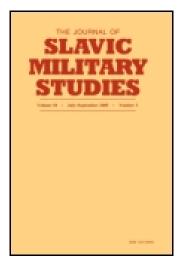
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Sun Tzu and Salami Tactics? Vladimir Putin and Military Persuasion in Ukraine, 21 February–18 March 2014

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Vladimir Putin used a composite of ancient and modern methods of military persuasion in first destabilizing, and then annexing, Crimea in February and March of 2014. Putin's use of military persuasion through Russian and proxy forces enabled him to annex Crimea and to set the stage for further imposition of Russia's will on Ukraine's eastern provinces. Russia's determination to resist excessive Westernization by Ukraine, especially the possibility of Ukrainian membership in NATO, exceeded the willingness of the U.S. and its allies to reverse Putin's gains in Crimea.

INTRODUCTION

Russia's occupation of Crimea in late February and early March 2014 put paid to 'end of history' assumptions and warned that peace in Europe could no longer be taken for granted. Russian President Vladimir Putin chose against an acknowledged and overt Russian military invasion of Ukrainian state territory. Instead, Russia occupied Crimea with special operations troops, supported by already deployed forces on their previously leased base there, and combined with political disinformation and strategic deception. The

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Russian forces removed insignias from their uniforms, claimed to be local militia, and surrounded government and military headquarters, establishing de facto control of the Crimean peninsula. Russian actions in Crimea were possibly part of a larger strategy with the eventual goal of a federated Ukraine or at least the objective of gutting the Maidan revolution and maintaining a Russian *droit de regard* over Kiev. One day after a referendum in Crimea on 16 March, with an overwhelming majority voting to break away from Ukraine and join Russia, Putin signed a decree recognizing Crimea as 'a sovereign and independent state'. On 18 March, Putin signed documents formally annexing Crimea to Russia and took a victory lap before Russia's political elite assembled in the Grand Kremlin Palace, declaring that 'Crimea has always been an integral part of Russia in the hearts and minds of people'.

The analysis of Russia's tactics and methods in Ukraine in late February and early March 2014 can be done from a variety of political and military standpoints. Instead of storming the barricades in the tradition of Suvorov, Russia employed a nuanced combination of political and military moves that combined various features of the theory and practice of military persuasion. This caught Western interlocutors off guard and very much constrained by limited options, and they found themselves racing to catch up with Russian manipulation of the situation. The following discussion outlines the main features of military persuasion and provides examples of its application to the Russo-Ukrainian crisis of 2014 and other issues.

DEFINING MILITARY PERSUASION

Military persuasion is the threat or use of armed force in order to obtain desired political or military goals. Military persuasion is a psychological strategy intended to influence the decisions of other state or non-state actors, without necessarily having to destroy their armed forces or societies. As a psychological strategy, military persuasion is heavily dependent upon timely and accurate intelligence. Intelligence that is late, or wrong, defeats a strategy of military persuasion as decisively as does firepower and maneuvers on the battlefield. Related to intelligence requirements, military persuasion also exploits cultural, societal, and ideological knowledge that contributes to an accurate picture of the opponent and the opponent's intentions and capabilities.³

¹ 'Russia's Vladimir Putin Recognises Crimea as nation', *BBC News Europe*, 17 March 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22621726 (accessed 17 March 2014).

² S. L. Myers and E. Barry, 'Putin Reclaims Crimea for Russia and Bitterly Denounces the West', *New York Times*, 18 March 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/19/world/europe/ukraine.html (accessed 19 March 2014).

³ For an elaboration of the concept, see S. J. Cimbala, *Military Persuasion in War and Policy: The Power of Soft*, Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT, 2002.

Military persuasion is not new. War has always been both mental and physical, involving the use of brain power as well as brute force. Great military thinkers from antiquity to the present have advocated some aspects or versions of military persuasion. The Chinese philosopher of war Sun Tzu, writing several hundred years before the Christian era, emphasized the importance of the psychological aspects of war and preparing for war. In particular, Sun Tzu noted that wars should be avoided if other means existed to protect one's interests. If war became necessary, it should be conducted in a way that minimized loss of life and social destruction:

For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.⁴

And,

Thus, what is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy . . . next best is to disrupt his alliances The next best is to attack his army The worst policy is to attack cities. Attack cities only when there is no alternative.⁵

Sun Tzu also noted that there are five circumstances or conditions in which victory can be expected: (1) he who knows 'when he can fight and when he cannot' will be victorious; (2) he who understands how to use both large and small forces will prevail—in war, some circumstances occur when 'the weak can master the strong' and one must 'manipulate such circumstances' to win; (3) the commander whose ranks are 'united in purpose' will achieve victory; (4) the one who is prudent and 'lies in wait for an enemy who is not' will be victorious; (5) he whose generals are able and 'not interfered with by the sovereign' will win.⁶

Vladimir Putin's problem in Ukraine in 2014, as seen from his perspective, was that he had to preserve a Russia-friendly regime in Kiev without taking actions so obviously menacing to the West that a military confrontation between Russia and NATO resulted. Russia's conventional military forces were obviously no match for those of the United States and NATO. Therefore, any effort to destabilize Ukraine in a politically favorable direction for Russia would have to involve a combination of discrete military moves backed by strategic deception and preparations for wider conflict, if necessary. Russia could not afford to overplay her diplomatic and military hands before testing the resolve of the Ukrainian government, the United States, the European

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War,* ed. and trans. S. B. Griffith, Oxford University Press, New York, 1963,

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 77–78.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 82–83.

Union, and NATO to react to Russia's 'salami tactics' of annexing the Crimean peninsula. Moving too fast or too dramatically would set off alarms in Europe and in Washington that threatened to turn a soft war into a harder one.

As a concept, military persuasion has some kinship with the ideas of deterrence, compellence, and coercive diplomacy. According to Alexander L. George, coercive diplomacy is distinct from deterrence and compellence. Coercive diplomacy is a strictly defensive strategy for the accomplishment of one of three possible objectives: (1) to persuade an opponent to stop an action in progress before it achieves its intended purpose; (2) to convince the opponent to undo or retract a previous commitment or action already taken; (3) to persuade the opponent to make changes in its government or regime. Deterrence has a different object, according to George: to persuade a potential or actual opponent not to undertake a decision or action that the opponent is assumed to have under consideration. Deterrence, in other words, operates before the fact of an enemy decision or action. In addition, George prefers not to include compellence within the scope of coercive diplomacy because the former term

implies exclusive or heavy reliance on psychological threats, whereas I wish to emphasize the possibility of a more flexible diplomacy that can employ rational persuasion and accommodation as well as coercive threats to encourage the adversary either to comply with the demands or to work out an acceptable compromise⁸

The author's view of military persuasion is that the concept can accommodate purpose-built uses for deterrence, compellence, and coercive diplomacy. But what is most demanding is not the defining of various concepts, but the implementing of deterrence, compellence, and coercive diplomacy in the exigent circumstances of crisis, war, or postwar peace and stability operations.

In his actions during late February through mid-March 2014, Vladimir Putin successfully combined deterrence and compellence but appeared to bypass or deemphasize coercive diplomacy. Russia's unexpected occupation of Crimea was both a deterrent and a compellent threat. The deterrent was directed both to Ukraine and, more indirectly, to the United States and its NATO allies, who Putin saw as partly responsible for overthrowing Yanukovych. The number of Russian forces (acknowledged and otherwise) deployed in Crimea was sufficient to deter any Ukrainian military resistance to the occupation. At the same time, the presence of Russia's Black Sea

A. L. George, 'Coercive Diplomacy: Definition and Characteristics', in A. L. George and W. E. Simons (eds.), *The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy*, 2nd ed., Westview Press, Boulder, CO, 1994, pp. 7–12.
Ibid., p. 9. On compellence, see T. C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1966, pp. 70–72.

Fleet in Crimea raised the symbolic and strategic costs of any attempt by the United States or NATO to intervene directly in the region. Russia's annexation of Crimea added to this a compellent threat: Crimea was now Russian state territory, and any effort by outsiders to reverse this status would be tantamount to an attack on Russia itself.

As for the use of coercive diplomacy, some might argue that a very weak form of rhetorical coercive diplomacy was used by Russia to push back against the post-Yanukovych government in Kiev. Russia blatantly refused to recognize that government as legitimate and branded its office holders as hooligans or worse, emphasizing the neo-Nazi or other rightist political slants held by some of the new power holders or power seekers. On the other hand, Putin did not coerce the new government in Kiev into resignation or other meaningful political concessions. The 'coercive' element in coercive diplomacy for Russia was not significant at this early stage because Russia was still getting her bearings and deliberating her responses. The later decision was for military incursion into Crimea regardless the political consequences.

So far we have discussed the concept of military persuasion and given some examples. The next section addresses the topic of how military persuasion works: its constituent elements or sinews of execution.

THE COMPONENTS OF MILITARY PERSUASION

As suggested in the previous section, concepts of war making, war limitation, and war avoidance, together with the policies they are designed to support, receive their validation in action. From a military perspective, what is valid is what works. What follows, therefore, is a summary of those categories of variables and causal factors that make military persuasion work (or fail, if mistakenly applied).

The Will of the Opponent

Military persuasion has as its primary object the influencing of the will of the opponent. This does not exclude military operations intended to destroy the fighting capabilities of the opponent, when necessary. In one sense the preceding assertion is truistic: All war is about influencing the will of the enemy. But military persuasion attempts to change the other side's own view of the possible risks and gains associated with its options. This change in the opponent's mind set normally occurs while the opponent still has some capacity to fight back and therefore some potential losses to guard against and assets to protect.

Russia's occupation of Crimea in February and March 2014 had the object of influencing the will of the Ukrainian government (regarded as an

illegal usurper in Russia's eyes), of member governments of the European Union, and of NATO, including the Obama administration. Russia also sought to impress the publics in those countries with the presumably reasonable nature of its demands and the threat that a hostile Ukraine would pose for Russian security. In addition, Russia also had to influence the will of the Ukrainian military, by preventing any Ukrainian forces from retaliating or otherwise provoking a Ukrainian-Russian firefight. This element was probably the biggest 'if' in Putin's Crimea gambit.

Estimating the opponent's will is difficult because that will is subject to change in response to our efforts to drive in a preferred direction. In other words: war, deterrence, and coercive diplomacy are interactive sports, in which the actions by one side are interpreted by the other and fed back into the assessment and decision system of the second side. Images of the enemy may change during the course of conflict. The criticality of the opponent's will in war is underlined by British historian B. H. Liddell Hart. In his discussion of the decision by the German high command in 1918 to sue for peace despite the possibility that Germany could have continued fighting, Liddell Hart noted that 'the true aim in war is the mind of the hostile rulers, not the bodies of their troops; that the balance between victory and defeat turns on mental impressions and only indirectly on physical blows.'9

Terrorists seek to influence not only the will of the opposed states and their governments, but also the 'will' of public opinion in target or observing states. They do this by the process of converting pain into power. The process by which terrorists convert pain into power is a subtle alchemy. It begins with the conversion of private suffering and grief into public horror and theater.¹⁰

The Russian occupation of Crimea, accompanied by reassurances that Russia was simply trying to safeguard Russian nationals and Russian identity against political persecution, was also supported by subtle but unmistakable manipulation of the fear of wider conflict. Large Russian military maneuvers in early March near the Ukrainian border included modern infantry units and armored weapons and the movement of airborne forces from the Moscow region to southern Russia. The reminder to Ukrainians and other governments and peoples of the former Soviet Union of the costs of war should it occur was obviously intended to forestall any Western counterescalation, including the use of force, and to arouse public opinion in

B. H. Liddell Hart, Strategy, Meridian Books-Penguin Group, New York, 1991, p. 204.

L. R. Beres, 'Preventing the Ultimate Nightmare: Nuclear Terrorism Against the United States', International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence, 10 (1997) pp. 333–342, citation p. 337.

S. L. Myers and A. Smale, 'Russian Troops Mass at Border with Ukraine', *New York Times*, 13 March 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/14/world/europe/ukraine.html (accessed 14 March 2014). Russia confirmed 13 March that military exercises had begun in the regions of Rostov, Belgorod, and Kursk. See 'Ukraine Crisis: Russia Begins New Military Exercises', *BBC News Europe*, 13 March 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26564846 (accessed 13 March 2014).

Europe in favor of a diplomatic solution leaving Russia in control of Crimea. However, going too far with the stimulation of this popular fear factor could be counterproductive, as it would cast Russia's image into that of a bullying aggressor instead of its preferred image as a besieged European partner. Another problematical facet of this aspect of military persuasion for Russia was the possibility of unsanctioned firing as between Russian and Crimean forces. Potshots between hotheads or inadvertent skirmishes would have the potential to reverberate further across the civil and military chains of command in Crimea, in Ukraine outside of Crimea, in Russia, and in NATO. Inadvertent escalation of what was intended as a prompt and decisive coup de main and subsequently came unglued into a civil war could not be ruled out as a possibility.

Interdependence of Ends and Means

War and crisis management are interactive bargaining situations in which the ends and means of the participants are shared within a common decision space. Because this is so, there are tacit as well as explicitly collaborative aspects even during the combat phase of a war.

Peace and stability operations since the end of the Cold War offer many lessons with regard to overlapping ends and means in military persuasion. Stability operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, Haiti, Somalia, and elsewhere demonstrated that the trump cards for success were held by locals, not by outside interveners. Only by pacifying or otherwise neutralizing the most important armed formations and political influencers in the host country could the US, the UN, or other external force hope to bring about peace and stability at an acceptable cost. The strength of local resistance was that it could turn 'acceptable' into 'unacceptable' costs by the power of psychology based on media coverage. Making foreign 'peacekeepers' or 'nation builders' appear as blooded imperialists was worth many divisions to those who sought to deter or defeat the military intervention.

The interdependence of ends and means is especially important in ending a war or crisis. When the Nixon administration attempted to extricate the United States from the war in Vietnam, it found its hands tied because its options for escalation were limited (due to opposition on the home front) and its options for de-escalation were dependent upon North Vietnamese and NLF willingness to collaborate by agreeing to a peace. The US wanted to terminate the war by extricating US combat forces while leaving in place

For example, the *New York Times* reported 18 March that a group of soldiers wearing no insignia stormed a Ukrainian military mapping office near Simferopol, killing one Ukrainian soldier and wounding another, according to a statement by the Ukrainian Defense Ministry. Ukraine responded by authorizing its troops to fire in self-defense. See S. L. Myers and E. Barry, *op. cit*. Conflicting reports were offered as to the particular circumstances. See 'Ukraine officer "killed in attack on Crimea base", *BBC News Europe*, 18 March 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26637296 (accessed 18 March 2014).

a viable regime in South Vietnam. North Vietnam wanted to undermine the regime in South Vietnam but recognized that this goal would be easier to accomplish after US troop withdrawal. Each side also had residual military cards to play. The North Vietnamese and NLF could continue the counterinsurgency in South Vietnam indefinitely (easier after more US troops departed); the US could always resume air attacks against targets in North Vietnam. The peace agreements of 1973 acknowledged the interdependence of opposed means and ends by giving the US a face-saving exit and deferring the demise of the South Vietnamese regime for two years.

The predicament of NATO allies with respect to Russia's fait accompli in Crimea in 2014 was similar in this respect to the frustration of Nixon in lacking viable alternatives for escalation or de-escalation. Putin was apparently unmoved by US and EU threats and plans to impose visa bans and freeze assets of Russian officials and financial oligarchs. No NATO member state regardless of its level of alarm proposed military intervention in Crimea. On the other hand, pleas from German Chancellor Angela Merkel to Putin, for accommodation and for reconsideration of Russian occupation, fell on deaf ears, despite Merkel and Putin's previously established high level of agreement on other issues and interpersonal respect and trust.¹³ Notwithstanding Western disappointment at Putin's unwillingness to negotiate seriously about Crimea, Russia and NATO still shared a common security space in a cramped continent. Putin could not push the issue beyond Crimea itself (at least, not immediately) and he could not use a prompt military invasion of Ukraine to force a pro-Russian regime on Kiev without unpredictable, and possibly unacceptable, consequences for Russia.

Perspective Taking

A third aspect of the applied psychological strategy that we call *military persuasion* is the concept of perspective taking. This is the act of understanding the 'other' in its own terms. The task is easy to state but enormously complicated in practice. How much do we really know, especially before a war begins, about the actual mind-set of the opponent? History records many disappointments and intelligence failures. Cultural differences make the problem of intelligence estimation harder. US strategic military surprises in the 20th century were not coincidentally related to the inability to anticipate the surprise strikes of non-Western armies and polities: Pearl Harbor, Korea, the Tet offensive, the October war of 1973, and Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, among others.

A. Smale, 'Ukraine Crisis Limits Merkel's Rapport With Putin', *New York Times*, 12 March 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/13/world/europe/on-ukraine-merket-finds-limits.html (accessed 13 March 2014).

Perspective taking is not the same as sympathizing with the enemy. It involves a willingness to understand the cultural, social, economic, and political settings that produce the enemy mind-set: Understanding is not tantamount to approval. But understanding does connote respect, at least, for the significance of the opponent's worldview, political objectives, and military art. One of the difficulties that great conventional military powers have in dealing with varieties of unconventional warfare, including terrorism and insurgency, is this problem of perspective taking.

In its expansion of the war in Vietnam, for example, the Johnson administration assumed that gradual escalation of ground and air war, together with diplomatic overtures and demonstrative bombing pauses, would coerce North Vietnam to the conference table. Johnson was doomed to be frustrated. North Vietnam could not be coerced without putting its regime at risk by invading the North with US ground forces. Such a dramatic step required more troops than the US was willing to commit, and it threatened to prolong the war, raise US casualties, and bring China into the conflict as a combatant.

In the case of Russia's occupation of Crimea in March of 2014, US NATO and EU performances with respect to perspective taking about Russia's leadership, its worldviews, and its probable courses of action, following the abdication of Viktor Yanukovych from the office of Ukrainian President, were deficient. Neither Russia's historical roots in Ukraine nor Putin's perception of a vital interest in Crimea, home of Russia's Black Sea Fleet, were appreciated. The study of history teaches us that states have competing narratives with respect to their interpretation of historical events. Understanding a state's narrative is important in predicting its strategic calculus and likely political priorities. As Stephen M. Walt has noted:

Vladimir Putin's understanding of the history of NATO expansion is sharply different from the version purveyed by its promoters here in the United States or by politicians in Poland and Estonia. That difference in perspective helps explain why Putin responded as he did to the events in Ukraine, and a more wide-ranging knowledge of history might have warned U.S. policymakers to expect precisely the reaction they got. ¹⁴

Thus, in his address to Federation Council members and State Duma deputies 18 March 2014, Putin noted that 'Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride'. In the same speech, he referred to the ouster of Yanukovych from power in Kiev as an illegitimate overthrow by unprincipled factions: 'Nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites

S. M. Walt, 'Condemned to Repeat It: Why Washington's Foreign Policymakers Desperately Need to Study up on Their History', www.foreignpolicy.com, 10 March 2014, in *Johnson's Russia List* 2014, #53, 11 March 2014

executed this coup.'¹⁵ With regard to the behavior of the United States and NATO since the end of the Cold War, Putin stated that 'they have lied to us many times, made decisions behind our backs, placed before us an accomplished fact. This happened with NATO's expansion to the East, as well as the deployment of military infrastructure at our borders'.¹⁶ The Russian President called for a post-Cold War narrative that acknowledged Russia's place in the world order as seen from the Kremlin:

Today, it is imperative to end this hysteria, to refute the rhetoric of the cold war and to accept the obvious fact: Russia is an independent, active participant in international affairs; like other countries, it has its own national interests that need to be taken into account and respected.¹⁷

One does not have to agree with Putin's perceptions of recent history, nor with his assumptions about Ukraine's immediate post-Yanukovych regime and about Russia's role in the international order. But strategic thinking requires that a state's leaders and their perspectives should be understood correctly before other states attempt to influence that state's behavior.

Perceptions Management

Perceptions management is the manipulation of symbols and information in order to get one's view across to a desired audience. Perceptions management is something more inclusive and more subtle than propaganda per se. Much of Russia's propaganda emitting from the Kremlin during the Maidan crisis and the run-up to the annexation of Crimea was transparently tendentious, missing only the hyperbolic prose of Ehrenburg and the video montage of Eisenstein. But almost any person in a responsible position of authority finds it necessary to exercise persuasion supported by perceptions management. Politicians are either natural perceptions managers or they are forced to learn the skill.

In war or other military operations, perceptions management includes the manipulation of images and symbolic meanings in order to influence the enemy, to motivate actions on our own side, and to affect the views of others

Vladimir Putin, Address by President of the Russian Federation, 18 March 2014, in *Johnson's Russia List* 2014, #61, 19 March 2014.

¹⁶ Ibid.

^{1/} Ibid.

D. M. Herszenhorn, 'Russia Is Quick to Bend Truth About Ukraine', *New York Times*, 16 April 2014, p. A1, A11. Lilia Shevtsova, expert on Russian politics for the Carnegie Moscow Center, noted, with regard to Russian government statements about policy toward Ukraine: "We can't trust anything. Even with the Soviet propaganda, when they were talking with the Soviet people, there were some rules. Now, there are no rules at all. You can invent anything" (*Ibid.*, p. A11).

whose opinions may matter in the equation.¹⁹ Perceptions management techniques used by the Cold War Soviet Union included the concept of reflexive control: getting the opponent to reason in a manner that suits the purposes of the controller, although those purposes and supporting techniques are concealed.

Perceptions management is necessary in intelligence and in strategic military deception. For example, the deception *Operation Bodyguard* that preceded the Normandy invasion in 1944 involved not only the sending of false messages through allied communication nets, but also the creation of entirely fictitious armies in England (supported by faux pieces of equipment that German agents would be certain to have photographed). Another World War II example was provided by Japanese diplomats who continued their peace negotiations with their American counterparts in Washington even after the Japanese government had decided upon the necessity for a surprise strike at Pearl Harbor and military planners had set the date.

Sometimes military perceptions management is supported by an enemy leader's self-delusions and wishful thinking. Stalin refused to accept reliable warnings of a possible attack by Germany in 1941, although his own foreign intelligence services, as well as those of other countries, offered many indicators of Hitler's plans for *Operation Barbarossa* sprung on 22 June 1941. Stalin was pessimistic about the likely outcome of a surprise attack by Germany, on account of his own awareness of the Soviet Union's lack of preparedness for war, in part due to Stalin's purges of the Soviet officer corps from 1937 to 1939. He was not the first person to deny the possibility of an unacceptable outcome by assuming that what is impossible to contemplate is therefore impossible to happen. Something similar happened to Ukrainian Maidan demonstrators and political factions who imagined that a regime change in Kiev could be carried out without reaction from Russia.

The battle of perceptions management in Ukraine in 2014 began with the defenestration of the Yanukovych regime in February, in the aftermath of street protests and demonstrations in Kiev and elsewhere. Anti-Yanukovych protests had begun in the fall of 2013 after the then Ukrainian President spurned a proposed trade deal with the European Union in favor of one with Russia. As protests and demonstrations increased, the street narrative became that Yanukovych was ignoring the will of the people and had to reverse his course of action or reform his government. Western governments, including the United States, sided with the demonstrators and adopted their view that Yanukovych must repeal his decision to embrace Russia and/or negotiate with opposition factions to restructure his regime. Despite apparent Russian urgings to stand fast and take swift action to quell protests,

¹⁹ Some of these activities are included in what the US military now refers to as 'influence operations'. See J. Arquilla, *Worst Enemy: The Reluctant Transformation of the American Military*, Ivan R. Dee, Chicago, 2008, pp. 132–155.

Yanukovych folded and bolted to Russia—perhaps catching Vladimir Putin by surprise. Western perceptions saw the departure of Yanukovych as a victory for democracy in Ukraine and looked forward to a post-Yanukovych regime moving closer in alignment to the West.

Vladimir Putin saw things differently. Russia's perceptions management following the departure of Yanukovych was that a democratically elected head of state in Ukraine had been overthrown by an illegal putsch. In addition, the Kremlin saw a post-Yanukovych regime as an immediate political and possible future military threat to Russia. Accordingly, Russia claimed that the Russian-speaking majority in the autonomous Ukrainian republic of Crimea was endangered by a new and presumably hostile regime in Kiev. This narrative was suspect in the West, but it played well in Russia and in Crimea, formerly a part of Russia and the Soviet Union and now included in post-Soviet Ukrainian territory. The Kremlin narrative was, as noted earlier, boosted by the labored breathing of Russia's leaders in their public diplomacy used to describe the leaders of the revolt against Yanukovych.

Claiming risks to Russian speakers in Crimea and hostile intent in Kiev, Russia preempted the stakes and the narrative of perceptions management by turning loose pro-Russian militants across the Crimea. In late February, armed militants took over government buildings in Simferopol, the regional capital, as street crowds chanted 'Russia, Russia', and legislators demanded a vote to redefine relations with Ukraine. Crimean police officers officially under the control of the Ukrainian interior ministry in Kiev made no serious efforts at crowd control and stood aside as armed militants stormed government buildings. The symbolic appearance of a Russian flag atop the Crimean parliament building on 27 February iced the cake of perceptions management, creating the impression that Crimea's legislature was anxious to escape Ukraine for a Russian embrace. Subsequent dispatch of additional Russian troops to Crimea could then be described as forces needed to protect regional legitimacy and order and to allow Crimean residents a free choice of affiliation with Ukraine or with Russia.

Moral Influence

Moral influence is the fifth, and perhaps most important, aspect of military persuasion. Sun Tzu defines moral influence as 'that which causes the people to be in harmony with their leaders, so that they will accompany them in life and unto death without fear of mortal peril'. The concept of moral influence as a part of military persuasion has a number of separate components. First,

A. Higgins and S. L. Myers, 'Grab for Power in Crimea Raises Secession Threat', New York Times, 28 February 2014, p. A1, A8.

²¹ Sun Tzu, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

it implies popular support for the aims of war and for the means required to fight and conclude the war. Second, it also implies harmony within the armed forces themselves and between them and the political leadership. The military should not be misused for missions or purposes that are professionally inappropriate. Nor should armed forces be permitted to fall into the hands of competing political factions, each grappling for control of the state. A third aspect of moral influence is how a society treats those who serve in its military. Moral influence includes the expectation that military service and the risks that it entails will be honored and respected by the state and by the people. Fourth, the Western tradition of jurisprudence adds to Sun Tzu's discussion the notion that moral influence resides in the feeling on the part of governments, armed forces, and publics that a war is being fought for a just cause and by using just means.

Superficially it might appear that Russia lost the battle of the narrative when it came to moral influence in Ukraine. From the standpoint of international law and the international community, Russia's takeover of Crimea was illegal. Russia had detached an important part of Ukrainian territory over the objections of Ukraine's recognized government. In addition, Russia, together with the United States and the United Kingdom, had signed an agreement in 1994 that guaranteed the territorial integrity and political sovereignty of Ukraine in return for Ukraine's agreement to surrender its post-Soviet nuclear arsenal. Further, Russia's use of fifth columns of political agitators and unofficial 'local' military forces in Crimea had the familiar stench for Europeans of Cold War Soviet behavior. Finally, Russia's coup in Crimea also reminded Europeans of Russia's war against Georgia in 2008, including Russia's post-conflict recognition of breakaway Georgian republics Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states.

On the other hand, the US and allied European view of Russia's legal and moral performance in Crimea was notably without some historical perspective. Great powers throughout history have been inconsistent in their commitments to the sovereignty of nation-states, on the one hand, and to the principle of self-determination and the so-called 'responsibility to protect' endangered peoples against governmental destruction of human values, including genocide, on the other. For example, NATO's bombing of Serbia for 78 days in 1999 in order to protect and support the autonomy of ethnic-Albanian Kosovars took place over Russia's objections and without UN approval. NATO countries later recognized Kosovo as an independent state, also over Russia's objections. Another example was the decision by the United States to impose regime change on Iraq in 2003, despite the absence of United Nations support and even opposition from NATO members such as France.

Cases of sovereignty versus self-determination also occur with the breakup of empires. The United States was born in a revolution against an empire. The collapse of the Soviet Union and its empire in 1991 resulted

in the creation of 16 new sovereign states. A number of these states have important political, military, and economic ties to post-Soviet Russia. Putin has made no secret of his desire to assert priority interests in former Soviet security space, as, for example, in his plans for a Eurasian union. Some see the Eurasian Union as a plan to recreate the former Soviet Union.

Others doubt that Putin is really interested in bringing back any vestige of communism. Putin has been characterized by at least one expert commentator as a 'neo-Soviet' and by another as an 'authoritarian kleptocrat': Seeing inside Putin's motivational structure is a psychodrama that is as irresistible as it is discouraging of parsimony. As *POLITICO Magazine* editor Susan B. Glasser has noted, 'Putin has by turns confused, infuriated, outwitted and just plain befuddled the West When it comes to understanding Vladimir Putin, Washington's been getting him wrong as often as right for more than a decade now'. ²²

The actual behavior of states and empires throughout history on the issue of self-determination versus sovereignty suggests the essential wisdom of Thucydides in his history of the Peloponnesian War, when Athenian generals tell magistrates from Melos that 'they that have odds of power exact as much as they can, and the weak yield to such conditions as they can get'. On the other hand, this statement in the realist tradition is not necessarily the end of the matter. There is a difference recognized in international and common law as well as in religious thought between rightful and wrongful assertion of power. The strong can do what they want, at least temporarily, but, if they contravene international norms of legality or humane decency, they feed opposition even more determined to have its revenge. On the other hand, the feeling that 'God is with us' or that we are otherwise fighting on the side of right versus wrong is a powerful force multiplier for states at war, especially on the home front.

In this regard, Putin's methods and tactics in Crimea during the latter part of February to the middle of March 2014 may have been lacking in moral influence from the perspective of Western audiences. Why was that so? Western audiences were surprised and annoyed by Putin's approach because of a collective sentiment or zeitgeist that the world (at least in Europe) had moved beyond the days of imperial-style land grabs and territorial annexations. New states and territories in the postmodern world are supposedly created by plebiscites or internationally approved humanitarian interventions, preferably managed and approved by the major alliances (like NATO) or the United Nations. But from the standpoint of many Russians, who regard Ukraine as an historical part of Russia, and as essential to its defense against

See Susan B. Glasser, 'Putin on the Couch' www.politico.com, 13 March 2014, in *Johnson's Russia List* 2014, #56, 14 March 2014. Putin's public personae are also analyzed in F. Hill and C. G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, 2013.

Thucydides, cited in M. Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, Basic Books, New York, 1977, p. 5.

possible attacks along Russia's western borders, a Russia-friendly government in Kiev is both a strategic and cultural imperative. Putin's moral influence among many Russians is based, in part, on his efforts to rebuild the reputation of Russia as a great power. As well, Putin's methods in Crimea employed stealth, deception, and minimum uses of force in order to mobilize public opinion in eastern Ukraine behind his fait accompli in Crimea, leaving the West chasing Russia's control over events and their dominant narrative.

RUSSIA AND STRATEGIC HISTORY

The preceding discussion begs the question whether Crimea is part of a larger program of strategy and policy on the part of Putin and his advisors or, to the contrary, a somewhat improvised and hasty reaction to events in Ukraine and their implications. Perhaps there is some truth in both interpretations. Putin's actions in Crimea are not entirely sui generis: They were preceded by a context of demands upon Russia from its post-Cold War military and geostrategic setting, compared to that of the Soviet Union. Putin's policy is not the result of psychodrama. It is the product of his having lived in strategic history and his (and our) understanding of that history. Neither in Russian nor in English is strategic history self-interpreting. Heads of state and military commanders make strategic history as they go, doing their best to tie together the ends, ways, and means of politico-military action.²⁴

The Barack Obama administration sought to reset relations with Russia during that US President's first term in office, leading to the accomplishment of the New START agreement on strategic nuclear arms reductions in 2010 (taking effect in February 2011). However, subsequent US–Russian and NATO–Russian disputes over the Obama plan for deploying missile defenses in Europe created obstacles to further progress on nuclear arms limitation, on nonproliferation, and on a revived Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) more acceptable to Russia than the defunct Cold War original version.²⁵

In addition to an expanding NATO, encirclement by troubled or ambitious regional partners, and a deficient conventional military establishment, early 21st-century Russia faced the inevitable need to adjust to postmodern warfare and the impact of advanced technology, conventional weapons, and command-control systems. Even if Russia could rebuild the Soviet ground forces of the 1980s, it would not suffice to ensure against future threats based on newer weapons and the strategies made possible by postindustrial

On the concept of strategic history, see C. S. Gray, War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic History, 2nd ed., Routledge, New York, 2012.

²⁵ For pertinent perspective and background, see S. J. Blank, *Arms Control and Proliferation Challenges to the Reset Policy*, U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle, PA, 2011.

technology. Postindustrial or third-wave warfare created a new military cyberspace in which the capability for systems integration across the parts of a knowledge-based strategy would prove to be decisive. The various parts included: command, control, communications, and computers (C4); intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); long-range, precision-strike; and stealth technology. Even if Russia had the military-industrial complex that it had during the Soviet era, it would still lag in smart technology on account of its underdeveloped private sector economy. Russian economic performance improved in the first decade of the 21st century relative to the miserable performance of the 1990s, mostly due to oil prices but also on account of a widespread perception of stronger state leadership. However, it was a larger challenge to convert this or other economic boomlets into permanent improvements in Russia's hollowed-out and cash-strapped conventional forces.

Improved economic performance is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for a Russian army that can cope with third-wave, postindustrial warfare. Smart soldiers and innovative commanders who can think outside the box are as important as technology, as the nature of warfare shifts from massive battles of attrition to flexible and small-scale military operations. In addition, future warfare will take place in at least five dimensions: land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace. These multiple environments for future warfighting make the challenges posed by the 'initial period of war' especially problematical for technically backward militaries. The possibility of decisive losses within minutes or seconds in the 'initial period' of war, including a possible cyberwar that would create chaos with exclusively electronic casualties, is now within the reach of feasible or foreseeable military art. Expression of the condition of the co

For perspective on Russia's challenges with respect to information and cyber wars, see T. L. Thomas, 'Russia's Information Warfare Strategy: Can the Nation Cope in Future Conflicts', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 27 (2014) pp. 101–130. See also: T. L. Thomas, *Recasting the Red Star: Russia Forges Tradition and Technology through Toughness*, Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, KS. 2011.

For recent expert commentary on Russian views of future war, see D. Goure, 'Moscow's Visions of Future War: So Many Conflict Scenarios So Little Time, Money and Forces', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 27 (2014), pp. 63–100; and J. W. Kipp, 'Smart Defense From New Threats: Future War From a Russian Perspective: Back to the Future After the War on Terror', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 27 (2014), pp. 36–62.

Russian and Soviet literature on this subject are extensive. See, for example: S. P. Ivanov, *Nachal'nyy period voyny: po opytu pervykh kampaniy I operatsiy vtoroy mirovoy voyny* (The Initial Period of War: On the Experience of the First Campaigns of the Second World War), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1974. For comparison with Russian World War I experience, see I. I. Rostunov (ed.), *Istoriya Pervoy Mirovoy Voyny* 1914–1918, Vol. I (History of the First World War), Nauka, Moscow, 1975, ch. 3–4. The Soviet *Voyenno-istorichesky zburnal* (Military-Historical Journal) covered this topic extensively. See, for example Lt. Gen. A. I. Yevseev, 'O nekotorykh tendentsiyakh izmenii soderzhaniya i kharaktera nachal'nogo perioda voyny' (On Certain Tendencies in the Changing Content and Character of the Initial Period of War), *Voyenno-istoricheskiy zburnal*, 11 (1985), pp. 10–20. See also A. A. Grechko et. al., *Istoriya vtoroy mirovoy voyny*, 1939–1945, Vol. 2, Voenizdat, Moscow, 1974, pp. 74–182 and *passim*, for a discussion of Soviet military doctrine from 1936 to 1939. For an appraisal of Soviet threat assessment between the

Russia's historical exposure to attack and invasion, including the defeats imposed on the Soviet Union during the early stages of Hitler's *Operation Barbarossa* in 1941, remains in the DNA of today's and tomorrow's Russian political leaders and commanders.²⁹

Russia's national security concept of the year 2010 and its related military doctrine show its fears of surprise attack in the face of NATO conventional military superiority. This concern became especially acute in the period immediately following NATO's 1999 war against Yugoslavia, coincident with the official enlargement of NATO to include Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. NATO's *Operation Allied Force* forced an historic Russian ally to capitulate to the alliance's demands for repatriation of Albanian Kosovars by means of an air war alone, without the necessity for a ground invasion. Russia rushed in at the endgame to make a dramatic gesture of deploying its share of the peacekeeping force into Kosovo.

But NATO's willingness to go to war for the first time in its history and in the face of Russian objections, bypassing the United Nations Security Council, advertised Russia's post-Cold War military backwardness in technologies related to the 'Revolution in Military Affairs'. Russia's draft military doctrine of 1999 and its national security concept of 2000 therefore opened the door to the possible use of nuclear weapons not only for deterrence but also for war fighting. The security concept stated that the use of nuclear weapons by Russia would become possible 'in the event or need to repulse armed aggression, if all other measures of resolving the crisis situation have been exhausted and proven ineffective'. Russia's more recent doctrinal expressions and policy statements have not revoked the expressed prerogative for nuclear first use in the face of a lost or losing conventional conflict with the potential for an otherwise catastrophic military defeat for Russia. 31

A 'Barbarossa complex' is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for present-day Russia to avoid wars or to prevail in war if necessary. However, Russian military planners might reasonably assume that the initial period of war can be one of great danger. What seemed politically absurd in

two world wars, see John Erickson, 'Threat Identification and Strategic Appraisal by the Soviet Union, 1930–41', Ch. 13 in E. R. May (ed.), *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment before the Two World Wars*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1984, pp. 375–424.

For overviews of this issue, see D. M. Glantz, 'The Red Army in 1941', pp. 1–37 and J. Kipp, 'Soviet War Planning', pp. 40–54 in D. M. Glantz (ed.), *The Initial Period of War on the Eastern Front, 22 June–August 1941*, Frank Cass, London, 1993; R. H. Phillips, *Soviet Military Debate on the Initial Period of War: Characteristics and Implications*, Center for International Studies, MIT, Cambridge, MA, 1989, and J. W. Kipp, *Barbarossa, Soviet Covering Forces and the Initial Period of War: Military History and AirLand Battle*, Soviet Army Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, KS, undated.

Gited in S. J. Blank, Threats to Russian Security: The View from Moscow, US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 2000, p. 10.

The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation', 5 February 2010, in *Johnson's Russia List* 2010, #35, 19 February 2010. See also N. Sokov, 'The New, 2010 Russian Military Doctrine: The Nuclear Angle', Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, 5 February 2010, http://cns.miis.edu/stories/100205_russian_nuclear_doctrine.htm

a temporary surge of US-Russian 'reset' and post-post-Cold War Europe was not necessarily impossible from the standpoint of Russian military pessimists. From the perspective of risk-averse Russian military planners, Russian forces drawn back to the western border districts of the current Federation will be in very much the same position as those which faced the onslaught of *Barbarossa* in 1941. Russian intelligence will place equally high importance on the detection of enemy political decision to attack (strategic warning) as on the acquisition of order-of-battle data and other information essential for response to tactical warning. As Graeme Herd has noted, after 1991, shocks to Russian national consciousness and identity have been numerous:

These shocks helped fuel a sense of encirclement and a profound diminution of strategic presence and prestige and so the need to re-assert Russian Great Power. In the field of decision-making, priority-setting and strategy formation, the political response has been towards the creation of a regime which is perhaps even more centralized than the Soviet template it replaced, one that is based on aggrandized personal networks rather than functioning institutions.³²

Therefore NATO would be well advised to continue its program of political and military collaboration with Russia, notwithstanding angst over Ukraine, and to encourage improvements in Russia's early warning and control systems so that they are less susceptible self-fulfilling pessimism. In addition, NATO enlargement should deemphasize the alliance's nuclear guaranty except as a last resort. In this regard, the US and Russia would also be well advised to: (1) continue pursuit of strategic nuclear arms reductions beyond the limits agreed in the New START treaty, signed in 2010 and entered into force in 2011; (2) undertake NATO-Russian negotiations on the reduction and/or elimination of non-strategic nuclear weapons deployed in Europe; and (3) further pursue Russian-NATO cooperation on European missile defenses as adumbrated in the Madrid discussions between Russian and NATO leaders in 2010. Reaching agreement on the reduction or elimination of European non-strategic nuclear weapons (NSNW) or on missile defenses may present both domestic and foreign policy difficulties. As Nikolai Sokov has noted with respect to Russia's perspective on NSNW:

A solution to the paradox of TNW [theater nuclear weapons]—assets that Russia apparently does not need, but continues to hold on to—can be found in domestic politics rather than in strategic planning. The Russian

³² G. Herd, 'Security Strategy: Sovereign Democracy and Great Power Aspirations', Ch. 2 in M. Galeotti (ed.), *The Politics of Security in Modern Russia*, Ashgate Publishers, Farnham, Surrey, 2010, pp. 7–27, citation p. 8.

government attitude toward TNW appears to represent a complex mix of domestic and bureaucratic politics, [mis]perceptions, and idiosyncrasies.³³

In addition, the US and Russia have an objective community of interest in lowering the nuclear threshold by improving the quality of Russia's conventional forces (to a point) relative to its nuclear ones, so that Russia's nuclear employment policies and declaratory doctrines are less forward-leaning with respect to nuclear first or early use in a conventional war. More specifically, Russia must be disabused of the notion that a nuclear first use in Europe or elsewhere would be an effective means of 'de-escalation' of an otherwise conventional conflict on terms favorable to Russia. Escalators run in two directions.

Indeed, a more favorable climate for US-Russian and NATO-Russian cooperation on nuclear arms limitation should also contribute to more realistic threat assessments in Moscow with respect to the prevention or conduct of conventional warfare. Russia is not threatened primarily by NATO—unless Putin loses control of his limited-risk forward strategy in Ukraine and creates a self-negating feedback loop. Instead, the threat of regional wars on Russia's periphery or terrorism and insurgent wars within Russia must now take pride of place in General Staff and Ministry of Defense contingency planning. Preparedness for these contingencies of limited and local wars, regular and irregular, will require a smaller, more professional, and more mobile military than post-Soviet Russia has fielded hitherto.³⁴ As well, Russia's armed forces, together with the General Staff and Ministry of Defense, must be made accountable to its political leadership as an institutional, not a personal, matter. Unless these political and military building blocks are put into place, Russia's armed forces and military doctrine will be maladapted for the security challenges of the 21st century.

N. Sokov, 'Nuclear Weapons in Russian National Security Strategy', Ch. 5 in S. J. Blank (ed.), *Russian Nuclear Weapons: Past, Present, and Future*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA, November 2011, pp. 187–260, citation p. 216.

On the subject of accomplishments and disappointments in Russian military reform, see R. N. McDermott, 'The Brain of the Russian Army: Futuristic Visions Tethered by the Past', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 27 (2014) pp. 4–35; A. Golts, 'Reform: The End of the First Phase—Will There Be a Second?', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 27 (2014) pp. 131–146; and K. Giles, 'A New Phase in Russian Military Transformation', *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 27 (2014) pp. 147–162. For additional perspective, see D. R. Herspring, 'Russian Nuclear and Conventional Weapons: The Broken Relationship', Ch. 1, pp. 1–31, and R. N. McDermott, 'Russia's Conventional Armed Forces: Reform and Nuclear Posture to 2020', Ch. 2, pp. 33–7, both in S. J. Blank (ed.), *Russian Nuclear Weapons: Past, Present and Future*. See also A. Cohen and R. E. Hamilton, *The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA, 2011; R. Thornton, *Military Modernization and the Russian Ground Forces*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, PA, 2011; R. McDermott, *The Reform of Russia's Conventional Armed Forces: Problems, Challenges, and Policy Implications*, The Jamestown Foundation, Washington, DC, 2011; and P. Baev, 'Neither Reform Nor Modernization: The Armed Forces Under and After Putin's Command', Ch. 5 in M. Galeotti (ed.), *The Politics of Security in Modern Russia*, Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey, pp. 69–88.

CONCLUSIONS

Vladimir Putin took Crimea not only by force but also by successful use of military persuasion. He played chess against his opponents inside and outside of Ukraine, including the United States and NATO, in order to limit the impact of Ukraine's ouster of the Russia-friendly Yanukovych government and to keep his hand in the negotiations about post-Yanukovych Ukraine, under the brooding omnipresence of Russian military power ever close by. Putin maneuvered his opponents into a situation in which they would have to escalate dramatically in order to reverse his coup in Crimea in a timely manner, and Western governments lacked both the resolve and the capability to do so. Therefore, Putin established temporary 'escalation dominance' in Crimea without formally committing Russian forces to battle and without any costly military engagements between Russian and Ukrainian forces (although Russian military equipment was on the ground that 'self-defense forces' would not normally have access to, and Russian Spetsnaz likely were used in sterile uniforms).³⁵ In so doing, he also had to read correctly the temperature and temperament of the US and allied NATO countries and judge how far to push the combination of covert actions and influence operations. As Janis Berzins of the National Defence Academy of Latvia has noted, Russia's Crimean campaign was a victory achieved by the operationalization of what Russian military thinkers refer to as 'New Generation Warfare' that includes a coordinated campaign of strategic communications using political, psychological, and information strategies.³⁶ As Berzins notes:

Thus, the Russian view of modern warfare is based on the idea that the main battle-space is the mind and, as a result, new-generation wars are to be dominated by information and psychological warfare, in order to achieve superiority in troops and weapons control, morally and psychologically depressing the enemy's armed forces personnel and civil population. The main objective is to reduce the necessity for deploying hard military power to the minimum necessary, making the opponent's military and civilian population support the attacker to the detriment of their own government and country.³⁷

Whether Putin's initial political and military success in Crimea in 2014 would be turned into enduring accomplishments or transitory victories followed by successful Western countermeasures remained undecided

For historical and legal perspective on this issue, see W. Hays Parks, 'Special Forces' Wear of Non-Standard Uniforms', *Chicago Journal of International Law* 4 (2003) pp. 493–560.

J. Berzins, Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defense Policy, Policy Paper No. 2, National Defence Academy of Latvia, Center for Security and Strategic Research, April 2014.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

as Russia recognized as sovereign and then annexed Crimea in mid-March of 2014. Continued turbulence in Ukraine was assured in the short term. Putin's long-term objectives were as subject to the disciplines of warfare and military art, as well as to the insights of strategic history, as were those of his predecessors as rulers of Russia. As Professor Colin Gray has noted, with respect to the important lessons from strategic history:

Military and strategic advice is always hostage to political preference and discretion. The past and the present of our strategic history attest abundantly to the persisting truth of this claim. Regardless of the form of contemporary governance, political authority will command military action, for good, ill, or both.³⁸

³⁸ C. S. Gray, Defense Planning for National Security: Navigation Aids for the Mystery Tour, Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, Carlisle, PA, March 2014, p. 37.