (according to the author's opinion) as the effective element of RUPF in the Donbass.

Horbulin followed the transformation of ways of implementing the pro-Russian Militias and Insurgent Organizations based on analysis of the active phase of the conflict, starting with the Crimean events in February 2014 till 2017. The author emphasized that Russia was flexible in its application of pro-Russian militias and constantly changed the concept of their application depending upon the specific conditions of the operational environment. According to the author, changes also took place in the organizational structure of pro-Russian Militias and Insurgent organizations. At the initial stage, these were decentralized formations headed by Russian retired officers, experienced veterans, and mercenaries. Subsequently, after the reorganization, paramilitary units got effective mission command systems. To increase the combat capability and efficiency quasi-militaries needed to organize effective training. Moreover, Russia supported paramilitary units with weapons and heavy military equipment, therefore there was a need for training operators. The training was organized and conducted by Russian instructors. In the following chapters, the author examines in detail the operations where pro-Russian

Militias and Insurgent organizations fought against UAF units. As a conclusion, the author emphasized that Russian Military success in Crimea and in the Donbass region depended on the effective implementation of paramilitary units in the right place at the right time.⁴³ The monograph of Horbulin represents the one of the most complete sources that can be helpful to answer the main research question.

Michael Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russian Operation in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine Opposed Point of View*

This study highlights the takeaways from the Russian military operation in the Crimea and in the east of Ukraine, where a group of authors argues that during the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula, Russia deployed the most trained and professional forces. The Russian forces includes the naval infantry, the Airborne Forces and the special operation forces units. From these authors' point of view the use of these units led to the success of the entire operation. Employment of high-proficiency units, used undercover, managed to save control of Russia's own forces and prevented unexpected crises or incidents which could turn the population against Russia.⁴⁴

The situation was different in Eastern Ukraine. Moscow used the separatist armed units formed from volunteers from the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine, as well as mercenaries from the Russian Federation and abroad. As a rule, armed units of the separatists were headed by retired officers of the Russian Armed Forces who were

⁴³ Horbulin, *The World Hybrid War*, 270.

⁴⁴ Michael Kofman, Katya Migacheva, Brian Nichiporuk, Andrew Radin, Olesya Tkacheva, and Jenny Oberholtzer, *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2017), 5-25.

veterans of wars in Chechnya or Afghanistan (1979 to 1989).⁴⁵ Many of them had powerful personalities with their own ideology and interpersonal conflicts. As a consequence for Russia it was difficult to implement a coordinated management of these units. The activities of these units were characterized by the lack of coordinated actions at the operational level of combat operations. Low staff training and low level of discipline led to significant losses in equipment and personnel during combat operations. From Kofman and Migacheva's point of view, the use of RUPF provoked more chaos than reaching the planned Moscow objectives.⁴⁶ Thus, the authors suggest that in the future, Russia will avoid the formation and use of RUPF in the accomplishment of military objectives as a part of Hybrid War.⁴⁷

The Role of Russian Private Military Companies in a Russian Hybrid War

The Russian private military companies are no less important as a tool in RUPF, constituent parts which were widely used during 2014 and 2015.

Until recently, Private Military Companies (PMC) were considered to be non-government contractors that provide professional security services. Their tasks were mainly limited to the protection of production facilities, the escort of valuable goods or the protection of Very Important Persons (VIPs) from attacks. However, over the last few years, Russia has brought this type of activity to a fundamentally new level,

⁴⁵ Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, 56.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 64.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

demonstrating that a PMC can carry out offensive operations and even form the “backbone of the occupation army.”⁴⁸

In a study conducted by the International Volunteer Community “Inform Napalm,” called “PMC Rush: Russian Private Armies,” a group of international experts conducted an analysis of the history and present-day use by the Russian Federation of PMC for the achievement of military objectives in the context of Hybrid War. Thus, according to the authors, there is irrefutable evidence of the participation of seven private companies in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine from 2014 and 2015. The main task was to conduct reconnaissance and sabotage activities against the armed forces of Ukraine.⁴⁹



Figure 4. The List of PMC Employed by Russia Overseas

Source: International Analytical Organization, “PMC Rush: Russian Private Armies,” Inform Napalm, accessed February 13, 2019, <https://informnapalm.rocks/pmc-rush-ua>.

Wagner’s Group was the most capable and famous PMC which operated in Ukraine. The first testing ground for the Wagner Group was the Ukrainian Crimea. Initially it demonstrated close cooperation with the Russian army. In 2014 Wagner’s

⁴⁸ International Analytical Organization, “PMC Rush: Russian Private Armies,” Inform Napalm, accessed February 13, 2019, <https://informnapalm.rocks/pmc-rush-ua>.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

fighters helped the regular military units of the Russian Federation seize objectives and disarm Ukrainian Army soldiers during the occupation of the Crimea. While the Russian troops struggled to hide their identity and avoid identification, conversely Wagner's PMC was quite well suited to conduct certain tasks in the Crimea.⁵⁰

Russian Application of Unconventional Paramilitary Formations
TRADOC G-2 Analysis and Control Element View

In October 2015 TRADOC G-2 Analysis and Control Element Threats Integration issued *Threat Tactics Report: Russia*. This *Threat Tactics Report* focuses on three distinct operations initiated by Russia in (1) Georgia in 2008, (2) Crimea in 2014, and (3) Eastern Ukraine in 2014 and 2015. The *Threat Tactics Report* presents and analyzes the tactics used in these conflicts, the lessons learned, and adjustments made by the Russian Armed Forces.⁵¹ The significance of the work is that the authors have analyzed in detail the composition and interconnection of conventional and unconventional components used by Russia during Crimean annexation and war in Donbass.

The significance of this work is that the authors identified critical operations which led Russia to successes during both case studies, and the RUPF contribution to achievement of the military objectives. Those critical operations will help to determine the specific criteria which will be used during analysis in order to answer the primary research question.

⁵⁰ International Analytical Organization, "PMC Rush."

⁵¹ TRADOC G-2 Analysis and Control Element (ACE), *Threat Tactics Report, Russia* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: TRADOC G-2, October 2015).

Summary

A lot of resources deal with the issue of Hybrid War. Specific attention was paid following the events of 2014 in Ukraine. In this chapter the first supporting question was answered: “What is Russian Hybrid War against Ukraine and its primary characteristics.” The first part of this chapter considers the literature that defines and characterizes the main features of the Russian Hybrid War against Ukraine. The second part presents sources that reveal the RUPF composition and activities that may have played a major role during the Russian War against Ukraine. The sources which were used in the work represent both Western, Russian and Ukrainian specialists points of view. This will help to avoid subjectivism during the attempt to answer the main research question. A close look was given to the Gerasimov Doctrine about what he describes as the “Modern type of War” which perfectly describes current Russian actions against Ukraine. The next chapter will provide the methodology used by this study to answer the primary and secondary research questions.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology provides an understanding of the framework of this study. This research paper concentrates on descriptive content analysis of primary and secondary information to examine the RUPF during Crimea annexation and war in Donbass as an element of Russian Hybrid War. This chapter will discuss the research methodology designed to answer the primary and secondary research questions. The research is significant help to the Ukrainian Army to develop an effective strategy of reforming and modifying their army for a successful counter-action in the future. Moreover, the material presented in this research could be useful for European Security (EU and NATO) since there is a threat of a repetition of the Ukrainian scenario in the Baltic States.

Purpose and Organization

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of RUPF during the Hybrid War against Ukraine. The primary research question is: Were the RUPF a key component during Crimea annexation and war in Donbass as an element of Russian Hybrid War? This will be answered by analyzing two case studies through the lens of the second and third supporting questions: How Russia employed RUPF during Crimea annexation and war in Donbass (their roles and actions)? How effective were application of RUPF in military operations against Ukraine? The purpose of this chapter is to present the academic methodology which guided research and describe the process of how each case study is analyzed. This chapter is broken down into three blocks. First, it discusses case

study methodology, as defined by Dr. John C. Creswell, in order to explain how analysis is derived from cases. Second, this chapter outlines the case studies. Third, this chapter delineates the process used for evidence collection and a method for analysis.

Methodology

This research will be conducted using a qualitative methodology based on case studies. The fundamentals of this research are based on methodological definitions determined by Professor John C. Creswell from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Professor Creswell argues that qualitative research is a major research methodology in social sciences, and helps to understand a particular event or environment as “the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.”⁵² In this research, understanding of Russian Hybrid War and application of RUPF in it; is accomplished by examining two military operations and attempting to better comprehend the relationship unconventional paramilitary formations have with the success of each of these cases. Creswell argues that it is the obligation of the researcher to determine the number of cases required, identify the individual cases, explain why these cases facilitate a greater understanding of the research topic, and describe the depth and boundaries of study for each of the cases.⁵³

⁵² John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 15.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

Case Studies

The selected case studies occurred in Ukraine during the 2014 to 2016 period of time and reflect the timeliness of this study. The first case study is the 2014 Russian Hybrid campaign as a result of which during less than one month Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula. It examines application of both conventional and nonconventional, quasi-military assets and activities. The second case study covers the Russian campaign in Donbass in the 2014 to 2016 time period. During this time there was a destabilization of the situation in the Donbass region followed by active military operations with widespread use of a quasi-military component. Through the use of these case studies, conclusions regarding the role of quasi-military forces in Russian Hybrid War against Ukraine might be possible and allow researchers to achieve the desired purpose of this study.

Data Collection

The research data will be collected from the primary (Ukrainian and Russian texts) and secondary sources. A significant amount of research was conducted via the Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library. The internet was used broadly to collect diverse data. The secondary sources consist of the variety of literature that includes books, reports, scholarly journals, magazine articles and digital resources. This research does not conduct any human interviews. Reviewing multiple data sources, which included reports, news articles, scholarly journal articles, books, student papers and in-depth, peer-reviewed academic studies increased the credibility and validity of the research.

Organization of the Research Process

The research process consisted of three main phases. The collection and selection of data and information were developed in the first phase. The second phase was to categorize information resources and distinct relations of primary and secondary research questions. The second phase also established methods, criteria, and metrics of comparison between cases of unconventional paramilitary formation (RUPF) operations. In the final phase, collected data and information is compared and analyzed to formulate a clear and concise conclusion.

Method of Analysis

The methodology used for this study is a qualitative content analysis method of research aimed at assessing both case studies by sequential consideration of the critical operations that occurred during the Crimea annexation and War in Donbass. The cases will be compared against critical operations identified by H. David Pendleton, John M. Cantin in TRADOC G-2 *Threat Tactics Report: Russia*. These critical operations provide criteria that can be analyzed in each case to answer the secondary research questions: How Russia employed RUPF during Crimea annexation and war in Donbass, (their roles and actions)? How effective were application of RUPF in military operations against Ukraine?

The critical operations that will be used as criteria are: initiation of anti-government demonstration; taking over the Regional State Administration (RSA), Police, and Ukrainian State Security Service (SBU) local departments; taking under control the transportation hubs, communication networks; Ukrainian military bases blockade; taking over the border checkpoints. Once case studies have been analyzed, key deductions will

be consolidated and used; in order to answer the primary research question by indicating whether the RUPF were a key component during Crimea annexation and war in Donbass as an element of Russian Hybrid War.

Criteria and Metrics

A preponderance of evidence for each criteria will be the metric to determine how Russia employed RUPF, how effective they were, and if the RUPF were a key component of Russian Hybrid War. Below is an illustration of how text will be analyzed in an effort to visually depict the paragraph structure in the analysis portion of the case studies.

Case study	Crimea annexation	War in Donbass
Critical activities		
Initiation of anti-government demonstration		
Taking over the RSA, Police and SBU departments		
Seizure the Transportation Hubs		
Communication Network control		
Ukrainian military base blockade		
Seizure the Border checkpoints (Sea Guard)		
Result	★	★

Figure 5. Illustration of Approach to Case Study Analysis

Source: Created by author.

Validity and Limitations

The validity of this case study is limited in that it explores only unclassified data for a few historical examples. Applicability of the conclusions beyond the examined cases requires further research.

Summary

Chapter 3 describes the qualitative case study methodology that is used throughout the research to answer the question of whether Russian quasi-military forces played a major role during the Crimea annexation and War in the Donbass. Two case studies will provide the appropriate breadth and depth necessary to determine key findings. Moreover, chapter 3 defines the process through which the case study will be analyzed, as seen in the above illustration. The following chapter examines and analyzes the details of the two case studies. It then proceeds into the details of a particular case study. First, the Crimea annexation case study will be considered followed by the war in the Donbass case. Both will be analyzed using the process illustrated above. Chapter 4 concludes with a cross comparison of the individually evaluated case studies.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Purpose and Organization

The purpose of this study is to examine the Crimea annexation and war in the Donbass operations and identify if the RUPF played a key role in those case studies. The purpose of this chapter is to examine two Russian campaigns and analyze the case studies through the lens of the second and third supporting questions: How Russia employed RUPF during Crimea annexation and war in Donbass (their roles and actions)? How effective were application of RUPF in military operations against Ukraine?

The organization of chapter 4 includes a detailed description of the critical operations conducted by conventional forces and Russian unconventional paramilitary formations during the Crimea annexation and war in the Donbass 2014 and 2015. After the description of each critical operation, will be a transition into the analysis of the supporting questions, as depicted in chapter 3.

Crimea Annexation

The Balance of Forces

At the onset of the Crimea annexation in February 2014, UAF had 189 military bases and 18,800 military personnel stationed in the Crimea Peninsula, most of them represented the Ukrainian Navy.⁵⁴ According to the Ukrainian–Russian agreement,

⁵⁴ CBS News, “Ukraine Troops Leave Crimea by Busload; Defense Minister Resigns After Russia Seizes Peninsula,” *CBS News*, March 25, 2014, accessed February 23, 2019, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ukraine-troops-leave-crimea-by-busload-defense-minister-resigns-after-russia-seizes-peninsula/>; ECHOMSK, “Transcript of a Secret Meeting of the National Security Council February 28, 2014 [Стенограма

Russia had its Black Sea Fleet Headquarters there and could station in the Crimea Peninsula up to 25,000 troops. However, in February, Russia had roughly 12,000 military personnel stationed in Crimea and the only combat unit was the 810 Separate Naval Infantry Brigade (also known as 810 SNIB). Accordingly, based on this agreement Russia could increase the number of military units if needed.

Initiation of Anti-Government Demonstrations

February 23, 2014 was the official launching date of the Crimean occupation operation.⁵⁵ At an early stage the Kremlin expected to capture Crimea exclusively by non-kinetic methods. Under the plan of action the Russian undercover SOF operatives and pro-Russian Cossacks from Kuban, Rostov-na-Don and Serbia were to initiate anti-Ukrainian demonstrations in the Crimean major cities of Simferopol and Sevastopol involving the mass of local ethnic Russians. Then in response to popular calls, with support of SOF operatives, the Crimean parliamentarians were supposed to make a decision to hold a general referendum on the question of the accession of Crimea to Russia. The plan was based on the Ukrainian authority vacuum in the Crimean Peninsula as a result of the political crisis in Ukraine and on the assumption of support of the ethnic Russians living on the Crimean Peninsula.⁵⁶

секретного заседания СНБО 28 февраля 2014 года],” *ECHOMSK blog*, February 23, 2016, accessed April 16, 2019, <https://gordonua.com/publications/stenogramma-sekretnogo-zasedaniya-snbo-vo-vremya-anneksii-kryma-v-2014-godu-polnyy-tekst-na-russkom-yazyke-121122.html>.

⁵⁵ Berezovets, *Annexation: The Island of Crimea. Chronicles of «hybrid war»*, 46.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 46-51.

In February 23, 2014 the demonstration under the title “People’s Will Against Fascism in Ukraine” was organized in Nakhimov Square in Sevastopol. Russian mass media announced about 20 thousand participants, local sources reported about three thousand. The aim was to destabilize the situation on the peninsula and create conditions for a decision to hold a referendum. Participants of the protest action changed the flag of Ukraine to the Russian state, constantly chanted “Russia!,” “Putin is our president!,” “Russia, we are thrown, take us back!”⁵⁷. At that time during demonstrations were spotted the representative of a Cossacks organization who were wearing camouflage uniforms and Cossacks’ hat. In the meantime people went to a big rally on Lenin Square in Simferopol. The demonstration consisted of pro-Russian-dominated representatives as well as supporters of a united Ukraine, and Crimean Tatars who also supported the Ukrainian Crimea. During the demonstration, the first clashes between representatives of opposition groups were observed. During the period from 23 to 26 February, taking advantage of the passive response from law enforcement and administrative authorities, pro-Russian demonstrations covered almost the entire peninsula and the tension on the Crimea Peninsula gradually escalated.

On the morning of February 26, a group of deputies of the State Duma of the Russian Federation arrived in Crimea to assist the Crimean parliament to decide on a referendum. On that day, Russian parliamentarians, with the support of Russian GU agents and SOF operatives, planned to hold a closed session of the Crimean Parliament to decide on a request for assistance from Russia in order to protect the Crimean Peninsula from Ukrainian nationalists and conduct a referendum. At the same time, a big pro-

⁵⁷ Berezovets, *Annexation: The Island of Crimea. Chronicles of «hybrid war»*, 48.

Russian demonstration was organized under the walls of the Crimean Parliament. Representatives of the supporters of Russia turned out about five thousand people. But the Russian leadership did not expect that 12,000 people would come out in support of Ukraine who quickly suppressed the opposition forces and prevented the Crimean parliamentarians from entering the session hall. This caused a breach in the Kremlin's plans.⁵⁸

Employment

Throughout the initiation of anti-government demonstration operations in the period February 23 to 26, Russia used RUPF basically in a supporting role, while GU agents and SOF operatives were the main assets. Allegedly, GU and SOF organized the coordination center in Sevastopol which conducted planning, organization and allocation of financial resources for anti-government demonstrations. At that time the only representatives of RUPF were the Cossacks organizations whose primary objective was assistance in organizing the demonstrations, providing perimeter security to prevent intervention of Ukrainian Law enforcement units, and coordination of pro-Russian protesters actions during demonstrations. Thus the role of RUPF can be interpreted as a secondary role.

Effectiveness

At this point the Kremlin authorities did not achieve their desired end state. Consequently, RUPF actions could be considered as a partly successful. They succeeded

⁵⁸ Berezovets, *Annexation: The Island of Crimea. Chronicles of «hybrid war»*, 48-51.

in organizing and involving a large number of pro-Russian people in demonstrations. However, the significant miscalculation was the insufficient appreciation of the Ukrainian demonstrator's capabilities who were able to prevent the Crimean parliamentary sessions. That fact was unexpected for Putin but it didn't stop him. This is borne out by the following events.

Taking Over the Crimean Parliament, Cabinet of Ministers,
and SBU Departments

On February 26, President Putin ordered the Ministry of Defense to conduct a spontaneous and comprehensive inspection of Western and Central Military Districts forces combat readiness. Later in the day the Russian Federation announced four-day military exercises along the Russian-Ukrainian border.⁵⁹ Under the cover of conducting the military exercise Russian military authorities started to project forces into Crimea. According to the Russian Defense Minister, the increase in number of Russian Military in Crimea was because of the need as a part of the exercise to reinforce the protection of Russian Federation strategic military infrastructure located in Crimea.⁶⁰

The next day, on February 27, at 4.20 a.m. less than a company of well-armed military personnel took over the Crimean Parliament and Cabinet of Ministers' buildings in Simferopol. The 120 military personnel, armed primarily with machine guns and grenades, quickly seized the government buildings and hoisted the Russian flag.⁶¹ Based

⁵⁹ Berezovets, *Annexation: The Island of Crimea. Chronicles of «hybrid war»*, 56.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁶¹ TRADOC G-2 Analysis and Control Element Threats Integration, *Threat Tactics Report, Russia*, 26.

on an analysis conducted by Russian military observers Anton Lavrov and Alexey Nikolsky, it is assumed that Russian Special Operation Command was behind the seizing of the local parliament on February 27.⁶²

Since the operations conducted by Special Forces are largely covert actions it is difficult to find direct evidence of Russian SOF unit's participation in open sources. Therefore, there are alternative viewpoints that exist which suggested that taking over the administration building in Simferopol was conducted by unconventional paramilitary formations. Major Antonius J.C. Selhorst in his monograph "Fear, Honor, Interest: An Analysis of Russia's Operations in the Near Abroad" stated that "local paramilitary forces and Cossacks stormed the parliament" on February 27.⁶³ Until now the experts point of view is ambiguous. In spite of a variety of opinions most of the US and Ukrainian sources assume that operation was conducted by professional Russian Military. Ukrainian analyst Volodymyr Horbulin in his research assumes that the primary role in the takeover operation was played by Russian military personnel undercover; allegedly it was representatives from Russian SOF units.⁶⁴ The next day, Acting President of Ukraine Oleksandr Turchynov issued an order to local SBU and the National Police (NP) departments to regain control of government buildings. In response, the SBU and NP leadership remained reluctant to comply with the order, because they had defected to the

⁶² Bukkvoll, "Russian Special Operations Forces in Crimea and Donbas," 17.

⁶³ Antonius J. C. Selhorst, "Fear, Honor, Interest: An Analysis of Russia's Operations in the Near Abroad (2007-2014)" (Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2015), 34.

⁶⁴ This is the general impression from reading Horbulin's, *The World Hybrid War*, 256-270.

occupiers already. Against NP and SBU officers who resisted, the RUPF used intimidation, bribery and blackmail.

The main task of this stage was the seizing the Crimean Parliament and Cabinet of Ministers' buildings by force. The Crimean parliamentarians made the decision about the initiation of the process of Crimean separation from Ukraine and conducting the following referendum. The decision was made to hold a referendum on the separation of the Crimea from Ukraine during the parliament session on March 14, 2014, and the Ukrainian collaborator Sergei Aksenov was elected prime minister of Crimea.⁶⁵ The actions of Prime Minister Aksenov following this decision significantly contributed to accelerating the process of annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation.

Employment

When reviewing the role of RUPF at this stage of Russian Campaign, the most prominent role played Russian Armed Forces, most likely representatives of SOF units. Russia employed conventional forces (allegedly Russian SOF units) to take over the Crimean Parliament and Cabinet of Ministers' buildings. In that activity RUPF continued to play a secondary role mainly taking part in demonstrations to support of Crimea's reunification with Russia. Also RUPF were employed for intimidation, bribery and blackmail of the SBU and NP officers who had resisted.

⁶⁵ Berezovets, *Annexation: The Island of Crimea. Chronicles of «Hybrid War»*, 71.

Effectiveness

In this stage the supporting actions taken by RUPF allowed Russian Armed Forces to totally suppress the Ukrainian Local authorities in Crimea and replace them with pro-Russian “marionettes.” SBU and local NP leadership defected to the Russian side without any resistance.

Taking Over the Transportation Hubs and Communications Networks

In the north, the Crimean Peninsula is connected to mainland Ukraine, forming the Perekop Isthmus. Two strategic highways and two railways pass through this isthmus. Control of which means the land blockade of the peninsula (figure 6).

In parallel with the seizure of the Crimean Parliament on February 27, the blockade of large transportation arteries began. At first, the two main roads through the isthmus were blocked. Then the main highways toward to the major cities of Crimea such as Sevastopol and Simferopol were blocked. The RUPF established checkpoints and inspected all transport and population. Only the population with a Crimean registration was allowed to pass through. Armed Cossack units and local self-defense detachments; consisting of pro-Russian volunteers manned and secured checkpoints.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Berezovets, *Annexation: The Island of Crimea. Chronicles of «Hybrid War»*, 82.



Figure 6. Location of Crimean Strategic Transportation Hubs and Main Airports

Source: Lonely Planet, “Map of Crimea,” accessed March 25, 2019, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/europe/ukraine/crimea/>.

On the night of February 28, Russian Armed Forces servicemen seized and blocked two airports in Crimea—Belbek (Sevastopol) and Simferopol International Airport (Simferopol) (figure 6). The work of the airport in Sevastopol was completely blocked. All internal and external flights were canceled and the staff was removed from their jobs.⁶⁷ A different situation happened at the Simferopol Airport. The airport was fully under the control of the Russian Military, but continued to carry out all scheduled flights.

⁶⁷ Berezovets, *Annexation: The Island of Crimea. Chronicles of «Hybrid War»*, 83.

The airports were taken over by representatives of the Russian Federation's Armed Forces without identification marks.⁶⁸

Crimea was transformed into an informational isolated island on February 28 by unknown forces. The “unknown forces” in fact were Russian Military, who seized the Crimean regional nodes of the communication company “Ukrtelecom.” Ukrtelecom is the primary telephone and Internet communications provider in the region. The company lost the technical ability to provide a link between the peninsula and the rest of the territory of Ukraine, as well as on the peninsula itself. As a result of the actions of the “unknowns,” several fiber-optic main cables of the company were physically damaged.⁶⁹ During 28 February, Russian military personnel who were supported by local self-defense units took control of the Crimean State Television Company.⁷⁰ Thus, the information and communication blockade of the peninsula took place.

Employment

The role of RUPF in this stage of the Russian Crimean annexation was secondary. As in previous stages they performed supporting action while the conventional Russian Forces conducted critical actions. RUPF represented by Cossacks and local self-defense units were only responsible for establishing the checkpoints on the main roads that connected the Crimea Peninsula and Ukraine. The most demanding activities such as

⁶⁸ Berezovets, *Annexation: The Island of Crimea. Chronicles of «Hybrid War»*, 83.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁷⁰ TRADOC G-2 Analysis and Control Element Threats Integration, *Threat Tactics Report, Russia*, 27.

taking over the airports, and local communication hubs to include TV companies were performed by RCF.

Effectiveness

With regard to the effectiveness of actions conducted by RUPF, there is no doubt that it was effective. Controlling the main roads allowed Russia to prevent possible projection of Ukrainian Armed forces by land. Moreover, the control of major airports gave Russia ability to regulate what forces could be brought into Crimea by air.⁷¹

Considering effectiveness of taking over the communications facilities, Russia completely blocked transmitting Ukrainian mass media through TV and Ethernet. The local population no longer had access to Ukrainian news. It allowed the attackers to not just transmit, but shape their message to those living on the peninsula, in other words conduct informational operations.⁷²

Ukrainian Military and Coast Guard Bases Blockade

Meanwhile, Russia continued to increase the number of military forces on the peninsula. The transfer was mainly carried out by sea and air. On the morning of March 1, 2014, the self-proclaimed prime minister of Crimea, Sergey Aksyonov, declared that he had exclusive control over the local police, and requested that Putin help in the protection of the region. He noted that the referendum on the independence of Crimea was scheduled for March 30 (this later date had been changed from March 16,

⁷¹ TRADOC G-2 Analysis and Control Element Threats Integration, *Threat Tactics Report, Russia*, 27.

⁷² Ibid.

2014). Putin's plan was to take over all Ukrainian military bases and force the Ukrainian military personnel to abandon Crimean territory by the referendum date.

During the night of March 2, 2014 about 200 Russian soldiers took position around the Ukrainian military base located 29 km from Simferopol. Later, around 10 armored tactical vehicles and 8×8 wheeled amphibious armored personnel carriers arrived for reinforcement. By morning the Ukrainian military base was completely surrounded by Russian Military. At that time inside the base were only about 60 Ukrainian military personnel. During the day any attempt by Ukrainian officers and soldiers to get inside the base were thwarted. Later on the Russians forces made two demands: leaved the arms and military equipment and abandon the military base. Meanwhile, the commander of the Naval Forces of Ukraine in Sevastopol, Rear Admiral Denis Berezovsky switched to the Russian side. The Ukrainian military contingent on the peninsula became isolated, and remained in place without guidance.⁷³

During March 2014 the Russians started to take over the Ukrainian warships. This was done by blocking Ukrainian ships at the port exits preventing them from access to the open sea. The widespread tactic was the flooding of old ships at the exit of the bay, completely blocking Ukrainian ships inside. After that, Russian crew members captured Ukrainian ships using high-speed boats. An example of such tactics was the blockade on Lake Donuzlav. The blockade of the Ukrainian Fleet in Donuzlav lasted from March 3 to March 27, 2014. It began with the blocking of the exit from Donuzlav by the missile cruiser "Moscow," and later was associated with the flooding of the Russian large anti-

⁷³ Berezovets, *Annexation: The Island of Crimea. Chronicles of «Hybrid War»*, 100-117.

submarine ship “Ochakov” to prevent the release of the Ukrainian fleet to the open sea. As a result, 13 Ukrainian ships were seized in Donuzlav.⁷⁴ In a similar scenario, the Russian conventional forces took over two Coast Guard bases in Kerch and Balaclava. Part of the personnel become turncoats, but most remained faithful to the Ukrainian oath.

Therefore, by the similar scenario during March 2014 the RCF sized all 189 Ukrainian military bases and 51 (80 percent) of the Ukrainian ships stationed in Crimean Naval Bases.

Employment

Like in the previous critical action during seizing the Ukrainian military bases the key role was played by RCF. The only difference was that Russian military personal did not hide their belonging to the Russian Army. The RUPF, in particular Cossack units, were used primarily to secure the area around the bases from civilians. The Russian Army and RUPF used a combination of naval and land blockades to prevent the Ukrainian Military from getting inside or outside of their bases. All actions were supported by psychological warfare, intimidation, and bribery to convince most Ukrainian units to surrender without offering resistance. In units whose commanders initially refused to surrender, a few well-placed shots and a couple of resulting casualties typically sufficed to quickly change the resistors’ minds.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ TRADOC G-2 Analysis and Control Element Threats Integration, *Threat Tactics Report, Russia*, 30.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Effectiveness

Despite the fact that RUPF played a minor role in these activities their actions were successful. In fewer than four weeks, the Russian Armed Forces accompanied by Cossacks and local self-defense units, captured approximately 189 Ukrainian military sites and most of Ukrainian Naval ships, often without firing a shot.

War in Donbass 2014 and 2015

Anti-Government Demonstration and Seizing RSA

In February and March of 2014, Crimea was the major theater of the conflict in Ukraine. In the same time the protests against the new Ukrainian Government began in almost all major cities of Eastern Ukraine. Starting from April 2014, the epicenter of the conflict shifted to the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. Following the same scenario as in Crimea, Russia actively started to destabilize the situation in the region by organizing the anti-Ukrainian Government protests. Simultaneously, during the anti-government demonstrations were the first attempts to seize local administration buildings by RUPF.

In this part the anti-government demonstrations and seizing the RSA activities will be considered as a one activity because those events occurred in the same time.

On February 23, 2014 the Ukrainian Parliament voted to repeal the official status of the Russian language, inciting hatred in the eastern sections of Ukraine where a major part of the population speaks Russian. This event, coupled with the Russian intent to destabilize the situation in the region, encouraged the pro-Russian population to protest. At the same time Russia sent to Ukraine the first representatives of Cossacks and other separatist organizations to organize mass protests. The head of the Security Service of

Ukraine (SBU) in an interview during an official press conference stated that at that time Russia started to project the private military companies to prepare the RSA takeover operations.⁷⁶ The Ukrainian Government did not give due consideration to the rising tide of anti-Ukrainian protest in the Donbass region. The first series of major demonstrations happened in Donetsk and Kharkiv on March 1st, 2014 by mostly unarmed pro-Russian protesters (figure 7). Several thousand demonstrators with Russian flags and symbols came out to the cities' central square. They demanded the federalization of Ukraine and recognition of the autonomy of the Donbas. During that demonstration were the first attempts to seize the RSA building.⁷⁷ Later, on March 9, protesters took over the RSA buildings in Luhansk, Donetsk, and Kharkiv demanding a referendum be held on reunification of the Donbass region with Russia. In some cases, local police did not offer any resistance, and permitted the protesters to take over the buildings. Only after direct orders from Kyiv on March 10, did the security forces manage to regain control of all the captured RSAs in the three cities.

⁷⁶ You Tube, "Head of the Security Service of Ukraine Interview," October 7, 2017, accessed April 3, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHAWkE1J3X4>.

⁷⁷ Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, 34.

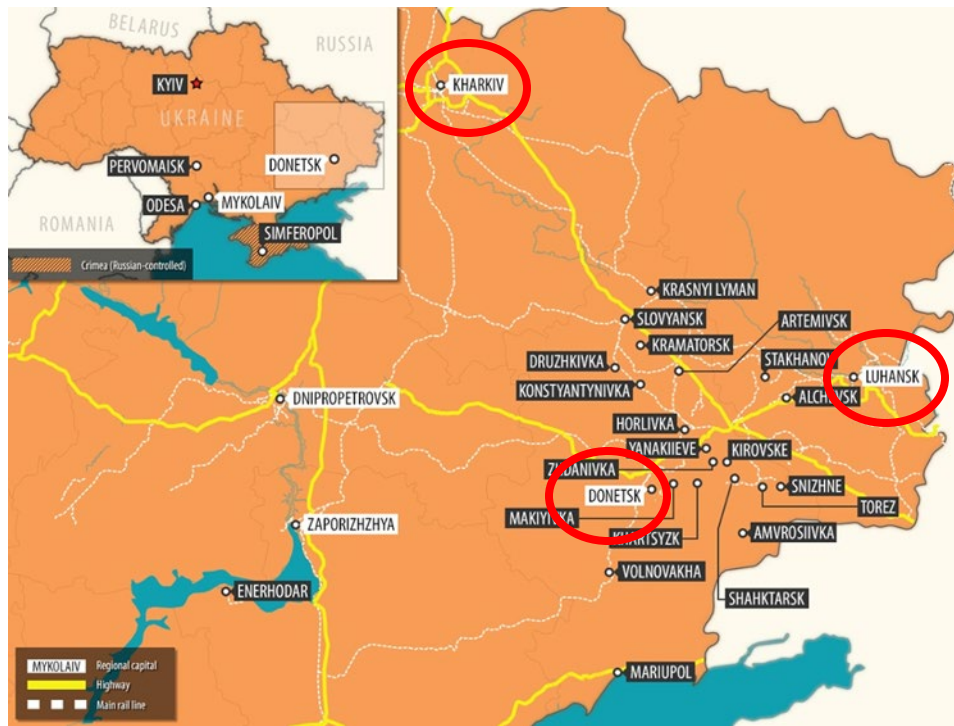


Figure 7. Map of Eastern Ukraine

Source: Radio Free Europe, “Ukraine Interactive Map,” accessed April 10, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/map-separatism-ukraine-interactive/25395976.html>.

On 6 April, 1,000 to 2,000 pro-Russian protesters once again gathered at a rally on Central Square next to the RSA building in Donetsk to demand a status referendum similar to the one held in Crimea in March 2014. During that demonstration the representatives of Russian PMC, Chechens, Cossacks, and volunteers from the Caucasus groups conducted an armed takeover of the RSA building.⁷⁸ Within the month of April 2014 the RUPF units took over RSAs and municipal buildings in Donetsk,

⁷⁸ You Tube, “Head of the Security Service of Ukraine Interview.”

Luhansk, Slovyansk, Kramatorsk, and Krasny Liman cities.⁷⁹ Later on the separatists claimed the Peoples Republics in Donetsk and Luhansk.⁸⁰

Employment

The role of RUPF was unique from the previous case study in that it played a major role in initiating the destabilization of the situation in the Donbass region. The goal was to gain control of key centers of power and government in the Donbass region. The RUPF were prepared, organized, and conducted the rally protests against the Ukrainian Government with subsequent seizing of administrative buildings. Moreover, the critical events occurred simultaneously throughout the entire Donbass region. The seizure of administrative buildings in all cities took place under the cover of, and during, the demonstrations. In this case, it made it difficult for the national police to actively oppose the seizure as they simply could not approach the buildings. During the first unsuccessful takeover attempt the RUPF were acting unarmed. During the next effort they used light small arms presumably brought from Russia.

Effectiveness

In terms of results, the initial RUPF action effectively started the process of sociopolitical destabilization in the Donbass region. The delayed and indecisive response of the Ukrainian Government to events caused the unravelling of the situation. As a result there were established the Donetsk People Republic (DPR) and Luhansk Peoples

⁷⁹ You Tube, “Head of the Security Service of Ukraine Interview.”

⁸⁰ TRADOC G-2 Analysis and Control Element Threats Integration, *Threat Tactics Report, Russia*, 34.

Republics (LPR) which covered almost all the Donbass region. Assuming authority, the new DPR and LPR called for a referendum on independence.

Seizing the National Police and SBU Departments

In 2014, there were two regional directorates of the SBU in the Donbas region. One of them was in Donetsk and second one in Luhansk. Also, there were two NP divisions in Donetsk and Luhansk and in each city at least one NP station. For separatists, seizing control of SBU and NP departments were of great importance: first of all it prevented the counteraction of their actions by Ukrainian law enforcement forces; secondly, it gave access to significant stocks of small arms and ammunition.

On April 9, 2014 the large group of separatists which included representatives from the Donbass Peoples militia, “Vostok” Battalion, PMC stormed the regional directorate of SBU and gained access to 300 assault rifles and 400 handguns. A couple of days later the second regional directorate of SBU in Luhansk was seized. By the end of April the separatists without much resistance managed to gain control over two NP divisions in Donetsk, Luhansk and NP stations in Slovyansk and Kramatorsk. In all of these cases the seizers were gaining access to the weapons lockers. This was facilitated by two factors: the police gave up without resistance after being intimidated by the separatists or just defected to them. By August 2015, Ukraine’s chief military prosecutor reported that about 5,000 police had defected to the separatists.⁸¹

⁸¹ Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia’s Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, 41.

Employment

In terms of the role of RUPF during the seizing of the NP and SBU departments in April 2014, they were the main instrument in the implementation of this critical activity. Allegedly, these assaults were coordinated by Russian GU operatives and SOF operators. To integrate disparate RUPF units they were unified under a single chain of command system. Former Russian Main Intelligence Directorate veteran Igor Girkin led a large conglomeration of insurgents called the South-East Army, becoming the leading political figure of the separatist movement on Donbass.⁸²

Before taking over the NP and SBU departments the separatist quite often used tactics of bribery and intimidation of the officials. Most times the SBU and NP serviceman allowed the insurgents to occupy the buildings and did not resist or assist them. The insurgents took over the buildings usually at night to use the element of surprise or on weekends when they knew the staff would not be inside. As mentioned above, with the RUPF involvement about 5,000 police defected to the separatists. As an example the commander of the special operation unit of the Donetsk SBU regional directorates, Alexander Khodakovsky, in April 2014 defected to the separatist side and became the commander of the RUPF Vostok Battalion which participated in almost all major battles during the 2014 and 2015 period.⁸³

⁸² Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, 55-56.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 40.

Effectiveness

The action conducted by RUPF units could be considered as successful. As a result of careful planning and effective actions the insurgents took over all NP and SBU buildings in the Donbass region in less than one month. Taking over the armories allowed the RUPF to arm the fighters and further spread the insurgency. The political aspect of success was total control of government and law enforcement installations by insurgents, which gave an opportunity to begin to appoint ministers, mayors, and municipal workers, giving the Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples Republics a sense of legitimacy.⁸⁴

Transportation Hubs

On April 6, 2014 the Ukrainian Army with Interior Ministry forces started the counter-terrorist operation in the Donbass region. The tasks were to suppress the RUPF movement and regain control in the conquered cities. The insurgents expected the Ukrainian Army offensive operation. To prevent, or at least slow down, the Ukrainian Army, the RUPF set up checkpoints throughout the Donbass. The insurgents manned checkpoints in most major cities and towns to control movement and traffic. Often the RUPF blocked the Ukrainian military columns movement using pro-Russian civilian mobs and at the same time hiding behind them. The Ukrainian soldiers and officers were confused by the situation and did not know how to deal with the insurgents that were accompanied by pro-Russian civilians.

On May 26, 2014 the two pro-Russian separatist battalions “Oplot” and “Somali” attempted to capture one of the terminals at the Donetsk International Airport (DIA). The

⁸⁴ TRADOC G-2 Analysis and Control Element Threats Integration, *Threat Tactics Report, Russia*, 36.

DIA was the strategic key point for Ukraine and RUPF. It is located in the geographical center of Donbass region. Ukraine feared that Russia would possibly use air transport for bringing weapons and equipment into Donbass or insert troops into the region as they had done in Crimea. During 242 days the Ukrainian Army heroically held the defense of the DIA. But in January 2015, after fierce fighting, control over DIA moved to the RUPF. The DIA was completely destroyed and the runway was damaged.

Employment

The RUPF played a primary role during seizing and establishing control over major transportation hubs in the Donbass. The idea was to establishing the checkpoint networks on major roads and on every road coming in and out of the cities. Therefore, the RUPF could control people and car traffic, and block the roads if necessary. In most cases manning the checkpoints was the responsibility of the “Donbass Peoples Militia” units which consisted of local volunteers. In order to delay or completely block Ukrainian Army movement the insurgents quite commonly used unarmed civilians which conducted demonstrations on traffic routs.

When reviewing the role of RUPF during battles for the DIA, the most prominent characteristic is the diversity of tactics used by Russia in order to take over the DIA. During the first attempts, Russia employed lightly armed RUPF units such as “Donsky Cossacks,” and the “Russian Orthodox Army” in their attacks. In the first battle, the enemy grouping took heavy losses in personnel. Later on the tactics were changed and Russia started to use the most capable and trained RUPF battalions Vostok, Somali, “Sparta,” and PMCs such as “Vagner Group,” and “Slavonic Corps.” Those units were equipped with a full range of artillery systems, infantry fighting vehicles, and tanks. After

a while the Russian Military authority understood that direct attacks would not bring the desired result. The next tactic was “attrition war.” Using RUPF units, Russia cut the Ukrainian line of communication to the DIA and almost surrounded the DIA. Simultaneously Russia constantly conducted artillery strikes on the airport. These actions made the continued defense of the DIA unfeasible.

Effectiveness

In terms of effectiveness, control over transportation hubs and DIA allowed the rebels to control movement in certain areas of Donbass, monitor Ukrainian Forces movements, acquire equipment and disarm Ukrainian troops.⁸⁵

As an example on April 16, 2015, six armored vehicles were captured by the RUPF accompanied with pro-Russian civilians at a checkpoint near Kramatorsk. Later 14 Ukrainian Armored Personnel Carriers with 100 soldiers were surrounded by a large civilian crowd in Pcholkino, but were able to leave after surrendering their ammunition.⁸⁶

Seizing the Local Communication Networks

After seizing local governments and law-enforcement agencies in the region the next critical activity carried out by RUPF was transforming the Donbass into an informational island isolated from the Ukraine area. Also, for the leaders of the newly

⁸⁵ TRADOC G-2 Analysis and Control Element Threats Integration, *Threat Tactics Report, Russia*, 38.

⁸⁶ Kofman et al., *Lessons from Russia's Operations in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine*, 44.

established DPR and LPR it was critical to start their campaigns for statehood in the media; using TV, radio, and social media.⁸⁷

Following the already known Crimean scenario, on the night of April 16, 2014, representatives of RUPF took over the local TV and radio main office in Donetsk. A few days later, the regional office of the local TV channel was captured in Lugansk. As a result of separatist actions, the Ukrainian television and radio broadcasting was completely stopped, in the Donbass region.

The next step was to seize offices and communication equipment of local mobile operators. It should be noted how fast the new DPR and LPR authority set up new local mobile communication. The same applies to the newly established separatists TV and radio channels. After one month in control of the region there were broadcast about 30 Russian and four local separatist TV channels. Experts say that the broadcasting signal is so strong that it reaches neighboring regions.⁸⁸

Employment

To complete the above mentioned activities Russia employ RUPF representatives. According to eyewitnesses, the seizures were carried out by representatives of the Donsky Cossack units. Since the local Ukrainian Law Enforcement was completely suppressed in the region, during the take over the insurgents did not meet any resistance from the Ukrainian side.

⁸⁷ Horbulin, *The World Hybrid War*, 230.

⁸⁸ BBC, "Why Ukraine Loses Russia in the Informational War," *BBC News*, July 26, 2016, accessed October 23, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2016/07/160726_donbass_tv_information_policy_sd.

Effectiveness

In regards to effectiveness within a couple weeks the RUPF took control of all TV, radio, and mobile providers in the region. It allowed Russia to manipulate political and social perceptions, and to dis-inform and destabilize the Donbass society.

With access to mobile carriers' equipment the RUPF effectively began to use it to determine the position of the Ukrainian units. After that, artillery strikes were made on the positions of the Ukrainian forces.

Ukrainian Military Base Blockade and Taking Over the Border Crossing Points

In April-May 2014, the LPR and DPR authorities understood that it would be impossible to avoid full-scale military operations against Ukrainian Armed Forces. Moreover, on April 14, Kyiv launched an anti-terrorist operation in the Donbass. At that point, the RUPFs were mostly armed by light small arms and had the few combat vehicles which were captured during the battles. Therefore, for the effective continuation of military operations, the priority for RUPF leadership was to get military equipment such as tanks, infantry combat vehicles, artillery systems and ammunition.

Historically, in the Donbass region there were not any UAF combat military bases. That it is because during the Soviet Union historical period the Soviet authorities concentrated major military power closer to the Western Ukrainian border. In 2014 there was only one National Guard military base in the south of the Donbass region. On April 16, 2014, about 300 Donsky Cossacks attempted to take over the Ukrainian National Guard base in Mariupol. The main intent was to get access to the weapons which were stored in the base. After warning shots, a police special operation unit together with the

National Guard opened fire on the insurgents. Once three insurgents were killed and 13 got wounded the Cossacks retreated. After that the epicenter of hostilities shifted to the Ukrainian–Russian border.

At midnight on June 2, 2014 about 100 armed members of the RUPF began assaulting the Luhansk border guard department. The defenders only had light small arms which were not enough and reinforcement did not get there in time. During a two-day siege, on June 4, the building and the area were captured by insurgents. On June 5, a group RUPF crossed the Ukrainian border and attacked the border crossing point (BCP) of Marinovka from the Russian side. Later on the series of attacks on Ukrainian BCPs spread along the Ukrainian-Russia border. Ukrainian border guards did not have the ability to resist the RUPF attacks for a long time, and any reinforcement was complicated because the lines of communication (LOC) were blocked by the insurgents. Subsequently, the Ukrainian border guards had to retreat. As a result the segment of the Ukrainian state border in the Donbas was overrun under the control of the RUPF.

Employment

During Ukrainian military base blockade and taking over the BCPs the major role was played by representatives of RUPFs. Predominantly the rebels from the “Army of the South-East” and “Cossacks National Guard” which are territorially related to the LPR, were employed to storm the Ukrainian BCPs along the Ukrainian-Russian border.

Often, the rebels took over the BCPs without any resistance because they threatened the Ukrainian Border servicemen with reprisals against their families if they tried to fight. As a rule, raids were carried out at night when part of the border guard personnel was at home.

Effectiveness

Considering effectiveness of RUPF activities at this stage in general can be considered as successful. The only failed action occurred during the attack on the Ukrainian National Guard Base, where Donsky Cossacks were forced to retreat after taking casualties. In taking over the BCPs the RUPF set up an effective line of communication through the Ukrainian-Russia Border and got control of the movement of supplies, which swelled the ranks of militia and increased their arms and equipment. Since the RUPF totally controlled the Ukrainian state border in the Donbas, Russia started to funnel tanks, various artillery systems, armored fighting vehicles, and ammunition to support the insurgents. This significant weapons buildup allowed the RUPF to effectively confront UAF and continue to taking over the cities in late August and early September 2014.⁸⁹

The Results of Analysis

Throughout the following analysis of two case studies, table 2 is utilized to illustrate the results of each examined critical activities. The table is organized by supporting questions detailed to demonstrate how they contribute to assessing the role of RUPF in each critical activities. This chart contributes to the key findings listed within chapter 5.

⁸⁹ Nadia Schadlow and David Maxwell, "Separatist TTPs in Ukraine," Pix Today, accessed January 23, 2019, <https://www.pixtoday.net/article/article/74767>.

Table 2. Results of Case Studies Analysis				
	Crimea annexation		War in Donbass	
Critical activities	Employment	Effectiveness	Employment	Effectiveness
Initiation of anti-government demonstrations	Supported Russian SOF and GU actions: secure the perimeter provocative actions intimidation of pro-Ukrainian activists	Desired results were not achieved. Actions did not lead to the desired result.	organization and execution fights with the pro-Ukrainian activists	Desired results were achieved. situation were destabilized precondition to RSA storming
Seizing the local RSA, NP and SBU departments	Supported Russian SOF and GU actions: extortion bribery intimidation	Desired results were achieved. - NP, SBU defected - RSA were took over.	Organization and execution storming intimidation	Desired results were achieved. - RSA, SBU, NP seized - RUPF obtained weapons
Transportation Hubs	Supported RCF actions: secure the perimeter of airport duty service on checkpoints	Desired results were achieved: airports were sized checkpoints blocked Perekop Isthmus.	Organization and execution of all activities	Desired results were achieved. UAF movement blocked Airports were took over RUPF obtained weapons
Seizing the local communication networks	Supported RCF during storming	Desired results were achieved: info isolations spreading Rus. Propaganda.	Organization and execution	Desired results were achieved. info isolations spreading Rus. Propaganda detecting locations of UAF units
Ukrainian military base blockade	Supported RCF: secure the perimeter storming bribery intimidation	Desired results were achieved: 189 base were seized captured Ukr. mil. Equipment.	Organization and execution	Desired results were not achieved. military base was not captured
Taking over the BCP	Supported RCF: - secure the - perimeter - storming - bribery - intimidation	Desired results were achieved: 2 Navy Boarder Guard base seized.	Organization and execution	Desired results were achieved. border control set up LOC RUPF obtained weapons and mil. equipment
Result	RUPF played supporting, accompanying role		RUPF played major role	

Source: Created by author.

Role and Actions during Crimean Campaign

In the first case study the RUPF role and actions could not be addressed as a prime contributor to achieving the desired outcome. During the anti-Ukrainian demonstrations in Simferopol and Sevastopol, the RUPF played the role of provocateurs and incited the Russian supporters for aggressive clashes against pro-Ukrainian demonstrators. Conducting perimeter security, representatives of RUPF prevented Ukrainian Police from resolving conflict situations during demonstrations. In other critical activities RUPF members were employed for extortion, bribery and intimidation of Ukrainian officials and Ukrainian servicemen, while RCF seized and got control of all critical objects in Crimea Peninsula. In terms of the Crimea Campaign the RUPF role was secondary after RCF. When analyzing RUPF actions during critical activities, all of them were aimed to support and provide assistance to RCF performance.

Effectiveness of RUPF Actions during Crimean Campaign

Due to the fact that during the Crimea annexation, RUPF performed a secondary role, their effectiveness could only be assessed indirectly in the context of the success of the actions of the RCF. During the initiation of anti-Ukrainian demonstrations in the Crimean major cities; only one of the critical activities failed to achieve the desired result. At that point the Kremlin authorities did not achieve their desired end state. Consequently, RUPF actions could be considered as a partly successful. They succeeded in organizing and involving a large number of pro-Russian people in demonstrations. However, the significant miscalculation was the insufficient appreciation of the Ukrainian demonstrator's capabilities who were able to prevent the Crimean

parliamentary sessions. In all others critical activities the RUPF performed their secondary role effectively as demonstrated by the fact that Russia achieved the desired end state.

Role and Actions during War in Donbass 2014 to 2016 Period

When analyzing the RUPF role during Russian Campaign in the Donbass it is safe to state that RUPF played the major role in all critical activities. The organization and executions of activities were performed by RUPF.

In terms of actions the RUPF exercised a variety of tactics and procedures during critical activities. At the time of initiation of the anti-Ukrainian rally and seizing the RSA, SBU, and NP departments, the RUPF members actively used non-kinetic methods to achieve the goal. For instance, to win over Ukrainian Military, law enforcement personal or local officials, the RUPF used bribery, extortion, and intimidation. Later on during Battle for the DIA and following actions, the insurgents effectively employed the variety of military equipment; tanks, BTRs, multiple launch rocket systems, howitzers, and unmanned aerial vehicles during combat actions. After the RUPF got control over regional communications networks and media they set up local separatist TV and radio channels. That indicates their capabilities in conducting anti-Ukrainian information operations.

Effectiveness of RUPF Actions during War in the Donbass

Within a couple of months the planned and organized actions conducted by RUPF eliminated the Ukrainian authority in the region, established control over portions of the

Ukrainian-Russia state border and set up LOC with Russia. The insurgent's actions effectively destabilized the Donbass region resulting in the emergence of two separatist republics; the LPR and DPR in a region.

Summary

Within chapter 4, two case studies were examined and analyzed to determine the role of RUPF within Crimea and the War in the Donbass campaigns. By comparing the key findings it is seen that the role of RUPF were not identical in both case studies. During the Crimea annexation Russia utilized RUPFs as a supporting and supplementary element for the RCF. Within the War in Donbass, RUPFs were used as a main instrument throughout the campaign from 2014 to 2016.

Chapter 5 further outlines the answers to the main and supporting research questions, key findings, and recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter provides the interpretation and analysis of the data presented in chapter 4, and recommendations not only for European security (EU and NATO) to deal with Russian Hybrid War in the future but also areas that require further study. The purpose of this research paper is that given the experience that Ukraine has gotten from the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbass, it is critical to develop an effective strategy for countering the Russian Military in a hybrid war. In order to do that one aspect of Russian Hybrid Warfare was examined, RUPF and their role in Russian Hybrid Warfare. This was done by answering the research questions. The primary research question was: Were the Russian unconventional paramilitary formations a key component during Crimea annexation and war in Donbass as an element of Russian Hybrid War?

In order to answer the primary research question, other, more specific research questions needed to be presented and answered. The secondary research questions are: What is Russian Hybrid War against Ukraine and its primary characteristics? How Russia employed RUPF during Crimea annexation and war in Donbass (their roles and actions)? How effective were application of RUPF military operations against Ukraine? Through answering those questions the author was able to answer the primary question and examine Russian unconventional paramilitary formations and their role in Russian Hybrid Warfare.

This chapter is organized in four main parts; an introduction, the interpretation of findings described in chapter 4, recommendations based on those findings, and a summary conclusion.

Chapter 4 provided interesting data that demonstrated in both cases that RUPF played a role in both examples of Russian Hybrid War. Of interest is that RUPF played an important but supporting role in the annexation of Crimea but was the major player in the war in the Donbass. The interpretation of the findings from chapter 4 follows in the next section.

Interpretation of Findings

To answer the primary research question, the secondary research questions must be answered first in order to provide the data necessary to answer the primary question.

Answers to the secondary research questions are:

1. What is Russian Hybrid War against Ukraine and its primary characteristics?

The broad definition of Russian Hybrid War includes the combination of traditional military means, special operations and subversion methods, with separatist terrorist groups, as well as informational, economic, and diplomatic pressures used by Russia against Ukraine. Russian Hybrid War consists of three main phases: (1) shaping, (2) active, and (3) continuum phases. During the shaping phase, Russia used informational, economic and political elements of influence, shaped the ideological, political and military (including unconventional methods) preconditions for their future aggression. The purpose of the active phase was the occupation of Crimea and the continuation of destabilization of the situation in Ukraine through initiation of the armed conflict in the Donbass. The implementation of the active phase became possible due to

the synchronized use of military, quasi-military and informational elements of hybrid war. The result of the second phase of the Hybrid War was the annexation of Crimea and the formation in February 2015 of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. With the creation of self-proclaimed republics, Russia moved to the third phase of the Hybrid War. During this phase the Russian Federation is trying to "freeze" the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, forcing the Ukrainian Government to recognize the separatists in a "negotiating process" and to start negotiations with separatists. To this end, Russia continues to use all elements of the Hybrid War to increase pressure on Ukraine, including increasing its troop presence near the Ukrainian border. Russia denies its participation in the conflict and at the same time conducts a large-scale information campaign against Ukraine.

The thesis mainly focused on Russian unconventional forces activities during the Russian active phase of Hybrid War. Consequently the definition for Russian Hybrid War against Ukraine is: the variety of different modes of warfare applied simultaneously and the adaptive use of closely integrated sets of conventional weapons, irregular tactics and formations, terrorism and criminal action on the battlefield to achieve the desired political and military goals.

2. How Russia employed RUPF during Crimea annexation and war in Donbass (their roles and actions)?

The Crimean annexation was characterized by limited application of RUPF during the conduct of critical events. There was also a limited number of RUPF. The only representatives of RUPF were Donsky Cossacks, Local self-defense units, and Ukrainian collaborators. During the Crimean Campaign Russia employed RUPF in combination with RCF, where RUPF performed the supporting and supplementary functions.

Generally, their functions were: using bribery, extortion, and intimidation win over the Ukrainian Military, law enforcement personal, and local officials; securing the perimeter during anti-Ukrainian demonstrations; playing the role of provocateurs to incite the Russian supporters for aggressive clashes against pro-Ukrainian demonstrators; and preventing Ukrainian Police from resolving conflict situations during demonstrations.

However, during the War in the Donbass (2014 to 2016) the RUPF were used as primary Russian military assets to conduct all critical operations in the region. The application range of RUPF was broad. In the beginning of the conflict they were employed for initiation of the anti-Ukrainian movement in the region. Later on we could see RUPF as a small regular army effectively employing the variety of military equipment such as tanks, BTRs, multiple launch rocket systems, howitzers, and unmanned aerial vehicles. The broad duplication of RUPF is indicated by the number of unconventional military formations that operated in the territory of Donbass. There was also shown to be the participation of eight Russian PMCs and variety of militia formations which were mentioned in chapter 1.

3. How effective were application of RUPF military operations against Ukraine?

The main indicator of effectiveness is the result of the two campaigns. In the first case within one month and six days Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula which resulted in the violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Ukrainian State. In the second case through ongoing conflict Russian created in the Donbass a chaotic and unstable environment. The longer this situation exists the more likely Russia will attempt to manipulate Ukraine to conform to Russia's self-interests.

The primary question of the thesis is: Were the Russian unconventional paramilitary formations a key component during Crimea annexation and war in Donbass as an element of Russian Hybrid War? The answer to that question is; the RUPF role was not identical during the Crimea annexation and War in the Donbass 2014 to 2016. In the Russian Crimea Campaign the RUPF were not a key component of Russian military assets. They performed a supporting and supplementary role to the RCF actions. Within War in Donbass the RUPF were the key component.

Key Findings

During the implementation of anti-Ukrainian demonstrations in Crimean major cities and first attempts to take over the government's buildings, the RUPF and RCF did not gain the support of the local Russian speaking population (ethnic Russians). The Russian leadership did not expect that the majority of Crimean population would not support the idea of "Joining Crimea to Russia." During demonstrations organized by Russia, the number of pro-Ukrainian supporters exceeded twice the number of pro-Russian demonstrators. The main part of them were the representatives of the Crimean Tatars who are ardent opponents of Russia. This caused a breach in the Kremlin's plans for the rapid seizure of the Crimean Peninsula.

The Russian actions in Crimea can not be easily generalized for future scenarios. This is due to a number of special factors inherent in this case:

1. A series of highly favorable circumstances-political, historical, geographical, and military. It is difficult to envision the same combination of circumstances which will intersect to create another similar situation.

2. Ukraine did not resist militarily, and therefore this operation cannot be analyzed for lessons on how Russia will employ RUPF or RCF during future operations.
3. Russia carried out the Crimean annexation at a time when Ukraine was vulnerable because of the revolutionary events causing governmental weakness.

On the other hand should a similar intersection of circumstances occur (in the Baltic for instance) the Crimean case should be looked at as providing a warning of possible Russian actions.

The Russian actions in the Donbass however, can be generalized for future scenarios. Particularly in the Eastern European Region for Estonia and Latvia states given their large ethnic Russian populations. This is true as well for Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, which are states where the significant growth of Russian influence can be observed.

Areas for Further Study and Recommendations

The results of the analysis carried out in the work can be used to develop doctrinal documents for an effective counteraction of RUPF; as a one of the primary assets in Russian Hybrid War. Based on Ukrainian lessons learned the recommendations for countering the RUPF are following:

1. Increase the presence of internal security services operatives (analytical groups) in potentially vulnerable regions in order to identify or prevent illegal separatist activities, emergence of radical separatist groups or organizations.
2. Conduct internal informational campaign against separatism.

3. Early identification of the sources of support for separatist movements both internal and external.
4. Increasing the criminal sanction for participation in separatist organizations.
5. Regulation of mass media resources to eliminate any possibilities of separatist propaganda or other elements of enemy information operations.

Due to the potential threat of a repetition of the Ukrainian scenario in the Baltic States and some former Soviet states, the material presented in this research can be useful as “lessons learned” for Eurasian security experts.

Russia has had an extensive and thorough information warfare (also known as INFOWAR) campaigns during Crimean Campaign and war in Donbass which supported RUPF activities. The recommendation for future research is the analysis of how effective was Russian INFORWAR campaigns during Crimean and Donbass operations against Ukraine. Since the definition of Russian Hybrid War includes other non-kinetic aspects such as economic, political, and diplomatic pressure, they also present opportunities for further research.

Summary

Chapter 5 presented the interpretation of the findings of the research and summarized the answers to the primary and supporting research questions. The key findings of this study significantly shows; that the research findings can be generalized for possible future scenarios of Russian Hybrid War in the Baltic and some post-Soviet Union states. The Crimean annexation and Donbass War scenarios as an element of Russian Hybrid War, should not be considered as a model of future Russian actions but,

rather as lessons. As Russian General Gerasimov said; “Each war does present itself as a unique case, demanding the comprehension of its particular logic, its uniqueness.”⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Gerasimov, “The Value of Science Is in the Foresight New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying Out Combat Operations.”

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