Putin's Russia as Strategic Competitor

by Meelis Kiili

Resumé

För mer än 2000 år sedan skrev den kinesiske generalen och militärteoretikern Sun Tzu: "Om du känner din fiende och känner dig själv, behöver du inte frukta resultatet av hundra slag. Om du känner dig själv men inte fienden, för varje vunnen seger kommer du också att lida en förlust. Om du känner varken fienden eller dig själv, besegras du i varje slag."[1] Det krävs således att vi inte enbart har kunskap om våra egna samhällen och dessas svagheter liksom trender och utmaningar som konfronterar oss, utan också tar med i bilden hur detta påverkar Ryssland. Vi måste använda rätt utgångsvärden för att kunna värdera de ryska kapaciteterna, liksom för att kunna värdera landets avsikter, ambitionsnivå och riskvillighet. För detta finns att tillgå alltför få strateger och analytiker med djupare insikter i ämnet. Flertalet framträdande officiella personer som har att hantera frågor kopplade till Ryssland inser inte att landet förhåller sig till en komplett annorlunda logik och dito värderingar. Av en mängd olika skäl, alltifrån avsaknad av kompetens till en önskan om att uppnå populistiska politiska vinster, frammanas linjära lösningar på ytterligt komplexa situationer. Syftet med denna artikel är att ge ett litet bidrag till vad som får ses som ett begränsat försök att lära om och förstå Ryssland.

THE IDEA THAT two parties are in strategic competition implies some level of conflict between them. Contemporary non-linear conflict, often referred to as 'grey-zone' or 'hybrid', blurs the boundaries between different stages of intensity. Yet the traditional (Western) division into peace, crisis and war—see *Figure 1*—is still useful in helping to visualise, understand and explain processes, challenges and opportunities from both our own and Russia's perspective. The Russian Chief of the General Staff, General of the Army Valery Gerasimov, used a similar illustration of the conflict spectrum in his whole of government guidance for hybrid war.[2] The only difference is that while Figure 1 describes conflict from a defensive perspective, Gerasimov's starting point was offensive.

Peace, Crisis and War

For most European countries, the end of WWII marked the start of a period of peace and prosperity. Yet not all shared the same fortune. The Hungarian revolution against Soviet-imposed policies was crushed in 1956; Czechs and Slovaks suffered a similar fate in 1968. Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians resisted and fought for many years after the war, and it was not until 1994 that the last occupying forces left their soil. In the same period, the 1990s, the Balkan nations became engaged in harsh conflict. War broke out in Georgia in 2008, while today in Ukraine violence and death are an everyday reality. Russia has been directly or indirectly the major player in all these conflicts. It has extended its operations into the social, cognitive,

economic and information domains to the extent that the notion of a 'border state' no longer relates only to the traditional dimension of geography. Any NATO country can become a border state at any time. Peace is not a perpetual condition, but a strategic aspiration.

But even in peacetime, democratic societies face unrest and turbulence through, for example, elections, political battles, environmental disputes, strikes and riots. These are normal, even progressive, if they are conducted within the formal and tacit norms of society, but hyper-connectivity and individualisation has prepared fertile ground for the rise of populist policies and radical parties. Politicians must rapidly deliver promises that often turn out to be unaffordable and unsustainable. Decision-making becomes emotional rather than analytical and pragmatic.

Through the long period of peace, defence has for many become irrelevant. Societies have no sense of imminent threat. Competition for resources results in cuts to defence spending and the creation of a myopic foreign policy. The widely differing cultures and historical experiences within the transatlantic nations do not allow common strategies to be generated to maintain resilience. Each nation has its own formulae for peace and prosperity. While there is a collective perception of Western values—human rights, the sovereignty of states, freedom of speech, free movement, rule of law, democracy—these may be manipulated to serve hypocritical and ill-judged policies. But consistency should require that, for example, the sovereignty of Ukraine should be seen as imperative as the sovereignty of any other country. The very moment values are dishonoured, they cease to be a strength. As tradeable commodities, they simply provide Russia with footholds for long-term gain.

Grey-zone Conflict

Grey-zone conflicts entail situations in which nations are pushed out of their comfort zones, and when the tacit social norms and dynamics of group behaviour escalate above the threshold of normality (see Figure 1) creating uncertainties for the targeted country. According to the late President of the Russian Academy of Military Science, General of the Army Makhmut Akhmetovich Gareev, grey-zone conflict involves the creation of managed chaos for provoking various kinds of disturbances, and the disruption of the targeted state's internal resilience.[3] Russia has attempted to create 'controlled instability' on various occasions, including in NATO and EU countries. Russia's efforts to manipulate election processes, for example, have become a norm rather than an exception. Russia has weaponised social media, which is cheap and anonymous, to attack social processes or national debates. It has even attempted to organise coups d'état, such as in Montenegro in 2016. Opportunities form a major element of Russia's way of thinking—it strives to create them, and use them to achieve its own objectives.

Grey war is difficult to counter. It does not have a solid structure but is fluid and, as autocratic regimes do not have the ethical constraints that democratic states do, is well-suited to clashes between them. Grey-zone activities may allow Russia to gain the initiative in and shape the nature of any conflict by attacking an adversary in the social and cognitive domains. Several leading Russian military thinkers, such as General Gerasimov, Kartapolov and S.A. Bogdanov regard grey war not just as the initial phase of a broader war, but as the phase that will determine whether objectives are achieved. According to them, Western civilisation is most vulnerable in this period, permitting

maximum effect to be achieved with minimal expenditure.

Russian policy makers generally believe that they understand Western politics better than the West understands theirs. They believe they can predict how the transatlantic leadership will respond, providing them opportunities for strategic surprise and an ability to outmanoeuvre the West. As former Deputy SACEUR, General James Everard, noted, "We may lose without noticing it, if we fail to regard hybrid concept as a warfare plus."[4] The risk is clear if we do not make a conscious effort to learn to know Russia and apply proper policies to restrain its ambitions. We need plans and policies that aim to prevent it from reaching the grey zone in the first place and restoring normality as quickly as possible if it does—before controlled instability escalates to hot war.

Hot war is far more understandable than grey-zone conflict as there are clear distinctions between the belligerents. But its brutal nature and embedded risks clearly make it the most undesirable form of conflict; it is safe to assume that Russia too would wish to avoid it. Yet, as Leon Trotsky, the founder of Red Army said, "You may not be interested in war, but war is interested in you." Despite the predictions of commentators such as Norman Angell, who suggested in 1913 that war was impossible due to the financial and economic interdependency between states, and despite the fact that no head of state, political circle or diplomat desired war at that that time, the bloody and long-lasting First World War erupted nonetheless.[5] Furthermore, Russian ideology, adapted from authors such as the Prussian General Friedrich von Bernhardi, rests on the concept that war is a biological need of mankind (according to Bernhardi, war is a law of nature so fundamental that all other laws are subordinate to it).[6] This difference in understanding peace and war is the most essential difference between transatlantic and Russian thought.

Russian Society

For many, 'Russia' and 'Russians' are synonymous. However, Russian citizens are not a homogeneous group, but a very diverse collection of people of different ethnicity, religion and social norms. Chechnya, for instance, despite its defeat in the second Chechen war, has been able to establish a social order rather remote from Kremlin norms and central legislation.

Czar Peter the Great introduced the word 'Russia' to refer to the territories of ethnic orthodox Slavs. This relatively recent interpretation (the Russian Primary Chronicle traces the cultural origins of Russia to the Kyivan Rus peoples federated under the Varangian (Viking) dynasty. Also, centuries long Mongol dominance is ignored. It was an effort to strengthen his power and mark the dominance of his rule over his conquered territories. The social order of the Russian empire has been extremely varied throughout its history. For instance, the Czars granted extensive privileges to the German-speaking Estonian and Livonian Knighthood, creating a semi-autonomous western cultural and economic space. Finland also had autonomy and only loose ties to the central power, thus it was only logical that the Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians and Poles would seize the opportunity to create independent states of their own at the time of the Russian revolution in 1917.

The Soviet Union made efforts to build a state in which everyone was Soviet, no matter their origin. Soviet society was supposed to be "socialist in content but national in form".[7] It promoted an ideology illustrated by numerous role models, from Karl Marx to the

local collective farm's milkmaid. These role models do not exist in contemporary Russia, where the only reference is the president—the centrality of his role stands in contrast to a lack of broader identity or ideology.

The president also has a power circle – the oligarchy. The essence of oligarchy, the concentration of power and resources in the hands of a small circle of people, has not changed since ancient times. Russia's oligarchy is hierarchical – the practices of its leadership are replicated at each level down to the lowest level of state governance, all under the strict control of an autocratic Kremlin – and organised into political and economic structures. The economic structure is obliged to pay tribute to the political structure as the price for its permission to exploit the nation's resources. It is strictly forbidden to be active in politics unless it is to implement a tasking from the political oligarchy.

The president is pivotal to the system. No decision is made without his consent, and no appointment without his approval. The senior ranks of the oligarchy comprise his close KGB associates, friends and trusted acquaintances whose existence depends on him being in power. Vassals with no political ambition run the administration. The president is not immortal, but while there may be alterations to the current power distribution under a new leader, it is safe to assume, particularly after the recent rather rudimentary amendments to the Russian Constitution, that there will still be just one person in charge. New favourites and beneficiaries will be installed, wealth and influence will be redistributed, the Russian oligarchy will very likely remain intact.

Corruption is rife. Close associates, friends, former colleagues, and acquaintances are the beneficiaries of state sponsored projects and the holders of influential positions in the administration. Power circles have concealed or semi-formal ties to organised crime. Hypocrisy and nepotism are widespread and widely tolerated. This does not mean that people do not want better lives. For the most part, they want a good education for their children and reasonable living standards, and there is a hard-working middle class providing services and benefits for society – but this is a very different middle class from that of the West. First, most of its members are state employees, such as teachers, scientists, civil servants, and the military. Second, private entrepreneurs are literally at the mercy of the oligarchs and must yield in cases where interests conflict, undermining the potential embedded in the middle class, reducing the effectiveness of society, and providing a motivation for the oligarchy to stay in power.

The opposition, meanwhile, is weak and divided. A significant part is also another tool of the leadership, used to imitate democratic processes and to implement so-called 'guided democracy', which ensures that pre-approved candidates are elected through phony elections.

These conditions have combined to create a trend in which many people, irrespective of their social status, look to make their way closer to the circle of oligarchs. Loyalty thus has a rather different connotation in Russia, the widespread corruption is accepted as a means, and the leadership remains relatively confident of their ability to shape and control domestic public opinion. Nonetheless, the easy access to and rapid spread of information means that occasional events sometimes lead to sporadic demonstrations without central organisation or leadership. Russia has thus started to curtail free means of communication and control the flow of information.

The oligarchy must also be rewarded economically. Russia's total GDP is compara-

ble to Canada's, but its per capita rate is much lower.[8] The distribution of wealth is thus extremely discriminating, making the welfare and living standards of ordinary Russian citizens much lower than those of their Western counterparts. The oligarchs are content with this system, so improving the living standards of the people is not on offer.

Societal Glue

The power circle has recognised the need to create at least some sense of statehood if, in the absence of identity, ideology, or prospects for economic improvement, the state is not to collapse in a complete social vacuum. Victory in the Second World War has thus become a central feature of Russian's self-esteem. Since it is literally Russia's only remaining significant achievement on a global scale, both society and the power circle hang on to their former glory and the huge sacrifice made by the Russian people. Victory over the Nazis has become almost a religious event, with the Soviet Union portrayed as the saviour of humanity. Historical facts, such as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, the invasion of Poland and the Soviet-Nazi victory parade in Brest to celebrate its defeat, Russia's support to Nazi Germany during its 1940 campaign in France, United States lend-lease programme to support the USSR war effort, are all denied, ignored or reduced in significance. Those who mention these contradictory facts are accused of rewriting history.

Geopolitics is another platform manipulated by the power circle. Prominent professors such as Aleksandr Dugin, Kamaludin S. Gadziyev, Vladimir A. Kolosov, Nikolai S. Mironenko, Nikolai N. Nartov, Dmitri Trenin, and Gennadiy Ziuganov are associated with various schools of thought that elaborate Russia's position in the world, its interests, its values, its desire to be respected and its right for its hegemony to be accepted.[9] Despite the 19th century tones of their arguments, they have been able to attract some sympathisers within the transatlantic community ready to plead that we should respect their demand to refrain from placing NATO bases on the soil of former USSR satellites. This, of course, denies basic principles of sovereignty which allow every country the right to invite (or to deny) the presence of others on their territories. It ignores the reality that the physical locations of every military formation of every Alliance nation are, by definition, NATO bases. And it overlooks the hypocrisy that allows Russia to build new bases in the Arctic, for example, where its own territory borders that of four NATO members.

In the Russian mind, the idea of 'respect' is closely tied to a desire to be feared. This may appear an alien concept, but it has precedents in Europe's history. Kaiser Wilhelm II, for example, demanded respect. This sentiment was shared by his people—in his book *Armed Nation*, Field Marshal Colmar von der Goltz wrote, "Our status as a respected nation is not due to the sharp wits but due to the sharp sword".[10] This thinking illustrates haw complex and complicated states of affairs can often have simple, even primitive reasons. The Kaiser's actions were driven by his ego; this is likely also true of the Russian president.

Geopolitics is intended to provide the oligarchy with the purpose and moral grounds to unite the nation and justify their demands. It is supposed to create an illusion of cultural supremacy over a West that has abandoned the fundamental principles of Christianity, and to portray Russia as the saviour of core Christian values—the Third Rome. Even the recent amendments to Russia's constitution emphasise the moral domination of

the Orthodox Church. This ideology of 'the Russian World' was meant to win the hearts and minds of the population and to justify the dominance of the Russian oligarchy.

However, there were flaws in this plan. The structure and demography of Russian society are changing. The growing proportion of Muslims, for instance, means that appeals to Christian values are not necessarily attractive for a significant part of the domestic audience. In the near abroad, meanwhile, the invasion of Ukraine made it impossible to claim the supremacy of the Russian World. The strategic effect was quite the opposite. Putin repeated the mistakes of Stalin's invasion of Finland in 1939, which united a fragmented society into a solid entity. In Ukraine, the population transformed from being merely residents into a nation. Given their sense of betrayal, this change is most likely irreversible. The autocephaly of the Ukrainian church marked a final failure of the Russian World ambition. Putin managed to create an enemy from this expected outcome, leaving him, in his own words, with only three allies—the Army, Navy and Air Force.[11]

The Military

The military instrument of power is central to the Russian leadership. It is the most visible of the tools available to the state and is used to create the illusion of military supremacy to impress the domestic audience. It is also a tool to intimidate neighbours and to harass the wider global community. Modernisation has undoubtedly produced an impressive set of armed forces compared to the state they were in a decade ago. Yet it is not so much Russia's new generation weapon systems that should be a concern—most of these have turned out to be upgrades of existing systems—but its short and effective decision-making cycle and militarised whole of government approach.

In common with many autocratic nations, Russia, and the Soviet Union before it, have had a 'super weapon' fixation, looking for and sometimes even announcing a breakthrough technology that would give them the upper hand over the West. Prior to the warfighting in the 1991 Gulf War, for example, the Soviet Union's leading generals were convinced that Soviet military equipment would outperform that of the West. Its poor performance had an enormous negative psychological effect not only on the military but also on a society for which defeat in Afghanistan was still a fresh memory. Another silly Soviet slogan boasted, "We might not have as many goods as West does, but we do have the most powerful hydrogen bomb".

It is not, however, weapons that fight, but people. In hindsight, morale was low in the Soviet Armed Forces, whose self-regulating system was adapted from the hierarchical arrangements of the prison system. The two-year conscription period resulted in four drafts in service at any one time, with the most recent performing every duty, while the older drafts enjoyed privileges. Abuse and humiliation of new recruits was regarded as normal masculine behaviour, tacitly approved by the officer corps. This system was inherited by the Russian Armed Forces but collapsed when the conscription period was reduced to one year. Some are nostalgic about the earlier arrangements and while remnants of it remain, there is not enough time or hierarchy to make it as self-sustaining.

Mandatory conscription is not very popular in contemporary Russia but is necessary to build the wartime strength of the reserve component. The regular component is relatively effective and competent, with most sol-

diers having combat experience from Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria. Its Special Forces have a prominent role in grey-zone conflict. In addition to formal structures, Russia uses illegal armed groupings such as those formed in the occupied Ukrainian (the United Armed Forces of Novorossiya) and Georgian territories, and semi-private mercenary companies such as the Wagner Group, and the Moran Security Group. The combination of regulars, conscripts, Special Forces, and proxy forces does not necessarily make Russia an insuperable military power, but it is a force to be taken seriously.

Adding to the danger, though, are the speed of decision making and the availability to the president of unrestricted state resources, including human capital. These increase Russia's chances to achieve its hot war objectives before NATO could assemble a large enough force to respond. At present, Putin could likely rally popular support for such an unpopular decision as the population has been conditioned to believe that is under attack, destined to fulfil a greater purpose and, in any case, has little to lose. Russian attitudes towards death are different from those in the West – it is not that Russian people want to die, but that historically Russia's rulers have regarded human capital as a renewable resource. Front line troops in the Soviet Army were told that their task was to stay alive for six minutes until the next echelon could take over. The population is prepared to make sacrifices if they believe there to be a greater cause—something, perhaps, as worthy as victory in the Second World War.

Russia as a Threat to the West

If threat is a combination of intent, capabilities and opportunities, then Russia is a threat. It may not have a formal strategy to meet its objectives, but it does have the combination of ends, ways and means that hint at such a strategy. In terms of ends, Russia's objectives collide with our own. As former Secretary of State General James Mattis put it:

> Putin seeks to shatter NATO. He aims to diminish the appeal of the western democratic model and attempts to undermine America's moral authority; his actions are designed not to challenge our arms at this point but to undercut and compromise our belief in our ideals.[12]

Putin himself has repeatedly announced the need to end the Western dominance and to create a new multipolar world order, in which Russia has hegemony over its near abroad. In addition to these geopolitical ends, Russia wants to ensure the survival of its oligarchical elite. Gary Kasparov, the chess champion and long-time Putin opponent, argues that Putin has

> no consideration of what is or is not good for Russia, or for Russians, only what is best for him and his close circle of oligarch elites.[13]

In terms of means, Russia has 3 percent of the world's economy, 2 percent of its population and about 12–13 percent of land area. It also has 1 900 nuclear warheads. The nuclear arsenal aside, these numbers are not so impressive. The transatlantic nations have up to 50 percent of the world's economy, and five to six times the population of Russia. While its employment cannot be ruled out, even the nuclear arsenal is an uncertain resource, given the desire of the oligarchs to survive and to preserve their luxury lifestyles. Most of them have invested, and have property in western Europe, where family members also live.

Squaring the Circle: Hybrid Operations

The huge misbalance between ends and means should not, however, indicate that Russia is not a real threat. Putin is fully aware of the shortages in his conventional toolbox, and has chosen to attack the problem from a different angle. As he explained in 2006:

> we should not chase after quantitative indicators … our responses will have to be based on intellectual superiority. They will be asymmetrical, less costly.[14]

Deputy Defence Minister of the Russian Federation and Chief of the Main Directorate for Political-Military Affairs of the Russian Armed Forces Colonel General Andrey Kartapolov has laid out the main characteristics of hybrid or asymmetric operations.[15] They entail: searching for and exposing the enemy's weak points; imposing one's own will on the enemy for the duration of the conflict; and spending few resources in response to enemy actions. The goal is to achieve superiority or parity by operating in the economic, diplomatic, information and military domains. Success can be best guaranteed by precisely determining the enemy's most vulnerable points as action here will ensure maximum effect with minimal expenditure of one's own forces and resources. Gerasimov, meanwhile, notes that:

> In modern conflicts, political objectives are achieved through the use of political, diplomatic, economic, and other non-military means in combination with military force. Non-military means have been, in a number of cases, more effective than military force, whereas the ratio between the former and latter should be roughly 4:1.[16]

Implemented successfully, a hybrid approach should create conditions of chaos, domestic political crisis, and economic collapse in enemy states.[17] Russia's adoption of the concept is an effort to operationalise the doctrine for confrontation with the West advanced two decades ago by Yevgeny Primakov.

The situation in the Kerch straits – a complex application of political, economic, information, and other non-military means, carried out with the support of the military force[18] – illustrates the grammar of Russian offensive hybrid operations. The Mariupol and Berdjansk harbours in the Azov Sea are vital sea lines of communication for Ukraine. They are essential lifelines for heavy industry, hubs for export and import and, along with the steel industry, leading employers in the region. The construction of a bridge over the Kerch Straits prevented the use of very large ships, but did not stop trade, prompting Russia to design a sophisticated hybrid operation. Russia announced the need for pre-emptive action in the Azov Sea to avoid terrorists infiltrating Russian ports. All ships entering the Azov Sea, including Russian ones, were inspected by the Russian border guard and customs authorities: for Russian ships, this took about thirty minutes, but for ships operating under other flags it took up to a week. As businesses cannot afford such delays, the Ukrainian harbours became unattractive and lost most of their long-term customers. This had adverse impacts on the Ukrainian, and in particular, the local economy where salaries were cut and jobs lost.

But it also affected social dynamics. Deepening uncertainty increased friction between pro Ukraine and pro-Putin elements of society. Propaganda and disinformation appeared, supporting pro-Russian sentiments, and condemning the legitimate Kiev government. The detention of 24 Ukrainian sailors was meant to intimidate and humiliate the personnel of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and the Ukrainian government, and to send a strategic message echoing Thucydides

maxim that "the strong do what they will, the weak suffer what they must".[19] Even the Western sanctions against Russia were manipulated: the shallow waters in the straits require the use of a pilot service from Kerch port which, because it in occupied territory, attracts sanctions for anyone doing business with it. Overall, the Kerch operation created multi-level sinister effects in different domains, while costing Russia nothing.

The constant political competition in democratic societies makes long-term planning difficult. Russia, on the other hand, can employ strategic patience as there is no apparent risk to Putin's power. According to one former diplomat, Putin does not play chess; he is a good poker player.[20] He gambles big, then waits quietly for his next chance knowing that targets of opportunity are the most difficult to predict. Meanwhile, emotions settle, and the West becomes used to a 'new normal', creating the impression domestically that Russia's imperial might has been restored—this is important, as even autocratic leaders must be attentive to popular sentiments in their societies. Successful gambling thus also requires means such as pundits, politicians, and former state officials from the West. Whether they are influenced by economic, political, informational and psychological approaches, the intent is to increase instability and fractures in the transatlantic community.

The hybrid concept aims to weaponise anything that can be weaponised: information, history, energy, and so forth. As early as 1920, the Soviet diplomat, Maxim Maximovich Litvinov, suggested that energy should be the Soviet Union's primary leverage over the West.[21] Today, however, oil and gas are Russia's main source of revenue, making it dependent on the Western market. This revenue is so important that domestic industry is a secondary customer and must yield to priority sales to the EU; on many occasions, particularly in cold winters, deliveries to the internal market have been reduced. Yet the transatlantic community has not been able to make use of this advantage; on the contrary it has proved difficult to implement a diversified energy policy. Russia's has been able to gain disproportional influence on some Western governments by feeding their hunger for energy and desire for profit, while at the same time engaging influential individuals with access to decision makers—for example, the employment by Gazprom of the former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder.

Conclusion: A Clash of Cultures

In its official rhetoric, Russia portrays itself a victim facing the preparation phase of a hybrid attack from the West. In this phase, according to Russian theorists, information is the primary means for manoeuvring into a favourable position. In a war, there are no lies. All information is either secret or used for deception – as Winston Churchill once noted, "In wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies."[22] Russia uses strategic deception at all levels to influence the behaviour of Western populations, create internal tensions, and divide alliances. This may seem sinister to the West, but for Russia it is simply a legitimate and pragmatic aspect of war.

This disrespect for Western terms, customs and norms makes dialogue with the Russian leadership difficult. In fact, any attempt to hold a dialogue with the Russian political leadership is likely to fail due to the completely different understanding of the two sides. Throughout history, change in Russia has always come from within, not through engagement with external powers.

The world-famous Russian writer Aleksey Tolstoy noted that

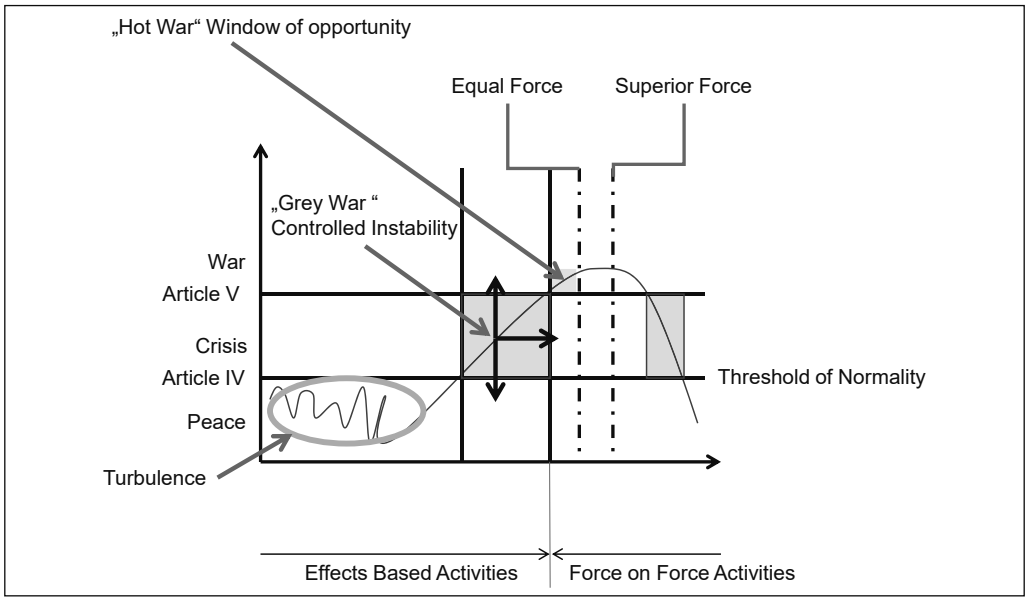

Figure 1. The Stages of Conflict.

> Russia has two faces: the light one with close ties and deep roots to European culture and the dark one with shadowy violent sinister nature. Every time when Russia faces West she prospers, every time she turns away it causes suffering and disarray.

The face that Russia shows, depends entirely on its leadership. Today, it is the shadowy one. Russia's political and military leadership has accused the West many times over of launching hybrid war on it and sought to prepare its population, economy, and military for that war, however it may develop—conventional or hybrid. This wish to accustom people physically and mentally to a state of permanent war should not be ignored or ridiculed but recognised in Western policy making. Colin S. Gray has proposed that, "If war is politics by other means, then politics can be war by other means, also."[23] This construct allows an actor to play on the field of an opponent without compromising its values and ethics. Putin may be acting ethically according to Russian standards and it is hard to judge anyone who operates in a different cultural environment. But it is possible to judge one's own pundits and opinion leaders. Violating fundamental values and social norms to engage with a strategic competitor for the sake of personal gain, be it political or pecuniary, is definitely not ethical.

It is essential for policymakers who seek to engage Russia to know what they want to achieve and to understand the cultural context in which Russia operates. Russia cannot be changed or persuaded to adopt Western values, but its oligarchy can be contained. Historically, containment has been the only effective method for dealing with Russia. Its objective should not be defeat or causing suffering to the population, but persuading the oligarchs that they will be beaten--that their luxurious lifestyle is in danger if they decline to honour international treaties or violate the sovereignty of independ-

ent countries. Containment will effectively reduce Russia's ability to develop capabilities, reduce its opportunities and eventually lower the leadership's level of ambition. For decades, the oligarchy has stockpiled wealth and monopolised power. They have much to lose. Threatening this may evoke primitive sentiments, but it works. Solidarity based on shared values should continue to be the guiding principle for assuring security among the transatlantic nations. At the same time, we should not avoid presenting gamblers with opportunities, and ensure they remain persistently alarmed about the risk of losing their personal wealth.

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