



COUNTERING RUSSIAN STRATEGIC APPROACHES: SPECIAL OPERATIONS IN HYBRID WARFARE

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*Views expressed do not represent official NDU, DOD or USG positions

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RUSSIAN STRATEGIC IDENTITY

- Not a normal state but a very normal empire
 - **Goal is power to control → autonomy, prestige, luxury for rulers**
 - **Influence is means to control**
 - Mafia governance
 - Extract resources without transactional social contract – predictably arbitrary
 - Control disposable populace – citizens as serfs
 - Kremlin battles over prestige and wealth – Byzantine intrigue more than glories
 - Expansionist empire
 - Imperial DNA written through conquest
 - Mongols forged state
 - Muscovy fought for central control
 - Tzarist realpolitik – deceit, destruction and deportation
 - Messianic Mission
 - Eurasianism – unique place in history and the world
 - Third Rome – burden to stabilize through strength

RUSSIAN STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

- Challenge of US dominance and NATO expansion
 - **Rival power centers expose Russian weakness**
 - This is not fear of Operation Barbarossa 2.0
 - Kremlin knows NATO not offensive even if expansive
 - Real threat is obvious weakness undermines core domestic control
 - Cold War showed failure of “better life”
 - Kremlin today cannot even deliver “good life”
 - Undermines patron-client value to international “partners”
 - **руководитель** not seen as bully... seen as replaceable ∴ irrelevant
 - China in CAS, Kazaks “go your own way”
 - *US narratives miss this by focusing on “bad” Kremlin instead of “feeble” one*

RUSSIAN STRATEGIC PARADIGM

- Russia is NOT reacting defensively
 - It was outmaneuvered by post-Cold War US actions
 - *US Political* Destabilization
 - Kosovo, Bulldozer Revolution (Serbia), Color Revolutions, Arab Spring, Maidan
 - *US Military* “Conquest”
 - Baltics, attempted Georgia, Iraq, Afghanistan, growing efforts in Ukraine
 - *US Economic* Chokehold
 - Fracking and Petropolitics, Arms Sales, IMF/WB manipulation, currency dominance
 - **All undermine Kremlin’s ability to occupy unique place in history**
- The evidence of US actions is clear but US responses of intent (“democratization ~ liberty, prosperity”) are unbelievable...
 - US/NATO expansion normal for a rival empire = Kremlin lens for itself/GPC

RUSSIAN STRATEGIC METHOD

- “Lies, damn lies and statistics” – the center of Russian narratives
 - **Хитрость** (cunning) is a virtue as much as necessity
 - **Лгать – истина** (to lie is abiding truth)
 - **Враньё лучше чем ложь** (lies with some truth are better than complete falsehoods)
 - **Враньё** requires control to ensure the lie does not stray too far from reality
- Kremlin assumes all others either do this or are too stupid to try
 - Views of any US expertise seen as exceptions to systemic foolishness of democracy
- Taken together, these lay the foundation for Hybrid Warfare

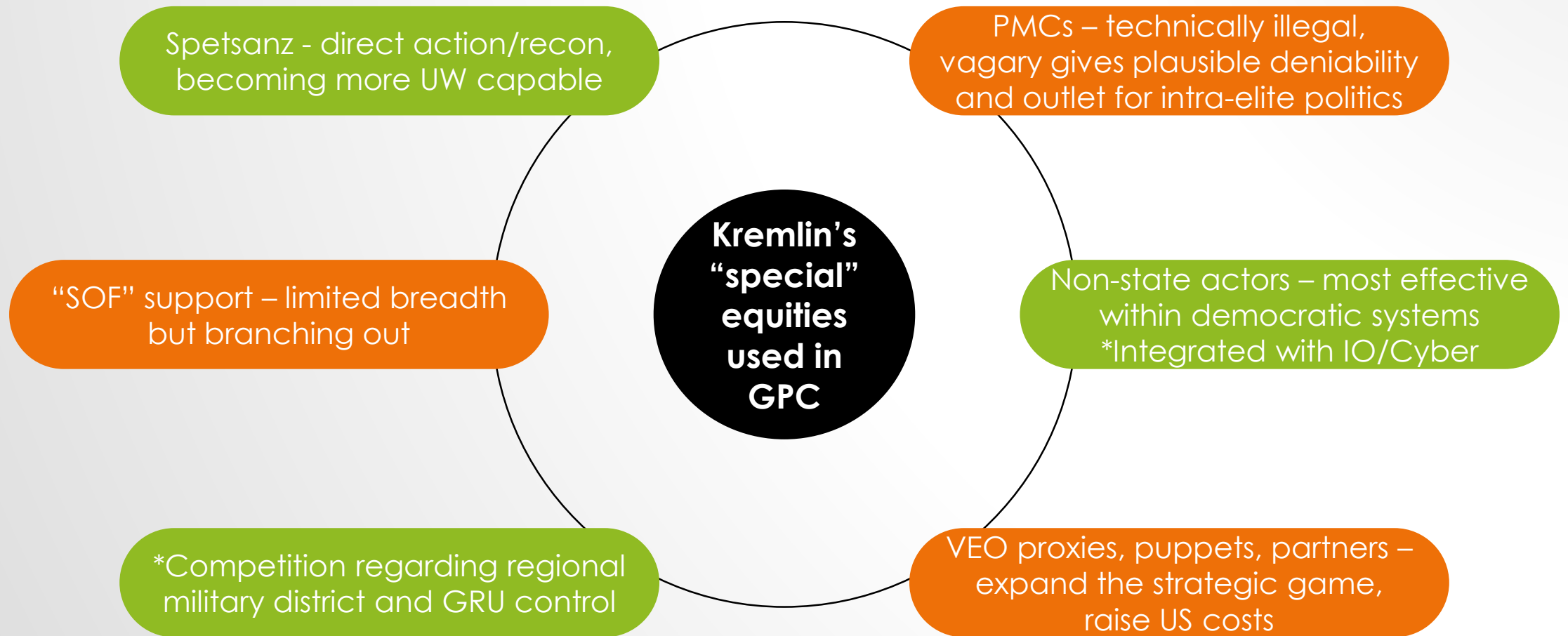
CORE HYBRID WARFARE CONCEPTS

- **Reflexive control** – setting the conditions for adversary perceptions to induce behavior favorable to one's interests
- **активные мероприятия** – active measures as political warfare (statecraft)
- **Offense dominance – logic of asymmetry means operationalize everything**
 - Resilience harder in democracy
 - Inherent fissures are easily mobilized absent compelling (obvious) external threat
- **Маскировка** – camouflage and surprise
 - Predictably unpredictable
 - Credible capability and intent
 - Opaque as much as attributable

HYBRID WARFARE CONSENSUS

- Gerasimov was not outlining new approach, he described US approach – with an apparent degree of respect among enemies... as if to say “game on”
- Gerasimov confirmed the longstanding Russian view that hybrid warfare is full-spectrum
 - Conventional as much as unconventional capabilities and uses of them
 - State-society is the center of the battle
 - Governance capacity, autonomy and legitimacy as both tools and arenas
 - Tactical-Operational-Strategic nesting across geostrategic landscape
- Special operations have critical role – Russian concept more expansive than ours, even with far fewer resources

Russian “Special” Operations



SAMPLE OF CURRENT APPLICATIONS

- Ukraine/Syria combat training (they see it like early post-9/11 US CT/COIN)
- Ensure security dominance in CAS/Caucasus Great Game – connect GPF~SOF
 - Increase 201st Motorized Rifle Division – example of other “pivots” to bolster, not expand footprint
 - Attempting to undermine US CT and China econ spread into security
- Libya: security for Haftar, support to contra-government messaging
 - Share in oil profits – financing siloviki owned PMCs
- Civil society – Night Wolves to volunteer brigades
 - NGOs highly effective tool even with foreign entity registration – personnel placement gets them in system
 - Democratic activism – operationalize BLM as much as BLM (KGB letter writing operations)
- Operations in the Information Environment
 - *Redefining history, interpreting today, instigating tomorrow*

LOGIC OF HYBRID WARFARE WORKS IN RUSSIA'S FAVOR

- Russian Special Operations expanding reach because hybrid warfare
 - Has low opportunity and sunk costs – can pull up stakes
 - Gives prime mover advantage
 - Acts as a force multiplier for Special Operations
 - Only limited by resources not targets
- However, there are real limitations to what Russia can do...
 - Primarily internal rather than what US/NATO does

DYNAMICS AFFECTING FUTURE RUSSIAN SPECIAL OPERATIONS USES

- Demographic time bomb – projected 1/3 population decline by 2050
 - Implications for Special Operations
 - Exacerbates recruiting problems writ large
 - Kremlin's Operational Response = expand range of Special Operations and Compatriots to entice wider spectrum into system
- Petropolitics get more complicated – Entrance of US as major exporter changes OPEC~Russia balance of power
 - Implications for Special Operations
 - Exacerbates resourcing woes combined with declining tax revenue
 - Kremlin's Operational Response = increase private funding with personal payoff (mining/oil field security contracts)

US/NATO RESPONSE TO RUSSIAN HW – INITIALLY REACTIONARY

- Increasing Hybrid Defense
 - US/NATO developing resilience ~ Russian operationalization of elections
 - Implications for Special Operations
 - Less mythology of little green men, more reality of naming and shaming (Finlandization less likely)
- Kremlin's Operational Counter = distract widely, defend locally
- Kremlin's Strategic Counter = return to logic of Hybrid Warfare
 - Enshrines opportunism (reactive) as much as predictable unpredictability (proactive)
 - Everything is on the table so spectrum of conventional and unconventional operations remains viable... space for special operations

EXAMPLES OF POTENTIAL FUTURE RUSSIAN SPECIAL OPERATIONS USES

- Staged provocation in Baltics
 - Referenda as much as security incident
 - Zapad and Suwalki Gap
 - Narva/Tallinn
- Balkans pivot
 - Radev (Bulgaria) and Dodik (Bosnia)
 - Social identity contra “liberal/decadent” Western Europe
- Building partner capacity for counter “terrorism” globally
 - Russian allies benefit from increasing narrative space and justification for stability/contra democracy “CT” operations
 - Turkey the golden ticket to destabilizing NATO
- Maritime interdiction skill development following Kerch
 - Counter piracy as precursor to “inspections” in expanded EEZ
 - Gdansk-Klaipeda flashpoint

HYBRID WARFARE OFFENSE-DEFENSE BALANCE

- Russia has inherent advantages over the West
 - Not because of inherent superiority but because of inherent vulnerabilities in open, integrated, democratic states/societies
 - They are there until the West figures out a way to build hybrid defense
- Russian disadvantages will remain hidden from mobilizable populations UNLESS/UNTIL the West exposes...
 - Russia's trajectory
 - Kremlin's feebleness

US/NATO SOF ABILITIES TO EFFECT STRATEGIC GAME AND RUSSIAN PLAY

- SOF can accomplish 3 primary tasks in Great Power Competition
 1. Presence operations raise operating costs
 - a) Signal interest and raise questions about follow-on investment in area
 - b) Probing adversary as much as reconnaissance for potential partners
 2. Building partner capacity since network matters as much as, if not more than range time
 - a) Strategizing and integrating governance support
 - Door to influence and resilience, not endpoint as in previous “stabilization efforts”
 - b) Strategic communication
 - Costs willing to pay, lines cannot be crossed, negotiables → escalation management
 3. Build deterrent effect of resilience → resistance mobilization → reduce opportunities on the board

CURRENT AND PROJECTED US/NATO SOF EXAMPLES – PARTNERS

- Nordic & Baltic regions
 - State-society-business working groups, civil defense planning/exercises
 - Threat narratives balanced with empowerment – “we can and will fight”
 - *Lithuania – Mobilization and Civil Resistance Department (Mol-MoD)*
 - *Estonia – Women’s Volunteer Defense Organization (Estonian Defense League)*
 - *Sweden – Civil Contingencies Agency “If Crisis Or War Comes” pamphlet*
 - *Finland, Denmark working on similar efforts*

DEVELOPING US/NATO SOF EXAMPLES – JOINT/INTERAGENCY

- Civil Affairs – DOS Conflict and Stabilization Operations
 - Currently building pathways for co-deployments in INDOPACOM
- MARSOC, SFAB – DOJ
 - Partner law enforcement and police ethics training
- PSYOP – DOS Public Diplomacy
 - Messaging: coordinating authorities/permissions for increasing active Information Operations capabilities
- Proposed Example –Ukraine: GPF/SOF Joint Projects (N3/N5)
 - Seabees/Army Corps of Engineers Dnieper river lock upgrade
 - Navy Expeditionary Medical Unit – Reserve Civil Affairs MEDCAP
 - *SOF support in the human domain – governance, messaging, network development

IRREGULAR WARFARE WRIT LARGE

- Hybrid Warfare will be here for the foreseeable future... it has a long history
- Russia will adapt but with increasing domestic constraints and rivalries with China in Central Asia
- Russian Special Operations are expanding – the risk is overtaking US SOF to match
- Solution is making irregular warfare a broad skillset and SOF forward-leaning in the global competition space
 - Presence as much as proficiencies
 - GPF impact human domain \leftrightarrow SOF as conventional deterrent
 - Doing so expands opportunities to defend, deter, counter, and ultimately win in hybrid warfare