



# SMALL WARS JOURNAL

## Grading Gerasimov: Evaluating Russian Nonlinear War Through Modern Chinese Doctrine

By Victor R. Morris

Journal Article | Sep 17 2015 - 7:45am

### Grading Gerasimov: Evaluating Russian Nonlinear War Through Modern Chinese Doctrine

V. Morris

“Wars are not declared, and having begun, proceed to an unfamiliar template,” stated General Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, during a closed speech at the Russian Academy of Military Sciences. The primary topic of this speech was “The Role of the General Staff in the Organization of the Defense of the Country in Correspondence with the New Statute about the General Staff Confirmed by the President of the Russian Federation.”

This speech given in late 2013 was crucial because it enumerated and elucidated the strategies that would develop Russian nonlinear military doctrine in 2014, which is known as “Gerasimov Doctrine”. Russian Foreign Policy Reviews, State Security Strategies and “Gerasimov Doctrine” combined with Russian political views codify *nonlinear war* as the emergence of a new kind of war. This new form of warfare is facilitated by 21st century technologies and multiple actors employing combinations of conventional and unconventional instruments. In short, “the very rules of war have been fundamentally changed” and, according to General Gerasimov, non-military means have surpassed the power of force to achieve strategic and political goals. The current situation in Ukraine and, to some extent in neighboring former Soviet republics (primarily Baltic States), highlights the application of nonlinear war.

Is it working?

In order to adequately assess current and future threats to European security and the methods to counter such threats, this article intends to “grade”, or evaluates, specific applications of nonlinear war in Ukraine based on Chinese military doctrine, geopolitical strategies and conflicts in Europe.

### Russia’s Road to Nonlinear War: Cold War, 1979-Present

*Unrestricted war is a war that surpasses all boundaries and restrictions. It takes nonmilitary forms and military forms and creates a war on many fronts. It is the war of the future.*

-Colonel Qiao Liang and Colonel Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted War*, Beijing, 1998

“Gerasimov Doctrine” contains particular similarities to the Chinese doctrine outlined in Unrestricted Warfare

published in 1999, and historical roots in previous Russian doctrine. Both strategies involve using proxies, or surrogates, to not only exploit vulnerabilities in low intensity conflict, but to also prepare for future operations, which may involve high intensity conflict. Other strategies involve applying both low and high tech asymmetrical means, and also engaging in several forms of war. For example, Unrestricted Warfare describes 13 forms of “total war” and methods to consciously mix “cocktails” on the battlefield, or to employ combinations of forms of warfare in order to find innovative and effective approaches. In Ukraine, the notion of consciously “mixing cocktails” to produce effective nonlinear strategies highlights the unpredictable effects that these tactics may have on the organs of government. Regardless of the particular nonlinear strategies applied, destabilization and exploitation of vulnerabilities are the results. Therefore, the assessment tool for this article is the effective application of warfare combinations in four categories to reach specific long-term political outcomes.

In continuing to approach this assessment within an academic metaphor, this article imagines Russia as a student. Russia has studied nonlinear war since the Cold War (called Active Measures) and Afghanistan through the 1980s, and continued these studies with interventions in Moldova and Lithuania in the early 1990s. Furthermore, from 1994 to 2009, Russia double majored in nonlinear war during the First and Second Chechen Wars. While completing Undergraduate degrees, Russia entered the workforce by engaging Georgia with espionage in 2006, conducting cyber attacks against Estonia in 2007, and completing “counterterrorism” campaigns in Chechnya in 2009. The Russo-Georgian War in 2008, however, is an exemplary case first, of the evolution of nonlinear or hybrid capabilities; secondly, of the application of indirect instruments in order to destabilize a country; and thirdly, of the volatile effects of such tactics that persist until today. Moreover, during and after this conflict, Russian tactics also combined cyber warfare with both informational and conventional means. Currently, through the lens of this article’s academic metaphor, Russia is further developing its nonlinear war practices by pursuing a Master’s Degree in Ukraine. This program involves subjects like gaining and maintaining popular support, military mobilization, refinement of nonlinear approaches to war and preparation for future unconventional conflicts.

## 21st Century Warfare

*What we see in Russia now in this hybrid approach to war, is the use of all the tools that they have to reach into a nation and cause instability.*

-General Philip M. Breedlove, Munich Security Report 2015

“New generation, ambiguous, hybrid, nonlinear, unrestricted, irregular, unconventional and asymmetric” are all terms associated with 21<sup>st</sup> century warfare. Warfare is typically defined in two general forms: *Traditional and Irregular*, where the latter can apply hybrid threat strategies to reach mutual benefitting effects. Irregular Warfare is defined as a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations. Irregular Warfare favors indirect approaches and asymmetric means. A central component of Irregular Warfare is *unconventional warfare*, which employs “activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerilla force in a denied area”. Another definition of Irregular Warfare outlines the achievement of “strategic objectives by avoiding an adversary’s conventional military strength while eroding an adversary’s power and will, primarily through the use of indirect, non-traditional aspects of warfare.” The former application of unconventional warfare relies on external parties aiding indigenous actors against governments. Some

examples of aid involve training, equipping, advising and employing kinetic action to seize terrain or increase the advantage of irregular forces. The term “irregular forces” refers to State and non-State military or paramilitary forces. Nonlinear warfare directly or indirectly employs non-military and military instruments through the following means: diplomats, intelligence agencies, professional soldiers, special operations forces, insurgents, guerillas, extremist groups, mercenaries and criminals.

Contemporary *hybrid warfare*, *hybrid threat* and *hybrid aggression* have all been used to describe potent and complex variations of warfare in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although this type of warfare is not new, contemporary threat actors are redefining the application by employing 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies and combinations of diplomatic, intelligence formation, militaristic, economic and humanitarian means, and in various domains to include cyberspace. What further complicates this form of warfare is the persistent fluctuation and manipulation of political, informational and ideological conflict-- key aspects of hybrid warfare which extend past traditional coercive diplomacy and unconventional war. This article utilizes the term “nonlinear war” in the same way as defined by Russian military doctrine: as a means to reach desired strategic orientation and geopolitical outcomes primarily using non-military approaches.

## **Making the Grade**

*Today's wars will affect the price of gasoline in pipelines, the price of food in supermarkets, and the price of securities on the stock exchange. They will also disrupt the ecological balance and push their way into every one of our homes by way of the television screen*

-Alvin Toffler

As previously outlined, the grading process considers the effectiveness of warfare combinations and their ability to reach their intended outcomes. In the case of Ukraine, probable intended outcomes are summarized first, as destabilizing both the region specifically and the European Union as a whole and secondly as preventing NATO military infrastructure near Russian borders, and thirdly as preventing NATO membership expansion. Political ideology involving Eurasianism and dividing the west are also possible objectives. The following assessments are based on how well the Russian Federation conducts various operations in conflicts with regard to four combination categories as outlined in Chinese unrestricted warfare doctrine: *supra-national*, *supra-domain*, *supra-means* and *supra-tier*.

Supra-national Combinations are a synthesis of national, international and non-state organizations. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, global powers must borrow multinational and non-state powers in order to expand their own influence. One of the most recent examples of this combination involves the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and its competition with Ukrainian European integration, which eventually led to the 2014 Ukrainian Revolution. This union operates through supranational and intergovernmental institutions which include a mutual defense alliance. Possible Russian objectives for the EEU involve growth into a powerful, supra-national union of sovereign states analogous to the European Union in order to form a unilaterally beneficial bridge between Europe and Asia. Intermediate competitive objectives may involve enlarging the Customs Union to post soviet states, which could eventually involve breakaway regions of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine whose parent countries have already signed association agreements with the European Union. Ukraine is strategically important because it has the second largest economy of any of the 15 former republics of the Soviet Union. The EEU is the probable mechanism for waging current and future non-military forms of warfare with regard to international law, finance, economics and resources. This fact is made evident by the recruitment efforts of the EEU on one side,

imposition of sanctions, northwestern European defense cooperation, and oil production by Middle Eastern States, on the other.

Another example of the concise application of supra-national combinations is the perceived manipulation of the world's largest security intergovernmental organization, known as the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). This organization is responsible for monitoring ceasefires in Ukraine, including the Minsk Protocol which collapsed in early 2015, and the ceasefire currently in effect. Historically, the Russian Federation has accused the OSCE of being a tool for Western states to advance specifically western economic and political interests. Recently, allegations have surfaced that the OSCE has a pro-Russian bias, which explains the organization's failure to monitor the Minsk Protocol and the subsequent ceasefire and subversive combat operations. This view is consistent with the fact that International Warfare's objectives are to subvert and sabotage the rule of law. **Grade: D**

Supra-domain Combinations involve employing or merging combinations beyond the domains of the traditional battlefield. Russia's ability to overlap all domains to include activities in cyberspace to create political and military effects offers a prime example. The combinations that Russia has employed under this model involve: Media and Fabrication, Cultural warfare (defending compatriot diasporas abroad and leveraging historical memory), Psychological warfare, and Network warfare (dominating or subverting media). Additionally, Russia has emphasized influence operations in the informational domain to reduce the requirement for military forces, which is exercised through: subversion, disinformation campaigns and false narrative control, English and Russian language propaganda, protests and disruptive "trolling" and Twitter.com activities online. Although disinformation campaigns erode over time, employing a whole of government approach using information operations and attacks in the cyber domain supports the overall nonlinear, destabilization efforts in Ukraine as a key component of this type of new warfare. **Grade: A**

Supra-means Combinations unite aspects of military and non-military means to reach desired objectives. This category can be directly applied to the initial destabilization of Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. The Crimea operation was a decisive application of nonlinear warfare for a variety of reasons. It illustrates nonlinear warfare phases involving initial destabilization, deception, information operations and limited military intervention, all with local population support. Supra-means Combinations are also visible in the current conflict in Eastern and Southeastern Ukraine involving pro-Russian conventional, irregular and special operations forces that employ blended tactics supported by a malicious information campaign. This initial assessment alone, however, does not adequately address the applications and compounding effects of the more complex combinations in this category. Combinations of technological, resource and economic aid warfare must also be assessed. The technological assessment focuses on having an advantage that involves superior conventional military equipment and weapons of mass destruction capabilities; Russia currently has both. Conversely, pro-Russian separatists currently do not have full control of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine and Sea of Azov access. Therefore, it is clear that this group is not completely successful in combining militaristic, cultural, resource and economic aid warfare at that level. This particular lack of success in turn affects the same combinations on the supra-national level, but with a different degree of intensity. These intermediate objectives involving territorial control may be further met through cease-fire agreements giving concession to separatists, or overt deployment of military forces into the Donbas region if recognized as a Russian State.

Conversely, the result may be a sustained de-centralized insurgency or "frozen conflict" with ineffective mission command from Russian military and political actors further destabilizing both countries economically. International military aid and assistance to Ukrainian security forces and internally displaced persons are also possible long term outcomes creating further instability in the region. Operating through the entire depth of the enemy territory is one of the specified objectives included in "Gerasimov

Doctrine”, which ultimately results in territorial defense related political objectives. **Grade: C**

Lastly, Supra-tier Combinations melds all levels of conflict in each campaign. For instance, the Ukraine campaign for Russia melds tactical, strategic and operational levels of conflict in the region. This category’s assessment is based on “beyond-limits” war in Unrestricted Warfare, where both decentralized and man-machine combinations perform multiple functions. These functions span regional ground tactics to international political level effects. Conventional and unconventional operations involving naval fleets, commercial airliners, armed civilians, tanks, air defense and artillery weapons employment, drone operations, abductions, assassinations and electronic warfare are all examples of how, in Eastern Europe, tactics from this category continue to blur the traditional lines of war. **Grade: B**

### Report Card Conclusion

The above grades are a snapshot in time or “academic term”, and undoubtedly fluctuate based on measures taken by domestic and international partners to counter nonlinear war in both Ukraine and in neighboring countries. This assessment is designed to highlight the approaches and combinations employed during nonlinear war, and more importantly, how these tactics are evolving to become more innovative and effective. By no means, does the article downplay the severity of the conflict in Ukraine and loss of life as a result. If Russian doctrine and military modernization programs continue to evolve based on nonlinear war experience and limitation assessments, international actors will be presented with an increasingly unconventional threat in future conflicts. In order to counter nonlinear and unconventional approaches to war, and identify vulnerabilities, one must first understand and assess these approaches to preempt crippling and irreversible political effects.

### References

1. Unrestricted Warfare
1. Counter Unconventional War White Paper (USASOC)
1. Munich Security Report 2015
1. JP 3-26 Counterterrorism
1. TC 7-100 Hybrid Threat

### About the Author



#### Victor R. Morris

Victor R. Morris is a civilian contractor at the U.S. Army Europe’s Joint Multinational Readiness Center (JMRC) in Germany. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of JMRC, United States Army Europe, United States European Command, the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, the United States Government or Booz Allen Hamilton.

Available online at : <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/grading-gerasimov-evaluating-russian-nonlinear-war-through-modern-chinese-doctrine>

Links:

{ 1 } <http://smallwarsjournal.com/author/victor-r-morris>

Copyright © 2016, Small Wars Foundation.



Select uses allowed by Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 3.0 license per our [Terms of Use](#).  
Please help us support the [Small Wars Community](#).