OPERATING IN THE GRAY ZONE: AN ALTERNATIVE PARADIGM FOR U.S. MILITARY STRATEGY
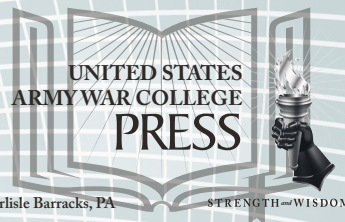
Antulio J. Echevarria II

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Antulio J. Echevarria II

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Comments pertaining to this report are invited and should be forwarded to: Director, Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, U.S. Army War College, 47 Ashburn Drive, Carlisle, PA 17013-5010.

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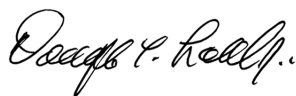
FOREWORD

Much has been written about the ways in which rival powers are employing "measures short of war" to extend the reach of their policies. These measures—which cross military, economic, informational, and diplomatic lines have been labeled, rather poorly, as "hybrid" or "gray zone" wars. None of these measures is novel, except in the ways each has been enhanced by new technologies. However, together they expose critical weaknesses in the West's conception of war. One such weakness is the absence of a planning framework appropriate for situations that are "not war" and "not peace."

In this monograph, Dr. Antulio J. Echevarria II offers such a framework. His aim is to provide military strategists with a vehicle for thinking about outpositioning rival parties rather than merely subduing them through kinetic force. By re-orienting our thinking in terms of positioning, Dr. Echevarria argues, we will find ourselves better prepared to coerce or deter our competitors, two essential competencies for operating in the gray zone.

The Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press is pleased to publish this important monograph as part of its Advancing Strategic Thought Series.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.
Director
Strategic Studies Institute and
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANTULIO J. ECHEVARRIA II became the editor of the U.S. Army War College Quarterly in February 2013. Prior to that, he was the Director of Research for the U.S. Army War College. Dr. Echevarria is the author of *Reconsidering the American Way of War* (Georgetown University Press, 2014); *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (Oxford University Press, 2007); *Imagining Future War* (Praeger Securities International, 2007); and *After Clausewitz* (University Press of Kansas, 2001). He has also published extensively in scholarly and professional journals on topics related to military history and theory and strategic thinking. Dr. Echevarria is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, the U.S. Army War College, and was a Visiting Research Fellow at Oxford University. He holds M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in history from Princeton University, and is currently working on a book on military strategy for Oxford University Press.

SUMMARY

Recent events in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, and the South China Sea continue to take interesting, if not surprising, turns. As a result, many security experts are calling for revolutionary measures to address what they wrongly perceive to be a new form of warfare, called "hybrid" or "gray zone" wars, but which is, in fact, an application of classic coercive strategies. These strategies, enhanced by evolving technologies, have exploited a number of weaknesses in the West's security structures.

To remedy one of those weaknesses, namely, the lack of an appropriate planning framework, this monograph suggests a way to re-center the current U.S. campaign-planning paradigm to make it more relevant to contemporary uses of coercive strategies.

Hybrid vs Conventional War.

One of the advantages of so-called hybrid or gray zone wars is they appear to strike at the seam between conventional and irregular warfare. A practical remedy, then, for such possibilities is to "stitch" the seams between the two with redundant capabilities and overlapping responsibilities; redundancy is a military necessity that practitioners readily recognize but defense budgets rarely permit. Nonetheless, it is an effective and simple solution to what some experts too eagerly refer to as a complex problem.

Historically, hybrid war has been the norm, whereas conventional war—which basically emerged after the Second World War—has been something of a fiction. Many experts seem not to be aware of this fact, which explains in part why "hybrid" or "gray zone"

wars appear to be new. This lack of historical awareness also contributes to the West's lack of conceptual preparedness.

Gray Zone Wars.

What makes gray zone conflicts "interesting" for a contemporary strategist is that they occur below the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) Article 5 threshold and below the level of violence necessary to prompt a United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution. Thus, to respond to them in a deliberate and considered manner, the U.S. military needs to adjust its campaign-planning paradigm. This new paradigm must account for more than just the use of kinetic military force during wartime, and it must accommodate more than just the goal of dominating an adversary through decisive operations.

Admittedly, any model can be abused by personnel not trained in its use. However, a campaign-planning model, or paradigm, of some sort is necessary because the exercise of non-kinetic (and eventually kinetic) power in economic, diplomatic, informational, and military dimensions requires a great deal of coordination. Moreover, not only must the United States coordinate its own efforts, it must synchronize them with those of its allies and strategic partners. In some cases, it must also take into account the activities of nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations, even if it does not coordinate with them directly.

The Coercion-Deterrence Dynamic.

One way to think of the exercise of power for purposes of coordination is to do so in terms of a coercion-

deterrence dynamic. Much literature exists on coercion and on deterrence; however, very little considers the two as a single dynamic. That omission is ironic since this dynamic is basic to most types of armed conflict—with the obvious exception of genocidal wars—as well as the majority of combative situations short of war.

Typically, one party wants to compel its opponent to do something, but at the same time, it wants to deter that opponent from doing something else. Thus, it is best to think of coercion and deterrence as the proverbial two sides of the same coin for planning purposes.

Rather than domination through decisive operations, as per the current model, the alternative paradigm would have the goal of out-positioning rival powers in economic, diplomatic, informational, and military dimensions. This goal could apply to peacetime and wartime situations, as well as those between them.

A Practical Application.

How might such operations apply to the case of Ukraine, for instance? First, it is important to understand the war's key features operationally as well as strategically; doing so will help to identify some of the strengths and weaknesses of the belligerent parties. To date, the conflict in Ukraine has had both high-tech and low-tech aspects, but the former are much more important. As an example of how positioning might work from a military standpoint, a high-tech overmatch in electronic warfare (EW) systems and in long-range surveillance assets can tip the balance in favor of Ukraine and achieve some coercive and deterrence goals for the West. Positioning within the military

dimension can thus be expressed as "overmatch," and achieving it facilitates coercion and/or deterrence operations.

For best effect, coercion and deterrence should have diplomatic, informational, military/operational, and economic dimensions; and these clearly must be integrated and synchronized. The proposed framework, then, does not offer new tools, but rather a vehicle for coordinating their use.

Understanding Coercion and Deterrence.

Coercion and deterrence have many of the same limitations, and if the West desires to use the coercion-deterrence dynamic, it must understand these limitations. Among the most important is that both strategies are fragile and vulnerable to friction, but perhaps deterrence more so than coercion. Both thus require active monitoring of potentially fluid situations, credible communications across cultural and psychological boundaries and, at least, some shared expectations regarding the use of force. Like most other strategies, coercion and deterrence are vulnerable to mirror-imaging or projecting one's values and ways of thinking onto one's adversaries. Such projections lead to risky assumptions about what one's rivals hold dear and how they will behave. Perhaps one example is assuming Putin will view stability operations with the same sense of importance as the West does.

In sum, the so-called hybrid and gray zone wars of the present are not new, but they have highlighted important failings in the West's conception of armed conflict as well as the U.S. military's model for planing campaigns in support of strategies.

The West does not have to embrace the values of its rivals in order to develop counters to their coercive strategies. However, it does need a model capable of providing flexibility not only from the standpoint of responding to a crisis but also from the perspective of preventing one. The coercion-deterrence dynamic can accomplish that.

For it to work, however, it must be set within an equally flexible framework, one capable of accounting for the fluctuating potential and variable combinations of all forms of power. Positioning offers such a framework. Gaining the advantage is at the heart of strategic practice, as any historical survey or military treatise would attest.

Although Western democracies rightly defend the inviolability of civilian authority over military leadership, political leaders and diplomats will rarely have the training, time, or experience to become experts in the use of these strategic tools. It thus falls to military professionals to do so.

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Despite its uncertain origins, the mixed blessing of living in "interesting times" rings especially true for today's strategists.[1] Recent events in Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, and the South China Sea continue to take "interesting," if not surprising, turns. We could say the same of the various ways in which military force has been used of late. Security analysts, military and policy practitioners, and defense scholars alike have struggled to come to terms with such uses, assigning labels such as "hybrid" wars, "gray zone" conflicts, "unrestricted warfare," or "new generation" wars, among others, to distinguish contemporary practices from those associated with so-called traditional or conventional wars.[2] While the original aim of such labeling, or re-labeling, may have been to draw the attention of busy policymakers to rapidly emerging security issues, it has evolved into something of a culture of replication in which the labels are repeated more out of habit than conscious reflection. This habit has led to a wealth of confusion that has clouded the thinking of policymakers and impaired the development of sound counter-strategies. As a result, many security experts are calling for revolutionary measures to address what they wrongly perceive to be a new form of warfare, but which is, in fact, an application of classic coercive strategies, enhanced by ever-evolving technologies, that exploits weaknesses in the West's security frameworks.

Uses of the term hybrid war, for instance, have drifted far afield from its inventors' original objective, which was to raise awareness of threats that cannot

be defeated solely by the employment of airpower and special forces.[3] By the late-1990s that particular combination of military forces was said to mark a "new" American way of war, one that ultimately proved irresponsibly limited in scope. Accordingly, the term hybrid was initially intended to serve as a counterpoise to an otherwise imbalanced approach to war. That intention was its chief merit. However, the term now stands for the use of more than one "mode" of warfare or element of national power, as if doing so were something exceptional.[4] Its popularity is not unlike that associated with the word "blitzkrieg" in the 1940s, a label that was never an official term in the Wehrmacht's military doctrine, but rather a neologism coined by the media and political and military commentators at the time.[5] What Premier Paul Reynaud declared before the French Senate in late spring of 1940 resembles what many analysts are now claiming of hybrid warfare:

> Our classic conception of war has come up against a new conception . . . Of all the tasks which confront us the most important is clear thinking. We must think of the new type of warfare we are facing and take immediate decisions.[6]

Not only was Reynaud's message too late for France, but it was also confused by the panic of the moment. While clear and precise thinking is always useful, the French were done in less by a new conception of war than by a war plan that struck heavily at an unexpected point in their lines and against forces that were among the least prepared, both in material and in personnel, to withstand it (Figure 1).[7]
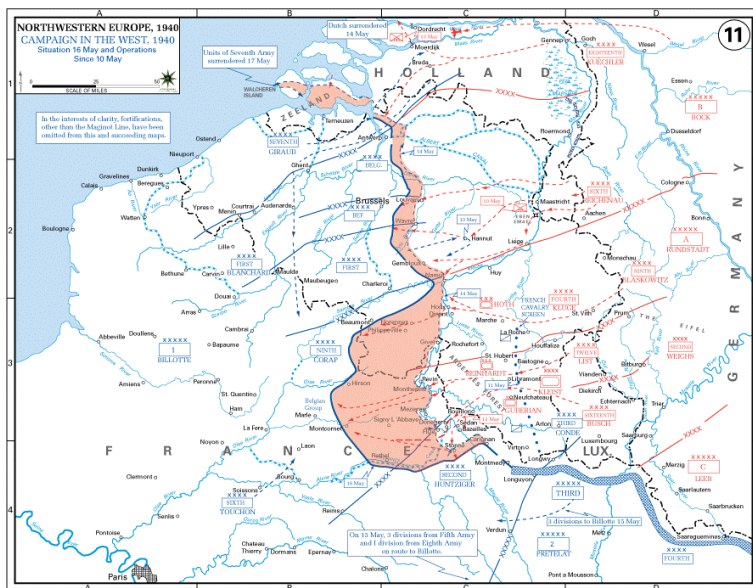
**Figure 1. German Invasion of France
May 10-16, 1940.**

Similar to the newness of the purported blitzkrieg of 1940, that of the so-called hybrid warfare of 2014-15 was more "*schein als sein*."[8] The success of the Germans in 1940 and of the Russians in 2014 and 2015 depended not on creating new conceptions of war, but on conducting accurate assessments of their opponents, and then developing campaign plans that avoided the strengths and exploited the weaknesses of those adversaries. In each case, campaign success depended greatly on achieving operational surprise, which in turn owed much to the defenders' lack of preparedness across multiple domains. As a rule, vulnerability to surprise is a function of being unprepared. It is nonetheless a credit to the information operations of both, the aggressors of 1940 and those of 2014,

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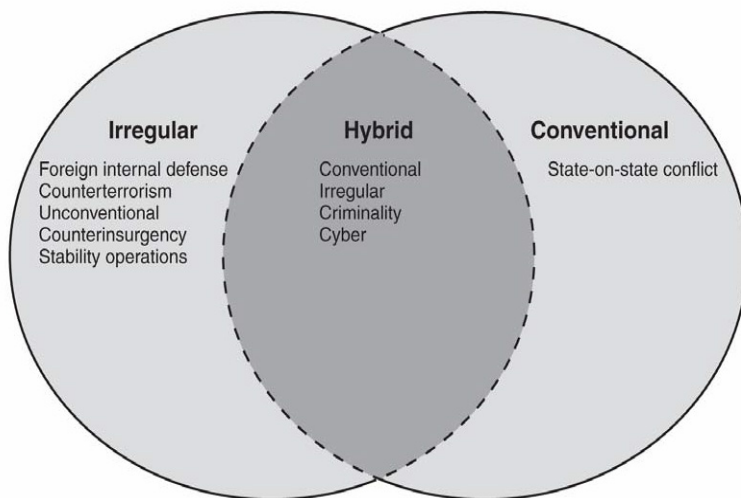that their campaigns were perceived as new forms of warfare.[9]

However, at this stage in the debate, it is no longer enough to urge the defense community to exercise greater restraint in the labels it chooses, or to employ more precision when describing types of warfare. Such undertakings, however tempting to scholars, would only condemn one to a fate much like that of Sisyphus, and with equally fruitless results. Nor would it suffice merely to dismiss hybrid or gray zone wars as nothing new, as true as that statement is. Whatever these terms might convey to today's readers, Russian aggression and Chinese coercion have highlighted weaknesses in the U.S. military's conceptual framework for planning campaigns in support of strategies. These weaknesses and shortcomings add up to conceptual unpreparedness, which demands a remedy.

Accordingly, this monograph proposes a recentering of the current U.S. campaign-planning paradigm for executing military strategy. It offers a framework for war planners to use in developing and coordinating strategic options for countering the types of hostile activities Beijing and Moscow, especially, have been promoting. Since U.S. military thinking helps inform that of many North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members and non-NATO partners, including many in the European Union (EU), the approach recommended here may also apply to Western war planning more broadly.[10]

HYBRID VS CONVENTIONAL WAR

The literature published on war and strategy is extensive, but surprisingly little of it compares "irregular" to "conventional" warfare (or "new" to "traditional" warfare) in an analytically meaningful way. Instead, most comparisons place a simplistic and poorly informed view of the latter against a shallow and mythologized understanding of the former. The special report issued in 2010 by the U.S. Government Accounting Office (GAO) is a case in point. This widely used report employed a Venn diagram to describe the characteristics of hybrid warfare. The Venn diagram from the report consists of two overlapping circles, Irregular and Conventional, with Hybrid occupying the middle space (Figure 2).[11]

Importantly, the diagram also reveals how service perspectives have driven the U.S. military's compartmentalization of war.[12] In professional parlance, U.S. military services have maintained their expertise by assuming "jurisdiction" over specific forms or types of warfare. Special operating forces hold purview over irregular warfare and general-purpose forces over conventional warfare.[13] The problem, then, is how to assign responsibility for the so-called hybrid space, which presumably could exploit any seams between the two. Ultimately, this problem is a bureaucratic one because the answer lies not in compartmentalizing warfare, as bureaucracies are wont to do, but in creating and maintaining responsibilities that deliberately overlap.

Irregular

Foreign internal defense
Counterterrorism
Unconventional
Counterinsurgency
Stability operations

Hybrid

Conventional
Irregular
Criminality
Cyber

Conventional

State-on-state conflict

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DoD) military concept and briefing documents and academic writings.

Figure 2. The Hybrid Warfare Concept.

Admittedly, maintaining redundant responsibilities is inefficient and produces friction; yet, it contributes to "sewing up" the seams between the services and builds resilience against the realities of strategic consumption and combat attrition in wartime. Collectively, the U.S. armed forces share functional and geographic responsibilities for the conduct of war through the existing unified command structure. Where necessary, new unified or subunified commands, such as the Cyber Command and the Africa Command, have been established to provide stronger "stitching" over perceived gaps in responsibility.[14] Of course, as always, success requires thorough and continuous assessments of organizational authorities and responsibilities to ensure they are adequate.[15] Nonetheless, this requirement is a challenge, not a crisis.

The GAO's Venn diagram expresses the divisions differently and misleadingly portrays the divisions between conventional and irregular warfare as real and discrete. In fact, mainly service interests and perspectives drive them, which in turn are supported more by budgetary pressures than by the study of warfare. Any historical analysis of armed conflict since the beginning of the Thirty Years War (considered by scholars as something of a watershed in the rise of the nation-state model) would reveal that conventional warfare, represented in the GAO diagram as "state-on-state conflict," is essentially an artificial category. Few, if any, so-called state-on-state conflicts from the Early Modern period to the present fit neatly into the category of conventional. Instead, most had prominent irregular and conventional features, particularly regarding America's wars from the 18th century onward. As a result, nearly all warfare from the early-1600s to the present is hybrid in character, thereby making the term hybrid redundant.

The Second World War, for instance, is often thought of as the quintessential conventional conflict—a clash among nation-states employing massive air, ground, and naval forces. Yet, the propaganda campaigns, the subversive activities, and the disruptive actions from irregular parties also played vital, if underappreciated roles. The Axis powers also used propaganda and subversive activities to create confusion and to exacerbate political divisions prior to an invasion, as in Denmark, Norway, France, and other countries.[16] As history shows, the actual extent of seditious elements found in any one country has been exaggerated, but that only underscores the degree of success such psychological disruption achieved. For the Allies—French, Greek, Norwegian, Polish,

and Yugoslav resistance fighters, as well as Soviet partisans and Chinese communist guerrillas all contributed to disrupting Axis plans at critical times. Estimates of the size of such forces range from tens of thousands to many hundreds of thousands of individual fighters depending on the stage of the conflict.[17] Some of the leaders of these groups, such as Josip Tito of Yugoslavia or Mao Zedong of China, stood at the head of major ideological movements that were shaping the political landscape of Europe and Asia in violent and consequential ways—prior to, during, and after the conflict. The irregular aspects of the Second World War have not drawn the same degree of attention as its conventional features. Nevertheless, to ignore them is to foster a misunderstanding not only of this war but also of all those to which it is compared.

The absence of historical awareness is not unusual in defense circles. After all, policymakers must focus on the needs of the present. Unfortunately, this focus tends to treat the present as if it were *sui generis* and thus independent of the past, and immune to history's interpretation of the past. The regrettable result is historical illiteracy, which in turn has compounded the West's conceptual unpreparedness. A case in point is the characterization of contemporary armed conflict attributed to Russian General Valery Gerasimov (Figure 3). While the characteristics he identified may have intentionally exaggerated the degree of change in the current Russian model of warfare, the fact that the discrepancies have gone unchallenged thus far is evidence of a lack of historical perspective.[18]

Traditional Military Methods	New Military Methods
1 Military action starts after strategic deployment (Declaration of War).	**1** Military action starts by groups of troops during peacetime (war is not declared at all).
2 Frontal clashes between large units consisting mostly of ground units.	**2** Non-contact clashes between highly maneuverable interspecific fighting groups.
3 Defeat of manpower, firepower, taking control of regions and borders to gain territorial control.	**3** Annihilation of the enemy's military and economic power by short-time precise strikes in strategic military and civilian infrastructure.
4 Destruction of economic power and territorial annexation.	**4** Massive use of high-precision weapons and special operations, robotics, and weapons that use new physical principles (direct-energy weapons – lasers, short-wave radiation, etc.).
5 Combat operations on land, air and sea.	**5** Use of armed civilians (4 civilians to 1 military).
6 Management of troops by rigid hierarchy and governance.	**6** Simultaneous strike on the enemy's units and facilities in all of the territory.
	7 Simultaneous battle on land, air, sea, and in the informational space.
	8 Use of asymmetric and indirect methods.
	9 Management of troops in a unified informational sphere.

Figure 3. Changes in the Character of Armed Conflict According to General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the Russian General Staff.

This chart draws a number of erroneous distinctions between purportedly traditional approaches to war and new ones. Items 1 and 2 as they relate to Traditional versus New Military Methods, respectively, are patently false. Using the Second World War as the quintessential traditional war, Hitler's divisions invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, without a dec-

laration of war; nor did the Japanese declare war on the United States before they attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. In fact, the aggressor rarely declared war because doing so would have meant surrendering certain adventges, especially surprise, to the defender. One major exception to this rule was the Soviet Union's declaration of war against Japan in August 1945. Moreover, the history of American uses of military force, which amounts to more than 200 cases, shows war was declared against foreign powers only 11 times (in 5 wars).[19] Furthermore, few American conflicts began as "frontal clashes between large [ground] units." Most involved small numbers of ground troops or, as with many 20th-century interventions, only engaged naval or air elements.

Items 3 through 5 can be true or false, depending upon the political purpose to be fulfilled by the use of force, and the circumstances under which it is employed. Item 6 is true only in regards to conventional units; special units or irregular forces typically function with looser command structures.

Under the category New Military Methods, only items 3 through 9 are truly new, and they were made possible by the advent of emerging communications and targeting technologies. Importantly, these items do not represent new conceptual approaches to war, but rather time-honored ones that novel social media tools can execute more effectively. Airpower theories provide examples, particularly those of John Warden, which were developed and implemented (with mixed success) during the latter decades of the 20th century. A notable exception to the technology bias is Item 5. To be sure, the use of civilians in military roles has been increasing since the 1970s, particularly with the rise of private security companies.[20] Yet, this

phenomenon is not new, but rather a return to what most scholars see as the pre-Westphalian model of conflict in which civilians performed many of the functions traditionally associated with regular troops, often to include fighting.[21] The post-Westphalian model, whereby the state exercises increasing control over armed conflict, has long been problematic for cases outside Europe. In short, comparisons between traditional military methods and so-called new ones often misrepresent the former in ways that exaggerate the differences between the two and, in the process, obscure the crux of the problem—a party's unpreparedness.

What the Gerasimov doctrine describes, therefore, is classic coercive pressure applied with an admixture of newish technological means.[22] Modern communications and targeting tools now enhance the ease and effectiveness of using informational warfare; they also facilitate the "management of troops in a unified informational sphere." Nor is there anything especially new about the employment of so-called "asymmetric and indirect methods." According to such logic, Germany's use of U-boats in the Second World War to interdict Allied shipping across the Atlantic Ocean would qualify as asymmetric; yet, it took place within the context of a multi-dimensional conventional conflict on a grand scale. Germany's choice was driven largely by circumstances. Nor was commerce raiding the only means by which Hitler had hoped to break British morale; he also employed terror bombing, which many analysts today might classify as asymmetric. In fact, the Second World War was as "full spectrum" as any modern war could be, so much so that terms like "asymmetric" and "indirect" appear naïve. In any event, asymmetry is inherent in the

nature of war, if for no other reason than the intrinsically unequal relationship between attack and defense. Unfortunately, such terms stubbornly persist.

GRAY ZONE WARS

What makes gray zone conflicts "interesting" for a contemporary strategist is that they occur below NATO's Article 5 threshold, and below the level of violence necessary to prompt a UN Security Council Resolution.[23] In some cases, they also take place below an armistice threshold that might trigger stringent response measures, such as tighter economic sanctions. Prime examples of such wars are the aggressive moves undertaken by Moscow in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, and by Beijing in the South China Sea. It should be said, however, the "Russo-Ukrainian War" is anything but gray to Ukrainians; nor is the Kremlin's denial of involvement actually persuasive. Yet, neither the hostile actions of Moscow nor those of Beijing have provided legal justification for direct military intervention on the part of the West. Typically, the West avoids intervening directly unless it first detects a breach in lawful norms or protocols (there have been some notable exceptions). One way to operate below such political and legal thresholds is to employ irregular or highly specialized regular proxies, such as volunteers or militias, capable of affording plausible deniability to an aggressor. In any case, it is possible to counter gray zone aggression that employs paramilitary or extra-military forces with similar measures.

It is, nevertheless, irrefutably clear that Moscow and Beijing have exploited the West's conception of, and long-standing aversion to, armed conflict to accomplish what some Pentagon observers describe as

"wartime-like" objectives. Thus far, these objectives have remained outside the scope of what military strategists and campaign planners are legally authorized or perhaps professionally trained to address. Figure 4 depicts this problem graphically using the current campaign-planning paradigm, which represents a standard crisis-return-to-normalcy model.[24]
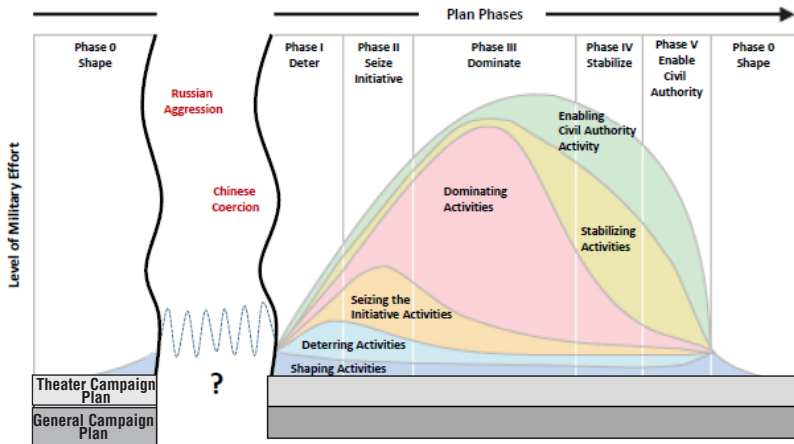

Figure 4. Notional Operation Plan Phases.

The vertical or y-axis shows the expected fluctuation of kinetic military effort over the course of a campaign. **Shaping Activities** are underway before the crisis begins, but these are modest compared to the scale of military effort required to resolve the crisis. In the early stages of the crisis, **Deterring Activities** are initiated, which then transition into **Seizing the Initiative Activities**. These become **Dominating Activities**, which in turn transition into **Stabilizing Activities**. **Shaping and Deterring Activities** continue throughout the campaign, fading as stability is restored and military presence is reduced. The fundamental

sequence is thus first to seize the initiative, and then dominate the opponent, followed by stabilizing the situation, and finally passing control to civil authorities. The logic driving this sequence is that domination of the opponent is a prerequisite for achieving policy goals. Yet, that is not always necessary. In strategies of exhaustion, for instance, the object is to make opponents give up the fight without having to dominate them physically. Similarly, decapitation strategies or operations aimed at regime change do not necessarily fit this model, as domination is not required or already exists in non-military dimensions.

What's more, military practitioners sometimes treat the phases as a collective antidote for the uncertainty and chaos of war: if commanders know what phase they are in, they know what types of operations they should be planning and conducting.[25] Consequently, the phases and their associated planning objectives take on a logic of their own, one quite independent of and perhaps not aligned with policy aims. Force-sizing constructs, moreover, draw from this paradigm to assist in rationalizing the size and role of U.S. forces: if Phase III is the crucial one in the campaign-planning paradigm, then U.S. forces must be sized and trained accordingly; capabilities required for Phases IV and V, therefore, would receive lower priorities. As a result, the U.S. military's uneven performance in those phases is an outcome of a self-reinforcing cycle, one that mirrors what the services value most while reinforcing their expectations about what is vital in the conduct of war. Put differently, the current campaign-planning paradigm exerts prescriptive, if indirect, influence over the conduct of military operations as well as the formulation of U.S. defense policy.

Figure 4 thus shows the model's limitations with respect to gray zone wars, specifically, when or rather where they occur, namely, within Phases 0 and I, or along the seam between them. In this space, the kinetic military effort is typically at its lowest level, or non-existent. Gray zone hostilities, thus, exploit this situation, which is in turn compounded by the West's overall reticence to use military force.

The model's failure to account for such situations raises two important questions. The first is whether the model itself is flawed, or whether it is simply being misapplied or overused. The second is whether any model is useful or indeed possible given the complexity of the contemporary strategic environment. Put differently, does a model do more harm than good if the inclination of military culture is to seek simple solutions to complex problems?

The answer to the first question is, yes: the current planning model is flawed because it does not reflect reality; and, yes, it has been misused. The model represents an ideal, not a pattern. An ideal is an aspiration—what a perfect campaign should look like. A pattern is an approximation of what campaigns have looked like. Models should be based on actual practice, not ideals, that is, on approximations rather than aspirations. Otherwise, they lead to cognitive dissonance between expectations and realities. The current planning model suggests the ideal is domination of an opponent. Yet, in practice, domination is neither always possible nor always necessary. Most objectives are far short of this goal and thus, much time and effort is wasted in trying to achieve the unnecessary.

Oddly, not only does the current model overlook this point, it neglects the patterns evident in America's own wars and military interventions. The most frequent type of military strategy used by the United States in the 20th century was decapitation, particularly in Latin America where it often supported policies aimed at regime change. As a starting point, a campaign-planning model for U.S. troops ought to draw from how and why Americans have actually used force historically. Clearly, the research for such a model must have a broad basis, but to ignore U.S. history is to say no core or enduring interests ever drove American uses of military force. Recent efforts to topple the Taliban and to remove Saddam Hussein, Muammar Gaddafi, and Bashar Assad from power serve as reminders that American history remains relevant to the contemporary American way of war.

Figure 5 offers a snapshot of America's various armed conflicts and military interventions from 1775 to 2015. It is worth noting that none of these conflicts fits the current campaign-planning paradigm accurately. Even in the Civil War and the Second World War, where we should expect to see some alignment, America's opponents were not "dominated," per se, by the conduct of decisive operations in a nominal Phase III. During both wars, U.S. forces (and their allies) gained the upper hand in many dimensions, but acquiring advantages will not necessarily equate to domination. In each case, "domination" did not occur until stability operations created it in Phase IV. Domination does not come with winning a decisive battle,
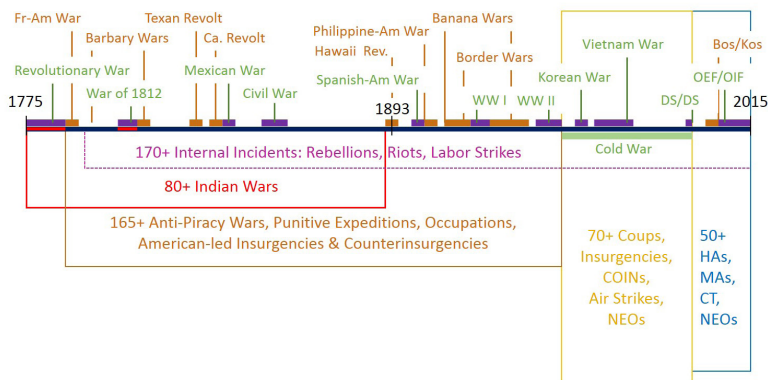
War: The use of military force to protect or promote one's interests.

Figure 5. America's Wars and Armed Interventions.

but with establishing control over an adversary's political and legal institutions, to include its military ones. Decisive victory does not create the conditions for domination; it is merely a precursor to them. It allows us to put the appropriate forces and other elements in the proper places to achieve control.

To answer the second question, the pitfalls of misusing models, of mistaking aspirations for patterns, can be addressed in part through military education and training. However, that alone will not suffice without the aid of a flexible framework. While a single campaign-planning model, per se, is not necessary, some organizing framework is needed to coordinate military, interagency, and international efforts. Such an outline might also prove useful to some nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations though these are not obliged to coordinate their efforts with those of the United States and its allies.

Models, like theories, should explain rather than prescribe; but they are often employed for the latter purpose, even by those who should know better or

who may have only the best of intentions. A general framework, perhaps centered on positioning as proposed here, is thus a better option. It can be made loose enough to account for, and to assist in coordinating, multiple lines of effort across any number of "peacetime" or "wartime" situations. The individual phases themselves would be left to military and policy practitioners to develop jointly, rather than to enshrine them in doctrine. As such, this framework would lack that essential ingredient, a template, which makes it vulnerable to prescriptive abuses. Even with such a general framework, the U.S. military's professional education system would do well to continue warning of the pitfalls of rigidly adhering to any doctrine. As always, the goal of military instruction must be to enhance professional judgment, not to promote doctrinaire adherence to a given template or set of principles.

To be sure, the decision to use military force should always remain a policy choice. That principle notwithstanding, Western strategists and war planners (both NATO and non-NATO) need an alternative campaign model, one that enables them to develop counters to gray zone wars before hostilities commence. As a minimum, such a model should aid military professionals in developing the military advice they must provide policymakers when asked.[26] In actuality, the West is not facing a new conception of war, but rather an older one. Better said, an "old-fashioned" version unencumbered by post-modern political norms and legal constraints.[27] At the very least, then, any alternative model must portray the "pre" and "post" stages of conflict more inclusively.

What might such a military-strategic or campaign model look like? It is important to note the operational

phases depicted in Figure 2 are currently under revision. Whenever the new doctrine is published, it may not have the same phases or even the same number of them. In fact, it likely will not. However, that is unimportant because the goal at this stage is to offer and debate alternatives. The current schematic of operational phases, referred to by some insiders (less than affectionately) as the "sand chart," merely serves as a point of reference, a way to visualize the problem.

The Coercion-Deterrence Dynamic.

We can simplify the problem of representing gray zone wars by regarding Moscow's hostile actions in Ukraine and Beijing's activities in the South China Sea as either an act of coercion or deterrence or a combination of both. Modern strategic studies address coercion and deterrence at length. None, however, treats the two as complementary components of a single, core dynamic. Yet, this dynamic is fundamental not only to war itself, however it is defined, but also to what precedes and follows it—which, again, may not fall neatly within the definition of peace. As Clausewitz noted, war is the use of force to compel an opponent to do one's will.[28] Put differently, armed conflict is at root coercion (or compelling) by violent means. Yet, as modern dictionaries show, violence encompasses much more than the use of kinetic military force.

Activities outside the realm of armed conflict thus also involve coercion, diplomatic and otherwise, even though the level of force employed might not cross the threshold into a declared war. Some might call this type of coercion "political warfare," though this term, like so many labels, ultimately adds more confusion than it dispels.[29] If war takes place within the "womb"

of politics, as Clausewitz claimed, then all warfare is ineluctably political.[30] The question is whether a policy and the war it begets will be aggressive or defensive in nature. Either way, the adjective "political" is unnecessary when associated with warfare. In Clausewitz's view, the essential difference between political coercion during peacetime and political coercion during wartime was simply the addition of physical fighting, combat.

Clausewitz's discussion of defense also draws on the logic of deterrence. Most strategists today would agree: our ability to deter is at least partly dependent upon our ability to defend, and vice versa. The two concepts are closely related, but deterrence is the larger category because we sometimes need offensive capabilities (not just defensive ones) to deter, especially in situations involving extended deterrence. In addition, a successful deterrence usually means a successful defense, though defense can succeed even after deterrence fails. Put another way, we can add a corollary to Clausewitz's proposition that the defense is stronger than the attack, namely, to coerce, is more difficult than to deter.

Indeed, in practice, coercion and deterrence constitute the proverbial opposite sides of the same coin: we attempt to compel others to do what we want while at the same time deterring or dissuading them from doing what we do not want. This coercion-deterrence dynamic exists in nearly every type of conflict. The exception that proves the rule is genocidal war because it aims not to coerce a population but to eliminate it. Even ethnic cleansing (which differs in kind from genocide) is at the bottom for driving a people from a territory and makes use of both coercive and deterrence measures.

More significantly, the coercion-deterrence dynamic is also relevant to conditions short of war, which makes it well-suited for gray zone situations. Between 1936 and 1939, for instance, Adolf Hitler's willingness to risk war—juxtaposed against the allies' desire to preserve peace—made his use of coercive force and diplomacy quite effective. We might call it coercive diplomacy today, though the term was not in vogue at the time. Instead, it was more likely to be called "armed diplomacy," or "gunboat diplomacy" when referring to maritime confrontations.[31] Hitler's brand of armed or coercive diplomacy used a military force that was rearming the Wehrmacht (which even early on was obsolete in important ways, especially regarding its tanks) to exert both a deterrent and coercive pressure. Hitler deterred heads of state in London and Paris from using force, while coercing them into granting his demands for territorial acquisitions. The idea of going to war, even with demonstrably favorable odds, was decidedly uncomfortable to British and French diplomats whose publics still remembered the high costs of the last war.

One solution for dealing with gray zone wars, therefore, is to design operations and campaigns around the coercion-deterrence dynamic, which is, around either coercing or deterring rival powers, or some combination of the two. Most campaigns will likely entail a fluid blending of the two. Peacetime coercive and deterrence operations might include activities such as the following: mobilizing military forces, initiating training exercises along a border, conducting aircraft overflights or other shows of force, executing arms transfers, or sharing intelligence. Moreover, actions once referred to, somewhat derisively, as "military operations other than war" can easily sup-

port a coercion-deterrence framework: enforcement of sanctions, implementation of no-fly zones, as well as airstrikes, and counterterrorism raids, among others.[32] Such uses of force can often help in establishing credibility or demonstrating resolve, key elements in the success of any coercive or deterrence strategy.

The point is many of the tools contemporary strategists and campaign planners need are already present; the coercion-deterrence dynamic merely affords them a framework within which to develop and coordinate short-range options or longer-term courses of action.

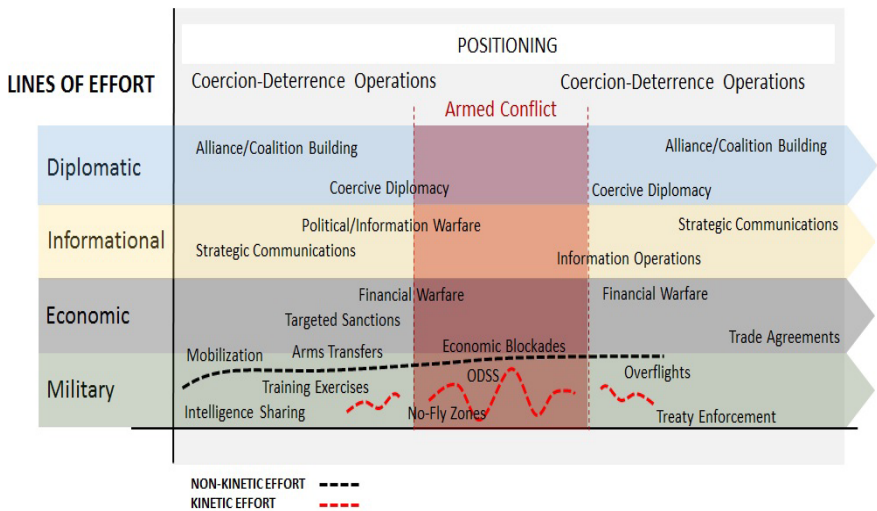Accordingly, an alternate to the "sand chart" might look something like Figure 6.

Figure 6. A Framework for Positioning.

This figure depicts the elements of national power as Lines of Effort, in which military force is not necessarily the central one. It is, however, almost always a key one in that it often provides a means for exercising the others. A naval blockade, for instance, is a form

of economic warfare carried out using military force. U.S. policymakers have long called for a "whole-of-government" approach to the formulation of strategy and the waging of war, but little has happened to turn the rhetoric into practice. This might be one step toward realizing that aim. In any case, military strategists and campaign planners must think in terms of an integrated expression of power, not only for our own security but also to understand how to weaken that of our rivals.

Figure 6 portrays the intensity of force evenly within each Line of Effort, but in practice, the scale would be dependent on variables too numerous to list. In addition, the elements of national power unfold at different rates. Military power can achieve swift effects with air strikes; but if the aim is to provide security for populations within a certain zone, prolonged effects may be needed. Likewise, economic power can take quite some time to develop depending on the type of infrastructure involved, though financial warfare in the form of credit denial or targeted sanctions can achieve results quickly. Similarly, informational power can achieve faster results if it plays to existing prejudices, those things people want or have been conditioned to believe, rather than attempting to alter perceptions or change minds to embrace new ideas. Russian information operations have succeeded largely because they took advantage of years of anti-Western—and especially anti-U.S. rhetoric.[33] Ultimately, the ability to exercise diplomatic power depends on the capabilities resident in other domains. Thus, the pace and scale of each Line of Effort largely (but not only) depends on the strengths and weaknesses of our rivals relative to our own, and in light of our objectives and any legal and political constraints.

Notably, in this diagram, Positioning takes the place of Shaping and Deterring. The term Shaping has always been vague and inadequate.[34] In contrast, Positioning conveys a clearer sense of immediate and long-term objectives for each Line of Effort: to gain positional advantages that facilitate accomplishing what we want to achieve overall.

As historical analysis suggests, at root, strategy is simply the practice of countering the strengths and exploiting the weaknesses of an opponent in ways that make accomplishing our objectives ever more likely. For grand strategists, that means building alliances, coalitions, and other security or trade agreements to enhance our global position relative to our competitors. For military strategists, that amounts to employing the various types of military power made available by those agreements to weaken, or nullify, our rivals' ability to resist—all with the aim of furthering the designs of grand strategy.

Such positioning takes place not only in physical or geographical dimensions but also in cultural and psychological ones. Positioning can also be expressed in qualitative or quantitative terms; with respect to military power, for instance, out-positioning our rivals is commonly referred to as achieving "overmatch" and it has dimensions involving weaponry, leadership, training, and logistics that are clearly qualitative and quantitative in nature.

In addition, the much maligned and often misused "principles of war," such as mass and surprise, are in fact nothing more than relative operational advantages. Many Western militaries have developed sets of more or less the same principles, which all too quickly (and all too regrettably) become recipes for victory.[35] Whether any principles of war are enduring or time-

less is irrelevant; all that matters is whether they offer useful advantages in any given situation. Accruing such advantages does not guarantee victory, of course; but it does make our task progressively easier and our opponent's increasingly more difficult.

Even in the absence of a grand strategy, which some scholars argue is too often the case for the United States, the pursuit of positional advantages will usually further most U.S. interests.[36] For situations in which Washington might wish to cooperate rather than to compete with its rivals, positional advantages can form a portion of the "trade-space" in negotiations.

Simply put, strategy at any level amounts to gaining those advantages—diplomatically, informationally, militarily, and economically—that make it more and more likely we will achieve what we want. Admittedly, what we want may depend greatly on what we think we can get, which in turn hinges on how we assess our strengths and weaknesses in relation to those of our opponents, a relationship that is both subjective and subject to change. In Figure 4, therefore, Positioning takes the place of Shaping and Deterring; but, like them, it must continue indefinitely.

A necessary corollary to this rule, then, is that the pre-war phase of conflict is crucial, perhaps even "decisive" in military terminology, in the prosecution of armed conflict. Steps taken during this phase—attracting the best allies or partners, conducting an objective net assessment, getting the politics right, achieving and securing operational overmatch—are of obvious and enormous importance. Furthermore, mistakes made at this stage can be difficult to undo later; poor decisions at the outset can make "winning" the conflict and achieving a favorable settlement problematic

to say the least. Figure 7, thus, stresses the importance of heightening the awareness of military strategists and campaign planners regarding the value of pre-war positioning, to include properly arming one's allies and partners.[37]
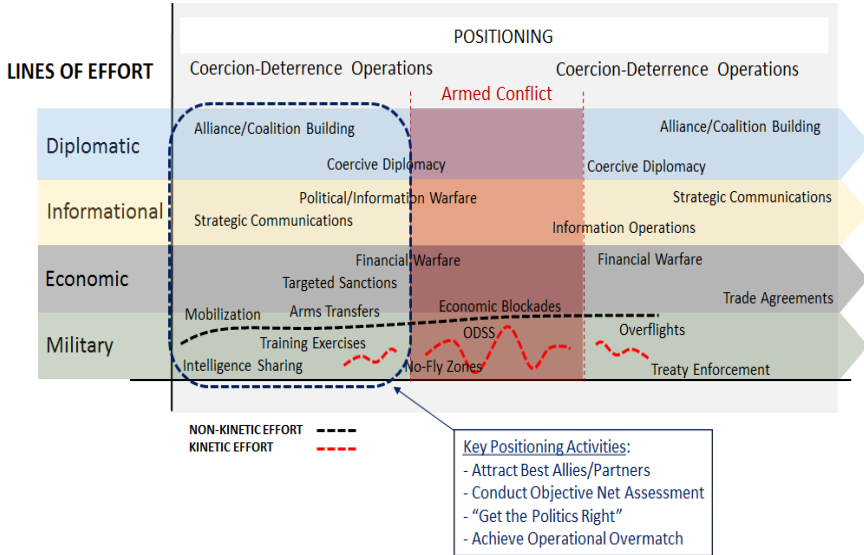

Figure 7. Key Positioning Activities.

After more than a decade of fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. military has come to appreciate the importance of Phases IV and V. Laudable efforts have gone into understanding the value of stability operations and support operations and the capabilities needed to conduct them. However, the U.S. military may now run the risk of forgetting how even the best efforts in those phases could not overcome mistakes made in Phases 0 and I; the effects of those early errors persisted and worked against achieving satisfactory outcomes in both conflicts.

A Practical Application.

How might such operations apply to the Ukrainian case, for instance? First, it is important to understand the war's key features operationally as well as strategically; doing so will help identify some of the strengths and weaknesses of the belligerent parties. Thus far, the "Russo-Ukrainian War" in the Donbass reveals contemporary combat formations are integrated systems, just as they have always been, but with a twist. Brigade or battalion combat teams now consist of armor, mechanized infantry, self-propelled and towed artillery, rockets, mortars, as well as an array of anti-aircraft and electronic warfare (EW) weapons. These systems are generally aided by surveillance conducted by remotely piloted aerial vehicles (usually referred to as UAVs or drones), which can also be armed with air-to-surface missiles.[38]

In some respects, armored mobility has returned to the battlefield: newer models of tanks (such as T-90s and modified T-72s) and other heavy vehicles equipped with reactive armor are reasonably well-protected against contemporary anti-tank weapons. However, they remain vulnerable to attack from above by UAVs or by artillery munitions designed to penetrate the tops of vehicles (where little or no reactive armor is present). In turn, UAVs are vulnerable to jamming by EW weapons that disrupt the vehicles' GPS systems. Artillery, mortars, and multiple launch rocket systems (MLRSs) can destroy mechanized units in short order. Nonetheless, counter-battery radar can detect such indirect-fire systems and thus subject them to rapid and devastating counter-fires. According to at least one source, artillery has accounted for

85 percent of casualties in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict; this percentage is significantly higher than that of the Second World War where the average was 75 percent.[39] Notably, most Russian artillery systems today deliver area-fires rather than precision-fires. Many engagements occur at long ranges, between 10 to 15 kilometers, well beyond the direct line of sight.

Accordingly, the lethality of the contemporary battlefield has increased tremendously, and military formations must remain highly mobile and dispersed while within the range of enemy weapons: Russian battalion combat teams now occupy the same frontage as their Cold War brigades once did, and they have artillery units assigned in direct support to maneuver with them. EW and air-defense systems have become vital elements for any combat formation; if a unit's EW systems are rendered inoperable, it becomes vulnerable to detection by UAVs, which can help direct artillery and rocket fires onto it within a few short minutes. In reality, combat formations lacking even one of the major elements in this integrated combat system—armor, infantry, artillery, air, anti-aircraft weaponry, and EW capabilities—are vulnerable to defeat in detail.

The technological character of contemporary warfare puts a premium on achieving technological or numerical overmatch against one's foe. However, the Ukrainian military admitted to being unprepared, not only technologically, but in most other dimensions.[40] It possessed little in the way of matching capabilities (not to mention overmatch), and thus found it difficult not only to win engagements but also to present a credible deterrent to Russian or separatist forces. Hence, Ukrainian forces lacked the ability to coerce their foes. NATO and non-NATO organizations can help remedy at least the technological dimension of

that imbalance by providing weaponry with greater range, accuracy, and survivability than the Russians possess. The aim should be to facilitate the exhaustion of Russian forces by inflicting ever-higher losses on them. Note: the aim differs from that typically associated with a strategy of attrition. Historically, mercenary, contractor, and "ad hoc volunteer" formations have been vulnerable to wars of exhaustion. Reports of Russian efforts to avoid military service, if true, suggest such measures would prove beneficial to Western deterrence efforts.[41]

For best effect, coercion and deterrence should have diplomatic, informational, military/operational, and economic dimensions; and these clearly must be integrated and synchronized. However, thus far, the economic dimension—the imposition first of personal, then sectoral sanctions—is the strongest one, albeit, its effectiveness is unclear. Early reports suggested the Russian economy was suffering, falling exchange rates, rising consumer prices, and a plummeting gross domestic product (GDP).[42] Yet, these results may well have had more to do with tumbling oil prices and Putin's counterproductive economic policies than the sanctions themselves, though the latter certainly inhibited Moscow's ability to take remedial action by limiting its access to international markets and loaning institutions.[43] As some analysts warn, however, economic coercion in the form of sanctions may become more difficult to employ in pursuit of policy objectives due to the ability of states with larger economies, such as China, to retaliate by limiting access to their markets.[44] Other reasons include workarounds, such as black markets and alternative trading partners, as well as the basic reluctance of companies to follow sanction protocols that might hurt their bottom lines.

As reports from the U.S. Department of Defense and NATO headquarters indicate, a form of military deterrence is already underway with some repositioning of troops in Eastern Europe, in addition to an uptick in training exercises and other shows of force.[45] Critically, success in the military dimension also consists of establishing and reinforcing anti-access/aerial denial (A2/AD) or "no-go" zones to restrict Russian freedom of maneuver in strategically and operationally important areas, such as Kiev or in the region around the port city of Mariupol. If denied air cover and EW protection, Russian units cannot maneuver without risking detection and swift decimation. Arms sales or transfers of equipment capable of providing Ukrainian combat formations with technological overmatch, or, at least, parity, in EW assets and counter-battery radars, would thus target such efforts.

Understanding Vladimir Putin's motives might prove useful, as some analysts claim.[46] However, doing so could prove counterproductive if he chooses to remain flexible in how he prioritizes and achieves them.[47] In any case, he has not disguised his overall aims, as some experts have noted.[48] For these reasons, the West's goals are (or should be) contingent on what Putin has demonstrated he is capable of doing, rather than what he might want in each case. For instance, the West may well decide to take additional steps to deter further aggression in Ukraine and other parts of Eastern Europe, even while pressing forward with further diplomatic initiatives vis-à-vis Moscow. It might thus apply coercive pressure aimed at encouraging Putin to reduce some of his support to separatist forces, and channeling his intervention in Syria more constructively. The deterrence objective could be accomplished by providing qualitatively superior

military hardware, in enough numbers, to Ukrainian troops, so they have the capability of launching limited counterattacks and of inflicting higher casualties on hostile forces than they themselves incur. The battles in Ukraine have been primitive in many respects, but high-tech in others; the speed and range of one's weapons, therefore, matter a great deal. Furthermore, arming Ukrainian troops with specific high-tech weaponry complements the West's use of economic coercion (through sanctions) by compounding the fiscal costs for Moscow.

The aim of sanctions has been both to punish Moscow and to make sustaining the invasion of Ukraine economically untenable. Accordingly, a military strategy aimed at causing Russia to expend more economic resources in countering Ukrainian high-tech systems would complement such aims, and various studies already exist describing how such cost-imposing strategies might work.[49] In short, even in the environment of a gray zone war, NATO military planners can, and should, design campaigns in which coercive or deterrence operations, or in combination, are conducted to enhance diplomatic, informational, and economic measures already in play, or under development.

Such military operations need not involve physical combat though it is generally difficult to coerce or deter rivals if one's willingness to use military force is not abundantly clear to all parties. Still, military strategists and campaign planners essentially have all the tools they might need to design and carry out "non-shooting" coercive and deterrence operations. While military hardware, advisors, and intelligence support may be limited legally or politically, for the most part, the West can function within such restrictions. Ambiguity presents opportunities to both sides, not just aggressors.

However, to take advantage of this ambiguity, the West will have to adjust its mindset. One step in the right direction would be to set aside such terms as "opponent" or "enemy" in favor of "rival" or "competitor." Unlike enemies, rivals may cooperate in one theater while competing in another. To illustrate the point, we may call upon the quintessential conventional war once again, the Second World War, specifically the uneasy alliance between the Western powers and the Soviet Union. The West must also embrace what Clausewitz referred to as strategy's "quiet labor," that is, the ceaseless work of integrating military aims and political objectives, and of acquiring as many advantages as possible before, during, and after any use of military force.[50] Strategy does not stop simply because funding streams do; plenty of opportunities remain for coercive activity to take place below the threshold of war, and these must be strategized and war-gamed. If history is any guide, we can be sure our rivals will instigate coercive activities wherever and whenever it appears to be advantageous to do so.

Understanding Coercion and Deterrence.

To employ the coercion-deterrence dynamic, the West's military strategists and campaign planners need to study each strategy more closely because each has important limitations. These do not disappear when the two are used in tandem. As stated previously, coercion usually means compelling people to do something, such as surrender; whereas, deterrence is commonly seen as getting people to opt not to do something, such as becoming irregular fighters and continuing to fight.[51] Clearly, each strategy closely resembles the other. Coercive strategies typically

include such measures as punishment, denial, intimidation, and reward—all of which have been in use for centuries. Rome's legions fought many punitive actions designed to coerce opponents rather than to annihilate or enslave them. Punishment might have been severe in some cases, but usually, Rome wanted tribute, not ruins. Medieval wars, as well, often aimed at coercing foes through military actions designed to punish or deny, such as taking livestock, burning crops, or imposing levies.

Although coercive strategies have been employed for centuries, serious study of them did not begin until the 1950s and 1960s. The two pioneers in this subject were the political scientist and national security analyst Robert E. Osgood and the Harvard economist, game theorist, and Nobel Prize winner, Thomas C. Schelling. As Osgood, a veteran of the Second World War, noted: "The purpose of war is to employ force skillfully in order to exert the desired effect on an adversary's will along a continuous spectrum from diplomacy, to crises short of war, to an overt clash of arms."[52] To this view, Schelling added the argument that military force could not only shape an adversary's behavior short of all-out war, but it could also be applied in "controlled" and "measured" ways to compel, intimidate, or deter. "The power to hurt," Schelling asserted, "is bargaining power. To exploit it is diplomacy—vicious diplomacy, but diplomacy."[53] Its purpose is to alter an opponent's behavior without having one's own conduct modified too greatly in the process.[54]

This view forms the basis for the "bargaining model" of war in which military power functions almost as a type of currency to be expended in a process of violent bartering.[55] It is a view well-suited for gray

zone wars though it has serious limitations in that the currency of exchange is actually lives, not goods. That fact adds another dimension to the notion of bargaining because it means, with mounting casualties, parties can become invested in an armed conflict in ways not typical of bartering. Consequently, they might remain committed to a course of action longer than they should; it is easier to "walk away" from the marketplace than from an armed conflict.

Coercion and its complement, deterrence, thus require viewing diplomacy and war together, as a "continuous spectrum," rather than as they are perceived today, as an activity bifurcated along distinct political and military areas of responsibility. Unfortunately, as stated earlier, this partition exists more for legal, doctrinal, or bureaucratic reasons, which do not necessarily facilitate the practice of strategy. While those boundaries must be respected as far as the approval of military actions is concerned, they are poor excuses for not planning or strategizing potential courses of action.

To be sure, the West's political and legal partitions render it vulnerable to exploitation by its rivals. However, the task of the strategist is to overcome these weaknesses by finding workarounds that are acceptable both legally and politically. The West could certainly remove its self-imposed partitions, if it wished, or at least adjust them so they are less limiting. Nonetheless, doing so would likely prove difficult since those partitions are closely intertwined with the West's values, and many Western states do not want the recourse to war to be an easy one. A clear and present existential threat might prompt a radical shift in those values. However, gray zone wars, by design, are not meant to pose such a threat.

Coercion and deterrence have many of the same limitations. Both require active monitoring of potentially fluid situations, credible communications across cultural and psychological boundaries, and at least some shared expectations regarding the use of force. Like most other strategies, coercion and deterrence are vulnerable to mirror-imaging, or projecting one's values and ways of thinking onto one's adversaries. Such projections lead to risky assumptions about what one's rivals hold dear and how they will behave. Perhaps one example is assuming Putin will view stability operations with the same sense of importance as the West does.

In theory, coercive strategies offer more flexibility and greater control over escalation than other military strategies such as attrition or annihilation, though these too can exert coercive and deterrent pressure. We can apply coercive force incrementally in what is known as "graduated pressure," an approach tried by U.S. Presidents James Polk in the Mexican-American War, and Lyndon Johnson in the Vietnam War. Each applied force in steps or phases, increasing its intensity with the aim of bringing their opponents to the negotiating table. The idea was to avoid committing more military power than necessary, or no more than the American public seemed likely to abide. However, each ran into difficulty because their respective opponents' pain thresholds were higher than anticipated, which in turn meant the amount of coercive force had to be increased beyond what was expected.[56] As one historian noted with regard to the conflict in Vietnam, "The level of pain Hanoi was prepared to endure was greater than Washington could inflict."[57]

To be sure, applying coercive pressure gradually may help achieve one's objectives at minimal cost;

however, it can also prolong the struggle and increase one's losses until war weariness sets in and the public demands an end to the conflict. Friction and human emotion can also make it more difficult to measure and control the level of force we employ, thereby potentially leading to escalation.

In addition to these limitations, deterrence has several others unique to it.[58] A military strategy of deterrence requires making our adversary believe we have the physical and psychological capacity either to defeat an act of aggression or to make its costs exceed its benefits. International relations literature currently recognizes four types of deterrence: **direct,** which refers to deterring an attack against oneself; **extended**—deterring an attack against a friend or ally; **general**—deterring a potential threat; and immediate—deterring an imminent attack.[59] In practice, these usually overlap in some way. For instance, the French and British practiced immediate and extended deterrence on behalf of Poland in 1939 but failed to dissuade Hitler from invading it.

Much of today's strategic literature also underscores how difficult it can be to assess whether a strategy of deterrence is working. It is not always possible to know whether the absence of a rival's action was because of deterrence, or despite it. As former U.S. National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, once noted:

> Since deterrence can only be tested negatively, by events that do *not* take place, and since it is never possible to demonstrate why something has not occurred, it became especially difficult to assess whether the existing policy was the best possible policy or a just barely effective one.[60]

It may actually be possible to research historical records, as they become declassified, to determine whether in certain cases deterrence truly worked. Obviously, those results will come well after the fact, and might not serve the needs of military planners. It is best, therefore, to accept this uncertainty at the outset.

Second, deterrence is inherently fragile. It rests on establishing a balance of power—in technological, military, political, and diplomatic dimensions—that can change quickly, and give one party a decisive advantage over the other; or one party may feel it is losing parity and must act before it is too late. Consequently, deterrence can have a short shelf-life. For that reason, a deterrence strategy requires constant attention.

Third, as with any military strategy, deterrence requires knowing one's adversaries, especially since not all would-be aggressors can be deterred. Some, like Hitler, could be delayed, but not truly deterred. Whenever they hesitated, they did so only long enough to deal with a problem on another front or to gain a better advantage in the situation before them. Additionally, "suicide bombers" may have challenged the rational-actor model of deterrence in recent years. One way of coping with such actors is by denying them the conditions they require for success, such as by hardening defenses and dispersing likely targets so as to reduce casualties, thereby making the attack itself seem less useful.[61] Deterrence also works best when parties share a baseline of expectations. Each party must be able to "read" the motives and actions of its rival; otherwise, counterproductive decisions can occur.

Finally, deterrence is vulnerable to friction and chance. Accidents, large or small, always happen. It can be difficult to determine whether such incidents were accidental: was an aircraft overflight due to

pilot error, or was it on a special mission? How parties respond to accidents or unforeseen events can easily upset deterrence, particularly if efforts at communication are misperceived; this is especially true of nuclear deterrence. Communication is, of course, vital, but cultural and psychological filters can act as a form of friction and distort one's intended message. That is not to say ambiguity is never beneficial in strategy. Sometimes it can be useful to keep rivals guessing as to where one stands. Ambiguity is, in fact, one of the principles underpinning the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, which clearly stated the United States did not support Taiwan independence but also laid the groundwork for a "robust unofficial relationship" between the two parties.[62]

As a matter of comparison, Beijing's particular approach to gray zone wars involves a form of direct deterrence. It consists of positioning several hundred land-based, anti-ship ballistic and cruise missiles in a manner capable of denying or restricting the movement of other countries' naval vessels within the East China and South China Seas. The Chinese may well view their strategy as "counter-intervention" or "peripheral defense," since it is designed to prevent other powers from interfering in offshore areas Beijing sees as vital to its interests.[63] In contrast, the Pentagon refers to this strategy as anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) since it hampers Washington's ability to provide extended deterrence for its allies in the region. Beijing's counter-intervention strategy includes not only the use of modern air and missile technologies but also a Chinese version of "political warfare," which entails refuting the lawfulness of an intervention, also known as "law-warfare" or "lawfare."[64] As noted, the West's legalist view of war is particularly vulnerable to this tactic.

In response, the United States and its allies have considered employing their own A2/AD strategy, one that would restrict the movement of Chinese and North Korean vessels within the Western Pacific Region.[65] If implemented, the West's countermove will result in overlapping missile and aircraft defensive zones along the Pacific Rim. Yet, the West can do much more to strengthen its strategic position with respect to China. It can enhance its alliances in the region with more multilateral training exercises, intelligence sharing, and cooperation, and even arms sales and rearmament programs in select cases; it can also develop additional trade agreements along the lines of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The West also needs to do more in the way of strategic communications to shore up its image in Asia and the Pacific, and especially in China.

A word of caution is in order, however, since implementing coercion and deterrence strategies can lead to competition for military superiority, an arms race. Simply defined, an arms race is an effort to keep pace with, or to surpass, an adversary's military might. Some debate exists over whether an arms race is underway in Asia and the Pacific rim.[66] History, in fact, shows arms races are often the outgrowth of the coercion-deterrence dynamic. One critical question, then, is whether the West believes its collective economic power is sufficient to prevail in such a race and whether it wants to accept the risk of engaging in one. With that in mind, the West would do well to review its economic policies and ensure they are up to the challenges of global competition in the 21st century.

In sum, the so-called hybrid and gray zone wars of the present are not new, but they have highlighted important failings in the West's conception of armed

conflict as well as the U.S. military's model for plan-
ning campaigns in support of strategy. The West's
conception of war is at once unrealistic and self-limit-
ing. It confines armed conflict to an artificially narrow
space in the spectrum of international behavior, rather
than giving it broader scope as a risky but common
political activity. As a result, the West has put itself
at a disadvantage. Its rivals do not view war as an
anomaly but as a natural, if sometimes costly, means
of pursuing their interests. The West does not have
to embrace the values of its rivals in order to develop
counters to their coercive strategies. However, it does
need a model capable of providing flexibility not only
from the standpoint of responding to a crisis but also
from the perspective of preventing one. The coercion-
deterrence dynamic can accomplish that.

For it to work, however, it must be set within an
equally flexible framework, one capable of accounting
for the fluctuating potential and variable combinations
of all forms of power. Positioning offers such a frame-
work. Gaining an advantage is at the heart of strategic
practice, as any historical survey or military treatise
would attest. While that fact is not necessarily in dis-
pute — what the West in general and the United States,
in particular, have lacked for some time is a frame-
work capable of capturing and rationalizing that prac-
tice. Positioning offers that framework, and it does so
without sacrificing flexibility in terms of the method
or the intensity of application. Accruing advantages,
in turn, adds heft to coercion and deterrence, and may
help pave the way for cooperation on other fronts and
in other ways.

Viewing hybrid or gray zone wars as forms of co-
ercion, deterrence, or both facilitates lifting their veil
of ambiguity. It also enables military strategists and

campaign planners to develop courses of action capable of applying pressure to as many dimensions as possible, and for as long as desired, to achieve policy goals.

Unfortunately, the U.S. military's current model for designing campaigns overlooks both the coercion-deterrence dynamic and framework of positioning. It exists independent of political contexts and objectives and portrays military campaigns merely as struggles between opposing wills for domination. At best, it represents an ideal case—how the military services might wish to fight—which is exactly the wrong approach since ideal cases, by definition, do not occur in the real world. On the contrary, a model should derive from an analysis of historical practice; it should approximate what typically happens in armed conflict and, wherever possible, identify recurring themes for the edification and conceptual preparation of practitioners. For that reason, the study of coercion and deterrence strategies ought to feature more prominently in professional military education. These strategies also deserve a central place in any official doctrine related to campaign design.

Although Western democracies rightly defend the inviolability of civilian authority over military leadership, political leaders and diplomats will rarely have the training, time, or experience to become experts in the use of these strategic tools. It thus falls upon military professionals to do so. Yet, to be successful, military professionals must render their advice in language policymakers find accessible. Otherwise, the gap between civilian and military thinking will grow ever greater, and eventually the West will find itself seriously out-positioned by its rivals.

ENDNOTES

1. A much shorter version of this essay appeared as Antulio J. Echevarria II, "How Should We Think about 'Gray-Zone' Wars?" *Infinity Journal,* Vol. 5, No. 1, Fall 2015, pp. 16-20.

2. Elizabeth Quintana, "2016 Year Ahead: SDSR 2015 and Threats to the UK," December 2015; available from *https://rusi.org/multimedia/2016-year-ahead-sdsr-2015-and-threats-uk,* accessed January 29, 2016.

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12. For an example of the diagram's use, see Woo Pyung-Kyun, "The Russian Hybrid War in the Ukraine Crisis: Some Characteristics and Implications," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis,* Vol. 27, No. 3, September 2015, pp. 383–400.

13. James Burk, "Expertise, Jurisdiction, and Legitimacy of the Military Profession," *The Future of the Army Profession*, Don M. Snider and Gayle L. Watkins, eds., New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002, pp. 19-38.

14. For more information, see: Department of Defense, *Beyond the Build Delivering Outcomes through Cyberspace The Commander's Vision and Guidance for US Cyber Command,* Fort Mead, MD: United States Cyber Command, June 3, 2015; available from *www.defense.gov/Portals/1/features/2015/0415_cyber-strategy/docs/US-Cyber-Command-Commanders-Vision.pdf,* accessed February 10, 2016; and see information available from *www.africom.mil/,* accessed February 10, 2016.

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20. John Andreas Olsen, *John Warden and the Renaissance of American Air Power,* Washington, DC: Potomac, 2007.

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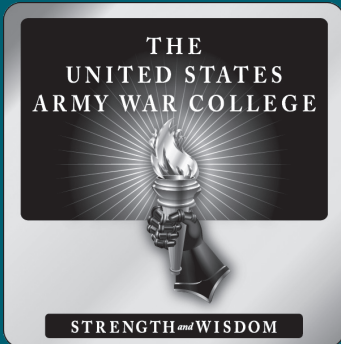
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