

Grasping at Shadows

Understanding Great Power use of Grey Zone and Hybrid Warfare Approaches
Through Historical Analysis

By

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Abstract

Renewed, multipolar great power competition, marked by operations beyond peace but short of war, challenges Western conceptions of a peace-war binary. Attempts to explain this challenge through concepts of grey zone conflict and hybrid warfare are the subject of debate as to both the historical reality and explanatory utility of these concepts. Missing from these debates is a serious examination of whether grey zone and hybrid warfare concepts can explain historically similar cases. This thesis presents three such cases, French revisionism from 1774-1783, Soviet Far East strategy from 1937-1941, and American anti-fascist strategy from 1936-1941, to examine and test the utility of these concepts. The grey zone and hybrid warfare were found to provide descriptive and explanatory utility for these cases. Case analysis provides suggestions for the use of these concepts and recommendations for modern strategists and analysts.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my late mother, who I hope would be proud but unsurprised.

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Introduction

It has been more than five years since the United States declared the return of great power competition within then President Trump's 2017 National Security Strategy.¹ President Biden's October 2022 National Security Strategy centres great power competition as one of two strategic challenges, with the second being the interrelated challenge of resolving shared transnational challenges, such as climate change, within the context of that competition.² However, while the United States perceives itself credibly challenged by Russia as a revisionist regional spoiler and China as a rising competitor, the balance of power yet remains with the American-led system of alliances. Thus, challenges come not necessarily in the form of direct military confrontation, nor from being outcompeted in peaceful spheres, but instead from unconventional measures approaching but remaining below the threshold of war. Operating in this grey zone, challengers seek to find strategic seams, confuse risk perception, and obfuscate the very nature of the conflict.³

The idea of competition in the grey zone, whether specified by name or left unstated, suffuses much of Western strategic thought. While not appearing by name in the 2022 NSS, the 2021 Interim NSS for example refers the need to “develop capabilities to better compete and deter gray zone actions” even as the 2022 NSS elaborates further operating towards the same goal.⁴ These actions are often described as a mixing of conventional and unconventional tools of statecraft into hybrid warfare. Definitions of hybrid warfare vary in scope from a term within

¹ Donald J. Trump, “National Security Strategy of the United States of America” (Washington, DC: White House, 2017), 27, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

² Joe Biden, “National Security Strategy” (Washington, DC: White House, 2022), 6.

³ Nathan Freier et al., “Outplayed: Regaining Strategic Initiative in the Gray Zone, A Report Sponsored by the Army Capabilities Integration Center in Coordination with Joint Staff J-39/Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment Branch,” *Monographs, Collaborative Studies, & IRPs*, June 1, 2016, 7, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/925>.

⁴ Joseph R. Biden, “Interim National Security Strategic Guidance” (Washington, DC: White House, 2021), 14.

operational-level military doctrine, to whole-of-society attempts to destabilize opponents, to indeed a useless umbrella term that could include almost any action by a state that the observer does not like.⁵

Discussions of the grey zone and hybrid warfare have, for the past several years, routinely gone hand in hand. Canada's 2017 defence policy *Strong, Secure, Engaged* (SSE) the changing nature of conflict as how "[s]tate and non-state actors are increasingly pursuing their agendas using hybrid methods in the "grey zone" that exists just below the threshold of armed conflict."⁶ SSE envisions these concepts as interlinked with hybrid methods being constrained to the grey zone. What exactly the grey zone is and what hybrid methods are used within that zone is left undefined within SSE.

Despite widespread usage in American, Canadian, and European scholarly and defence publications, both the grey zone and hybrid warfare have come under significant criticism. Critics have generally described the concepts as too broad and inclusive to be useful, more prone to add confusion than provide clarity, and ultimately presenting nothing new. Some even call for these terms to be stricken from the strategic lexicon forever lest they cause further damage.⁷ Even in the face of such criticism, the concepts persist in both academic and defence publications. There appears to be something useful in these concepts which causes the analyst to reach for them.

American, Canadian, and other Western national security and defence strategy are built towards addressing challenges and threats within great power competition. Whether explicitly

⁵ Lawrence Freedman, *The Future of War: A History* (London: Penguin Books, 2018), 225.

⁶ "Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy" (Department of National Defence, 2017).

⁷ Donald Stoker and Craig Whiteside, "Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking," *Naval War College Review* 73, no. 1 (n.d.): 12–48; Damien Van Puyvelde, "Hybrid Warfare - Does It Even Exist?," *NATO Review*, 2015, <https://www.nato.int/DOCU/review/2015/Also-in-2015/hybrid-modern-future-warfare-russia-ukraine/EN/index.htm>.

stated or implicitly understood, the nature of those challenges is seen to exist in no small part within the grey zone and employing hybrid warfare. If these concepts are being depended upon to provide an explanatory heuristic in understanding current and future challenges, then they must be tested and clarified through further research.

The purpose of this research is to determine if the concepts of grey zone conflict and hybrid warfare are useful to describe a range of cases within great power competition. If these concepts are useful, then questions naturally follow including: are these concepts distinct and if so, how are they related? Why do states use the grey zone and hybrid warfare, and why do they stop using them? Do only certain types of states operate in the grey zone and use hybrid warfare? The focus on currently evolving examples and specifically states seen as adversaries to the West complicate answering these questions.

The methodology for this study is a comparative historical case analysis. Three historical cases are presented in which the grey zone and hybrid warfare concepts are applied to assess the explanatory utility of those concepts. Each case shares the employment of strategies, tactics, and capabilities by a great power state consistent with what is now described as grey zone conflict and hybrid warfare and occurring within multipolar conditions. The cases vary in criteria, such as regime type, threat perception, geostrategic concerns, offensive versus defensive orientation, and other factors. This allows for testing of these concepts in the description of similar behaviour by dissimilar states.

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter One is a literature review of the grey zone and hybrid warfare concepts. The aim is to retrace the debate and in so doing rein back the popular usage of these terms in order to recentre the debate to the concepts offered by the original proponents of each concept. The role of mass interest in these concepts brought on by

the 2014 Russian intervention in Ukraine is examined. Chapter One concludes by presenting the grey zone and hybrid warfare as distinct, but interrelated, with a modified continuum of conflict presented for use throughout the study.

Chapters Two, Three, and Four are historical case studies. Chapter Two examines French strategy 1774-1783 as it exploited the American Revolution in its rivalry with Great Britain. Chapter Three presents a defensively oriented Soviet Union interfering (1937-1941) in the Sino-Japanese War to manage competing security demands posed by two aggressive powers, Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. Chapter Four provides a liberal-democratic example and contrast to the preceding chapter by presenting the United States 1936-1941 attempting to maintain the global order even as its executive branch was restrained by internal political obstacles.

Chapter Five concludes this study by presenting a comparative analysis of the case studies, providing findings, and suggesting areas and approaches to further research. Some broad recommendations for modern strategists are offered.

Chapter One: Grey Zone, Hybrid, and Application

It is becoming a well-worn trope of contemporary strategic studies to declare the world is shifting towards a multipolar order marked by great power competition. This competition is presented as the result of a revanchist Russia and a rising China challenging the status quo of Western dominance led by the United States. Scholars and strategists alike argue that challenges to the United States status quo dominance come not in the form of superior peacetime competition or open military challenge, but instead through unconventional means below the threshold of warfare within the grey zone. One US Army War College monograph puts this simply, extending the colour metaphor in both directions:

Many U.S. competitors have chosen to operate in this space by design. A favorable U.S.-led status quo has, to date, allowed the United States and its partners to dictate the terms and outcomes of both the “black” – open and unambiguous traditional military conflict – and the “white” – routine and peaceful diplomatic and economic relations – scenarios. In order to compete more effectively many U.S. opponents choose to operate in between.⁸

The United States and its allies dominate the “black” of traditional warfare using conventional military forces as well as the “white” of diplomatic and economic competition. This leaves the space between “white” and “black” as a zone where U.S. opponents expect to obtain a comparative advantage. In this way, the grey zone injects strategic confusion, throws off conventional risk calculation, and exploits seams between the foreign affairs and defense departments of Western nations.⁹

In pursuing a strategy to remain within grey zone while challenging American dominance, it is argued Russia and China resort to a fusion of what is presented as conventional and unconventional tools of statecraft, but what might be better described as traditional and

⁸ Freier et al., “Outplayed,” 3.

⁹ Freier et al., 7.

unorthodox tools as perceived by Western strategists. These traditional tools are those in which, generally speaking, the United States and its allies maintain dominance, namely engagement in international institutions, international commerce, and conventional military forces. Unorthodox, unconventional tools run the gamut from classic subversion and espionage, the use of transnational criminal organizations, emerging technological capabilities, such as cyber warfare and social media-enabled deceptive propaganda to name but a few. This fusion is commonly referred to as hybrid warfare and particularly ascribed to the actions of the Russian Federation against its near abroad in Eastern Europe.

This mainstream usage of the grey zone and hybrid warfare receives significant criticism. Such criticisms can be boiled down to a few main themes. First, the grey zone and hybrid warfare are imprecise terms that are too often used interchangeably. Second, the grey zone and hybrid warfare merely present new terms for previously known state behaviour, or put another way these concepts are ‘nothing new’ and are not worth consideration. Third, the grey zone in particular introduces dangerous confusion between peace and war. Overall, some critics are so zealous in their criticism that they advocate for the wholesale elimination of the terms grey zone and hybrid warfare from academic and strategic discourse.¹⁰ In order to address these criticisms regarding the utility of the grey zone and hybrid warfare, these terms must be first unpacked.

Grey Zone

Originating within the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) in 2015 and embraced by the US State Department, the grey zone refers to the adversarial space between

¹⁰ Stoker and Whiteside, “Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking”; Van Puyvelde, “Hybrid Warfare - Does It Even Exist?”

peaceful relations and conventional warfare.¹¹ While the exact wording of proposed definitions have varied, all have rotated around this central theme of a confounding space between the more intuitively understood states of peace and war. Comparing this early definition to RAND's usage of "activities beyond normal diplomacy and trade but below the use of kinetic military force" in their 2022 study of Chinese grey zone activities demonstrates how analysts have consistently reached for some way to describe this class of activities, while finding the peace-war binary insufficient to do so.¹²

The USSOCOM Gray Zone White Paper more specifically defines the grey zone as "competitive interactions among and within state and non-state actors that fall between the traditional war and peace duality."¹³ Reflecting this, the USSOCOM White Paper author Philip Kapusta recognized the existence of perspective-dependent definitions of conflict and noted how it may be strategically advantageous to cultivate ambiguity about what type of competition or conflict actors may be in, or even whether an adversarial relationship exists at all. This would allow actors to control the perception of their actions, and therefore to avoid activating tripwires or crossing red lines, thus remaining below the threshold of escalation into conventional war. Kapusta further describes the United States as struggling "when dealing with challenges not fitting neatly into our traditional models" noting how "[n]o organizations in the US government has primacy for gray zone challenges" leading to problems for unity of effort thus creating seams and blind spots. Grey zone challenges are not presented here as something new, but of returning

¹¹ Philip Kapusta, "The Gray Zone" (United States Special Operations Command, 2015), <https://info.publicintelligence.net/USSOCOM-GrayZones.pdf>; "Report on Gray Zone Conflict" (United States of America, Department of State, International Security Advisory Board, January 3, 2017), <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/avc/isab/266650.htm>.

¹² Bonny Lin et al., "Competition in the Gray Zone: Countering China's Coercion Against U.S. Allies and Partners in the Indo-Pacific" (RAND Corporation, March 30, 2022), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA594-1.html.

¹³ Kapusta, "The Gray Zone."

relevance, albeit under a new term, in an era beyond American dominance in the 1990s and 2000s yet lacking the clear adversarial dyad of the Cold War.

The key text of the grey zone is Michael Mazarr's *Mastering the Grey Zone* as evidenced by citation chains and even explicitly acknowledged by critics of the concept.¹⁴ Mazarr contends that grey zone conflict warrants significant attention owing to three main reasons. First, Mazarr proposes that potential adversaries, "notably China, Russia, and Iran," make use of what can be described as grey zone strategies. Second, he suggests the costs of outright military aggression have become so severe that alternative approaches are preferable to aggressive states. Third, Mazarr suggests that, while tools of statecraft suitable for the grey zone have always been used, technological and societal advancement have provided far more capabilities such as "cyber weapons, advanced forms of information campaigns, and elaborate civilian tools of statecraft, such as coast guards."¹⁵ While Mazarr does argue "large-scale operations in this indistinct landscape will be the dominant form of state-to-state rivalry in the coming decades," he concedes that conflict in the forms of traditional warfare, hybrid warfare, classical diplomacy, and espionage may and will occur outside the bounds of the grey zone.

Mazarr engages early with the question of which types of actors make use of grey zone strategies. He identifies the familiar examples of Chinese and Russian actions in the 2010s, but also more restrained examples of "rising powers such as Brazil, Turkey, and India" alongside sporadic mention of historical anecdotes from as early as Greek city state warfare.¹⁶ Mazarr's chief concern, however, is use of grey zone strategies by revisionist states:

¹⁴ Christopher Paul, "Confessions of a Hybrid Warfare Skeptic," *Small Wars Journal*, March 10, 2016, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/confessions-of-a-hybrid-warfare-skeptic>; Stoker and Whiteside, "Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking," 18.

¹⁵ Michael J. Mazarr, "Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding A Changing Era of Conflict," 2015, 3.

¹⁶ Mazarr, 2–3.

This analysis is not meant to suggest that only measured revisionists, or revisionists more generally, would use gray zone strategies. The United States and other countries have employed many tools and techniques characteristic of this form of conflict, from propaganda to information operations to covert and proxy operations. But the most persistent and forceful of such strategies will issue from revisionist states, who have the most urgent motive to force change.¹⁷

In effect, Mazarr proposes to begin the analysis with the most likely users of the grey zone.

Key to understanding the grey zone, according to Mazarr, is understanding degrees of revisionism. For Mazarr, “measured revisionists” who “are both integrated into the world community and deeply exasperated with it” are those most likely users of the grey zone.¹⁸ They are willing to take measured risks to enhance their relative power within the existing world hierarchy. Mazarr considers measured revisionism to be a natural worldview for a rising power:

Such states recognize the value of a rule-based order and harbor no interest in aggressive wars. But they are ambitious; they do demand and presume a transformation of some elements of the system; and they therefore possess a motive to seek out deliberate but powerful strategies for change” and “view existing global rules, institutions, norms, and power balances as insufficient to meet their goals, or unjust, or biased against them, or some combination of all of these.¹⁹

The exact boundaries, however, of this conceptual category are unclear, even though it serves as a means to place states with more transformative aims than status quo powers and more restraint than predatory powers. In this way, measured revisionism sits roughly in the middle of a spectrum alongside targeted revisionism, and bounded by passive and active status quo powers on one side and by opportunistic and reckless predator states on the other (Table 1). In contrast to measured revisionists, a targeted revisionist state is one Mazarr considers as motivated less by pressing needs for improvement in power relations and national grievances, and more by

¹⁷ Mazarr, 10.

¹⁸ Mazarr, 10.

¹⁹ Mazarr, 11.

entitlement. It is willing to bend or break the rules of the world order, even violently, to preserve roughly the status quo of the global balance of power.²⁰

Table 1 – Mazarr’s Expanded Typologies of State Preference: Status Quo Versus Revisionist²¹

Passive Status Quo (“Lambs”)	Active Status Quo (“Lions”)	Targeted Revisionist	Measured Revisionist	Opportunistic Predator (“Jackals”)	Reckless Predator (“Wolves”)
No motive to overturn system or gain relative advantage; limited investment in current-patterns. Security through appeasement and band-wagoning.	Powerful defense of existing status, supports rules-based order, little motive for aggressive relative gains acquisition. Self-defense, balancing.	Satisfied power with no motive to harm system, but revisionist and risk-accepting on a few issues; little ethno-nationalist motivation; sensitive to relative power, violent in defense of order.	Primary goal is preserving power; favors many elements of global order, but dissatisfied with current status, power relations and rule sets; strong nationalist narratives and motivation; determined to enhance relative power.	Seeks change in power balance, but risk-averse and self-protective; values security of regime more than change in status; will ally with lions as well as wolves.	Values relative gains more than security. Highly risk-tolerant and aggressive. Doctrinal or ideological requirement to spread territory. Determined to upset system. Unlimited aims.
Sweden	United Kingdom	United States	China	North Korea	Nazi Germany

Measured revisionists not only want to make gains, but they also want those gains to be legitimized by other states through recognition of their great power status and great power interests. More nuanced in their goals than just power-seeking predators, measured revisionists “crave the recognition that comes from such inclusion—most fear and resent being labeled as the sort of marginal troublemakers implied by the rogue state category.”²² Mazarr links this need for

²⁰ Mazarr, 20.

²¹ Mazarr, 20.

²² Mazarr, 14.

recognition to the origin of the revisionist aims in the first place: a national narrative that motivates calculated risk-taking to increase internationally recognized power and status. Not content to merely accept some states are revisionist as some sort of essential character, Mazarr remains interested in why states become more or less revisionist over time. Mazarr's interest here is practical because he holds that the "reasons why states seek revisionist goals can be all-important in understanding the degree of threat or challenge they pose to U.S. interests and the international order."²³ In most cases, this appears as a form of historical grievance and/or a strong national identity informing a belief of entitlement to great power status and influence.

Mazarr does briefly consider the grey zone's relationship to hybrid warfare. For Mazarr, the grey zone is predominately an arena of non-violent, but often subversive or clandestine activities, while hybrid warfare includes some use of conventional military force in the violent pursuit of political objectives. Mazarr envisions some overlap and provides a specific example in what he describes as Iranian grey zone employment of Hezbollah's hybrid force.²⁴ More generally, Mazarr contends:

Such operations overlap with the higher-intensity end of gray zone conflict as I am defining it, but the hybrid warfare concept clearly imagines a far more violent clash that involves direct use of many military instruments. In this sense, hybrid war is truly "war" in a Clausewitzian sense, whereas gray zone strategies are a less violent and looser form of conflict.²⁵

Put another way, the grey zone is not presented as completely free of violence, but that violence is limited and cloaked by the use of covert operations or proxy forces. Mazarr seems unable to decide if a sort of lower intensity, presumably proxy-based hybrid warfare may exist within the

²³ Mazarr, 16.

²⁴ Mazarr, 44.

²⁵ Mazarr, 46.

most violent end of the grey zone or if the violence inherent in conventional military capabilities pushes hybrid warfare out of the grey zone entirely.

James Wirtz extends Mazarr's work by accepting the description of grey zone approaches and the potential rationale for their use and then incorporates an analysis of how the grey zone interacts with deterrence. For parties undertaking a strategy of deterrence, the outbreak of hostilities is a strategic defeat because deterrence failed to preserve the peace. Wirtz suggest that "[s]hort-of-war strategies seek to sidestep deterrent threats by actually exploiting an observation about parties that adopt deterrence as a strategy — they would prefer to threaten others with the use of force rather than actually engage in hostilities."²⁶ In this way, grey zone strategists shift the obligation of escalation to the deterring party and bank on a bet that the target of grey zone conflict will decide that actively resisting is not worth the costs.

Mazarr's framework serves as the overt foundation of most serious scholarship within this subject area. Widely cited, Mazarr's work remains the most compelling theoretical and conceptual explanation of the grey zone. Works building from Mazarr have tended to further the analysis of a limited range of potential adversaries to the United States in current and future geopolitical conditions.²⁷ None, however, meaningfully expand upon hybrid warfare's role within the grey zone, nor do they apply the grey zone to any but the most recent cases of the 2010s.

David Kilcullen, as part of his broader analysis on the evolution of modern warfare in the 21st century, sets aside these debates to examine closely the nature of Russian and Chinese sub-

²⁶ James J. Wirtz, "Life in the 'Gray Zone': Observations for Contemporary Strategists," *Defence & Security Analysis* 33, no. 2 (2017): 107.

²⁷ Over fifty such works appear in Google Scholar, but are best exemplified by: Freier et al., "Outplayed."

warfighting approaches.²⁸ Kilcullen describes Russian strategy in the 21st century as one of liminal warfare intended to exploit the ambiguity of operating up to the very blurred line between peace and war and in spaces of legal and perceptual ambiguity to forestall strategic defeat and buy time to build modern conventional military capabilities.²⁹ China, on the other hand, is presented as practicing conceptual envelopment in which China perceives its own actions as warlike in areas the West does not see as arising to the level of war. Put another way, Kilcullen argues that the Russian approach is one of vertical escalatory brinkmanship while the Chinese approach is one of pervasive horizontal escalation.³⁰

This analysis is rich and useful in understanding specifics but does not engage directly in the wider debate on grey zone conflict and hybrid warfare. However, Kilcullen's concepts of liminal warfare and conceptual envelopment fundamentally rests on the useful assumption that such approaches target an apparent seam in the West's ability to understand conflict that straddles the line between peace and war. In this way, Kilcullen echoes the 2015 USSOCOM White Paper and its description of the perspective dependent and cultivated ambiguity elements of the grey zone. While not exactly presupposing the existence of the grey zone, Kilcullen's analysis rests on the assumption that there is something special about the conceptual space between peace and war.

In contrast, Stoker and Whiteside provide a strong criticism of not only the concepts of grey zone conflict and hybrid warfare, but also the American strategic enterprise more broadly.³¹ They decry these terms as a fashionable failure of America to think clearly about the connections

²⁸ David Kilcullen, *The Dragons and the Snakes: How the Rest Learned to Fight the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 150.

²⁹ Kilcullen, 119.

³⁰ Kilcullen, 175.

³¹ Stoker and Whiteside, "Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking."

between political and military issues and point to how, by 2020, usage of the grey zone and hybrid warfare had become amorphous and interchangeable.³² Stoker and Whiteside argue for retaining the peace-war binary and suggest that states of peace and war can exist despite intentional or unintentional obfuscation on both sides of a conflict. They go as far as suggesting that the “terms, as well as the concepts arising from them, should be eliminated from the strategic lexicon” and “cause more harm than good and contribute to an increasingly dangerous distortion of the concepts of war, peace, and geopolitical completion[.]”³³ To be clear, Stoker and Whiteside’s prescription for a return to the peace-war binary is theoretically workable. Edge cases can be best-fit into the concept of peaceful competition or war as necessary from a theoretical perspective, and state actors can reduce ambiguity unilaterally by declaring war or by establishing a firm redline and following through with war, even if those actions have unappealing political implications.

However, in not providing any historical analysis, Stoker and Whiteside leave unanswered the question of whether grey zone and hybrid warfare describe a historical mode of conflict now returning under new terminology in need of conceptual refinement as a third option to their binary of accepting or rejecting the current state of thinking. Curiously, they assert that “when new terms appear—and they will—they must be tested immediately against history” yet only advance historical objections to some concepts of hybrid warfare, offering no historical analysis supporting a rejection of the grey zone.³⁴

Ultimately, it appears that for many analysts and scholars there is utility to be found in the concept of a grey zone outside of the peace-war binary. Without such a category or some

³² Stoker and Whiteside, 26.

³³ Stoker and Whiteside, 13.

³⁴ Stoker and Whiteside, 39.

other tool like it, difficulty is encountered in describing the full range of competitive moves on the world stage. It seems that a trinary model, which includes a third interstitial grey zone category, provides a more useful approach.

Even so, three key issues need to be addressed. First is a lack of breadth in cases. Excepting an unsystematic and limited survey by Geraint Hughes, there has been very little recent work considering grey zone applicability to history and certainly no true case studies.³⁵ Second, Mazarr's grey zone model is intended only to fit measured revisionist actors and it remains an open question if the same logic applies to targeted revisionist and status quo power use of the grey zone. Third, and perhaps most challenging to resolve, is the lack of consensus of how hybrid warfare should be understood in relation to the grey zone. It is because of this third issue that an understanding of hybrid warfare's conceptual development, and subsequent conceptual confusion, is required.

Hybrid Warfare

The current usage of the term 'hybrid warfare' originates from a 2005 short piece by then-Lieutenant General James Mattis, USMC and Frank Hoffman. In part, the piece concerns efforts by Mattis and Hoffman to extend the earlier concept of the "Three Block War" to incorporate a fourth block emphasizing the pervasive availability of information operations and psychological warfare capabilities to non-state actors. The heart of their thinking, however, is the prediction that American conventional superiority will force potential adversaries to innovate away from purely conventional responses. They write that "our conventional superiority creates a compelling logic for states and non-state actors to move out of the traditional mode of war and seek some niche capability or some unexpected combination of technologies and tactics to gain

³⁵ Geraint Hughes, "War in the Grey Zone: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Implications," *Survival* 62, no. 3 (May 3, 2020): 131–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2020.1763618>.

an advantage” arguing from a position of American conventional dominance against state adversaries, proved by victories against Iraq, and apparent tactical competency in counterinsurgency.³⁶ Mattis and Hoffman saw these types of threats as likely to emerge from failing states where militias, remnants of defeated or defecting state militaries, and transnational non-state actors, such as criminal and terror organizations could intermix and jointly challenge American interests.

Although Mattis would famously quip later as US Secretary of Defense that nothing keeps him up at night, because he is the one keeping others up, it would appear Mattis and Hoffman’s chief concern in 2005 was that the United States would face adversaries able to blend conventional military capabilities with guerrilla warfare into a complex threat too complicated for the Marine Corps, and the wider United States military, to overcome without modifying the individual and collective training systems to account for that potential threat. While largely focused on prescriptions for the Marine Corps to win tactical to operational conflict against hybrid opponents in failed states, Mattis and Hoffman make mention of the potential for adversaries to blend “other forms of economic war or crippling forms of computer network attacks against military or financial targets” alluding to the potential for regional or great power adversaries to wage hybrid warfare against the United States.³⁷ Which state actors Mattis and Hoffman had in mind at the time was not stated, but taking the view from 2005 it is not unreasonable to suggest they were thinking of regional spoilers, such as Iran and North Korea. The lack of any discussion on the possibility of great power competitors, such as Russia or China, employing hybrid warfare is understandable for the time, but glaring in hindsight.

³⁶ James N. Mattis and Frank Hoffman, “Future Warfare: The Rise of Hybrid Wars,” *Proceedings-United States Naval Institute*, November 2005.

³⁷ Mattis and Hoffman.

Hoffman continued work on the hybrid warfare concept in the late 2000s. By 2009, Hoffman was arguing that the coming character of warfare would be that of a convergence towards hybrid threats. Hoffman argued that “[w]hat once might have been distinct operational types or categorizations among terrorism and conventional, criminal, and irregular warfare have less utility today” and instead the United States must “expect to face competitors who will employ all forms of war and tactics, perhaps simultaneously.”³⁸ Hoffman warned that, while the United States remained well prepared to face any conventional adversary and was increasingly developing its counterterror and counterinsurgency capabilities, the blending and blurring of modes of conflict within hybrid warfare significantly challenge and confuse American responses.

Far from categorizing hybrid warfare as a new phenomenon, Hoffman categorized hybrid threats as quite challenging to overcome but not unique in historical context. Hoffman briefly outlined several examples from history such as the Peninsular War (1807–1814), the Boer War (1899-1902), and the American war in Vietnam (1961-1975) among others as presenting hybrid characteristics. Here Hoffman categorizes the historical examples as “compound wars” and distinguishes them from his own concept of “hybrid wars” by describing the former as regular and irregular forces operating under “unified direction” but lacking the operational or tactical level “fusion” he describes as being Hezbollah’s innovation in the Second Lebanon War 2006.³⁹ Hoffman states the difference between compound wars and hybrid wars is meaningful, but does not indicate precisely where the distinction lies, nor does he leave open room for historical examples of whatever may rise to the level of operational fusion.⁴⁰

³⁸ Frank G. Hoffman, “Hybrid Warfare and Challenges,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 52 (2009). 34-35.

³⁹ Hoffman, 36.

⁴⁰ Whether the distinction between hybrid and compound is useful and whether historical cases rise to the level of hybrid is not a settled question. Peter Mansoor rejects the utility of the compound vs hybrid distinction and offers a 1700s example of tactical fusion in the Battle of Cowpens 1781. Williamson Murray and Peter Mansoor, eds., *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3.

Setting aside this point, it is clear Hoffman's core argument is that compound or hybrid threats were not uncommon in history but that the capabilities available to such threats had, by 2006, become so sophisticated as to mark a significant increase to the challenge posed by those threats. At the time, however, Hoffman still conceived of these threats as emerging from what may be described as the bottom up: from militants acquiring conventional capabilities as was the case in Hezbollah's use of guided and cruise missiles in 2006 and his projections that in the future not only would more advanced weapons become available to such forces, but also that emerging modes of conflict, such as cyber warfare, would also fall into their hands.

By the early 2010s, interest in the hybrid war concept extended out from the American military and into niche areas of military history. Where Hoffman had only alluded to historical cases, Williamson Murray and Peter Mansoor led initial work in rigorously applying hybrid warfare against past historical cases. In gathering a series of historical essays in their 2012 book, Murray and Mansoor sought to build from Hoffman's attempts to intellectually prepare the American military for future hybrid wars not by future prognostication of emerging capabilities but by careful examination of past conflicts in pursuit of a deeper understanding of hybrid threats.

Murray and Mansoor's contributors were free to vary slightly in their own definitions of hybrid warfare, but all began and remained close to one definition that eliminated the hybrid-compound distinction emphasized by Hoffman. They defined hybrid warfare as “[c]onflict involving a combination of conventional military forces and irregulars (guerrillas, insurgents, and terrorists), which could include both state and nonstate actors, aimed at achieving a common political purpose” and actively posited that hybrid warfare can exist “at all levels of war, from

the tactical, to the operational, to the strategic.”⁴¹ From these premises, nine historical cases rich in detail are presented covering the 1st, 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries.⁴²

Mansoor’s own assessment of this work was that, while just the first steps in a closer examination, it illustrated that “although there is little new in hybrid warfare as a concept, it is a useful means of thinking about war’s past, present, and future.”⁴³ Mansoor held that hybrid warfare does not change the nature of war itself, but it does change the ways in which war is waged by the participants. Murray concluded from this initial historical analysis that the hybrid mode of conflict presents opportunities for the underdog to frustrate and negate the overwhelming superiority of their opponents by adopting hybrid warfare. To Murray, hybrid wars lacked “‘silver bullet’ solutions” for any side owing to the complexity this mode of war generates.⁴⁴

The hybrid warfare concept then, to Murray and Mansoor, serves as a useful way of thinking about a historically prevalent form of warfare forgotten at great peril by those who bought into the “technophilia that marked the American enthusiasm in the 1990s and early 2000s for what many termed ‘the revolution in military affairs’”⁴⁵ In contrast to Hoffman, who earlier argued that Hezbollah’s success in 2006 arose mainly from technologically-enabled conventional capabilities, Murray argued those technical specifics were secondary to Israel’s intellectual failure in allowing themselves to be blinded by a faith in conventional superiority. Worse yet, according to Murray, was the failure of American defence experts to see this blending of

⁴¹ Murray and Mansoor, 2–3.

⁴² The cases included Germanic resistance to Roman expansion, English occupation of Ireland 1594-1603, the American Revolution from the perspective of the revolutionaries, the Peninsular War 1807-1814, the American Civil War 1861-1865, the German army in the Franco-Prussian War 1870-1871, British imperial policing 1700-1970, Japanese operations in Northern China 1937-1945, and the American war in Vietnam.

⁴³ Murray and Mansoor, *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*, 2012, 1.

⁴⁴ Murray and Mansoor, 294.

⁴⁵ Murray and Mansoor, 289.

conventional and irregular tactics as a part of a historical pattern, and perhaps even a broader historical norm, now returning with new technological specifics. Castigating those analysts who jumped to call hybrid warfare a truly novel approach, Murray wrote that “[f]ew, if any, of these exercises in thinking about the future examined history to see if the past might offer context and evidence to understand the phenomena of political entities mixing conventional military operations with the activities of insurgents and terrorists.”⁴⁶ For Murray and Mansoor, the last thing needed from hybrid warfare was another buzzword. Instead, what was needed is some way to reintroduce an understanding of this historical mode of conflict so as to not be blindsided by its return no matter the particular, technical specifics.

While not specifically referencing or engaging with the work led by Murray and Mansoor, the 2013 monograph by Timothy McCulloh and Richard Johnson was a natural progression of both the military futurism of Hoffman and of attempts to ground such thinking in history.⁴⁷ The work was in effect two monographs in one. Efforts to understand hybrid warfare were split between McCulloh, who attempted to discern principles of hybrid warfare by comparing the 2006 Hezbollah case to Soviet partisans of 1941-1945, and Johnson, who compared American experiences in the Vietnam War to Operation Iraqi Freedom through the lens of American operational art with a view to developing approaches to counter hybrid threats. While each presented case is relatively shallow, their work marked an earnest attempt to inform American thinking on hybrid threats by applying contemporary operational art to some reasonable historical cases.

Of note, it does not raise the idea of hybrid warfare at the strategic level, instead considering it an operational approach available to armed forces in pursuit of strategic objectives.

⁴⁶ Murray and Mansoor, 290.

⁴⁷ Timothy McCulloh and Richard Johnson, *Hybrid Warfare* (MacDill Air Force Base: JSOU Press, 2013).

Neither does the work consider hybrid warfare as an option of choice for great powers, with the Soviet partisan case applying the ‘former/overrun regime forces’ model envisioned by Hoffman. Little would become of this attempt, however, as the work by McCulloh and Johnson became quickly eclipsed by events bringing the term hybrid warfare to mass audiences.

The debate of whether hybrid warfare presented something wholly new or merely a revival of an old mode of war surged to prominence because of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014. With Ukraine’s Maidan Revolution resulting in the replacement of the pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich with a government committed to integration with the West and Europe, Russia sought to re-align Ukraine by force. Russia annexed Crimea by deploying unmarked special operations forces in February and co-opted pro-Russian protests in Donbas to create a pro-Russian separatist proxy in April. While Russia was able to achieve a decisive *fait accompli* in Crimea, by August the Ukrainian counter-offensive against Russian proxies led to increasingly large, yet unacknowledged and outright denied, deployments of conventional Russian forces. This move catapulted the concept of hybrid warfare to more widespread attention, even garnering mainstream media discussion.

Russia’s tactics of 2014 led to interest in hybrid warfare as a tool of state actors. Rather than “build up” by the proliferation of advanced and portable conventional military systems to non-state actors as Hoffman predicted, Russia achieved similar effects by partnering foreign intelligence personnel, unmarked special operations forces (SOF), and limited conventional troops with local proxy forces all the while denying the presence of Russian personnel. While Russia’s rapid annexation of Crimea precluded any serious fighting, this hybrid force saw intense fighting in Donbas during Russia’s undeclared invasion. Later dubbed “hybrid maneuver” by the United States Army Asymmetric Warfare Group, Russia relied on local regular and irregular

forces to provide protection for Russian forces. By relying on local forces, Russia limited the need to deploy significant numbers of infantry and instead sought to bubble wrap high tech capabilities such as artillery, air defence, electronic warfare, and modernized armour at stand off from contact with Ukrainian forces.⁴⁸ Local forces provided the mass to take the brunt of losses, guerrilla capabilities to complicate Ukrainian response, and a thin veneer of legitimacy to local and international audiences.

In seeking to understand what had just happened, many Western analysts turned to the hybrid warfare concept. Retroactively, some began to refer to Russian actions leading into the 2008 Russo-Georgian War as hybrid in their support for secessionists and covert deployment of regular military assets in support of those proxies. The military thought of Russia's Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, who proposed that the lines between war and peace had been eroded and that blending military and non-military methods would be key for victory in 21st century conflicts, became a matter of intense debate and speculation.⁴⁹ By 2015, what was increasingly understood as Russia's hybrid threat caused grave concern among NATO members and the NATO secretariat. Questions arose asking if this was a new type of warfare NATO was unprepared for as propaganda and proxies masked Russian intent, sowing confusion and discord. European members especially took to the use of "hybrid threat" instead of "hybrid war" to describe efforts to undermine European security during peacetime.⁵⁰ Despite Russia's use of primarily military, if undeclared, mixing of conventional forces and local proxies to seize

⁴⁸ "Russian New Generation Warfare Handbook" (United States Army Asymmetric Warfare Group, December 2016), 4–5.

⁴⁹ The unsettled debate on what exactly the Gerasimov Doctrine is and if it even exists is irrelevant to the present study. It is not in question that Gerasimov and others within the Russian general staff observed the facts of American conventional military dominance and the difficulties that Western forces faced in the War on Terror in the Middle East. Gerasimov and others sought to apply what they observed from recent conflicts to the existing Russian, and prior Soviet, doctrine on subversion to develop options for the 21st century.

⁵⁰ Freedman, *The Future of War: A History*, 224–27.

territory in Ukraine, the hybrid warfare narrative shifted to encompass something far more amorphous and all encompassing. This was perhaps an inevitable process as Lawrence Freedman suggests:

In this respect ‘hybrid warfare’ emerged as a lesser form of warfare, coming to the fore because of problems with regular warfare, and an appreciation of the possibilities of popular resistance. It gave coherence to what was often no more than a set of ad hoc and improvised arrangements. As with many similar concepts, such as asymmetric warfare, once adopted as a term of art ‘hybrid warfare’ tended towards a wider definition. As the term came to be adopted by the US armed forces, the theory became more elaborate ... If pushed it could encompass almost everything.⁵¹

As definitions widened and more and more capabilities and approaches were added under it as an umbrella, the early coherence Freedman writes of became increasingly obscured. Once described by Murray and Mansoor as a new concept to describe a forgotten mode of warfare, hybrid warfare’s increasingly vague boundaries led to criticism that the concept was confusing instead of clarifying.

It is this confusion, which magnified the explosion of interest in, and usage of hybrid warfare terminology, that invited harsh criticism from national security scholars. One such early critic, Damien van Puyvelde, described hybrid warfare as dominating the discussion about the future of warfare while simultaneously inviting all threats to be viewed as hybrid and suggesting erroneously the blending of conventional and irregular as something entirely new. Van Puyvelde’s prescription is simple: forget about hybrid warfare and focus on the specifics of each potential threat.⁵² He points to what would become a common refrain in pointing out, in essence, that hybrid warfare does not describe something wholly new to warfare:

Most, if not all, conflicts in the history of mankind have been defined by the use of asymmetries that exploit an opponent’s weaknesses, thus leading to complex situations involving regular/irregular and conventional/unconventional tactics. Similarly, the rise of

⁵¹ Freedman, 225.

⁵² Van Puyvelde, “Hybrid Warfare - Does It Even Exist?”

cyber warfare has not fundamentally changed the nature of warfare, but expanded its use in a new dimension.⁵³

This is a point agreed upon by hybrid warfare proponents Hoffman, Murray, Mansoor, and McCulloh, among others. What is missed by Van Puyvelde is that the hybrid concept is meant to help modern strategists, often confounded by the mixing of conventional and unconventional threats, connect current conflicts with historical modes of warfare so that they can understand and apply the broad lessons of history to these new specifics.⁵⁴ It must be made clear that Van Puyvelde's criticism is accurate for the loose, popular way hybrid warfare began to be used from 2014 onwards. That such criticism can be accurate for the widespread usage of the term but not reflect the nuance suggested by the original proponents clearly indicates that the concept had been, by 2015, entirely derailed from earlier theorizing.

Christopher Paul was similarly critical of the concept. While remaining open to its possibilities, Paul conceded utility in understanding a blurring and mixing of modes of conflict, but ultimately considered that to be "pedestrian" and lacking novelty. For Paul, it was not so much that the hybrid threat concept had nothing of value, but more that it failed "to deliver in a meaningful way on the promise of useful categories for thinking about conflict and blurred boundaries in other less military, less kinetic areas."⁵⁵ Writing in 2016, Paul sought for hybrid warfare, or for the grey zone, to engage with the types of ambiguous conflict approaching, but seemingly not reaching, the level of warfare practiced by Russia and China. It is by this point

⁵³ Van Puyvelde.

⁵⁴ Why exactly a return to facing hybrid threats so confounds Western strategists is well outside the scope of this work. Whether it be blinding techno-optimism caused by faith in the 1990s RMA, a lack of understanding of the breadth of military history, more general erosion of Western military thinking in the face of a switch from the overwhelming Soviet conventional threat to amorphous unconventional threats in the War on Terror, or something more fundamental about the Western way of warfare, or some other reason, it is clear from the early concerns by Mattis and Hoffman to the "hybrid warfare scare" of the mid to late 2010s that there is some sort of difficulty for many Western strategists to understand and respond to blended conventional and unconventional threats.

⁵⁵ Paul, "Confessions of a Hybrid Warfare Skeptic."

that the concepts of hybrid warfare and grey zone conflict began to be used interchangeably by some to the vexation of critics and proponents alike. In effect, widespread usage of the hybrid warfare concept to describe strategic-level actions had moved the goalposts for the concept. Despite Hoffman, McCulloh, and Johnson confining their proposals of hybrid warfare to the operational level of analysis and implications for military doctrine, the demand was now that hybrid warfare serve as a whole new theory of strategic competition.

In the face of this criticism, Frank Hoffman waded back into the debate in 2018. Hoffman, now informed by a further decade of observation, again repeated his judgement that the American strategic enterprise traditionally focused far too rigidly on conventional, interstate warfare. Explicitly referring to delays by the American military to think outside a “‘big war’ paradigm” in adapting to counterinsurgency in Afghanistan and Iraq, and curiously leaving unsaid the growing calls in the late 2010s to reoptimize for great power competition, Hoffman warned that American strategic culture was “too slow to grasp the full range of conflict types” and if this remained unchanged it would cause the US military to stay “in a perpetual state of costly and reactive adaptation.”⁵⁶

To change this culture, Hoffman proposed heuristic constructs to aid in understanding complex adversaries and forms of conflict. The first construct proposed by Hoffman is a new continuum of conflict, his figure 1 reproduced below, that eschews the peace-war binary and instead offers a sliding scale from non-violent to increasingly violent and organized conflict.

⁵⁶ Frank G. Hoffman, “Examining Complex Forms of Conflict: Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges,” *PRISM* 7, no. 4 (November 8, 2018): 31.

Figure 1⁵⁷

FIGURE 1: A HEURISTIC CONSTRUCT FOR CONFLICT.



Hoffman asserted that constructs, such as his new continuum of conflict, “opens our cognitive lens to the full-range of challenges we must understand” and brings “analytical coherence to both the complex array of contemporary security problems as well as the range of the military professionals’ domain within the national security arena.”⁵⁸ He further offers a definition of grey zone tactics as non-traditional, but non-violent statecraft that occur within measures short of armed conflict reproduced in Figure 1.⁵⁹ Of most relevance to the present discussion, Hoffman offers a revised definition of hybrid conflict meant to distinguish it from irregular warfare lacking conventional military components:

The purposeful and tailored violent application of advanced conventional military capabilities with irregular tactics, with terrorism and criminal activities, or combination of regular and irregular forces, operating as part of a common design in the same battlespace.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Hoffman, 32.

⁵⁸ Hoffman, 32.

⁵⁹ Hoffman curiously asserts that grey zone tactics must include covert or illegal activities that subvert political order, abuse legal processes, or corrupt financial processes in a remarkably value-laden description that goes beyond a definition of activities short of war but meant to gain strategic advantage.

⁶⁰ Hoffman, “Examining Complex Forms of Conflict: Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges,” 40.

Here Hoffman emphasizes the diffusion of advanced military capabilities, once only thought to be in the realm of conventional forces, as well as hardens the definition of hybrid conflict to include violence as a necessary element.

Aside from the theoretical proponents and critics of hybrid warfare, who engaged in the debate described thus far, numerous studies were conducted to specifically understand Russian and Chinese foreign policy of the mid 2010s. Many scholars, rightfully interested in Russian hybrid aggression in its near abroad and China's growing influence, attempted to apply hybrid warfare concepts to analyze current conflicts. However, schemes to universalize these studies fall into the trap identified by Murray, Mansoor, Freeman, and Van Puyvelde in focusing on hype around emerging technologies specific tactics. These efforts are compromised by the inability to determine if findings are broadly applicable across cases or simply unique to specific technological and strategic circumstances.⁶¹ In most cases, the researcher's intent was not to create or confirm some overarching theory of hybrid warfare, but instead to merely understand what was occurring and suggest countermeasures. As such attempts to universalize their findings run counter to the purpose of those studies. Despite this, some scholars attempt to create theories of hybrid warfare from analysis informed by contemporary Russian and Chinese activities alone.

One such example of an analysis hampered by limited contemporary cases is the work by Dani Belo. In conducting comparative analysis of two modern cases in Russia and China. Belo contrasts these two powers and explains the differences by recourse to the geostrategic momentum of these powers as determined by a quantitative "evaluation of net resources [i]n the

⁶¹ This is not to say such scholarship is ineffective, but it is limited in external validity due to n=1. Examples of such scholarship include: Bettina Renz and Anna Smith, "Russia and Hybrid Warfare - Going Beyond the Label" (Aleksanteri Papers, 2016).; Andrew Monaghan, "The 'War' in Russia's 'Hybrid Warfare,'" *Parameters* 45, no. 4 (Winter 2016-2015).; and Merle Maigre, "Nothing New in Hybrid Warfare: The Estonian Experience and Recommendations for NATO" (German Marshall Fund of the United States, n.d.), <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/nothing-new-hybrid-warfare-estonian-experience-and-recommendations-nato>.

form of a ledger” of relative power.⁶² Belo suggests that powers falling behind in geostrategic momentum, such as modern Russia, are pushed into a “hybridism in retreat” marked by use of kinetic, militarized options to regain lost status.⁶³ China, on the other hand, is presented as a rising power growing in geostrategic momentum that can practise patient “offensive hybridism” that uses more subtle informational, cyber, and economic means.⁶⁴ While some criticism can be laid in stereotyping Russian and Chinese activities, simultaneously glossing over Russian cyberwarfare and economic coercion on the one hand and similarly deprioritizing Chinese military sabre rattling, such as into Taiwan’s air defence identification zone on the other, more pressing are the sweeping claims made on the basis of two ongoing cases. Fundamentally, this analysis suffers from being a snapshot in contemporary time that does not consider historical cases.

Stoker and Whiteside are perhaps the fiercest critics of the hybrid warfare concept. They indict hybrid warfare, alongside the grey zone, as failures by the American strategic enterprise “to think clearly about political, military, and strategic issues” and call for a swift erasure of the term lest they continue to “an increasingly dangerous distortion of the concepts of war, peace, and geopolitical competition.”⁶⁵ Stoker and Whiteside largely repeat the refrain that hybrid war is used far too broadly and can “describe nearly every form of interstate competition,” that some hybrid war proponents (who they dub “hybridists”) erroneously claim hybrid warfare is wholly new, and that hybridists do not properly engage with military history.⁶⁶ More incisively, they

⁶² Dani Belo, “Conflict in the Absence of War: A Comparative Analysis of China and Russia Engagement in Gray Zone Conflicts,” *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 26, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/11926422.2019.1644358>.

⁶³ Belo, 4–5.

⁶⁴ Belo, 11–12.

⁶⁵ Stoker and Whiteside, “Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking,” 13.

⁶⁶ Stoker and Whiteside, 29–33. 38.

charge that hybrid warfare, when used in the post-2014 strategic context, “dangerously confuses” peace and war by presenting aggressive peacetime activities as a type of warfare.⁶⁷ It is unfortunate that Stoker and Whiteside do not reference or engage with Murray and Mansoor, who suggested in 2012 that the then-new concept of hybrid warfare could be a means to reintroduce an understanding of the very conflict dynamics Stoker and Whiteside chastise Western scholars and strategists for forgetting.

Hybrid warfare as a concept must be understood along two dimensions. At an operational or tactical level of analysis, hybrid warfare is sufficiently defined and can be readily understood as an item within the typology that contains combined arms, unconventional, and guerilla warfare among other items. There are clear operational and tactical implications to military operations which have received, and should continue to receive, attention to historical and ongoing examples. It is only at the strategic level that the concept becomes undefined and stretch beyond meaning. There are two obvious options in response to this state of affairs: discard the use of hybrid warfare as a strategic level concept entirely as Stoker and Whiteside recommend,⁶⁸ or attempt to repair the concept as advocated by Christopher Paul.⁶⁹

Applying the Grey Zone and Hybrid Warfare

At issue is whether and to what extent the grey zone and hybrid warfare provide a useful way to understand interstate conflict. The rush of these terms into the popular lexicon after Russian’s 2014 attack on Ukraine led to a widespread overapplication and watering down of the concepts which rightly invites criticism. When such criticism is brought to bear on earlier, more thoughtful proponents of these concepts, the verdict is much less clear. Early proponents, such as

⁶⁷ Stoker and Whiteside, 34–35.

⁶⁸ Stoker and Whiteside, “Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking.”

⁶⁹ Paul, “Confessions of a Hybrid Warfare Skeptic.”

Hoffman and Mazarr, were clear that they hadn't discovered a wholly new form of conflict, but instead were establishing a new way to understand re-emerging versions of strategies which have been employed throughout history. When the debate is framed in these terms, the critics position can be boiled down to a conclusion that the grey zone and hybrid warfare are not useful in understanding conflict and may in fact confuse and mislead. This is the core debate once it is stripped of popular sensationalism and the fetishization of the technical details of specific capabilities.

With the easy targets of the critics removed from consideration, and the debate in some ways reset to compare criticism to the early proponents, problems with the criticism emerge. First is to suggest that there is no utility to be found in applying new concepts to aid understanding of what may be old patterns of conflict expressed by new means, but then offer no solution beyond simply re-reading the Western strategic canon.⁷⁰ Second, and somewhat in contrast with the first, is to suggest that new concepts must be tested against history, but then neither doing such testing nor allowing for the possibility that such testing could prove the grey zone or hybrid warfare to be of use. The term strategy itself, for example, is a concept that can trace its current usage back only a few hundred years despite clearly describing a key element of statecraft that is undoubtedly millennia old. Hoffman offers clearly what the goal of these concepts should be: to offer a heuristic model to “the fog of complexity” presented by actions in the grey zone and by hybrid threats.⁷¹ Whether such heuristics are effective or not can be established by tests against history, as seemingly both critics and proponents agree.⁷²

⁷⁰ Stoker and Whiteside, “Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking,” 38.

⁷¹ Hoffman, “Examining Complex Forms of Conflict: Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges,” 32.

⁷² Stoker and Whiteside, “Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking,” 39; Murray and Mansoor, *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*, 2, 290.

Mazarr's work on the grey zone is accepted as the key text because it offers a clear concept of measured revisionist states operating below the threshold of war to pursue incremental gains motivated by national grievances.⁷³ While seemingly useful to understand the contemporary actions of Russia and China, it is time to move beyond this limited concept by testing the grey zone against cases outside of these current measured revisionists. Rather than continue to compare ongoing Russian and Chinese activities again and again with slightly newer details and slightly adjusted definitions, a bold expansion of the case set is needed to see if the grey zone is useful to understand a diversity of examples. Beyond Mazarr's measured revisionists, how might status quo powers and targeted revisionists operate in the grey zone? How would differences in regime type and geostrategic risk affect those states' choices? Do grey zone actors always seek to avoid war, or is that situation dependent? Wrestling with these questions by applying the grey zone to varied historical cases is a necessary step in expanding the concept.

Hybrid warfare must be understood as a separate, but related concept to the grey zone. The grey zone best describes strategies in which actors seek to obfuscate the existence or nature of conflict and to control escalation. The means by which this grey zone may be exploited could be wholly non-violent or may include violence cloaked by covert action, through proxies, or calibrated to be so minor as to not warrant a full-scale response. Actors seek to remain within the grey zone to foster ambiguity and confusion. Hybrid warfare's blurring of conventional military capabilities with the unconventional and non-military means is, in contrast, meant to introduce unmanageable complexity on an opponent, generally from a position of perceived inferiority. Hoffman suggests hybrid warfare must include violence so that it may be clearly understood as

⁷³ Paul, "Confessions of a Hybrid Warfare Skeptic"; Stoker and Whiteside, "Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking," 18–19.

politically motivated armed conflict.⁷⁴ The scale of analysis is largely irrelevant to the overall concept as it is the tools that change, not the general intent.⁷⁵ Hybrid warfare may then exist within the grey zone when its violent aspects are cloaked by the use of proxies, or in particularly bold cases, successful *faits accomplis*, but it may also exist within the bounds of a traditionally understood and acknowledged state of war.

Prior proponents approach this idea of hybrid warfare's relation to the grey zone but do not fully reach it. Mazarr allows for covert or ambiguous violence at the "higher intensity end" of the grey zone, especially when cloaked by proxies or when constrained to threatened violence.⁷⁶ Hoffman's stacking of violent methods ranging from irregular warfare to hybrid warfare and then conventional warfare as correlating with escalations along a continuum of conflict also approach this idea while leaving the grey zone unmentioned.⁷⁷ A modification of Hoffman's continuum is offered as figure 2 to aid this understanding.

⁷⁴ Hoffman, "Examining Complex Forms of Conflict: Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges," 40.

⁷⁵ By way of example an operational hybrid threat may seek to physically fix an opponent with guerrillas and constrain freedom of action by exploiting political and psychological factors to set up for strikes by advanced conventional capabilities, while a strategic hybrid threat may destabilize an opponent by use of coordinated cyber-attacks, propaganda, economic coercion, and violent action by proxy criminal or insurgent forces. In either case, the intent is to maximize the impact of all measures by introducing potentially unmanageable complexity on the opponent in ways that selective or sequential employment of those capabilities would not.

⁷⁶ Mazarr, "Mastering the Gray Zone," 46.

⁷⁷ Hoffman, "Examining Complex Forms of Conflict: Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges," 32.

Figure 2 Modified Continuum of Conflict

Continuum of Conflict			
Peaceful Competition	Grey Zone Competition		Traditional War
Methods / Approaches			
Measures Short of Armed Conflict	Unconventional Warfare	Hybrid Warfare	Conventional Warfare

Modified from Fig. 1 to Hoffman, Frank G. "Examining Complex Forms of Conflict: Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges." *PRISM* 7, no. 4 (December 8, 2018): p. 32.

To answer questions about how the grey zone and hybrid warfare may be useful in describing conflict, the challenge to test these concepts against history must be answered. Rather than copy Mazar's earlier analysis by focusing on measured revisionists, this test must be made against a variety of cases in which categories such as revisionist versus status quo status, regime type, threat perception, and whether war followed grey zone activities must be varied. The following chapters will offer just that. The second chapter introduces a new classical case in which French intervention in the American War of Independence showcases a measured revisionist, as informed by traditional-religious ideology around an absolute monarch, which employed hybrid warfare at the strategic and operational levels both within the grey zone and in conditions of declared warfare. The third chapter provides an example of the Soviet Union of the 1930s as a status quo power, highly alarmed by external threats and directed by dictator Stalin, using hybrid warfare within the grey zone to manage escalation with Japan to avoid war until far more favourable conditions emerge. The fourth chapter considers the final case: the United States of 1936-1941 as a state not under direct threat, but whose birthright as leader-in-waiting to a liberal world order appeared under grave threat by fascist powers as perceived by an

interventionist Franklin Roosevelt restrained by democratic institutions to grey zone options.

Should the grey zone and hybrid warfare be proven useful to explain the differences and nuances of each case then that would both disclose useful insights to the patterns of these forms of conflict and suggest these concepts will be useful across other historical and modern cases.

Chapter Two: Vergennes' Grey Zone, French Strategy 1774-1783 ⁷⁸

The Treaty of Paris of 1763 saw France lose prestige, several colonies, and financial strength. Writing on the significance of this turn of fortune, William Edwards perhaps overenthusiastically described France as being “reduced to the status of a second, perhaps a third, class power.”⁷⁹ Despite this humbling, French leaders refused to consider the situation permanent. Duc de Choiseul, Minister of War and Marine, advised King Louis XV that “Britain is the avowed enemy of your power, of your state.”⁸⁰ Choiseul supervised a vigorous naval rearmament plan, intending to exploit future British weakness to recover France’s lost standing. However, as Anderson notes, Britain’s credit was by then vastly superior to that of France.⁸¹ Even as France was rebuilding, Britain continued to make relative gains in potential strength. France would have to undertake a more indirect strategy, one that would be put into practice by the Comte de Vergennes in the reign of King Louis XVI.

In 1774, his Christian Majesty inherited a state which his ministers considered not only humbled, but at risk of falling even further behind. King Louis XVI’s foreign minister, Charles Gravier le Comte de Vergennes, quickly outlined for his king the political and strategic situation of Europe. Vergennes saw France as receding through her loss of commercial, naval, and diplomatic prestige as caused by the Seven Years’ War and the First Polish Partition of 1772. No longer were they the feared and respected cornerstone of Europe’s balance of power, Vergennes sought to first secure short-term security through solidifying the Family Compact with Spain’s

⁷⁸ An earlier version of this chapter is published as Christopher Hunt, “Vergennes’ Grey Zone: Grappling with the Grey Zone and Hybrid War through French Strategy 1774–1783,” *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 20, no. 1 (December 1, 2019), <https://jmss.org/article/view/69491>. and is partly reproduced abiding with that publication’s policy on these.

⁷⁹ William Edwards, *Notes on European History*, vol. 3 (London: Rivingstons, n.d.), 157.

⁸⁰ Edwards, 3:158.

⁸¹ Matthew Smith Anderson, *War and Society in Europe of the Old Regime: 1618-1789* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton, 1998), 184.

Charles III, a fellow Bourbon crown, and with an Austrian defensive alliance. This would buy time to prepare for the war with Britain which Vergennes saw as inevitable.

Although Vergennes preached the importance of rational calculation, his assessment of French interests was inextricable from a vision of France's rightful place in Europe. Orville Murphy succinctly assesses Vergennes' state of mind:

Thus, in 1774, Vergennes was a revisionist, dissatisfied with Louis XVI's position, and determined to change it for one more compatible with his vision of Louis XVI's special role in the international system. England, he knew, would not welcome France's bid to gain that needed margin of strength and the necessary diplomatic advantages ... England, therefore, was the obstacle standing in the way.⁸²

Vergennes thus expected and planned for war. With alliances with Spain and Austria secured, France would ensure that war would come at a time of military and diplomatic advantage to Louis XVI.

When Choiseul was forced into retirement in 1774 through court intrigue entirely unrelated to foreign and defence policy, the duke's program of military reform and rearmament continued. As George Otto Trevelyan notes, in his classic *The American Revolution*, France invested heavily in her navy and army in the decades leading up to its 1778 Treaty of Alliance with the United States and subsequent direct intervention in the North American theatre. France expended significant resources in ship building, aiming to rebuild a force capable of challenging their British rivals. Not only did Louis XVI command "by the year 1770 sixty-four French sail of the line, and fifty frigates," gunnery drill and sailing exercises were prioritized at considerable cost at a time the British Cabinet sought financial savings from the Royal Navy by reducing their budget for the same type of exercises. Choiseul's reforms extended beyond his retirement to the French Army as well, in the areas of recruiting, drill, and equipment: "Regiments of the line, one

⁸² Orville Theodore Murphy, *Charles Gravier, Comte De Vergennes: French Diplomacy in the Age of Revolution, 1719-1787* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1982), 218.

and all, were dressed in the same uniform; and in 1777 the infantry were supplied with a type of musket so excellent that ... it held its ground through the Napoleonic wars, and up to the middle of the nineteenth century.”⁸³ Although, by 1770, the French navy had been set on the right path, further time was required to prepare for war. However, even with time, without a change to the strategic dynamics or the achievement of a decisive knock out blow, Britain’s superior economic position threatened victory simply through staying power. Fortunately for Vergennes, another legacy of the Seven Years’ War, the American Revolution, provided the perfect opportunity for France to covertly sap British strength.

Growing tensions between Britain and its American colonies had escalated to open conflict by 1775. The fateful “shots heard ‘round the world,” marking open battle between rebels and redcoats at the Battles of Lexington and Concord, were fired in April of that year. By year’s end, major fighting had erupted, George Washington was made commander of the Continental Army, and Britain had surged regulars to the colonies under the command of General Howe. Earlier British hopes to dispatch the insurrection in short order was, by winter’s onset, bleak. But while that brought concern to George III and his ministers, at the same time it ignited the excitement of the French people and the scheming imagination of Vergennes.

Perhaps no individual exemplified French excitement as clearly as Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais. A watchmaker and playwright, Beaumarchais’ enthusiasm for the American Revolution would soon turn him into a deniable agent and arms dealer. In London on an unrelated task from Louis XVI, Beaumarchais became informed, insofar as was possible through conflicting channels, of Britain’s growing problems in dealing with the American rebellion. Upon returning to France in September of 1775, Beaumarchais petitioned Louis XVI to aid the

⁸³ George Otto Trevelyan, *The American Revolution*, ed. Richard B. Morris (New York: David McKay Company, 1964), 304–7.

Americans. While His Christian Majesty was hesitant to support republican insurgents over fellow monarch George III, it was Vergennes who saw an opportunity to covertly sap British strength.⁸⁴

Vergennes championed support for the American rebels, but only if France could retain plausible deniability. Beaumarchais was employed as a deniable asset, secretly provided with state funds and “miraculously” evaded authorities, to maintain the pretense of a private arms dealer. He would sell arms to the rebels on extremely generous terms of credit. For a veteran diplomat such as he, this state of affairs provided an opportunity to make relative gains against Britain without escalating prematurely to war. This not only bought more time for rearmament efforts, but also set the best diplomatic conditions for the coming war. Instructing his King on a different matter, Vergennes told Louis XVI, “It is easy to make a war without being, materially, the aggressor.”⁸⁵ This summarizes clearly France’s approach to the issue of Britain and America. By eschewing an initial offensive, France positioned themselves as the defender, and thus had some cause to call on its defensive alliances. Vergennes later rebuffed Austrian attempts to pull France into a land war of Bavarian succession in order to retain this option. By threatening to call Austria as an ally against Britain, the foreign minister was able to secure a suitably ambiguous French neutrality.⁸⁶

Projecting this image of France as the defender notably could also be seen as an attempt to pre-empt Britain calling Portugal as a defensive ally. It is hard, however, to prove the efficacy of this move given Portugal was never called to war as an ally by Britain and likely would have

⁸⁴ Edward Everett Hale and Edward Everett Hale, *Franklin in France*, vol. 1 (New York: Burt Franklin, 1969), 35–37.

⁸⁵ Murphy, *Charles Gravier, Comte De Vergennes: French Diplomacy in the Age of Revolution, 1719-1787*, 218.

⁸⁶ Involvement in a European land war was, of course, what Vergennes sought to avoid at all costs. By positioning France as the defender against Britain, Vergennes offered an all or nothing deal to Austria: either France stays out of war in Bavaria or Austria must also join the war against Britain.

been more of a liability, with a Spanish army at their door in Europe, than an asset. Still, it is well known Vergennes expended considerable effort to persuade Charles III and his ministers to avoid war with Portugal. Vergennes assessed that Spanish might was needed for the coming war against Britain in Europe and focused diplomatic engagement to solidify a Bourbon strategy which would dictate terms after the defeat of Britain.⁸⁷

By spring 1776, following diplomatic efforts to secure the support of Spain and commitments of neutrality from other European states, Vergennes persuaded Louis XVI to approve support for the American rebels. The court arranged for Beaumarchais to be provided with one million livres from the French treasury, matched by a further one million from Spain by that summer, with further funding to follow. A great trading house was created from the ground up under an assumed name, Roderigue Hortalez, that served as a front for transferring French arms to the rebels.⁸⁸ Hortalez and Company - in reality, Beaumarchais and his agents - were granted permission to purchase arms from French arsenals using the same money, now laundered, granted from the Bourbon treasuries. Royal gun-factories conveniently neglected to stamp royal ciphers onto cannons and mortars earmarked for Hortalez.

Having set these conditions, on 17 July 1776 Vergennes was able to decline direct assistance to American agents in Paris, feigning neutrality. He suggested instead that a M. Hortalez may be interested in selling them weapons on terms of credit. Offering a years' credit on a return of tobacco, Hortalez provided much needed arms and equipment to the Americans.⁸⁹ The exact details of these arrangements were kept from His Christian Majesty, allowing him to

⁸⁷ Murphy, *Charles Gravier, Comte De Vergennes: French Diplomacy in the Age of Revolution, 1719-1787*, 261–71.

⁸⁸ Brian Champion, "Spies (Look) Like Us: The Early Use of Business and Civilian Covers in Covert Operations," *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 21, no. 3 (May 28, 2008): 540, <https://doi.org/doi:10.1080/08850600701651268>.

⁸⁹ Trevelyan, *The American Revolution*, 327.

truthfully state his ignorance to the matter. Vergennes further arranged for the relaxation of customs and port controls, ensuring vessels belonging to Roderigue Hortalez and Company could depart Havre and Nantes without scrutiny. The arrival of arms, ammunition, and clothing for 25,000 men came as great assistance to the rebels at this early stage of the war.

Through Beaumarchais, Vergennes connived to develop the American rebels as a proxy force against Britain. France's covert support extended beyond this system of deniable arms transfers, but also into the provision of trained officers and experts. French artillery officers accompanied Beaumarchais' initial shipment, and the French army made available many more officers on an allegedly volunteer basis.⁹⁰ While it was not unusual at the time for more adventure-seeking officers to serve foreign causes, it certainly appears convenient that so many were granted leave to America while France was covertly arming the rebels.

France's actions as a benefactor included substantial support to American privateers. Throughout 1777, American privateers were given safe haven in the harbours of Normandy and Brittany. From there, these privateers could prey on British merchant shipping, sell prizes⁹¹ in French ports, and take on gunpowder and French sailors before launching further attacks. Trevelyan notes that many "of those cruisers were American only in name," and that for at least one large corsair, one flying Stars and Stripes and carrying letters of marque from the American Congress, there were so many French sailors aboard that "out of a hundred and twenty-five fighting men, on board one of these formidable vessels, only two were citizens of the United States."⁹² That so many French sailors were available for service on American privateers suggests direct French involvement, or at the very least systematic tolerance. Such numbers

⁹⁰ Hale and Hale, *Franklin in France*, 1:130.

⁹¹ It must be recalled that prize law respecting the seizure and sale of naval vessels and cargo had become highly developed by the late 18th century.

⁹² Trevelyan, *The American Revolution*, 356–57.

stretch the notion of proxy warfare, instead suggesting covert direct action reminiscent of Russia's use of deniable troops in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine.

Despite France's best efforts to keep such intervention quiet, the support grew so flagrant as to draw the attention of Britain. The ambassador to Versailles, Lord Stormont, incessantly protested these actions and offenses. Vergennes maintained the façade, even as it grew increasingly incredible, that France was neutral. Louis XVI's ministers forbade the purchase of prizes from American privateers, but conveniently did not detect their transfer at sea off the French coast. Lord Stormont demanded that Benjamin Franklin, rumoured to be in France as foreign minister for the rebels, not be permitted into Paris. Vergennes replied that a courier had been dispatched at once to Nantes so that Franklin be barred from proceeding, "but being uncertain of the precise time of his departure, and of the route which he has taken, we cannot be sure that the intentions of the King will be carried out," while venturing that an elderly man of "almost eighty"⁹³ surely could not disrupt the peace and goodwill between France and England.

French involvement by this time was hardly a secret. It is unknown how much Britain knew versus that which was suspected, but speculation by foreign ambassadors ran wild throughout 1777. The Danish ambassador to Spain, for example, predicted no war that year, but put favourable odds on war beginning in 1778. He noted the French navy was now at war readiness and was aware of Beaumarchais' movements.⁹⁴ Britain was at least aware of Roderigue Hortalez and Company as early as 28 October 1777, as secret orders to General Howe outline.⁹⁵

⁹³ Franklin had just reached the age of 70.

⁹⁴ Murphy, *Charles Gravier, Comte De Vergennes: French Diplomacy in the Age of Revolution, 1719-1787*, 259.

⁹⁵ Samuel Flagg Bemis, "Secret Intelligence, 1777: Two Documents," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (May 1, 1961): 237, <https://doi.org/doi:10.2307/3816251>.

While such flagrant support perhaps could not go undetected, it had served its purpose by supplying the American rebellion at its time of greatest need, interdicting British merchant traffic to its colonies and providing sufficient time for France to complete her naval and army preparations. As French protests of innocence began to ring false in October of 1777, France's investment in the American rebellion as a proxy force paid off. At the Battle of Saratoga, almost 6,000 British troops were captured by General Horatio Gates. The surrender of British General John Burgoyne marked a turning point, one beyond which France felt confident in turning their American proxy into an overt ally.

Openly signing a Treaty of Alliance with the Americans in February of 1778, France provoked Britain into declaring open war. French naval power engaged the British in battle across multiple theaters: the English Channel, the West Indies, and the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. French naval efforts outside of Europe and North America largely failed to achieve decisive successes but did tie up British resources. Most importantly, direct support in terms of naval and land forces, as well as increased material support, were now be dispatched to America.

France sent Charles Henri Hector, le comte d'Estaing, with a force of sixteen ships to engage British forces in the American theatre. D'Estaing's ships, twelve of which were ships of the line capable of threatening British ships in a decisive line battle, immediately changed the operational calculus for Howe's forces. Britain could no longer boast complete sea control. Unable to depend on naval superiority and sealift, the British were now constrained at sea by the French and by the lighter, more agile Continental army and militia in the American wilderness. Indeed, July 1778 saw Howe blockaded in New Jersey.

D'Estaing's record in the Americas was mixed. He saw success in the West Indies, seizing several islands and battling a thinly stretched Royal Navy. However, he failed to achieve

any success when fighting in command of combined French and American forces in several battles of the Southern Campaign.⁹⁶ He was replaced in 1781 by Admiral Francois Joseph Paul, le comte de Grasse.

By 1779, Vergennes, after successfully persuading Charles III to focus on Britain instead of opening a new front against Portugal, brought Spain into the war. The Bourbon Crowns planned to combine their forces in a massive armada capable of forcing an invasion of the British Isles. Sixty ships of the line and 30,000 troops were assembled. Their aim was to seize the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth, and incite an Irish revolt against the English if possible. Despite their local naval superiority, the fog of war intervened through a series of miscommunications. This caused significant delay, which when compounded by an outbreak of sickness, caused the Bourbons to lose their opportunity.

As this case study is not intended to be a history of the war, but rather an analysis of French strategy, it is appropriate to move directly to the Fall 1781 Siege of Yorkton. July 1780 marked the arrival of an expeditionary force of French regulars under the command of Jean-Baptise Dontatien, le comte de Rochambeau. Remaining in Newport for a year to support a blockaded French fleet until it could escape, Rochambeau then marched his 7,000 men to link up with Washington's army. Washington and Rochambeau marched on Yorktown, while de Grasse's fleet of 29 ships wrested control of the Chesapeake Bay and installed a blockade. As John Ferris notes, "the British position in the Thirteen Colonies was destroyed by a classic hybrid force: a French fleet, a Franco-American army, and swarms of irregulars."⁹⁷ The Siege of

⁹⁶ D'Estaing returned to France humiliated, mocked by the American delegation and falling out of favour with the French court. It should be noted that d'Estaing was wounded twice leading land forces against the British in the south, perhaps demonstrating a surplus in gallantry which may offset his deficit in tactical acumen.

⁹⁷ John Ferris, "Small Wars and Great Games: The British Empire and Hybrid Warfare, 1700-1970," in *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 302.

Yorktown resulted in the surrender by Lord Cornwallis of almost 8,000 troops. The last major battle of the North American theatre, this decisive victory brought Britain to the bargaining table and eventually the 1783 Treaty of Paris.⁹⁸

Analysis

It is clear Vergennes sought to make relative gains against Britain without prematurely triggering a war. His strategy focused on preparing France for an eventual war while weakening Britain's position. The latter was accomplished by the development of the American rebels as a proxy force and by diplomatically isolating Britain from potential European allies. Vergennes clearly saw France as in competition with Britain but sought at every turn to disguise French intentions. Ideally, Britain would not detect France's covert actions. Failing that, Vergennes aimed for plausible deniability to preclude the declaration of war. While France's covert actions may have been detected, it is an open question whether or not Britain would declare war in the absence of France signing the Treaty of Alliance 1778.

Mazarr's three-pronged conception of the grey zone ably explains French strategy under Vergennes. Through his own words, and by the assessment of several historians, Vergennes sought to reclaim France's place as the arbiter of Europe. Not seeking to disrupt the international order but merely restore France's place as a first-rate power within it, Vergennes and thus France in the 1770s meets the criteria of measured revisionist. While France may not have affected demands or faits accomplis, Vergennes did seek to alter the balance of power by reducing British strength while France rearmed. Even given the relatively short duration, France's use of proxy warfare to decrease British power does paint Vergennes' actions as gradualist up until the 1778

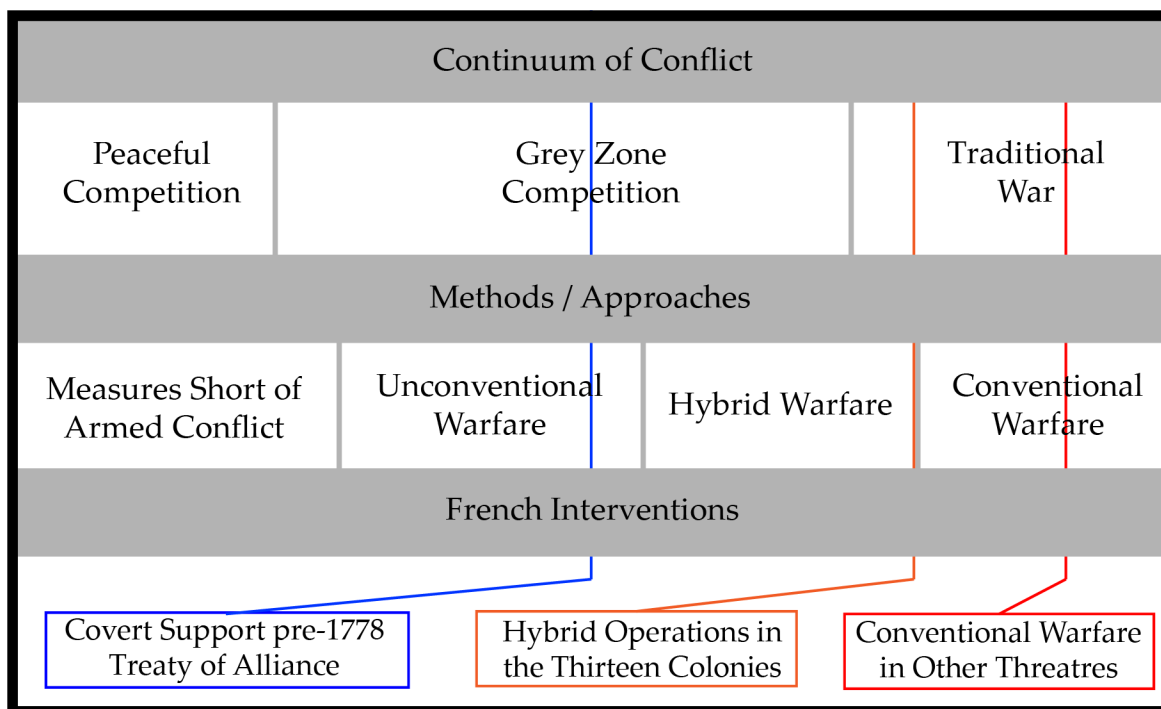
⁹⁸ That France would face its own revolution as perhaps an 18th century version of "CIA blowback" is of interest but, as this chapter is concerned solely with how Vergennes' strategy helps disentangle thinking about the grey zone and hybrid war, this particular observation is deliberately left outside the scope of the study.

Treaty of Alliance. Burgoyne's defeat at Saratoga in 1777 changed the calculus towards war. Nothing in the literature, including Vergennes' comments and correspondence, suggests that he would have abandoned this strategy in the absence of a Saratoga. France's development of the American rebels as a proxy force, supported through covert supply channels, volunteer experts, and the provision of safe havens, clearly meets the criteria of unconventional tools as envisioned by Mazarr. According to the model employed, France's actions can clearly be understood as a grey zone approach by a second-rate power in pursuit of revisionist aims.

Hybrid warfare, with its bifurcated definition in the literature, warrants a two-pronged assessment. The first assessment is that the classic definition of hybrid warfare, as offered by Hoffman and employed by Murray and Mansoor, essentially the combination of conventional and irregular forces in pursuit of common objectives, clearly applies to those Franco-American combined operations that fused conventional French naval power and regular infantry with American militia. It was used to great effect to reduce British forces freedom of action, with conventional French naval forces blockading by sea and irregular American militia disrupting movement through the wilderness. These hybrid tactics enabled conventional, decisive success at Yorkton. There is evidence to suggest the Bourbon Armada of 1779 sought to use conventional warfare to encourage an Irish uprising which, adding an irregular element, resulted in a combined hybrid force in Britain's home territory. It is less clear, however, whether the classic definition applies to French actions prior to the Treaty of Alliance. The closest example may be the heavy involvement of French sailors aboard American privateers. Further, it could be said France's proxy approach in providing training and heavy weapons, such as cannons to the Continental army caused, an American hybrid threat to the British by proxy. This itself should be understood as a proxy strategy that enabled the American surrogate force to field a hybrid force,

not hybrid warfare on the part of the French themselves owing to the lack of French conventional units prior to the Treaty of Alliance. As such, these measures are better understood under the umbrella of unconventional warfare.

Figure 3 – French Interventions Categorized



The second assessment addresses the broader hybrid warfare definition, or rather as this thesis suggests a grey zone conflict employing strategic hybridity. This broader definition provides wider opportunity to consider Vergennes’ strategy as hybrid prior to the Treaty of Alliance. Despite this broadening of scope, France’s strategy within the grey zone between peace and war cannot be considered hybrid. Aside from proxy warfare, Vergennes’ chief weapon before the Treaty of Alliance was diplomacy. While he persuaded Spain to monetarily support France’s proxy war and secured peace with France’s European neighbours, these achievements were not intended to create synergistic effects. Vergennes employed diplomacy to create favourable future conditions in parallel to, rather than in synergy with, the proxy warfare

strategy. This is more as a result of the narrow nature of France's power than of a deliberate choice by Vergennes to not seek synergistic effects. Vergennes is noted as being keenly aware of the importance of economic pressure, but French commercial interests were not sufficiently integrated with Britain's so as to provide leverage.⁹⁹ As this broadened concept includes the more narrowed one already discussed above, it, of course, would also conclude France employed hybrid warfare in the North American theatre.

Having concluded that the concepts of the grey zone and hybrid warfare can describe and explain portions of Vergennes' strategy and France action before and during the Anglo-French war, it is clear that understanding these concepts as separate but interrelated provides the clearest view. Returning to the modified version of Hoffman's continuum, we can see how mapping French modes of conflict as depicted in figure 3 illustrates the value of separating the grey zone and hybrid warfare. Vergennes employed the grey zone to shape the strategic environment for eventual open war with Britain. In the grey zone phase of his strategy, he employed unconventional warfare to develop the American revolutionaries as a proxy force but was unable to add strategic hybridity due to France's limited economic and informational interconnectedness with Britain. If, counterfactually, France had more tools at its disposal, it seems very likely that Vergennes could have employed them alongside unconventional use of military power in what we now would call strategic level hybrid warfare. Once satisfied that an open war could be won, Vergennes abandoned the grey zone approach to enter in a broadly conventional war. However, within this global conventional war, France engaged in hybrid warfare in the Thirteen Colonies alongside American regular Continental Army troops and irregular militias.

⁹⁹ Murphy, *Charles Gravier, Comte De Vergennes: French Diplomacy in the Age of Revolution, 1719-1787*, 256.

Chapter Two: Grey Bear Blue Dragon, Soviet Far East Strategy

Although the juggernaut that was the late World War II Soviet Union would prove unstoppable on the road to Berlin, the Soviets were significantly weaker in the late 1930s. Materially, Soviet industrial output had not yet converted to total war production while from personnel and doctrinal perspectives, Stalin's Great Purge had just begun. Geostrategically, the Soviet Union was surrounded on both flanks by aggressive, fascist states: a resurgent Nazi Germany to the west and an expanding Empire of Japan to the east. For all the potential strength of the Soviet Union, its leaders considered their position to be highly precarious. It would take time to convert that potential strength into combat power, time that the Soviets would have to buy through walking a delicate tightrope of escalation and ambiguity.

Navigating the Soviet Union through these troubled waters took a careful balance between avoiding both insufficiently aggressive defense on the one hand and catastrophic escalation on the other. In the west, Machiavellian diplomacy forestalled conflict with Nazi Germany, while in the east, military support for both Nationalist and Communist China, coupled with diplomacy aimed at maintaining a pretense of peace, kept Japan from threatening the Soviet Union long enough for Japan-United States relations to significantly deteriorate in the years before Pearl Harbor. Developing a deeper understanding of the latter strategy serves to elucidate understanding of the grey zone and of hybrid operations.

Historical Context

Understanding the strategic decisions undertaken by the Soviet Union during the 1930s requires an eye for the geographic challenge faced by this massive land power. The enormous scale of Soviet territory and the limitations of their Far East transportation infrastructure must not be underestimated. This meant the assignment of forces, and thus finding the best compromise

and balance, between the European theatre and the Far East was a non-trivial matter.

Miscalculation could prove dire. Deploying too few forces in the Far East would invite attack by the Japanese, but deploying too many might leave insufficient forces to act in Europe.

In November 1936, Germany and Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact. Although aimed at the Communist International specifically, the pact was perceived by the Soviets as a declaration of intent against the USSR itself. The view from Moscow was that the fear of being encircled by hostile powers was coming to pass. While Japanese grand strategy would play out using the southern based strategy advocated by the navy, many officers within the Imperial Army strongly advocated for a Northern Expansion Route approach that would see pre-emptive war with the Soviet Union and annexation of sparsely populated, resource rich Siberia.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, this view was not limited to just the Soviets. American Ambassador to Japan Joseph Grew's January 1937 analysis of the situation referred to Soviet fears as "well-justified" given the general situation.¹⁰¹

The Soviet Union and Japan engaged in escalating border disputes from 1932 to 1939. Initially marked by border violations and allegations of spying, the conflict turned hot in 1935 as skirmishes broke out between Soviet and Japanese forces, as well as their respective client states. The most important battle in this period for understanding Soviet decision making is the Battle of Lake Khasan. Fought 29 July – 11 August 1938, the battle saw Japanese and Manchukuoan (Japanese puppet state) troops attack an area of de facto Soviet controlled territory in the vicinity of Lake Khasan. Japanese forces wrested control of their objectives through surprise, isolating

¹⁰⁰ The specifics of internal Japanese debate between the Northern Expansion Route, targeting the USSR and favoured by the army, and the Southern Expansion Route, targeting European colonies and favoured by the Navy, remains outside the scope of this thesis. It is sufficient to understand the credibility of a Japanese attack on the USSR and the possibility for the Soviets to influence Japan into adopting a southern, anti-capitalist strategy.

¹⁰¹ Max Beloff, *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia*, vol. II (London: Oxford University Press, 1949). 173.

and defeating company sized groups of border guards before digging in. The Soviet response was slow, disorganized, and successful only due to superior numbers. Soviet forces restored the pre-attack status quo at the cost of three times the Japanese casualties and the loss of nearly one hundred tanks.¹⁰² While Soviet forces had a better showing in the 1939 Battle of Khalkhin Gol, the costly victory at Lake Khasan served to orient the Soviets to the Japanese threat in the Far East.

From the Soviet perspective, the mid to late 1930s were marked by an increasingly credible threat of attack by the Japanese in the East. With the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact and considerable losses in the Battle of Lake Khasan, it appeared to Moscow that the most dangerous future was upon them. Understandably, this led to what Max Beloff beautifully understates as “anxieties in the Far East”.¹⁰³

Socialism in One Country: Status Quo For Now

This situation must be understood in the broader context of Stalin’s foreign policy. It must be remembered that the Soviet Union focused on near-term survival and maintenance of the status quo. Surrounded by fascist ‘wolves’ and seen by liberal-capitalist powers as a speed bump for the Nazis at best, Stalin wisely rejected the ideological objective of world revolution in favour of the continued existence of the Soviet state. This, perhaps, temporary rejection of permanent, world revolution sought to establish the Soviet state as a recognized player in world affairs. Both diplomatically, through official recognition, and strategically, as a great power. Although often duplicitous, diplomatic engagement within international society demonstrates

¹⁰² G.F. Krivosheyev, *Soviet Armed Forces Losses in Wars, Combat Operations and Military Conflicts* (Moscow: Military Publishing House, 1993). 63-65.

¹⁰³ Beloff, *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia*, II:167.

Soviet intentions to secure recognition as a powerful member of the society of nations and, in turn, use that recognition as a shield against aggressors.

According to Rice, the foundation of Stalin-era Soviet grand strategy is singularly that of Socialism in One Country.¹⁰⁴ Contrasting the vision of those, such as Trotsky, who advocated for permanent revolution, Stalin's view was that the survival of the Soviet state was *sine qua non* for the world revolution. Stalin's commitment to the view was fiercely ideological. As Kissinger observes, "Stalin's character had a philosophical core which made him nearly incomprehensible to Western leaders. As an old Bolshevik, he had suffered imprisonment, exile, and privation on behalf of his convictions for decades before coming to power."¹⁰⁵ For internal, political purposes, rhetoric around the principle of Socialism in One Country was put forward in primarily military terms. For example, in a February 1938 issue of *Pravda*, a piece signed by Stalin argued that so long as fascist and capitalist states remained, the Soviet Union would be under grave threat of invasion and restoration of bourgeois administration. Therefore, the piece argued, the entirety of Soviet society must be mobilized to forcibly repulse the coming invasion.¹⁰⁶

While phrased in entirely military terms for public consumption, Soviet strategists were keenly aware of the value that economic and political maneuvering might provide the USSR. The influential Soviet general and military theorist Mikhail Tukhachevsky¹⁰⁷ envisioned economic and diplomatic actions which pit capitalist states against each other, isolating those capitalists most dangerous to the USSR.¹⁰⁸ Tukhachevsky suggested that the greatest security

¹⁰⁴ Condoleezza Rice, "The Making of Soviet Strategy," in *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986), 660.

¹⁰⁵ Henry Kissinger, "Stalin's Bazaar," in *Diplomacy* (Simon & Schuster, 1994), 333.

¹⁰⁶ Joseph Stalin, "On the Final Victory of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.," 1938, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1938/01/18.htm>.

¹⁰⁷ Tukhachevsky was one of the architects of Soviet military modernization, spearheading the development of Soviet air power, mechanized forces, and airborne. Tukhachevsky was one of the theorists who influenced the enduring Soviet doctrine of deep battle.

¹⁰⁸ Rice, "The Making of Soviet Strategy." 662.

could be achieved by synchronizing industrial, war, diplomacy, and economic plans to create the most favourable situation for the Soviet Union. Despite his elimination in the 1937 military purges, Tukhachevsky's ideas persisted in Stalin's use of diplomatic moves to minimize and sequence which capitalist and fascist states the Soviet Union faced at any one time.

Under Stalin, the Soviet Union engaged in a duplicitous strategy of advocating collective security in the open while maintaining subversive activities through support of international communist parties.¹⁰⁹ The 1920s and 1930s saw the USSR transition from an international pariah to a recognized state complete with semi-normalized relations with major powers and even League of Nations membership as of 1934. The Soviet Union argued fiercely in favour of collective security at the League, condemning Japanese aggression and supporting measures, such as that suggested by Australia in 1937, to build a comprehensive collective security apparatus in East Asia.

This period in which the Soviet Union primarily relied upon diplomacy and appeals to collective security, while simultaneously sponsoring subversive activities and preparing its war machine, might on the surface suggest measured revisionism. One major element of the measured revisionist, according to Mazarr,¹¹⁰ is participation in international society as a means to protect and enable power gains while not internalizing the norms which they exploit. However revisionist the Soviets became in the future, their focus on state survival and through the status quo within the time period of this case study cast even aggressive actions as focused on survival. Diplomatic moves phrased in liberal-internationalist terms first were designed to pit capitalist and fascist states against one another, setting the more advantageous conditions envisioned by

¹⁰⁹ Albert Weeks, *Stalin's Other War: Soviet Grand Strategy, 1939-1941* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002). 36-37.

¹¹⁰ Mazarr, "Mastering the Gray Zone." 24-25.

Tukhachevsky. Kissinger notes this change of diplomatic strategy was aided by the selection of Maxim Litvinov, a man Kissinger describes as “urbane” and of sufficient “bourgeois origin” suitable to match this change of approach as Foreign Minister. However, motivated by perceptions of grave external threat, Communist subversion activities, namely the direction from Moscow that Communist parties vote with antidemocratic groups including fascists to destabilize capitalist governments, were ceased.¹¹¹ This is entirely consistent with short term status quo interests by deprioritizing revisionist activities more suited to permanent revolution so as not to alienate or degrade would-be capitalist allies of convenience.

As the drumbeats of war grew louder throughout the late 1930s, the Soviet Union increasingly discarded the cloak of collective security. The signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the invasion of Finland in 1939 signaled this shift and while the latter event cost the USSR its seat at the League, it was no longer needed. The Soviet Union had gained recognition and survival through diplomacy and would now pursue its next objectives through military force.

Soviet Aid to China

The July 1937 outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War provided the Soviet Union with a perfect opportunity to forestall a Japanese attack. Although modernization was well underway, Soviet leaders were not ready to confront Japan directly.¹¹² China provided the Soviets with a suitable proxy with which to degrade Japanese strength and delay a future conflict while avoiding an open war with Japan. The Soviets were quick to provide open diplomatic support, siding with Chinese complaints to the League and signing the Sino-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact in August 1937. Additional diplomatic support, of a sort, came in Stalin’s

¹¹¹ Kissinger, “Stalin’s Bazaar,” 335.

¹¹² Yu. V. Chudodeev, “Relations between the Soviet Union and China on the Eve and during the Second World War,” *Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences* 86, no. 3 (May 2016): 258–67, <https://doi.org/10.1134/S1019331616010068>. 259.

direction that the Chinese Communists cooperate and support Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists.¹¹³ In keeping with the doctrine of Socialism in One Country, namely the utmost importance of securing the Soviet state, ideology was not as important as compared to the Nationalist's superior potential to oppose the Japanese. Economic followed in the forms of loans and non-military resources.¹¹⁴ Of interest, however, is the significant military aid provided in both equipment and skilled personnel.

Although images of the famed American "Flying Tigers" dominate Western popular memory of foreign support to the Chinese resistance to Japan's brutal invasion, it is the Soviet Union which contributed the most support in terms of time and materiel prior to American entry into the Second World War. It is true that American sympathy for the Chinese was high in the public consciousness and support favoured by President Roosevelt among other select members of the executive branch. However, opposition in the American legislatures, in the state department, and in the military slowly translated intention into actual support that by the time the "Flying Tigers" arrived, the American declaration of war against Japan was mere months away.¹¹⁵ It is true that, prior to the arrival of these forces, some American financial aid and private flying instructors had trickled into China, but this translated into relatively little effect. By contrast, the Soviets provided support in money, materiel, advisors, and pilots from September 1937 to April 1941. Indeed, despite his fiercely anti-communist rhetoric, mercenary

¹¹³ The Soviet Union had supported the Nationalists as early as the 1920s, directing the Chinese Communist party into a military treaty with the Nationalists and even training Chiang Kai-shek in Moscow in 1923. This support would break down by the late 1920s with the Nationalists dismissing Soviet advisors and purging Communists. This led to the first phase of the Chinese Civil War.

¹¹⁴ John Alexander Lance, "Icarus in China: Western Aviation and the Chinese Air Force, 1931-1941," 2014. 32.

¹¹⁵ The inability for the American executive to translate intention into effect is explored further in the American chapter of this thesis. In brief summary, the lack of an autocratic decision-making system as well as the lack of a clear strategic threat may explain this lack of American investment and efficacy.

air advisor to Chiang Kai-shek and later Flying Tigers commanding officer Claire Chennault consistently praised the impact of the Soviet mission.¹¹⁶

Dubbed Operation Zet, the Soviet mission saw thousands of aircraft with pilots and supporting personnel sent to aid the Chinese Nationalists from 1937-1941. The Soviets provided this support to the Nationalists rather than the Communists owing to the former's regular army structure and the presence of a Nationalist air arm.¹¹⁷ The presence of a battered, but existent air arm provided an element of plausible deniability for Soviet squadrons disguised as Chinese forces. According to one count, the USSR supplied 1,250 aircraft in total to the Chinese alongside thousands of "volunteer" (covertly assigned regular military) advisors and specialists.¹¹⁸ Soviet aircraft and advisors began arriving in November 1937. Several flights of fighters with some bombers were initially dispatched alongside approximately 450 personnel including pilots, maintainers, and other specialists. Some of these personnel were veterans of advisory efforts in the Spanish Civil War. These were shipped initially through Hong Kong until an overland route through Mongolia could be established.¹¹⁹

Unlike earlier advisory efforts by other powers that saw the deployment of individuals, the Soviet Union dispatched entire squadrons complete with aircraft, aircrew, and other staff. Equipment was painted in Chinese colours while personnel were deemed "volunteers". In some cases, Soviet advisors formed Soviet-Chinese mixed bomber crews as a way to compromise between immediate mission efficiency, the secondary objective of training Chinese forces, and plausible deniability. Noting these attempts at secrecy, Demin and Koletnikov illustrate how:

¹¹⁶ Michael Schaller, "American Air Strategy in China, 1939-1941: The Origins of Clandestine Air Warfare," *American Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (1976): 7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2712474>.

¹¹⁷ Lance, "Icarus in China." 32.

¹¹⁸ Chudodeev, "Relations between the Soviet Union and China on the Eve and during the Second World War." 262.

¹¹⁹ Lance, "Icarus in China." 59-60.

The presence of Soviet military units in China was not paraded, and when possible was concealed ... Party meetings were held secretly from the Chinese, and upon the approach of any outsider they transformed into “technical discussions”. All personnel had disguised assignments, even in Moscow, and there were orders not to discuss what happened with the people and the aircraft. About the pilot who allowed himself at a banquet, hosted by the Chinese governor, to propose a toast to Soviet-Chinese friendship, a denunciation was quickly sent to Moscow. All these over [sic] legends were shields of gauze. You simply cannot pass off some peasant boy from Tambov or Voronezh as a Chinaman, and Japanese intelligence operated efficiently on Chinese territory. The SB, I-15, and I-16 aircraft were well known to them, both from the military parades in Moscow and from the international air expositions in Milan and Paris. None the less, they flew along the ferry route without any national markings.¹²⁰

Absolute secrecy would not be required, to meet Soviet objectives. Plausible deniability sufficient to introduce ambiguity was enough to avoid escalation.

Responding to Japanese protests of arms shipments to China in April 1938, Commissar for Foreign Affairs Litvinov stated that, “the sale of arms including air planes to China is entirely in accordance with international law ... especially in view of the fact that arms are provided to China, just as incidentally to Japan, by many countries.”¹²¹ The aim was not to maintain absolute secrecy, but to ensure enough ambiguity of the situation to remain below the threshold of war. In fact, as Lance notes, complete secrecy would be counterproductive to Soviet aims. By extending a credible aviation effort in China that became known to Japan, Stalin gained a leverage in the form of a card to give up in return for some other concession.¹²²

The objectives of Operation Zet also did not require that the Chinese Air Force be improved. Despite the provision of advisors to China, and the invitation of Chinese personnel to flying schools in the Soviet Union,¹²³ Lance notes that by the Soviet withdrawal in 1941 little

¹²⁰ Anatolii Demin and Vladimir Kotelnikov, “Soviet Bombers in China,” trans. George Mellinger, *Soviet Bombers in China*, 1999, http://www.j-aircraft.com/research/George_Mellinger/soviet_bombers_in_china.htm.

¹²¹ Beloff, *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia*. 184.

¹²² Lance, “Icarus in China.” 70.

¹²³ Anatolii Demin, “Soviet Fighters in the Sky of China,” accessed July 6, 2020, http://j-aircraft.com/research/George_Mellinger/soviet_fighters_in_the_sky_of_ch.htm.

institutional improvement could be noted in the Chinese Air Force.¹²⁴ Far from a failure, this is the result of deliberate choices made along the way that prioritized keeping China in the fight against Japan and continuing to pin Japan down in mainland China.

Rather than a focus to develop the Chinese Air Force, the Soviet Group primarily engaged in operations against the Japanese. By 1938, the Japanese had nearly destroyed the Chinese Air Force. Instead of rebuilding the Chinese capability, the Soviet Group took the offensive. In February 1938, Soviet bombers, disguised as a Chinese wing, attacked the Japanese aerodrome near Taipei. Squadron commander and Hero of the Soviet Union F.P. Polynin recalled the attack:

As we had planned, we passed north of Taiwan, then turned sharply, and began descending with our engines muted... No enemy fighter was in the air... The enemy used no camouflage. To all appearances, it felt fully safe... My plane shook slightly: the bombs began falling. In the centre of the apron, fountains of explosions splashed one after another. "I hit it!" I reveled and, descending, led my plane towards the strait. The other crews of my nine followed me, and two other groups of bombers approached the target ... Caps of explosions in the sky. This was Japanese anti-aircraft fire. Too late! We dropped 280 bombs on Taiwan; most of them hit the targets. Our blow was so sudden that no enemy fighter had time to take off.¹²⁵

The presence of a seemingly restored and skilled Chinese Air Force was perhaps a great shock to Japanese troops who had grown used to air superiority.

The Soviet Group would go on to play a critical role in the massive Battle of Wuhan. Fought 11 June – 27 October 1938, the Battle of Wuhan saw over one million Chinese forces engage hundreds of thousands of Imperial Japanese Army troops, resulting in immense casualties to both sides. Although Japanese air forces attempted to reduce Chinese positions prior to the main battle, these strikes were stymied by effective interception by Soviet fighters. The Soviet Group traded favourably with the Japanese. Despite disputed accounts from each side, it appears

¹²⁴ Lance, "Icarus in China," 63–64.

¹²⁵ Chudodeev, "Relations between the Soviet Union and China on the Eve and during the Second World War." 262.

that Japanese losses exceeded that of the defenders and that it was primarily Chinese, not Soviet, piloted aircraft that were shot down.¹²⁶ These aerial successes were only possible as a result of Soviet intervention.

With Japanese superiority in the air checked, the sheer number of Chinese land forces defending Wuhan coupled with the defender's advantage resulted in significant Japanese casualties. Wuhan fell to the Japanese at great cost, resulting in a loss of offensive momentum. There was no further decisive battle, but Soviet aid continued to flow in the form of further equipment, aircraft, and rotation of "volunteer" aircrew.

By 1940, the Soviet Union's strategic calculus had changed. Japan's grinding advance into China had nearly completely stalled. Ever increasing Japanese military resources were sucked into the quicksand of stubborn Chinese resistance. Chinese guerillas, Communist and Nationalist both, freely moved through and attacked from the countryside behind Japanese lines. Chinese regular units retreated westward and northward while mounting local offensives aimed at destroying critical infrastructure and attriting Japanese troops. With the Japanese army's strength sucked into a Chinese quagmire, the threat of the Northern Expansion Route was greatly diminished. This reduced threat from Japan against the Soviet Union meant that Operation Zet no longer served a critical purpose.

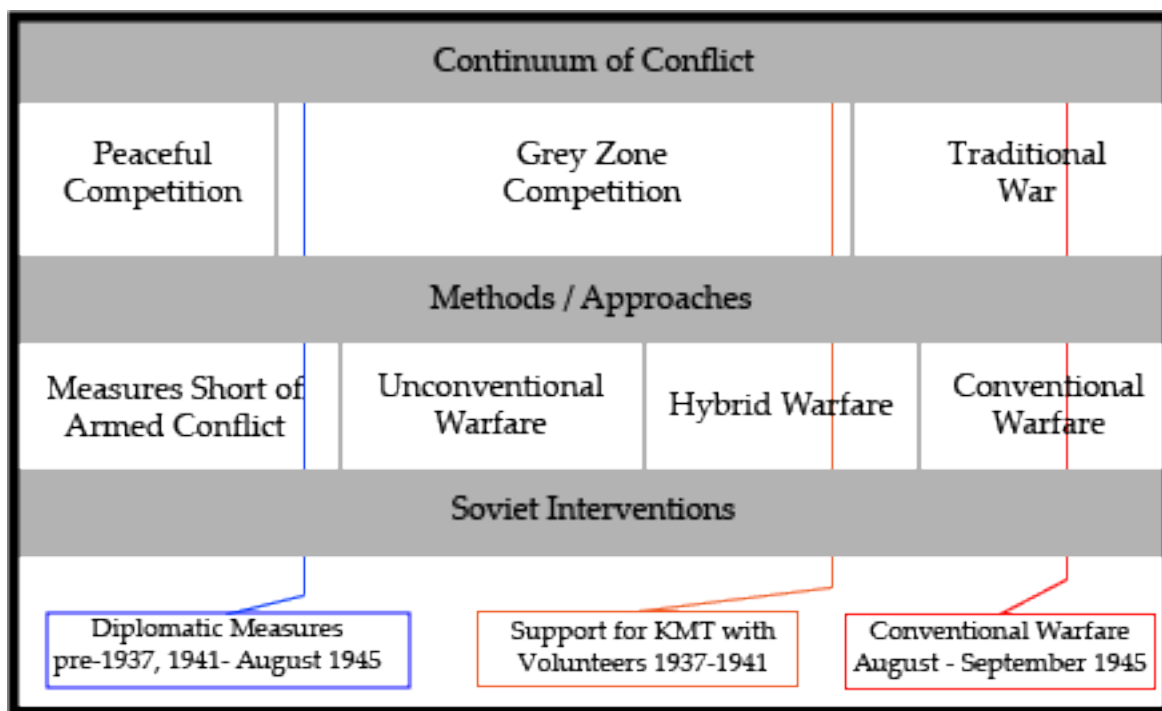
In early 1941, the strategic situation had changed even further from the Soviet view. The previous year saw Germany rapidly seize France and take the air war to Britain, while the Soviets, despite occupying the Baltics, fell well short of their territorial aims in failing to annex Finland. The Far East, however, was more favourable to Soviet interests. Japan was thoroughly bogged down in China. The United States, quick to criticize but slow to act on Japanese

¹²⁶ Demin, "Soviet Fighters in the Sky of China." Part III.

aggression, was beginning to actively support China and sanction Japan. The threat of the Northern Expansion Route from the Imperial Japanese Army had effectively died in China while the Japanese navy would soon have to face the United States.

Soviet diplomatic moves in April 1941 responded to this new situation, recognizing Vichy France in the west as a means to control escalation while agreeing to the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact to formalize a shift of concern from east to west. The Soviet Volunteer Group was withdrawn after signing this pact, with other forms of aid dwindling quickly thereafter.¹²⁷ With the Japanese threat effectively gone, the Soviets were free to turn their attention westward towards Germany. While Japan considered attacking the Soviet Union throughout the war, conflict did not resume between the two powers until the Soviet attack on Manchuria in August 1945.

Figure 4 – Soviet Interventions in China Categorized 1937-1945



¹²⁷ Chudodeev, "Relations between the Soviet Union and China on the Eve and during the Second World War." 264.

Analysis

Throughout their response in the 1930s to the threat of Japanese expansion in the Far East, the Soviets deliberately cultivated ambiguity. The Soviet approach in this period can be understood through the lens of the perspective-dependent element of the gray zone. From the Stalinist perspective, informed by Socialism in One Country, all non-communist states are enemies to the Soviet Union. Diplomatic agreements, multilateralism, and strong advocacy for collective security existed only to keep the Soviet Union in the game long enough to build the strength to survive militarily, ideally under circumstances of a war pitting fascist states against capitalist states. The classic Russian question of, “against whom are you waging friendship?” applies. Continuing state sponsored subversion through communist movements illustrates the duplicity of Soviet attempts to become a member in good standing of international society, while the double-layered concealment of Soviet “volunteers” as members of Chinese squadrons operating Chinese aircraft served to create enough plausible deniability to cultivate ambiguity about the real state of conflict between the Soviet Union and Japan. This ambiguity allowed for escalation with Japan to be managed in pursuit of the chief Soviet objective in the Far East: avoiding an invasion by the Japanese Army.

At the operational level and below, Soviet military aid did not create a hybrid threat for the Japanese but did bolster the existing hybridity of Chinese forces. Chinese resistance included both formations structured along regular army equipment and doctrine as well as guerilla fighters employing partisan tactics. Soviet assistance did, however, increase the capabilities of both conventional and unconventional Chinese forces.

On the conventional side, the Soviets improved Chinese capabilities materially by providing arms and equipment on very favourable terms and more directly with the addition of

the Soviet Volunteer Group of air forces. While the material support no doubt extended the ability of Chinese formations to resist the Japanese, it is the air group that provided the most direct and decisive assistance. The arrival of Soviet squadrons restored an air component to Chinese forces just as their own Chinese Air Force had been nearly destroyed. By sending this air group directly into operations against the Japanese, the Soviets restored a critically important component of the Chinese conventional threat by striking unprepared Japanese forces in depth and preventing the Japanese from securing total air superiority. This added a modern, conventional edge to the technologically inferior Chinese forces that often relied on mass and attrition against the Japanese.

On the unconventional side, directives from Stalin to the Chinese Communists ordering their cooperation with the Nationalists enhanced the unity of Chinese resistance. It must be stated that infighting did occur between Chinese factions during the war, however the pressure on the Communists to support the Nationalists meant that guerillas behind Japanese lines were a more united and pressing threat to the invading forces lines of communication and supply.

Taken together, the Soviet approach in China demonstrated a magnification of what was a hybrid Chinese force resisting the Japanese invasion. By supporting, and in the case of air forces replacing, both conventional and unconventional capabilities, the Soviets enabled a severe threat to Japanese forces by confronting them with the complex military problem Hoffman described in his original work observing Hezbollah and formulating the initial hybrid warfare theory,¹²⁸ a complex military problem formed from the fusion of conventional military capabilities and irregular forces to which there is no easy response.

¹²⁸ Hoffman, "Hybrid Warfare and Challenges."

At the strategic level, it is clear the Soviets appreciated the need to employ all instruments of state power to meet state objectives. Tukhachevsky's vision of synchronicity between economic, military, diplomatic, and informational plans understood through the lens of Socialism in One Country implies a strategy that rejects the peace-war binary envisioned by Western strategic thought and embracing a spectrum of conflict in which "war was just another step on the continuum"¹²⁹ of the great Soviet struggle. It further implies the desire to find a skillful, efficient way of maximizing the limited capabilities of the Soviet Union, at least until such a time that sufficient military power could be generated. Such a strategy could be considered hybrid in that all available instruments of state power were intended to produce a greater result than the sum of its parts effect on specific objectives, with contrast to a more familiar escalation from peace to war with the chief instrument of state power changing at each step. Although further analysis of primary sources related to Tukhachevsky's theories and Soviet decision making are required to draw more concrete conclusions, the case appears to showcase a strategic approach consistent with hybrid warfare.

The case of the Soviet Union's use of sub-warfighting strategies to manage the threat of Japan while retaining western-facing military resources for use against Germany provides a useful point of comparison to modern grey zone actors. According to Belo's model of hybridism in retreat and offensive hybridism, the rapidly strengthening Soviet Union should have utilized offensive hybridism by subtle means.¹³⁰ Instead, this case showed the opposite: the Soviet Union perceived, through the lens of Stalin's revisionist grievance and elevated threat sensitivity, that it was greatly at threat from Japan and that a heavily militarized response was necessary. This disconnect implies a need to capture qualitative differences suppressed by arithmetic models,

¹²⁹ Rice, "The Making of Soviet Strategy," 663.

¹³⁰ Belo, "Conflict in the Absence of War."

such as Belo's, as it is readily explained by the ideology lens that saw militarized, hybrid responses as urgently necessary to maintain the status quo and to protect the Soviet state.

Comparing Soviet and American covert support for the Chinese provides insights into how the internal political structure of states can impact their ability to employ grey zone approaches. Although bureaucratic, Soviet decision-making structures allowed for dictatorial control of state policy. This was especially possible in the immediate aftermath of Stalin's purges, permitting the realization of Stalin's Far East policy without resistance from the military or diplomatic service. This is in stark contrast to the extreme difficulty faced by Roosevelt in attempting to arrange meaningful aid, assistance, and other covert support for the Chinese. This difficulty will be further expanded upon in the next chapter and in the conclusion.

Chapter Three: Heir to the Empire, American Strategy 1936-1941

America's rise to superpower status, beginning at the turn of the 20th century and realized in victory after World War II, can be difficult to conceptualize as merely the history of one great power among many. For those who have only known a world in which the United States forms a pole in either a bipolar or unipolar world, it is perhaps hard to imagine America as just one power among several. However, the United States had to grapple with external and internal challenges to grow into a great power within a multipolar world, turning to grey zone approaches during this time.

The focus of this chapter is on the years immediately prior to America's entry into World War II. Examining this period, marked by the re-election of Franklin Roosevelt to a second term as president and ending with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, how a democracy protected by two oceans may approach the grey zone differently than authoritarian regimes with continental threats. Although the United States, as understood through the lens of Roosevelt's strategy, flirted with grey zone opportunities during this period, it ultimately did not pursue a strategy similar to that of Vergennes' France or Stalin's Russia as explored in the first two chapters of this thesis. Indeed, the Roosevelt's use of a grey zone approach is distinct from those other cases in that Roosevelt chiefly wielded ambiguity and gradualism against domestic, rather than foreign opponents.

Before proceeding to the case proper, the historical context and ideological foundations which inform the positions of both Roosevelt and his isolationist opponents must be understood. The following section traces those currents to set the stage.

Targeted Revisionism: Manifest Destiny, Mahan, and the Roosevelts

Unlike the previous cases explored in this thesis, that of late 18th Century France and the 1930s Soviet Union, the United States in Roosevelt's second presidential term was neither motivated by an intense feeling of righting wrongs or of facing existential threat. It is true that the United States, having grown in military and economic power, had joined the great powers after defeating Spain and by catching up to the Britain as a commercial sea power. However, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, the fundamental orientation of the United States towards these powers was different to the previously identified cases. In the case of Spain, the United States saw an imperial power that had been in decline for decades. In the case of Britain, by this period the United States began, under the influence of naval theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan, as a partner or even successor to Britain instead of a rival. Consequently, rather than a measured revisionist or status quo power, the United States in this period is best understood as a targeted revisionist.

Targeted revisionists, as defined by Mazarr, are generally satisfied with the international order in terms of structure but seek to alter a small number of aspects of power distribution or specific issues. Mazarr suggests that targeted revisionists lack the frustrations and grievances of measured revisionists who seek a wider reordering of world power often based on ethno-national identity.¹³¹ The distinction between targeted and measured revisionists may appear slight at first glance but, as this case demonstrates, this difference of worldview can help explain why what might otherwise be described as a status quo state would take revisionist action in the grey zone.

Founded on competing currents of imperialism and anti-imperialism, the United States was, for its first century, largely content to focus on expansion through the North American

¹³¹ Mazarr, "Mastering the Gray Zone," 20.

continent. Fulfilling what was felt to be America's manifest destiny, the United States pursued westward expansion through land purchases from European powers and by intermittent warfare and "Indian removal" of indigenous nations throughout the 19th century. Concurrently, the development of the Monroe doctrine simultaneously reinforced American isolation from European affairs while also necessitating the development of the power and influence necessary to backup its demands for non-interference in the Americas.

While the founders debated whether the United States' future would be one of agrarian ideal or commercial powerhouse, broad agreement inevitably developed around the need to protect the republic and its immediate interests. Writing in 1787, the Federalist founder Alexander Hamilton argued for the necessity of a federal navy to protect American commercial interests in Federalist Paper No. 11:

By a steady adherence to the Union we may hope, ere long, to become the arbiter of Europe in America, and to be able to incline the balance of European competitions in this part of the world as our interest may dictate.

But in the reverse of this eligible situation, we shall discover that the rivalships of the parts would make them checks upon each other, and would frustrate all the tempting advantages which nature has kindly placed within our reach. In a state so insignificant our commerce would be a prey to the wanton intermeddlings of all nations at war with each other; who, having nothing to fear from us, would with little scruple or remorse, supply their wants by depredations on our property as often as it fell in their way. The rights of neutrality will only be respected when they are defended by an adequate power. A nation, despicable by its weakness, forfeits even the privilege of being neutral.

Hamilton advocated for a commercial and industrial economy protected by a capable military, aiming in some ways to emulate and reform the British model. Although later marginalized by Jeffersonian presidential administrations, Treasury Secretary Hamilton's recommendations were approved by George Washington first in the establishment of the Revenue Cutter Service within the Treasury Department and later in the establishment of the United States Navy.¹³² Throughout

¹³² The Continental Navy was disbanded in 1785 with the sale of its last ship. The United States Navy was established in 1794 with its first ships entering service in 1797. In the interim, the Revenue Cutter Service was employed in anti-piracy interdiction and other military tasks in addition to customs duty.

the 19th century, the navy was predominantly used to defend American commerce and to support American ground wars in the western hemisphere.

By the turn of the 20th century, debates raged on the foreign policy direction of the United States. Dulles notes the national mood of the late 19th century was one of a sense of security and national superiority enabling isolation and avoidance of ‘entangling alliances’ with European nations. This changed starting in the late 1890s. The closure of the American frontier and widespread agricultural failure caused by the 1890s’ drought gave cause to question the viability of further expansion inland specifically and more generally to question the agrarian ideal. Continued growth in manufacturing led to demands for access to new markets and for that access to be safeguarded, necessitating a stronger navy supported by a series of bases.¹³³ Perhaps in this way, Hamilton’s prescriptions had been ahead of its time.

One of the most influential voices promoting American naval expansion and a de facto American imperialism was Alfred Thayer Mahan. In analyzing the struggle for supremacy among mercantilist powers, Mahan assessed that England had gained a self-sustaining edge by developing a navy of such strength that it could assure continued growth of its colonies and trade while denying the same to its adversaries.¹³⁴ This edge allowed for the commercial wealth necessary to maintain the advantaged position and to secure global dominance. This dominance could only be assured by naval supremacy because in Mahan’s view, despite the great wealth and power that land-based continental powers could amass, commercial exchange is most efficient and profitable by sea: “Control of the sea, by maritime commerce and naval supremacy, means predominant influence in the world; because, however great the wealth product of the land,

¹³³ Foster Dulles, *America’s Rise to World Power 1898-1954* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1955). 21.

¹³⁴ Azar Gat, “From Sail to Steam: Naval Theory and the Military Parallel 1882-1914,” in *A History of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). 451.

nothing facilitates the necessary exchanges as does the sea.”¹³⁵ In this way, a great land power may be restrained by a great sea power.

Mahan commonly referred to the struggle between Britain and France in which the former eclipsed the latter by way of achieving commercial and naval dominance, thus choking out French influence. Indeed, Mahan attributes the decisive end to major combat in the American Revolutionary War to a lapse in British naval acumen met by skillfully-wielded French sea power. “Before quitting that struggle for independence, it must again be affirmed that its successful ending, at least at so early a date, was due to the control of the sea—to sea power in the hands of the French, and its improper distribution by the English authorities.”¹³⁶ The naval historian does offer praise to Washington’s strategic abilities in the same chapter, but gives special prominence to Washington’s ability to foresee a need to bring decisive sea power to bear which would allow for a major land victory at the Siege of Yorktown.

Mahan’s appreciation for Great Britain as what could be seen as “the supreme example of sea power at work”¹³⁷ is integral for understanding American targeted revisionism in this era. Mahan, in his own words, admits to an ideological conversion from a traditional American anti-imperialist view to an advocate of adopting lessons from the British imperial model. Mahan writes, “As far as my own views went, I might say I was up to 1885 traditionally an anti-imperialist; but by 1890 the study of the influence of sea power and its kindred expansive activities upon the destiny of nations had converted me.”¹³⁸ It is important to note imperialism in this sense is meant as the extension of political and economic influence, and indeed domination,

¹³⁵ Alfred T. Mahan and Charles Beresford, “Possibilities of an Anglo-American Reunion,” *The North American Review* 159, no. 456 (1894): 551–73. 559.

¹³⁶ Alfred Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History 1660-1805* (Greenwich: Bison Books, 1980). 173

¹³⁷ Crowl, “Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Naval Historian.” 451.

¹³⁸ Letter Mahan to Ashe July 26, 1884. Quoted from Crowl, “Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Naval Historian.” 463.

by all appropriate means including, but not limited to, military power. Fundamentally, Mahan viewed war as the execution of policy direction, provided by the political level, in pursuit of state objectives. In Mahan's view, navies are superior to armies in this regard in that they provide a more flexible instrument to achieve national policy not only by way of combat power projection but also in their diplomatic utility as a less overtly aggressive tool.¹³⁹

For Mahan, France and Britain provided the United States with exemplars of what to avoid and what to emulate respectively. As Philip Crowl summarizes:

Like France, [Mahan] argues, the United States has neglected its maritime interests in favor of inland developments; its government, being democratic, is less inclined to support military expenditures than was the landed aristocracy of England; not enough of its people follow 'callings related to the sea'; it has 'no foreign establishments, either colonial or military' and therefore no 'resting places' where ships of war can coal and repair.¹⁴⁰

There was great danger, in Mahan's view, that the United States would follow the path of France in pursuing inland development at the expense of overseas commerce. Although Mahan was critical of forcing what he thought must be a process, he articulated the prediction that the United States and Great Britain would inevitably become partners and allies:

... I would avoid all premature striving for alliance, an artificial and possibly even an irritating method of reaching the desired end. Instead, I would dwell continually upon those undeniable points of resemblance in natural characteristics, and in surrounding conditions, which testify to common origin and predict a common destiny.¹⁴¹

To Mahan, the character of both states was so similar that an alignment of the two would surely occur naturally.

Also of great concern to Mahan was difficulty in motivating the citizens of a democracy to care for their defence and destiny at sea. Assessing the national mood in 1894, Mahan concluded that "the ground is not yet prepared in the hearts and understandings of Americans ...

¹³⁹ Philip Crowl, "Alfred Thayer Mahan: The Naval Historian," in *Makers of Modern Strategy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, n.d.), 462.

¹⁴⁰ Crowl, 463.

¹⁴¹ Mahan and Beresford, "Possibilities of an Anglo-American Reunion." 554.

The difficulty is that the United States, as a nation, does not as yet realize or admit that it has any strong interest in the sea.”¹⁴² For Mahan, this was a problem that required a persuasive proselytizer to convert the American people towards naval and imperial enthusiasm.

Over the ensuing decades, the United States expanded into the Caribbean and into the Pacific. The 1898 Spanish-American war saw the United States acquire Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. Fearing Japanese influence, the United States annexed Hawaii in the same year. Although actively contested by strong anti-imperial voices, the United States continued this imperial process through the turn of the 20th century. The presidency of Theodore Roosevelt oversaw both an expansion of American influence, beginning construction of the Panama Canal and rebuilding the army and especially the navy, and a significant warming of relations with Great Britain. Theodore Roosevelt’s order for the United States “Great White Fleet” to circumnavigate the world was perhaps the most noteworthy demonstration of America’s growing influence and interests. Although isolationists would return to prominence in the aftermath of World War One, the seeds of an American imperialism had been sown by Mahan, Theodore Roosevelt, and others. These would come to fruition under the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt.

Restraint Interventionist: Franklin Roosevelt 1936-1941

Mahan’s influence on American strategic thinking extends beyond merely naval strategy. As Rofe argues, one must “consider Mahan as the guide in providing a vision of the place of the United States on a world stage”¹⁴³ for both Theodore Roosevelt and, more importantly to the case at hand, Franklin Roosevelt. This guidance becomes applicable in explaining Franklin Roosevelt’s restrained interventionism as a targeted revisionist, resulting from Roosevelt’s

¹⁴² Mahan and Beresford. 556.

¹⁴³ J. Simon Rofe, “‘Under the Influence of Mahan’: Theodore and Franklin Roosevelt and Their Understanding of American National Interest,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 19, no. 4 (December 16, 2008): 732–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592290802564536>. 740.

application of Mahan's conceptions of "empire" and the relationship of the United States to a waning Imperial Britain. In this way, the naval strategy is important as a means to an end rather than the end itself. Understanding naval strategic prescriptions illuminates the broader mode of strategic thought.

It is abundantly clear that Franklin Roosevelt was exposed to the works of Mahan. Roosevelt himself, in signing a prepared response to a citizen's letter, consented to the sharing that, "as a young man I had the pleasure of knowing Admiral Mahan and I have an almost complete collection of his books and magazine articles."¹⁴⁴

Roosevelt shared a great appreciation for Great Britain with Mahan, albeit one that appears to have arisen at least somewhat independently. Influenced by the liberal progressive and social Darwinist thinking of the time, Roosevelt considered the United States to be the apex of civilization with Britain as the greatest civilization of the Old World.¹⁴⁵

Mahan was keen to articulate the unique need for American policy to reflect public commitment, writing that in the United States "national policy, if it is to be steadfast and consistent, must be identical with public conviction. The latter, when formed, may remain long quiescent; but given the appointed time, it will spring to mighty action—aye, to arms—as did the North and South under their several impulses in 1861."¹⁴⁶ Theodore Roosevelt felt, in sharing his views in a 1908 interview, that a lack of such public conviction was a great American weakness: "Here in the United States what is most lacking to us is to understand that we have interests in

¹⁴⁴ Letter Franklin Roosevelt to Miss M.J. Smith, 13 August 1936, President's Personal File, 3790, Admiral Thayer Mahan, FDR. Quoted from Rofe, "Under the Influence of Mahan." 731.

¹⁴⁵ Michael S Bell, "The Worldview of Franklin D. Roosevelt: France, Germany, and United States Involvement in World War II in Europe," 2004, 4.

¹⁴⁶ Mahan and Beresford, "Possibilities of an Anglo-American Reunion." 556.

the whole world. I wish that all Americans would realize that American politics is world politics[.]”

It appears that Franklin Roosevelt was keenly aware of this need as he steered his nation away from isolation to intervention on the world stage. As assessed by Henry Kissinger:

America’s entry into the war marked the culmination of a great and daring leader’s extraordinary diplomatic enterprise. In less than three years, Roosevelt had taken his staunchly isolationist people into a global war. As late as May 1940, 64 percent of Americans had considered the preservation of peace more important than the defeat of the Nazis. Eighteen months later, in December 1941, just before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the proportions had been reversed—only 32 percent favored peace over preventing triumph.¹⁴⁷

In this way, Roosevelt had managed international escalation and domestic perceptions to achieve this need for public support as identified by Mahan.

Although America was pre-occupied with the Great Depression before and during Franklin Roosevelt’s first term, fascist powers had already begun moving aggressively on the world stage. On 18 September 1931, Japan began its invasion of Manchuria. By February 1932, the Japanese gained complete control and established the puppet Manchukuo government. The United States condemned Japanese aggression but would take no action other than to refuse official recognition. In Europe, Germany withdrew from the League of Nations and the World Disarmament Conference in late 1933 while also beginning intimidation and propaganda efforts that set the stage for reunification with the Saarland in 1935. In Africa, Italy launched an invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935.¹⁴⁸

The American legislature responded to this growing storm by solidifying America’s neutral stance in world affairs. Buoyed by the Nye Committee and by public opinion which had

¹⁴⁷ Henry Kissinger, “America Re-Enters the Arena: Franklin Delano Roosevelt,” in *Diplomacy* (Simon & Schuster, 1994). 392.

¹⁴⁸ Frank Russell, *The Saar Battleground and Pawn* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1951). 91.

come to believe American involvement in World War One was for reasons of a purely commercial nature, Congress began passing the Neutrality Acts to prevent American involvement in foreign conflicts. These acts made no distinction between aggressor and defender, instead preventing the sale of arms and military equipment to all belligerent parties to an international conflict. The Neutrality Act of 1936, passed in February of that year, extended the ban to include prohibitions on extending credit to belligerents. Roosevelt strongly believed that any neutrality legislation should provide his executive with the discretion to apply arms embargos only on aggressor states, thereby handing him a tool of influence towards peace and justice. While Dulles characterized this as an abdication of leadership in foreign affairs,¹⁴⁹ Kissinger correctly places this incident at the very beginning of an education and persuasion campaign that would ready the American people for war.¹⁵⁰

Franklin Roosevelt was re-elected in the November 1936 presidential election. It was during this second term that Roosevelt applied an approach of deliberate ambiguity to create an “on ramp” to eventually entering America into military conflict with the fascist powers. Taking office on January 20, 1937, this year would mark an escalation in fascist aggression and the beginnings of Roosevelt’s shifting of American opinion towards intervention. Throughout the spring and summer of 1937, German intervention in the Spanish Civil War intensified. In the Far East, Japan began its invasion of China after the July Marco Polo Bridge incident.

Roosevelt’s early attempts to test and shape American public opinion are exemplified by the Quarantine Speech of October 5, 1937. Delivered in Chicago at the dedication of the Outer Drive Bridge, a New Deal-funded major infrastructure project, this speech provided Roosevelt the opportunity to bridge the concept of a growing threat to world prosperity. Roosevelt opened

¹⁴⁹ Dulles, *America’s Rise to World Power 1898-1954*. 175.

¹⁵⁰ Kissinger, “America Re-Enters the Arena: Franklin Delano Roosevelt.” 379.

the speech with an appeal to an American people who “had told [him] in every look and word that their material and spiritual well-being has made great strides forward in the past few years” by contrasting “the prosperous farms, the thriving factories and the busy railroads” with a “reign of terror and international lawlessness” that “began a few years ago.”¹⁵¹ Drawing on Christian morality, and perhaps even subtly referencing the Nye Report, the president called for a world in which the sanctity of treaties was respected and where industry could be turned to peaceful rather than bellicose ends. Roosevelt painted a dark picture in which “civilians, including vast numbers of women and children, are being ruthlessly murdered with bombs from the air” among other atrocities, all while leaving the perpetrators glaringly unnamed. Roosevelt closed by stating “[t]herefore, America actively engages in the search for peace” leaving the questions of how and against whom for the listener to determine.¹⁵²

Isolationist voices were quick to condemn the quarantine speech as a dangerous step towards abandoning non-intervention. Kissinger notes that, despite having opportunity and motive to walk back his comments, Roosevelt kept open significant room to maneuver when speaking to the press: “Yet, despite the critical onslaught, Roosevelt spoke ambiguously enough at a news conference to keep open the option of collective defense of some kind ... Roosevelt insisted that his speech implied actions that went beyond moral commendation of aggression.”¹⁵³ Roosevelt’s own cautious Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, was among the critics later judging that the speech set back the cause of American internationalism by six months.¹⁵⁴ Whatever

¹⁵¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt, *October 5, 1937: Quarantine Speech*, The Miller Center Presidential Speeches, accessed October 6, 2021, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/october-5-1937-quarantine-speech>.

¹⁵² Roosevelt.

¹⁵³ Kissinger, “America Re-Enters the Arena: Franklin Delano Roosevelt.” 379-380.

¹⁵⁴ Dulles, *America’s Rise to World Power 1898-1954*. 181.

immediate impact the speech had, Roosevelt did gain valuable information from public and elite reactions.

While the Quarantine Speech appeared to have little immediate success in bolstering support for internationalism, the isolationists hit back with an attempt to constrain the government's ability to declare war in January 1938. Introduced at several points starting in 1935 by Democratic representative Louis Ludlow, the Ludlow Amendment required a national referendum on any declaration of war except in the event of invasion of United States. Although the amendment enjoyed widespread public support and the endorsement of close to half of all Democrats in the House of Representatives, the Roosevelt administration was successful in ensuring the amendment would not leave the Judiciary Committee: on January 10, 1938, the amendment very nearly came into the House for debate when a petition for debate was defeated by a margin of 209 votes against to 188 in favour.¹⁵⁵ Roosevelt made an impassioned appeal to the House, by way of a letter read by the speaker just prior to the vote, calling upon the representatives to consider how crippling the proposal would be to American foreign policy and security.

Given the relative strength of isolationist public opinion and isolationist legislators, the Roosevelt administration did not react to the March 12, 1938, *Anschluss* of Austria to Germany. This mirrored the muted responses of the European democracies. Roosevelt remained restrained through the Munich Crisis and the First Vienna Award later in 1938, calling for moderation on the one hand while accepting no American responsibilities in European affairs on the other.¹⁵⁶

Clearly Roosevelt felt unable to take stronger diplomatic stances in late 1938. But while the American people and elites were not yet ready for stronger action, they would prove

¹⁵⁵ Dulles. 183.

¹⁵⁶ Dulles, *America's Rise to World Power 1898-1954*. 184.

receptive to further persuasion as rising tensions made their way into the minds of everyday Americans. As Graebner notes, the press of the time overwhelmingly considered the Munich settlement as a disastrous failure of British and French diplomacy while continuing with increasingly weak defenses of American isolationist policies.¹⁵⁷ This period of changing public opinion allowed for Roosevelt to increase in his efforts to persuade the American people towards interventionism and in covert efforts to support the European democratic powers.

In an October 26, 1938, radio address to the Herald-Tribune Forum, Roosevelt repeated his arguments from the Quarantine Speech in calling for the pursuit of peace against unnamed, but clearly identifiable aggressors. Roosevelt began with an appeal to American morality, emphasizing that world peace cannot exist without respect among the world powers for the fundamental liberal ideals of the rule of law and individual freedoms of speech, thought, and worship of God. Roosevelt reiterated a desire to turn economic resources towards reconstruction and social prosperity while maintaining that the United States “nor any nation, will accept disarmament while neighbour nations arm to the teeth.”¹⁵⁸ In this way, Roosevelt sought to justify American military preparations while assuaging the concerns that disarmament was being slowed by politicians loyal to the armaments industry.¹⁵⁹ Moving to his core argument, Roosevelt rejected a desire by the United States to impose liberal democratic values on others while maintaining determination to protect that way of life for every American. In direct answer to isolationists, Roosevelt stated:

¹⁵⁷ Norman Graebner, *America as a World Power: A Realist Appraisal from Wilson to Reagan* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1984). 53.

¹⁵⁸ Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Radio Address to the Herald-Tribune Forum. | The American Presidency Project,” The American Presidency Project, accessed November 8, 2021, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/radio-address-the-herald-tribune-forum>.

¹⁵⁹ Many proponents of the Neutrality Acts, such as Senator Gerald Nye of the Nye Committee, advocated for American non-interventionism due to their belief that the United States entered World War One to support the armament and banking industries: the so-called “merchants of death” willing to sacrifice American lives for profit.

And we affirm our faith that, whatever choice of way of life a people makes, that choice must not threaten the world with the disaster of war. The impact of such a disaster cannot be confined. It releases a flood-tide of evil emotions fatal to civilized living. That statement applies not to the Western Hemisphere alone but to the whole of Europe and Asia and Africa and the islands of the seas.

Roosevelt closed in calling for peace, restraint, and negotiations. Perhaps most telling of Roosevelt's vision was his final line: "Let us work for the same ideals within our own borders in our relations with each other, so that we may, if the test ever comes, have that unity of will with which alone a democracy can successfully meet its enemies."¹⁶⁰ Calling for, and building towards, a unity of will seemed to answer directly Mahan's earlier lamentations of a democracy's inability to maintain the arms and strategic intent necessary to succeed as a great power in a world of monarchies and autocracies.

While he continued his domestic persuasion campaign, Roosevelt also vigorously pursued plans to support materially Britain without violating the Neutrality Acts. In October 1938, Roosevelt met with the British air minister and with people connected to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain to propose an arrangement to increase British and French military aircraft production. The plan involved the United States supplying all aircraft components to factories located in Canada, leaving only the final assembly to the benefactor states. As civilian goods prior to their assembly into warplanes, the export of these aircraft components would violate the spirit of the Neutrality Acts, but not the letter of the law. Although this scheme collapsed owing to the logistical complexity of providing aircraft components at scale and with secrecy, the episode does show Roosevelt's resolve to materially support the United Kingdom against Germany and Italy. Through an intermediary, Roosevelt informed Chamberlain that, "in the event of war with the dictators, he had the industrial resources of the American nation behind

¹⁶⁰ Roosevelt, "Radio Address to the Herald-Tribune Forum. | The American Presidency Project."

him.”¹⁶¹ From this point out, Roosevelt began an escalation of both preparation for American intervention and messaging to convince the American people of the necessity of that intervention.

By early 1939, Roosevelt reduced the ambiguity of his public remarks significantly. In his State of the Union address of January 4, 1939, Roosevelt repeated much of the same appeal as his previous addresses but with far greater urgency. Warning of raging “undeclared wars” and threats of renewed aggression, Roosevelt declared that “Storms from abroad directly challenge three institutions indispensable to Americans, now as always. The first is religion. It is the source of the other two—democracy and international good faith” before later castigating the world’s dictatorships for banishing “religion, democracy and good faith among nations to the background” in stark contrast to the Christian ideals of the “Prince of Peace.”¹⁶² Roosevelt further warned that the American people “know what might happen to us of the United States if the new philosophies of force were to encompass the other continents and invade our own. We, no more than other nations, can afford to be surrounded by the enemies of our faith and our humanity.”¹⁶³ To answer these threats, Roosevelt called upon the Congress and the American people to prepare now and steel themselves lest a surprise attack or development bring an end of their way of life. While not yet naming these dictatorships, in the context available to audiences of the time it is clear Roosevelt meant Germany, Italy, and Japan.

In March 1939, Germany annexed the remainder of Czechoslovakia. By April, Roosevelt began directly linking “the continued political, economic and social independence of every small

¹⁶¹ Kissinger, “America Re-Enters the Arena: Franklin Delano Roosevelt.” 383.

¹⁶² Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Annual Message to Congress 1939,” The American Presidency Project, accessed November 11, 2021, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/annual-message-congress>.

¹⁶³ Roosevelt.

nation in the world” to American “national safety and prosperity.”¹⁶⁴ Roosevelt argued that American interest could no longer be limited to the Monroe Doctrine as advancing technology stitched the Old World ever close to the New.¹⁶⁵ On April 14, 1939, Roosevelt directly appealed to Hitler and Mussolini by letter to reject aggression and settle their problems through peaceful means. The White House released the text of the letter to the press on April 15, 1939. In the letter, Roosevelt called upon both to guarantee that they would not attack thirty-one specific territories and states for at least ten years. The response from the dictators was one of sarcasm in the former case and vicious mockery in the second.¹⁶⁶ But as both Chamberlain at the time, and Kissinger later, noted, the greatest impact of this message was to reinforce American public opinion towards intervention against Germany and Italy.¹⁶⁷

April 1939 also saw Roosevelt increase unofficial military cooperation with the United Kingdom. This cooperation took the form of an agreement wherein the United States Navy concentrated in the Pacific while the Royal Navy concentrated in the Atlantic. Kissinger notes that this agreement mirrors one between the United Kingdom and France prior to World War I which allowed France to concentrate naval forces in the Mediterranean. The implication of this arrangement, however, was a moral obligation for the United States to defend British possessions in the Pacific.¹⁶⁸

Britain declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, in response to the Germany invasion of Poland. The American prohibition on arms exports to belligerents remained in effect at this time, but what had changed from previous years was American public and elite opinion

¹⁶⁴ Kissinger, “America Re-Enters the Arena: Franklin Delano Roosevelt,” 383.

¹⁶⁵ Kissinger, “America Re-Enters the Arena: Franklin Delano Roosevelt,” 383.

¹⁶⁶ Kissinger, 384.

¹⁶⁷ Graebner, *America as a World Power: A Realist Appraisal from Wilson to Reagan*. 57.

¹⁶⁸ Kissinger, “America Re-Enters the Arena: Franklin Delano Roosevelt,” 384.

towards the need to contain Nazi Germany. On September 21, 1939, Roosevelt called Congress to a special issue urging the renewal and extension of cash-and-carry¹⁶⁹ exceptions to arms exports. Owing to the British blockade of Europe, only Britain and France could meet these exceptions. Congress approved cash-and-carry with a clean majority vote of 55-24 in the Senate and 243-172 in the House of Representatives.¹⁷⁰

The Phoney War between September 1939 and May 1940 provided American leadership a hope for peace in the expectation that cooler heads may prevail or, failing that, a stranglehold formed by the Maginot Line by land and the Royal Navy blockade by sea would knock out Germany. During this time, Roosevelt dispatched Undersecretary Sumner Welles to Europe as a potential mediator. Whether this was an ineffectual final attempt at peace, as Dulles writes,¹⁷¹ or yet another chess move, as is Kissinger's view,¹⁷² the ultimate effect was a demonstration that Roosevelt had exhausted every attempt at peace by a means acceptable to America isolationists. As Germany launched its western offensive, Roosevelt was able to persuasively advocate for support to the Allies.

On May 10, 1940, Germany launched an invasion of the Low Countries and of France. Six weeks later, France had fallen. Roosevelt condemned by name the fascist powers while directly linking the Royal Navy to American security across the Atlantic. Roosevelt later strengthened the Atlantic defense through the September 1940 destroyers-for-bases deal. This deal transferred 50 American destroyers to the Royal and Royal Canadian navies while acquiring basing rights in the North Atlantic and Caribbean. This deal, executed entirely by executive

¹⁶⁹ Cash-and-carry referring to the requirement belligerent purchasers pay cash as opposed to purchase on credit and to transport munitions aboard their own ships.

¹⁷⁰ Dulles, *America's Rise to World Power 1898-1954*. 189.

¹⁷¹ Dulles. 189.

¹⁷² Kissinger, "America Re-Enters the Arena: Franklin Delano Roosevelt." 386.

action, freed British forces from Atlantic garrisons and allowed the United States to finance and construct strategic infrastructure that, while ostensibly for American use, would primarily benefit British forces.

Across the Pacific, Roosevelt met continued Japanese aggression by ratcheting up economic pressure. In the July 1940 Export Control Act, the United States expanded an export ban on war material which resulted in an embargo of military material flowing to Japan except for oil. The exclusion of oil was meant to avoid an outright provocation to war.

On March 11, 1941, Roosevelt signed the Lend-Lease bill into law. This bill allowed for the transfer of military material to any government the President deemed vital to the defense of the United States. Roosevelt used this mechanism to provide billions of dollars in military equipment and supplies to the British Commonwealth, Free France, China, and the Soviet Union among others. Prior to the Act's passage, British and American military staff began to meet to coordinate how to best make sure of American industry to support the British war effort.¹⁷³

In April 1941, Roosevelt extended the Pan-American Security Zone, a zone in which no Western Hemisphere nation would tolerate belligerent actions, far eastward to just 50 nautical miles from Iceland. In the zone, the United States Navy provided supplementary convoy escort and broadcasted any U-boat sightings in the clear, greatly favouring British and Canadian convoy operations. In September 1941, Roosevelt responded to the sinking of an American destroyer by a German submarine by ordering the United States Navy to sink on sight any German or Italian submarine in the Security Zone.¹⁷⁴

Although famously depicted in popular media as the Flying Tigers, the First American Volunteers Group of the Republic of China Air Force had ultimately no combat impact prior to

¹⁷³ Kissinger. 389.

¹⁷⁴ Kissinger. 392.

declared war between the United States and Japan. The architect and commander of the volunteer force, Claire Chennault, had privately advised the Chinese nationalists since 1937. In October 1940, Chennault conferred with Chang Kai-shek on a plan to secure American aircraft and pilots to replace the reductions of support from the Soviet Volunteer Group. Chennault returned to Washington to lobby for an American air volunteer group over the winter of 1940-1941. With the strategic environment now changed towards American interventionism, Chennault found support from Roosevelt and members of the cabinet. One hundred P-40 fighters with military pilots and ground crew “discharged”¹⁷⁵ from the United States Army Air Force and Navy formed the First American Volunteer Group. Personnel and equipment first left San Francisco in July 1941 with the entirety of the group arriving by November 1941. Ultimately, the group did not see combat prior to the outbreak of war with their first combat mission occurring on 20 December 1941. The unit acquitted themselves favourably in air combat over China and eventually were redesignated an official United States Army Air Force formation in July 1942.¹⁷⁶

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and made a declaration of war some hours thereafter. The next day, the United States declared war on Japan triggering Italian and German declarations of war against the United States in turn. Now a declared belligerent with opponents in multiple theatres of war, American involvement in World War Two was longer be limited to ambiguous grey zone actions and instead took form of an outright military struggle for unconditional victory.

¹⁷⁵ Almost the entirety of the unit was formed from US military personnel with a handful of civilian mechanical and technical experts. Personnel were employed as contractors for the Central Aircraft Manufacturing Company, a Chinese aircraft manufacturing company established by sympathetic American entrepreneur William Pawley, as either “instructors” or “metal workers” for official purposes.

¹⁷⁶ Lance, “Icarus in China.” 65-66.

Analysis

Roosevelt's chief opponents to the deployment of military force and stronger economic measures were not the leadership of the fascist nations but the isolationists within the United States. By managing ambiguity, Roosevelt was able to overcome resistance from isolationists and build considerable war support by 1941. Both Mahan and Theodore Roosevelt noted that in a republic such as the United States, national policy must be identical to public conviction if it was to have greatest effect. Franklin Roosevelt ably built that public conviction by carefully escalating both his rhetoric and his actions in opposition to the fascist powers. This was no mere box-ticking exercise, but instead as Kissinger notes a work of great leadership in shifting national opinion. Indeed, the escalation of Roosevelt's economic, industrial, and military support to the Allies, in particular Great Britain, can be seen as a sort of domestic salami slicing in which the United States gradually escalated its material support through the grey zone up to a state of undeclared naval war against Italy and Germany in September of 1941.

As noted earlier, the United States in this case is an example of a targeted revisionist. This is because the United States lacked the motive to become a more strident revisionist in two main ways. First, owing to its highly protected geography consisting of three oceans and three cordial neighbours, the United States was free to operate without fear for its survival. This most simple of geostrategic analysis is no surprise. Secondly, and a greater interest to the thesis, the United States lacked a compelling grievance to motivate more aggressive revisionist moves. Informed by the strategic thinking of Theodore Roosevelt and Alfred Thayer Mahan, Franklin Roosevelt, as chief strategist in this case, saw a future in which the United States would inevitably supplant Great Britain as the world's leading power. Far from being aggrieved by the world order, Roosevelt saw the United States as the heir to the empire and therefore in a position

where cautious stewarding and shepherding of that liberal world order would protect this imperial inheritance. Therefore, the United States only needed to preserve and steward, rather than fundamentally reorder, and thus could afford to be a focused and targeted revisionist safeguarded its coming inheritance.

Turning to conceptions of grey zone conflict and of hybrid warfare, this case shows that such tools of analysis and explanation can fit the actions of a democracy. One can rightly describe the pre-war actions of the United States as steps to preserve international peace and security, however the strategy in question was clearly one of elevated competition directed at adversaries in excess of normal peacetime competition. Roosevelt perceived a threat to the United States' interest in a stable liberal world order. It was his intent to restrain and eventually intervene against the fascist powers. Restrained by elite and public support for isolationism at home, Roosevelt was left with means below the threshold of war and indeed below the threshold of maximum pressure.

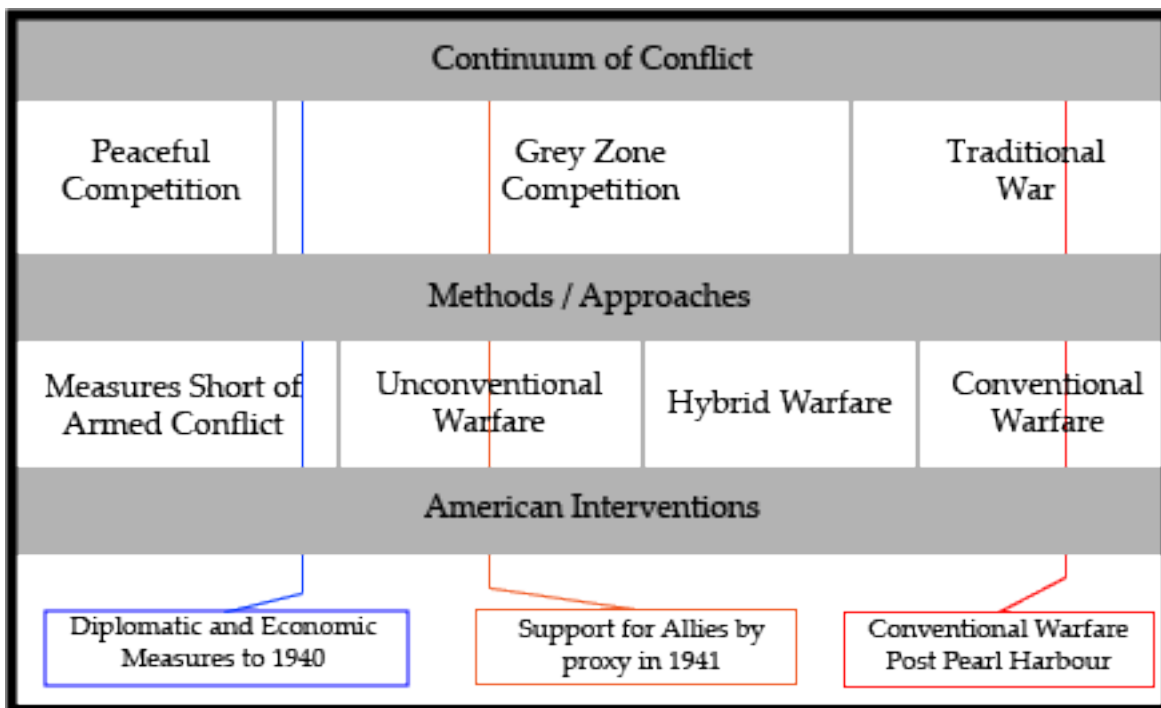
While Roosevelt was unable to directly add a militarized hybrid element to his strategy, exemplified by the very late dispatch of the Flying Tigers to China, he was able to indirectly exert military force against Germany by proxy through support to the Allied powers. It cannot be said that the United States engaged in a hybrid war of the operational type, that is to say one that combines conventional and unconventional military force in direct conflict with opposing forces. Despite opportunities and even proposals to do so, the United States did not directly deploy or encourage "volunteer" or deniable forces in direct support to conventional or unconventional forces combating the fascist powers until the very late dispatch of the Flying Tigers.

At the grand strategic level, United States efforts, outside of the rhetorical, overwhelmingly took the form of economic sanctions against fascist powers and economic

support to Allied Powers. To be sure, programs such as cash and carry, lend-lease, and the destroyers for bases deal to name a few had a significant positive impact on the ability of the Allied powers to resist in the early war period. However, while arguably not limited in intensity, this support was limited primarily to the economic instrument of state power. In this way, American intervention prior to mid 1941 lacked hybridity. One may consider historical counterfactuals in which Roosevelt had access to additional ambiguous and high deniability assets in options. In the absence of such counterfactuals, the historical Roosevelt was an interventionist restrained by the tools available in a democracy of the 1930s and indeed a democracy within which a significant population held isolationist views.

Roosevelt pushed the situational ambiguity of the grey zone to the limit from April 1941 onwards. The extension of the Pan American Security Zone to Iceland constituted a significant shift towards using American military power to support the allies and stymie the fascists. This state of affairs escalated by the September 1941 order to sink on sight all German and Italian submarines found within the zone. While too late to make a significant difference, the July dispatch of the Flying Tigers volunteer group to provide direct air support to the Chinese nationalist resistance to Japan marked a willingness to enter a hybrid war similar to that of the Soviet Union which had supported the Chinese in the same way in 1930s. Both shifts in the use of the instruments of American power indicate a shift towards the use of military power in ambiguous, but impactful ways. Had the United States not entered the war in December 1941, it seems very likely that America would have escalated its deniable involvement towards what is now described as hybrid warfare within the very upper limits of the grey zone.

Figure 5 – American Interventions under Roosevelt Categorized



Implications

This case provides an important example of a targeted revisionist state applying a strategy enabled by a defensible geostrategic position. The domestic political situation of the United States in this period further provides an additional variable for consideration. It can clearly be seen that Roosevelt managed ambiguity to control escalation, not out of fear of provoking a foreign response, but instead in dealing with domestic political opponents in the form of the isolationist movement. This dynamic is not necessarily unique to democracies and the grey zone may prove alluring to any state government beholden to domestic power brokers.

Challenging the spectrum presented at Figure 5, adapted from Frank Hoffman’s simpler spectrum, is the incidence of an ambiguous state of undeclared and geographically constrained war between the United States and Nazi Germany in the pre-Pearl Harbor Atlantic. Roosevelt’s radical extension of the Pan-American Security Zone to the vicinity of Iceland and the

September 1941 order to sink Italian and German submarines on sight stretched to the breaking point the concept of a delineation between the grey zone and traditional warfare. This situation however, illustrates a further example of states willing to remain within the grey zone by mutual, unstated consent which avoids premature entry into open, traditional war.

Chapter Four: Conclusions and Implications

A common thread emerges from examining the strategies of Vergennes, Stalin, and Roosevelt. As with all strategists throughout history, these three sought to achieve their ends by the employment of finite means in appropriate ways. What makes these cases noteworthy, however, is from each strategist's need to manage the escalation of conflict to prevent premature passage of the threshold between peace and war. It is through case comparison analysis that insights emerge both theoretical, for grey zone conflict and hybrid warfare as explanatory tools, and practical in terms of guidance for strategists and other defence practitioners.

Case Comparison

The three cases presented in this thesis were selected to extend the existing body of case literature using the concepts of measured and targeted revisionism, grey zone conflict, and hybrid warfare. Each presented a strategist selecting these ways and means within differing international, historical, and domestic contexts. The expected result of these cases, a limited number compared to potential candidates, was not to develop an all-encompassing theory but to test the utility of these concepts against new cases. Selecting diverse cases from history provides opportunity for comparison while also directly answering those critics who view grey zone and hybrid warfare concepts as ahistorical presentism.

The cases examined hold the strategic approach, engaging in grey zone conflict as described in chapter one, approximately constant while varying in several other respects. As summarized in Table 2, the three cases varied in aspects such, as governmental system, external threat perception, revisionist type, and methods. Additionally, in all three cases examined the grey zone actor eventually went to war with the adversary or adversaries targeted for grey zone activities. This section will address these similarities and differences in greater detail.

Table 2 - Case Comparison

	France 1774-83	Soviet Union 1930s	United States 1936-41
System of Government	Absolute monarchy	Stalinist dictatorship	Presidential republic
Strategist	Comte Vergennes	Joseph Stalin	Franklin Roosevelt
Perception of External Threat	Medium	High	Low
Grievance	France must be the centre of European politics	Soviet Union besieged by capitalists and fascists in all directions	United States will inherit leadership from the United Kingdom
Revisionist Type	Measured	Measured	Targeted
Revisionist Ideology	Traditionalist / Religious	Stalinism, Socialism in One Country	American imperial thought: Mahan and Theodore Roosevelt
Methods Employed during Grey Zone	Providing proxy force (American revolutionaries) weapons, materiel, money, advisors, port facilities to generate hybridity	Providing proxy force (KMT) weapons and materiel, use of deniable air force with Soviet aircraft and personnel to generate hybridity	Economic sanctions and embargos, providing materiel and operational support to Allied forces, very late dispatch of deniable forces
Deniability	High	Medium	Low
Went to War	Yes, subsequently	Yes, delayed	Yes, subsequently

International relations are, to extend Robert Putnam's original statement on negotiations, always two-level games.¹⁷⁷ Some attention must be given to the domestic political game that the strategist must simultaneously play alongside the international. In both the French and Soviet cases within this thesis, the strategists Vergennes, through orchestrating French strategy for King Louis XVI, and Stalin exercised autocratic control. Through these autocratic structures, of absolute monarchy and dictatorship respectively, almost no domestic restraint limited the strategist's freedom of action. For Vergennes and Stalin, the restraints on their options primarily arose from facets of the international system and an unfavourable balance of power. Conversely,

¹⁷⁷ Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (1988): 427-60. 434.

in the American case the primary limiter to Roosevelt's desired plan of action was domestic opposition from isolationists rather than material limitations or fear of direct threats. That the grey zone fits even the United States case stands in opposition to more widespread belief that the grey zone is chiefly a tool of revisionist, authoritarian states.

The extent to which each strategist saw their state to be under threat varies across the three cases. Stalin saw the Soviet Union to be in grave peril, viewing his as a vanguard socialist state that capitalists and fascists alike would aim to put down in an attempt to forestall the inevitable world communist revolution. As described in chapter three, this threat perception as codified in the ideology of Socialism in One Country informed the urgent action of Stalin's Far East strategy which, while heavily reliant on violence, was effectively for the purpose of maintaining the status quo. For Vergennes, the threat to France was much less pressing. Vergennes saw France in decline after its loss in the Seven Years' War and at risk of never reclaiming what he believed to be the French birthright as centre of European politics without careful action to craft a reversal. Roosevelt's America perceived the least threat, insulated geographically by two oceans and manageable land borders as well as insulated ideologically by the perception the United States would inevitably inherit world leadership from the United Kingdom.

The nature of the grievance, revisionist type, and revisionist ideology, and the previously discussed threat perception vary considerably among the cases. Broadly, the revisionist type is driven by the nature of the strategist's grievance which is in turn informed by the difference between what the strategist's ideology demands and what the balance of power in the international system permits. In the case of Vergennes, France's status as a measured revisionist resulted from the delta between Vergennes' traditionalist view that the French King's birthright

was to be the center of European politics and the military and economic realities faced by a post Seven Years' War France. French relative weakness, especially compared to Britain, was important as a restraint on Vergennes' options to satisfy his grievance and therefore was an important driver but not the sole motivator as might be assumed by classical forms of realist analysis. For Stalin, the extreme perception external threat was instead core to the ideology of Socialism in One Country. In this second case, preserving the status quo as a way to ensure the Soviet Union's short term survival was the "grievance" as it were. Finally, Roosevelt's targeted revisionism in his second term was informed strongly by his own interventionist ideology, rooted in American imperial thought by way of Theodore Roosevelt and Alfred Thayer Mahan, in an environment marked by such low American perception of external threats that Roosevelt had to exert considerable effort to outmaneuver and to diminish powerful isolationist sentiments among the people and the political class alike. By comparing these three cases it becomes apparent that the strategist's ideology, and therefore the strategist's grievance, is not necessarily a simple cloak for realpolitik needs. The balance of power could drive a grievance as with Stalin, exacerbate a grievance as with Vergennes, or be irrelevant as with Roosevelt.

Turning to the methods employed within and beyond the grey zone as well as the level of deniability of those methods, similarities immediately emerge between the two autocratic cases of Vergennes' France and Stalin's Soviet Union while the democratic United States differs. The two autocratic states provided extensive support to a proxy force engaged in conflict with the target of their grey zone conflict. Both dispatched money, advanced weapons, other war materiel, and deniable military personnel who would engage in direct fighting against their adversary. One notable difference is in the scale between Vergennes' and Stalin's covert interventions, with the former providing individual officers and the later deploying formed flying units. That France

provided the American privateers with safe haven in the form of port facilities while the Soviet Union did not provide similar safe haven is explained by the geographic and military nuances of each case. In both cases, the strategist took steps to ideally conceal the extent of their activities and, at a minimum, achieve some level of deniability.

Stepping one level below into the military execution of these strategies at the operational level, both France and the Soviet Union generated what could be described as a hybrid threat for their adversary by greatly enhancing the conventional capabilities of their proxy force. France would go along to fight against Britain as military allies of the United States, bringing powerful conventional naval and army forces into the North American theatre to fight alongside relatively weaker American conventional forces and irregular militia groups generating a hybrid threat for Britain. Contrasting the two autocratic states, Roosevelt's America primarily used economic sanctions against the fascist powers while slowly escalating the nature of materiel and operational support to Allied Forces. It should be noted that Roosevelt, on several occasions, attempted to provide greater support, such as a plan for the early provision combat aircraft covertly transferred to the British Commonwealth. He was stopped by the inability to carry out such a plan in secrecy or the greatly delayed plan to send a deniable air force, the Flying Tigers, to China, only to be blocked largely by concerns arriving from US domestic opposition.

In all cases it appears strategists reached for a combination of all available means that, when combined simultaneously, move towards the accomplishment of their states political objective, while avoiding for the time being, a state of war. Each strategist had at their disposal differing levels of military, diplomatic, and economic power: France wielding diplomatic and military power, the Soviet Union primarily using military force, and the United States using

considerable economic pressure until public opinion supported militarized actions. Differences in method therefore appear to emerge as a result of differences in available means.

Limitations on available means informed each state's actions. For Vergennes' France, military and economic weakness limited options for direct conflict with Britain until sufficient rearmament could be completed. The Soviet Union of the 1930s also faced a shortfall in military capabilities when compared to Stalin's grave concerns about the possibility of united capitalist attack on the communist vanguard state. Roosevelt's America grew economically and militarily stronger each year, but the administration faced unified and strong isolationist opposition both within and outside the president's party. Given these restraints, each strategist formulated a strategy aimed at preparing for and influencing a more favorable situation in the future while striving to appear outside of direct conflict with their target of grey zone activity. For the two autocracies, fostering a perception of normal relations within the international community was of great importance. Both attempted this by taking great steps to conceal their grey zone military activities and by engaging in duplicitous and skillful diplomacy.

Once conditions sufficiently changed to lessen these limitations, all three studied powers would eventually go to war with the targets of their grey zone methods. In the French and American cases, war directly followed the grey zone conflict and in such conditions that France and the United States could credibly claim to be the defender or at least to not be the party that directly escalated the conflict to a state of war. In the case of the Soviet Union, Stalin ceased his grey zone conflict with Japan once it became clear that the United States would check Japan. Although the Soviet Union did eventually attack Japan, this was not until August 1945 when Japan's defeat was clearly inevitable and the Soviet Union's intentions had strongly shifted to revisionism. In all cases it appears the strategists were willing to use all necessary means

available but had to devise a strategy to work around limitations precluding the immediate use of decisive military force. In this way, all three strategists advanced national objectives despite significant barriers until such time that the situation became conducive for the use of conventional military force.

Conceptual Implications

A core criticism of the grey zone and of hybrid warfare, as was explored in the introduction to the thesis, is the question of whether these concepts add to or muddy the understanding of conflict around the boundaries of peace and war. Debates about whether the grey zone and hybrid warfare describes a new phenomenon can be put to rest. As has been demonstrated by the preceding empirical chapters and earlier works,¹⁷⁸ these concepts can be applied to additional historical cases with ease. Deliberately ambiguous action, leveraging a mix of all elements of state power, and constructing hybrid conventional and irregular forces are within the broader historical norms.

Some, such as Stoker and Whiteside,¹⁷⁹ may view this as a death blow to the concepts, suggesting they are nothing more than a series of buzzwords with a little substantial backing. However, what the proponents of such criticism do not engage with is the question of why Western analysts and strategists grasp at these concepts and frameworks to aid them in dealing with a contemporary security environment.

Fundamentally, any assessment of the utility provided by the grey zone conflict concept must grapple with the decision to accept or reject the peace-war binary. Assuming one retains the

¹⁷⁸ Murray and Mansoor, *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*, 2012.

¹⁷⁹ Stoker and Whiteside, “Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking.”

peace-war binary, as for example Stoker and Whiteside recommend,¹⁸⁰ western strategists then must deal with what appears to be great difficulty understanding highly bellicose forms of peace and highly limited forms of war as evidenced by those authors' complaints about confused analysis and extensive publications on the subject of grey zone conflict and hybrid warfare. Put simply, if academics and analysts are reaching for concepts such as these it may be because such a concept could enable their thinking around the fuzzy boundary of highly combative peace and highly limited war. As demonstrated by this thesis' case studies, strategists of the past have found it useful to operate in what is now described as the grey zone.

This thesis has found that the category of grey zone conflict can be used as a heuristic tool to describe and explain three historical cases. Contrary to criticism from Stokes and Whiteside that the grey zone is just the result of "one's knowledge of military history and history in general [being] insufficient"¹⁸¹ and that "new so-called classifications of war would be instantly killed if properly examined through these lenses [of history and existing theory],"¹⁸² this concept appears equally able to explain several situations described in this thesis at least as ably as some type of highly bellicose peace or highly limited and mutually undeclared war.

Vergennes' France covertly financed, equipped, armed with heavy weapons, and sheltered American rebels and privateers prior to joining the American Revolutionary War conventionally, all the while feigning peace with Britain and with Britain disinclined to push the issue. Stalin's Soviet Far East policy involved direct, but deniable deployment of Soviet pilots, ground crew, and aircraft to fight Japan in China while both the Soviet Union and Japan cautiously shied away from considering that period of conflict to be a war. Roosevelt's America

¹⁸⁰ Stoker and Whiteside, 39.

¹⁸¹ Stoker and Whiteside, 38.

¹⁸² Stoker and Whiteside, 39.

not only wielded its incredible economic power to support the Allies and to constrain Japan, but invested heavily in joint bases with Britain and penultimately entered undeclared naval war with Germany and Italy in the North Atlantic prior to declaration of war. Far from a modern fetish, these types of liminal activities appear to be historically grounded.

In these cases, the acting power was attempting to maximize its impact on the target power without tripping a red line into war, while the target itself was disinclined to declare that a state of war now existed until subsequent escalation out of the grey zone. It is possible to assign these actions to either a form of highly aggressive peace or highly limited and undeclared war, but it is far clearer and simpler to recognize that both actor and target believed they were in a grey zone. While not historically referred to as a grey zone by typology, this in between space is historically useful in conditions of great power conflict and therefore a return to understanding such a liminal space through new terminology is a modern way of understanding a return to one previous mode of conflict.

Moreso than the grey zone, the bounds of hybrid warfare remains blurry. As described in chapter one, two usages are common in the literature. The first, original, and least controversial is the definition of hybrid warfare as a tactical and operational level approach which exists in the same category as modes, such as conventional combined arms, unconventional warfare, and guerilla warfare among others. This concept is relatively well understood thanks to analysis started by Frank Hoffman¹⁸³ and continued primarily by practitioners within the United States Special Operations Command community.¹⁸⁴ Hybrid warfare in this model combines conventional forces with irregular and potentially non-traditionally military components to create a complex challenge for an adversary to defeat. This might, for example, take the form of an

¹⁸³ Hoffman, "Hybrid Warfare and Challenges."

¹⁸⁴ One early example being McCulloh and Johnson, *Hybrid Warfare*.

insurgency equipped with traditionally conventional weapon systems such as Hezbollah's 2006 use of advanced anti-ship, anti-air, and anti-tank guided missiles as well as rocket artillery, or conversely a conventional force partnering with irregular forces such as Ukraine's 2022 hybrid defence with extensive use of protests, recognized territorial defence units, and hastily equipped and self-organized resistance groups behind the lines of Russian advance. Hardly a new form of warfare from a historical view, this combination of conventional and irregular capabilities appears to be a common historical form.¹⁸⁵ Western military tradition has drifted away from this historical reality over the 20th and early 21st centuries. This understanding of hybrid warfare is clear, relatively uncontroversial, and is an important part of an operational-military level theory of modern warfare.

Problems emerge when hybrid warfare is used to describe the actions of states at the strategic level. Criticism of the application of hybrid warfare at the strategic level rightly point out how quickly the concept sucks in all activities practised by adversary states until every possible action must be fit into a convoluted master strategy. The result of this is that hybrid warfare quickly begins to lose any descriptive or explanatory utility as it loses specificity.

Whether operational or strategic, hybrid warfare seeks to unite diverse capabilities in such a way that the opponent is faced with overwhelming complexity aimed at forcing response dilemmas at all levels. Instead of seeing hybrid warfare as an alternative or equivalent to war competing with the grey zone concept, it is grey zone conflict and war that should form the overarching categories of state conflict which may or may not include hybrid warfare activities. Hybrid warfare may be practised by a state attempting to remain in the grey zone as in the case of Soviet volunteers bolstering Chinese conventional capabilities against Japan in Operation Zet

¹⁸⁵ Williamson Murray and Peter Mansoor, eds., *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

or practised during a state of war as an operational approach as was the case in Franco-American operations in the North American Theatre 1778-1783. That such strategists may feel compelled to remain within the grey zone and use hybrid warfare to maximize their impact while doing so speaks to the restraints and limitations such actors face in being unwilling or unable to enter war. Therefore, it is more important to understand this strategic choice through the concept of staying within the grey zone and not by fixating on the exact methods and capabilities. Prioritizing hybrid warfare as a somehow unique and special mode of conflict hides the strategic choice by enabling such a fixation.

Attempts to develop an understanding of grey zone conflicts solely with recourse to the arithmetic balance of power may be effective when considering modern cases, such as Dani Belo's analysis of Chinese and Russian grey zone approaches, but this breaks down when compared against this thesis' historical cases. Belo argued that the differences between current Russian and Chinese grey zone approaches are explained by strategic momentum measured by increasing or decreasing relative power: "In a form of a ledger, relative power can be calculated by subtracting the countries expenses, such as social welfare, or and social liabilities, such as political instability, from its corresponding assets such as natural resources endowment."¹⁸⁶ Belo suggests that states in relative decline reach for kinetic, military responses while states making gains can wait to rely on more subtly non-kinetic means, such as economic influence, propaganda, and cyber.

All three cases presented in this thesis challenge Belo's theory. 18th Century France certainly suffered a staggering blow in losing the Seven Years' War but was able to rebound significantly by direct entry into war with Britain with the 1778 Treaty of Alliance with the

¹⁸⁶ Belo, "Conflict in the Absence of War." 2.

United States. Indeed, Vergennes' strategy was one of caution during France's period of weakness, with more provocative options occurring once French rearmament neared completion and with the aim of weakening Britain in the immediate years prior to war. Stalin's Soviet strategy fits from the perspective of a strategist who viewed his state as under grave threat in a time of weakness, but objectively the rapidly increasing industrial and military might of the Soviet Union should have marked a state gaining geostrategic momentum. Roosevelt's American strategy 1936-1941 appears, at first glance, to fit Belo's model, but under closer scrutiny one can see that Roosevelt attempted on several occasions to deploy more provocative means yet was stopped by domestic politics. In these cases, it appears the driver of strategic behaviour was not solely the relative balance of power but instead the strategist's orientation towards that balance of power. Furthermore, that orientation derives not simply from strategic momentum but specifically from the overarching grievance motivating revisionist end goals.

Practitioner Recommendations

There can be a great danger in relying on historical analogies to guide current decision-making on current issues. Practitioners, such as analysts and strategists, must instead use history to improve pattern recognition and develop a broader perspective in creating the almost intuitive power that Clausewitz referred to as *coup d'oeil*. The following are initial recommendations arising from this research project.

This thesis reinforces Murray and Mansoor's position that hybrid warfare, as we now describe it, is one of armed conflict which has been observed through history by other terms. As stated in their 2012 work, "although there is little new in hybrid war as a concept, it is a useful means of thinking about war's past, present, and future."¹⁸⁷ The three cases considered within

¹⁸⁷ Murray and Mansoor, *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*, 2012, 1.

this thesis support this statement. For reasons beyond the scope of this thesis, Western strategists and militaries struggle to conceptualize and combat what are now described as hybrid threats. The concept of hybrid warfare provides a useful conceptual tool as 21st century conflict presents cases which appear similar in many respects to those previously encountered in history. Rather than fetishize hybrid warfare, Western strategists must recognize how its modern manifestation in specific cases matches or differs from historical examples. History may be inspiration, but not a guide, for how to conduct or to combat hybrid warfare.

Understanding and countering the strategies of Russia and China would be aided by developing a fuller understanding of the worldview and the grievances each presents because, as has been demonstrated in this thesis, outcomes counter to what a purely numeric analysis of the balance of power can readily arise. Put another way, strategic empathy must be developed to avoid mirror imaging intentions or dismissing qualitative nuance in purely numeric models. For Russia this may be achieved through an understanding of Vladimir Putin's revanchist impulses to rebuild the Soviet Union and imperial Russia. Putin's own writings, and those of Alexander Dugin on Russian Eurasianism, serve as entry points to the aggrieved worldview directing the Putin regime.¹⁸⁸ Understanding these grievances can assist the analysts in determining the intentions and strategic end state of Russian revisionism.

For China, one might look to the latest iterations of Chinese political military thought including modern interpretations of People's War and Xi Jinping's Major Country Diplomacy. Underpinning these elements of Chinese strategy is the foundation of Maoism, previous iterations of the People's War concept and the foreign policy doctrine of previous Chinese

¹⁸⁸ Marcel van Herpen, *Putin's Propaganda Machine*, 2016. 192-193.

premiers, and traditional Chinese spiritual and moral philosophy such as Confucianism, Taoism, and their expression in Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*.

To be clear, the aforementioned suggestions are offered for illustrative purposes. Any rigorous investigation of Russian or Chinese grievances must be grounded in a fulsome understanding of their historical and cultural contexts. This is complicated for Western analysts who may lack this contextual cipher. In this way, the importance of area studies and regional expertise in any analysis seeking to explain or predict specific grey zone and hybrid warfare strategies must not be ignored.

Devising a strategy to counter modern measured revisionists requires an investigation into each state's geostrategic situation, culture, and ideology of grievance that remains firmly outside the scope of this thesis. However, a few avenues of investigation emerge from the analysis conducted within this work.

The most obvious solution is to refuse grey zone conflict and to rely on traditional deterrence to prevent escalation from the grey zone to war. By its very nature, grey zone strategies are the result of limitations on the grey zone actor's capabilities and are generally, but not always, the actions of relatively weaker parties. The trouble with this is that without careful consideration, the targets of grey zone conflict may find their superiority eroded over time leading to conventional conflict. This dynamic played out in all three cases examined within this thesis. A related approach may be the attempt to defuse the revisionist's grievance. If a zone of possible agreement exists that would truly satisfy the revisionist's grievance, then conflict could be defused, but it would be important to ensure the grievance is truly being resolved as opposed to buying time through short term appeasement. This is further complicated by the deliberate ambiguity cultivated by grey zone actors obfuscating not just means, but also intentions.

Fundamentally, a grey zone approach relies on the possibility of ambiguity and deniability. Countermeasures aimed at reducing ambiguity and holding adversaries to the peace-war binary could reduce, or even eliminate, the grey area spaces in which these adversaries tend to operate. A lighter version of this approach is exemplified by the Biden Administration's release of intelligence assessments prior to, and during the opening stages of, the 2022 Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine¹⁸⁹ as well as similar reporting from the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence¹⁹⁰. Countermeasures like this approach mark a departure from previous concerns about sharing classified assessments of what could or might happen but constitute a way to roll back the edges of ambiguity.

A heavier version of this approach, and one that is seemingly advocated by Stoker and Whiteside, would be to communicate ironclad red lines and commit to holding these lines by deterrence, compellence, and indeed punishment by military force if necessary.¹⁹¹ There is nothing in this thesis that suggest such an approach could not *prima facie* succeed if a state could commit to the approach, but there is initial evidence that it may be very difficult for liberal democracies to practice. Roosevelt faced considerable barriers to deploying American military resources to counter the fascists states in the interwar period. It was only when political opinion finally coalesced around interventionism that Roosevelt was able to directly wield military power such as with the radical extension of the Pan-American Security Zone.

¹⁸⁹ Ken Dilanian et al., "Bold, Effective and Risky: The New Strategy the U.S. Is Using in the Info War against Russia," *NBC News*, April 6, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/us-using-declassified-intel-fight-info-war-russia-even-intel-isnt-rock-rna23014>.

¹⁹⁰ As of 9 April 2022, daily Tweets from the official account of the UK MoD, <https://twitter.com/defencehq>, have provided unclassified strategic level intelligence updates reporting on Russian activities and intentions in the Russo-Ukrainian war.

¹⁹¹ Stoker and Whiteside, "Blurred Lines: Gray-Zone Conflict and Hybrid War—Two Failures of American Strategic Thinking."

James Wirtz's suggestions perhaps split the difference in arguing for strengthening diplomatic engagement to harden alliances, call out grey zone actors, and reinforce the norms of liberal international society. Wirtz frames this as necessary, but not sufficient to deter grey zone aggression. He argues that strategists must expand the range of options available to respond to short-of-war strategies and ideally pre-agree across alliance structures which responses would be appropriate in given scenarios.¹⁹² This would provide a playbook of options beyond appeasement and acceptance, but less stark and escalatory than Stoker and Whiteside's suggestions.

If the two most obvious responses to adversary use of grey zone and hybrid approaches are to accept and defuse grievances or to attempt to reject them by reducing space of ambiguity, a third approach may be open for Western strategists who feel the West is already in decline: retool for grey zone conflict and hybrid warfare. Kilcullen offers a version of this broad mode in his suggestion that the West adopt a strategy of "Going Byzantine" by changing the Western military model to one that embraces Eastern Roman approaches, such as selectively copying adversary military models, diversifying away from an over-focus on conventional military dominance, focusing on retaining and expanding an edge in select technologies, and pitting opponents against each other.¹⁹³ It must be remembered that historical analogies provide insight, not predictive value, meaning such as approach may not mean inevitably decline as was the case for the Byzantines.

Kilcullen notes several opportunities to copy from adversary methods in morally acceptable ways including overtaking them in areas of weapons research, but it is most instructive to consider how Western states could optimize for grey zone conflict and re-integrate hybrid warfighting across the spectrum of conflict. The United States is equipped with a variety

¹⁹² Wirtz, "Life in the 'Gray Zone': Observations for Contemporary Strategists," 112.

¹⁹³ Kilcullen, *The Dragons and the Snakes: How the Rest Learned to Fight the West*, 237-238.

of tools suitable for both grey zone conflicts and hybrid warfare, such emerging capabilities in electronic warfare and cyber operations, but also well-established capabilities such as the United States Army Special Forces, with their original role of unconventional warfare, and foreign covert operations capabilities within the Central Intelligence Agency Special Activities Center. By way of example, Peter Mansoor considers elements of the American invasion of northern Afghanistan in 2001 as a hybrid operation between conventional air and land power combined with Western special operations forces supporting Northern Alliance irregulars.¹⁹⁴ This re-optimization appears to be underway, notably in a shift away from employing US Army Special Forces in direct action roles back to their traditional unconventional and irregular warfare roots in supporting Eastern European allies through the Resistance Operating Concept, and with the creation of multiple Security Force Assistance Brigades.¹⁹⁵ Additionally, America retains a leading role in world politics, the global economic system, and in defence industrial production that it could leverage effectively in grey zone conflict.

Smaller Western nations face tough decisions in the return to great power competition. Many have chronically underfunded their defence budgets and even with significant reinvestments face challenges in producing broadly capable conventional forces. However, these minor powers often possess significant wealth, technology, and a small number of highly trained military personnel. Canada, for example, contributed significantly to the multinational military training mission in Ukraine prior to the outbreak of the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian war with early

¹⁹⁴ Dr. Peter Mansoor *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*, Think JSOU Strategic Studies Webinar, 2020, <https://youtu.be/TzBvmshr13c>.

¹⁹⁵ The Resistance Operating Concept (ROC) provides a multinational framework for setting the conditions for United States allies to produce a credible resistance in the event of invasion and for allied special operations forces support such resistance forces by developing shared doctrine and procedures. This is meant to not only make support to resistance more effective during wartime, but also to increase the ability of a American allies to resist occupation and therefore increase the deterrent posture. Otto Fiala, *Resistance Operating Concept (ROC)* (MacDill Air Force Base, Florida: The JSOU Press, 2020).

observations suggesting this mission positively impacted the ability of the Ukrainian Armed Forces to resist the Russian invasion. Canada also possesses the scientific basis to become an effective cyber power with the lack of development in this area seen to be ineffectual capability development and burdensome policy barriers.¹⁹⁶ Smaller, high technology powers may be able to leverage a smaller number of highly advanced defence systems as force multipliers to larger in number, but less capable local forces, thus creating a hybrid force.

Future Research

The purpose of this study was to answer an impasse in the debate over whether concepts of grey zone conflict and hybrid warfare add utility to the understanding of conflict near the boundaries of peace and war. This was addressed by broadening the case set through the development of historical case studies for the purposes of comparative analysis following, in part, the work begun and shepherded by Murray and Mansoor.¹⁹⁷ The results of this study imply several avenues of future research both qualitative and quantitative.

A readily apparent area for future study would be to reinvestigate modern Russian and Chinese cases already considered, but with a stronger focus on understanding the nature of their revisionist ideologies with a view towards better explaining and perhaps predicting these states behaviour. This has been described in some detail in the previous section on practitioner recommendations. Future study of this type would broaden existing scholarship, such as the more arithmetic balance of power work of Belo¹⁹⁸ or the evolutionary innovation perspective of

¹⁹⁶ Alexander Rudolph, "Canada's Active Cyber Defence Is Anything But Active," Canadian Global Affairs Institute, accessed April 18, 2022, https://www.cgai.ca/canadas_active_cyber_defence_is_anything_but_active.

¹⁹⁷ Murray and Mansoor, *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*, 2012.

¹⁹⁸ Belo, "Conflict in the Absence of War."

Kilcullen,¹⁹⁹ by providing more in-depth coverage of the strategists' ideological motivation and desired end state.

In all three cases presented within this project the state studied employed a grey zone conflict approach and subsequently went to war with the target of their grey zone strategy within the life of the conflict prompting grey zone action. Future case development should be undertaken to search for cases where a grey zone approach was employed but that did not result in a subsequent state of war. This is particularly important to understanding whether the existence of the grey zone improves or worsens great power management. If the majority of cases involving grey zone conflict inevitably led to war, and presumably war at a time and in conditions favourable to the grey zone actor, that may imply the acceptance of a grey zone weakens the institution of great power management. It may also suggest that the target of grey zone activities would best respond by resolving, even escalating, the conflict before the switch from grey zone to war while the target retains the advantage. On the other hand, if conflict in the grey zone rarely escalates to war it may serve as an effective tool of great power management especially of interest as the return of great power conflict in the 21st century features multiple nuclear powers.

Only one of the cases studied in this project was democratic and that case demonstrated some noteworthy differences to the two autocratic cases which are worthy of further investigation. As noted in the case comparison section to this chapter, the Roosevelt United States case is marked by its targeted revisionism, as opposed to the measured revisionism of the autocracies, primarily economic and materiel support methods, as opposed to the autocracies' deniable forces and more direct support to proxy forces, and the low deniability of methods

¹⁹⁹ Kilcullen, *The Dragons and the Snakes: How the Rest Learned to Fight the West*.

employed,²⁰⁰ as opposed to the far more secretive methods of Vergennes and Stalin. One might suggest the openness and institutionalized domestic opposition intrinsic to the system of government make democracies less likely to employ riskier and more secretive grey zone methods, but with just one democratic case under consideration, it is too early to draw a firm conclusion. Additional case studies exploring the use of grey zone conflict and hybrid warfare by democracies are warranted to address this topic.

Mazarr's original work in this space focused on the actions of measured revisionists. This study explored not a measured revisionist, but also a status quo power and a targeted revisionist. Further case studies should be conducted to explore whether and how targeted revisionists and status quo powers employ the grey zone and hybrid warfare. Mazarr's 2015 analysis²⁰¹ deliberately ignored status quo powers. This was a reasonable decision given the state of world politics in 2015, but the increasingly deteriorating security environment exemplified by the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian war may be one in which status quo powers are more inclined to employ military power to preserve that status quo while attempting to remain below the threshold of war. Many Western status quo powers have dispatched increasingly sophisticated weapons to Ukraine, provided generous economic assistance, and have admitted to sharing intelligence with the Ukrainian Armed Forces. It remains unclear what covert or unconventional warfare capabilities might be already employed or are being considered for employment. It would appear that status quo and targeted revisionist powers have an interest in exploiting the grey zone to pursue strategic objectives while remaining outside the bounds of open warfare and therefore investigation of historically similar cases is warranted. From an operational level of military

²⁰⁰ It should be noted Roosevelt and those close to him did attempt some more covert methods but were delayed or constrained largely by domestic forces as described in the case chapter.

²⁰¹ Mazarr, "Mastering the Gray Zone," 21.

analysis, Ukraine's total defence in the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian in the earliest months of the war demonstrated what appeared to be a hybrid defence involving armed societal mobilization not seen in a Western democracy in decades including extensive actions by territorial defence forces and organized partisan groups linked with joint fires.²⁰² Ukraine's total defence strategy will no doubt be studied in depth, but such study would without doubt be improved by drawing on available historical cases of democracies practicing hybrid warfare especially as the modern Western military structure of highly professional, exquisitely-equipped conventional force appears more costly to maintain in financial and personnel terms.

Much like the deliberate exclusion of status quo powers, Mazarr²⁰³ also set aside the question of opportunistic and reckless predator states²⁰⁴ from his analysis. Again, in the context of 2015 this is reasonable. Mazarr explains this deliberate exclusion by stating, "while such states may use gray zone strategies, it will be in service of larger aggressive aims that spread into traditional military aggression."²⁰⁵ Setting aside the value in understanding a predator state's use of hybrid warfare in open war to military theorists and practitioners, it is reasonable to dismiss the need to inquire into the well understood mechanics of an aggressor state's pursuit of political objectives through war. However, the finding that all cases considered within this thesis resulted in a transition from grey zone to a war lost by the grey zone target draws attention to the need for further investigation about that transition from grey zone to war and therefore from revisionist to predator. While an ongoing case exists in the form of Russia's February 2022 overt invasion of

²⁰² George Barros and Noel Mikkelsen, "Institute for the Study of War," Institute for the Study of War, November 1, 2022, <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/interactive-map-and-assessment-verified-ukrainian-partisan-attacks-against-russian>.

²⁰³ Mazarr, "Mastering the Gray Zone," 21.

²⁰⁴ Mazarr categorizes opportunistic predator states by analogy to jackals who seek major changes to the balance of power but prioritize regime survival such as North Korea. Reckless predators are categorized by analogy to wolves who are highly risk tolerant who prioritize relative gains over security such as Nazi Germany.

²⁰⁵ Mazarr, "Mastering the Gray Zone," 21.

Ukraine, in which Russia has clearly abandoned the grey zone and appears to have abandoned hybrid warfare, singular focus on just this modern case presents many pitfalls best addressed by understanding it within the broader context of the historical record.

A fundamental shift from the qualitative to quantitative should be explored to better understand the magnitude of grey zone and hybrid warfare phenomena and the relationships with its correlates. A model for this type of investigation exists in the form of Dan Altman's 2017 study on *faits accompli*.²⁰⁶ In that study, Altman assembled a broad dataset combining several existing datasets, for example the Correlates of War dataset, with other sources. Analysis of this broader dataset revealed that states acquire territory through the employment of *faits accompli* at a magnitude far greater than successful coercive diplomacy. A future quantitative study with a similar approach could reveal both the extent of grey zone and hybrid approaches within the historical record and explore correlations with the factors identified in this thesis such as internal system of government, threat perception, revisionist type, methods, and whether the state eventually went to war with the adversary. Such a study would inform the debate on and further the literature by discovering correlates for subsequent in-depth, qualitative investigation to understand causation. This would broaden the understanding of these phenomena and provide further insight to practitioners both employing as well as attempting to mitigate these approaches.

²⁰⁶ Dan Altman, "By Fait Accompli, Not Coercion: How States Wrest Territory from Their Adversaries," *International Studies Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (December 1, 2017): 884–85, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx049>.

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