



# WAR AND TRUTH

## A Review Essay by James P. Farwell

*Ukraine and the Art of Strategy*

Lawrence Freedman. Oxford University Press, 2019

*This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality*

Peter Pomerantsev. Public Affairs, 2019

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### About the Author

**James Farwell** is a non-resident Senior Fellow at the Middle East Institute in Washington and an Associate Fellow at King's Centre for Strategic Communications. He is the author of *Persuasion & Power* (2012), *The Pakistan Cauldron* (2011) and forthcoming *Information Warfare*.

In *Ukraine and the Art of Strategy*,<sup>1</sup> Lawrence Freedman offers his take on Russian strategy in Crimea and eastern Ukraine; he also discusses Syria and comments on strategic theory. Peter Pomerantsev follows up on his fascinating jaunt of 2014 into Russian political surrealism<sup>2</sup> with *This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality*.<sup>3</sup> Writing vividly, Pomerantsev's book centres on how social media foment confusion and disinformation to create disruption, eroding confidence in public and private institutions and making it difficult for people to discern the truth about ideas or events. Both books merit attention.

Pomerantsev's book is a great read. He uses vivid illustrations to show how social media and disinformation are a global concern. Social media's effects vary in impact. At times they are constructive, at others perverse. Russia stands alone in this arena. Consider Russia's Internet Research Agency (IRA). Heavily staffed by journalists, not intelligence officers, it has become Russia's most infamous factory for Internet disinformation. Yet exposing the purveyors of 'fake news' elicits little reaction.

Pomerantsev describes the courageous efforts of one Russian woman to discredit the IRA's operation by exposing it. She took huge risks to get out the truth, only to discover that few people cared. 'Instead of an outcry,' Pomerantsev reports, 'she found that many people, including fellow activists, just shrugged at the revelations.' Russians viewed IRA lies as part of a new normal. Anti-Putin dissenters in Odessa experienced the same futility. One point that he misses is that changing audience beliefs is difficult. Smart political campaigns don't even try. They focus on provoking emotions to channel beliefs into desired conclusions.<sup>4</sup> Social media can affect attitudes and opinions, but their impact can be overstated.

Pomerantsev identifies heroes and villains. In Belgrade, Srđa Popović teaches self-empowerment to overthrow despots. In Russia, bot-herder Nizhny Novgorod champions German far-right memes. In the Philippines, an enterprising Internet operator, identified as 'P', manipulated the crime issue to elect Rodrigo Duterte that nation's president and has helped to maintain his credibility. Philippines journalist Maria Ressa stands out bravely with her news website *Rappler* and her

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1 Lawrence Freedman, *Ukraine and the Art of Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

2 Peter Pomerantsev, *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible* (London: Public Affairs, 2014).

3 Pomerantsev, *This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality* (New York: Public Affairs, 2019).

4 Tony Schwartz, *The Responsive Chord* (New York: Anchor Books, 1973).

exposé of Duterte's excesses. She's a true heroine. We need more like her. Her courage sets an example.

Pomerantsev echoes cyber expert Evgeny Morozov<sup>5</sup> who demonstrated that the Internet helps dictators as well as democrats. Being a tyrant doesn't make you stupid. Venezuela, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Bahrain employ the Internet to identify dissidents and suppress dissent, notably by spinning conspiracy theories that demonise their opponents.

These days, 'conspiracy theory replaces ideology with a mix of self-pity, paranoia, self-importance and entertainment'.<sup>6</sup> Authoritarians use conspiracies to explain events, especially where the facts may be obscure to an uninformed public, filling in gaps by offering absurd connections of disparate items to fabricate a kaleidoscope of falsehood. Dmitry Kiselev, an influential Russian presenter gifted at spinning tall tales, invokes an ingenious rhetorical catchphrase to connect unrelated dots in propounding propaganda as truth: 'A coincidence—I don't think so!'<sup>7</sup> Kiselev weaves ridiculous narratives into plausible tall tales. Give the Devil his credit—Kiselev and his confederates elevate 'fake news' to high political art. Authoritarians and their supporters, Pomerantsev argues, obscure truth by creating 'white noise'. They flood their audiences with a tidal wave of information that renders them numb, cynical, and unable to assess news reports or information intelligently.

Actually, matters may be less dire. Pro-Erdoğan Turkey columnists pummel his critics. Yet he's not all-powerful. Municipal elections handed him his political head. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia intervened in Yemen, ostensibly to thwart Iran from turning the Houthis into terrorists. Its clumsy propaganda cannot conceal the starvation and disease—arguably war crimes—that its intervention has engendered.

Pomerantsev raises a cogent point about the chaos that disinformation and 'fake news' create. The value of his book lies in the examples he cites. There's no easy counter to fake news. Unsurprisingly, he is short on solutions. He argues that people need to read books and educate themselves. The requirement for taking responsibility to educate ourselves is a powerful point. Freedom can be easily lost if one fails to stand up for it. Nations that have won hard-earned

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<sup>5</sup> Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Pomerantsev, *This Is Not Propaganda*, p. 48.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

freedom in the wake of the Cold War know a thing or two about this challenge. So do the brave protestors in Hong Kong who demand that Beijing respect its legal obligations, entered into with the United Kingdom by treaty, to honour democracy in that city.

Political leaders and an *informed*, independent media in the West must provide clarity to political debate. In today's polarised environment, this has become a shaky proposition. The US news media used to report the news. Today they find themselves lost in a wilderness of partisan politics. They share the blame for confusion, lack of solid information, and disruption. Talk radio and talk television pass off inflammatory commentary as news to viewers tuning in mainly to confirm their prejudices or beliefs, not to get the low-down on facts. It's sad. Things are likely to change, at least in the West, only if citizens call out politicians and the media.

### **Strategic Communications, Competing Narratives, and Ukraine**

The core of Freedman's book is his analysis of Ukraine's civil war. Strategic communications is central to what transpired. There's nothing new about this tool. From ancient times, it has played a key role in armed conflict. Scipio Aemilianus used it through brutal action to subdue Spanish dissent.<sup>8</sup> Napoleon's Italian campaign can be viewed as an exercise in strategic communications, one that he exploited to gain power in France. Napoleon capitalised on the power of newspapers and social networks, art, poetry, personal appearances, and other information tactics, to gain power as First Consul.<sup>9</sup> George Washington used false propaganda during the American Revolutionary War to discredit the British.<sup>10</sup>

In that war, the gold medal for the use of strategic communications goes to Lt Gen. Charles, Earl Cornwallis. He surrendered at Yorktown, in the face of overwhelming superiority in forces, to Washington and Lafayette. Like any smart commander, Cornwallis knew when to fold. But while American history has been unkind to his reputation, Cornwallis was an exceptional commander, a brilliant strategist, and a ferocious tactician.

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<sup>8</sup> Alvin H. Bernstein, 'The strategy of a warrior-state: Rome and the wars against Carthage, 264–201 B.C.', in W. Murray, M. Knox, & A. Bernstein (eds), *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 63.

<sup>9</sup> James P. Farwell, *Persuasion & Power* (Washington: Georgetown U. Press, 2012), p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Commanding British forces in Virginia, he offered to free the slaves, who made up 40% of the state's population. Half of them defected, providing intelligence and other support. Cornwallis knocked the Colonialists on their back heel. Cornwallis's jealous superior, Sir Henry Clinton, forced Cornwallis to back down, and that tactic degenerated organisationally. Had the British pursued this strategy in Virginia and elsewhere with discipline, vigour, and focus, they might have suppressed the Revolution, even though a majority of Colonials supported independence.<sup>11</sup>

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Vladimir Lenin used movies on freight trains to shore up his revolution. William Donovan's OSS operatives adroitly used information warfare in carrying out their missions.<sup>12</sup> Strategic communications campaigns were a characteristic of the Vietnam War and of the conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan.

Pomerantsev points out that in Ukraine, the narratives of each side drove military action. Russia propounded the narrative that separation produces civil war and chaos. Kyiv argued that it leads to misery. Both sides calibrated their military action to support their narratives. Both authors raise the topic of 'hybrid warfare' in Russia, a complex topic that has engendered confusion. Many argue that Ukraine was a test-case for Russian hybrid warfare.<sup>13</sup>

Actually, Russia's military does not recognise the notion of hybrid warfare.<sup>14</sup> Although its political and academic elite does invoke the term, as *gibridnaja vojna*, and applies it to describe colour revolutions. The Russian understanding is distinct from Western interpretations. It corresponds to the definition of strategic communications that I offered in *Persuasion & Power*: 'the use of words, actions, images, or symbols to mould or influence the attitudes and opinions of target audiences to shape their behaviour in order to advance interests or policies, or to achieve objectives or a defined end-state'.<sup>15</sup>

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11 Gregory J.W. Urwin, 'Virginia Campaign Threatened the Revolution in Virginia', in R.G. Davis (ed.), *The U.S. Army and Irregular Warfare: Selected Papers from the 2007 Conference of Army Historians* (Washington: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2008).

12 Douglas Waller, *Wild Bill Donovan*, (New York: Free Press, 2011).

13 L. Todd Wood, 'Russian Hybrid Warfare in Ukraine', *Washington Times*, 19 November 2018;

Noah Peterson, 'Russia Field-Tested Hybrid Warfare in Ukraine. Why That Cyberthreat Matters for U.S.', *The Daily Signal*, 27 October 2017.

14 Ofer Fridman, 'A War of Definitions: Hybridity in Russia and the West', in Ofer Fridman, Vitaly Kabernik, and James C. Pierce (eds), *Hybrid Conflicts and Information Warfare* (London: Routledge, 2019) p. 73, and Ofer Fridman, 'On the "Gerasimov Doctrine": Why the West Fails to Beat Russia to the Punch', *Prism*, Vol. 8, № 2 (2019).

15 Farwell, *Persuasion & Power*, p. xviii–xix.

Russian military officers view *gibridnaja vojna* as an American gambit, not a Russian doctrine.<sup>16</sup> Russians view it as the ‘use of Western economic and soft power to bring about political change through covert and deniable means’.<sup>17</sup> Here emerges a critical distinction between Russian and Western notions of warfare. In Ofer Fridman’s words, ‘the West thinks of war in binary terms, as a conflict between defined actors for a temporary duration that has a beginning and an end. Russians think about it differently. They see the whole history of international relations as one eternal war.’<sup>18</sup>

Freedman sees Putin’s operations and actions as tactical. Mikhail Zygar concurs that ‘there was no concrete plan’.<sup>19</sup> Putin’s Defence Minister, Sergey Shoigu, cautioned against intervention. Advisers expressed concern about whether to keep Crimea *de jure* independent while *de facto* turning it into a proxy state. Putin elected to intervene and annex Crimea. Helpfully, most Crimeans (the ethnic Russians, but not the minority Tatars and Ukrainians) did, in fact, identify with Russia. While Freedman’s description of events is accurate as far as it goes, his analysis misses the mark. Putin operated tactically. But the key point is that Russian tactics stemmed from a strategic view towards Ukraine, the US, and NATO. One must understand Putin’s actions through that view.

Putin views the West as hostile to Russia. He believes it works continuously to oust him. The West views ‘colour revolutions’ such as those in Ukraine (Orange), Georgia (Rose), Kuwait (Blue), Yugoslavia (Bulldozer), Lebanon (Cedar), Kyrgyzstan (Tulip and Melon), Belarus (Jeans), Moldova (Grape), and Iran (Green), as the expression of individual citizens clamouring for freedom. Putin and his coteries hold the opposite view.

Georgy Filimonov and other Russian writers<sup>20</sup> state that, for Russia, *colour revolution* ‘refers to specific techniques intended to stage a coup d’état and

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16 Mark Galeotti, *Russian Political Warfare*, (New York: Routledge, 2019) p. 28.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

18 Author’s interview with Ofer Fridman, Director of Operations in the King’s Centre for Strategic Communications and Lecturer in the Department of War Studies at King’s College, University of London. An Israeli citizen, Russian by birth, who served for fifteen years in the Israel Defense Force.

19 *Ibid*

20 Georgy Filimonov, ‘The Color Revolutions in the Context of Hybrid Wars’, in Ofer Fridman, Vitaly Kabernik, and James C. Pearce (eds), *Hybrid Conflicts and Information Warfare* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2019), pp. 25, 33; Oscar Jonsson, *The Russian Understanding of War* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2019); Ofer Fridman, *Russian Hybrid Warfare*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); and Galeotti, *Russian Political Warfare*. All of these scholars delve deeply into the complex views offered by Russian academic, political, and military leaders over the last century. These scholars don’t always agree, but their fine scholarship and interpretations of how Russians have and do view the West provide invaluable contributions to understanding East-West relations.

establish external control over the political situation in a targeted economy?<sup>21</sup> Filimonov details the stages that define such revolutions. Russians believe that the US and its allies have stage-managed these revolutions behind the scenes.

Some Western experts on Russia, including George Beebe, citing the Armenian Revolution in 2018, argue that Putin does not object to democratic movements or popular protests per se. He opposes only the rise of anti-Russian governments on Russia's periphery, especially those intent on joining NATO.<sup>22</sup> He argues cogently for his views, but on this point a competing school of thought argues equally cogently.

Putin's strategic communications on Ukraine merits a close look. In the propaganda film, *Crimea: The Road Home*,<sup>23</sup> he puts out the narrative that the US stage-managed the Maidan Revolution to subvert and oust his regime. The film depicts Putin as a statesman, guided by reason, struggling to understand and to do right by Russian ethnic residents in Crimea. In this telling, Russian intervention played second fiddle to bolstering peace-loving Crimeans, with whose young children Russian special operators in unmarked uniforms shared chocolate. The film's narrative depicts Russia's patriotism, virtue, legality, and courage in the face of a determined foe aligned with terrorists.

Russian strategic communications touted a calibrated use of force deployed to *defend* Russians whose safety Kyiv and the US were endangering. This posture is not novel. Mark Galeotti points out that a 'recurring theme in Russian official and unofficial statements is the belief that their country has been belittled and beaten down by the West', and that this is a 'genuinely held view within a significant fraction of the political and especially security elite, most notably Vladimir Putin and his allies'.<sup>24</sup>

Here emerges another dimension in Putin's strategic communications, which he adroitly propagated. Putin blasted 'our Western partners, led by the United States of America', for ignoring international law in favour of 'the rule of the gun. They have come to believe...that they can decide the destinies of the world,

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21 Filimonov, 'The Color Revolutions', p. 33.

22 George Beebe, *The Russia Trap: How Our Shadow War with Russia Could Spiral into Nuclear Catastrophe* (Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2019).

23 *The Road Home*, Russian documentary film on Crimea by Andrey Kondrashov featuring interviews with Putin. It first aired on Russian TV channel Rossiya24 and was republished on YouTube by Russia Insight.

24 Galeotti, *Russian Political Warfare*, p. 16–17.

that only they can ever be right.<sup>25</sup> Putin's use of 'partners' is, as Ofer Fridman points out, 'a well structured play of words':

In Russian, the word 'partner' can be used in two different contexts. The first is similar to English as a synonym to associate, ally, etc. The second is as a synonym to opponent, but in a highly regulated, gentlemanly competitive game (in which the rules of participation are more important than the outcome). In English you can also use it, like 'a chess partner'. In Russian, however, it is much more prevalent, you can say 'partner in wrestling' and even 'partner in duel'—the question is what is more important, to play the game by the rules (then it will be partner), to wrestle or to fight for life (then it will be opponent/adversary/enemy).

So, when Putin says 'our Western partners' he doesn't mean 'our associates' or 'our allies', he actually implies two things: (i) Russia and the West are opponents, but (ii) Russia wants to manage its contradictions with the West in a very civilised gentlemanly way, when following the rules is as (or even more) important as the outcome.<sup>26</sup>

Putin's choice of the word 'partners'—he invokes it frequently in reference to the West—suggests restraint and the intention of avoiding military escalation. It's about competition for influence, not war. Western skeptics gag at that, as well as at Russian charges that the US or NATO staged the colour revolutions or aim to overthrow Putin. They note that President Barack Obama—whom Putin neither trusted nor respected—took pains to assure Putin that the US was not trying to overthrow his government.

Putin skeptics argue that hatred for the West consumes him. In their view, Putin is dissembling to mask an ambition to revive the Soviet Union. They treat Russian efforts to sow discontent, disruption, and distrust in social and political institutions, as well as election meddling, as proof of such ambition.

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<sup>25</sup> 'Address of the President of the Russian Federation', 18 March 2014, cited also by Galeotti at p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> Author's interview with Ofer Fridman, 23 October 2019.

The EU proved blind. NATO and the US also misread Putin. Putin had long cautioned that Russia viewed Ukraine as part of its vital sphere of interests.<sup>27</sup> He had signalled that making Ukraine part of NATO would cross a red line. Interestingly, he did not oppose Ukraine becoming an EU Associate Member, mainly cautioning that Ukraine would pay a stiff price as Russia terminated discounts on the sale natural gas. Nor did he oppose an agreement for new elections at the end of 2014 that likely would have produced a pro-Western President. Western leaders ignored those signals.

Russia and the West mirrored one another—each projecting its own motives, intentions, strategies, and tactics onto the other, and each assuming that the other side thought and would act as it itself does. Putin also misread how the West would respond. Freedman's Ukraine analysis merited strong analysis of Russia's strategic view and how this affected its actions.

Journalists such as Mikhail Zygar, who have first-hand knowledge of Putin and his inner circle, have reported on Putin's viewpoint, the conflicting advice he received, and the action he approved.<sup>28</sup> Putin revealed his attitude towards Western leaders in advising colleagues to watch the TV series, *House of Cards*, a Washington-based political soap opera about unbridled ambition, murder, and betrayal. Evidently, he felt the series accurately depicted Western politicians as scoundrels whose words about values and human rights are hypocritical nonsense.<sup>29</sup> He may have a point, but the sensibility isn't productive.

Putin is careful about his strategic communications. At every turn, he articulated a white-washed narrative that praised Crimeans—two-thirds of them ethnic Russians—for patriotically seeking to be annexed by the Motherland. He presented himself as a champion for peace and a statesman guided by reason.<sup>30</sup> He kept a straight face as he played fast and loose with the facts. Consider the role that Russian operators played in Crimea.

When Crimean Tartars and Crimean Russians staged competing rallies outside the Supreme Council building on 26 February, Russia's defence minister sent in

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27 Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, *Mr. Putin* (Washington: Brookings, 2013), Kindle Loc. 1923, 4611, 4847, 4923 6660/12753

28 Mikhail Zygar, *All the Kremlin's Men*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2016), p. 275–77.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 271–72.

30 Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy, *Mr. Putin: Operative in the Kremlin*, (Washington: Brookings Institution, 2015), Kindle Loc. 1831/12753. They write: 'A frequent refrain of Russian officials and Kremlin-connected commentators was that "Vladimir Putin is more reasonable than 99% of Russians".' What is an unreasonable Russian like?

paratroopers to carry out a night-time seizure of the building and to close the airport. In the meantime, FSB and GRU operators had shown up to organise an emergency session of parliament to elect a new, pro-Russian prime minister. When parliamentarians refused to attend, they were forced to show up.<sup>31</sup> Putin's propaganda film, *Crimea: The Road Home*, neatly obscures these facts in the interest of glorifying peace-loving, self-starting Crimeans.

Putin does not use the term *lanfare*, integral to China's Three Warfares concept of rooting its actions in dubious constructions of what it deems to be legal principles. But he does carefully encase Russian actions in legality. He said—incorrectly—that a treaty with Ukraine allowed Russia to station 20,000 troops in Crimea (actually it was 25,000). He insisted in the film that Russia respected that limit. Zygat calls him out. He puts the number close to 46,000.<sup>32</sup> Accession to the Russian Federation required satisfaction of legal formalities. In theory, Ukraine had to consent to such action. That being impossible, Russia had Crimea's Duma pass a law that authorised annexation upon voter approval by referendum. The referendum took place on 16 March 2014.

Back home, Putin secured Russian parliamentary approval for his plan. On 1 March 2014, in a well written speech, he formally asked the Federal Council, the upper house of the Russian parliament, for permission to deploy Russia's armed forces outside the country. It was all a matter of appearances. Putin is uncommonly articulate in formal and extemporaneous discourse, a key strength in his strategic communications. Zygat points out that while the Constitution required such permission, no previous Russian President had bothered to request it.<sup>33</sup> Of course, the vote authorising action was unanimous. These actions affected what Russia did in Ukraine, the limits it imposed on its actions and its operations. I wish Freedman had explored the implications of these actions of Putin.

Freedman misses another key point in failing to address what pressure the US tried to exert. On 1 March 2014, President Barack Obama and Putin spoke by phone. Obama threatened to boycott the upcoming G8 summit in Sochi. Putin shrugged off that threat. What Obama failed to do was warn Putin that annexing Crimea would produce tough economic sanctions, a response that Putin did not

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<sup>31</sup> Zygat, *All the Kremlin's Men*, p. 277–78.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

shrug off. Apparently, their imposition shocked him. But Obama waited until *after* the damage was done, in a referendum on 16 March, to act. Obama's obtuse strategic communications misled Putin. What action Putin might have taken had he read US strategic communications correctly, or had Obama been clearer, is speculation.<sup>34</sup> History does not reveal its alternatives. It's a lesson on the need to understand an adversary's messaging.

Errors by the parties in misreading one another riddle the Ukraine conflict. For years, Putin had cautioned that it viewed Ukraine as part of its vital sphere of interests, and that efforts to make it a part of NATO would provoke a strong response.<sup>35</sup> Alert foresight and prudent action by the EU and the West might have avoided the ensuing conflict.

Yanukovych was no hero. He was despotic. He was a Putin proxy. He enriched himself at the expense of everyday Ukrainians. He ran an incompetent, corrupt regime. Still, he was the legitimately elected President. He would have lost the December 2014 elections, just months away from the date of his flight from Kyiv. Putin was prepared to accept that result and Ukraine associate membership in EU, as long as it did not open the door to joining NATO. Yet no effective effort was made to persuade protestors to bide their time.

Whether or not ousting Yanukovych was morally and politically justified, unfolding events outraged Putin and triggered a chaotic, unproductive conflict. Caught off guard when Putin acted, there's no evidence the US or the West looked over the horizon to deal with the knock-on consequences.

Even after Russia acted, the West seemed tone deaf to Putin's signals. Russia limited its operations in Crimea. It denied an official presence. Its special operators wore unmarked uniforms. They behaved peacefully. They were polite, if firm. The gambit fooled no one. Nor was it intended to. Putin seemed to be signalling that he wanted to avoid creating a state of war. Russian success required military force. But its adroit use of information warfare in tandem with limited kinetic operations defined its approach in Crimea, and in eastern Ukraine.

Freedman acknowledges that political turmoil in Ukraine crossed a Russian red line. He rightly criticises the European Union's club-footed effort to force

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 282–83.

<sup>35</sup> Andrew Osborne, 'Putin warns NATO against closer ties with Ukraine and Georgia', *Reuters*, 19 July 2018.

Ukraine to separate itself from Russia. He correctly observes that both the EU and Russia were unwise to demand that Ukraine choose between them. That analysis is fine. But his analysis of the EU role, its strategic view, and its actions, would benefit from greater depth.

Putin lacks the dictatorial power of Josef Stalin. His actions bespeak a leader who views his grip on popular approval as tentative. To deal with that, he adopts multiple poses that enable Russians to identify with him and to value his leadership. His strategic communications pitches him as ‘everything from a big game hunter and conservationist to scuba diver to biker—even nightclub crooner’.<sup>36</sup> He is politician as performance artist. His communication suggests he is ‘the ultimate Russian action man, capable of dealing with every eventuality’.<sup>37</sup> The performances aim to unify Russians around him. Strategic communications to external audiences aims also to satisfy domestic audiences.

### **How successful was Russia’s intervention in Ukraine?**

Freedman and Pomerantsev argue from different perspectives. Pomerantsev focuses on Russian narratives. Russian action sought plausible deniability to avoid responsibility or provoking a reaction that defined that action as creating a state of war. Freedman writes that Putin failed to achieve the shock value of a bold move and miscalculated how events would play out. A better view may be that he wanted the world to see and understand what Russia was doing and why, and the consequences of a colour revolution.

Freedman seems to feel that for Putin, success entailed driving Ukraine away from the EU. Yet most would agree that his greater concern was NATO. Freedman gets Putin’s strategic miscalculation in eastern Ukraine right. Putin seems to have expected more popular support and the emergence of more and better pro-Russian local leaders. Russian action has damaged Russia’s standing within the international community. It triggered sanctions. Freedman argues that at ‘the core of the Russia-Ukraine conflict was a struggle over territory’. Narrowly, he’s correct. But assessing the incursion through a broader strategic lens, Putin is achieving a vital goal. The miserable stalemate advances his narrative that colour revolutions produce violence, hostility, deprivation, anger, misery, and chaos. The stalemate in eastern Ukraine is a poster child for that narrative.

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<sup>36</sup> Hill and Gaddy, *Mr. Putin*, Kindle Loc. 333/12753  
<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Kindle Loc. 354/12753.

It bears stressing: successful strategy requires a clear-sighted comprehension of how all stakeholders view a strategic situation. Sun Tzu is celebrated for his saying:

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.<sup>38</sup>

While some of my observations differ from Freedman's, I still recommend his book. It is well written. He understands the nature of strategy (although perhaps not that of Putin). His discussion of strategy is helpful, clear, and concise. Warfare is often ambiguous in what ignores and drives it. Freedman merits credit for his illuminating thoughts on strategy and the book is worth a close read.

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<sup>38</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, Lionel Giles, (trans.), (Amazon Classics, 2017), p. 6. Ofer Fridman makes the same point in his insightful discussion of Western misinterpretations of the statements made by Russian Chief of the General Staff, Army General Valery Gerasimov on the notion of hybrid warfare. Fridman, 'On the "Gerasimov Doctrine"'.  
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