



# **Strategic Multilayer Assessment's**

## ***Future of Global Competition & Conflict (GCC) Russia Panel Discussion***

**With the support of the  
Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) and  
National Defense University (NDU)**

Held 8 May 2019  
at National Defense University,  
Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington D.C.

Prepared by:  
NSI, Inc.  
Edited by Mr. Ali Jafri  
[ajafri@nsiteam.com](mailto:ajafri@nsiteam.com)

This report represents the views and opinions of the panel participants. This report does not represent official USG policies or positions.

## Contents

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Mr. Dan Flynn (Office of the Director of National Intelligence/IC Net Assessments)	
Mr. Gary E. Phillips (US Training and Doctrine Command, Assistant, DCS G2)	
<b>Russian State Behavior and Gray Zone Activities .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Speakers:</b>	
Brig Gen (Ret) Peter Zwack (National Defense University)	
Dr. Celeste Wallander (US-Russia Foundation)	
Dr. Elena Kovalova (National War College)	
<b>Russian Strategic Dynamics.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Speakers:</b>	
Dr. Angela Stent (Georgetown University)	
Mr. Michael Kofman (CNA Corporation)	
Dr. Spencer Meredith III (National Defense University)	
<b>Moderated Questions and Answers .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Mr. Jason Werchan (USEUCOM)	
<b>Biographies of Speakers &amp; Moderators.....</b>	<b>11</b>

## Executive Summary

On 8 May 2019, the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA, Joint Staff, J39) office, with the support of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) and National Defense University (NDU), convened a panel discussion on Russia in support of the SMA Future of Global Competition and Conflict effort. The scope of the day's event was Russian activities in the Gray Zone, its perception of global competition and conflict worldwide, and its long-term growth trends, economic activities, and diplomatic affairs. The event convened speakers from government, think tanks, and the academic community; each speaker offered prepared remarks, and then assembled to debrief and take questions.

Beginning the proceedings was **Mr. Dan Flynn**, Director of the IC Net Assessments Division within the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. He introduced the key themes of the day's event, among them, Russian strategy, economic statecraft, Gray Zone activities, and the future. **Mr. Gary E. Phillips** of US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), Assistant DCS G2, offered Opening Remarks. His comments reflected on Russian malign activities, including its behavior in the 2016 election. He noted Russian insecurity, and encouraged a critical analysis of the Kremlin's behavior.

Offering up a comprehensive accounting of Russia's complex demography, the distribution of its people, its military structure, and geographical contiguity was the first speaker, **Brigadier General (ret) Peter Zwack** of National Defense University. Each of these factors contributed to an overarching insecurity that the Kremlin manipulates to shore up domestic support. Since the government functions as a high-end autocracy, it often resorts to headline-grabbing adventures to fulfill the social contract with its people that it has long ignored, as evidenced by its governance failures. He stressed that the Russian state finds itself at war with ideas rather than traditional military threats. Internationally, Moscow enjoys escalation dominance in its near-abroad, but is constrained in its economic, demographic, and conventional military capabilities when looking at Russia's 11-time zone vastness, particularly in the currently peaceable Far East opposite China. Broadly, Brig Gen (ret) Zwack expects the Kremlin to continue to irritate and frustrate US global ambitions.

Continuing on the theme of Russian insecurity and the resultant impact on state policy was **Dr. Celeste Wallander** of the US-Russia Foundation. She further explored the social compact, and applied to different types of governance, comparing pluralistic democracies and autocracies. She extended her analysis to the particular brand of Russian President Vladimir Putin. She defined Putinism as a non-ideological brand of political power based on personal relationships. Many of these personal relations, she clarified, are those forged in 1990s St. Petersburg, as Putin was beginning his political career. The pursuit of stronger economic ties informs why Russia was so aggressive in forming the Eurasian Economic Union. Militarily, Dr. Wallander asserted, Russia is a revisionist power who seeks to change the rules of the international order. She also explained Russian escalation dominance in detail, and encouraged the attendees to avoid imprecise verbeage to describe this.

Concluding the first group of speakers was **Dr. Elena Kovalova** of the National War College. She said that Russia's strategic behavior is based on four major assumptions: that Russia is a great power, that it is a "beseiged fortress," that it is an "indispensable" European power, and the the end of the Cold War brought the humiliation of Russia. Further, she suggested that Russia's Gray Zone activities signal its own insecurity. The opacity of Gray Zone activities overstates the impression of Russia's global reach, its ability to alter the liberal international order and influence world politics, as well as

its capabilities and its technological advances; additionally, the ability to camouflage within the Gray Zone allows Russia to disguise its areas of concentration. Additionally, she asserted that Russia seeks to destroy political, economic, and military institutions in Europe, such as NATO and the European Union (EU). This reflects a Russian belief that it is an essential European power, and therefore is owed a seat at the table. To further this narrative, Dr. Kovalova cited narratives emerging from Russia about the true intent of its involvement in Syria and Libya, namely that Russia is securing consistent energy access to Europe. Additionally, Russia has continued its European charm offensive on issues related to the Arctic; here, Russia is said to have a captive audience. She concluded her remarks by noting that Putin's constitutional term ends in 2024, and urged attendees to examine the development of the Russian relationship with Belarus at that time; there might be, according to her, an opportunity for Putin to establish a new unified state, thus creating preconditions for a new term as the president of a newly created state.

The idea of Russian expansionism as destiny was introduced by **Dr. Angela Stent** of Georgetown University. She introduced several Russian strategic objectives of Russia, namely ensuring that Russia has a seat at the table, a conferring of respect by the international community onto Russia, its right to a sphere of privilege, and the legitimization of its own national interests. Further, she suggested, Russia seeks to replace the existing world order with one in which Russia enjoys more agency. Dr. Stent also highlighted specific activities that the Kremlin has organized to further these objectives. Among them were playing on existing societal divisions in the United States, delegitimizing democratic governance, providing a lifeline for embattled authoritarians abroad, and pursuing a strategic partnership with China.

**Mr. Michael Kofman** of CNA discussed conventional deterrence and the extension of those principles to Gray Zone activities. He also examined Russian attitudes towards Europe, and assessed that Russia feels that not only does it not have a stake in the current continental security structure, NATO is a projection of US military power, which Moscow resents. With respect to its near abroad, Mr. Kofman noted that the current generation of Russian strategic thinkers do not see these states as truly independent from Russia. Those individuals, he suggested, also understand Russia as flanked by a steadily creeping Europe from the West, and an aggressive China on the East. Strategically, Russia seeks a normalization of its gains, reflecting the USSR's status during the Détente period of 1972-1979. Mr. Kofman also explained Russian views on conflict and escalation.

Concluding the prepared remarks was **Dr. Spencer Meredith III** of National Defense University who presented slides on Russia's strategic dimensions. He echoed points on Russian instability, and suggested that its government operates as a mafia, but with imperial DNA. Operationally, Russia's ability to cloud the information domain underpins its hybrid warfare conduct; additionally, he highlighted the belief that hybrid warfare is full-spectrum. Because of this assertion, Dr. Meredith outlined the importance of the special operations community on both sides. Russia will likely be forced to think creatively about its hybrid warfare activities, because it faces some long-term challenges, such as its demographic time bomb, the shift in its relative power in energy markets due to the fracking revolution, and increasing resilience to its activities by its adversaries.

**Mr. Jason Werchan** of United States European Command (USEUCOM) convened the speakers for a moderated question-and-answer session. A question on possible actions by the US, with a specific focus on the military element of national power, to expand the competitive space, and win in the Gray Zone highlighted the necessity of US allies to help further these objectives, and a keen understanding of escalation management. Additionally, speakers spoke on the importance of perception to Russian narratives. Regardless of the intent, nearly any US action will be understood by Russia to be destabilizing, and advocating regime change. Broadcasting Russian successes will not

necessarily undermine the US position, speakers agreed, because power is best assessed as a balance sheet, and exposing shortcomings will only encourage future best practices. Additionally, the group tended to agree on the necessity of using precise language with specific definitions when discussing the issues highlighted in the day's sessions. Finally, speakers examined Central Asia as a potential arena for the United States to confront Russia (and China). Though they all admitted that the United States was the junior partner of the three, several of them highlighted potential areas of cooperation with partner states that could help achieve US objectives.

## Future of Global Competition & Conflict (GCC) Russia Panel Discussion

On 8 May 2019, the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA, Joint Staff, J39) office, with the support of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) and National Defense University (NDU), convened a panel discussion on Russia in support of the SMA Future of Global Competition and Conflict effort. The scope of the day's event was Russian activities in the Gray Zone, its perception of global competition and conflict worldwide, and its long-term growth trends, economic activities, and diplomatic affairs.

Introducing the day's events was **Mr. Dan Flynn**, Director of the IC Net Assessments Division. He framed the day's conversations, and highlighted the key themes of the event. Following Mr. Flynn (via videoconference), **Mr. Gary E. Phillips** of US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), Assistant DCS G2, recounted an inquiry made by General Stephen J. Townsend, Commanding General of TRADOC, regarding Russian activities in the competition period, including an increase in hostile activities around US Army recruiting stations. These activities were framed within the context of Russia's influence activities across the United States, including the 2016 Presidential election. His comments addressed Russian national insecurity, and its actions on the world stage, and encouraged attendees to think critically about what exactly Russia seeks to accomplish in the global competition space.

### Russian State Behavior and Gray Zone Activities

Noting the historical significance of the day of the event (the eve of the anniversary of Victory in Europe Day), and the year (the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of NATO), **Brigadier General (ret) Peter Zwack** of National Defense University introduced a framework with which to examine Russia. He conducted an accounting of Russia's complex demography, the distribution of its people, its military structure, and its geographical contiguity. The sprawling borders, he asserted, are as much a vulnerability for Russia as they are a strength. Furthermore, there is a vulnerability and insecurity that underpins the Russian government, and stresses the need for the regime to "hold the high ground."

This insecurity is cultivated through Russia's asymmetrical threat perception, its shortfalls in governance, and its shared history. There exists, Brig Gen (ret) Zwack suggested, a constellation of existential threats that encircle Russia—some legitimate, some perceived, and others contrived. The regime plays to these perceived existential threats in order to shore up support. Seeking support on foreign matters suggests a domestic governance shortfall, which Brig Gen (ret) Zwack attributed to Russia's status as a high-end autocracy, which operates within a free market system that is quite unlike the USSR of the 1950s-1970s. As such, the regime finds itself concerned more with combatting alternative ideas, rather than conventional military threats. Nevertheless, Russian state behavior is also informed by its bloody history, specifically the enormous losses that it suffered during World War II, and the great famines and purges that preceded it. These echoes of the past have a tremendous impact on the Russian soul that have lent an "organic ruthlessness" that lends to its tenacity in the Gray Zone.

Regarding their capabilities and activities, Brig Gen (ret) Zwack presented several salient points. The military exercises which Russia conducts regularly require a total mobilization of society, which offers a window of understanding into their escalation dominance. In Russia's near abroad, (e.g. Georgia, Ukraine, and the Baltics), Moscow can gain a military advantage in the short term. Similarly, along its periphery, Russia can move, mobilize, and maneuver itself into an advantageous position.

In its mid-abroad (e.g. Syria and Moldova), Russia can exercise escalation dominance, but to do so is more difficult. Finally, in its “far abroad” (e.g. Venezuela), an overextended Russia increasingly is operating more to save face, and recuperate money it has invested in the petroleum sector. With respect to China, Russia is nominally on board with Beijing’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), but is nervous about having Chinese influence across its southern periphery. Such apprehension also quietly exists in the case of future Chinese activity along the Northern Polar Route (NSR), where Moscow is grateful for Chinese money, but overall, cannot be comfortable about creeping Chinese influence both in the former southern lands of the former Soviet Union, and through the mostly Russian waters of the NSR. Brig Gen (ret) Zwack also noted that Russia believes that the Afghan government will eventually fail and therefore may be attempting to build a regional firebreak against the aftermath of such a scenario, as they have been empowering a new age Northern Alliance and is attempting to co-opt the Taliban. In all these cases and others worldwide, Brig Gen (ret) Zwack asserted that Russia will continue to irritate and frustrate US global ambitions.

The next speaker, **Dr. Celeste Wallander** of the US-Russia Foundation began by agreeing with the framework laid out by Brig Gen (ret) Zwack, and later provided a political science lens with which to analyze Russian President Vladimir Putin’s statecraft. She conducted a critical analysis of the Kremlin’s 2015 national security strategy in which it first and foremost called out the United States for its efforts to undermine Russian influence worldwide. Additionally, she explored political systems, and their level of sensitivity to populations, contrasting pluralistic democracies and autocracies and how national interests manifest between these respective systems. In authoritarian structures, policy serves the interests of the regime, whether these interests be aligned with the state religion (e.g., Iran), the interests of the military (e.g., Pakistan) or the interests of national political party (e.g., China); furthermore, national interests are defined as such simply because the regime designates them so.

Extending this study, she defined Putinism as a non-ideological brand of political power that is based on personal relationships, many of which were forged in the period of 1990’s St. Petersburg cronyism where Putin spent much of his early political career. What followed was an analysis of the financial concerns that motivate Russian state behavior. The status quo in Russian politics is based on access to wealth and one’s position in patron-client relationships, whereby those who fall from power in Russia end up on the losing side of the patron-client calculus. Therefore, maintenance of this system is critical to regime survival. To this end, Putin has struggled to substitute the growth that accompanies Western globalization with alternatives; to do so, he established and championed the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). The EAEU is designed to extend the rules of the Russian economy, and allow Russia access to the policies of privileged sphere nations and further prevent Western encroachment and influence.

Building on her explanation of economic statecraft, Dr. Wallander examined Russian military behavior. Russia perceives the United States as having a strategy to coerce and weaken Russia through institutions (e.g. NATO), and norms (the rules-based liberal international order). She asserted that Russia is not simply a revanchist power, but a revisionist one—it seeks to change the rules of the game. Such an understanding explains the invasion of Ukraine, because a strike against Ukraine was a strike against EU expansion, visa-free travel, and the rules-based international order that Russia claims is detrimental to its sovereignty. In order to better project power, Dr. Wallander examined Russian priorities on building its conventional forces, upgrading its nuclear and strategic capabilities, and building new relationships designed to thwart encirclement. Lastly, she cautioned against use of the stereotypical term “escalate to de-escalate,” which fundamentally misunderstands escalation dominance. She stressed that the Russian concept of escalation dominance is to escalate

to coerce surrender, which can include limited nuclear options, asymmetric, and conventional options.

Next, **Dr. Elena Kovalova** of the National War College, supported the assertion that Russia wants to use parts of the international order to destroy institutions in Europe. She also mentioned Putin's fear of regime change and the resulting motivating decisions from this insecurity. In order to best capitalize on its perceived status as a besieged fortress, the Kremlin operates in the Gray Zone; this is a space of non-attributable behavior, with plausible deniability, where actors can hide their weaknesses and exaggerate their abilities. In this dimension, the Russian regime thrives and depends on the narratives that form from such plausible deniability. Russia's analysts track global events while the Kremlin makes an illusion that everything that happens globally is "Moscow's hand." Such a tactic creates enormous advantages: it allows for a disproportionate increase in the impression of Russia's might. Also, it does not require massive investments, it diverts attention from real issues, operations, and areas of modernization; it also creates the effect of strategic surprise.

Additionally, Dr. Kovalova introduced the idea that Russia believes that it is an essential European power (rather than an Asian power), and Gray Zone activities that are relatively inexpensive for Russia to implement emphasize this. Furthermore, not only does Russia see itself as a great power, it seeks to be an attractive power; however, its inability to reach this status, according to Russians, is evidence of global injustice. As a means of correcting this injustice, the Kremlin might attempt to raise its profile in Europe by trying to position itself as a mediator between Europe and China.

Dr. Kovalova continued by noting that Russia will likely try to present itself as a new security provider in Europe over the next ten years. This is reflected in the narrative that they use with respect to Syria (namely that the United States is trying to choke off Syrian energy exports to Europe); that justifies their defense of the Syrian government, and also exposes the United States as an unstable, and uncommitted to US aligned and non-aligned states alike. The Kremlin offers a similar narrative when explaining its support for General Khalifa Haftar in Libya. Russia's courtship across Europe may have borne fruit at the Arctic Summit, where some observers noted a warming of relations between Russian entities and Northern European corporations. Per the current Russian constitution, Putin's term ends in 2024; at that time, Dr. Kovalova suggested there might be a union – either formal or informal – between Russia and Belarus, further illustrating Russian designs in Europe and the messianic image Moscow seeks to cultivate.

## Russian Strategic Dynamics

**Dr. Angela Stent** of Georgetown University began her comments by underlining the historical context of Russian expansionism, and the longheld tradition of viewing the West as antagonistic. In discussing how Russia managed to reassert itself after what the Kremlin views as the disastrous 1990s, she cited a clear plan implemented by Vladimir Putin to bring order, build a strong and prosperous state, all in service of returning Russia to its rightful place on the world stage. Further, she noted that Putin has skillfully taken advantage of division and distractions that have persisted in the West. The combination of those two factors has allowed Russia to work towards achieving its objectives, which Dr. Stent cited as ensuring it has a seat at the table, a conferring of respect by the international community onto Russia, its right to a "sphere of privileged interests" in the post-Soviet space, and the legitimization of its own national interests. In the short run, Putin has fashioned Russia as a status quo power, i.e. one who appeals to authoritarians by refusing to engage in the adventurism of which Putin claims the US is guilty. In the long run, Dr. Stent argued that Putin seeks to jettison the

post-Cold War international order, and replace it with a post-West order in which Russia has more agency. This, she asserted, is a 21<sup>st</sup> century application of 19<sup>th</sup> century power politics.

Russia has become very adept at operating in a resource-constrained environment, and has been able to reassert itself despite this reality. It has also been able to leverage private military companies to achieve its objectives. Another reason for its relative success has been the adroit opportunism of Vladimir Putin. Dr. Stent argued that Putin is a “savvy tactician”; the notable evidence of his policy improvisation was abundant in the recent Mueller Report. The reasons for the election interference that was detailed in that report, Dr. Stent asserted, was to take advantage of existing polarization in the US; exposing divisions within the US provided the Russians with a helpful foil to question the attractiveness of US democracy. By many accounts, the Russians are continuing their efforts, which reflects a belief that broadly adversarial relations between the US and Russia will persist.

Dr. Stent also examined the nature of the Sino-Russian relationship. Fifty years ago, the two powers were engaged in a hot war; however since then, they had initially developed an “axis of convenience”, which has evolved into today’s strong strategic partnership. Both China and Russia have a mutual interest in challenging the world order, establishing a post-West system, preventing future Color Revolutions, and maintaining a sphere of influence. Their partnership is buttressed by mutual diplomatic support, though Russia is clearly a junior partner, particularly given robust Chinese investments in its ambitious BRI project. Dr. Stent concluded her remarks by calling attention to the period around 2024, where there may be an opportunity for a change in Russian state orientation, due to a redistribution of power.

Continuing the conversation on the Gray Zone was **Mr. Michael Kofman** of CNA. He began his remarks discussing deterrence, and noted that the absence of military conflict between great powers since the Second World War is evidence of its efficacy, and denoted the reasons why states engage in Gray Zone activities. One reason being that the state is compelled by the risk of escalation, and therefore engages in activities short of conflict, and another being that states enjoy the benefits of a system to the degree that they do not want to risk upending that system with aggressive action. With respect to Russia, Mr. Kofman remarked that they feel as if they have no stake in the current European security structure, echoing points made by other panelists. NATO is understood by Russia to be a projection of US military power, which Russia resents. Further, Russia sees itself as a hereditary great power, which consequentially affords Moscow both a sphere of influence, and the ability to have a say on what lesser countries (particularly their neighbors) can do.

Russia’s immediate neighborhood, and existential perceptions thereof were also considered. Mr. Kofman explored the idea of buffer states, noting that these states are not necessarily neutral per se; rather, they function as a buffer between one state and the other. This condition has led to what he referred to as a “new Brezhnev doctrine,” wherein Russia exercises limited sovereignty on its neighbors, which they generally understand to be liabilities and vulnerabilities. Therefore, Russia insists on having a say on its neighbor’s strategic orientation; this has driven those neighbors to side with those who are against Russia, as a response. The Kremlin, Mr. Kofman asserts, still has an imperial mindset, which reflects their political elites’ upbringing in a time when neither Ukraine nor Georgia were independent entities. Russia being beset on either side by what it considers to be revisionist powers is not a new dynamic; a century ago, it was surrounded by ascendant Germany and Japan, and similarly today, Europe is steadily lurching from the West, and an aggressive China looms on Russia’s frontier.

Looking forward, Mr. Kofman suggested that Russia seeks a normalization of its gains, and status as a co-equal superpower, reflecting the norms established during the Détente period between 1972

and 1979. He also noted that the Russian military staff has developed contingencies if the nation's political resolve fails during a threatened period of war, as was the case during the events of Operation Barbarossa. Additionally, Russia has adapted its decision-making to reflect the changing character of war. Because of the operational pauses, lack of necessity of depth, and priority on information superiority, Russia has recalibrated its calculus. These conditions have led Russia to the belief that the only instances in conflict that matter are in the run-up to a conflict, and in the initial period of war. Despite this calculation, Mr. Kofman notes that the Russian general staff remains focused on its conventional capabilities, and only pays lip service to asymmetric means.

The last speaker, **Dr. Spencer Meredith III** of National Defense University, presented slides highlighting Russia's strategic dimensions. He began by noting that Russia conducts itself not as a normal state, but more as a mafia, where there exists some level of "predictable unpredictability." Its body politic is irrelevant, and stakeholders fight over prestige and wealth. It maintains its imperial DNA, supporting points made by the preceding panelists. Russia lives in fear of a dominant US and expanding NATO, but the most salient vulnerability is an internal one; Russia fears being exposed for its inability to provide a good life for its citizens. After the Cold War, Russian strategic behavior has not been defensive; rather, it has been outmaneuvered by the US politically (e.g. the Color Revolutions, the Euromaidan protests), militarily (Iraq and Afghanistan), and economically (the fracking revolution that has decreased US dependence on foreign oil).

Russia's ability to cloud the information domain underpins its hybrid warfare conduct, which includes reflexive control, active measures, offensive dominance, and the ability to hide oneself (reflecting the idea of "predictable unpredictability" mentioned earlier). Contextualizing comments made by the Russian Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, Dr. Meredith suggested that the Russian view of hybrid warfare is that it is full-spectrum, meaning that conventional warfare is not dead, and that nuclear deterrence does not necessarily preclude all forms of escalation. In addition, Russia is highly aware that the concept of the state is far from being irrelevant. Given this, Dr. Meredith suggested that special operations have an important role to play. There is a constellation of activities that comprises Russian special operations, including overt Spetsnaz forces, as well as the use of private military companies, civil society groups like the Night Wolves, figures like General Haftar in Libya, and civil activism. The reason for utility of this long list of entities is because of the low opportunity costs of conducting hybrid warfare.

Looking to the future, Dr. Meredith highlighted some trends that might complicate this conflict environment, notably the Russian demographic "time bomb" – even if projections do not reflect reality down the road, the very fact of concerns highlights Russia's vulnerabilities, the shift in Russia's relative power in energy markets due to the fracking revolution, and increasing resilience to Russian activities by its adversaries in Europe and the US. This will likely force Russia to think creatively about hybrid warfare. On the other side of the coin, Dr. Meredith outlined some dynamics salient to the West, including Russia's inherent feebleness, and the vulnerabilities of Western democratic societies. Dr. Meredith pointed out several successful initiatives that would help blunt the edge of Russian hybrid warfare, which he suggested will be part of the environment for the foreseeable future. He concluded by noting that Russia will adapt and expand its special operations forces, and warned US policymakers to resist the urge to overtask US special operations to match their counterparts. Rather, irregular warfare ought to be made an established competency across the national security enterprise.

## Moderated Questions and Answers

Following the panel presentations, **Mr. Jason Werchan** of United States European Command began a moderated question and answer session with the assembled experts. His first question to the panelists asked what the United States could do to expand the competitive space, and win in the Gray Zone, and great power competition and conflict. **Dr. Celeste Wallander** pointed out that trying to stop all Russian activities everywhere is a fool's errand; some of those activities are already tenuous, such as its campaign in Venezuela. She stressed the importance of the cyber realm to the Russian arsenal, and encouraged policymakers to prioritize building capabilities in this domain. The premium that Russia places on imposing costs on the United States, according to **Mr. Michael Kofman**, presents an opportunity for indirect competition. Furthermore, there is an opportunity for escalation management within Gray Zone activities. In short, the optimal place for Russia, from the US perspective, is somewhere between desperate and emboldened. Building on that point was **Dr. Spencer Meredith III**, who suggested that "Gray Zone deterrence" instead be framed as "re-direction." He also stressed the need to do more with electronic warfare, and encouraged greater cohesion as a means to build resilience. Next, **Dr. Elena Kovalova** highlighted the importance of reassuring US allies by showing a robust US presence, along with improving detection capabilities. **Brigadier General (ret) Peter Zwack** supported the aforementioned notions of support for allies, and building deterrent cyber capabilities. He also suggested confidence building measures between the two states, including arms control agreements, but he, and the other panelists agreed that meaningful arms control is confined to the distant future.

Questions on the consequences of broadcasting Russian fragility followed. One attendee asked if pointing out the weakness of the Russian system would suggest to the Kremlin that the West is advocating for regime change, which might, in turn compel some rash action. **Dr. Meredith** responded by saying that doing so is simply exposing reality, and that action will not paint Russia into a corner. Rather, he suggested, it would force them to re-direct. **Dr. Wallander** pointed out that irrespective of US intentions, Russia will always feel as if the US is trying to destabilize it. That thought was echoed by **Dr. Kovalova**, who noted that any US action will be perceived as regime change.

The following question expanded on this and interrogated the simultaneously existing, yet contradictory notions that Russia is feeble, yet also supremely capable. **Dr. Wallander** encouraged attendees to look at both Russian strengths and weaknesses together. Similarly, **Mr. Kofman** questioned the way that power is measured in 2019, and decried the concept of demography as destiny. He also stressed the importance of assigning a relative scale to measuring power, and dismissed the language of "peer" and "near-peer" competition. Russia, **Dr. Meredith**, asserted will continue to exist in its current form irrespective of how the US conceives of it, and maintained the resultant need to engage regardless. He also traced the recent history of US perceptions of Russia, from potential partner, to near-peer rival, to a threat. Following this, **Dr. Kovalova** remarked on the need for both sides to be engaged in some sort of dialogue in order to better understand the other. Additionally, **Brig. Gen. (ret) Zwack** pointed out several potential future outcomes that are critical to Russia's future. Even if regime change occurred, he noted, Russia could still remain in a state of confrontation with the West, depending on what entity or individual subsequently took power.

Continuing on the theme of the Russian capability/fragility paradox, another attendee asked whether it was wise to continue to highlight successful Russian operations against the US, particularly if Russia is in fact feeble. In response to this, **Dr. Wallander** noted that Russian behavior needs to be exposed so that stakeholders can understand the scale of the problem. Relatedly, **Dr. Meredith**

posited that doing so heightens awareness of the threat. Additionally, **Dr. Kovalova** noted the need for policymakers to prioritize threats and determine commensurate responses.

Attendees also asked about the broad nature of terms such as “Gray Zone” and “hybrid warfare.” Panelists agreed that there was a lack of consensus on what these terms meant and that this is problematic. **Dr. Wallander** said that the lack of a solid definition risks strategic and operational confusion. In support of that point, **Mr. Kofman** pointed out that many of the terms mentioned throughout the day’s panel can lack utility, because by such ambiguous terms “meaning all things, they come to mean nothing.” He encouraged a critical understanding of these concepts by better applying deterrence principles, namely by tailoring actions based on the perspective of one’s adversary. In response, **Dr. Meredith** stressed the importance of strategic communication, and pointed out that strategies on how to deal with political warfare are in fact statecraft. **Brig. Gen. (ret) Zwack** pointed out the use of “hybrid” as a buzzword, but concluded by saying that, at its core, it effectively means tampering with the system. **Mr. Werchan** suggested use of the term “competition short of armed conflict” as a sufficient replacement for the outdated nomenclature.

The status of Central Asia as a suitable environment for great power competition was also discussed. **Dr. Kovalova** pointed out that Russia was first apprehensive of China’s activities therein, but has since warmed up to their presence, though with many reservations. Moscow is adept at using Gray Zone tactics, namely disinformation in that region, of which it has long seen itself as a defender. The Chinese role in Central Asia, according to **Brig. Gen. (ret) Zwack** is coming under increased scrutiny by host nations. He also pointed out the pending security concerns of many of those states, particularly given the unresolved status of Afghanistan. The United States has the weakest presence of the three great powers in this region, **Mr. Kofman** asserted, and suggested that it might be better served staying out of the way, rather than being a point of convergence for its two adversaries, both of whom resent US activity in their respective near abroads. Despite its status as the least-invested in the region of the three great powers in the region, **Dr. Meredith** pointed out a number of initiatives where the US could make a meaningful impact, such as in law enforcement, governance support at the local level, and rule of law development. He prioritized specific countries based on their receptivity to US overtures relative to Russian/Chinese penetration, caveating the need for strategic assessments of potential “blowback” whereby these efforts could empower entities who could one day turn on the US. Specifically, **Dr. Wallander** mentioned Uzbekistan as a potential target for US activity, because they are neither particularly close to Russia, nor China.

## Biographies of Panelists & Moderators

### **Daniel J. Flynn**

Mr. Dan Flynn was selected to be the first Director of the IC Net Assessments Division in August 2018. In this position, Mr. Flynn is responsible for developing forecasts and comparative assessments to identify emerging challenges and opportunities for US intelligence capabilities.



Prior to his current assignment, Mr. Flynn was the Director of the Global Security Program for the National Intelligence Council's (NIC's) Strategic Futures Group. In this position, he led national-level assessments of long-term and crosscutting military-security issues for senior US policymakers and defense officials. His work informed the development of US national security and defense strategies, including the 2018 National Defense Strategy. He also was an advisor to several Defense Science Board studies.

Mr. Flynn also participated in writing several of the NIC's Global Trends reports, including the 2017 Global Trends: Paradox of Progress.

Prior to joining the NIC, Mr. Flynn served in multiple positions at CIA as an analyst and manager responsible for assessments of foreign weapons, technologies, and military innovations. He was a member of CIA's Senior Analytic Service (SAS) and former Chairman of the SAS Council. He also served as the CIA's Occupation Leader for Scientific, Technical, and Weapons Intelligence (S&T/W) responsible for promoting the career and expertise development of CIA's S&T/W analysts.

From 2004 to 2005, Mr. Flynn served as a senior staff member for The President's Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction. His duties included leading the Commission's research on the capabilities of the IC to support future US military operations, perform strategic assessments, and conduct scientific and technical analysis.

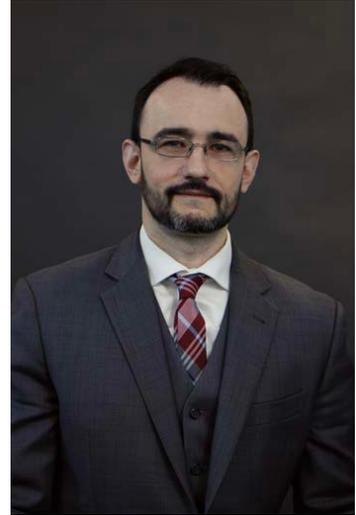
Mr. Flynn is a "Distinguished Graduate" of the National War College earning an M.S. in National Security Strategy. He also earned a B.S. in Aerospace Engineering from Boston University. Mr. Flynn is an ODNI "Plank Holder."

## **Michael Kofman**

Mr. Michael Kofman is an expert on Russia, Eurasia and Pakistan. His research focuses on security issues in Russia and the former Soviet Union, specializing in defense and military analysis.

Kofman has advised senior military and government officials on Russia, Eurasia and Pakistan and represented the Department of Defense on numerous occasions before foreign officials and dignitaries. In addition to his role at CNA, he is a Kennan Institute Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center. Kofman has published numerous articles on security issues in Eurasia, specifically Russia and Ukraine, and has appeared as a featured guest on broadcast news programs throughout the country.

Kofman holds an M.A. in Security Studies with a concentration in International Security from Georgetown University and a B.A. in International Affairs and Political Science from Northeastern University. He is fluent in Russian.



## **Dr. Elena Kovalova**

Dr. Elena Kovalova is a Professor of Strategy at the National War College, National Defense University. Her main areas of expertise are geopolitics and international security, great power competition, information warfare, foreign and security policy of Russia, Ukraine, Baltics, Eastern Central Europe, Caucuses, and Central Asia, governance, Sino-Russian relations, NATO, European Union, and security organizations in Eurasia.

Dr. Kovalova's academic credentials include a Post-Doctoral Scholar at the University of Oxford (UK), Fulbright Senior Scholar Fellowship (USA), British Academy Visiting Fellowship (UK), and Central European University (Hungary-Czech Republic). She has a Doctorate in Politics from the Institute of Politics and Ethno-National Studies, Kiev, Ukraine.



Dr. Kovalova was directly involved in higher education transformation in the post-communist world through the Yale University's Civic Education Project. She provided academic expertise for the European Commission's enlargement projects and participated in endeavors of the Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes (USA-Germany-Austria-Switzerland) designed to assist with reforms in the field of political military education in transition states. She served as a professor of National Security at the George C. Marshall Center, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany.

Dr. Kovalova was a Member of Chambésy Roundtable Discussions on European security issues (Geneva, Switzerland) with the involvement of Russian, European and U.S. experts and officials with an emphasis on the ongoing strategic review and the evolving mutual security perceptions.

She is the author of book chapters, articles, and policy papers on regional security issues including *The Fifth Estate: Illicit Networks in Central Asia in the Era of Sovereignty* (Lexington Books), *Oiling the Conflict: Crime and Corruption in the War-Torn Regions* (Berlin: LIT), *Convergence of Crime, Terror, and Corruption* (Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany: Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Military Institutions), *Regional Politics in Ukraine's Transition* (London: Routledge, BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies), *Internationalization of Ukraine: If Winner Takes All, Who Is Going Global?* (London: Ashgate).

## Spencer B. Meredith III, PhD

Dr. Spencer B. Meredith III serves as an Associate Professor of National Security Strategy at the National Defense University (NDU), College of International Security Affairs (CISA). With two decades of research and support to governance and conflict resolution, his principle areas of expertise are Russian, Eastern European, and Middle Eastern politics. Focused on the Gray Zone and countering peer-adversary influence, he is a Subject Matter Expert for multiple Geographic Combatant Command, Intelligence Community, and Joint Special Operations efforts. He has briefed at the National Security Council, and his current work focuses on democratization and the human domain in Ukraine and the Baltics.



With a doctorate from the University of Virginia in Government and Foreign Affairs, as well as a Fulbright Scholarship to the Republic of Georgia, he has a broad record of scholarship. His first book, *Nuclear Energy Safety and International Cooperation: Closing the World's Most Dangerous Reactors* (2014) resulted from work with key US Interagency and partner nation elites in Eastern Europe. His articles have appeared in peer-reviewed journals ranging from *Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, *Peace and Conflict Studies*, *Central European Political Science Review*, to *Special Operations Journal*; as well as in professional publications including *Strategy Bridge*, *Small Wars Journal*, *Inter-Agency Journal*, *Special Warfare*, and *Foreign Policy Journal*. He is a regular contributor to Joint Staff White Papers on cognitive factors in the contemporary and future operating environments.

## **Gary E. Phillips**

Mr. Gary E. Phillips was commissioned from the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) at the University of Southern Mississippi in February 1974 and entered active duty in April. After completing the Airborne School, the Ranger Course and the Infantry Officers Basic Course, he was assigned to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, as a Platoon Leader in the 4th Battalion 31st Infantry and subsequently as an Artillery Battalion and Artillery Group S2. After completing his detail as an Infantry officer and being assigned to Military Intelligence Branch, Mr. Phillips served in a wide variety of intelligence and operational assignments, including the 207th Military Intelligence Brigade S3 during Desert Storm, the Senior Military Intelligence Observer/Controller in the Battle Command Training Program, Commander of the 104th Military Intelligence Battalion of the 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized) Commander World Class Opposing Force (BCTP), ending his active Army career as the Commander of the National Ground Intelligence Center in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Since his selection as a Department of the Army Civilian, Mr. Phillips acted as the Director of TRADOC G2 Threats Directorate where he oversaw the development and publication of the Army's Operational Environment (OE) Estimate in 2000, 2004, 2009 and 2012. This Estimate provides the Army a forecast of likely conditions the Army will face on future battlefields and sets the foundation for training, leader development, and capabilities development. In 2006 Mr. Phillips established the Operational Environment Models and Simulations (M&S) Laboratory to ensure that the complexities of the OE were represented in Army M&S. This effort has been awarded five Excellence in M&S awards by the Department of the Army and the DOD Award for innovation in gaming. In 2009 Mr. Phillips was selected as a Defense Intelligence Senior Level (DISL) and joined the Senior Executive Service as the Director of the TRADOC G2 Intelligence Support Activity. In 2014 Mr. Phillips became the Senior Intelligence Advisor and Assistant TRADOC G2.

Mr. Phillips completed Army professional military education while on active duty and the Army War College. He is also a graduate of the DNI "Leading the Intelligence Community" course for Senior Executive Intelligence civilians. He holds a Master's degree in business and a Master of Military Arts and Science. He recently completed the George Mason University program for "Leadership Coaching and Organizational Well Being", in progress toward his Professional Coaching Certification. His awards include the Legion of Merit (1 OLC), Bronze Star, Meritorious Service Medal (6 OLC), Joint Service Commendation Medal, Army Commendation Medal (4 OLC), Commanders Award for Public Service, and Southwest Asia/Liberation of Kuwait Campaign Medal(s).

Mr. Phillips is married to the former Deborah Smith of Jackson Mississippi, and has two sons: Dustin, is a Military Police LTC serving at the US State Department and Bryan, has been selected to be a Vice Principal in the Park Hill School District, MO. Mr. Phillips has been blessed with 5 grandsons, Trenton, Kody, Dylan, Chase and Mason.

## Angela Stent, PhD

Dr. Angela Stent is Director of the Center for Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies and Professor of Government and Foreign Service at Georgetown University. She is also a Senior Fellow (non-resident) at the Brookings Institution and co-chairs its Hewett Forum on Post-Soviet Affairs. During the academic year 2015-2016 she was a fellow at the Transatlantic Academy of the German Marshall Fund. From 2004-2006 she served as National Intelligence Officer for Russia and Eurasia at the National Intelligence Council. From 1999 to 2001, she served in the Office of Policy Planning at the U.S. Department of State.



Stent's academic work focuses on the triangular political and economic relationship between the United States, Russia and Europe. Her publications include: *From Embargo to Ostpolitik: The Political Economy of West German-Soviet Relations, 1955-1980* (Cambridge University Press, 1981); *Russia and Germany Reborn: Unification, The Soviet Collapse and The New Europe* (Princeton University Press, 1999); *The Limits of Partnership: US-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton University Press, 2014), for which she won the American Academy of Diplomacy's Douglas Dillon prize for the best book on the practice of American Diplomacy. Her latest book is *Putin's World: Russia Against the West and with the Rest* (Twelve books, 2019).

She was a member of the senior advisory panel for NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in Europe for Admiral James Stavridis and General Philip Breedlove. She is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. She is a contributing editor to *Survival* and is on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Cold War Studies*, *World Policy Journal*, *Internationale Politik* and *Mirovaia Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnie Otnosheniie*. She has served on the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council for Russia and Central Asia. She was a Trustee of the Eurasia Foundation. Dr. Stent received her B.A. from Cambridge University, her MSc. with distinction from the London School of Economics and Political Science and her M.A. and PhD. from Harvard University.

## **Celeste Wallander, PhD**

Dr. Celeste Wallander is President and CEO of the U.S. Russia Foundation. She served as Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Russia/Eurasia on the National Security Council (2013-2017), and as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia/Ukraine/Eurasia (2009-2012), professor at American University (2009-2013), visiting professor at Georgetown University (2006-2008), Director for Russia/Eurasia at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (2001-2006), Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations (2000-2001), and professor of Government at Harvard (1989-2000).

She is the author of over 80 publications on European and Eurasian security issues, focused on Russian foreign and defense strategy. She received her Ph.D. (1990), M.Phil. (1986) and M.A. (1985) degrees from Yale University, and her B.A. (1983 – summa cum laude) from Northwestern University.

She is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, the Atlantic Council of the United States, and the International Institute for Strategic Studies.



## Jason Werchan

Mr. Jason Werchan is a Strategy Program Manager for the Strategy Division and Russia Strategic Initiative (RSI) assigned to the Headquarters of the United States European Command (USEUCOM). He was the Command's primary liaison for the Strategic Multilayer Assessment studies on Russia and the Gray Zone. His duties include developing the USEUCOM Commander's Theater Strategy, Campaign Plan, and annual Congressional Posture Statement. He is the Command's primary inject for inputs into various Defense Department strategic documents to include the National Military Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and Contingency Planning Guidance. Mr. Werchan entered Civil Service in January 2015 after retiring as a Colonel from the USAF. In his last assignment, he served as the Chief of Strategy for USEUCOM. He entered the Air Force in May of 1989 after receiving a commission through the Reserve Officer Training Corps at Texas A&M University. During his AF career, he served as an instructor and evaluator navigator in the RC-135, E-8C and T- 1A aircrafts. He has also been a student and an instructor at the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff College and was a fully qualified Joint Staff Officer. He has held multiple staff positions at the Pacific Air Forces and the Air Education and Training Command Headquarters to include Branch Chief for Strategic Plans for Education and Training and ISR Operations in the PACOM AOR. He also served as Chief of the Education and Training Command's Future Learning Division, and as the Deputy Commander for the 479th Flying Training Group at Pensacola NAS overseeing the AF's new Combat Systems Officer (CSO) training pipeline. In 2011, he served as the deputy commander of the Kabul International Airport (KIAI) ISAF base installation. He holds a bachelor's degree in Political Science from Texas A&M and a master's degree in managerial economics from the University of Oklahoma. His military awards include the Defense Superior Service Medal and Defense Meritorious Service Medal with one oak leaf cluster.



## **General Peter B. Zwack, U.S. Army (Retired)**

From 2012 – 2014, BG (r) Peter Zwack served as the United States Senior Defense Official and Attaché to the Russian Federation. By interacting with Russians at multiple levels since 1989, including defense, security, academia, policy, veterans, and private citizens, BG Zwack developed a unique hands-on perspective on Russia and Eurasian security affairs during a turbulent period that included the recent strife in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.

BG Zwack enlisted in the US Army in 1980 and received his commission via Officer Candidate School (OCS). He subsequently served 34 years as a Military Intelligence and Eurasian Foreign Area Officer serving in diverse and challenging duty and deployment locations including Afghanistan, Kosovo, Russia, South Korea and West Germany. During his career, he commanded at multiple echelons including the 66th MI Group and was the intelligence chief (G2) for US Army Europe from 2006-2008, and the senior Army intelligence officer (SIO) in Afghanistan from 2008-9.



Inducted into the OCS Hall of Fame in 2015, BG Zwack is a recipient of the Bronze Star, Distinguished Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Defense Superior Service Medal, and many other awards and citations including the Afghan Service Medal and NATO/Kosovo Medal. He was also honored as the Joint Chiefs of Staff "Action Officer of the Year" for 1999. He proudly wore the Ranger Tab and Airborne Wings.

Recently retired, he is the Senior Russia Eurasia Fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies within National Defense University. As such, he regularly consults and lectures within the defense department, interagency, think tanks, academic institutions and private industry on contemporary Russian and Eurasian security issues, and leadership lessons learned.

BG Zwack speaks Russian, German, Italian, and some French.

His home with family is Newport, Rhode Island from which he commutes to work in Washington DC. Diversions include military history and writing, travel, scuba diving and lacrosse.