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The Hybrid Challenge and Small States

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Hybrid warfare is currently a fashionable phrase utilised to analyse a specific form of warfare waged against both large and small states. Currently concern is raised about how a China or a Russia may be attempting to influence the domestic politics of states or alliances regarded as hostile to their interests. This could be mischief making in electoral politics or stirring up unrest in an age of populism to weaken and fragment state authority. This chapter examines how small state may be exploited in an age of the hybrid challenge but how sheltering may permit resistance.

Introduction

Hybrid warfare is a currently fashionable term used to describe a type of military and political conduct featuring simultaneity in the use of conventional and unconventional tactics with features of regular and irregular war, and supported or led by the application of other elements of national power.[1] While that combination is not entirely new[2], we now witness the potent addition of cyber-attacks, fake news, electoral intervention in the affairs of other states and the widespread utilisation of local groups (some of which may be terrorist) to instigate disharmony and confusion in the target country or warzone. Insurgency, in its evolved form, is now a potent mix of old and new means. Some commentators have traced the lineage of such hybrid/mixed behaviour back to the ancient world.[3]

One key enabler of this form of warfare is the new technologies developing around the internet. Foremost among these are communication strategies to rapidly promote a political agenda and incite public disruption. In short, the 'people' are targeted not only in a conventional sense by warfare, but through the delivery of emotional and personal messages directed to individuals and repeatedly reinforced; perhaps even via their mobile phones.

A hybrid war has three distinct arenas: first utilisation or posturing for a conventional battlefield; second provoking unrest, confusion and paralysis among communities through careful use of information and events; and third a variety of actions on the

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diplomatic, political and economic stages of international politics. This third arena is one in which states might engage with allies to persuade international and regional organisations to act in concert against a threat or, alternatively, may take the form of disruption and physical revision of international norms as was seen by Russian actions in Ukraine and Crimea. Diplomacy and winning a battle of persuasion is no mean feat in an era where truth is elusive and contested and propaganda is eminently powerful. To defend effectively against such tripartite warfare or insurgency is, to say the least, difficult. It requires any state or alliance to maintain a determined counter strategy across all three arenas, enacted over a sustained period. Defence against hybrid war presents a particular challenge for small states, especially those which must nestle in the shadow of a great power such as Russia.

In this article we examine the recent history of hybrid warfare during the 1990s following the collapse of the bi-polar world. This collapse permitted shifts and changes in war that enabled a wide range of actors to take advantage of ideological voids and political instability. We identify some crucial and new elements in the character of hybrid wars and the nature of hybrid threats. We argue that while the breadth and scope of hybrid threats ought to make these a cross-government and societal concern, ownership and response are difficult to articulate when smaller states necessarily must continue to live on good terms with their larger neighbours. We look at the particular implications for small states such as Finland in terms of the threat from Russia and we utilise 'sheltering' theory as originally developed by Baldur Thorhallsson[4] in order to examine a possible set of responses for small states to hybrid challenges arguing that classical alliance theory cannot explain the behaviour of small states in the current environment of hybrid warfare. Alliance theory[5] evolved to describe a particular dynamic in international relations that became increasingly apparent in the polarisation of power after 1945. The theory explained great power behaviour and that of powers aligned with them. One of the earliest challenges that Alliance theory had to withstand was that it emerged in the backdrop of a particular departure from the wisdom of balance of power and in a world with atomic weapons, polarisation and non-alignment. Three main alliances emerged, the two ideologically aligned blocks and the so-called nonaligned movement pioneered by Tito's Yugoslavia. Polar dialectic often served to ease, incentivise, coerce or compel such states to their respective folds. However, at the same time, even for the so called non-aligned states, there was always some sort of 'alliance of convenience' as states driven by core interests, economics, leadership and politics, and or cost benefit calculations aligned selectively with either of the poles. Cuba is an example, with its switch from a de facto US ally to a Marxist-Leninist ideology and natural alignment with the Soviet camp[6]. Alliance theory struggled to explain small state behaviour and still struggles to account for the current dilemmas of how small states such as Finland can 'shelter' under alliances such as NATO in an age of hybrid warfare.

History and Evolution

After the end of the Cold War, contradictory trends in warfare were apparent. For many scholars during the 1990s, the Soviet collapse brought about a new world order in which international politics had taken on a more optimistic shape. Scholars expressed the sentiment that war itself had been unlearnt and had been consigned to historical memory along with other arcane practices such as duelling and slavery.[7] In short, hard military power had been replaced by 'soft' power.[8] However, any idea that war had gone away is simply incorrect. Throughout the 1990s, civil wars and proxy wars, as well as terrorist threats, proliferated across the globe. But Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye were prescient in predicting how important 'soft' power would become. It most certainly is a feature of hybrid warfare thus leading us to the somewhat simplistic -- but nevertheless accurate -- claim that hybrid war consists of a mix of hard and soft power. Cultural power, too, is important in that it allows many (or indeed all) protagonists to claim they are the custodians of religious sentiment, ethnic and historical traditions, and are also keepers of sacred sites and artefacts.[9]

Much of this complexity was not recognised. Perhaps in the afterglow of 'winning' the Cold War, Western military dominance seemed assured. The Bosnian War had been eventually resolved and NATO prided itself on the defeat of Serbia. The Kosovo War did not result in a single combat fatality on the Western side. This mode of winning from the air with so-called precision bombing, led to the concept of a 'Virtual War'[10]. The Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) seemed to have brought about an age of accurate targeting and fewer civilian casualties. Liberal states could, it seemed, wage war at a distance with few sacrifices from their troops and little disruption to domestic politics. There were unintended casualties on the other side with some caused directly by the NATO bombing campaign. But, at least for Western states, future war was to be short, sharp and waged at a distance.

The events of 9/11 transformed international politics. With the wars in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) a traditional type of warfare returned – that of conventional 'boots on the ground'. Yet the opening episodes in these wars appeared to confirm earlier trends for distance in that the initial Afghan campaign was in many ways similar to the Kosovo war, fought initially largely from the air with the added involvement of special operations teams to hunt down al-Qaeda. While Iraq involved a larger military deployment, airpower remained crucial too. However, the '9/11 wars' did not prove easy. Victory cannot be considered complete until the enemy's will to continue fighting has been sufficiently eroded. In a conventional war this usually occurs when the counteroffensive is defeated. But in both of these conflicts the counteroffensive was delivered in a different mode from that of the offensive, and through enemies who had

morphed within civil society. Opposition came in the shape of a complex and multifaceted insurgency.[11]

The insurgents transformed these wars into a quagmire in which Western troops were forced to encounter the brutality of insurgency and endemic violence waged by a variety of sub-state actors, some of whom were proxy forces, some of whom were fighting civil wars and all of whom had their own locally-based agendas. The eventual disintegration of Iraq created the breeding ground for al-Qaeda to evolve and adapt and for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to emerge. The advent of multiple militias -- some of which were controlled and sustained by external actors -- and the operations of various criminal gangs fed off the area's human and material resources for their own political and economic gain. Refugees and those fleeing the region's war zones were exploited for political as well as financial capital. The so-called 'weaponization' of the migrant issue in politicised hybrid warfare continues to be a subject of considerable importance since homeless and dispossessed persons remain vulnerable to recruitment for the purposes of predatory groups and states.

In 2011, the 'Arab Spring' reinforced the United States' stance against committing manpower directly into theatres of war. The response in Western circles to the uprisings across the Arab world against brutal rulers-- such as the Qaddafi regime in Libya -- was characterised by a desire to 'encourage' the overthrow of unsavoury regimes but to do so using small special operations teams rather than significant numbers of troops. The character of the conflict in Syria since 2011 has also been determined by American reluctance to commit ordinary troops on the ground. Instead we have seen the deployment of bombing campaigns coupled with overt encouragement of rebel and militia groups.

Western states continue to demonstrate a preference for technology and surrogate forces through their persistent use of armed drones in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and Syria as well as by their reliance on local forces and private security contractors. One important consequence is that 'opponents' -- whether terrorists or other criminals -- adapt their behaviour by refusing to stay 'in theatre' to be hunted down and potentially killed. Insurgents and terrorists have become increasingly mobile, often crossing borders into complex urban environments and sometimes staging terrorist atrocities to provoke and unsettle. APSC Peshawar (2014), Mumbai (2008), Paris (2015), and the numerous attacks in London are examples of this agility and adaptability. While individuals or groups may perpetrate such acts to serve a personal agenda, at the same time they are consciously or unconsciously supporting or exploiting the designs of external powers. A counter-hybrid war strategy may thus have to engage with such groups as an auxiliary line of action. Mercenaries and groups with no obvious political or criminal agenda can become an instrument deployed in the third arena of hybrid warfare, working for a state

or indeed under the control of a non-state actor. Malign states engaging with such groups ostensibly keep their hands clean and avoid attribution yet retain a high degree of control. In this sense, as was witnessed during the 1970s, terrorists or what are identified as terrorist groups, may be part of an agenda motivated and funded, if not always totally controlled, by an external power.

Hybrid Wars?

In the UK, the contemporary outbreak of terrorist attacks, that began with the London suicide bombings of 2005, has been widely linked to the influence exerted by websites that highlight Western abuse of Muslim populations in war zones. Radicalised men -- and some women -- have travelled from the UK to fight in Iraq or Syria or have chosen to perpetrate terrorist attacks on UK soil. All the post 9/11 battlespaces have witnessed such opponents utilising a wide range of tactics to disrupt superior state forces even as they are embroiled in asymmetric but difficult struggles at home and also in conflicts abroad. This context has given rise to acts by random and apparently isolated individuals or by small teams that do not seem connected to or commanded by other entities. Rather they seem to be self-motivated, even when facilitated by external entities.[12] It also provides opportunities for covert state organisations to cultivate, motivate and even to create radicalised cells and/or individuals and use them to commit sensational acts. Such individuals or groups never know for sure who may be helping and/or facilitating them.

In short, what is now labelled hybrid warfare has been utilised by a range of groups, proxies and terrorists over many years. However, it was the Russian intervention in Ukraine (following on from the invasion of Georgia in 2008) and Russian actions in Syria that have stimulated much of the contemporary debate about the meaning of, use, and effectiveness of hybrid warfare.

By way of an example, the Ukraine conflict is considered by many analysts in the West to be a 'model' for hybrid war, and one that has implications for other small states such as Finland in its relations with Moscow.

From a conventional Western perspective Russia has, since the turn of the century, behaved like a revisionist power. Arguably this has been provoked by NATO's deliberate expansion to the East and by that alliance's incorporation of states such the Baltic republics. Russian analysts and spokespersons cite as antagonistic the ambition of Ukraine and countries such as Georgia to acquire membership of Western organisations. They also object to the European Union extending its influence and association agreements, such as was done for Ukraine. Russia found itself threatened by an eastward tide of NATO and EU influence. Hence Ukraine became a crucial testing ground for Moscow. The geostrategic and historic importance of Crimea to Russia and its Black

Sea fleet arguably left Moscow with little choice but to act in defence of its longer-term strategic interests.

Russia's 2008 intervention in Georgia was about securing territory and influence as well as protecting ethnic Russians. However, the war in Georgia was but a prelude to the annexation of Crimea and the bloody and ongoing war in Ukraine from February and March 2014, a conflict that renewed interest in the character of hybrid warfare.

Military action in eastern Ukraine and Crimea was preceded by the disruption of Russian speaking peoples in the region, using a potent propaganda campaign that cited historical examples of supposed injustice and grievances as well as the appearance of so-called 'little green men', unbadged and technically unrecognised in the escalating conflict. But, as Andrew Monaghan has pointed out, there was a powerful conventional warfare element.[13] Some 40,000 Russian troops were massed on the border while the battles at Donbas Airport involved high intensity conflict including the deployment of armour, artillery and multiple launch rocket systems as well as drones and electronic warfare. Keir Giles from Chatham House in London has added a critical voice to speculation that Russian operations in eastern Ukraine somehow constituted irregular warfare.[14] He pointed out that the Russian incursion into Ukraine was ultimately a large-scale conventional military cross-border intervention undertaken in August 2014. Russian troops and transport, although badged by the Russian authorities as primarily present to deliver and organise humanitarian aid, proved to be militarily decisive.[15]

Most analysis of the current mode of Russian hybrid war has centred around an understanding of the so-called Gerasimov Doctrine as developed by Valery Gerasimov, Russian Chief of the General Staff.[16] In 2013, in a now much-read essay, Gerasimov wrote of blurring lines between states of war and peace. He went on to describe 'long distance' and 'contactless' actions against the enemy as the primary means of achieving combat and operational goals. Some Western scholarly and military communities cite his essay as evidence of an innovative, farsighted and novel approach to war; essentially a new Russian military doctrine. This 'new' approach is additionally perceived as facilitating and underpinning an expansive and aggressive foreign policy agenda. Consternation and controversy have been stirred up by a combination of the Gerasimov Doctrine, modernization of Russian Armed Forces, energy 'blackmail', and the annexation of Crimea, as well as by the success of Russian policy in Syria in neutralising Western action to remove the Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad. In response, Western policy in Syria has signally failed to remove the government, control territory or stem human rights abuses. The retaking of the ancient city of Palmyra from ISIS by Russian-backed forces, widely reported and applauded in the Russian media, highlighted the Kremlin's ability to celebrate and promote the prowess of Russian military might despite coinciding with openly circulating reports of Russian complicity with members of ISIS.[17]

Russia and its official media outlets deny that a 'hybrid' doctrine, as described in the West, is applied by the Russian Armed Forces. Some sources even deny the existence of any such doctrine. Indeed, in the specific case of Ukraine, the weakness of the Ukrainian Army, the presence and embrace of the 'polite people' in the East (not the more sinister 'little green men' as described in the West), and the overwhelming support of the Russian people for the Crimea intervention (and Parliament in March 2014) have all been emphasised. This was a unique confluence of factors that, according to some analysts, it would be impossible to replicate elsewhere, such as in the US mid-west or in Poland.[18]

But does that also hold true for Finland or the Baltic States? There are historical, cultural and ethnic claims made by Russia on these states while the Russian-speaking population in Finland has been 'targeted' by Moscow-inspired propaganda. The Crimea war and its justification by the Kremlin reminded Finns that Moscow has at times viewed their state as part of the greater Russian homeland. Thousands of Finns have dual Russian citizenship and some commentators fear Moscow has planted agents among them who could infiltrate social and military institutions. In this context Finland's Defence Minister recommended that Finns with dual Russian citizenship should not hold positions that could allow them access to state security apparatus. In the wake of the Ukraine crisis, such fears were heightened when Johan Backman, a Finnish pro-Russian activist, opened a so-called 'representative' office in Helsinki for the Donetsk's People's Republic – the breakaway Ukrainian territory.

Finland, which is vulnerable to its large neighbour, has taken robust measures to fend off 'hybrid' or mixed activities. Helsinki has cooperated with NATO but stopped short of seeking admittance to full membership and remains keenly aware of the so-called Finlandization of the country during the Cold War, and alert to the 833-mile border it shares with Russia. A delicate but sophisticated balancing act means good relations with Moscow even while Finland, as an EU member state, has backed economic sanctions against Russia over Crimea.

As well as being subjected to airspace incursions by Russian aircraft, recently Finns have been bombarded with fake news and the output of troll farms, which attempt to create conflict and disruption in online communities by posting deliberately inflammatory or provocative comments,. Propaganda hostile to the Finnish Government has taken a variety of forms, not the least of which are claims from Moscow that Russian speakers in Finland face routine discrimination over property rights. In response, Helsinki has set up a public diplomacy programme to train government officials about disinformation and increased the emphasis on media 'literacy' in schools.

Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Sweden and Norway are also wary of hybrid warfare from the east. Russia has allegedly used its shared border with Norway to 'mischief make' by allowing refugees fleeing the Middle East to make their way across the border on bicycles! This reinforces the view that part of Russia's hybrid war strategy is the 'weaponization' of migrants, including exploitation of the migrant/refugee crisis to further divide politicians and peoples throughout Europe who disagree (sometimes violently) about migrant and/or refugee policies.

A contrary thesis is presented by Andrew Korybko whose 2015 study of hybrid wars claimed the US was the only country then engaged in hybrid war. He argued that it was 'counterproductive for any of the Eurasian Powers to attempt it in their region' due to proximity issues and the unintended consequences or spillover from what he calls the resulting 'black holes' on their own borders. He predicted the 'US will exercise a full monopoly on Hybrid War for at least the next decade, if not in perpetuity owing to the unique international circumstances in which it is waged.' He has further argued that 'Hybrid War is the new horizon for US regime change strategy.'[19] This mixture of irregular and irregular warfare will, he says, be the future for US interventions in pursuit of its foreign policy interests, particularly in an era of fake news.

It is now clear this adaptive form of warfare is successful, whatever the outcome of debates about the essence of Russian military doctrine and whatever claims may be made about future US strategies. Western responses to Russian provocations—or for that matter, Russian responses to US hybrid warfare—appear to be predicated on avoiding direct military conflict. In this sense the Russian 'gains' in Ukraine and Crimea have extended Moscow's grip on the region. Despite sanctions, diplomacy and some military posturing, (the latter limited to NATO reinforcing its strategic presence in both Norway and in Estonia) Russian tactical and strategic 'gains' remain intact.

A cleverly-articulated hybrid war strategy implemented by revisionist and ambitious power(s) does indeed produce confusion, discord and disharmony in the targeted state or region. There may be confusion as to the overall objectives (or even whether any intentional design exists at all) and what may contribute to achieving those intentions. Even more elusive and difficult to identify with clarity are the possible linkages between apparently disparate actions spread over a long period. How does communal disruption in one village link to the appearance of protestors in another city or to the circulation of rumours on the internet? How can these different events be put together? Uncertainty tends to generate dissonant views, often reinforced by elite political or financial interests. The nature of the threat, its aim and its provenance are variously disputed, resulting in an often disjointed and ambiguous counter-strategy. This makes it difficult to determine whether thresholds for retaliation may have been crossed.

Conclusions: Does Sheltering Work?

Of the three arenas of hybrid war discussed earlier -- first utilisation or posturing for a conventional battlefield; second, provoking unrest, confusion and paralysis among communities through careful use of information and events; and third, a variety of actions on the diplomatic, political and economic stage of international politics – actions relating to the first are the easiest to decipher.

Even the best guarded strategy or strategic intent may be discerned from an analysis of hostile power interests, force and infrastructural development, training and alliances. In short a military equivalent of what Henry Mintzberg describes as a 'pattern in a stream of actions'[20]. The second and the third arenas, however, require a more critical analysis as it is here that strategic lines are often hard to discern. Furthermore, the experiential lens[21] for strategic analysis—the bedrock of conventional military planning and systems thinking—is not terribly useful in a mixed conventional/insurgent scenario. Unless the targeted state can process national security as a broad, interrelated and mutually informing system, it is unlikely it could make the connections necessary to construct a comprehensive response.

The Finnish Army may be better prepared to tackle hybrid threats in the first arena than many of its European counterparts because, according to the Swedish Defence Agency, since 2014 the Finns have created a system of rapid reaction forces and swift mobilization units throughout its 280,000 military personnel. Lessons have been learned from Russian actions in Crimea where it took Special Forces and paramilitary forces only a few days to seize the territory. Finnish 'readiness' units are designed to allow conscripts to be led by professional soldiers, having received advanced training on weapons systems as well as being integrated with local authorities, the police and the Finnish Border Guard (FBG) national security agency.

Finland has also sought 'shelter' under the NATO alliance and took part in Trident Juncture 18, NATO's biggest military exercise since the Cold War in October and November 2018. The exercise was a rehearsal (or preparation) for how the US-led alliance would respond to the invasion of an ally. All NATO members plus Sweden and Finland participated in the exercise which took place only a few hundred miles from Norway's border with Russia. Finland claims it was punished for its participation by disruption of its GPS signal, alleging that Russia had in fact 'jammed' the system. This suggests intimidation of this small state with a view to discouraging any ambition it may have to join the NATO alliance. The Finnish leadership, in line with its policy of 'balancing' between East and West, summoned the Russian Ambassador to explain the mysterious GPS jamming but also clarified that it would not be seeking full membership of NATO. The wider debate in Finland speculates about who Russia may be targeting. Is it seeking to stir up the Russia-speaking population or should Russian actions be seen as

a response and a rebuke to NATO? Hence the disruption in Finland during the Trident Juncture exercise may be read as intimidatory for Helsinki but also as a warning to NATO.

As we have shown, the second arena of hybrid war -- provoking, exploiting and supporting unrest and dissension among peoples through the careful use of information and other forms of national power – is nothing new. In fact, Sun Tzu[22] talks about hollowing out one's enemy from the inside and absorbing the whole without fighting in his famous treatise on *The Art of War*.

War among people or violent social movements are what Heifitz describes as adaptive problems.[23] Such 'adaptive problems' do not follow the rules of systems and are, therefore, not easy to deal with. Conflicts may be deeply rooted in history, ideology, religion, culture, or in general deprivation. Solutions and responses that are unsympathetic to differing perspectives and deal only with the present or the near future must be inadequate because they treat the problem not for what it actually is but as how it has been constructed to be, that is, as a tame[24] or a critical[25] problem that does follow rules.

Prescriptions for fighting hybrid threats abound. An extensive literature seeks to categorise and classify social movements and conflicts. This remains important because, as seen in the Iraq War after 2003, the widespread misunderstanding of the 'people' by invading forces and their politicians meant an inevitable failure to understand the complexities of local politics. That failure allowed other external actors to fill the voids created by poor security planning and policing, and the misunderstanding of Sunni/Shia relations plus a fateful ignorance of the motivations of external actors.

Finland is an advanced democracy but is nevertheless vulnerable to the 'mischief' of suspicions being articulated about the 'loyalty' of those citizens holding dual Russian citizenship. That a senior government minister suggested dual citizenship may prohibit recruitment to certain sensitive positions illustrates how easy it is to stir up questions about which citizens are 'trusted' and who may be provoked as apparent victims of discrimination.

A third arena of hybrid war concerns diplomatic, political and economic initiatives on the international stage. Sun Tzu recognised the power of indirect warfare. To take the enemy without fighting and, in the process conserve vital resources, mandates the avoidance of direct confrontation. Long term social and political effects come as a consequence of sustaining an attack on the enemy on different fronts while keeping the scale and tempo of the 'offensive' within limits tolerable to the political elite and above the threshold of survivability for the masses. The dilution of economic, social and human capital in disparate directions generates a defensive mind-set, making the target state

further vulnerable to other forms of attack. This style of warfare circumvents constraints such as alliances, military parity and avoids direct conflict.[26]

Interference in elections through cyber-attacks is an issue that dogged the US presidential election and the UK's Brexit vote. Finland, too, has a deeply rooted fear of cyber warfare emanating from the East. Helsinki called for the creation of an international alliance to combat the growing threat and, in 2018, become the base for a cyber-defence initiative for the West through the establishment of the NATO-backed European Centre for Excellence. Funding comes from the US, the UK, France and the Nordic States, thus extending cooperation into cyber space. This dimension gives the act of sheltering practical as well as symbolic and deterrence application. By this means alliance support is extended into a domain in which the 'fight' against states with different 'values' may become 'unseen' even while it remains crucial to democracy, as Antti Hakkanen, Finland's Justice Minister has noted. Concern about the possible penetration of the electoral system is such that plans for electronic voting have been abandoned. What may prove to be an advantage for small states is their population size. Manual voting remains feasible for a smaller populace whereas in larger states such as the US or even the UK the electoral process becomes too time-consuming. Additionally, electronic methods to encourage and attract voters are being considered as a way to revive voter turnout. In this respect larger states may be more vulnerable to hybrid attacks. There are more 'entry' points for attack and there is certainly more contestation of the national narrative than in a small state such as Finland.

Hybrid war exhibits a non-kinetic extension of Ludendorff's concept of a total war with a covert twist. In the last decade, we have witnessed hostile cyber-attacks on banking, elections, security infrastructure, individuals and groups. As society becomes increasingly dependent on technology with everything from our daily lives, social interactions, homes and work exposed, the scope for malicious access has grown manifold. Stirring political, class, clan, tribe and gender relations, perhaps even to make parts of the target state ungovernable and easy to penetrate by a host of external and hostile actors has never been easier. Arguably, the more populous and complex the state, the more vulnerable it may be to the provocation of dissension and discord. Hybrid War can be wages at long distance, a contagious border provides a particularly dangerous blend of possibilities. The current and vivid examples of this are Russia and Ukraine, and India and Pakistan. Finland and the Baltic States find themselves particularly vulnerable on both accounts, proximity and complexity.

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