

# PROJECT 1721

*A U.S. Army War College  
Assessment on Russian Strategy  
in Eastern Europe and Recommendations  
on how to Leverage Landpower to Maintain  
the Peace*



Douglas Mastriano  
Project Leader





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**PROJECT 1721**

*A U.S. Army War College Assessment on Russian Strategy in Eastern Europe and  
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**Douglas Mastriano  
Project Leader**

**March 2017**

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*Project 1721* was produced under the purview of the USAWC to foster dialogue on topics with strategic ramifications. This study drew upon the expertise of hand selected USAWC faculty and students from across the services and from six nations to provide a thought-provoking discourse of a topic of timely relevance—the reemergence of Russian strategic Landpower.

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This research project was written to provide insightful and thought provoking discourse on the daunting security challenges facing the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). *Project 1721* would not be possible without the support and advice of numerous experts from around the world. Special thanks to the former Minister of Defense of Lithuania, Rasa Jukneviene, for her excellent advice on this project. Appreciation also goes to the following members of the Lithuanian Land Forces for their support: Colonel Dalius Polekauskas, Chief of Staff of the Lithuanian Army, Lieutenant Colonel Arturas Jasinskas, Major Eugenius Lastauskas, and Major Tomas Balkus. This research project is also indebted to Mr. Rolands Henins, Director of Latvian Defense Policy, and Lieutenant Colonel Raimonds Kursitis (Armed Forces of Latvia). Special thanks to Estonian Lieutenant Colonel Vahur Murulaid for his research for the chapter addressing national security questions raised in the United States. Thank you also to Mr. Jonas Ohman for his exceptional insight on Ukraine. Appreciation to U.S. Army Europe G2 for their support, especially Mr. Steven Boltz. Colonel Tarn Warren, the Chair of the Department of Military Strategy, Planning, and Operations (DMSPO) also provided excellent analysis and support. Lieutenant Colonel Mike Adelberg, USAWC, SSI, was a vital part of *Project 1721*, providing the final review of the study. Additionally, *Project 1721* would not be possible without the editorial and formatting skills of Ms. Donna Ferry, USAWC.

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Cover Photo: second Cavalry Regiment in Torun, Poland, on February 6, 2016. (U.S. Army photo by Staff Sgt. Jennifer Bunn, 2nd Cavalry Regiment, Public Affairs).



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# The Baltic States



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## FOREWORD

In early 2015, the U.S. Army War College (USAWC), at the request of the former Army Chief of Staff, General Raymond Odierno, published *Project 1704*, a study that discussed the changing strategic environment in Europe spawned by Russian aggression against Ukraine. The chief questions addressed by *Project 1704* included: (1) What is the Russian strategy in the region? (2) What is the appropriate North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and U.S. response? (3) What are the implications for NATO and U.S. Landpower?

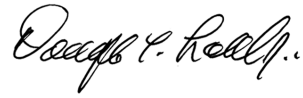
The positive response to *Project 1704* across NATO and the U.S. made it one of those rare assessments used to inform and shape strategy. Although much of *Project 1704* is still relevant in its view of the emerging Russian strategy toward NATO, the environment has changed. Since the publication of *Project 1704*, Vladimir Putin announced the modernization of the Russian armed forces and deployed forces to Syria, Russian aircraft aggressively buzzed a U.S. Navy vessel in the Baltic Sea, and Putin's political proxies threatened NATO members with nuclear war. *Project 1721* takes up where *Project 1704* left off.

The geo-strategic situation continues to change. Although many trends are disconcerting, there are points of light in the darkness. Chief among these is that Putin's aggressive tone and approach is forging a greater unity among NATO members hitherto not seen since the 1980s. Although many in NATO are facing divergent dangers (i.e., immigration/refugee influx), Moscow poses an existential threat to much of Europe. However, NATO is far from ready to meet this threat. Using defense spending as a measure of resolve, only 5 of the 28 NATO members are spending the pledged 2% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defense. The majority of NATO nations have a long way to go in "paying their fair share."

Another by-product of Putin's aggressive and hostile strategy is evident in Ukraine. Ukraine has a rich history, with much in common with Russia economically, culturally, and religiously. Yet, Putin's war against a once stalwart friend is working against him. A truly Ukrainian identity is emerging from this, something not evident since before the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. This identity is increasingly less friendly to Moscow.

The increasingly bombastic rhetoric and actions of the Kremlin is disconcerting and is placing European peace in a precarious situation – where one misstep by Moscow or Washington, D.C. could plunge the world into a costly war. Yet, weakness and lack of resolve from "the West" is not the answer. The world experimented with appeasement when faced with another nationalistic leader in the form of Adolf Hitler. The cost of capitulation and appeasement was a costly world war. The lesson of this experiment with

appeasement is best summed up by the aforementioned quote by Winston S. Churchill: "An appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last." *Project 1721* offers a way on how to preserve the peace in these turbulent and uncertain times.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Douglas C. Lovelace, Jr.".

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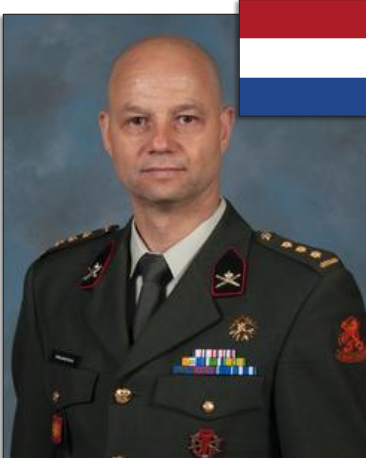
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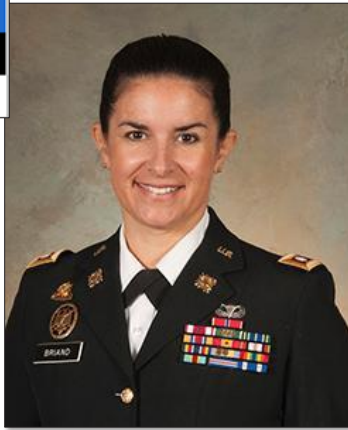


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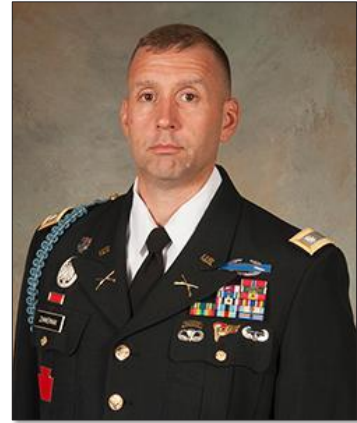
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## PREFACE AND HISTORIC CONTEXT

**Colonel Douglas Mastriano, Ph.D., U.S. Army War College (USAWC)**

*I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest.<sup>1</sup>*

Winston Churchill, October 1, 1939

The Great Northern War began in 1700 after Russian Czar Peter forged an alliance with Denmark and Poland to contest the supremacy of Sweden in the Baltic region. The Swedish Army initially prevailed in the war, winning the first battle for Narva (located in northeastern Estonia).<sup>2</sup> However, after rebuilding his army, Czar Peter returned 4 years later to lead a successful Russian siege of Swedish Narva in 1704. The victory was a remarkable reversal of Russia's fortune and put it on the path to becoming a European power.<sup>3</sup>



Czar Peter on horseback is depicted as trying to stop his army from committing atrocities against the people of Narva in 1704 after it was seized from the Swedes. By Nikolay Sauerweid.

The Great Northern War lasted until 1721, with various Swedish and Russian victories and defeats. Yet, Russia broke Sweden's power in the Baltic region. The war ended in 1721 with the Treaty of Nystad where Sweden gave up its Baltic territories to Russia. The 1721 Treaty of Nystad made Russia a European power, placing it in a position to influence not just the Baltics, but also Scandinavia and Eastern and Central Europe. Seizing on the new strategic environment achieved by this victory, Czar Peter moved his capital from Moscow to St. Petersburg, formally establishing the Russian Empire. The designation of St. Petersburg as his capital was a pivotal moment that symbolically declared that Russia was looking toward Europe.

The legacy of 1721 echoes across the centuries to us today. Since then, Russia has been an influential player in European affairs. Its first two centuries in Europe (1721-1917) were largely cooperative. Unfortunately, the greater portion of the past 100 years has been less than cordial. Ironically, as if symbolically turning back the clock on its relations with the West, the Russian capital was moved back to Moscow after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. The subsequent 84 years of atheistic Soviet rule unleashed one of the bloodiest epochs in human history, with genocide, ideological purges of those who disagreed with the government, ethnic cleansing, massed imprisonment, and the forced migration of entire populations. The Baltic nations felt the brutality of this period in unimaginable ways. Latvia typified the Baltic experience of living under Soviet rule when its population suffered mass executions, imprisonment for anyone perceived as a threat to the regime, and the deportation of one-third of its people to Siberia where many died. This deportation of ethnic Latvians dovetailed with a sinister Soviet policy of resettling ethnic Russians to the Baltic region. Although there was an economic incentive to this policy, it also had an ethno-political design. As a result, the percentage of ethnic Russians in Latvia increased from 10% to 30%.<sup>4</sup> Moscow's goal was to colonize the nation with enough Russians to keep it forever under its influence by stripping away their Latvian national identity.<sup>5</sup>

The 20th-century Russian dark ages ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. From the view of the West, a refreshing decade of cooperation and collaboration between Moscow, Europe, and the United States ensued, bringing hope that the century of Russian hostility was at long last over. Russia was viewed as a partner, and there was even serious discussion about it being offered North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership. However, the Russians tend to view these years with less fondness. For them, the 1990s was when their country was "on its knees," with a shrinking economy, declining life expectancy, rampant social chaos and a president (Boris Yeltsin) who was not respected abroad. The rise of Vladimir Putin, viewed in the West as the beginning of a period of revanchist and reactionary ethno-centric nationalism, is considered in Russia as the beginning of its regaining respect and great power status.

The U.S. and the major European powers were slow to adapt to the new strategic reality of growing Russian hostility toward the West. Even after the 2007 cyberattacks against Estonia, and the 2008 war against Georgia, there were hopes of a reset of relations with Russia. It was not until the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and its ongo-

ing war against Ukraine that Europe and the United States grasped the re-emergent Russian strategy that was determined to exercise its power and influence over the region (described by Moscow as the “near abroad,” the states of the former Soviet Union). It seems like the old threat to European peace is back. Yet, as history demonstrates, this is not a new dilemma. As Dr. John Lennox, a Professor of Oxford University says, “New things are old things happening to new people.” This rings true today for many of the senior officers in NATO still on active service, who began their careers facing a powerful Russian-led Soviet threat. Indeed, new things are old things happening to new people.

NATO nations have divergent views of how to contend with the aggressive Russian approach. The nations near Russia seek assurance and deterrence measures, while those further away often call for moderation. Yet, the notion that accommodation will reduce the threat is viewed more in hope than reality. Of this Winston Churchill brilliantly said, “The appeaser feeds the crocodile hoping that it will eat him last.” The U.S. and its NATO allies have hard decisions to make. Will it take sufficient action to deter further Russian aggression? Or, will the nations deliberate and delay action until it is too late?

*Project 1721* offers a way for the United States and NATO to preserve the peace without sacrificing the Baltic Nations to the territorial ambitions of Vladimir Putin and an expansionist Russia. Any strategy and operational

approach to providing assurance to the Baltics and deterrence of Russia must encompass a whole of government approach that includes all aspects of the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic instruments of power (DIME). A successful strategy must be accompanied with an approach that leverages not just the military instrument of power. It must also include the “Joint Force” of air, land, sea, cyber, and space, and the participation and support of NATO allies and its partners. As a USAWC assessment, *the focus of Project 1721 is what contributions Strategic Landpower can provide to maintain the peace in the Baltic region.* Any Landpower decision must be integrated in the NATO approach to the region. Having proved itself in the Balkans and demonstrated resolve in Afghanistan, NATO has never been stronger or better positioned to maintain the peace



Peter the Great (1672-1725). Russian Tsar and founder of the Russian Empire. Painted in 1837-1838 by Paul Delaroche

and stability in Europe. Although beset by numerous challenges, with the chief being diminishing defense spending, the United States must integrate its strategy and operational approach with that of NATO to ensure continuity and consistency.



President Obama and Estonian Prime Minister, Taavi Roivas, address American and Estonian Soldiers in Tallinn.  
(U.S. Army Photo)

**PUTTING A PRICE ON BLOOD AND ALLIES:  
AMERICA'S COMMITMENT TO THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY  
ORGANIZATION (NATO) ALLIANCE**

**Colonel Douglas Mastriano, Ph.D., U.S. Army War College (USAWC)**

*There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies, and that is fighting without them.*

Winston S. Churchill



Soldiers from across NATO during exercise Iron Sword 2014, in Pabrade, Lithuania. (U.S. Army Photo)

The advent of NATO is rooted in a century of conflict. The Alliance emerged after two bloody world wars. World War I (1914-1918) witnessed the transformation of Europe, the Middle East, and Africa at an appalling price in blood and treasure for people around the globe. Although entering the war late, the United States made a decisive contribution to the Allied victory. A horrific price was paid in that war. Yet, it was higher than it ought to have been due in large part to emerging technologies (i.e., tanks, chemical warfare, air power) and the failure of the Allies to accept unified command under one supreme leader. It took 4 painful years for the western nations to finally embrace the idea of a Supreme Allied Commander in the person of French Marshal Ferdinand Foch. It was Foch who led the Allies to victory in 1918.

After World War I, the nations met at Versailles to discuss how to prevent another world war. The United States led the discussion of forming international organizations and institutions as a way to prevent another calamity. Thus was born the League of Nations that would serve as an international forum to peacefully resolve disputes. However, the United States abandoned the lessons of World War I and decided to return to a form of isolationism (non-interventionism). Meanwhile, in Europe the recovery from the horrors of World War I was daunting. Entire generations of men had perished and the rapid withdrawal of the United States from Europe weakened the fledgling League of Nations. Additionally, Europe was besieged by hostile ideologies ranging from Bolshevism to Socialist Fascism. The Russian-led Soviet Union was the first to threaten the post-World War I peace by invading its neighbors in the Baltics and Poland. Although the Poles beat the Soviets back, peace would not endure for long, after fascist governments emerged in Spain, Italy, and Germany.

The resolve of the Allies and the League of Nations was put to the test throughout the 1930s. This included the Spanish Civil War, Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia, and others. Yet, the greatest challenge to peace came with the rise of Adolf Hitler. Hitler defied the mandates of Versailles and the resolve of the League of Nations and Allies. The first challenge was the rearmament of Germany, which was forbidden by the Versailles Treaty. This was followed by the seizure of the demilitarized (international zone) Rhineland. Despite these flagrant violations, the League and Allies took no action, emboldening Hitler to annex Austria in the 1938 Anschluss. This was followed by a demand to control the border (Sudetenland) of Czechoslovakia so that Hitler could "protect" ethnic Germans living there. In the now infamous Munich Conference, the Allies, led by British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, granted Hitler his demand (without consulting the Czechoslovakians) in exchange for a pledge for peace. Hitler promised peace, and Prime Minister Chamberlain returned to Great Britain saying he had achieved "peace in our time."

The "peace" lasted less than 6 months, ending with the Nazi invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Allies did little more than give long speeches of condemnation. Seeing nothing but weakness within the Allies, Hitler continued his expansionist agenda with the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. At long last, the Allies declared war, but did nothing until Hitler unleashed his machines of war against the Low Countries and France in the spring of 1940. The United States entered the fray in 1941 and, at considerable cost in blood and treasure, worked closely with the Allies to defeat the Nazi and Fascist forces. The second Supreme Allied Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, seemed to have adopted the strategy and approach of Ferdinand Foch in winning World War II, demonstrating the value of learning from the past.

The United States was eager to demobilize its Armed Forces after World War II, and it appeared that once again it would withdraw militarily from the world scene. Yet, the impending danger of a Soviet invasion of Central and Western Europe was rising, and the United States altered its strategy to keep a robust military presence in Europe. The bulwark to maintain the peace was NATO, founded April 4, 1949. The key tenant of the

NATO Alliance remains Article 5, which declares that an attack upon one member shall be considered an attack upon all. Although greatly outnumbered conventionally by Soviet forces throughout the Cold War, the United States, acting with its allies, provided an unprecedented era of peace across Europe not experienced since the Roman Empire.

The collapse of the Soviet Empire and the end of the Cold War in 1991 brought questions as to whether there was still a need for NATO. As deliberation continued on the future of NATO, instability exploded in the Balkans as Yugoslavia fragmented along ethnic lines. Horrific scenes of genocide were broadcast around the world to the dismay of modern viewers. The United Nations (UN) endeavored to bring peace through negotiations and by deploying inadequately armed forces to the region; yet, the atrocities continued. In the end, the bloodshed only ended when NATO deployed to the region with the power and might of its members' armed forces. Even then, commentators predicted that the Balkans would prove the end of the Alliance. They were proven wrong, and NATO emerged from the Balkan crisis stronger and unified.

The world changed suddenly when the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001. For the first time in its history, NATO invoked Article 5. It is ironic that when Article 5 was adapted in 1949, the belief was that it would be invoked when the Soviets attacked Europe. Yet, Article 5 was used to come to the support and defense of the United States. With the declaration of Article 5, soldiers from across NATO deployed to help the United States in its hour of need and went to Afghanistan under the banner of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

During its commitment to the mission in Afghanistan, political scientists again wrongly predicted that this would be the end of NATO. The forecasts of NATO's demise endured throughout its 13-year commitment to helping the United States in Afghanistan. To this end, Afghanistan was labeled by some commentators as "the graveyard of empires," and with such a specter in mind, the ISAF mission would put NATO to a difficult test. Even the Taliban believed that NATO was vulnerable and commenced their counteroffensive in 2006. The timing of their attack was not an accident. Early in 2006, the United States began to transition the southern portion of Afghanistan to the ISAF (NATO-led) mission. The Taliban believed that some NATO nations lacked resolve. Their goal was to kill enough NATO soldiers from any given country, so that in the face of unsustainable casualties, that nation would quit ISAF. It would be a strategic blow to the Alliance if a nation retreated from Afghanistan in the face of high casualties.



NATO Image

The fighting in 2006 was the worst since the end of the 2001-2002 American-led invasion. During the initial push, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld decided to restrict the number of ground forces deploying to Afghanistan. Due to this, the Taliban leadership was able to flee to safe havens in Pakistan. They used 2002-2006 to rearm, retrain, and recruit. When the opportunity to strike arrived in 2006, the Taliban was ready. The spring campaign kicked off with ferocity in April 2006, with the Canadian forces receiving the brunt of the attacks. This was arguably the greatest test of NATO's resolve. Yet, in the end, the combined forces of Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom (UK), Denmark, and the United States and their Afghan partners prevailed. The Taliban failed to drive a NATO nation out of the ISAF mission, and the Alliance came out of Afghanistan stronger.

As the ISAF mission ended, a new challenge arose threatening both the security of Europe and North America – Putin's Russia. The Russian annexation of Crimea, its war against Georgia and Ukraine, and its cyberattack against Estonia threaten the peace and stability so hard won. NATO is gradually taking measures to deter Russian aggression from being directed against the eastern member states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. It is at this point in the geo-political discourse that the question of America's commitment is being debated.

From an American perspective, it is troubling that many in Europe and Canada have ungraciously taken advantage of the security umbrella provided by the United States to slash their defense spending to create societies rife with government benefits. The spec-



ter of tiny military expenditure is amplified by short workweeks and long vacations by those nations reaping the benefits of an America providing for their security concerns. This misuse of American good will should end and every nation must do more. Yet, is the sacrifice and commitment to NATO solely from the United States? Some commentators in North America seem to believe so. What is not mentioned is that the NATO allies made incredible sacrifices fighting America's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It would be hard for the citizens of nations in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to justify their soldiers being deployed to Afghanistan from an economic or other perspective. The simple fact is that the United States was attacked, Article 5 was invoked, and they came to our aid. Of the 3,407 soldiers killed in Afghanistan during ISAF and Operation Enduring Freedom, 1,136 were from NATO or partner nations. This does not include the tens of thousands wounded allied and partner-nation soldiers. How does one place a price tag on such a commitment? Additionally, most of the NATO nations also deployed their soldiers to Iraq, which was not a NATO mission. They came, and many died to honor their commitment to the United States in friendship and in fulfillment for the ideas for which it stands.

It is not new to hear debates about whether NATO is obsolete. Yet, the outcome of the Cold War, the Balkans, the ISAF mission, and the deterrence effect on an aggressive Vladimir Putin demonstrates that the Alliance is more relevant than ever and central to maintaining the peace. It took two horrific world wars for Europe and the United States to realize the need for a viable military alliance. It would be a costly and irreversible mistake to undercut and weaken the one military alliance in world history that has so long held back death and destruction from a continent so familiar with war. It has been the greatest guarantor of democracy and defender of capitalism. NATO has made it possible for both Europe and the United States to enjoy unprecedented prosperity and security. History demonstrates that weakness results in war. It would be the greatest of calamities to telegraph weakness and doubt about America's commitment to NATO. How does weakening the Alliance benefit the United States? How does this make Europe safe and secure? What Russia hears from the political discourse in the United States could be catastrophic and may result in a risky gambit by Putin to try to seize the Baltic region. This would not be some far-away war, but something that would result in a conflict that would cause the collapse of the American economy and in the end, lead to another horrific world war.

NATO has immense value and enduring worth to Europe, Canada, and the United States. The Alliance has come out of difficult missions in the Cold War, the Balkans, and Afghanistan stronger. Yet, this strength can be undone by doubts of America's commitment to it. All 28 nations must do more from a defense perspective, but such negotiations should be conducted behind closed doors. A public debate could be misread in the Kremlin as a sign of weakness. Too much is at stake to telegraph lack of resolve and could result in a war of unimaginable proportions. President Ronald Reagan captured the importance of maintaining strength, saying in 1986:

*We know that peace is the condition under which mankind was meant to flourish. Yet peace does not exist of its own will. It depends on us, on our courage to build it and guard it and pass it on to future*

generations. George Washington's words may seem hard and cold today, but history has proven him right again and again. 'To be prepared for war,' he said, 'is one of the most effective means of preserving peace.'

NATO is a bulwark of strength to avert war only as long as the commitment of its members to honor Article 5 exists. Weakness invites war.



## RUSSIA'S SWORD OF DAMOCLES

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In early 2015, the USAWC, at the request of the former Army Chief of Staff, General Raymond Odierno, published *Project 1704*, a study that discussed the changing strategic environment in Europe spawned by Russian aggression against Ukraine. The chief questions addressed by *Project 1704* included: (1) What is the Russian strategy in the region? (2) What is the appropriate North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and U.S. response? (3) What are the implications for NATO and U.S. Landpower?

The positive reception of *Project 1704* across NATO and the United States has made it one of those rare assessments used to inform and shape strategy. Although much of *Project 1704* is still relevant in its view of the emerging Russian strategy toward NATO, the United States, and the European Union (EU), the geo-strategic environment has changed significantly. Since the publication of *Project 1704*, Vladimir Putin announced the modernization of the Russian armed forces and deployed forces to Syria, Turkey shot down a Russian aircraft after it violated its airspace, Russian aircraft aggressively buzzed a U.S. Navy vessel in the Baltic Sea, and Putin's political proxies threatened NATO members with nuclear war. The assessments of *Project 1721* take up where *Project 1704* left off.

The geo-strategic situation continues to change. Although many trends are disconcerting, there are points of light in the darkness. Chief among these is that Putin's aggressive tone and approach is forging a greater unity among NATO members hitherto not seen since the 1980s. Although many in NATO are facing divergent dangers (i.e., immigration/refugee influx), Moscow poses an existential threat to much of Europe. However, NATO is far from ready to meet this threat. Using defense spending as a measure of resolve, only 5 of the 28 NATO members are spending the pledged 2% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defense. The majority of NATO nations have a long way to go in "paying their fair share."

Despite the slow response in material action by NATO members, there are trends working against Putin's expansionist designs. One of the startling developments is in Finland and Sweden, two traditionally neutral nations in the Baltic region. Moscow's aggression against Ukraine and in the Baltic Sea is pushing these two nations closer to NATO and the United States. A realignment of one or both of these countries into the NATO camp would dramatically alter the strategic environment and give the West considerable leverage to prevent Russian aggression.

Another by-product of Putin's aggressive and hostile strategy is evident in Ukraine. Ukraine has a rich history, with much in common with Russia economically, culturally, and religiously. Yet, Putin's war against a once stalwart friend is working against him. A truly Ukrainian identity is emerging from this, something not evident since before the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. This identity is increasingly less friendly to Moscow.

The increasingly bombastic rhetoric and actions of the Kremlin is disconcerting and is placing European peace in a precarious situation where one misstep by Moscow or Washington, D.C. could plunge the world into a costly war. Yet, weakness and lack of resolve from “the West” is not the answer. The world experimented with appeasement when faced with another nationalistic leader in the form of Adolf Hitler. The cost of capitulation and appeasement was a costly world war. The lesson of this experiment with appeasement is best summed up by the aforementioned quote by Winston S. Churchill: “An appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last.”

## BLUNTING RUSSIA’S SWORD OF DAMOCLES IN THE BALTIC REGIONS<sup>6</sup>



Richard Westall's 1812 painting depicts a sword hovering over Damocles, held in place by a single horse hair. The saga represents impending doom or the not knowing of when the sword will fall.

The ancient Roman philosopher, Cicero, told a story of how King Dionysius answered a courtier, Damocles, who thought that ruling a realm was merely pleasure and leisure. In response to this naive view, King Dionysius offered Damocles to switch places with him. However, King Dionysius had a large sword suspended above Damocles' head, suspended by a mere hair from a horse's tail. Upon realizing the danger that came with ruling a kingdom, Damocles gave up his envy of King Dionysius and happily remained a courtier. The moral of the story is that imminent danger often “hangs by a thread” and a simple misstep or miscalculation could let the sword fall and unleash death.

Thus was the case a century ago when a complex web of alliances maintained the European balance of power. On one side: Russia, France, and the United Kingdom (UK); and on the other: Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Italy (Italy's allegiance was, however, in doubt). The Serbian assassin, Gavrilo Princip, shattered this delicate balance of power on June 28, 1914, after he murdered the Austro-Hungarian Archduke Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie. So precarious was the complex system of alliances that, in just over a month, World War I would engulf Europe. The irony was that the very system that was created to guarantee peace ended in bringing war. Such a precarious situation is developing in the Baltic region today, where a sign of weakness by NATO or a misstep by Russia could let the Sword of Damocles fall and unleash the horrors of another catastrophic war.



“The European Balance”: A 1914 German postcard depicting the precarious European Balance of Power that led to World War I.

The idea of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania being under a looming danger by a Russian “Sword of Damocles” is evident. The indicators of this growing peril are manifested in the Kremlin’s increasingly harsh rhetoric toward NATO, the aggressive and often reckless behavior of Russian military aircraft in the Baltics, and the dramatic increase in scale and tempo of Russian military exercises in the region. These events makes it appear that indeed a “Sword of Damocles” hangs over the NATO nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.



A Russian SU 24 buzzes the USS *Donald Cook* in the Baltic Sea on April 13, 2016.  
(U.S. Department of Defense Photo)

Vladimir Putin's grand strategy is to reassert Russian influence in the region and to make it a dominant player in international affairs. To achieve this end, Putin needs to diminish the credibility of NATO, especially in the Baltic nations. There are two military approaches that Putin can pursue to pushing NATO out of the Baltics: (1) a direct attack or (2) apply pressure in the form of ambiguity (often called hybrid warfare). The "unthinkable option" of a direct attack on Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania would be a high-risk move that could only come if American leadership is weak and NATO's commitment to its Baltic allies diminished. In such an all-or-nothing gamble, the goal for Russian forces would be to quickly seal off land, air, and sea access to the Baltic region within 36-48 hours. The narrow Suwalki Gap, just 65 km wide, is where Russian troops would easily sever all land access to the Baltic nations from Poland and the rest of NATO. Once the land route is cut, Russian anti-aircraft and anti-shipping assets would make it too risky for U.S. and other NATO forces to arrive to expel the invaders.

The second, and more likely, option for the Kremlin is to use ambiguity. This would take the form of fomenting a "local" (exported from Moscow) ethnic Russian separatist movement similar to what was witnessed in Ukraine. Such an eventuality would occur in an area with a high ethnic Russian population in either Estonia or Latvia (Lithuania's ethnic Russian population is but 6%). These would not be the little green men of Crimea. The separatists, who would really be Russian Special Forces, would appear as civilians seeking independence for the "discrimination" that they suffer from Estonians or Latvians. Moscow's goal would be to destabilize the region in a way where no direct connection between the Kremlin was evident. The purpose of this ambiguity is not just

to provide Putin plausible deniability, but, more importantly, to cause the NATO Alliance to dither and delay on taking action. NATO, not known for quick action, would act slowly to determine if the crisis was foreign or domestic.



The Bronze Soldier monument in Tallinn, Estonia. When a decision was made to move the Soviet era statue, pro-Russian protestors violently took to the streets, followed by a massive Russian cyberattack that debilitated the nation. (Photo: Douglas Mastriano)

As NATO dithers, debates and delays a decision, the opportunity for a low risk move to destroy the Alliance would begin. Moscow would order a large force along the borders of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to intimidate the Alliance and to provide covert support to their separatist movement. As security deteriorates and the local population suffers deprivations, Putin would announce a humanitarian mission to end the distress. Of course, Moscow would pledge that the army would be withdrawn from the disputed area once security is restored. However, before the Russian troops depart, there would be a referendum with the ethnic Russian population appealing to Putin to remain. This would be followed by an annexation of the land by Moscow. Thus, without firing a shot, the NATO Alliance could be undermined with a simple act of annexing a modest piece of Baltic land without going to war with NATO. The brilliance of this strategy of ambiguity is that, should NATO respond in uncharacteristic rapidity, Putin could merely deny any involvement and wait for another opportunity to try such an action when and where the environment was more favorable. However, there are concerted steps that NATO, and specifically the United States, can take to prevent either of the dangerous actions delineated above from coming to fruition.

The Armed Forces of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania must be capable, survivable, and maneuverable. This is why acquiring mid- to long-range weapons could make these nations less appetizing to Moscow. If attacked, these offensive weapon systems could wreak havoc to Russian command and control nodes and transportation hubs and disrupt the movement of Russian forces.<sup>7</sup> This would provide the Baltic nations with a credible military capability and a “capacity to deter by denial as well as to deter by punishment.”<sup>8</sup>

Concurrently, the United States should help reduce the anxieties of our allies by stationing robust military assets in the region. This would complement USAREUR’s campaign plan of making “30,000 American Soldiers look like 300,000.”<sup>9</sup> The genius of USAREUR’s plan is to blend the Active Army with the Army National Guard and Army Reserve to support the European Theater.<sup>10</sup> Part of this expansion is what should be called Deploy Forces to the Baltics (DEFORTIC). Using the Return of Forces to Germany (REFORGER) model from the Cold War, the goal is to have units rapidly fly soldiers into the region to use American equipment already staged there. This reduces the arrival time of “over the horizon” forces considerably.

Another key to forward defense of NATO includes *permanently* stationing American and NATO forces in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The 2016 NATO Summit made a historic announcement, with the UK deploying a battalion to Estonia, the Canadians deploying a battalion to Latvia, Germany committing a similar force to Lithuania, and the Americans doing the same for Poland. This is a good start to deterring a possible Russian invasion of the “eastern flank” NATO nations, but more should be done. The multinational force deployed in the Baltic region should be increased to a three-brigade element, one in each nation. Estonia should host an American-led multinational mechanized brigade combat team and Latvia a regional Baltic Brigade that should include forces from Sweden and Finland (if they are willing to participate as non-NATO partners). The brigade in Lithuania should be a multinational NATO force permanently stationed in the Suwalki Gap. Keeping this gap open is imperative to prevent any ideas in Moscow that it could easily cut this essential land route from the rest of NATO.

This three-brigade model for the Baltic nations borrows from the Berlin Brigade concept from the Cold War. Although the American, British, and French Brigades stationed in West Berlin could not stop a Soviet invasion, these served as a guarantee that, should there be an attack, three powerful nations would fight to defend Germany. Additionally, these brigades would have made the Soviet invasion bloody and difficult to accomplish. Simply put, the cost/benefit analysis would be too high for Moscow to try a violent seizure of West Berlin. This is the same end desired for the Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – making an attack on them too risky for Moscow to contemplate.

As the final element of a strategy to deter Russia from threatening the Baltics, NATO should also assist Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia in developing a robust unconventional warfare capability. If deterrence fails and Russian forces overpower NATO forces stationed there, waging unconventional war could be key. Simply the knowledge that



Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia have a robust capability to wage unconventional war against an occupying force would give Russian military planners pause, since it would trigger memories of the Forest Brotherhood that waged an insurgency against Soviet occupation forces from 1944-1956. This movement killed over 15,000 Soviet military and security forces and significantly hindered Moscow's ability to establish control over the Baltics.<sup>11</sup>

Should Putin contemplate taking an area of the Baltics with a high ethnic Russian population, the question is if NATO will act quickly enough to deter aggression. For example, Narva, Estonia, is more than 80% ethnic Russian. If Putin's strategy of ambiguity is attempted, would the United States be willing to risk New York for Narva? Indeed, the lack of an adequate forward force presence makes such an eventuality feasible. However, should the United States and NATO embrace the three-brigade concept for the region, the calculus for a Russian ambiguous attack on Narva, Estonia, changes the strategic calculus. A forward U.S. Army-led brigade deployed to Estonia reverses the strategic calculus from, "is New York worth Narva" to, "is Moscow worth Narva." This would not be a replay of 1940, as NATO would already be there to deter Russian aggression. This is the power of a modest forward presence of American soldiers and other NATO ground soldiers deployed permanently in the Baltic region. It changes everything from a strategic point of view and in the end will save lives and money.

Yet, there are voices in Western Europe and North America warning against doing anything to provoke Vladimir Putin. These often suggest that forward positioning forces in the Baltics will cross a Kremlin redline. Much is spoken of the Russian fear of invasion and that it should be given a buffer to demonstrate good will. The recklessness of such a view was demonstrated by how the French and British approached the demands of Adolf Hitler in the 1930s. With the horrors of World War I in their thoughts, the Western European leadership did all it could to accommodate and appease Hitler. This weakness encouraged Hitler to continue his aggression. Had the Allies exercised strength earlier in this epoch, perhaps the horror and devastation of World War II could have been averted.

Another example is the Emirate of Kuwait. In 1990, Saddam Hussein sought an excuse to invade Kuwait to ameliorate his economic and financial woes. Being confronted by a massive buildup of Iraqi forces on his border, the Emir of Kuwait ordered his forces to stand down as a gesture of goodwill. Instead of convincing Saddam Hussein of calling off his invasion of Kuwait, it simply made his mission easier, with the Iraqi Republican Guards rapidly seizing the nation on August 2, 1990.

The idea that Russia should be given buffer states to make it feel more secure is not unique in history. The Japanese Empire's strategy in the 1930's was to establish a Co-Prosperity Sphere. This was to not only to serve as an economic zone dominated by Tokyo, but also a buffer zone to protect Japan militarily. Although this was a sound theory from a Japanese perspective, life for the people in those nations included in this economic and military buffer zone was abysmal. The idea of allowing Russia economic

and military domination over any region is contrary to American strategy and ideals. What nations do the appeasers wish to surrender to Vladimir Putin to provide such a buffer zone?

Rasa Juknevičienė, a Member of Parliament and former Lithuanian Minister of Defense, brilliantly stated, “The biggest provocation for Putin is empty security promises. Lithuania’s policy in 1940 was not to provoke Stalin and Russia. Look at what that got us.”<sup>12</sup> The Baltic Nations had a policy of not provoking the Soviet Union in the late 1930s and in 1940. History demonstrated that weakness encouraged aggression. In 1940, Stalin demanded that Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania open their borders to the Red Army, which they did, in an endeavor not to provoke or antagonize Moscow. This weakness resulted in the invasion and occupation of these lands that within a year would suffer unimaginable horror and deprivations at the hands of Moscow. This is yet another example of appeasement inviting aggression.<sup>13</sup> The idea that inaction and weakness is a reasonable course of action for the United States and NATO is a hazardous and dangerous approach that historically has only resulted in costly and bloody wars. Indeed, the “[c]osts to deter Russia now is far cheaper than the costs later,”<sup>14</sup> as “Russia always goes for the weak one.”<sup>15</sup>

“There is a race for the Baltics, the side which comes first with substantial forces will prevail. To prevent conflict, there must be strength and resolve.”<sup>16</sup> If NATO acts with determination, war can be averted and peace preserved. However, the window of opportunity for the allies is closing.

The emerging Russian “strategy of ambiguity” is a direct threat to the NATO Alliance. Yet, it can be deterred now with resolve and a modest forward deployment of American Forces in the region. The United States can change the calculus in the region and avert a perilous move by Russia with a simple commitment of a brigade in the Baltic region. NATO has an opportunity to prevent the unthinkable from happening. There is a Russian “Sword of Damocles” hanging over the Baltic region, yet the impending doom can be blunted by the physical commitment of NATO landpower to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.





**CHAPTER 1: CAT AND MOUSE: PUTIN'S COMPLEX  
APPLICATION OF RUSSIAN STRATEGIC LANDPOWER**



Military Parade on Red Square in 2016. (Kremlin Photo)



## PUTIN'S COMPLEX APPLICATION OF RUSSIAN STRATEGIC LANDPOWER<sup>17</sup>

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Recent events demonstrate the complex and adaptive methodology being employed by Russia to exercise its influence over areas of Europe. The changing face of Russia's operational approach began in 2007 when it launched a crippling cyberattack on Estonia. This was in retaliation of an Estonian decision to move a Soviet era Red Army monument, something that Moscow opposed. This was followed by a large Russian conventional attack against the country of Georgia in 2008, occupying two large areas of the nation (Abkhazia and South Ossetia). In 2014, the world witnessed the Russian annexation of Crimea using soldiers in unmarked uniforms. In only one week, Russia seized control of Crimea "without firing a shot." The annexation of Crimea was rapidly followed by a Russian inspired and led subversive war in Eastern Ukraine.<sup>18</sup> A common thread among these diverse Russian operations is its use of ambiguity to confound and confuse decision makers in the West.

### RUSSIAN LANDPOWER

The 2008 invasion of Georgia and the ongoing intervention in Ukraine demonstrates Russia's reliance on the military and security services as instruments of its grand strategy. The application of the Russian military instrument of power has taken various forms over recent history. For instance, the Russian operation in Georgia was largely conventional. The 2014 Russian operation in Crimea diverged from the conventional approach by manipulating a sympathetic population and using a robust security infrastructure built up for the Sochi Olympics. Finally, Moscow inspired and is leading a separatist movement in Eastern Ukraine hidden behind a cloak of ambiguity and backed by the powerful capabilities of its army.<sup>19</sup>

These operations exhibit common features of Russia's use of military force. Russia depends on Landpower to achieve its strategic military objectives. This Landpower-centric approach is part of a broader Russian strategy to roll back Western influence – especially the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) – from the former Soviet republics. Russia has adjusted the use of its army to conduct hybrid, irregular warfare as the primary means of warfare against its neighbors so as not to provoke a decisive response from either the United States or other European nations. With this in mind, Information Operations (IO) and cyber-capabilities have emerged as key components of Russian military operations.

The importance of modernization is an ongoing concern for Moscow and its armed forces. These reforms are directed to developing a capability that can act decisively in the region, capable of anything from small special purpose forces missions to large-scale conventional operations. It is this ability to tailor forces across the range of operations that makes it uniquely adaptive and capable. To do this, Russia is concentrating resources on a small number of elite units, primarily airborne and special operations forces (SOF) that make up the core of its emerging Rapid Reaction Force.

## THE EMERGING RUSSIAN OPERATIONAL APPROACH OF AMBIGUITY

Moscow uses deception and disinformation to prevent a quick response from the West. When Putin believes that employing conventional forces is too risky, he resorts to using unconventional forces, scaled and adapted to the strategic environment to confound American and European decision-makers. This “strategy of ambiguity” was used to great effect in Crimea; such was the case where, despite evidence to the contrary, Putin denied that the “little green men” were his soldiers until after he annexed the region. By doing this, he operated inside the decision-making cycle of NATO and thus retained the strategic initiative. This approach exploits fissures in NATO and the EU.

Putin’s adaptable approach encompasses two phases, comprised of eleven factors. The goal of Phase 1 is to shape an environment favorable to Russian strategic interests. Phase 2 exploits cleavages in the NATO Alliance created during Phase 1 and attempts to alter the strategic environment through an ambiguous/hybrid intervention. The following delineates this adaptive, multi-faceted “strategy of ambiguity”:

Phase I: Shaping a strategic environment favorable to Russian interests.

- 1. Consolidate political power and use nationalism to maintain domestic support.** At the core of the strategy of ambiguity is the maintenance of Putin’s powerbase and his need for popular support. Putin secures his base by casting the West as the enemy of Russia and thus fuels the engine of nationalism. Staying in power is at the core of Putin’s “strategy of ambiguity.”
- 2. Modernize and leverage Russia’s nuclear arsenal to bully neighbors.** The modernization of Russia’s already massive nuclear arsenal is a threat to regional stability. Yet, a greater concern is the rhetoric coming out of the Kremlin threatening to use nuclear weapons against any European nation that challenges its national interests. Such was demonstrated when Moscow threatened Denmark with nuclear targeting should it join NATO’s missile defense shield. The use and threat of nuclear strikes is part of Russia’s emerging strategic/operational approach to bully and intimidate nations to submit to its desires.
- 3. Modernization of Russian conventional land forces.** The May Victory Parade in Moscow showcased Russia’s intent to replace its fleet of armored vehicles with modern systems. Although facing economic challenges, it seems that the Western Military District will benefit from this boost to conventional land force capability and capacity. When completed, this will alter the strategic dynamics of the continent.



4. **Apply economic incentives and blackmail to pressure neighboring countries' economic well-being.** Although this tactic has been applied against Ukraine, the dynamics of doing this against other European nations is a bit more complex. However, it is unlikely that Germany and other NATO members, who rely on Russian energy, are willing to have their economic well-being put at risk and therefore are not willing to take a hard stand against Russian expansionist activities in the east.
5. **Capitalize on long-term IO campaign.** The tools of the IO campaign include high-quality Russian cable and television, radio programming, hockey clubs, youth camps, and the internet. These export Moscow's strategic message across Europe, specifically targeting the Russian Diaspora. This brilliant campaign barrages the viewers/listeners with an unrelenting one-sided view of the world.

Phase II: "Invade" an Eastern European nation through a hybrid mix of irregular forces, augmented by Russian intelligence and Special Forces personnel and supported by a gradual introduction of conventional forces when the conditions are right.

6. **Use subversive activity to create instability in ethnic Russian areas.** With a continuous IO campaign brewing in the background, the groundwork is laid to manipulate disgruntled ethnic Russians where Putin chooses. As in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, these movements start as peaceful protests, but ultimately lead to taking over government buildings and armed insurrections. Once engaged in low-level combat, the rebels proclaim their right to self-determination and eventually appeal to Moscow for aid. However convenient it is to have local support in an uprising, the Kremlin does not need popular support in the Russian Diaspora to achieve its strategic ends. Should the local populace not support an uprising, Moscow can simply export a separatist movement from Russia to provide the pretext for an intervention as in evidence in Eastern Ukraine.
7. **Move a large conventional force along the borders to dissuade action against the subversives.** As in Eastern Ukraine, Moscow responded to the instability by deploying a large conventional force along the border under the guise of aiding refugees and containing unrest. The real reason, however, was to intimidate Ukraine, which hesitated out of fear of provoking a response from Moscow.
8. **Leverage ambiguity to maintain strategic flexibility.** Deception and disinformation are the key ingredients of this approach, and Putin uses these tools to sow ambiguity and thus obscure his strategy. As a result, the Kremlin remains a step ahead of NATO's decision-making process and quickly adapts its actions to keep the Alliance off balance.
9. **Violate international borders and support pro-Russian insurgents.** As the Ukrainian Army launched its offensive to subdue the rebels in Eastern Ukraine, the Russian Army was poised to provide support to their comrades. "Volunteer"

soldiers provided armor, artillery, and air defense assets that blunted Ukrainian offensive action. Meanwhile, the Kremlin equivocated about its intentions and denied involvement in the conflict. Had there been a determined international response against Moscow, Putin could have withdrawn support from the separatists, denied complicity in the violence, and waited for a more opportune time to try again.

**10. Seize an area to achieve a limited strategic end.** When the security of a targeted region collapses, and the international response is mired in debate, and a humanitarian crisis ensues, the conditions are set for Russian forces to intervene. The forces would arrive with aid, food, and provide security to the embattled people of the region. This intervention would be characterized as a temporary effort to ameliorate the humanitarian crisis Moscow created. By doing this, Russia can attain limited strategic objectives with minimal risk. The ultimate goal of this would be to discredit NATO by seizing a piece of a member state's territory.

**11. Nuclear blackmail to blunt a coherent NATO response.** As Russian forces move to bite off a piece of territory for "humanitarian reasons," the Kremlin would threaten to use nuclear weapons against any nation acting against its interests. Should the West have a weak political class ruling NATO's lead nations, the threat might just work and trigger a period of appeasement and surrender.

This two-phased, eleven-part plan demonstrates an adaptive strategic approach. Yet, despite the flexibility inherent in Putin's two-phase and multi-faceted approach to impose his influence in the region, concerted action now can preserve European security. The only way to do this, however, is through decisive and comprehensive action.

There are advantages that Russian strategic Landpower enjoys in the region. Foremost of these is geography. Although NATO expansion into Eastern Europe has deprived Moscow of buffer states, it has "interior lines of communication."<sup>20</sup> This is the ability to rapidly shift or move forces along its western frontier. This makes the so called unannounced "snap exercises" that Russia conducts close to NATO's eastern borders a serious concern.

Another factor working in favor of Russian strategic Landpower is the traditional, and at times extended, presence it has had across broad areas of the region. For instance, Russian domination over Estonia began in 1704 with the defeat of the Swedish Army in Narva at the hands of Czar Peter the Great. Russia completed its occupation of Estonia by 1710.<sup>21</sup> It would not be until 1917 that Estonia shook free from Russian occupation, but then had to contend with the German Army and, after World War I, the Red Army. Independence was finally secured in 1920; but this would end with another Soviet occupation (interrupted by a brief Nazi occupation) in 1940. During the Cold War, the region was a key location for the Soviet Armed Forces, with Russian troops remaining in the country until 1994. This extended and enduring presence of Russian troops and influence, spanning a greater portion of nearly 200 years in Estonia, is something that

should not be so easily ignored. This is why Putin, in part, is so belligerent toward the Baltic integration into NATO and why Article 5 of the Washington Treaty (an attack on one NATO member is an attack on all) is integral to their security.

However, the greatest advantage that Russian strategic Landpower retains is the application of a hybrid mix of forces to befuddle and confuse Western decision making. As the West prevaricates during a crisis, Russian troops move toward achieving their objective, which can be rapid, as in the case of Crimea, or slower and messier, as in the case of Eastern Ukraine. Yet, the appearance of Russian intelligence and Special Forces in Eastern Ukraine pretending to be a local independence movement would be laughable if it did not so brilliantly confuse and baffle Western politicians, who continue to lack unanimity and resolve on how to contend with this threat to European security.

## Putin's Strategy of Ambiguity



Yet, one should not be lulled into a false sense of security, even if NATO should figure out a way to deter or mitigate the hybrid application of Russian forces. In the background remains the real threat of its conventional attack, which is poised to support cross border hybrid operations. However, "supporting" a hybrid effort is just one course of action. Another outcome, often viewed unthinkable but not out of the realm of the impossible, is the hybrid war morphing into a conventional effort should the strategic environment prove opportune. This could even start off as a conventional fight if the United States becomes weak internationally. It may be just this that is in the back of Putin's mind with his stunning announcement to modernize and expand Russia's nuclear arsenal and armed forces.<sup>22</sup> In just a few years, Moscow will have both a modernized conventional ground force and robust unconventional force, backed by a large nuclear arsenal.<sup>23</sup>

The Western Military District includes Kaliningrad, the Russian land mass wedged between NATO members Poland and Lithuania along the Baltic Sea. Looking at a map, Kaliningrad appears as a wedge partially thrust between Poland and Lithuania, and, therefore, between Central Europe and the Baltic region. Such geography makes the land bridge between Poland and Lithuania key terrain and something that must be jealously guarded, as any Russian move would include quickly blocking NATO land access to the Baltic region (air and sea access also, thanks to the Kaliningrad isthmus).<sup>24</sup> This “unsinkable Russian aircraft carrier” is a boon for Russian strategic Landpower. Foremost, however, is the “forward” presence stationed there.

The emerging hybrid cat and mouse application of its military force makes it complicated for the West to come up with a coherent response to any Moscow inspired aggression. Yet, behind this hybrid approach is a capable conventional force that enjoys interior lines of communication, the benefits of operating on familiar terrain, and the promise of being provided with modern equipment.

Then there is Russia’s nuclear force. We can safely assume that any future Kremlin operation against Eastern Europe will be backed by a real threat of a nuclear strike against any nation acting contrary to Moscow’s interests. This is a consideration that completely changes the strategic calculus for NATO. Russian Landpower remains the centerpiece of any actions it takes in the future to expand its influence across the region. This is an increasingly capable and adaptive force, which has come a long way since its invasion of Georgia. The question remains: Should the United States and NATO respond when confronted by a sophisticated and adaptive foe?

# The Baltic States



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## CHAPTER 2: EUROPEAN SECURITY AND RUSSIAN EXPANSIONISM



Russian Military Parade in Red Square, 2016. (Kremlin Photo)





## EUROPEAN SECURITY, RUSSIAN EXPANSIONISM, AND CYBERWAR

**Researcher: Lieutenant Colonel Chris Briand, U.S. Army**

The European security environment has changed dramatically. With Moscow's annexation of Crimea, the invasion of Ukraine, and militarization of the High North, the question of collective security and the core purpose of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are priority topics with the European allies. Russia's destabilization of Ukraine has triggered detrimental effects both politically and economically in the region. Additionally, this has created fear among its neighbors that Russia will continue its "land grab" and take measures to weaken their independence and territorial sovereignty. As stated in the U.S. *National Security Strategy* (NSS), "Russia's violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as its belligerent stance toward other neighboring countries, endangers international norms that have largely been taken for granted since the end of the Cold War."<sup>25</sup>

Russia's aggressive behavior is a national security concern for the United States and works against its national interests to ensure a stable international order and prosperous economy. Former President Obama's strategy states:

American diplomacy and leadership, backed by a strong military, remain essential to deterring future acts of inter-state aggression and provocation by reaffirming our security commitments to allies and partners, investing in their capabilities to withstand coercion, imposing costs on those who threaten their neighbors or violate fundamental international norms, and embedding U.S. actions within wider regional strategies.<sup>26</sup>

On the other side, The *Russian National Security Strategy*, released in December 2015, describes an existential security threat from NATO's expansion and military buildup in Eastern Europe and the Baltics:

The buildup of the military potential of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the endowment of it with global functions pursued in violation of the norms of international law, the galvanization of the bloc countries' military activity, the further expansion of the alliance, and the location of its military infrastructure closer to Russian borders are creating a threat to national security.<sup>27</sup>

Additionally, the *Russian National Security Strategy* states that the European Union (EU) and the United States are a threat to its political goals, economic well-being, and national security by continuing:

State policy in the sphere of the safeguarding of national security and the socioeconomic development of the Russian Federation contributes to the implementation of the strategic national priorities and the effective protection of national interests. A solid basis has been created at this time for further increasing the Russian Federation's economic, political, military, and spiritual potentials and for enhancing its role in shaping a polycentric world.<sup>28</sup>

The U.S. and Russian national strategies are diametrically opposed in their desired end states, which puts the nations at odds. These opposing ends could lead to a clash should diplomatic or other missteps transpire.

Russia's annexation of Crimea and its destabilization of Eastern Ukraine is a political move rooted in Russia's traditional view of its sphere of influence (what the Kremlin dubs as the "near abroad"). Moscow has long viewed this regional geographic area as part of their Eurasian empire.<sup>29</sup> This is why a Wilsonian like Liberal Democracy threatens Putin's vision of his managed democracy (authoritative capitalism). Putin cannot have a successful open democracy on his border. This would create the potential for other nations to gravitate toward an open democracy and might even encourage Russians to advocate for a similar system. Hence, politically, Kiev's Western orientation and their attempt to align themselves with the EU creates, in the view of the Russian Government, a political instability to their vision of managed democracy in the former Soviet space.<sup>30</sup> More ominous for the Baltic States is Putin's statement that it is his duty to defend ethnic Russians wherever they live.



Vladimir Putin in 2015. (Kremlin Photo)

Ukraine poses several strategic concerns for Russia, one being the reliance on Ukraine's aerospace and defense industry. Russia's biggest strategic concern would be if Ukraine joined NATO, which would challenge Russia as a Eurasian Power. There are long-term implications for the west centered on security, stability, arms control, and trade in relation to Russia. The EU is dependent on energy from Russia and exports agricultural products to it.<sup>31</sup> In fact, during the crisis in Ukraine, the EU did not wish to impose a new set of sanctions on Russia until it was forced to do so after the MH-17 civilian airline was shot down.<sup>32</sup> Politically, as Putin is faced with more pushback and a downturn in the economy, he may face discontent. This is because his rule is hinged on

providing economic growth and social stability for the Russian people. These are key to Putin's legitimacy, which in turn can be undermined by the sanctions and the downturn in the oil price. Appealing to Russian patriotism against foreign (Western) threats is the tool he is using to survive the economic challenge to his regime. Based on his character and previous actions, he will continue to appeal to Russian nationalism and intensify military confrontation with Ukraine, if not the Baltic States, to secure his position as Russia's leader.

Vladimir Putin did not consider the economic implications of his actions in Ukraine. Crimea, which had been a major source of tourism and farming under Ukraine, is now an economic strain on the Russian economy.<sup>33</sup> "In April 2014, Ukraine shut off the spigot for the main irrigation canal, depriving the peninsula of water essential for many crops."<sup>34</sup> With Ukrainian banks closed, farmers can't secure credit, can't purchase seeds or fertilizer, and the tourist industry is down by 35%.<sup>35</sup>

These issues, coupled with the pressure of lower oil prices, are negatively impacting the Russian economy and the Ruble. In 2014, the Ruble lost half its value due to not only financial concerns, but also geopolitical concerns that Ukrainian separatists backed by Russia were planning a new offensive in Eastern Ukraine. Inflation is rising as the sanctions on food imports from the west aggravate the situation.<sup>36</sup> These are also negatively impacting the EU internally. Many European countries are facing declining exports and industrial output because of the sanctions. As the Russian economy slows as a result of lower energy prices and sanctions, business and wealthy individuals have begun sending money overseas.<sup>37</sup> In 2014, capital flight from Russia totaled \$152 billion.<sup>38</sup> A downturn in defense spending because of the economic situation is projected, and these economic hardships will add to the pressure on Putin at home and abroad.

Suggestions that the United States is pulling back in Europe—due to its “rebalancing” and focus on Asia—is causing unease in Europe, especially in light of the inability to formulate a common foreign policy, which is concerning to the United States and the Baltic nations.<sup>39</sup> The United States maintains approximately 67,000 U.S. Armed Forces in Europe with many on a rotational basis in Poland and the Baltic nations. This was recently bolstered by the deployment of military equipment in Eastern Europe. Yet, NATO military members have significant capability gaps that they rely on the United States to address. These gaps in strategic air and sealift, as well as aerial refueling, intelligence surveillance, and reconnaissance require more U.S. resources. At the NATO Summit in 2010, NATO partners adopted the latest strategic concept which consists of “three core tasks: collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security which addresses the concern of unconventional security threats and collective territorial defense.”<sup>40</sup> This Article 5 commitment of collective defense has reaffirmed NATO's primary purpose, which is the defense of its members. However, things are not as “simple” as they were when the Washington Treaty was signed in 1949 establishing the concept of collective security. The economic concerns compound an already tenuous strategic environment and could force Putin to act in a manner that could threaten European peace.



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**CHAPTER 3: THE CRISIS IN UKRAINE:  
RUSSIA'S WAR TO CONTROL  
THE SOUL OF EUROPE**



Ukrainian Soldiers Advance to Secure a Perimeter. (U.S. Army Photo)



## UKRAINE CRISIS: TESTING THE SECURITY AND STABILITY OF EUROPE AND BEYOND

**Researcher: Lieutenant Colonel Eric Zimmerman, U.S. Army**

Russia's intervention in Ukraine is a fundamental disregard of national sovereignty that threatens security and stability in Europe and U.S. national security interests. Russia's actions not only violate basic and accepted international norms regarding state sovereignty, but they also violate numerous signed agreements to include the United Nations (UN) Charter, Helsinki Accords, Russia-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Founding Act, and the Budapest Memorandum.<sup>41</sup> The crisis in Ukraine also threatens a foundational U.S. national security interest: "the security, confidence, and reliability of our allies,"<sup>42</sup> most notably the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Furthermore, the crisis is testing the resolve of NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The end of this crisis will have lasting implications concerning stability in Europe and U.S. interests in the region.

The Ukraine crisis provides an opportunity to demonstrate the post-Cold War relevancy of these organizations by exhibiting solidarity, cooperation, and resolve against a re-emergent regional threat. Conversely, should Russian actions in Ukraine continue to be met with inaction and indecision, the seeds may well be sewn for perpetual impotence or even eventual dissolution of both NATO and the OSCE. The Ukraine crisis entered its second year in March 2016.

While much of the world's attention has shifted, the crisis in Ukraine continues to smolder and even flare up on occasion. During 2016, Ukraine was the target of a significant and sophisticated cyberattack against its power grid.<sup>43</sup> OSCE observer movement is being restricted in areas not controlled by the Ukraine Government<sup>44</sup> and cease fire agreements have largely failed to take hold. Additionally, the Ukrainian military alleged that the "combined Russian-separatist forces in Eastern Ukraine continue to violate a ceasefire, including 28 occasions in [a] day."<sup>45</sup> The cease fire referenced here is commonly referred to as the "Minsk II" agreement, negotiated through multi-lateral talks involving Germany, France, Russia, and Ukraine, and put in place after the first round of agreements completely collapsed in the face of immediate violations and continued escalation of hostilities.<sup>46</sup>

As a result of Russia's unwillingness to fully support the implementation of the Minsk II peace deals, the European Union (EU) and U.S. sanctions were extended through the end of January 2017.<sup>47</sup> The sanctions, targeted primarily at Russian banking, energy, and defense sectors,<sup>48</sup> are having a modest direct effect, shaving "about 1.5 percent off Russian economic output in 2015."<sup>49</sup> While these sanctions are more than a symbolic gesture, they are not likely to have the desired effect of changing Russia's actions and policies in respect to the Ukraine crisis.<sup>50</sup> Given the inadequacy of narrow multi-lateral political pressure and economic sanctions, a stronger, broader, and more unified approach is required. Enter NATO and the OSCE.

NATO's response to the crisis has been to reassure its allies in the Baltic, Central, and Eastern European countries. This includes the establishment of temporary bases, the deployment of additional forces and capabilities, an increase in NATO-sponsored military exercises, and direct military assistance (training and funding) to the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF).<sup>51</sup> NATO action has been understandingly complicated and limited as Ukraine is not a NATO member. Despite this, some suggest that the perceived "ineffectiveness of the NATO response to Russian action in Ukraine might encourage aggressive Russian action elsewhere, including against the three Baltic states."<sup>52</sup>

Despite these criticisms, one could argue that NATO is performing exactly as advertised. After achieving success in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, what is preventing Putin from widening his campaign to the Baltics? What is preventing him from seizing a narrow fifty-mile swath of Lithuanian and/or Polish sovereign soil to establish a land bridge that unites Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast to Russian-friendly Belarus? Clearly, there is a reason that Russia's recently published national security strategy names NATO as a threat. Namely, that NATO is preventing Russia from bullying their way back into former Warsaw Pact states—states that are now members of the Alliance. This is not to say that there isn't room for improvement.

Additional NATO actions recommended by a study completed at the U.S. Army War College (USAWC), called *Project 1704*, includes: (1) the implementation of the September 2014 Wales Summit agreement to establish a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force as both a deterrence and an effective fighting organization; and, (2) clearly stating that NATO member Article 5 declaration "will be triggered not only by a conventional attack, but also by an ambiguous threat to destabilize member governments, such as cyberattacks or civil disorder inspired by external actors."<sup>53</sup> These are both very important and effective measures that would continue to send a message of unity and resolve.

OSCE response has been more active and hands-on than that of NATO. While this can be attributed to a wide variety of reasons, the most prominent is that not only do all 28 NATO members also belong to the OSCE, so do Russia and Ukraine. Additionally, while both NATO and the OSCE strive to maintain a secure and stable Europe, the OSCE strives to do so through means beyond military action:

The OSCE is a forum for political dialogue on a wide range of security issues and a platform for joint action to improve the lives of individuals and communities. Through its comprehensive approach to security that encompasses the politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions and its inclusive membership, the OSCE helps bridge differences and build trust between states by co-operating on conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation.<sup>54</sup>





Ukrainian Marines with a BTR-80 Armored Personnel Carrier at a Checkpoint in July 2015. (U.S. Army Photo)

This “whole of government” approach to regional affairs, coupled with both the resources and the necessary political backing of the nations that have direct interests in the Ukraine crisis,<sup>55</sup> make the OSCE an invaluable part of any solution in Ukraine.

OSCE response to the crisis has been multi-faceted. The most visible and publicized missions are the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine and the Observer Mission at the Russian Checkpoints of Gukovo and Donetsk, but the OSCE is doing considerably more. Additional efforts include facilitating high-level diplomatic and multilateral dialogue that includes Russian and Ukrainian political leaders, activities to strengthen Ukraine’s democratic institutions and practices (including election support and observers), and activities to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.<sup>56</sup>

But, like NATO, the OSCE is not without its critics. The OSCE has the usual criticisms of any large international organization – inefficiency, indecisiveness, and taking too long to respond. However, Russia asserts that it is biased toward Ukraine and that OSCE monitoring efforts were “aimed at helping and supporting one side of the conflict – the authorities in Kiev”<sup>57</sup> – and, from the “Ukrainian side,” that “up to 80 percent of the mission’s observers worked for Russian intelligence.”<sup>58</sup> Despite these and other criticisms, OSCE efforts are helping keep the crisis from escalation and have created time and space to allow political discussions to proceed, albeit painstakingly slowly.<sup>59</sup>

Both NATO and OSCE are important in achieving U.S. national security interests, and are particularly relevant given the threat to these interests posed by Russia’s actions in Ukraine. It is also evident that NATO and the OSCE have a long-standing tradition of cooperation, having worked alongside one another in the Balkans and, more recently, in Afghanistan.<sup>60</sup> As a member of both organizations, the United States should encourage NATO and OSCE leaders to find ways to deepen their cooperation in areas where their goals overlap. Ukraine is certainly one of those areas, and remarks by leaders from each organization reinforce this notion. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg recently thanked OSCE for “renewing dialogue and strengthening the OSCE’s instruments and discussion forums,”<sup>61</sup> and he called for increased information sharing between the two in order to increase transparency on military activities in Europe.<sup>62</sup> Newly appointed OSCE chairman, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, stated that solving the Ukrainian crisis was one of his top priorities. Given these statements against the backdrop of the Ukraine crisis, increased cooperation as a publicly stated common goal should be well within reach.

Russia’s actions in Ukraine threaten European security and stability, as well as directly and indirectly threaten U.S. national security interests in the region. While NATO and the OSCE are each conducting independent activities and missions in response to the Ukraine crisis, both Europe and the United States can benefit from deeper cooperation between the two. Fortunately, recent statements from leaders in both organizations indicate that they also share this belief. Strong support from the United States, a member of both organizations and a respected global leader, would advance this concept from a mutually held idea to a formally agreed upon and publicly announced common goal.

## THE CONFLICT IN UKRAINE: ITS IMPLICATIONS ON ARMED FORCES DEVELOPMENT

**Researcher: Colonel Volodymyr Postrybailo, Ukrainian Army**

*I would like to remind you that Alexander III, our emperor, once said that Russia has just two allies, the army and the navy.*

Vladimir Putin, April 2015

The Revolution of 2014 was a turning point in Ukrainian history. For the first time since its independence, the country seized the opportunity to join European civilization and determine its own destiny on the basis of freedom and democracy. However, Ukraine's aspirations were not acceptable to Russia because they contradicted its imperial ambitions and geopolitical objectives. As a result, Russia has utilized all instruments of national power in an endeavor to keep Ukraine under its sphere of influence. However, neither political, nor economic, nor informational pressure has achieved the Kremlin's objective. As a last resort, having violated fundamental principles of international law and bilateral agreements, Russia occupied Crimea and launched military aggression in Eastern Ukraine.

In this frustrating strategic environment, Ukraine revised its approach to national security and defense. Starting at the strategic level down to operational and tactical, Ukraine developed a new National Security Strategy and Military Doctrine, in addition to reevaluating its operating doctrines. This resulted in a series of ambitious comprehensive reforms of its armed forces based on lessons from the annexation of Crimea and anti-terrorist operations in Eastern Ukraine. Many lessons have already been identified, but the main one is best expressed in a famous Latin quote: "Si vis pacem, para bellum," or "If you want peace, prepare for war."<sup>63</sup> Despite concerns in the National Security Strategy of Ukraine that any permanent reduction of Ukraine's armed forces capabilities was a threat to national security, nothing was done to improve Ukraine's shrinking military capacity prior to the conflict.<sup>64</sup>

While Russia prepared for war, Ukraine did not. Between 2001 and 2014, Russia tripled its military expenditure; and in 2015, planned to increase its military procurement budget by 60%.<sup>65</sup> Russia's armed forces modernization, a key priority since 2011, is aimed at rearming 70% of troops with new equipment by 2020.<sup>66</sup> In contrast, in 2012, Ukraine planned to downsize its armed forces almost 50% by 2017, from 193,000 to 100,000.<sup>67</sup> The average defense spending between 2006-2011 was about 1.0% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with a modest increase to 1.1% of GDP in 2012.<sup>68</sup> Ukrainian military expenditures in 2014 increased by 65% compared to 2005, but the armed forces remained ill-equipped because the financial resources were spent on personnel rather than modernization and acquisition.<sup>69</sup> In this poor condition, Ukraine faced the Russian invasion.

Furthermore, for the first time in history, the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) is fighting a “hybrid war” on its territory. This is characterized by the insurgent’s disregard of humanitarian law, moral principles, human rights, and the needs of the civilian population. Additionally, there was massive use of artillery and multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) by the insurgents, including targeting populated areas to discredit the UAF. There are cases where insurgents forcibly embroiled the local population in military actions, using them as human shields. They also use large-scale sabotage warfare, including mining, sniper, and radio-electronic and informational warfare. In addition to operations in Eastern Ukraine, terror was spread to the other regions of the country (Odessa, Kharkov, Mariupol, etc.). Quite often there was an absence of a continuous, clearly defined front line, with heavy fighting in urban areas.

In response to these “hybrid challenges,” the reform of the UAF assumes, among other things: (1) improvement of C3 (command, control, and communication) structure, efficiency, and effectiveness; (2) creation of Joint Operational Staff (JOS), an analog of which (Joint Operational Command) was created in the recent past with U.S. support, but illogically dismissed during the Yanukovych presidency; (3) development of special operations forces (SOF); (4) strengthening the Army’s firepower; (5) enforcement of intelligence and counter-intelligence capabilities; and, (6) enhancement of the logistic and medical support system.<sup>70</sup>

What is the military threat to Ukraine, and what is its adversary’s strength? During the summer of 2015, Russia developed a powerful ground force in Eastern Ukraine. This force consisted of two army corps totaling up to 35,000 troops and supported by a reserve component of 21 tactical battle groups of regular Russian troops with a total strength of over 9,000 personnel.<sup>71</sup> In addition, along the Ukrainian eastern border, Russia mustered another 53 tactical battle groups numbering over 50,000 people.<sup>72</sup>

In such conditions, Ukraine needed to double its armed forces strength, which currently is about 250,000 personnel.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, here is another lesson: the idea of a professional all-volunteer force alone does not work if a country is faced with such a strong adversary, extended front line, sizable area of operation (AO), and with a long-lasting conflict. There is a critical requirement for a highly qualified, trained, and motivated reserve component. During 2014-2015, the UAF managed to increase its combat strength and capabilities through six waves of partial mobilization. In total, 210,000 men were mobilized, every sixth being a volunteer.<sup>74</sup> This approach provided a sufficient amount of troops in the AO, with up to three brigades simultaneously being deployed. Therefore, Ukraine will keep a mixed manning system of military professionals and conscripts.

Analyzing the conflict from the domains perspective, it can be concluded that they are being mostly conducted in land and cyber. Due to the adversary’s substantial air-defense capabilities and remarkable Ukrainian Air Force and Army aviation combat losses, the airspace is being used for medevac and transportation purposes only. At the same time, the conflict revealed the importance of UAVs. Prior to the conflict, the UAF did not have this technology. This gave the adversary a great advantage in this sphere. This is

another lesson, which is reflected in a number of the UAF conceptual documents. Due to the annexation of Crimea, the UAF lost the majority of their naval assets and capabilities. A new Maritime Doctrine was developed to ensure the revival of the Ukrainian Navy. The UAF does not have any space capabilities, but the space domain is definitely being used by Russia for intelligence and communication purposes.



To improve C3 structure, efficiency, and effectiveness, the UAF created four Operational Commands (North, South, East, and West) and the JOS. At the beginning of the conflict there was a shortage of digitally encrypted communication systems. C2 at all levels was mainly accomplished through analog Soviet-origin communication systems and often even via commercial cell phones. Not surprisingly, such communications were frequently eavesdropped upon by adversaries, which resulted in the breach of one of the fundamental principles of C2—concealment. This was another lesson learned. Therefore, communication is conducted via encrypted digital systems. The use of cell phones is restricted or prohibited.

Early stages of the conflict revealed critical weaknesses of the UAF sustainment capabilities. After 3 to 4 months of intensive combat engagement, the UAF did not have enough weapons and equipment to recover losses and activate reserve units. The existing battle dress uniform was of low functionality and poor quality. There was a lack of modern helmets and a limited amount of bulletproof jackets. Provision of food resources was inefficient. However, due to unprecedented support by civilian volunteers from all over the country, numerous NGOs, and enormous efforts made by the state defense industrial complex in close cooperation with the UAF, it became possible to improve the UAF logistic and medical support. As an example, in 2014 alone, about 20,000 weapon systems were repaired, restored to a state of combat readiness, and provided to the UAF.<sup>75</sup> Many weapon systems and military equipment are being manufactured, modernized, and supplied to the UAF, including the main battle tank “Bulat,” BTR-3 and BTR-4 armored personnel carriers, the “Stugna-P” anti-tank missile system, and small armored gunboats, etc.<sup>76</sup>

Highly mobile airborne troops have proved to be the most mission capable combat arm of the UAF Army. However, the early combat engagements revealed a shortage of their firepower. Taking into account this lesson, airmobile brigades were transformed into air assault brigades. A typical airmobile brigade is now reinforced by a tank company, self-propelled howitzer battalion, missile artillery battalion, and air defense artillery battalion.

At the beginning of the conflict the adversary had superiority over the UAF in cyber and informational warfare. Pro-Russian separatists supported by Russian armed forces made many efforts to demoralize not only Ukrainian soldiers and officers but also their family members. Massive mail outs of text messages to cell phones and e-mail inboxes of the UAF military personnel and their dependents is just one example of such informational influence. Therefore, the importance of strengthening the psychological fortitude of military personnel became another vital lesson learned. As a result, battle mind training is now fully integrated into the combat training system. There is, however, a great potential to capitalize on the UAF’s unique advantages. We defend our motherland against separatists and external aggressors; we are supported by the vast majority of the Ukrainian population as well as the international community; and, UAF morale and patriotism are very high.

Another important issue realized during the conflict was the necessity of establishing productive cooperation with governmental organizations, NGOs, volunteers in the capital and all over Ukraine as well as with local authorities in the AO, and building friendly trust-based relations with the local population in the AO. As a result, the UAF developed an effective and efficient system of civilian-military cooperation (CIMIC), which did not exist at all prior to the conflict. It spans from strategic (General Staff) down to operational and tactical levels. This not only harmonized all joint civil-mil activities and remarkably improved support of Ukrainian troops by the local population, but also increased situational awareness and quite often allowed for the receipt of valuable intelligence information.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) membership is a long-term aspiration for Ukraine. Kiev wants complete “interoperability between the UAF and the Armed Forces of NATO countries by 2020.”<sup>77</sup> In this context, there is an ambitious plan to transit the entire Ukrainian military to NATO standards by 2020.<sup>78</sup> Not surprisingly, the fundamentally new SOFs being created in Ukraine are in full accordance with NATO standards, approaches, and best practices. The best proof of the benefits of NATO-Ukraine military cooperation, and another lesson, is provided by those UAF units that participated in NATO-led exercises, initiatives, and programs such as Planning and Reviewing Process and Operational Capability Concept. These units, including the 95th airmobile brigade and 30th mechanized brigade, proved to be the most organized and capable of executing their missions and suffered fewer casualties compared to other military units and formations. This positive experience at the tactical level has to be shared, promoted, and brought to the operational and strategic levels.

Ukraine has a powerful defense industrial complex: this is another unique advantage the state has to capitalize on to strengthen the UAF. According to the Stockholm Peace Research Institute, Ukraine was among the ten largest exporters of major weapons in 2010–2014.<sup>79</sup> Doubtless, this industry requires foreign investments and modernization. The task for Ukraine’s strategic leaders, including military ones, is to make this attractive and mutually beneficial for Ukraine and NATO. The signing of the “Roadmap of Military-Technical Cooperation between Ukraine and NATO” on December 18, 2015, is the first promising step on this path.<sup>80</sup>

Military cooperation with NATO has great undiscovered potential and is the way ahead to further develop the UAF. The conflict has already revealed many gaps in Ukrainian doctrines and concepts, mistakes made during planning and execution of combat missions, and shortages in a number of joint functions that could have been avoided and overcome if the UAF had utilized the best practices and experience of the NATO countries’ Armies prior to the conflict. Nevertheless, because of its battlefield experience, high readiness, and enhanced operational capabilities, Ukraine’s Army is now one of the five strongest in Europe.<sup>81</sup> It is willing to share this experience with NATO countries, cooperation which would doubtlessly be mutually beneficial. Hopefully, the new National Security Strategy expenditure on security and defense totaling 5% of the country’s GDP will drive continued progress of the UAF’s development.<sup>82</sup>

In April 2015, Russian president Vladimir Putin stated, “I would like to remind you that Alexander III, our emperor, once said that Russia has just two allies, the army and the navy.”<sup>83</sup> This is unequivocal evidence that the military is the topmost instrument of national power Russia relies upon. Therefore, despite a number of institutional regional and global security systems, any country’s neglect of defense capabilities in the contemporary world is unacceptable.





## CHAPTER 4: RUSSIA AND THE BALTIC NATIONS



Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė (center) watches a battle demonstration with Lithuanian Chief of Defense Major General Jonas Vytautas Žukas (right) and Lithuanian Land Forces commander, Major General Almantas Leika, during the final day of Saber Strike 2015 at the Great Lithuanian Hetman Jonusas Radvila Training Regiment, June 18, 2015. (U.S. Army Photo)



## PUTIN'S / RUSSIA'S OBJECTIVES IN THE BALTICS

**Researcher: Lieutenant Colonel Algimantas Misiunas, Lithuanian Army**

There are three distinctive strands of Russian revanchist policy. One is directed toward Western countries, one toward the former Soviet republics that were not able to end Russian influence, and one is aimed toward the former Soviet republics that managed to break away from Russia and are steadily headed to the West. The Kremlin views the latter two categories as the “near abroad”<sup>84</sup> and employs all instruments of national power to communicate this to the West.

The wars in Georgia and Ukraine demonstrate that President Putin follows this policy, and also demonstrates that Europe has been waiting for his next step in pursuing this. After the Russo-Georgian war and the annexation of Crimea, Western observers and policymakers have expressed worries that Moscow’s next step will be the Baltic States. Furthermore, Russia is likely to employ a hybrid war strategy because the United States and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have no effective strategy to counter it. On the other hand, former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen clearly announced that if Russia intervenes in the Baltics it will be crossing a red line, and NATO will respond.<sup>85</sup> Determining whether it is worth it to Russia to attack the Baltic States, and what Putin’s real intentions are, is difficult to discern.

Since the Russo-Chechen wars, one of the goals for President Vladimir Putin has been the restoration of Russia’s former status as a global power with unlimited access to the oceans. In the late 1990s, the Warsaw Pact countries and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) had disintegrated into independent countries, each with divergent national strategic interests and objectives. In fact, overnight Russia had been thrown back to its 17th-century borders, with limited access to the Black<sup>86</sup> and the Baltic Seas. The collapse of the Soviet Union has changed the balance of power in the world. Therefore, it can be stated that Russia needs to control the Baltic nations for the following four reasons: (1) to build a land bridge with Kaliningrad,<sup>87</sup> (2) to ensure full access and control of the Baltic Sea; (3) to restore the former Russian Empire’s and Soviet Union’s boundaries in the western direction; and, most importantly, (4) to restore Russian influence in Europe by facilitating the collapse of NATO.

Swedish defense researcher Alpo Juntunen noted that “geography makes [Russia] a continental nation, however for centuries Russia has striven to become a sea power.”<sup>88</sup> The Naval bases in Kaliningrad and Crimea have provided Russia with the ability to project power in and around the Black and Baltic seas, while also providing the Russian Navy with access to the oceans. However, those bases, from the military perspective, can also be easily cut off from the mainland’s support. Russian military strategists view this as a critical vulnerability. Therefore, ensuring control of the Black Sea remains a top priority for Putin and was a driving factor guiding Russia’s strategy in its incursions into the territories of Ukraine when pro-Russian Ukrainian President, Victor Yanukovich,

was ousted from power. The strategic importance of Kaliningrad is almost the same, and there is no doubt that Moscow has prepared plans to reestablish lost access to the Baltic Sea and consequently to build a land bridge with Kaliningrad.

Russian revanchist political ideologists argue that Russia has to evoke its imperial ambitions and undermine American influence.<sup>89</sup> The Russian-Georgian war in 2008 and the ongoing Ukrainian conflict are messages from Moscow that Russia will preserve its vital space and influence in the “near abroad.” Moreover, the annexation of Crimea and the separation of Eastern Ukraine was promoted as a “reunification of Russian lands and Russian souls, mirroring the process of German re-unification in 1990 . . . [and] can be seen as revenge for the humiliation of Russia in the early 2000s.”<sup>90</sup> Therefore, many Western observers have argued that Moscow’s next step will be “ensuring security” of the Russian minorities in the Baltic States, in other words, regaining control over the Baltics.

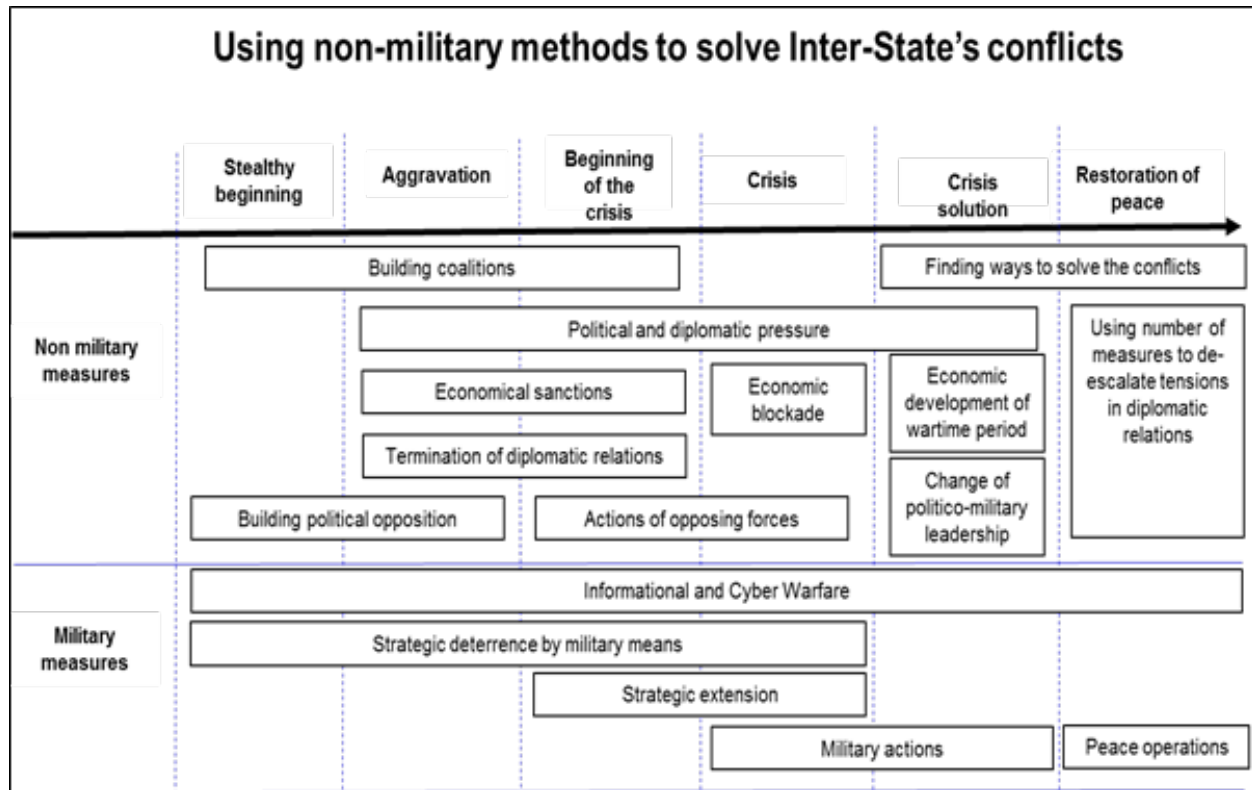
The most important reason would be the collapse of NATO. The *Russian National Security Strategy* and *Military Doctrine* describe NATO as a threat, and that the dissolution of NATO would be a great political-strategic victory for Putin. Given the complexity of the NATO decision making process and the versatility of the interests of the members of NATO, there is a strong possibility that NATO would fail to respond to possible Russian aggression against the Baltic States. There is no doubt that NATO would collapse if it failed to respond to armed aggression against one of its members. Therefore, from Moscow’s perspective, a limited scale intervention or other disguised operation in the Baltics might be worth the risk to test the unity of NATO.



The 2nd Cavalry Regiment on a road march across the Baltic region. (U.S. Army Photo)

The *Russian National Security Strategy* lists a range of threats, which assert that the United States and its allies are seeking to contain Russia to maintain dominance in world affairs, which challenges Russia's foreign policy.<sup>91</sup> The document asserts that an entire spectrum of political, financial, economic, and informational instruments could be applied to gain influence in the international arena, and that Russia will only use force when other options to protect its national interests fail.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, Russia's 2014 military doctrine considers the expansion of NATO military infrastructure toward Russia's border as a military danger. Large-scale military exercises in Russia's neighborhood, which NATO and the United States conduct to deter Russia, are described as threats.<sup>93</sup> An important nuance in the doctrine is that Russia perceives a need to defend what it sees as its vital sphere of interests. According to Polina Sinovets and Bettina Renz, two associate professors who studied Russia's 2014 military doctrine, Russia does not outline the perimeter of its sphere of vital interests and does not explicitly name the states in the sphere. A likely explanation for this is the wish to create some strategic ambiguity for potential opponents, including NATO.<sup>94</sup>

Moscow's strategy against the Baltic countries is clearly defined in the so-called "Gerasimov doctrine."<sup>95</sup> According to Gerasimov, Russia may at first employ non-military measures against potential adversaries, such as political and diplomatic pressure, information campaigns, economic sanctions, and show of force. Non-military measures would be applied in order to disrupt the opponent's political decision-making processes and to weaken the unity of military and political alliances.<sup>96</sup> Military measures such as unconventional and covert actions could be initiated in the opponent's territory before the beginning of military conflict. Moreover, local protests and the opposition would actively be exploited during the crisis. When the crisis escalates into an open military conflict, it is planned to launch unexpected and rapid operations in the territory of the adversary, to destroy its critical civil and military infrastructure with the aim to break the political or social will to resist. In addition, simultaneous information operations and cyberattacks would be applied extensively.<sup>97</sup> The figure below depicts Gerasimov's view of present day conflicts.



Gerasimov's view of the present day conflicts.<sup>98</sup>

Furthermore, recent Russian military operations in Georgia and Ukraine reveal that Russia relies on landpower to achieve its military objectives, relies on decentralized special operations forces (SOF) to conduct irregular warfare, and incorporates extensive information operations that link strategic messaging to operations on the ground.<sup>99</sup>

Since Russian Tsarist times, Russia's expansionist policy has been based on the principle "divide and rule." Today's political and military analysts call such a policy "Hybrid strategy or Strategy of Ambiguity."<sup>100</sup> However, Russia's "ends and ways" have never changed, only the means have varied. Russia's "end-state" has always been maintaining the role of a superpower in Eurasia. The ways have focused on using all the instruments of national power to intimidate and by using the strategy of ambiguity to disrupt the opponent's political decision-making processes; and, if this does not work, to change the opponent's policy toward Russia, to launch a massive and rapid land attack into the opponent's territory. Later, depending on how internal and external audiences react to this action, Russia will either maintain counterinsurgency warfare or will enjoy a quick and incredible victory.

## CONCLUSION

In Putin's and his supporters' view, NATO enlargement and the membership of the Baltic States in this organization has been the main geo-strategic failure of former Russian Governments. First of all, it is because the separation of the three Baltic States had left Russia with limited access to the Baltic Sea. Secondly, Russia again lost territories, which former Tsarist Russian and Soviet leaders had occupied in the 19th and 20th centuries. Finally, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of NATO has changed the balance of power and has damaged Russian imperial ambitions. Therefore, Putin's main objectives are to ensure permanent control in the Baltic Sea region, and if the situation permits, reestablish former power and influence over Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia.

Analysis of the Russian wars against Georgia and Ukraine, the published Russian strategies, and "Gerasimov's" doctrine indicates that a Russian occupation of the Baltic States would be executed by employing a combination of non-military and military measures. Any military or non-military actions will be supported by the employment of all the instruments of national power along with simultaneous information operations and cyberattacks. Furthermore, the Kremlin will use ambiguity, deception, and disinformation to prevent a quick response from the Western Community. And, due to the fact that Baltic countries have very small defense forces, the Russian campaign could turn quickly into another frozen conflict, which allows Putin to achieve his main objectives.





## LATVIA IN THE CROSSHAIRS: RUSSIAN INFORMATION WARFARE AND COUNTERMEASURES

**Researcher: Lieutenant Colonel Corey Collier, U.S. Marine Corps**

The fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent independence among the republics ushered in an era that many believed spelled the end of tensions between Russia and the West.<sup>101</sup> Unfortunately, this ship of dreams shattered on the rocky shoals of reality. Under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, Russia experienced a new tide of nationalistic fervor, casting its old nemesis, the United States, as the *raison d'être* for nationalistic security concerns and citing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a prominent example of U.S. encroachment.<sup>102</sup> Over the last decade, Russia has increasingly tested the resolve of Europe and the West, inciting and then intervening in manufactured crises in Georgia and Ukraine.<sup>103</sup> The Baltic States, particularly Latvia, could be the next target of Russian enlargement, a move that represents a direct threat to NATO.<sup>104</sup> Latvia's strategic geographic position, large ethnic Russian population, small professional military, and distance from major NATO countries like Germany and France present unique challenges to the state. However, it is possible for Latvia to survive this storm by understanding how Russia uses information warfare in combination with economic pressure and energy dependence to create tension. Likewise, it is important to recognize how Russia could change its approach to undermine Latvian independence due to Latvia's NATO membership. Finally, by implementing a few specific strategic initiatives, Latvia can counter these destabilizing forces and strengthen its position with regard to its Russian neighbor to the East.

A study of the events leading up to the 2014 Russian incursion into Ukraine provides insight into Russian strategy and understanding of what can happen without an effective counterplan. After the Ukrainian president took steps that would distance the country from the West and realign it with Russia, popular unrest broke out, leading to the ouster of Ukrainian President Yanukovich.<sup>105</sup> Using disinformation as part of a hybrid warfare strategy to destabilize Ukraine, Russia manufactured unrest further by sending plainclothes soldiers, later referred to as "little green men," across the border into Ukraine to seize key locations and act as instigators among the local ethnic Russian population.<sup>106</sup> After annexing Crimea and as tensions rose, Russia used the unrest as a pretext to invade, claiming an obligation to protect ethnic Russians.<sup>107</sup> Russia continues to provide thinly veiled support to separatists in the Eastern region of the country in a struggle that has no clear end in sight.<sup>108</sup>

In a controversial 2014 study of Russian strategy, authors Michael Weiss and Peter Pomerantsev describe how Russia has redefined the use of information as a key component of its hybrid warfare strategy.<sup>109</sup> According to the authors, Russia long ago abandoned the Cold War method of releasing information to counter the message of the West. Russia now exploits the freedom of speech its former republics enjoy to implement an intricate blend of disinformation using television, social media, and nongovernmental

organizations.<sup>110</sup> Using every medium available, Russia creates confusion, sows discord between ethnic Russians and other ethnicities, undermines political initiatives, and infuses doubt about the intentions of state governments while extolling Russian pride.<sup>111</sup> Russia used these techniques leading up to the 2014 incursion into Ukraine, and many of them are evident in Russia's strategy with other states today.<sup>112</sup> A look at recent history in the region bears witness to this reality, from the 2007 riots and cyberattacks in Estonia to the recent but limited internet campaign calling for independence in the Eastern Latvian region of Latgale.<sup>113</sup>

Although the Baltic States of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia are European Union (EU) and NATO members, there is growing concern they are the newest targets for Russian expansionism.<sup>114</sup> Due to its geographic location, Latvia represents an especially lucrative objective. Reestablishment of Russian dominance in Latvia would isolate Estonia and bring Kaliningrad closer to the Russian mainland. Once achieved, Estonia and Lithuania, virtually surrounded by Russia's influence, would have little choice but to reconsider NATO membership and economic alignment with the EU. Although Lithuania's position would be tenuous, the country's shared border with Poland would provide contiguous connectivity with other NATO nations. Estonia would become a veritable fortress, and economic benefits the country may enjoy otherwise would be consumed with military expenditures to defend the state.

Latvia's social makeup provides fertile soil for Russian information operations.<sup>115</sup> Caught between imperial powers, the Baltic States spent most of the last century consumed by competing world powers.<sup>116</sup> Accordingly, Latvians tend to view each other as either pro-Russian (with the communist baggage that comes with it) or as pro-Western (which to ethnic Russians means either sympathetic to Nazism or NATO aggression).<sup>117</sup> Latvia has a small population of only two million people, but one-third of that population identify themselves as ethnic Russian. Ethnic division carries with it social division, creating enclaves of predominantly ethnic Russian people.<sup>118</sup>

After independence, Latvia took measures to establish their national identity that added to these ethnic tensions. To gain citizenship in Latvia, ethnic Russians must pass an exam that tests their knowledge of Latvian history and their proficiency in the Latvian language.<sup>119</sup> Many ethnic Russians have neither the desire nor the skills to pass the exam. Compounding the matter, the Latvian Government rebuffed efforts in 2012 to establish Russian as the country's second language and removed the Russian language from the classroom throughout the education system, further dividing the population.<sup>120</sup> Latvian efforts designed to distinguish the country and its people as unique from Russia resulted in a large disaffected ethnic Russian population without citizenship, the ability to vote, hold public office, or even apply for a passport. Many ethnic Russians in Latvia view these initiatives as discriminatory.<sup>121</sup>

Russian news media, easily accessed via the internet and satellite television, pounced. Seeking to exploit the opportunity and reinforce the idea that Russia is the only state that cares for the concerns of Russians at home or abroad, the Russian news message

resonates well with many of the Russian diaspora in the region. Throughout these communities, Russian news stations portray state policies as an attempt to diminish Russian ethnicity while portraying Russian policy, and specifically Russian leaders like Putin, as protectors of Russian citizens and their rights.<sup>122</sup>

Bolstering this message, Russia offers counterproposals. Ethnic Russians – even third-generation Latvian-born ethnic Russians – can acquire Russian citizenship, Russian passports, and retire on a Russian pension years earlier than Latvian citizens.<sup>123</sup> The effects of these efforts are tangible, as demonstrated by the opinion polls of ethnic Russians in the Baltic States. The preponderance of ethnic Russians view Moscow’s actions in Ukraine as acceptable to protect Russian citizens; and view sanctions by the West against Russia for actions in Ukraine to be unacceptable.<sup>124</sup> The rise of social activist groups and nongovernmental organizations promoting Russian views provides another venue for Russian information to flow. Fueled by Russian money and acting as spokespersons for Russian initiatives in the Baltics, groups, like the Fund for the Support and Defense of Compatriots Abroad, act as proponents of Russian policy and provide a voice to ethnic Russians throughout the Eastern European area.<sup>125</sup> Exploiting the free society in Latvia, these organizations, many of which are Kremlin-funded, take advantage of the hard-won freedoms of fledgling democracies to undermine unity and exacerbate differences among ethnic groups.<sup>126</sup>

Information is not, however, a unilateral approach in Russia’s strategy, but is used in conjunction with other instruments of power. After the world reacted to Russian aggression in Ukraine with sanctions on Russian oil, Moscow reacted by emplacing an embargo on foodstuffs imported from the EU, an action that put a strain on the economies of the Baltic States and their political leadership.<sup>127</sup> Another issue the Baltic States recognized as key to future security after Russian actions in Ukraine is increased independence from Russia in the energy exchange market.<sup>128</sup> Thus far, their efforts have produced limited success.

In all of these efforts, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia recognize the need to bolster their ability to provide for their collective security. Although the Baltic States share a common concern of Russian incursion and violation of sovereignty, cooperation has been slow in developing.<sup>129</sup> As if the destabilizing actions of Russia were not enough, the Baltic States are also concerned with the validity of NATO promises to respond if threatened.<sup>130</sup> Even if Georgia and Ukraine were NATO members, the strategy of instigation and misinformation used by Russia to intercede never rose to the level that would have triggered a NATO collective defense response until it was too late. Under the distracted eye of the world, Russia pulled the levers of national power to manipulate events until intervention seemed to carry too much risk for the West. Although Latvia recognizes the need to provide better security, economic strain hinders the state’s ability to enact change. Latvia’s 2015 defense budget measured a paltry 1% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – it since has increased to 1.7% with the 2% threshold being achieved in 2018.<sup>131</sup> Likewise, with conscripted service no longer required, the number of active and reserve soldiers in the Latvian military rests at just over 13,000 soldiers in all.<sup>132</sup>

Although the Russian model of incursion previously used would have to be modified given Latvian NATO membership, a different avenue for Russian influence in Latvia exists – one that Latvia’s own constitution allows. With political party divisions and strong ethnic Russian unity, the possibility exists for Russia to use its information instruments to influence election results and empower pro-Russian leadership in the highest political offices.<sup>133</sup> With divided Latvian political parties unable to counter this threat by forming effective coalitions, a pro-Russian Party could form the government and be able to turn Latvian politics away from NATO and the EU. Unrest in the same vein as what occurred in Ukraine could result, opening the door for Russia, poised at Latvia’s doorstep and proclaiming its obligation to protect ethnic Russians, to become involved and leaving the United States and NATO to decide if intervention and possible escalation is worth the cost.

Nevertheless, there is still time to create an effective response to this threat, but serious steps must be taken soon. First, Latvia must find a way to close the gap of ethnic division in the country. Regardless of the country’s dark history over the last century, ethnic Russians will only feel animosity and disassociation with the country until they are embraced as part of the social makeup of a united Latvia. There is danger in making this move too quickly, because ethnic Russians gaining citizenship also immediately transition to voting constituents and could empower pro-Russian political parties. However, this move immediately counters the pro-Russian information campaign and undermines the message that only Russia is the protector of this large ethnic group.<sup>134</sup> Second, permanent NATO forces should be stationed in the Baltic region.<sup>135</sup> This move would strengthen the legitimacy of NATO in the region and provide an immediate counter-response to tensions and potential Russian incursions of “little green men.”<sup>136</sup> This move would immediately overcome the tyranny of distance in NATO’s ability to respond to a threat in the region.

A third course of action must include a dedicated increase in the defense forces of each Baltic State, and a serious effort to develop and exercise a unified defense plan that combines their forces as one in times of need.<sup>137</sup> This move would require regional cooperation and serious consideration for reinstating compulsory service in order to provide an immediate improvement to the collective defense of the region. A fourth course of action includes an effective counter to Russian disinformation.<sup>138</sup> This effort must extend beyond the Baltic region to all of NATO and the EU in order to present a unified information campaign that presents a unified message of resolve and collective security while removing the ambiguity and divisiveness of the Russian message. The establishment of the NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence is a good first step, but more must be done to unify the message and the effort.<sup>139</sup> To be effective, Baltic States like Latvia must ensure this message is presented in Latvia in the Russian language to the ethnic Russian population to counter Russian propaganda and create a national identity that conveys understanding while building unity. A final course of action must include progress in energy independence throughout the Baltics. A plan for continued development must include more energy sharing with EU partners while

further integrating the Baltic economies with Western Europe and Scandinavia to remove threats to energy resources as a way for Russia to intimidate Latvia and the Baltic States.<sup>140</sup>



## BALTIC BASTION!?

**Researcher: Lieutenant Colonel Vahur Karus, Estonian Defence Forces**

Following Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) rushed to secure and reassure its vulnerable Eastern flank and, more specifically, the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Since then, these three states have been the focus of debates in NATO, the European Union (EU), and in the United States concerning how to defend the Baltics against Russian aggression. Most of the discussion has centered on what NATO, the EU, and the United States will do to protect their interests in the Baltics. However, there are specific steps these countries can take to better prepare for potential future Russian aggression. To recognize the way ahead, it is important to understand the current composition of the armed forces of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, as well as the planned development of those three armed forces. Second, given Russian tactics in the region, correctly analyzing what capabilities these countries need to effectively counter conventional Russian forces is critically important. Finally, some recommendations are provided for the future forces of the Baltic States.

Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania each have small populations and limited land area, restricting their freedom of choice in every aspect of statehood. With 1.2, 2.0, and 2.9 million inhabitants respectively, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are together smaller than all of the other neighboring states.<sup>141</sup> Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are members of NATO and the EU and greatly emphasize bilateral relations with the United States.<sup>142</sup> Consequently, these factors have impacted how these countries organize their armed forces. All three countries' armed forces heavily emphasize land forces (while naval and air forces have only niche capabilities); and they heavily rely on NATO to cover the essential gaps in each countries' military limitations.<sup>143</sup>

The land forces of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are built around the Infantry Brigade concept as their primary maneuver force supported by a volunteer defense organization, which provides a territorial defense component. However, all three countries have different principles of manning, equipping, and organizing their brigades. Estonia relies heavily on the reserve army concept with mandatory military service as the primary system for producing wartime units for the brigades.<sup>144</sup> Estonian brigades are combined arms formations with all-around capability for independent operations. Estonia has two infantry brigades – one mechanized (wheeled armored personnel carriers) and one light infantry brigade – and territorial defense units provided by the volunteer Defense League.<sup>145</sup> The Estonian Navy specializes in counter-mine operations, consisting of three mine countermeasure (MCM) vessels and auxiliary ships.<sup>146</sup> The Air Force consists of Ämari Air Base and Air Surveillance Wing, and contributes to the NATO Integrated Air and Missile Defense System (NATINAMDS) with robust early warning and air defense mission command and control, and facilitates the NATO Air Policing Mission.<sup>147</sup>

The future development for Estonian Defense Forces (EDF) shows no changes to the existing organization, but concentrates on equipping units with state of the art equipment (CV-9035NL Infantry Fighting Vehicles, Javelin anti-tank missiles, and self-propelled artillery systems) and creating a larger high readiness reserve.<sup>148</sup> Even though Estonia invests 2% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to defense, this level of investment does not allow for the further expansion of the EDF.<sup>149</sup>

The Latvian military is built around one infantry brigade, consisting of two maneuver battalions and a combat support battalion manned by an all professional force and supported by volunteer *Zemessardze* (equivalent to U.S. National Guard) divided into three territorial regions consisting of one light infantry battalion each.<sup>150</sup> Recently, the Latvian Brigade's capability was greatly enhanced with the procurement of Combat Vehicle Reconnaissance (Tracked)—or CVR(T)—light armored vehicles from the United Kingdom (UK); previously, Latvia only had light infantry units.<sup>151</sup> Latvian Naval and Air Forces only possess niche capabilities like their Estonian counterparts, with similar tasks.

Budget cuts during the recent economic recession impacted the Latvian Armed Forces. However, this dynamic changed following the Russian occupation of Crimea. The Latvian Government has announced that the defense budget will reach 2% of GDP by 2018, an indication that Latvia is heading in the right direction.<sup>152</sup> However, as with Estonia, Latvia's GDP is too small to provide for the purchase of new capabilities or to expand their force structure. Likewise, the high personnel costs attached to a having a standing professional army will likely eat up Latvia's defense spending, leaving little for operations and maintenance (O&M) or the procurement of new capabilities.<sup>153</sup>



An Estonian and American Soldier at the Tapa, Estonian Training Area. (U.S. Army Photo)



Lithuania abandoned conscription in 2008, but reestablished this practice in 2015 to create reserves and manning for its second infantry brigade. Currently, Lithuanian land forces consist of an “Iron Wolf” mechanized brigade manned with professional soldiers and equipped with M113 armored personnel carriers. The development of a second infantry brigade is on the way, and, when ready, will primarily be a reserve formation with a professional cadre.<sup>154</sup> For territorial defense, Lithuania, like Estonia and Latvia, relies on its volunteer defense organization (in Lithuanian, *Krašto apsaugos savanorių pajėgos* [KASP]) of roughly six light infantry battalions.<sup>155</sup> The Lithuanian Navy and Air Force are very similar to its northern neighbors, and they possess niche capabilities like MCM vessels and air surveillance, with the exception that the Lithuanian Air Force has more rotary- and fixed-wing aircraft than either Latvia or Estonia.<sup>156</sup>

According to guidance from its Minister of National Defense, Lithuania will reach the 2% of GDP defense budget by the year 2020, and will purchase infantry fighting vehicles, anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons, weapons for fire support, and protective equipment.<sup>157</sup> This program is already under way, with Lithuania’s recent purchase of a new self-propelled artillery system from Germany in 2015.<sup>158</sup>

Despite achieving a defense budget of 2% GDP, Lithuanian defenses will be plagued with the same problems as the Latvian Armed Forces, due to reliance on professional soldiers, which cuts into the investment needed for new equipment and O&M. In both Latvia and Lithuania, and to a smaller degree in Estonia, the problem stems from the need to recruit well educated personnel for defense and pay salaries which are competitive with the rest of the society, while also securing enough available resources for the development of new capabilities, and maintaining the existing ones. Another result of these small military budgets is the inability to purchase the necessary all-around capabilities for initial self-defense such as air defense, electronic warfare, and an integrated fire support system.

The Baltic countries primarily rely on their ground forces for their defense. This is partly due to the fact that air forces and navies, with all their technical capabilities, are too expensive for small states to maintain; and partly due to the historical legacy of starting the build-up of armed forces from scratch. The economic recession at the end of the last decade drove most countries toward a reduction of their defense budgets, many by at least one-third. This fact, combined with pressure from NATO for deployable units, led Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania toward the development of a military primarily centered on a light infantry capability.<sup>159</sup> Despite this, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania pushed for the development of mechanized forces, and each state has, or soon will have, a mobile brigade with some level of protection. The acquisition of Javelin anti-tank missiles in 2015 improved the short-range defensive capabilities against Russia’s mechanized forces. Likewise, all three countries have a very short range air defense systems (VSHORAD) capability, some form of fire support system, and their maneuvers are supported by combat engineers.<sup>160</sup> However, the land forces are missing a multilayered air-defense, self-propelled fire support capability, and the means to deploy scatterable minefields with fire support means. In addition, there are no coastal defense systems to protect the vulnerable coastline of these states.

Although the Russian Federation is not signatory to the Mine Ban Treaty, all of the Baltic countries are, which restricts the use of certain artillery ammunition and mines.<sup>161</sup> Given the combination of the tactical effectiveness of landmines in canalizing and delaying an adversary's movements combined with its cost-effectiveness, all three would benefit by withdrawing from the treaty as long as there were no penalty for doing so. With the scarcity of forces available to counter possible Russian aggression, mines could prove critical in neutralizing Russian advantages. To multiply the effectiveness of mines, all three countries should purchase medium range anti-tank systems to maximize their range of employment.

Since Baltic countries do not possess the air assets to guard their air space and instead rely on NATO support, they must build up a layered, integrated air defense to at least have some sort of capability to counter Russia's air advantage. VSHORAD is effective against low and slow flying assets like helicopters and satisfies the needs of maneuver units, but to facilitate joint operations these Baltic States need medium range and long range air defense systems to influence enemy air operations. Also, a multi-layered air defense will have the added benefit of further facilitating air defense in support of the brigade's maneuver on the ground.

Fire support systems are yet another area which all three countries must build upon, with both fire support and counter fire assets. Lithuania's purchase of PzH 2000 is a step in the right direction, but Estonia is still relying on towed systems while Latvia does not possess any fire support assets which can tactically support the maneuver brigade. In purchasing new artillery systems, all three countries also must acquire artillery tracking systems, which will enable them to conduct counter-battery missions.<sup>162</sup> Along a similar vein is the need to develop coastal artillery. Since all three Baltic countries have small navies, they need to have a means to defend their coastlines against the formidable Russian Navy. Modern mobile coastal artillery or missile systems will at least give pause to an opposing navy, diverting additional resources away from enemy capabilities, and the smart use of coastal artillery will help all three states to minimize the risk of envelopment from the sea.

This leads to an additional capability the Baltic region must consider pursuing—effective electronic warfare and electronic countermeasures. Lessons learned from Russian aggression in Ukraine demonstrate that all the Baltic countries must develop and acquire electronic warfare systems to assist in countering enemy's C2, unmanned aerial vehicles, and certain weapon systems, which Russia is currently actively using.<sup>163</sup> Using drones or certain ammunitions for delivery will greatly enhance the effect achieved by non-lethal means.

Foremost, however, is the need for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to continue to build mechanized forces, since mobility and protection with direct firepower are the only means to delay Russia's mechanized forces. However, acquiring and maintaining the aforementioned capabilities, even if defense budgets doubled, will be impossible

unless foreign military sales to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania come with “friendly prices” or leasing options. And, even if obtained, the challenge of manning these new capabilities still exists. Therefore, the need for deployment of NATO troops continues, but must be viewed more from the perspective of special capabilities than from maneuver forces. This focus will allow the Baltic States to concentrate on the mechanization and development of maneuver formations while NATO forces fill the gap of some of the technical shortfalls.

Defending European security architecture has always been the task of NATO and is measured in the sum of all alliance members’ capabilities. The security situation has not changed this, and the Baltic States need help from other NATO countries to secure their part of the collective responsibility. As stated above, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania must concentrate their scarce resources to develop conventional capabilities that will act as a deterrent and, if need be, to counter Russia’s conventional forces until the whole of NATO can mobilize and restore security. The alliance must agree to provide specific capabilities until the Baltic countries are able to acquire and apply these capabilities themselves, to include ballistic missile defense and subsequent air defense layers along with allied air forces.

The development of mobile fire support systems together with coastal artillery will be part of developing brigades as main maneuver forces and must be accompanied by the passive means of fire support to execute effective counter-battery or counter-asset missions. Access to special munitions like scatterable minefields for their counter-mobility advantage against armor and tanks will help brigades to shape the conventional battlefield in their favor. Electronic warfare and electronic counter-measures capabilities will further multiply the effect of fires.

The current Latvian force posture of territorial defense and only one maneuver brigade leaves them vulnerable against a Russian conventional attack. Accordingly, Latvia would benefit by reestablishing mandatory service, thereby creating one additional maneuver brigade in the region. Furthermore, mandatory military service would help Latvia to integrate their Russian minorities into Latvian society and possibly undermine the threat of hybrid warfare. Although Estonia and Lithuania already have mandatory service and are well ahead in this regard in effectively applying more manpower toward their defense forces, all three countries require the assistance of the remainder of the alliance to effectively convert the Baltics into a reliable NATO bastion.



## CHAPTER 5: THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION (NATO) AND THE NEW RUSSIAN STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT



NATO Exercise Anakonda. Multinational Exercise in Poland from June 7-17, 2016. This exercise included 25,000 participants from 21 nations. (U.S. Army Photo)



## THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION (NATO): UNDERSTANDING AND SUSTAINING ITS RELEVANCE TO THE UNITED STATES

**Researcher: Colonel Gary Graves, U.S. Army**

In the post-World War II climate of 1949, the United States and 11 other like-minded Western nations committed themselves to the creation of the greatest modern-day alliance the world has ever seen—NATO. In the decades following NATO's formation, the global environment changed drastically from that established after the 1945 Potsdam Agreement. The Cold War ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and modern globalization allowed the U.S. economy to grow beyond transatlantic-markets of trade and commerce. At the same time, terrorism and unconventional warfare became the modus-operandi of transnational threats attempting to abolish world order. With these changes in the global environment, some argued that NATO was no longer relevant, or even needed by the United States for the advancement of its national interests. Moreover, the world has become more volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. Therefore, it is highly probable that the United States, because of its longstanding political, military, and economic commitment to NATO, could befall the same fate as ancient Athens during the Peloponnesian War—a super-power drawn into war by its alliances, not for its own political or military objectives. Essentially, history predicts the United States will enter into a conflict, not of its choosing, or in support of its national interests, but because of its obligations to its allies in a continuously changing and unknowable global environment.

From a U.S. economic and military perspective, this risk does not outweigh the benefits NATO provides the United States. Due to U.S. fiscal constraints and reductions in U.S. Department of Defense force structure, the alliance remains vital and necessary to the U.S. *National Security Strategy* (NSS).<sup>164</sup> As a “formal institution of leading democracies that provides a forum for discussion and a vehicle for action,” NATO is a strategic enabler for the United States.<sup>165</sup> Essentially, the NATO alliance is a means to balance the expenditure of finite U.S. national resources (blood and treasure) against U.S. national interests, while at the same time promoting global, international order.<sup>166</sup>

In view of this changing geopolitical environment, and an increasingly aggressive Russia, the NATO alliance remains not only relevant, but an essential component to the protection and advancement of U.S. national interests in Europe, with ancillary effects globally. This paper acknowledges NATO's outdated mandate, which does not account for the complexities of the global security environment or the modern-day character of war, and will address these concerns through specific recommendations for the mitigation of these issues. This proposal advances U.S. national interests, while at the same time supporting the international order in the 21st century, by maintaining a strong collaborative security approach between the United States and its closest and strongest allies—the member nations of NATO. Furthermore, this paper also stipulates that the

United States must continue to: assist NATO in increasing its overall capabilities (*Means*); respond to a multitude of threats, by applying interoperable resources across all of the warfighting domains (*Ways*); and, achieve the desired political end states—deter, and if required, defeat regional sources of instability, while promoting political integration and economic interdependence (*Ends*).

NATO has a direct effect not only on U.S. policy, but also on a variety of U.S. national interests. By continuing to invest in the success and growth of the alliance, the United States will influence its national, diplomatic, and economic destiny. Moreover, by strengthening NATO, the United States guarantees continued access and influence in Europe and the around the world. From a U.S. perspective, NATO is not exclusively about mutual defense. While defense is a fundamental pillar, with respect to U.S. national interests, the alliance is arguably more focused on international access, the stability and economic prosperity created from U.S. involvement in Europe, and legitimacy. The NATO alliance has been at the center of U.S. foreign policy and power projection, while concurrently maintaining the backbone of the European security apparatus.<sup>167</sup> This assertion remains valid largely because of the potentially devastating effects a decline in either European security, or U.S./European international relations, could have on a variety of U.S. national interests.<sup>168</sup>

The United States profits from a free, democratic, and peaceful Europe.<sup>169</sup> Equally, Europe benefits from the security umbrella NATO affords its members, of which the United States contributes more than 70% of the total defense expenditures of the alliance's 28 members.<sup>170</sup> This security, provided primarily through its collective defense principle stipulated in Article 5 of its mandate—a military attack against any is an attack against them all—has correlated directly into the political and environmental stability of Europe. A safe and secure Europe benefits the economies of both the United States and the European Union (EU). More specifically, “The transatlantic economy . . . accounts for half of the global GDP [Gross Domestic Product] and nearly a third of global trade.”<sup>171</sup> For the United States, which represents 28.10% of the global economy, this translates to roughly \$17.4 trillion of U.S. national resources.<sup>172</sup> Through this staggering financial portfolio, the economic power of the United States, enriched by its sustained access to secure and stable European markets, continues to be a key foundational principle of U.S. NSS and a vital source of continuing influence overseas.<sup>173</sup>

Furthermore, the geopolitical access NATO provides is a significant strategic advantage with respect to U.S. influence and global reach. For instance, as the United States increases its interests in Africa and continues its commitment to the Middle East, “Europe’s proximity to the Middle East [and Africa] lends it geo-strategic value for American power projection.”<sup>174</sup> As stated in the 2015 *National Military Strategy* (NMS): “The presence of U.S. military forces in key locations around the world underpins the international order and provides opportunities to engage with other countries while positioning forces to respond to crises.”<sup>175</sup> For example, U.S. aircraft stationed at military installations in the United Kingdom (UK), Germany, and Italy supported military action (Operation Odyssey Dawn) in Libya in 2011. Additionally, with respect to U.S. opera-



tions in Iraq and Afghanistan, Ramstein Airbase in Germany remains a vital logistical supply hub for both personnel and equipment entering those theaters of operation for more than a decade.<sup>176</sup> In this respect, a military presence facilitates the U.S.' ability to assure its allies, cultivate new partners, and maintain a stabilizing presence globally. This enables the United States to protect Europe's populace and borders through security collaboration.



Elements of the Lithuanian Iron Wolf Brigade in 2015. (U.S. Army Photo)

From a U.S. security standpoint, NATO addresses the risk that, in “an interconnected world, there are no global problems that can be solved without the United States, and few that can be solved by the United States alone.”<sup>177</sup> By accepting this conviction, and understanding the complexities and dangers of today's global security environment, NATO provides the best solution to this dilemma: a credible, multilateral political, economic, and military mechanism to deter, and if required, defeat current and emerging threats.

This understanding highlights that NATO is, first and foremost, a political organization. NATO not only demonstrates transatlantic cooperation and solidarity between the United States and Europe, but also represents a mechanism for burden sharing as it correlates to the expenditure of national resources (blood and treasure).<sup>178</sup> From Iraq to Afghanistan, and Libya to Eastern Europe, the past decade of persistent conflict demonstrates that no nation-state alone, including the United States, can independently defeat the range of diverse threats threatening the international order.<sup>179</sup> Just as it did during the Cold War, NATO “can serve as the hub for American and European leaders to develop the ties with other institutions and non-European countries to provide for the common defense.”<sup>180</sup> Examples include efforts to address the Ebola pandemic, Russia's aggression against Eastern Ukraine, “the rise of IS [Islamic State] in Syria/Iraq, halting

Iran's nuclear program, the postwar stabilization of Afghanistan and Central Asia, and the United States 'pivot' to Asia."<sup>181</sup> The complexity and enormous cost of these efforts has necessitated the United States to reorient its geostrategic priorities and expenditures in order to address increasingly dangerous regional instabilities. The success of these efforts is not dependent on the United States alone; it is also reliant on the other members of the alliance to refocus their foreign policy and security costs, to achieve an equitable sharing of the transatlantic security burden (financial, diplomatic, and military).

From a validity/authority rationale, NATO offers the U.S. international legitimacy to act, within the framework of international law and norms, inside the global security system to protect and advance its national interests and those of its allies and partners.<sup>182</sup> As stated by former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen (2009-2014):

The combined and voluntary will of 28 of the world's strongest, sovereign democracies is an extremely powerful source of political legitimacy. Something that unilateral action or coalitions of the willing simply cannot enjoy. This carries over into our missions and operations. It attracts partners whose political support and military contributions add to our broader international legitimacy.<sup>183</sup>

"With Europe's record on democracy, human rights and the rule of law, NATO contributed to advancing global public goods that fell outside its narrow security interests."<sup>184</sup> In essence, the alliance conveys international legitimacy and authority of action (political, military, or economic) that would not, or could not, achieve sanction by the politically polarized United Nations (UN). This is possible because of the relationship between the UN Charter and the North Atlantic Treaty; in its creation, the NATO mandate reaffirmed the alliance's belief and support of the principles established by the UN.

Like the 20th-century, the 21st-century global security environment is complex, unpredictable, fiscally constrained, and comprised of multiple interconnected weak and failing states, including powerful armed groups, some of which maintain the ability to violently alter the geopolitical/strategic landscape within their own nations and in other various regions.<sup>185</sup> Because of these influences, "the United States can ill-afford to act unilaterally in such an age of advancing globalization and hybrid threats."<sup>186</sup> The United States and its policy makers can no longer focus predominantly on power politics and a position of dominance in the international system.<sup>187</sup> On the contrary, focus must be on evolving the fidelity of the international system itself, a structure of moral global citizens that endorse and advance U.S. core values, and the UN Charter.<sup>188</sup>

Former Secretary of Defense, Leon E. Panetta, reinforced this position with the following underpinning message to the Institute of Peace in 2012:

In order to advance security and prosperity in the 21st century, we must maintain and even enhance our military strength. But I also believe that the United States must place even greater strategic emphasis on building the security capabilities of others. We must be bold enough to adopt a more collaborative approach to security both within the United States Government and among allies, partners, and multilateral organizations.<sup>189</sup>

This not only validates the necessity of the NATO alliance, but also mandates a U.S. obligation to assist in the enhancement of ally/partner capabilities and capacities that are increasingly effective and interoperable. By doing so, the United States promotes the ability to shape the global security environment, while enhancing the collective ability of NATO to respond and defeat any source of regional instability.



## REDEFINING NATO . . . ENDS, WAYS & MEANS

NATO is a vital component of U.S. strategy and foreign policy with respect to the protection and advancement of U.S. national interests in not only Europe, but also the international community. While NATO's mandate may be dated, its foundational philosophy – to safeguard freedom, common heritage, civilization, and principles (democracy, individual liberty, and rule of law) – allows the alliance to endure, despite the current complexities of the global security environment.<sup>190</sup> Although NATO maintained the peace in Europe throughout the 20th century, for it to remain pertinent and effective, it needs to adapt to the threats of the 21st century.<sup>191</sup> For this to occur, the United States must continue to lead, through financial investment, and political commitment and mentorship, in order to influence the following evolution and ratification of NATO's mandate and strategy (Ends, Ways, and Means) to shape the global security environment.

## Ends.

Comparable to the original three foundational purposes stipulated in the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty, there are three over-arching resolutions for NATO. If implemented, these will concentrate and focus the efforts of the alliance, specifically with respect to a vision for collective defense, cooperative security, and crisis management—the alliance’s three core tasks. More importantly, these suggested resolutions demonstrate an enduring commitment to a multilateral approach rather than unilateral, with respect to core national interests, by each member of NATO.<sup>192</sup>

*Principle #1:* NATO should continue to encourage political dialogue and diplomacy between its members and foster a comparable interface and collaboration with the rest of the international community. This is indispensable because, similar to the global environment surrounding post-World War II Europe, reshaping:

the global order [today] will be more difficult than it was in the 1940s. [There are] . . . more countries today and norms of equality and democratic participation mean that most will demand a seat at the table. The U.S. remains the preeminent power but the gap between the U.S. and the rest is narrowing. We [the United States] . . . benefit enormously from the rise of the rest, but we [the United States] are no longer the undisputed leader of the ‘free world.’<sup>193</sup>

Even in today’s global security environment, NATO represents, figuratively, a finite geopolitical table. In literal or factual terms, the alliance is a viable mechanism for political discourse among a multitude of diverse nations which have drastically different political identities and cultures, and who view the world through very different geopolitical lenses.

Fortunately, the ability of NATO to assimilate and synergize the varied cultural beliefs of its members, focusing on common values and interests, is one of its greatest strengths. This contextualizes NATO’s soft power with respect to international relations: the ability to shape the will of other nations and actors, typically through the appeal of its access to political, military and economic institutions, and/or cultural values, to support and advance core national interests and objectives.<sup>194</sup> Although the character of the global security environment continues to evolve, international relationships, and the agreements that transpire between nations, remain a diplomatic endeavor.

*Principle #2:* NATO must enhance its ability to deter, and if required, defeat regional sources of instability, not just the military prowess of a common enemy. Unlike the Cold War, NATO no longer faces a single communist threat embodied by the Soviet Union. On the contrary, the alliance confronts modern dangers such as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, cyberwarfare, piracy, narco-trafficking, hybrid warfare, radical nationalism, and more recently, mass immigration. These problem-sets exemplify an assortment of regional sources of instability that severely influence global security, economic prosperity, and international order, and may necessitate a situationally dependent strategic response.

Conceptually and practically, in the context of a NATO strategic response, today's global security environment exemplifies the necessity for an effective response capability, namely, NATO's hard power. This entails the ability to compel or coerce the will of a state or nonstate actor, typically through the threat, or actual use, of forceful action.<sup>195</sup> Furthermore, NATO's hard power illustrates the prerequisite to expand its mandate: specifically, understanding the character of war, its impact within the different warfighting domains, and defining what constitutes an act of aggression. For example, in the framework of Article 5, "any action initiated by an external state or nonstate actor that threatens the political and economic security or territorial integrity of a NATO member will engender a collective response."<sup>196</sup> This means that NATO should maintain not just an effective military deterrent, but also a broader response capability that accounts for the potential threats that may operate in the virtual realms (i.e., cyber).

*Principle #3:* NATO needs to foster domestic governmental stability among its members. NATO's profile has transformed, especially with the incorporation of former Warsaw Pact countries into the alliance following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although the West perceived this NATO enlargement as a mechanism to provide greater stability to all of Europe, this expansion propelled multiple transitional, and somewhat weak and fragile, newly democratic states into a very mature and demanding political/military arena—a precarious position for states struggling to provide for the basic needs of its populace.

Since the end of the Cold War, and especially in the last two decades, the proliferation of weak and failing states has been the principal source of regional instability and conflict.<sup>197</sup> These states:

are unable to control all their territory, maintain a monopoly over the instruments of force or perform core functions beginning with providing security for significant sections of their populations. Moreover, they also suffer from high degrees of corruption. When these conditions become severe, a state's legitimacy seriously erodes and it can even vanish.<sup>198</sup>

Because NATO draws strength and legitimacy from its partnerships, the alliances' founding members (the original 12) should work closely with new and emerging allies to ensure the sustainability of membership criteria. By doing this, NATO not only shapes the global security environment by facilitating internal stability of its member states, but also provides an assembly of legitimate governing bodies, dedicated to the global advancement of security, freedom, prosperity, and order for the international community to emulate.

## **Ways.**

NATO's core tasks of collective defense, cooperative security, and crisis management, are the *Ways* by which the alliance applies the wide-ranging, yet finite, capabilities and resources (*Means*) to achieve the desired political objectives (*Ends*). However, in

these times of fiscal austerity, NATO members need to work more efficiently together to “develop, acquire, operate and maintain [unrivalled] military capabilities to undertake the Alliance’s essential core tasks agreed in NATO’s Strategic Concept.”<sup>199</sup> NATO interoperability is a vehicle for the alliance to enhance this effectiveness and efficiency, through shared understanding of each member’s capabilities and capacity, and mutual trust within the organization, to “swiftly react to crises in a multilateral manner with unity of purpose and effort.”<sup>200</sup>

Although NATO interoperability does not demand “identical military systems (hardware and software) or corresponding operational approaches between leading and supporting nations,” it does require a collective understanding of the entire multinational PMESII (Political, Military, Economic, Social, Information and Infrastructure) landscape, of both adversary and ally/partner equally.<sup>201</sup> This is essential to equip leaders, both political and military, at all levels, with the comprehension and forethought to make decisions, mitigate risk, and account for 2nd/3rd order effects.<sup>202</sup>

The United States has operated as part of NATO for over 65 years; however, NATO interoperability remains far from perfect.<sup>203</sup> Numerous challenges – typically manifested by a myopic and parochial approach toward multinational understanding, focusing solely on friendly/enemy capabilities, the political/military objective, and the physical characteristics of the operational environment – continue to hinder the overall effectiveness of NATO.<sup>204</sup> This inadequate approach does not account for the complexities of the present-day global security environment or NATO interoperability. It reflects outdated, linear practices and a conventional Cold War mindset mistakenly applied to the current global security environment, categorized as complex, asymmetric, and hybrid.<sup>205</sup>

To achieve NATO interoperability, members of the alliance must go further than the old adage: “See yourself, see the enemy, and see the terrain.”<sup>206</sup> Rather, member nations need to appreciate additional strategic and operational aspects not traditionally considered to operate successfully as a multinational force.<sup>207</sup> For example, alliance members must understand the standard forms of operational employment, mission command and signal/communication capabilities, and overall logistical/sustainment capacity.<sup>208</sup> Furthermore, NATO must recognize that many of the allies and partners operate under national caveats restricting their acts while deployed.<sup>209</sup> Alliance members may also preserve historically engrained frictions, shaped by common and sometimes contested national histories, which may impede operational participation and cooperation.<sup>210</sup> This multinational understanding is vital for NATO members, as it relates directly to planning considerations, collaboration, and the ability of the alliance to interoperate during the execution of its missions.<sup>211</sup>

The ability to communicate this knowledge is as important as this detailed multinational understanding between nations. Although this poses a challenge due to the nature of the alliance itself, i.e., various operating systems/procedures and language barriers, it is an integral requirement for success. By sharing essential collective knowledge, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) empowers its members by increasing situational

understanding thereby facilitating the resolution of possible misconceptions of ally or partner capabilities.<sup>212</sup> This enables informed decision-making to support the desired political end state, but more notably, builds greater trust in the alliance.<sup>213</sup>

While achieving a shared collective multinational understanding in NATO is demanding, building trust between its members is even more challenging.<sup>214</sup> As stated by General (Retired) Martin E. Dempsey, former Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff: “Building trust with subordinates and partners may be the most important action a commander will perform.”<sup>215</sup> In the context of NATO operations, building trust correlates to social discourse, personal relationships, and common understanding, all of which require time to mature in a diverse alliance such as NATO.

When operating in conjunction with NATO allies and other joint, interagency, intragovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) partners, diversity is the *modus operandi*; a common language, doctrinal terminology, planning process, collective operating system, and other military equipment are not.<sup>216</sup> These dissimilarities can lead to biases, creating fissures in alliance solidarity and hindering NATO collaboration, integration, and unity of effort.<sup>217</sup> It is crucial that all NATO members place these parochial preconceived biases aside.<sup>218</sup> Although difficult to accomplish, successful implementation will allow better incorporation of the distinctive capabilities and capacities of each NATO ally and JIIM partner; interoperability is not about achieving congruency, rather, it is about compatibility and understanding how to integrate each contributing nation.<sup>219</sup> This cultivation of trust allows NATO to operate more effectively and efficiently, achieving synergistic effects, correlating directly to strategic, operational, and tactical success. Once established, trust becomes the foremost advantage binding contrasting units or organizations together, empowering the many to act as one, and forging a unity of effort and purpose toward the accomplishment of the desired political end state.<sup>220</sup>

## **Means.**

Symbiotic to NATO’s desired political end state, the alliance requires adequate resources—financial investment, political support, and military/non-military capabilities—from its members to operate effectively in the global security environment.<sup>221</sup> This equates to the assertion that NATO must continually reorganize itself to have the necessary conventional/unconventional and select “niche” capabilities available to proactively prepare for and respond to the wide-range and varied contingencies currently confronting the alliance.<sup>222</sup> For example, the dangers range from the complex, multi-dimensional hybrid warfare employed by Russia in Ukraine, to the cost-efficient, yet potentially devastating threat of cyberwarfare by any capable actor who has the ability to interface with the cyber-domain.<sup>223</sup>

Unfortunately, of the 28 NATO nations, more than 70% of European land forces do not have the means to deploy equipment or personnel significant distances or to sustain them; this is primarily shouldered by the United States.<sup>224</sup> Furthermore, although NATO has developed a cyber-aggression response capability, there are “insufficient techno-

logical capabilities in the organization to respond to cyberwarfare.”<sup>225</sup> In essence, the alliance’s ability to respond to security challenges can only be as successful as its capabilities; NATO can maintain a strong defense, but only with adequate fiscal investment.<sup>226</sup>

This investment equates to a 2% of GDP benchmark for defense spending, of which only Estonia, Greece, Poland, the UK, and the United States achieved in 2015.<sup>227</sup> As stated by U.S. Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter:

The Transatlantic relationship and Transatlantic security is, as ever, a two-sided affair. . . . As allies, we must all accept our fair share of security responsibility to each; and as allies we all must choose to invest in, develop, and field new capabilities now and in the future.<sup>228</sup>

This emphasizes for NATO that, to effectively address the challenges and threats of the 21st century, it must modernize its response capabilities while developing new and improved technologies. To accomplish this, alliance members must increase their national defense spending to at least the 2% GDP benchmark unanimously agreed upon by alliance members at previous NATO summits, such as the Wales Summit in 2014.<sup>229</sup> Furthermore, the alliance should look to external, yet complimentary organizations, such as the EU, private industry, and other supporting alliances and partnerships, which have the expertise and resources available to augment the NATO Strategic Concept.<sup>230</sup> These investments are a critical requirement to the enduring relevance of the alliance and will provide NATO the political strength and military capability to defend its members and share the cost-burden through a multilateral, transatlantic approach to cooperative security.

It is apparent that the United States and Europe each benefit from an unequalled, mutually supporting and dependent alliance, actualized by NATO.<sup>231</sup> In today’s global security environment, the alliance faces a multitude of diverse challenges and dangerous threats, such as terrorism, nuclear proliferation, piracy, mass migration, and hybrid warfare.<sup>232</sup> Yet, the greatest danger facing the alliance is the growing sentiment of ‘American Indifference’ toward NATO, especially among the U.S.’ political elite; a result from the growing transatlantic gap between members “willing and able to pay the price and bear the burdens of alliance commitments, and those who enjoy the benefits of NATO membership . . . but don’t want to share the risks and the costs.”<sup>233</sup>

As stated by Former U.S. Secretary of Defense, Robert M. Gates, to the North Atlantic Council on June 10, 2011:

The blunt reality is that there will be dwindling appetite and patience in the U.S. Congress – and in the American body politic writ large – to expend increasingly precious funds on behalf of nations that are apparently unwilling to devote the necessary resources or make the necessary changes to be serious and capable partners in their own defense.<sup>234</sup>

This speech predicts a bleak and irrelevant future for NATO; however, the nature of the 21st-century global security environment demonstrates that the United States needs to “operate as a closely integrated joint team with interagency and multinational partners



across the range of military operations.”<sup>235</sup> A fundamental component of this conviction, especially during these times of fiscal austerity, military downsizing, and increasing globalization, is NATO—a strong and proven network of military allies capable of operating together multilaterally toward common political end states and interests.<sup>236</sup> For this reason alone, the United States should continue to invest politically, militarily, and financially in the alliance.<sup>237</sup>

Furthermore, although the U.S. military remains the world’s most resourced and accomplished fighting force, capable of sustained unilateral action virtually anywhere in the world, NATO provides the United States with the undeniable benefits of geopolitical/strategic access, burden/cost sharing, and legitimacy.<sup>238</sup> Because of this, for more than seven decades, NATO operations have been the United States’ preferred manner of applying military power toward its goals of protection and advancement of core U.S. national interests and projecting power and U.S. influence globally.<sup>239</sup>

According to the 2015 U.S. NSS, the United States is committed to leading “the world through a shifting security landscape toward a more durable peace and new prosperity”; however, in today’s global security environment, the United States requires the assistance of its strategic transatlantic allies.<sup>240</sup> The crucial multilateral capacities contained in NATO enable it to face not only the current challenges of the 21st century, but also those yet to surface. As the United States “increasingly takes a more indirect [multilateral] security role in the years ahead, NATO will continue to serve as a source of interoperable military forces that are unavailable anywhere else.”<sup>241</sup> By accepting this enduring importance and relevance of NATO, the United States will control its political, military, and economic destiny within the global security environment today and into the future.



## BACK TO BUSINESS: THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION (NATO) AND ITS CONCEPT OF COLLECTIVE DEFENSE

**Researcher: Colonel Markus Kreitmayr, German Army**

*We face enormous challenges both in our Eastern and our Southern neighborhoods. People across the Alliance are understandably worried about their security. And their security is NATO's responsibility. We must be fully committed to doing collective defence and crisis management both at the same time. We do not have the luxury to choose our challenges. We must face them all. North America and Europe must continue to stand together. To defend our common values. And to keep future generations secure.*

– NATO Secretary General  
Jens Stoltenberg<sup>242</sup>

In a speech at the German Marshall Fund in Brussels on October 28, 2014, Jens Stoltenberg, the new Secretary General of NATO, outlined his three priorities based on the key decisions taken at the September 2014 Wales Summit. Thus, focusing on the solidarity and resolve of an alliance of democracies, Stoltenberg said that he was resolved to “keep NATO strong” as a political and a military alliance.<sup>243</sup> Moreover, building on the success of partnership and enlargement programs, he added that NATO would “work with partners to bring more stability to [its] neighborhood.”<sup>244</sup> To achieve these two goals, Stoltenberg said that he was determined to “keep the bond between Europe and North America rock solid.”<sup>245</sup>

Stoltenberg described NATO's new direction in this speech and provided a vision for NATO's long-term growth in the changing 21st-century security environment. Thus, to remain strong, the Alliance “must preserve and strengthen collective defense.”<sup>246</sup> To address security challenges, NATO must send “strong signal[s] of solidarity and deterrence and engage to prevent and manage crisis [and] to stabilize post conflict situations.”<sup>247</sup> To these ends, “Allies on both sides of the Atlantic must play their full part [and] invest in [the] Alliance politically and financially.”<sup>248</sup> With this analysis, Stoltenberg addressed NATO's historical strength—its adaptability.

According to Stoltenberg, the nature of security challenges may change, however, the “winning combination” is “working together in a strong NATO.”<sup>249</sup> This incorporates three key tenets of NATO's enduring principles—cohesion, consensus, and collectiveness—and thereby links it to the centerpiece of NATO's founding document, its principle of collective defense laid down in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. According to this principle, NATO member states consider “an attack against one or several members as an attack against all.”<sup>250</sup>

To remain relevant in the changing 21st-century security environment, NATO must leverage its historical strength and focus on adaptation. It should implement a revolutionary approach that builds on the lessons of the previous 65 years and that proactively

addresses the challenges of the emerging strategic environment. NATO's successful adaptations during and after the Cold War suggest that the Alliance's two distinct, but revolutionary, approaches helped it to overcome a direct confrontation with the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact and developed NATO to a political and military Alliance that took on contemporary security challenges. NATO's strategic adaptation at the outset of the 21st century was an important step that preserved the Alliance's relevance and concludes that, to remain relevant, NATO must adapt more comprehensively in the immediate future.

NATO is also challenged by the crisis in Ukraine and a "Russia [that] has profoundly readjusted its position in the international system."<sup>251</sup> Thus, "Russia's annexation of Crimea, invasion of Donbas, and threats to Ukraine and other European countries not only menace the stability of the post-Cold War order in Europe, but also pose a fundamental challenge to the assumptions about the strategic environment that have undergirded the NATO alliance for the past quarter of a century."<sup>252</sup>

In "opposing NATO" and the European Union (EU), defining "NATO as an opponent," and changing "borders in Europe," Russia has overturned the 2010 assessment that "the Euro-Atlantic area is at peace and the threat of conventional attack against NATO territory is low." Additionally, this has spelled the end of NATO's goal of a "true strategic partnership" with Russia, at least for the mid-term.<sup>253</sup> Although a major conventional attack on NATO territory seems unlikely, the threat of a limited hybrid aggression including military means against the Baltic States has increased, and with it, the risk of escalation.<sup>254</sup>

Since such a development can undermine NATO's credibility and cohesion, threatening its relevance and challenging the core principles of its existence, NATO as a whole has "to come to grips with this reality."<sup>255</sup> This new reality in Europe has not come as "a sudden change" or "a full surprise"; as the 2008 events in Georgia indicate, it represents a "fundamental climate change" in NATO-Russia relations.<sup>256</sup> Moreover, this reality indicates Russia's application of a revised strategic approach. A core element of this emerging Russian approach leverages a "strategy of ambiguity."<sup>257</sup>

The seven components of this strategy turned out to be: "(1) consolidate political power and use nationalism to maintain domestic support; (2) capitalize on [a] long-term Information Operations (IO) campaign; (3) use subversive activity to create instability in ethnic Russian areas; (4) move a large conventional force along the borders to dissuade action against the subversives; (5) leverage ambiguity to maintain strategic flexibility; (6) violate international borders and support pro-Russian insurgents; and, (7) seize an area to achieve a limited strategic end."<sup>258</sup>

This strategy is based on “three common features of Russia’s use of military force.”<sup>259</sup> These include: leveraging “IO and cyber-capabilities,” the conduct of “hybrid, irregular warfare,” and a “landpower-centric approach.”<sup>260</sup> Moreover, as the “nuclear saber-rattling” during the annexation of Crimea demonstrated, this strategy of ambiguity seems to be backed by a nuclear element that calls for the “use of nuclear weapons early in a crisis to offset NATO’s conventional superiority” and to de-escalate the situation.<sup>261</sup>

Following the events in Ukraine, the 2014 NATO Summit in Wales changed its expected focus from the evaluation of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operations and its transition to the new Resolute Support Mission, to what was called “a pivotal moment in Euro-Atlantic security.”<sup>262</sup> According to the Wales Summit Declaration, “Russia’s aggressive actions against Ukraine have fundamentally challenged [NATO’s] vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace.”<sup>263</sup> Consequently, these actions required clear signals of NATO’s resolve and cohesion directed toward Russia, but also to keep open the door for future dialogue and consultations. Thus, the Alliance’s deliberations in Wales resulted in several decisions with regards to Russia, but also built the starting point for a comprehensive review of NATO’s future tasks and goals.<sup>264</sup>

Although scholars agree that the Wales Summit was one of the most important summits in NATO’s history, there are differences in the evaluations of the outcome.<sup>265</sup> There are critics arguing that the meeting unveiled NATO as incapable to act as a whole within the breadth of crisis management and collective defense missions. The reason is a flawed policy of financial cuts and military reductions paired with political unwillingness to use the military instrument of power resulting in an under-resourced and weak Europe with insufficient military capacity and capabilities. As such, initiatives launched in Wales seem to be a cosmetic patchwork of loosely connected activities.<sup>266</sup>

Others argue that decisions made in Wales are of particular significance since NATO’s reaction on Russia’s aggression, despite the diverse security interests of the allies, indicated great consensus and comprehension of a flexible framework of political and military activities.<sup>267</sup> Moreover, the initiatives launched indicate a fundamental reorientation of NATO far beyond the Russia-Ukraine crisis toward the role of a global security actor that has been “rejuvenated with a sense of purpose and intent,” synonymous with the notion of “NATO’s rebirth.”<sup>268</sup>

In response to Russia's aggressive behavior, NATO members agreed on a Readiness Action Plan (RAP) that provides a balanced set of actions and sub-initiatives—ranging from maritime surveillance and air policing in the Baltics, to forward positioning of equipment and small units, to increased exercise activities and the creation of a Land-power-centric brigade size Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF)—as a spear-head force of the NATO Response Force (NRF).<sup>269</sup> However, the RAP goes beyond the challenges presented by Russia “in areas further afield that are of concern to allies” and “seems aimed at satisfying all of NATO's various constituencies.”<sup>270</sup>

NATO also agreed on a Defense Planning Package (DPP) that seeks to improve NATO's military capabilities, including “cyber-defense” and “land forces readiness,” and reaffirms the already existing Framework Nations Concept (FNC) that was proposed by Germany and that seeks “to develop capabilities and forces, particularly in Europe.”<sup>271</sup> Moreover, a Defence and Related Security Capacity Building Initiative was launched, aiming to formalize security cooperation activities in Iraq and Afghanistan as part of NATO's Cooperative Security pillar. Furthermore, in terms of defense spending, allies repeatedly stressed the “importance of both quantity and quality” and “agreed to re-double efforts to achieve the respective targets.”<sup>272</sup> However, the less ambitious timeline in regards to the existing targets, as well as the debate over more appropriate ways to achieve an “equitable burden sharing,” indicated a lack of urgency.<sup>273</sup>

Moreover, the Alliance started a Partnership Interoperability Initiative to “enhance [NATO's] ability to tackle security challenges together with [its] partners.”<sup>274</sup> Finally, the Alliance introduced a revision of its integrated command structure in recognizing “the need to expand, modernize, and invest in [its] security tools” and “to adjust the command structures directing those military assets.”<sup>275</sup> This appears to be a step in the right direction, although scholars caution about a simplified “back to basics” approach that focuses narrowly on Article 5. Hence, the rapidly changing and complex security environment as well as its members' diverse interests require a NATO with a balanced approach to collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security that integrates regional and global perspectives.



German Soldiers off-loading their vehicles at railhead in Poland. (U.S. Army Photo)

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATO'S STRATEGIC APPROACH

Secretary General Stoltenberg framed NATO's strategic environment and defined its problem. His speech at the German Marshall Fund stressed that NATO does "not have the luxury to choose [its] challenges" and therefore cannot focus on one pillar of its three-folded set of tasks.<sup>276</sup> Moreover, in his foreword to the first annual report, the Secretary General recognized the need for NATO's adaptation since its strategic approach does not address the breadth of challenges in the emerging security environment.<sup>277</sup> Hence, in accordance with John Kotter's *Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change*, Stoltenberg must strive for "Establishing A Sense Of Urgency" among NATO officials and its member nations' policymakers to enable NATO to adapt in the ever changing international security environment.<sup>278</sup>

This lack of a sense of urgency suggests that several members are satisfied with the initiatives agreed on in Wales and do not envisage a comprehensive overhaul of NATO's strategic concept. Otherwise, they would have commissioned a new concept to be developed for the 2016 Warsaw Summit. In addition, there is a tendency in the Alliance to "call failure success and weakness strength."<sup>279</sup> Hence, NATO as a whole has to develop a common sense of urgency for a third revolutionary adaptation to make NATO "fit for purpose in addressing the 21st Century security challenges."<sup>280</sup>

To implement this change, creating the "Guiding Coalition" is the next important step.<sup>281</sup> This strategic leadership team should encompass Stoltenberg and at least the secretaries of state and defense from the United States, United Kingdom (UK), France, and Germany. Such a group would demonstrate cohesion through a collaborative trans-atlantic approach, strong European commitment, inclusion of diverse strategic cultures, and representation of regional and global perspectives on security and defense. Based on its history in NATO and its geostrategic location, Germany could play a major role, in particular, in terms of collective defense. It entered NATO when the country was divided and benefitted from NATO's solidarity and cohesion during the Cold War, eventually resulting in its unification in 1989. Moreover, Germany by "shaping the Wales decisions," is expected to contribute more to NATO based on "its economic strength," and has committed itself through the FNC.<sup>282</sup>

Furthermore, in developing a "Vision And Strategy," the Alliance has to review its current approach and provide a new Strategic Concept by 2018 that is embedded in a long-term *NATO Vision 2030 Plus*.<sup>283</sup> The latter cannot only focus on a Europe "whole, free, and at peace."<sup>284</sup> Instead, it must define the kind of NATO that can and should achieve this goal. In turn, this goal has to be expanded to a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace in a stable world, since in the 21st-century globalized security environment the former is not achievable without the latter, as the developments in the Middle East, North Africa (including the Mediterranean) and the Asia-Pacific (in particular, the South China Sea) demonstrate.



Based on the idea of “Communicating the Change Vision,” both the emerging new strategy and its long-term vision must be articulated and communicated to explain NATO’s “purpose, will, and intent” providing the Alliance’s strategic narrative as the “essential glue that holds [NATO’s] elites together.”<sup>285</sup> As such, the new strategy, the vision, and its supporting narrative have to be fully implemented through a set of sub-strategies and its related actions and activities. All of this must be based on NATO’s enduring principles of cohesion, consensus, and collectiveness.

Moreover, as described in Kotter’s *Eight-Stage Process of Creating Major Change*, “Empowering Broad-Based Action” through member countries’ initiatives, “Generating Short-Term Wins” through the successful implementation of agreed on programs, “Consolidating Gains And Producing More Change” through continued “renewal of [the] Alliance,” and eventually, “Anchoring New Approaches In The Culture” through a step-by-step development of a “NATO Common Collective Security Identity and Culture” should determine follow-on activities of the Alliance.<sup>286</sup>

NATO’s initial activities should focus on what Stoltenberg articulated as the core of his vision of “keeping NATO strong.”<sup>287</sup> The centerpiece and foundation of a strong NATO is its comprehensive ability to collectively defend its members. Hence, in the realm of deterrence and defense, and based on its Cold War experience, NATO has to adopt a 21st-century version of its Flexible Response strategy linked to the idea of deterrence and détente. Critics will argue that such an approach would risk a new Cold War.<sup>288</sup> However, such a view indicates a lack of urgency, since Russia already chose this path and initiated the new confrontation.<sup>289</sup> Thus, the recommended approach will be understood by Russia, and will seek to deter a further escalation, while aiming to overcome tensions by guiding both sides out of a security dilemma.<sup>290</sup>

This approach should incorporate not only conventional activities based on the RAP, but also elements that reinforce a broader approach to collective defense stressing countermeasures against Russian IO, cyberattacks, and landpower centric, hybrid aggression. Thus, in “regaining the strategic initiative” through a comprehensive whole of NATO’s governments approach, the Alliance should emphasize to “develop intelligence capabilities in the region; decrease energy dependence on Russia; focus information operations and cyber-capabilities; position long-term U.S. Landpower in the Baltics; [and] maintain credible NATO land forces in theater.”<sup>291</sup>

The EU could be an essential partner in providing soft power elements to a broader collective defense approach. Both organizations should therefore review their “Berlin Plus” arrangement and develop it into a mutually supporting agreement. Moreover, Germany could be the framework nation to comprehensively enhance NATO’s collective defense based on its existing commitments, military cooperation programs, and its landpower centric armed forces.<sup>292</sup> In addition, a review of NATO’s nuclear strategy – including its nuclear posture – is inevitable to provide a flexible, survivable, reliable, and accurate nuclear deterrence against the already existing threat posed by Russia.<sup>293</sup> With the United States in the lead for this component of deterrence and defense, a “rock

solid" transatlantic bond and the cohesion of the Alliance would be most effectively demonstrated.<sup>294</sup>

In addition, NATO should consider another round of enlargement for those countries already in the process and should include Georgia and Ukraine. NATO must not allow Russia to undermine this process by threat or use of force to prevent membership. Although the standards for all members must be the same, historic events, such as Germany's acceptance during the Cold War, provide evidence that their flexible and prudent application can improve Euro-Atlantic security in the long-run. However, NATO must come to terms with acceptable security guarantees to potential new members during their application process. Recent experience indicates that "NATO cannot invite countries to join the Alliance if it is unwilling or unable to defend them."<sup>295</sup> Existing agreements like the Partnership for Peace (PfP) framework document may be a starting point.

In all of these crisis management activities, the EU could be an essential partner based on its own interests, articulated ambitions, and available soft power capabilities. This would reinforce the 2010 Strategic Concept's aim to "fully strengthen the strategic partnership" of both organizations.<sup>296</sup> Moreover, these activities would also be in line with the goal of enhanced "cooperation between NATO and the [UN]" and would build on the founding principles of NATO.<sup>297</sup> However, crisis management as well as collective defense have to be strengthened by cooperative security activities that build on NATO's partnership programs.

Hence, NATO has to reframe its partnership concepts, aiming to offer interested global democracies a formal way of cooperation based on the experience of the ISAF mission, to support existing partners with security assurances adjusted to their strategic situation and mutual interests, and to integrate existing programs; however, these should be adapted to the changes in the emerging security environment.<sup>298</sup> A starting point for such a reframing process could be the approach proposed by a 2013 Atlantic Council report that utilized "the concepts of strategic differentiation and flexible structures" and recommended to take actions in four realms, outlined as "Military Operations; Global Commons and Transnational Threats; Education, Training, and Mentoring; [and] Strategic Cooperation."<sup>299</sup> In any case, the adaptation of NATO's approach to partnerships has to take into account the recent developments in the Alliance's Eastern flank and has to build on or transition from successful existing formats.

NATO must leverage its historical strength and has to go back to the business of adaptation. Thereby, it has to develop and implement a third revolutionary approach that builds on the lessons and success of the previous 65 years and that proactively addresses the challenges of the emerging strategic environment in the 21st century. Thus, to preserve its relevance, the Alliance has to strengthen its credibility through enhanced effectiveness built on the foundation and modern interpretation of collective defense. As Stoltenberg pointed out, "working together in a strong NATO" still is the "winning combination" for NATO's success.<sup>300</sup> This combination rests on the Alliance's enduring principles of cohesion, consensus, and collectiveness. NATO must adapt successfully

again, because this time not only is Euro-Atlantic security at stake, but also the international order that NATO has taken responsibility for, whether the Alliance likes it or not.<sup>301</sup>



U.S. and Lithuanian armored forces on the move. (U.S. Army Photo)



## WILL THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION (NATO) SURVIVE THE NEW STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT?

**Researcher: Colonel Peter Nieuwenhuis, Royal Netherlands Army**

*There is no contradiction between increasing the strength of NATO and engaging with Russia. Indeed, it is only by being strong that we can develop a cooperative and constructive relationship.*

– NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg<sup>302</sup>

NATO faces considerable challenges, in particular regarding its relationship with Moscow. It is clear that the crisis in Ukraine is a low point in its relationship with the Russian Federation. The “pivot to Asia” by the United States and the decrease of its Armed Forces’ budget, raises questions about America’s commitment to the Alliance. This apprehension is particularly felt by NATO members in the eastern part of the Alliance’s territory, especially those on the Russian border, who fear a shrinking U.S. commitment. Finally, eroding shared values, divergent national interests, and maybe even the tradition of mutual trust,<sup>303</sup> have the member states lacking a unified view and strategy. NATO should reconsider its policies and approaches for Europe in light of the current strategic environment. The question is whether NATO’s founding principles, procedures, and processes are suitable and strong enough to persuade the members to invest in the organization.

On April 4, 1949, 12 founding nations established NATO with the signing the North Atlantic Treaty<sup>304</sup> in Washington, DC.<sup>305</sup> The foundational principles for the creation of NATO were intended to deter Soviet expansion, prevent the revival of nationalist militarism in Europe through a North American presence on the continent, and encourage European political integration.<sup>306</sup> The basis of the treaty was Article 51 of the United Nations (UN) Charter, which gives independent states the right for individual or collective defense. Collective defense is at the core of the North Atlantic Treaty and provides a framework for member states to protect each other if attacked (Article 5).<sup>307</sup> The Treaty gives other European states the possibility to accede for membership and thereby contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area. However, new members are by invitation of the seated members, after a unanimous agreement (Article 10).<sup>308</sup> Since its establishment in 1949, NATO has invited 16 nations to join, for a total of 28 member states today.<sup>309</sup>

The 2014 Ukraine crisis changed the European security environment. Although Ukraine is not a NATO member, the subsequent NATO initiatives, especially the leading U.S. role, remains significant. The United States took the lead to reassure East European allies and moved to strengthen the Alliance cohesion. Yet, this, combined with NATO’s December 2015 decision to invite Montenegro to start accession talks to become the 29th member of the Alliance, brought the relationship with Russia to a new low point.

In 2014, the relationship changed dramatically with the Russian annexation of Crimea and its involvement in the violent unrest in Ukraine. Although Ukraine is not a NATO member, there is a close relationship between the country and the Alliance. As a result, NATO implemented immediate assurance measures. These measures are:

a series of land, sea, and air activities in, on, and around the territory of NATO Allies in Central and Eastern Europe, designed to reinforce their defense, reassure their populations, and deter potential aggression.<sup>310</sup>

To counter the threat that Russia poses to the region, NATO approved the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) during the September 2014 NATO Wales Summit to improve its ability to respond to hostile moves by Moscow.

Implementation of the RAP is not only challenging, but demonstrates NATO's credibility and therefore it may influence its future. The question remains, however, if all member states are willing to make the RAP a success. RAP requires a long lasting irreversible (financial) commitment and that all member states understand and accept each other's point of view or even a different approach toward solving issues. The next question is if the internal NATO processes and structures sufficiently support implementation and execution of the RAP. It needs an analysis of the financial process and the military structures to answer this question. Will the consensus decision-making model and the Open Door Policy stand the test of time? Or will Russia succeed in its strategy to break the NATO cohesion and be the winner in the end?

The transatlantic NATO link between the United States and Europe has, since the birth of the organization in 1949, been one of its strongest points. Today this seems to be its Achilles heel. NATO appears to be a strong and cohesive Alliance, but under the surface, sometimes emotions run high. Disagreements about the participation in the war in Iraq in 2003 and the disproportional contribution of the United States to NATO, compared to the European member states, are chief concerns. The question is if member states are willing to solve these issues at all. Are they willing to carry the burden of long-lasting, irreversible commitment? Are they politically willing to understand and accept each other's differing points of view?<sup>311</sup>

During the Cold War, the United States provided a security umbrella for Europe to deter Soviet aggression. After the Soviet Union collapsed, the United States was the undisputed victor and world leader. An illustration of its power at that time was the first Gulf War in 1991. With its political and economic power, the United States was able to create an impressive multinational coalition. Its strong military power enabled the United States to turn its words into deeds at any particular moment. A focused information campaign supported its efforts to influence the domestic and international powerbrokers. It even felt strong enough to use the UN to provide the legal authority to take military action. Its strength and confidence ensured a positive result in the UN Security Council with its normally annoying VETO rule. Europe had the possibility to grow under the U.S. umbrella.

However, the geopolitical, economic, and military environment has changed drastically. There is a rise of new and strong political, economic, and military powers in the form of China and Russia. New alliances like BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) are important.<sup>312</sup> Non-state actors, without Westphalian structures, are starting to gain global influence. More interstate and intrastate conflicts arising throughout the globe, such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) issue, the Ukraine crisis, tension in the South China Sea, transnational terrorism, the Russian application of ambiguity, and non-traditional war, have transformed the global environment.<sup>313</sup> It seems there is less political and economic appetite in the United States to project global power, and the decreasing defense budget supports this policy. Although the United States still wants to lead, building and empowering alliances is one of the solutions to set priorities and share the burden.<sup>314</sup> Meanwhile, Europe continues to take advantage of the American security umbrella by skimping on their own defense spending.



NATO Soldiers during the opening ceremony of Exercise Saber Strike 2015. (U.S. Army Photo)

Meanwhile, the European view of Russia tends to diverge from that of Washington, D.C. Some Europeans view their relationship with Russia as of strategic importance for bilateral relations, especially trade. "They know that it would be shortsighted to engage in permanent confrontation with Russia because it is not sustainable and it would damage European interests."<sup>315</sup> This is different for the United States, which does not share a continent, nor has strong cultural or social links, and is economically less connected with Russia. Therefore, it is easier for the United States to impose sanctions against Russia.<sup>316</sup> These opposing opinions collide behind the scenes of the most important transatlantic organization.

NATO must expand its strength and cohesion by implementing the RAP. Simultaneously, it is situated in the complex and stormy love-hate relationship between the United States and Europe. Think tanks in the United States tend to assert that NATO is "an institution not enhancing America's strategic power."<sup>317</sup> They urge the United States to "stop treating national security as a form of welfare for other states."<sup>318</sup> But it is not a one way street; the United States has regional interests in Europe, too. These are the continuation of their leading role in the region, a decrease of the financial burden to NATO to more equality, a stronger burden sharing Europe, and projecting a strong counterweight policy against a rising Russia. Conversely, European interests are the continuation of U.S. involvement, especially its resources, a strong(er) and long-lasting relationship with Russia, and more focus on the European cooperation in, for example, the European Union (EU). And, by analyzing the interests of the United States and Europe, the differences become clear.

To keep NATO relevant, both entities must show willingness to change and to invest politically, financially, and also mentally. To stay a global leader, the United States must accept that it has to share power with other power centers. In the case of Europe, it "has to be ready to accept that structures of power will develop independently of its influence."<sup>319</sup> Besides this, it has to guarantee the Alliance its focus and resources until the European allies increase their commitment. Finally, it must be prepared to accept to sometimes "agree to disagree" with the European partners. The European countries must show the willingness to increase their financial contribution to the agreed upon 2%. They need to take responsibility for their security as they do for their economic development. And, like the United States, the European countries also must be prepared to accept to "agree to disagree." NATO needs increased political dialogue and public diplomacy; Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty provides a perfect basis for this.<sup>320</sup> NATO can support national interests both in the United States and in European NATO countries. If the parties manage to overcome the differences and muster the willingness, it is possible that "NATO in the twenty-first century could be an even more significant actor on the international scene than it was in the second half of the twentieth."<sup>321</sup>

In this environment, NATO is trying to keep a grip on the situation. This is not easy. Russia is resisting NATO's enlargement policy. Meanwhile, NATO is seen as under-performing and too slow. There seems to be dissatisfaction about the consensus decision-



making policy and questions about its ability to respond with military quickly. Therefore, scholars question the internal structures, like the Supreme Allied Commander Europe's (SACEUR) role and the budgets, especially the way NATO covers its military missions and operations. Simultaneously, there also seems to be less commitment for enhanced engagement and participation, according to the United States, especially with NATO's European members. On the other hand, there has been commotion in Europe since the United States' "pivot to Asia" declaration. The European NATO members, especially those in Eastern Europe, question the United States' commitment to NATO. It looks like NATO is situated in a political impasse with no visible incentive from countries to change. The sudden deterioration of the relationship with Russia, after the annexation of Crimea and its interference in Ukraine, makes conditions even more difficult. This is especially true for the European NATO members, because for them a stable relationship with Russia is essential.

Against this background, one wonders if NATO is able to take control of the situation. Can it still be as important as in the years after its foundation? Is it able to implement the RAP and thus improve its readiness and responsiveness, and show cohesion and willingness to invest in the future of the Alliance? The relationship between NATO and Russia is essential for NATO's future and still central to defining the European-Transatlantic regional and global security configuration. To achieve this, NATO needs adjustments not only in the military domain, but also in the political, financial, and cultural domains.

To increase readiness, responsiveness, and commitment to contribute, NATO should reconsider some of its internal affairs. A better way to share the financial burden for missions and operations amongst all member states needs a review of the financial process. Probably more "common funding" in those cases will increase into a willingness to contribute. Without the loss of civilian decision power, NATO should consider empowering the role and authority of SACEUR in the military process. For example, they should be able to execute an alert-exercise for the NATO Response Force (NRF)/Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) once a year or start a planning process without North Atlantic Council (NAC) approval. NATO, together with its member states, must start the discussion about quicker national approval processes for force employment and the use of force. It is understandable that a national NRF/VJTF contribution does not mean a complete transfer of authority to NATO without any restrictions. However, these processes need to be streamlined and better aligned with the current readiness and environmental requirements.

Finally, NATO should make clear to all member countries that its survival depends on their willingness to make it a success. The organization seems stymied due to transatlantic political differences and disagreements. Both the United States and Europe should understand the vital importance of this transatlantic link, and they must act and contribute accordingly. For the United States, this means accepting Europe's different view and the importance of including Russia in future solutions. They should agree to disagree. Europe should show that they can cope with some issues themselves, and show

their willingness to commit. That makes it possible for the United States to decrease its disproportionate contribution. However, it is essential to increase all European defense budgets to at least 2% Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as soon as possible, as was pledged during the Wales Summit in 2014. Together, with the continuing U.S. commitment and its unique capabilities, NATO not only stays relevant, but can be an even more significant actor than it was before.

## CAN CYBER TRIGGER ARTICLE 5 OF THE WASHINGTON TREATY?

**Researcher: Colonel Joseph Barber, U.S. Army**

The principle of collective defense is at the heart of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) founding treaty. The principal is enshrined in Article 5. NATO invoked Article 5 for the first time in its history after the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States; NATO has also taken collective defense measures on several occasions without invoking Article 5, for instance in response to the situation in Syria and in the wake of the Ukraine crisis. What is similar in all of these instances is that the attacks or incursions were conventional from one state to another state. With the recent increase in cyber-threats, espionage, and activities, especially by states unfriendly to NATO, the question is if NATO will invoke Article 5 for a cyberattack, and what constitutes such an attack. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg told a key alliance planning summit in mid-March of 2015 that "cyber is now a central part of virtually all crisis and conflicts. NATO has made clear that cyberattacks can potentially trigger an Article 5 response." To accomplish this, "the alliance needs an innovation strategy for the coming decade."<sup>322</sup> This has prompted much debate from the NATO members as to what constitutes a cyberattack and what type of investment this will cost each country in the mutual defense of NATO. Some view Stoltenberg's comments as bravado in invoking Article 5 over cyberattacks. Yet, the 2007 cyberattack against Estonia demands action. As NATO develops its cyber-strategy, it will need to take into account several key aspects of cyber to get at the core of the problem: Defining Nation State Cyber-Espionage; Defining Nation State Cyberattacks; and Development of Defense Strategies.

One of the most difficult problems concerning cyberwarfare is actually defining what it is: cyber-espionage, cyberattack, or malicious mischief. Many NATO nations and international bodies abroad have their own definitions, but none have narrowed it down to a single consensus. Factors like the extent and nature of the damage caused by the attack (material versus physical), the identity of the attack, and how the stolen information is used all influence the perception of cyber. One set of guidelines for nation-state cyberwarfare, the *Tallinn Manual*, attempts to provide definitions, procedures, and rules governing international cyber-operations.<sup>323</sup> This manual, published in 2013 as a result of a conference hosted by the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence in Tallinn, Estonia, defines cyber-espionage as "an act undertaken clandestinely or under false pretenses that uses cyber-capabilities to gather (or attempt to gather) information with the intention of communicating it to an opposing party."<sup>324</sup> While most nations characterize cyber-espionage as specifically targeting secret information for malicious purposes, this definition does not address the intent of the attack, the nature of the information stolen, nor the damage done to the nation or business within the nation. For the purposes of International Law, the *Tallinn Manual* definition is appropriate and provides the basis to build upon and be ratified under International Tribunal. However, the obstacles facing nation-states now are legal and political ones, which is making it difficult for nation-states to defend themselves against cyberattacks. Cyberattackers are exploiting legal and political loopholes to conduct attacks against weaker nation-states

without consequence. The *Tallinn Manual* definition needs to be updated to become an all-encompassing definition to allow victim states to take appropriate countermeasures for even the slightest cyber-intrusion. This will assist in providing a definition to the difference between a host nation and individual cyberattack.

Although, in science fiction movies, cyber is used to conduct physical harm to a nation-state, which is a clear attack, in reality, 99% of cyberattacks are not physical and deal with loss of service, information, or communication. Additionally, it is hard to ascertain in many instances (without further investigation) where and who exactly conducted the attack. There are several types of attacks; one type of these is Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS), which is mainly used to disrupt a nation-state's communication systems. DDoS is favored as it requires little resources against a larger, more powerful victim. Another type of attack encompasses using malware, such as viruses, worms, Trojan horses, etc., for disrupting or destroying information, collecting information, or disrupting normal operations. Another type of cyberattack uses "logic" bombs, which lie dormant until a specific time or are triggered by an event, disguising themselves to access private information without the users consent. The final type of cyberattack is the manipulation of video/audio technology to listen in on conversations or watch operations in real time.

Open sources suggest that the most famous cyberattack in recent years is the Stuxnet virus, which was discovered in 2010. Stuxnet allegedly targeted Iranian nuclear facilities and was unique because it was the first major cyberattack that could inflict damage on the physical world as well as the digital world.<sup>325</sup> Russia in recent conflicts has used cyber effectively. In 2007, in response to Estonia removing a Soviet-era World War II monument, Russia launched a massive DDoS attack on Estonia that shut down service to major websites and disrupted communications nationwide. In 2008, before Russia sent troops into Georgia, it used DDoS to shut-down communication systems, cutting off Georgia from the outside world. Lastly, in 2014, Russia used DDoS to disable Ukraine's mobile phone communications network before employing traditional battlefield methods.<sup>326</sup> Cyber-espionage and cyberattacks do not take place in the realm of warfare. They may be seen as criminally based, but NATO, under the grand strategy, needs to take aim at making all cyber-intrusions illegal and look for countermeasures to prevent attacks.

Deterrence is a useful counter-cyber/espionage strategy for NATO and its nation-states, provided under Article 5, as long as they garner the authority and the resources to carry it out. Deterrence in reference to cyber is when a nation or NATO convinces its enemy that it is willing and able to respond to cyber-intrusions using military force.<sup>327</sup> The purpose for most nation-states is to use NATO's might, under Article 5, to scare other nation-states from committing cyberattacks in the first place and thus preventing the need for retaliation. However, in the case of Russia and their use of cyber, the advantage clearly lies in an active defense. According to Article 5, defensive force must be "necessary and proportionate" to the attack that gave rise to the right.<sup>328</sup> An active defensive network with counter-attack capabilities could provide a deterrence for Russia, if NATO responded quid pro quo. The response does not always need to be large-scale to be

successful. For example, in 2007, Estonia responded to Russia's DDoS attack simply by suspending certain services to computers with Russian Internet Protocol (IP) addresses. This simple defensive measure completely stopped all Russian cyber-incursions.

For NATO to invoke Article 5 of the Washington Treaty due to a cyberattack, it must first clearly define cyber-espionage/activity and have Jeffits definitions written into International Law. Second, they need to clearly articulate what constitutes an attack as defined by International Law. Lastly, they need to develop a playbook of defensive and offensive strategies to protect NATO countries from cyber-threats, with the invocation of Article 5 being a last resort. NATO has a way to go, especially just to catch up with the technology of modern times. Cyber has become an inherent form and part of warfare that nation-states are actively using and will into the future. Understanding this medium of warfare is inherent to establish International Law to prosecute individuals and hold nation-states accountable for transgressions. Getting all of NATO on a grand strategy will be the first step in being able to invoke Article 5 against a hostile nation. NATO will set a precedent when they do.



**CHAPTER 6: A NEW NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION (NATO)  
APPROACH: THE VERY HIGH READINESS TASK FORCE (VJTF)**



Lithuanian Soldiers at the 7th Army's Joint Multinational Training Command's Hohenfels Training Area. (U.S. Army Photo)





## DETERRENCE, PROVOCATION, OR ASSURANCE: IS THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION'S (NATO'S) VERY HIGH READINESS TASK FORCE (VJTF) THE RIGHT ANSWER?

**Researcher: Colonel Kevin Copsy, Officer of the British Empire (OBE), British Army**

NATO is facing a complexity of security challenges that threatens the alliance and the security of those countries who contribute to its collective defense. Russia's interest in Ukraine altered the security landscape in Eastern Europe, and NATO has once again returned to its core task, Article 5—the ability to unite 28 countries if a member is attacked.<sup>329</sup> NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg summarized the challenges now facing the Alliance:

Today, Europe's security environment is more complex and more unpredictable than for a generation. We live in an age of instability. With complex and interconnected challenges. We face a more assertive Russia which is destabilising the European security order. And we face extremism and violence across the Middle East and North Africa [MENA]. Fuelling the worst refugee and migrant crisis in Europe since World War Two.<sup>330</sup>



The Lithuanian Iron Wolf Brigade during a NATO Exercise. (U.S. Army Photo)

The rise in global tension led NATO to develop a strategy to realign the Alliance with the challenges stated by the Secretary General. One vital initiative is the generation of the VJTF, a “5,000 strong multinational land-based force, equipped with the appropriate air, maritime, and Special Forces, some of which are able to deploy within 2-3 days.”<sup>331</sup> The VJTF is designed to ensure NATO remains a “strong, ready, robust and responsive Alliance.”<sup>332</sup> Tasks for the VJTF include offensive operations, close air support, and responding to an attack from weapons of mass destruction. The concept is that NATO will sanction the immediate deployment of the VJTF as a crisis emerges to act as a deterrent

to further escalation,<sup>333</sup> by countering Russia's ability to conduct hybrid warfare tactics.<sup>334</sup> The VJTF concept reached its full operating capability in June 2016. Led by Spain, the Task Force was successfully tested during Exercise Trident Juncture, a major NATO exercise consisting of 36,000 troops, over 140 aircraft, and more than 60 ships drawn from 36 countries.<sup>335</sup> The United Kingdom (UK) has declared it will contribute 3,000 personnel to the VJTF when it assumes the lead of the Task Force in 2017.<sup>336</sup>

In addition to the VJTF, NATO will place a non-permanent and constantly rotating Brigade-size force of approximately 3,000 personnel deployed to the Baltic States, Poland, Bulgaria, and Germany.<sup>337</sup> The VJTF, and the increase in rotational forces, is designed to deter Russia. NATO's Secretary General put it simply: "we will have as much presence in the east as needed."<sup>338</sup>

## COUNTERING RUSSIAN AGGRESSION

At the 2014 NATO summit in Wales, the Alliance agreed to a Readiness Action Plan (RAP), which outlined a "coherent and comprehensive package of necessary measures," to largely counter an assertive Russia following Moscow's involvement in Crimea and its "subversive activity in eastern Ukraine."<sup>339</sup> The RAP has two pillars: adaptation and assurance. Adaptation, as outlined in the Secretary General's 2015 report, is to "urgently implement long-term changes to NATO's forces and command structure" and enhance the Alliance's capability to react "swiftly and decisively."<sup>340</sup> The second theme, assurance, is the continual presence of land, sea, and air capability in those territories within the Alliance that are most vulnerable, such as the Baltic States and Poland.<sup>341</sup> The creation of the VJTF is a result of NATO's adaptation, which not only provides deterrence, but also a strategic level of assurance to those states that are susceptible to Russia's aggressive, authoritarian, and nationalistic activity. The VJTF will meet this challenge by demonstrating the three core tasks of the Alliance: "collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security."<sup>342</sup>

The VJTF concept is not new. From 1961 onwards, NATO's answer to the threat on its flanks rested on an often forgotten multinational unit called the Allied Mobile Force (AMF). Although designed as a Joint force, the AMF was based around a land component of Brigade strength. It had the ability to deploy rapidly to Norway or Turkey to swiftly deter any Russian aggression. Like the VJTF, the AMF was a political tool to demonstrate Alliance solidarity.<sup>343</sup> An attack on the AMF was an attack on the Alliance. The VJTF is a modified concept of the AMF, designed to counter the security challenges in the North. However, NATO has now expanded, making the deployment and employment of this multinational force a possible strategic vulnerability to NATO. Conversely, the VJTF is an important statement of political unity that is part of a larger and more capable force that can deter or intervene in a crisis.

## WHAT IS NATO'S VJTF RESPONSE FORCE TO DO?

The VJTF is at the heart of a graduated reaction capability called the NATO Response Force (NRF), which comprises approximately 40,000<sup>344</sup> personnel. The VJTF is the lead brigade in one of three multinational brigades within the NRF construct, with each one rotating annually into the high-readiness role.<sup>345</sup> Once the VJTF brigade is deployed, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) will authorize the deployment of the two remaining NRF brigades (called the Immediate Follow-On Forces Group [IFFG]).<sup>346</sup> In addition, the VJTF/NRF is augmented by a further Standing NATO Maritime Naval Group (SNMG), an increased air component (in the case of the Baltics, this force is based on the current Baltic Air-Policing Mission), a special operations force (SOF), and finally a chemical, biological, and nuclear (CBRN) defense regiment.<sup>347</sup> The NRF fills the gap in ability to swiftly deploy to a crisis on the Alliance's extremities (Scandinavia, Baltics, or Turkey) since the disbandment of the AMF.

The NRF is touted as a "highly ready and technologically multinational force,"<sup>348</sup> that is based on a framework nation for 12 months at a time. Once deployed, it will operate under a NATO Joint Force Headquarters at Brunssum or Naples with the capability to conduct three distinct roles. Firstly, the VJTF is to provide an immediate collective defense response capability prior to NATO ordering a full mobilization. Secondly, the Task Force could conduct "crisis management [and] peace support operations," or "[d]isaster relief and the protection of critical infrastructure."<sup>349</sup>

The NRF initiative is messaging two different audiences. The VJTF is a deliberate show of force and deterrent aimed directly at the Russian Government. Secondly, the Task Force provides assurance to those smaller NATO countries in Eastern Europe that are most concerned about Russia's stance in international affairs – a move that is painfully evident in the Ukraine crisis.<sup>350</sup> The VJTF is clearly a political instrument. Should a crisis continue to escalate, thereby requiring the NRF to deploy, then it would no longer be political symbolism, but warfighting, where the capability and not the nationality of the force will count.<sup>351</sup>

The VJTF and NRF are tools to ensure escalation dominance, and implicit deterrence, similar to those used during the Cold War. Escalation dominance, as defined by the European historian Xavier Pinat, is when a nation (or NATO) can deploy dominant capability "at each successive rung up the escalation ladder, all the way up to the top rung of nuclear weapons."<sup>352</sup> At its lowest rung, it is hoped that a multinational force such as the VJTF is able to act as a "tripwire" deterrent, which if crossed, and the VJTF is attacked, it is deemed an attack on the Alliance as a whole. A "tripwire" approach is nothing new, as the American economist and foreign policy advisor, Thomas Schelling, highlighted during the Cold War: "The garrison (of American troops) in Berlin is a fine collection of soldiers as has ever been assembled, but excruciatingly small. What can 7,000 Americans do. . . . Bluntly, they can die. They can die heroically, dramatically and in a manner that guarantees that the action cannot stop there."<sup>353</sup> The similarities between the multinational Berlin brigades as a tripwire and the VJTF are stark. The VJTF is but one activity

within a larger NATO demonstration of solidarity – but these notable initiatives are not part of a long-term strategy.

## **NATO – TACTICS WITHOUT STRATEGY: THE DIVERGENCE BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH**

“NATO is a political organization with a military purpose”<sup>354</sup> that is increasingly focused on providing political assurance to the new NATO members in Eastern Europe. Not all European countries share the same enthusiasm. Key Western European allies are “disinterested in adding fuel to Putin’s fire,”<sup>355</sup> and would rather have NATO resources focused on combating terrorism and mitigating the flow of refugees from MENA and affecting NATO’s Southern flank. Despite this threat emerging from MENA, NATO officials admit, “There is no southern strategy, not yet.”<sup>356</sup> The U.S. European Command and NATO’s Allied Command have provided negligible military support to the south, such as supporting the deployment of a NATO Maritime Task Group in March 2016 to “tackle criminals responsible for smuggling refugees and migrants across the sea between Turkey and Greece.”<sup>357</sup> Turkey, who is a key NATO member, recognized the threat emerging from MENA by requesting an Article 4 meeting to discuss amongst the allies how to address the crisis.<sup>358</sup> Although the crisis has been debated amongst the NAC, there is little political appetite for NATO to become embroiled with European Union (EU) domestic concerns. This view is perhaps short-sighted.

Until now, NATO has been expanding without identifying the capabilities needed to defend its new Alliance partners.<sup>359</sup> The Alliance’s newest members (such as the Baltic countries) “lack a large military on their soil and as a result they depend upon NATO (predominantly United States) assistance.”<sup>360</sup> The rapid expansion to 28 countries, with Montenegro joining in 2016, is exposing a vulnerability within NATO caused by the divergent security perspectives amongst the Alliance’s European members and that of the United States.

## **FACING THE THREAT TO SOVEREIGNTY NOT TERRITORY**

The Wales Summit in September 2012 focused on avoiding an unlikely scenario – an unprovoked Russian military attack against a NATO member.<sup>361</sup> However, they did not address two larger security concerns: “non-military exploitation by foreign actors of NATO members’ internal vulnerabilities and the security vacuum of European countries not belonging to NATO.”<sup>362</sup> These two threats warrant some form of response, given Russia’s ability to avoid confrontation by inciting an “inner decay” within a European society – Eastern Ukraine is a constant reminder of that strategy. Yet, NATO believes its new VJTF can address these threats, asserting: “Any attempt to violate the sovereignty of one NATO member nation will result in a decisive military engagement with all 28 allied nations.”<sup>363</sup>

Russia's strategy of targeting sovereignty and not territory is called "hybrid war," which the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg defines as "the wide range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures designed to disrupt, confuse, damage, or coerce."<sup>364</sup> Ultimately, hybrid warfare seeks to exploit the seams and cracks within a society and its alliances. For NATO, this could mean that Russia is able to exploit the seams between the three core roles of the Alliance, which are "collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security."<sup>365</sup>



NATO leadership—a demonstration of political unity.<sup>366</sup>

NATO has yet to refine how it will address the advent of hybrid threats. It is perhaps here that the EU can take the lead. The EU has many soft levers of power to deal with hybrid challenges: socio-political, economic, trade and energy policies, and financial and economic sanctions. In terms of capacities, the EU is able to focus on a crisis where the state is threatened and extremist fighting continues.<sup>367</sup>

The VJTF could play an important supporting role in a hybrid scenario. Conceptually, NATO has three tasks in a hybrid security crisis: deterrence, defense, and de-escalation. The reinvigorated NATO that emerged from the 2014 Wales Summit is already expanding to include intelligence, early warning, increased cyber-defenses, and an efficient decision-making process for the Alliance.<sup>368</sup> These developments will complement any EU initiative that is designed to counter a hybrid threat. In addition, the deployment of the VJTF will reduce pressure on a host government, theoretically allowing that

government to concentrate on non-military aspects of the threat it faces.<sup>369</sup> For example, the VJTF could bolster domestic police forces to maintain internal security, provide improved border defenses, SOF, or humanitarian support, thereby denying an actor, such as Russia, the pretense it needs to “protect” the Russian diaspora.<sup>370</sup>

NATO needs to refine the VJTF and RAP strategy to counter the hybrid threats in the north and south. The Alliance should also seek to broaden its perspective and cooperate with civilian organizations and be less militarized in its thinking. However, NATO must not try to replicate those civilian capabilities and tasks that the EU is able to implement to counter a hybrid threat.<sup>371</sup> Addressing the hybrid threat will be a significant challenge for NATO, as the last Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) General Philip Breedlove cautioned, the VJTF “should not militarize hybrid warfare,”<sup>372</sup> over concerns that NATO’s actions may escalate beyond an irreversible tripwire into conflict. Such concern is warranted, hence the need to ensure any decision to deploy the VJTF/NRF is swift, well-thought-out, and legitimate.

## COMMAND AND CONTROL OF THE VJTF

Analysts question if the 2-7 days to deploy the VJTF is quick enough, especially since it took only 30 hours for Russia to seize its operational and strategic objectives in Crimea. Given the operational agility demonstrated by Russia, a week to decide if NATO should deploy to reinforce a member of the Alliance is simply too long. This plays to Putin’s strategic ambiguity,<sup>373</sup> his unity of command, and interior lines of supply and reinforcement.<sup>374</sup> Therefore, NATO must find a way to speed up its decision-making process. As Putin reportedly said, “If I wanted, Russian troops could not only be in Kiev in two days, but [also] in Riga, Vilnius, Tallinn, Warsaw or Bucharest too.”<sup>375</sup> With such a stark warning, NATO must devise a way to seize or quickly regain the initiative.

The decision to deploy the VJTF lies with the NAC, a 28-nation political decision-making organization based in Brussels, Belgium. The VJTF consists of many countries, with each one providing a vital capability that is interdependent on the other. The force is so integrated that, should an Alliance VJTF member veto the mission, the deployment of the Task Force is stopped in its tracks.<sup>376</sup> The NAC is aware of this challenge, and as a result, SACEUR has been granted the authority to “alert, stage, and prepare” forces prior to seeking NAC approval.<sup>377</sup> The NAC would then assume political control of the escalating situation and give direction on the deployment of the remaining NRF brigades. Although encouraging, this move does not compress the lengthy decision-making process. One option is to delegate the deployment of the VJTF to the Secretary General. This would be a variation to the 1999 Kosovo crisis where the Secretary General was delegated the authority to expand the target lists.<sup>378</sup>

Despite the challenges, there are reasons to be optimistic—NATO took less than a day to agree on an Article 5 response following 9/11. However, should the Alliance be faced with less stark aggression, the need for consensus may slow any appropriate military response against a quicker adversary.<sup>379</sup> As the NATO Secretary General Jens

Stoltenberg warned, “It doesn’t help to have a force ready to move in 48 hours if it takes 48 days to take a decision to make it move.”<sup>380</sup>

Lastly, there needs to be a frank discussion on how NATO can swiftly operate without United Nations (UN) legitimate authorization. Article 5 of the Washington Treaty is supported by Article 51 of the UN Charter—the right of individual or collective self-defense in the event of armed attack. Conversely, any NATO sub-Article 5 deployment (to address a hybrid threat for example) must be kept away from the UN where Russia could use its veto against military activity.<sup>381</sup> The absence of UN legitimacy to deploy may concern some European NATO members.

## HOW TO OVERCOME THE LOGISTICAL COMPLEXITY

A rapidly deployable intervention force is needed to project NATO’s power quickly. Creating the VJTF is a good start; however, the follow-on forces are just as critical.<sup>382</sup> Like other expeditionary operations, the initial force package must have the ability to be self-sustainable for a period before it requires replenishment. The arrival of a larger follow-on force will only increase the demand on NATO’s logistical apparatus, as well as stretch the patience and capability of whichever NATO country Task Force is deployed. This issue has been partially resolved through the generation of eight new NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU) that have been established in Eastern European countries to support planning, training, and reinforcements.<sup>383</sup> Multinational Corps North East, a revitalized NATO headquarters based in Szczecin, Poland, is coordinating NFIC implementation.<sup>384</sup> However, as NATO learned during the Cold War, the pre-positioning of stock can also hamper the allies since it determines an area of deployment and a key node that may be targeted.<sup>385</sup> In addition to pre-positioning stock, the force must have the ability to swiftly deploy once the NAC gives authorization. Here the United States plays a key role. The United States currently does not provide forces for the VJTF (these are European only), although the Pentagon has pledged to deploy the Task Force using American strategic airlift if required. Hopefully, with the provision of U.S. airlift and the recent commitment by NATO countries to develop airfields and ports, the NFIUs will be able to ensure the swift arrival and integration of the VJTF and NRF.<sup>386</sup>

Hopefully, NATO has learned from the troubled history of the AMF. The strategic movement of the AMF was a significant weakness—one that was never resolved.<sup>387</sup> The AMF did not have troops rotating through the commitment; some NATO countries designated them, with each one operating in nationally defined areas of operation.<sup>388</sup> Conversely, the VJTF consists of multinational forces that rotate every year with little or no consistency in the capabilities being offered. Also, being multinational, the force must deploy from various countries and come together as a coherent force. As a result, the multinational VJTF organization not only makes the logistical burden significant, but it may also undermine the overall deterrence effect of the VJTF.<sup>389</sup> It will simply take too long and is too complex. Although there are concerns, the VJTF is necessary to face NATO’s uncertain security dilemmas. Importantly, the VJTF demonstrates Alliance cohesion and resolve at a time when NATO may be deemed irrelevant.

## NATO'S RELEVANCE AND THE NEED FOR THE VJTF

The seizure of Crimea and Russian activity in Ukraine acted as an awakening for NATO, which until then was an Alliance that won the Cold War and was concluding its mission in Afghanistan. The 2014 NATO Summit in Wales brought the Alliance together once again to face the multiple security challenges through “resources, capabilities, and the political will required to ensure our Alliance remains ready to meet any challenge.”<sup>390</sup> The new SACEUR, General Curtis Scaparrotti, recently reinforced this position as he assumed his new appointment in April 2016. He said, “even with the end of the Cold War, our NATO Alliance . . . remains vital as we face a new set of challenges,” identifying one of them as “a resurgent Russia, striving to project itself as a world power.”<sup>391</sup> The agreement to generate a VJTF is only one response by NATO toward Russia’s belligerent stance and the wider insecurity facing the Alliance. Secretary General Stoltenberg also announced in May 2016, “an increase to NATO presence in the eastern part of [the] Alliance” (predominantly Turkey), in addition to “more air patrols, aerial surveillance, and deployment of anti-missile defenses.”<sup>392</sup>



The role of the U.S.: strategic airlift.<sup>393</sup>



If NATO is to remain relevant, it must also address the blurred area between Article 5 and Article 4, and the rise in hybrid threats. Articles 4 and 5 of the 1949 Washington Treaty are:

Article 4

The Parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened.

Article 5

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.<sup>394</sup>

As Russia has ably demonstrated in Ukraine, it is able to create an “inner decay” of a victim country, which negates the need (possibly) for a conventional Russian incursion. NATO should end the distinction between the two Articles, not in legal and decision-making terms, but in the ways and means to fulfill its strategic objectives. Moreover, NATO should move away from the pure military style of deployment and seek a more whole-of-society approach, in order to have greater interaction and coordination with the EU, which is better suited (in a complimentary way) to work alongside NATO in the European neighborhood.<sup>395</sup> As a result, a more robust and adaptable VJTF is needed to tackle the kaleidoscope of security challenges the Alliance now faces.

## SHOULD THE UNITED STATES LEAD THE VJTF?

The role of the United States – politically and militarily – in NATO is vital for the existence of the Alliance. The primary contributors of the VJTF are European nations, with the United States providing high-end military assets, such as: airborne intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), combat sustainment, mid-air refueling, and strategic lift to deploy the force.<sup>396</sup> These capabilities are already based in Europe and would be re-assigned from the U.S. European Command as part of a larger military investment in Europe. Indeed, NATO’s new “deterrent” posture coincided with a recent announcement by the U.S. Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter, that the Pentagon will provide \$3.4 billion of funding for forces stationed and training in Europe.<sup>397</sup> Carter believes, “This is the first chapter of a very good book for Europe in terms of U.S. commitment.”<sup>398</sup>

Given the likely slow decision-making of the NAC to launch the VJTF, it is possible that a large part of the Task Force could be American.<sup>399</sup> Such a move would be easy to implement. The SACEUR is also the commander of the U.S. European Command. He

has the requisite legal authorities to reduce readiness and commence a deployment of U.S. Army Europe (USAEUR) elements, with its commander assuming the immediate role of NATO Land Component Commander, which would be augmented by NRF elements as they deploy. This move would ensure NATO maintains its edge over Moscow should other NATO members hesitate to deploy the VJTF.<sup>400</sup>

It is pivotal the United States remain involved in Europe, despite recent American domestic criticisms over some European countries “free-loading” or “not pulling their weight.”<sup>401</sup> Such comment is perhaps unfair. The VJTF is primarily focused on a deployment to the Baltics. Each Baltic State has a small military (although Estonia exceeds the NATO standard of spending 2% of its Gross Domestic Product [GDP] on defense). Yet, despite their size, these NATO members have demonstrated their commitment to the Alliance by contributing significantly to the NATO mission in Afghanistan, and the generation of the VJTF and the NFIUs. Elsewhere, other NATO countries such as Turkey, Italy, Greece, and Spain have all deployed significant assets to stem the consequences of the protracted conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Libya. It is because NATO’s European states are distracted by the migrant and Eurozone crisis that it is important the United States plays an active role in the strategic deterrence of Russia. The United States should not undermine its deterrent posture by reducing its forward presence in Europe or their overall military commitment to NATO. Although maintaining such a presence is expensive, the rewards of peace and stability in Europe is worth it.<sup>402</sup>

## MANAGING THE RUSSIAN REACTION TO THE VJTF

The deployment of the VJTF and its exercises in Eastern Europe will lead to a direct increase in the NATO military footprint, which is a particular sore spot for Russia.<sup>403</sup> Some European countries worry that Russia will see the RAP as a provocative measure that will only escalate the already high tension in the region.<sup>404</sup> The Russian’s claim that, ever since the re-unification of Germany, NATO has abandoned the agreements made in the Conventional Forces Europe Treaty, which states that forces would not be based alongside Russia’s border. The NRF/VJTF and other NATO initiatives are, as Moscow sees it, a breach of trust.<sup>405</sup> In addition, the expansion of NATO members and recent U.S. announcement to increase rotational deployments along NATO’s eastern flank is playing to Putin’s mindset of being right.<sup>406</sup> As a result of NATO action, Russia has responded.

NATO conducted over 300 exercises in 2015.<sup>407</sup> The larger exercises consisted of 6,000 personnel. Over the same period, Russia had deployed 100,000 across the Russian border with Europe. Added to this impressive figure is an unknown number based in Crimea and subversively operating in Eastern Ukraine. Although a considerable force, it is assessed that the Russian military operating along Europe’s border include significant numbers of unmotivated, non-paid or scarcely trained conscripts. However, it is still a large force that could easily ignite a crisis.<sup>408</sup>

The implementation of the VJTF has been called “destabilizing” by the Russian Foreign Ministry, which claims the NATO Alliance is “designed to contain Russia.”<sup>409</sup>

Indeed, Russia describes NATO's RAP as "a major threat that requires Russia to acquire new weapons, modify its military doctrine, and take other expensive and unneeded responses."<sup>410</sup> NATO may feel Russia's reaction is expensive and unnecessary, but in early May 2016, Russia's Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced Moscow will establish up to three new military divisions in the West and South by the end of 2016 to counter "the buildup of NATO forces in close proximity to Russia's border."<sup>411</sup>



Russia's military transformation.<sup>412</sup>

A major issue is that Russia doesn't have the same strategic culture as NATO. On one hand, NATO's RAP, which includes the VJTF, sends a strong message of assurance to the newer members of NATO such as the Baltic States and Poland. Conversely, Putin does not see the RAP as a reason to de-escalate in the region, hence the Russian military transformation. Therefore, NATO must continue to engage in a transparent manner and maintain a balance between being "convincing" without "provoking" Russia.<sup>413</sup>

Clearly, the RAP must not be abolished because of Russia's sensitivities. To do so would demonstrate a sign of weakness amongst the Alliance, a fracture that Putin would exploit. Instead, Russia should be encouraged to look inwards for its security threats; it has "demographic challenges, intermittent terrorist threats, and an economy overly dependent on natural resource exports."<sup>414</sup> These areas are the source of Russia's instability, not the 3,000 personnel as part of NATO's VJTF.

As Colonel Douglas Mastriano, a U.S. Army military historian observes, “of concern, Moscow need not confront NATO to get what it wants. By leveraging deception, the Kremlin can retain strategic agility and gradually assert influence over its neighbors without actually going to war with NATO.” He adds, “With such an approach, Russia can secure its strategic objectives with minimal risk.” The ultimate goal, however, would be to discredit NATO, thereby threatening the security of the Baltic States.<sup>415</sup> To do so would drive a wedge between NATO and the EU, a strategy advocated by the ancient Chinese strategist Sun Tzu as follows: “when he is united, divide him . . . attack his strategy, disrupt his alliances.”<sup>416</sup>

## **CONCLUSION: ISSUES FOR NATO TO CONSIDER**

Although NATO has been involved in costly adventures in Afghanistan, Libya, and the Balkans, the Alliance has now returned to its original core role of Article 5 of the Washington treaty. VJTF/NRF commitment is the most significant initiative by NATO in adapting to its security challenges. Although preparing for the Article 5 contingency, NATO must recognize that most risk occurs at the Article 4 level through hybrid activity. To counter the hybrid threat, the VJTF/NRF can help alleviate the pressure of domestic governments and the EU. To make the VJTF credible, more work is required to mobilize the full diplomatic, military, economic, finance, and law enforcement capabilities of NATO, especially if faced with a hybrid threat. NATO understands “its need to change—change the way it operates, change the way it invests, change the way it plans, and change the way it makes decisions to deal with these new security circumstances.”<sup>417</sup>

Given Russia’s involvement in Crimea and Ukraine, and its mounting assertiveness in the Baltic States, the VJTF/NRF will be a vital capability in the defense of NATO allies. Key is the political cohesion to ensure the VJTF can swiftly deploy. There must be unity, confidence, and resolve in meeting the challenge, such as delegating appropriate authorities to NATO Secretary General and SACEUR. The challenges of command, control, and logistics of a diverse multinational force are formidable, but NATO has continually adapted over its 65-year history. However, with Russia-NATO relations at their lowest point since the Cold War, it is critical the Alliance reiterates the intentions of the NRF to ensure no Russian backlash.

NATO has already proven itself in the most demanding of operational environments. The Alliance brought peace and stability to the Balkans and Kosovo, and came out of the Afghan International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission stronger and refined by fire. Here, on the Afghan fields of battle, the new NATO members proved their military capability and political resolve as dedicated supporters of the Alliance. Moreover, the ongoing training and deployments taking place amongst the Alliance members means that the VJTF, although it may have its challenges, will demonstrate a reinvigorated and capable NATO.

## CHAPTER 7: ADAPTING POLICY TO THE NEW RUSSIA



Russian Military Parade at Red Square in 2016. (Kremlin Photo)



## ADAPTING U.S. POLICY TOWARD THE NEW RUSSIA

**Researcher: Colonel Ryan Wolfgram, U.S. Army**

When former President Obama took office in 2009, he instituted a new approach toward Russia. This was evident in former Vice President Biden's visit to Munich, where he declared, "it's time to press the reset button and to revisit the many areas where we can and should be working together with Russia."<sup>418</sup> Ruth Deyermond suggested that "the reset aimed to reverse the severe decline in U.S.-Russia relations which had taken place during the presidencies of Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush."<sup>419</sup> Although Russia was under the leadership of Dmitry Medvedev, Vladimir Putin really retained the key to power. Yet, President Medvedev and President Obama seemingly advanced this so-called reset and promoted a foreign policy that appeared somewhat neoliberal. For the moment, it seemed that the reset was working. As Ms. Dreyermond declared, "The signing of a new arms control treaty, Russian assistance on Afghanistan, greater Russian cooperation on Iran, the Russian decision not to block United Nations (UN)-sanctioned action in Libya in spring 2011, and Russia's accession to the WTO [World Trade Organization] are all indicators of this success."<sup>420</sup>

However, the failures from this policy outweigh the achievements, thereby making the reset an inhibitor to an effective strategy for countering Russian aggression. For example, the annexation of Crimea, violations of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty,<sup>421</sup> and the shoot down of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17,<sup>422</sup> stand as a stark testimony in the failure of this policy. These forced the United States to reevaluate its foreign policy toward Russia. Two actions conducted by Russia's military have validated Vladimir Putin's agenda as well as provided some insight into his grand strategy. Gustav Gressel says that, "Russia's military modernization and re-emergence as an expansionist, revisionist actor on Europe's eastern borders has profound strategic consequences for Europe."<sup>423</sup> These actions are a precursor of how Vladimir Putin intends to achieve his strategic ends.

The first action occurred as a result from the war with Georgia. The effects of this affected the Russian economy, as noted by Jacek Wieclawski:

Quite surprisingly for the Russian governing elite the intervention in Georgia generated a massive outflow of capital from the Russian market resulting in a huge drop of indexes on the Moscow Stock Exchange and depreciation of the Russian ruble. The outflow reached about \$130 billion at the end of 2008 and Russian attempts to stabilize ruble largely failed.<sup>424</sup>

Mr. Gressel says that, "Russian forces were slow in mobilising and deploying to the theatre. . . . Tactical and operational planning was poor and inflexible, as was leadership. Situation awareness was poor, and led to many incidents of 'friendly fire'."<sup>425</sup> Therefore, while Russia took some time to learn from its military blunders, it openly challenged U.S. foreign policy in one area – the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF).

Josh Rogin, a senior correspondent for the Daily Beast on national security affairs, reported the first documented occurrence:

November 27, 2012, two top Obama administration officials held a closed-door hearing . . . acting Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Rose Gottemoeller and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Global Strategic Affairs Madelyn Creedon told lawmakers that Russia had violated the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF).<sup>426</sup>

This was, in many ways, the true reemergence of Vladimir Putin as the President of Russia and his exercising of control that even threatened the civil liberties of its citizens. BBC News wrote, “US state department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said the US was ‘concerned about both the verdict and the disproportionate sentences . . . and the negative impact on freedom of expression in Russia’.”<sup>427</sup> This violation and others directly challenged U.S. interests as listed in the *National Security Strategy* (NSS): “American values are reflective of the universal values we champion all around the world – including the freedoms of speech . . . [the right to] choose leaders democratically; and the right to due process and equal administration of justice.”<sup>428</sup> These events, along with the modernization of Russia’s military, adaptation of tactics, and the education of its leaders to confront the West, was the beginning of the end for President Obama’s reset policy. The policy completely collapsed with the annexation of Crimea and the ongoing Russian-led war in Eastern Ukraine.

## EXPANSIONIST AGENDA REVISITED

The encroachment of Eastern Ukraine was the next step in Mr. Putin’s grand strategy for an expansionist, revanchist agenda. To gain insight as to why Vladimir Putin is pursuing this agenda, it is helpful to consider a recent study that looked at the population of ethnic Russians now living in Ukraine. The study stated, “Most people living in the eastern part of the country hardly knew any Ukrainian and preferred to speak Russian. All these people suddenly became strangers in their own land.”<sup>429</sup> Mr. Putin wants to reconnect Russians to Russia, saying in a recent interview with *60 Minutes*:

In an instant 25 million Russian people found themselves beyond the borders of the Russian state, although they were living within the borders of the Soviet Union. Then, all of a sudden, the [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] USSR collapsed – just overnight, in fact. . . . And all of a sudden, they turned out to be outside the borders of the country. You see this is a huge problem. . . . Do you think it’s normal that 25 million Russian people were abroad all of a sudden? Russia was the biggest divided nation in the world. It’s not a problem? Well, maybe not for you. But it’s a problem for me.<sup>430</sup>

The Russian president is using the diaspora to exploit a vulnerability in the region via a proxy separatist movement. With this in mind, Russian General Valery Gerasimov (Army Chief of Staff) asserted, “that the involvement of the population’s protest potential was becoming a new method for carrying out combat operations.”<sup>431</sup>



Stephen R. Covington goes on to say, "Russia today is a system change power. Putin's breakout strategy is designed to destabilize, and the approach seeks to unfreeze frozen conflicts, break rules, and foster tensions where useful to accelerate the melting away of Europe's proven security principles and rules."<sup>432</sup> The Russian Chief of Staff agrees with this emerging Russian military approach; Gerasimov states that non-military versus military methods are his focus:

He makes the important comment that non-military measures are occurring at a rate of 4:1 over military operations. This is an important point, and one that encourages the use of surrogates. Covert operations, to include information warfare measures and special operations forces [SOF], accompany such methods.<sup>433</sup>

Though this strategy is not new, it brilliantly exploits ethnic divides to create a line of buffer zones around Russia's borders. This is what Dmitri Trenin calls, "liberating the territory of Novorossiia."<sup>434</sup>

The vision Mr. Putin has for Russia is as a powerful regional hegemony with the ability to threaten the very stability of Europe. Understanding this expansionist agenda, in light of the insolvent U.S. reset policy, demonstrates that the West is overdue for a viable policy and strategy. This reevaluation is necessary not only because of the war in Ukraine and the occupation of Crimea, but also Russia's continued violation of treaties and agreements. The growing list of Moscow's broken promises and treaty violations include the Budapest Memorandum, the INF, and the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), among others.

## **U.S. POLICIES**

In light of the breach of treaties and violations of international borders, the United States must act swiftly to counter this assertive Russian policy. Before being able to grapple with this, however, the United States needs to act to get its own house in order. Among the chief obstacle is its annual budget as encapsulated by sequestration or better known as the Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011.<sup>435</sup> Mr. Kogan, a senior fellow with the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, states that, "The Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011 imposed caps on discretionary programs reducing funding by more than \$1 trillion over the ten years from 2012 through 2021."<sup>436</sup> Though a budget passed, providing the Department of Defense the necessary funds to meet identified requirements, it will expire in 2017. If a follow-on budget does not pass, then the constraints listed in the BCA of 2011 will reduce the Department of Defense's ability to accomplish U.S. objectives during the remaining years. This will affect modernization and training and trigger additional reductions in force structure, thereby creating an opportunity for a potential adversary to challenge the United States.

Russia has demonstrated that it will no longer abide by the INF. Of this, *The New York Times* reporter Michael Gordon said: "The United States has concluded that Russia violated a landmark arms control treaty by testing a prohibited ground-launched cruise

missile.”<sup>437</sup> This undermines cooperation for nuclear arms control,<sup>438</sup> and can trigger an arms race. A recent article published in *Russia Direct* stated:

that the head of the Russian delegation at negotiations discussing military security and arms control, Anton Mazur, announced that as of March 11, Moscow will cease its participation in the Joint Consultative Group within the framework of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE). In this manner, Russia has withdrawn from the treaty that it suspended back in 2007.<sup>439</sup>

The CFE limits military force structure and thereby prevents the United States and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) the ability to counter Russian aggression.<sup>440</sup> With Russia no longer limiting its behavior within the confines of the INF, and if the remaining signatories continue to abide by the treaty, they are not only risking the credibility of U.S. policy, but also leaving exposed the credibility of NATO.

The U.S. NSS is clear on its position regarding security and unequivocally states that, “The first is the security of . . . allies/partners and the second is the international order advanced by U.S. leadership that promotes peace, security and opportunity.”<sup>441</sup> These core interests highlighted in both the *Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR), soon to be called the *Defense Strategy Review* (DSR), and the *National Military Strategy* (NMS) show our written resolve to pursue two of the six national security interests nested within the NSS.

The two interests listed in the QDR and the NMS, “the security, confidence, and reliability of our allies; and the preservation and extension of universal values,” are vital to the United States.<sup>442</sup> In reviewing these documents, there is a consistent theme of building partner capacity (BPC). BPC is the U.S. military working with allies and partners to provide for the defense of their interests while protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of their homeland. The United States enables this capability through exercises and training designed to assist in raising the level of proficiency for these militaries. Another consideration in regards to BPC is assisting in the acquisition of military equipment; for example, “approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Lithuania for Stryker Infantry Carrier Vehicles and associated equipment,”<sup>443</sup> and “approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to Estonia for Javelin missiles.”<sup>444</sup> BPC allows for broad latitude in the protection of U.S. interests abroad while providing for the assurance that the United States is a valuable partner in the protection of sovereignty and the territorial integrity of our allies and partners.

## ELEMENTS OF NATIONAL POWER

In reviewing these three separate policies, it is clear how each can have a direct or indirect impact on the overall U.S. foreign policy toward Russia. What does require a little more explanation is how all the elements of national power (diplomatic, informational, military, and economic instruments [DIME]) have proven ineffective in addressing Russia’s aggression. Concerning the diplomatic element, President Putin has continually shown a nuanced interpretation for every violation of a treaty, violation of sovereignty and territorial integrity, and disregard for human rights.

An example is evidenced with Russia's interpretation for its non-support of the CFE and the INF; its continual ignoring of requests for a withdrawal from Georgia, Crimea, and Eastern Ukraine; and finally, a disregard for the civil liberties of its civilians, such as freedom of speech. In each of these, the diplomatic element of power, whether it is the U.S. President, Secretary of State, or the Secretary of Defense, produced nothing and actually strengthened the image and popularity of Vladimir Putin.<sup>445</sup> With the informational element of power, Russia presents Western powers as the evildoers by continually spinning the information and creating a common enemy for the people of Russia to unite.<sup>446</sup> The United States struggles to dominate the information domain and has little success in moving public opinion unless Mr. Putin miscalculates and crosses a line with his own population.

The economics involved have amounted to sanctions against Russia, but when asking the average Russian citizen about the effect of sanctions on the economy, "86% stated it was having an effect."<sup>447</sup> In a recent blog by Mr. Wilson, a former chief economist for Ernst & Young, he said that:

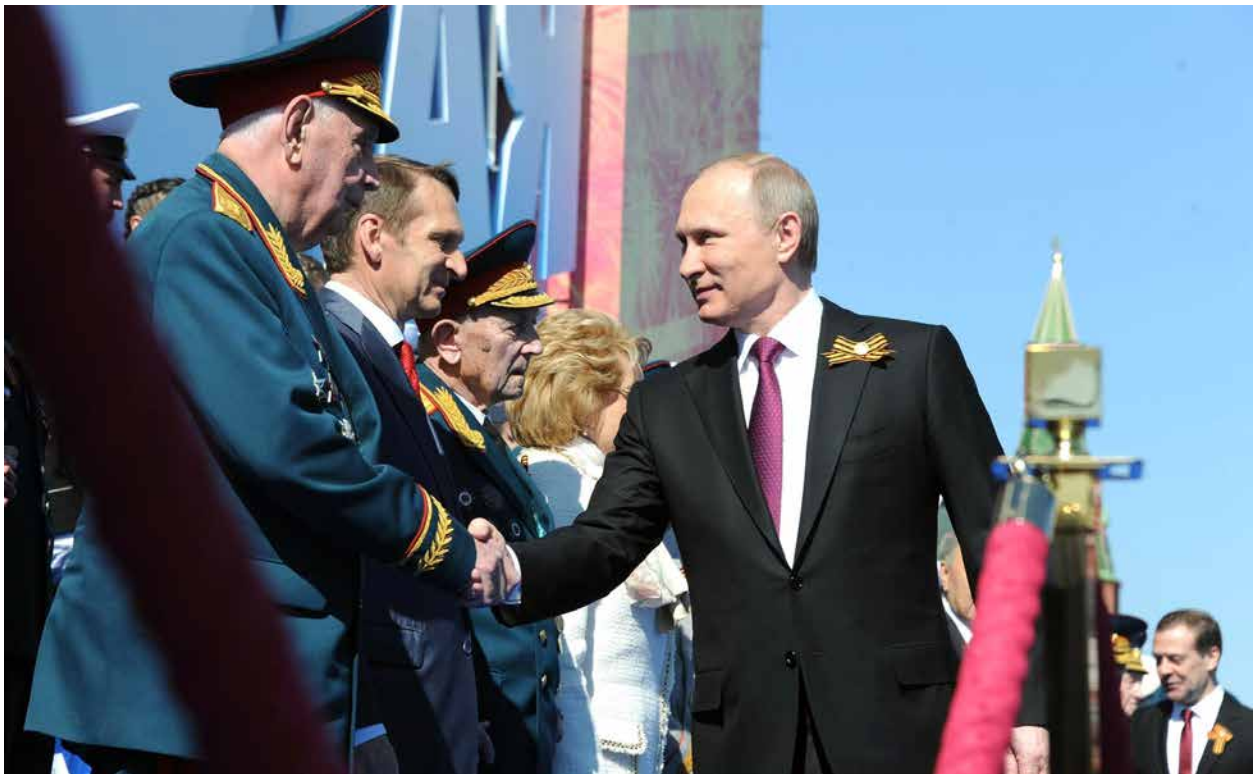
The economic sanctions imposed after the invasion of the Crimea peninsula have produced deeper damage than anyone expected . . . western countries prevented Russian companies from raising money in Europe and the United States and have also blocked arms trades.<sup>448</sup>

Gustav Gressel confirmed this by commenting, "Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and collapsing energy prices, have caused severe setbacks for Russian rearmament programmes."<sup>449</sup> However, he adds, "Although the low oil price, among other factors, may cause delays, most modernisation programmes should yield their first results by 2020."<sup>450</sup> Though rearmament is suffering, Russia's military modernization continues. The last element of national power is that of the military. It is noteworthy that military actions carried out by the United States continue to assure our allies and partners in the region of its commitment to create a capability focused on interoperability between national militaries. Exercises such as these have "sent a signal to Russia regarding NATO resolve."<sup>451</sup> However, Russia is also signaling to the Western powers:

A Russian 'snap exercise' conducted in March 2015, which brought together 80,000 military personnel. . . . The NATO 'Allied Shield' exercise conducted in June 2015, which brought under one framework four distinct exercises taking place along the Eastern flank of the Alliance, totaling 15,000 personnel from 19 Members states and three partner states.<sup>452</sup>

The large number of soldiers and assets the Russians employed validated what Gressel highlighted as the culmination of training months prior: "All of the exercises involved the quick mobilisation of Russian transport to the theatre and the earliest possible 'resuming' of offensive operations."<sup>453</sup> These exercises, whether the *Zapad* or the *La-goda*, "indicate that Russia's military thinking is offensive in nature and geared toward expansion, not defence."<sup>454</sup>

Mr. Gressel goes even further to say that the lack of modernization of forces in Europe will do little to counter the technological advances of the Russian military.<sup>455</sup> Specifically, he states, “During the post-Cold War ‘interbellum’ (1989-2014) the readiness of some European member states’ armies degraded considerably.”<sup>456</sup> After considering the military element of national power, to include taking a glimpse at our allies and partners capabilities and capacities, it is evident that the period from 2008 to 2014 saw the initial reform of the Russian military while the United States reduced its footprint in Europe and embraced a policy of BPC. Gressel sums it best: “European armies in particular are not large enough to practise combined arms manoeuvre warfare on their own, still less to carry out larger joint operations.”<sup>457</sup>



Vladimir Putin during the May 9, 2016 Victory Day Parade. (Kremlin Photo)

## THE DRIVERS OF INSTABILITY

Western economic sanctions are having an effect on the Russian way of life for its citizens. Pew Research demonstrates this, and the articles from Wilson and Gressel validate the impact to society and the military. The concern is in the identification of the tipping point, for this driver of instability. What will transpire when Russian economic conditions deteriorate too much and if Vladimir Putin decides to color the issue by stoking national pride with the annexation of one of the Baltic States? Mr. Wilson states, “The drop in the value of trade is indicative of the collapse in economic activity. During the first eight months of [2015], imports have declined by 39 percent while exports have dropped by almost 30 percent.”<sup>458</sup> Could this be an indicator of future aggression?

Mr. Gressel adds, “unforeseen events in world politics might persuade Russia that its European export market might collapse anyway or that the chances for expansion are now better than they will be.”<sup>459</sup> The struggling Russian economy could be the trigger that drives President Putin to continue his expansionist agenda.

This leads to the next driver of instability – President Vladimir Putin. He was the master puppeteer of Russia during his first two terms as president. Then, Putin worked behind the scenes as the Prime Minister of Russia before re-ascending to where he is again president. Mr. Putin is a driver of instability because of how he views the region. Of this, Covington says, “Putin’s choice reflects a view that Russia can only address its non-competitiveness by changing the world around Russia, and most critically, by changing the European security system.”<sup>460</sup>

Covington continues, “His policy requires a changed Europe to enhance Russian strategic competitiveness and requires a changed Europe to avoid political change inside Russia.”<sup>461</sup> Therefore, no matter what the policy, it is a necessity that the current European security structure must change.<sup>462</sup> A recent RAND study stated, “Putin’s view of foreign policy is deeply shaped by his own experience, including as a former KGB [Soviet Committee for State Security] officer, and that a zero-sum, strictly realpolitik view of the world permeates all his interactions with the West.”<sup>463</sup> Putin is a realist, who not only sees opportunity, but also is waiting for the appropriate time to realize his expansionist agenda. His overall end state is the establishment of Russia as a de facto regional hegemony.

## **RISK**

There are three risks that challenge the credibility of U.S. foreign policy. The first of these is not implementing a coherent strategy that safeguards the credibility of the NATO alliance. The second risk is Russian exploitation of disparate U.S. policies. The final risk is not implementing an improved strategy. The impact of these risks, if not properly addressed, will have disastrous consequences and will open the door for Russia to openly challenge NATO’s Article 5 and the global reach of the United States.

Former President Obama reaffirmed the U.S. position on NATO in 2014, during a visit to Estonia, saying:

Article 5 is crystal clear: An attack on one is an attack on all. So if, in such a moment, you ever ask again, ‘who will come to help,’ you’ll know the answer – the NATO Alliance, including the Armed Forces of the United States of America. We’ll be here for Estonia.<sup>464</sup>

To ensure the credibility of the United States and its obligations under Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, it is imperative that a comprehensive strategy materialize. Yet, Russia continues to prepare its military for rapid notice deployments against NATO members in Eastern Europe.<sup>465</sup> In mitigating this risk, BPC will enable our partners in defending

against gray zone conflict, specifically hybrid warfare.<sup>466</sup> Any action initiated by Russia requires a response, and if the U.S. action is slow or perceived as a show of non-support to its NATO members, then the credibility of U.S. foreign policy is threatened.

Risks of disparate or contradictory policies, when taken collectively, reduce the effectiveness of an overarching U.S. foreign policy. The recurring congressional policy on funding unnecessarily threatens the U.S. military by placing self-induced domestic pressure that reduces the combat effectiveness of the U.S. military. This caustic policy limits the readiness of our armed forces, reduces the training readiness of the total force, and cripples its ability to provide a timely response in defense of NATO.

U.S. Defense Policy and Russia's disregard for the CFE and INF treaties places self-imposed constraints on the other treaty signatories and limits the United States' ability to show assurance in times of conflict by not providing a substantial force to ensure a credible deterrence. Then there are the U.S. national strategic documents that mention how the approach of BPC limits deterrence through increased assurance. Some believe the reason for this approach is the common belief that this is a cost saving measure created by "budget hawks on the hill"<sup>467</sup> to work in the confines of the BCA mentioned earlier.

The remaining risk is in not implementing a revised strategy that allows a whole of government approach to work toward a clear strategic end state. This end should counter Russian aggression in a proactive manner, vice the typical reaction to Russian acts of violation of sovereignty and territorial integrity after the fact. What adds to this risk is the element of time. It is this researcher's assessment that for the next 12 months the United States is vulnerable to belligerent actors testing the will of the political leaders of this country. With this being an election year, and the President's constructivist view,<sup>468</sup> President Putin may see an opportunity to achieve an easy win.

## **RISK MITIGATION**

To mitigate the risks delineated above, there is a requirement to synchronize all factors affecting U.S. foreign policy toward Russia. There must be a unifying effort by the National Security Council (NSC) to support the synchronization of these policies through the development of a strategy to focus the elements of national power. To bring these disparate policies in line, there must be discussion on dissolving the CFE or at least modifying it to allow for the movement and basing of military forces and equipment in the Eastern European region to better assure our allies threatened by the Russian *Zapad* and *Lagoda* exercises.

The United States needs to reinforce the Budapest memorandum with its own style of hybrid warfare. This will reestablish the damaged credibility of the United States by not conducting a visible counter action to Russia's violation of Ukrainian and Georgian sovereignty and territorial integrity. This strategy should incorporate all the elements of national power. There has been sufficient use of the diplomatic and the economic ele-

ments of power, but what is lacking is the use of military force and an effort to counter Russia's antagonistic information campaign. A recent RAND study stated:

Western media proved to be particularly vulnerable to Russian information warfare operations because, in line with the principle of providing balanced opinions, enough airtime had to be provided for the Russian narratives as well, even if they were blatantly false, often self-contradictory interpretations.<sup>469</sup>

The next year is one of increased vulnerability, and if the United States is going to remain a leader on the world stage, then it must not fall victim to what Henry Nau phrased as "the malaise of multilateralism."<sup>470</sup>

## CONCLUSION

U.S. foreign policy requires coordination to be credible in countering Russia's expansionist agenda in Eastern Europe. The policy of reset has failed, and the current U.S.-Russia policy of assurance, deterrence, and cooperation needs expansion. In reviewing all three disparate policies affecting foreign policy, it is easy to see the impact, but it was not until this discussion that the seams became visible; and therefore, U.S. credibility is at stake. In discussing the risks, the articulation of a few mitigation actions can suggest ways for incorporating two underutilized elements of DIME – the information and military elements. The current U.S. foreign policy is ineffective because of the constraints established in these underlying policies. This produces an uncoordinated effort preventing the credibility of an effective and comprehensive foreign policy. This, along with the element of time, presents a vulnerability for the United States and a corresponding opportunity for belligerent actors to capitalize on an assessed weakness.

To salvage the credibility of U.S. foreign policy, senior leaders must address the lack of synchronization. Policy fratricide will continue if there is no unifying effort orchestrated by the NSC to support the synchronization of disparate policies. For example, with an unsupported CFE, the United States could move and base military forces and equipment in Eastern Europe and thereby ensure the NSC addresses all three disparate policies by modifying each to support the overall foreign policy of assurance and deterrence. The NSC Deputies meeting is the appropriate entity to ensure a coherent, coordinated, and credible foreign policy because the appropriate leaders in attendance can represent the interests for the underlying policies affecting the overarching foreign policy. At this meeting, identification of the seams will show the gaps requiring corrections. Sending these corrected gaps to the NSC Primaries meeting will guarantee implementation actions ensuring that underlying policies are correct and produce a focused comprehensive foreign policy.

The second area to ensure credibility is by incorporating the U.S. media establishment and social media conglomerates to join in the fight and contribute to blocking Russian narratives. A way to implement this recommendation is through the creation of joint venture between the Department of Defense and U.S. companies. This would most

likely require a revision of existing rules and regulations allowing the access of private companies to sensitive military events or situations so the creation of an effective counter information campaign can produce a viable strategy to counter Russian narratives. This acknowledges that the U.S. military cannot win in the information arena without the assistance of industry.

The final recommendation is to protect against the element of time by immediately supporting the two previous recommendations. With a non-supported CFE, the United States can permanently base a division headquarters, with enablers, in Eastern Europe to provide the appropriate synchronization of forces and efforts within the region. This might look like a Division Tactical Action Center (DTAC) under the command of a one-star general officer forward positioned in Latvia. This will send the appropriate message to Russia and reinforce the U.S. foreign policy of deterrence. The NSC should convene to approve the moving and basing of a DTAC to Latvia while ensuring it has the requisite enablers to be a credible and effective tool for the President to counter any expansionist agenda by Russia.

Protecting the credibility of the United States requires the implementation of the aforementioned mitigation strategies and recommendations by the senior leaders within the government. Otherwise, President Putin will continue with his expansionist agenda, and the United States will lose its standing as a global hegemony. This will forever change the security situation in Europe and undermine the 70 years of general peace and stability that the United States, in concert with its allies, has provided the region. Failure to act with determination could forever damage U.S. and European relations and cooperation. Such a breach of trust could have catastrophic economic effects that would be impossible for Washington, D.C. to overcome.



## CHAPTER 8: VANQUISHING THE SPHINX



Russian RS-24 Yars Mobile Nuclear Intercontinental Ballistic Missile on parade in Moscow to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of WW II. (Kremlin.ru)



## VANQUISHING THE SPHINX: ANSWERING THE HARD QUESTIONS FACING THE BALTICS

**Researchers: Officers and Soldiers of the Estonian Defense Forces (EDF)  
Headquarters, under the direction of Lieutenant Colonel Vahur Murulaid**

In ancient Egyptian and Greek mythology, a fearsome beast called the Sphinx roamed the region around Thebes wreaking havoc and killing any who could not answer its riddle. At long last, the tragic Greek hero Oedipus faced the Sphinx, answered its riddle and secured his throne.



Oedipus defeats the Sphinx by answering its riddle. Painting by Francois-Xavier Fabre, 1808.

In a similar fashion, the Baltic nations face difficult questions. If these go unanswered, or incorrectly responded to, there could be severe consequences. Lieutenant Colonel Vahur Karus answers the top five questions facing the region created by a hostile aggressive Russian foreign policy.

## **1. What would Russian hybrid war look like, and what can be done to prevent ethnic minorities from being used in the Baltic region to advance Moscow's strategy?**

The Kremlin does not disguise its hostility toward the West and its main institutions: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). After all, Western values such as democracy, pluralism, transparency, human rights, freedom, and the rule of law would be a death knell to a kleptocratic authoritarian regime. Moscow viewed with great alarm the “color revolutions” that led to freedom in Georgia, Ukraine, and elsewhere. Fearing that this was in store for the regime in Russia, the Kremlin set out to delegitimize, discredit, and undermine Western policies and institutions as well as the entire post-Cold War security order. With such a perspective, the *Russian National Security Strategy* describes NATO and the West as a threat to its regional and global ambitions.

The Kremlin's strategic end state is to restore Russia's status as a great power with the associated benefit of dominating Eastern Europe. Leveraging its military power is central to this objective. Moscow uses its military to not only flex its muscles, but to also deflect attention from Russia's economic troubles and the regime's growing domestic repression. Not unlike how Hitler used military adventurism to rally Germany, or when Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands; Putin is leveraging his military to exploit Russian patriotism to foster national unity and continued political support.

European and transatlantic institutions and the entire European security architecture stand in the way of fulfilling Russia's main strategic aim—so Moscow is determined to abolish them. With such an antagonistic strategy, Russia is the most serious geopolitical and military threat to NATO. Paradoxically, Moscow accuses NATO of encircling Russia and preparing for a military aggression against it, even though its military footprint is modest, particularly in comparison with Russia's military forces.

Russia has demonstrated its penchant for dangerous adventurism, while it manages to keep the West off balance and continuously scans for and exploits weaknesses. Moscow is aggressively opportunistic when advancing its interests, and its modus operandi is to seize the initiative and achieve a *fait accompli* that the West would be unwilling or unable to challenge. It is weakness rather than strength which provokes Russia into action, just as it was in the case of Crimea, where the Ukrainian state, weakened by domestic turmoil, was unable to defend itself. However, the regime respects strength and tends to back down to avoid a direct collision with determined and resourceful opponents. A case in point is the swift and determined U.S. response to Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, when Russian troops stopped their march toward Tbilisi after the United States deployed its warships to the Black Sea, while also promising substantial logistical support to the Georgian armed forces.

Russia has demonstrated a penchant to use military force, or its threat, when exploiting weaknesses. This happened in the 2008 Russia-Georgia War, in 2014 to Ukraine, and

now in Syria. This also involves provocative military behavior to test the responses of the Alliance and individual allies, as in the case of dangerous overflights of USS *Donald Cook* in the Baltic Sea in April 2016. It is a matter of great concern that, when it comes to the use of force, Moscow's decision-making circle has shrunk to just President Putin and no more than two or three of his most trusted members of the regime. When making decisions, he is not constrained by constitutional checks and balances or the rule of law. Putin has the military and security apparatus ready to execute his will. This provides Moscow with flexibility and agility.



Russian military parade during the May 9, 2016 Victory Day Celebration in the Red Square. (Kremlin Photo)

Russia's use of a wide range of instruments in recent conflicts has generated discussions in NATO on how best to deter future aggression. "Hybrid warfare" has become a moniker of Russia's approach in the West. It is often considered in NATO capitals that Russia would not dare attack a NATO member by means of a direct and overt act of military aggression, but would rather choose an indirect approach described by its Chief of General Staff, or 'hybrid warfare' tactics, to challenge the Alliance and its collective defense guarantees.

Moscow retains an immense advantage with military force in the Baltic region. Its military power is the hard currency that poses a serious or even existential threat to the most exposed of NATO allies – the Baltic States. In this regard, five elements stand out: (1) Russia's military modernization and build-up (particularly in the Western Military District); (2) its Anti-Access Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities; (3) nuclear strategy; (4) continuous exercises; and, (5) the uncertainty surrounding the Kremlin's intent.

## RUSSIA'S MILITARY MODERNIZATION AND BUILD-UP

Russia is pursuing its most ambitious military modernization program in recent history and has earmarked a budget of around 19.3 trillion Rubles to rearm its Armed Forces by 2020. Its priorities are modernizing nuclear weapons, introducing new systems into the Aerospace Forces, and the Navy and Ground Forces units, in that order. This push for military modernization by President Putin is underpinned by significant investments into developing, producing, and fielding new weapon systems, or upgrading legacy systems, which are steadily giving a new qualitative edge to Russia's Armed Forces. Although economic woes may force Russia to reassess some of its choices, cuts in military spending are a last resort, and their effect on the re-armament program would only come after years of recession. Western sanctions that restrict access to certain technologies certainly act as a factor to slow the pace of the military modernization, but they are unable to stop it.

Russia's ability to apply lessons learned from past operations, such as the war against Georgia in 2008 or more recent campaigns in Ukraine and Syria, is also noteworthy. As a result, Russia has made steady advances in improving command and control, increasing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, making various units and formations more cohesive and effective in warfighting, and improving logistics. Militarily, Russia is certainly no longer a decaying post-Cold War power with obsolete or vanishing capabilities.

Qualitative improvements are accompanied by significant quantitative increases. The ground forces established eight new brigades in 2015, and in January 2016, the Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced plans to form three new divisions in the Western Military District adjacent to the Baltic States. These changes signal a move back to a Cold War-like military posture, where it was in preparation for high-intensity large-scale combined arms warfare. Although, at the Munich Security Conference, Russia's Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev accused the West of taking the world back to the Cold War, it is Russia that continues to do this in terms of ongoing changes in its military posture.

Some of the most capable formations in Russia's Armed Forces are located in the Western Military District, and in any actions involving the Baltic States they could quickly bring considerable force to bear. In addition to the existing maneuver brigades and the announced formation of new divisions, a number of niche force developments are especially relevant regarding the Baltic region. These include greater use of Special Forces; lightly armed but more rapidly deployable airborne forces; naval infantry and other specialist units combined with support from battalion tactical groups; reformed Aerospace Forces; and ongoing development of C4ISR. This increases the speed, agility, and flexibility of the forces that can be employed against the Baltic States.

Many of these units and capabilities are positioned in the immediate vicinity of the Baltic States, making it easy for the Kremlin to launch a short or no-notice attack on one

or all three of the Baltic States. Even if a larger concentration of forces are deemed necessary for an overwhelming attack, Russia's military campaigns (i.e., Syria and Ukraine) demonstrate its ability to move substantial forces across vast distances and to sustain them for prolonged periods of time.

### **ANTI-ACCESS AREA DENIAL (A2/AD)**

Russia has an array of stand-off weapons systems including multi-layered air defense, mobile coastal defense, land, sea, and air-launched cruise missiles, and tactical ballistic missile platforms that give it an ability to implement an A2/AD approach. In conjunction with its naval, submarine forces, electronic, cyberwarfare, and other capabilities, Russia can turn areas falling within range of these weapons into isolated "bubbles." A2 is a strategic and game-changing problem as it means that those zones are difficult to penetrate – by land, sea, or air. This would make moving NATO reinforcements into the Baltic region dangerous and costly. The AD part is the operational side of the problem, as it makes it more difficult to operate forces inside such zones. Countering A2/AD is fraught with a high risk of escalation, as well as with significant loss of lives, time, and capabilities.

The Baltic States, parts of Poland and Finland, and large swathes of the Baltic Sea are areas under A2/AD threat due to Russia's capabilities in the Kaliningrad enclave and along Russia's border with Estonia and Latvia as well as Russia's alliance with Belarus. Russia's advanced air defense systems S-300/S-400, deployed in the Kaliningrad enclave and near St. Petersburg in Russia, and the integration of these systems with the corresponding air defense systems in Belarus, create an overlapping air defense engagement area over the Baltic States capable of threatening aircraft flying in this airspace. Given the importance of air superiority in any conflict, this is a serious impediment to reinforcing and defending the Baltic States. In addition, Russia's Baltic Fleet based in St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad is capable of contesting maritime lines of communication between the Baltic States, Poland, and the rest of NATO.

Russia's short-range ballistic missiles "Iskander" (SS-26 "Stone"), if positioned in Kaliningrad, are capable of targeting infrastructure, bases, and troop concentrations in Poland, Lithuania, and southern Latvia. In conjunction with the same type of systems based on the western fringes of the Western Military District, this capability extends to targets in Estonia and the rest of Latvia. Such systems can destroy critical nodes (ports, airports) and infrastructure required for the reception, staging, onward movement, and integration (RSOI) of the Allied forces deployed to the Baltic States, thus further complicating NATO's rapid deployment operations. Taking also into account the air- and sea-launched cruise missile capability, Russia has the capacity to significantly raise the costs of reinforcing the Baltic States. It is also worth pointing out that Russia would be capable of not just sealing off the Baltic States in the "bubble" that covers air, naval, and land dimensions, but it would also be capable of fiercely contesting other spaces of critical importance to military operations – in the electromagnetic spectrum, cyberspace, and even outer space (by using anti-satellite capabilities).

Last, but not least, in the event of conflict, Russian land forces operating from the Kaliningrad enclave and Belarus could close the so-called “Suwalki gap” —a narrow land corridor from Poland to Lithuania. While sharing about 1000 km of land border with Russia and Belarus, the Baltic States are linked to the rest of the Alliance just by a 65 km-wide gap between the Kaliningrad enclave and Belarus, which has only two roads and one railway line passing through it from Poland to Lithuania. Establishing control over this gap would cut the Baltic States from the rest of the Alliance.

## **NUCLEAR STRATEGY**

Moscow places great stock on its nuclear deterrent and uses it to dissuade opponents from intervening in the conflicts where Russia has important interests at stake or from pursuing policies seen as detrimental to Russia’s geopolitical interests. Moscow will use the threat of nuclear escalation to dissuade NATO allies from attempting to reinforce and defend the Baltic States. The Alliance would be confronted with a dilemma of either honoring its collective defense commitments and thus possibly entering an escalating nuclear war, or stepping back and negotiating a settlement under the terms dictated by Moscow and thus dissolving NATO.

## **MILITARY EXERCISES**

The Kremlin uses military exercises for launching operations and intimidating its neighbors. These exercises represent a way of camouflaging intent, should Moscow decide to launch a surprise attack. Turning exercises into an operation against the Baltic States would give very little or no early warning time for NATO. The exercise tempo of the Russian military demonstrates that they are continuously readying themselves for conflicts of varying scale and intensity. A striking feature is that many of the military exercises conducted by Russia are offensive scenarios, including the invasion of the Baltic States and Poland and targeting the Nordic countries. Attention is being paid to improving interoperability with the armed forces of Belarus.

The large exercise *Zapad* (West) 2013 is a good example of Russia’s focus on developing synergy rehearsing joint actions using modern technologies, which combine civilian agencies and the military in a mobilized format that heavily features the experimental use of automated command and control. The exercise was staged jointly with Belarus and followed an established pattern by rehearsing offensive operations in a Western direction, including against the Baltic States. Above all, Northern Fleet submarine activity (timed to coincide with *Zapad* 2013), with the nuclear forces exercise that President Putin ordered, demonstrates that Moscow includes first use of nuclear weapons as a “demonstration strike” to induce an enemy to negotiate—in other words, the operational use of tactical or other nuclear weapons to “de-escalate” a conflict.



## 2. What should NATO do to prevent Russian hybrid war in its member States?

After the demise of the Soviet Union, the allies assumed that Russia was interested in a partnership with NATO and therefore sought a dialogue. However, as Estonia's President Toomas Hendrik Ilves has pointed out, dialogue is not a policy (least of all a strategy). Despite the progress made since 2014, NATO lacks a cohesive strategy and suitable deterrence and defense posture to deal with a resurgent Russia, and the problem is most severe in the Baltic area. There are four fundamental challenges that NATO as an Alliance must address.



(Kremlin Photo)

### STRATEGY

NATO's Strategic Concept adopted in 2010, while not perfect, is adequate in the current environment. Furthermore, allies have made it clear that NATO's focus is on collective defense, reducing the need to open this document to time-consuming discussions. NATO's strategy toward Russia, however, needs revising. The Alliance is returning to the dual-track approach of deterrence and dialogue first introduced by the Harmel report of 1967. While the notion of combining dialogue and deterrence is valid, the circumstances faced today differ significantly.

In the 1960s, the threat to NATO was the Soviet Union over-running the entire European continent. The threat to NATO today is a miscalculation by Russia that it could achieve a quick but limited fait accompli inside NATO's borders, while not triggering

an Article 5 response. This is based on the Russian assumption that it has a time advantage over NATO. The focus of NATO therefore needs to be on deterrence, because Russia's military aim is no longer to over-run Europe. There are fears that strengthening deterrence would increase the likelihood of escalation, while history tells us a different story – weakness emboldens Russia and strength deters Russia. Russia employs an aggressive anti-Western narrative and accuses NATO of escalating the situation and encircling Russia – a claim that is unfounded but effective in influencing some NATO allies. The bottom line is that Russia portrays NATO as its main enemy, which means that tensions between NATO and Russia will continue regardless of what actions the Alliance undertakes. The safest course for NATO is to demonstrate, both in words and deeds, its resolve and ability to defend every ally against every form of aggression while remaining open for dialogue.



The Russian state-of-the-art Tank Armata, May 2016. (Kremlin Photo)

## STRATEGIC ANTICIPATION

There is both a cognitive and a resource-related side to NATO's limited strategic anticipation. The Alliance appears to be surprised by Russia time and again. This is due to difficulties associated with reading the intent and plans of the Kremlin regime. On the other hand, Russia rarely disguises its true political and grand strategic intentions. Quite to the contrary, it has proclaimed them publicly, but the West has chosen to not believe Russia's declarations. The West misunderstands Russia by thinking that it will obey the rules. We essentially project on Russia our way of thinking about international

relations and security. However, Moscow's logic is that, when given a chance to further its interests, it will use the opportunity to carry out its plans without hesitation. Doing this is rational behavior for Russia as long as it can assume the West will opt for cooperation rather than confrontation.

The decrease in Allied Land Forces is particularly troubling. Combat forces with firepower were replaced with light capabilities better suited for expeditionary crisis response and counter-insurgency operations. Meanwhile, NATO's maritime efforts have been focused to the southern part of the Alliance. Nuclear deterrence lacks coherence and credibility.

Defense expenditures across NATO are not sufficient to rebuild the range of capabilities necessary to deter a resurgent and aggressive Russia. (During the Cold War, most European countries spent 3-5% or more of Gross Domestic Product [GDP] on defense.) Consequently, there is a tendency in some parts of NATO to make the threat fit our existing posture and capabilities. It is easier to make the threat look less acute so as to not have to undergo changes in capabilities and raise defense expenditures. This is a dangerous path. Although tasks of the NATO Command Structure have proliferated since the end of the Cold War, its size has shrunk drastically.

## **NATO'S POSTURE IN THE BALTIC STATES**

The numbers of host nation and Allied forces in the Baltics are far inferior to the Russian forces in Western Military District. The Baltic States lack strategic and operational depth, which makes giving up space for time impossible. A limited incursion creating a *fait accompli* in the Baltic States could be undertaken by Russia with the forces already stationed in the vicinity of their border and hence with limited early warning. NATO's conventional military posture in the Baltic States should be able to convince Russia that it is able to delay and bog down an invading force and inflict unacceptable damage to it. This force is not required to win the war, but it must be able to fight alongside the host nation forces to buy NATO time for reinforcements. NATO's presence in the Baltic States is not large enough to this end. The length of the shared border between Russia and the Baltic States offers the Russians the ability to claim territory without possibly even having to fire a shot at NATO forces, thus rendering the value of the forward-based forces void.

The stance of non-NATO countries in the region (Sweden and Finland) matters. The uncertainty surrounding their decisions and actions—with regard to both Russia and the Alliance—complicates NATO's plans and response options in the Baltics. Without these two countries in NATO or having very close cooperation with the Alliance in the context of collective defense, NATO lacks strategic and operational depth in the region. Should Russia compel Stockholm and Helsinki to stay out of a conflict, NATO's response options, particularly given the A2/AD threat, would be limited even further.

### **3. What would make the unthinkable happen – that is, a Russian Conventional Attack on the Baltic Nations?**

Even if Moscow has no intent to challenge NATO directly, this may change overnight and can be implemented with great speed, following already prepared plans. The capability to do so is, to a large extent, in place. It is hard to predict as to what may trigger Russia's action. This might come at the time NATO and the EU are distracted by another crisis or a misperception of NATO's activities and miscalculation of the Alliance's resolve. Whatever confluence of circumstances might trigger the action, Moscow would come up with any pretext that suits its propaganda narrative – from “defending the oppressed Russian-speaking population” to “pre-empting NATO's military attack” or “defending access to Kaliningrad.” Russia is capable of surprising the West, as happened in Ukraine and Syria. A military fait accompli in the Baltic States could easily become one of such surprises – with fatal consequences to the Alliance.

However, the intent would not materialize in the face of a show of strength, cohesion, and solidarity by NATO. Credible deterrence is thus key, but the critical question is how NATO's deterrence posture fares in its most vulnerable spot – the Baltic States.

### **4. What size force from the United States and NATO should be stationed in the Baltic region? Should these forces be permanent?**

The Alliance should move toward a threat-focused rather than a capability-focused approach. It should concentrate on what capabilities are needed, not what capabilities are available. In addition, we must look at asymmetric (including cyber), conventional, and nuclear weapons as part of a single strategy, and strengthen NATO-EU cooperation to make deterrence more credible. This integrated approach must be reflected in planning and exercises.

NATO must regain capabilities lost after the Cold War and develop new capabilities taking into account Russia's military modernization and build-up. They must invest in the necessary R&D and cutting-edge technology, especially in the framework of the U.S. “Third Offset” Strategy in which a proper link with the European allies should be developed. Allies should step up their investments on capabilities that are required to counter the A2/AD challenge, deal with asymmetric threats, as well as conduct large-scale combined arms warfare.

To resource this re-generation of capabilities, NATO must increase defense spending. Eastern flank states should consider going over the 2% benchmark in their defense spending like Estonia has. This would send a message to the United States that they are serious about facing the real threat that Russia poses to them. Other allies should make a clear statement of intent to move toward the 2% benchmark significantly faster than the promise of trying to do so within a decade.

The Alliance's planning should be coordinated with the possible contribution of Sweden and Finland, as well as of the EU as a whole. It will be necessary to work with Sweden and Finland to secure overflight permissions, gain access to the use of their air bases, and develop Host Nation Support arrangements already in peacetime. The Alliance should also conduct prudent planning for defending Sweden and Finland, as a way of reassuring them that their support to the Alliance would not leave them exposed to Russia's punitive military action.

## **PRESENCE**

The only way to guarantee the security of the Baltic States against a conventional Russian military threat is by having a capable military force in these countries. They must be able to prevent a *fait accompli* by Russia and, should an attack occur, delay the opposing forces for NATO to deploy additional units and capabilities to the region. While we agree with both the former and current Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), General Breedlove and General Scaparrotti, who would prefer permanent forces in Europe, the debate about permanence should not be at the forefront if the continuous presence of combat-capable forces can be ensured through rotations. As the saying goes, "It doesn't matter if a cat is black or white, so long as it catches mice."

## **LAND FORCES**

The U.S. units rotating through the Baltic States, while strengthening assurance, are not enough for credible deterrence and defense. They can be bypassed and hence neutralized. Ideally, this would require one brigade in each of the Baltic States that would, along with host nation forces, be able to significantly delay the opposing forces and help counter the Russian A2/AD threat—if Russian forces are unable to act with impunity on land, they are more vulnerable to Allied air power. Allied brigades in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania would be able to cover more territory by having their constituent battalions conduct simultaneous independent operations. This would make a quick Russian *fait accompli* unlikely. Furthermore, since a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) is not regionally focused, an equivalent-sized force in each of the Baltic States would hedge against the possibility of VJTF being unavailable due to it being deployed elsewhere.



Russian helicopters during the May 2016 Victory Parade in Moscow. (Kremlin Photo)

## **AIR FORCES**

Air force capabilities are needed to provide protection for Baltic and Allied forces, and to prevent Russian aircraft from freely operating over NATO's territory. The Alliance's aim must be to maintain or establish conditions for local (at first), and then general, air superiority in the airspace of the Baltic region.

## **NAVAL FORCES**

As significant Allied reinforcements are brought by sea, it is crucial that access to the Baltic Sea is maintained or re-established quickly. The Baltic States need capabilities in and adjacent to the Baltic Sea that could effectively limit Russia's freedom of maneuver and degrade their capabilities. This requires a continuous combat-capable presence with high firepower, high survivability, and the plans, rules of engagement, and authorization to act immediately in response to aggression. To effectively counter Russia's A2/AD, for example, sea-based air defense (SBAD), anti-submarine warfare capabilities, as well as surface ships and submarines with long-range strike capabilities are needed. Allocating an AEGIS-equipped ship for the Baltic Sea area would significantly enhance deterrence.

## **MARINES AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES (SOF)**

Marines and special operation forces are some of the most capable fighting forces in NATO. They would be of high importance in defending the Baltics and, therefore, their presence would send a strong deterrent signal to Moscow. As the Baltic States are in the most vulnerable situation in NATO, we propose relocating some of the U.S. Marines Black Sea rotational force to the Baltic States. In the Baltics, the footprint and familiarity with local conditions of the U.S. Marines is modest and mainly gained through the Baltic Operations (BALTOPS) exercise. SOF would have a significant affect in the Baltic States and an important role in de-masking Russian actions, which Russia might try to conceal as “green men” or “soldiers on vacation.” As the SOF troops are able to operate behind enemy lines and conduct special reconnaissance missions, they would be instrumental in providing information both to the Allied defense establishments as well as to the wider public. We, therefore, propose embedding strategic communication/information officers with the SOF teams operating in the region who could record and disseminate information.

## **REINFORCEMENT**

NATO’s high readiness forces need to be more robust and adequately trained to stand the rigors of war. There can be only one criterion for the VJTF: it must be ready for a violent and sustained war. This means a well-trained and highly cohesive force able to operate in a non-permissive environment with proper enablers, well-drilled and taut command and control, and the soundest logistic foundations. Above all, it requires the right mindset. A multinational force containing up to 14 nations that have never trained together will not be capable of deterring, let alone fighting. The VJTF must be less focused on hybrid conflicts and more suited for high-end warfare.

## **PREPOSITIONING**

Prepositioning the stocks of armaments and munitions is needed to speed up the Allied reinforcements. We recommend that at least a battalion-worth of heavy equipment be prepositioned in each Baltic State to be able to quickly surge the presence of Allied troops when necessary. As a priority, heavy maneuver vehicles, artillery, anti-armor and air defense assets, and munition stocks should be prepositioned.

### **5. What are the plans to modernize the Baltic armed forces to increase their mobility, survivability, and lethality?**

The Alliance’s success in defending the Baltic States depends on the efforts of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as much as on the contribution of the other allies. The so-called “porcupine” strategy should be employed by the Baltic States, so that their armed forces could act as “speedbumps with spikes” and gain time for mobilizing additional national reserve forces as well as for the incoming Allied forces:

- Development of self-defense and RSOI capabilities of the Baltic States should be supported both financially and by offering favorable conditions for purchasing the necessary armament, equipment, and supplies.
- In addition to the acquisition of defensive assets such as anti-armor, air defense, and anti-ship weapons, the allies should also support development of the Baltic offensive capabilities and help increase the survivability of their forces.
- The Baltic States should continue doing their part. This entails ensuring high readiness of their defense forces; conducting frequent exercises to test this readiness; investing into new capabilities; and, working to facilitate freedom of movement of the Allied forces into and between the Baltic States.
- As the most exposed and vulnerable NATO allies facing growing demand for resources – to ensure host nation support, greater investments into defense infrastructure and armaments as well as to support larger force structure – all the Baltic States should steadily increase their defense spending above the 2% benchmark (as Estonia has already done).
- Particular attention should be paid to the development of the infrastructure necessary for the reception and movement of the Allied forces in the event of a crisis in the Baltic States. Since most of it (airports, harbors, railways, roads, and bridges) is the responsibility of the civilian authorities, they should pay greater attention to the additional requirements for handling movement of large and heavy military forces. As fulfilling those requirements can be very costly and since a lot of civilian infrastructure development is done with the help of the EU funding, there should be an agreement on the permissibility of including those requirements into the projects co-funded by the EU.

Although the security challenge that NATO faces is formidable, it is not impossible to overcome. The key is taking concerted measures now to prevent a war later. There is no doubt that Moscow has hostile intentions toward NATO. Yet, peace can be maintained by strength. The assessments of this section offer a way for NATO to preserve the peace for a bright and prosperous future.



## CHAPTER 9: THE WAY AHEAD AND RECOMMENDATIONS



A Bradley Fighting Vehicle of the U.S. Army 3rd Infantry Division at Tapa, Estonia. (U.S. Army Photo)



**FIVE SMOOTH STONES: HOW THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION (NATO) CAN DETER THE “GOLIATH” RUSSIAN THREAT TO THE BALTICS<sup>471</sup>**

Colonel Douglas Mastriano, Ph.D., U.S. Army War College (USAWC)

*Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.*

I Samuel 17:40



David prepares to fight Goliath in a wood carving by Maerten van Heemskerck (1498-1574).

The world is in turmoil; the geostrategic security environment is rapidly changing as witnessed by the new and adaptive threats facing the NATO Alliance. On the southern periphery are the expansive Islamic State (IS) and a refugee/migration crisis of Biblical proportions. Meanwhile, the unparalleled peace and stability experienced by most of Europe since 1945 is at risk with the rise of a hostile Russia. Each of these security chal-

lenges are a threat to the Alliance. However, it is the peril posed by the Kremlin that should keep NATO senior leaders up at night. Indeed, Russia's advantage in geography in Eastern Europe and its emerging adaptive, hybrid approach to war poses an existential threat to the Alliance.



Russian Soldiers during the May 2016 Victory Day Celebrations. (Kremlin Photo)

The key component of the Kremlin's emerging adaptive approach to conflict is the application of ambiguity. This cloak of ambiguity has been used to confound North American and European decision makers. Thus was the case in 2014, when so-called "little green men" appeared in Crimea. Although there was no doubt that these were Russian forces, Vladimir Putin denied the obvious, with key leaders in the West dithering on how to respond. Moscow's gambit worked, with Putin declaring the annexation of Crimea only a month after the "little green men" appeared. This was followed by a separatist movement in Eastern Ukraine that was inspired and led by Moscow. Although Russia's involvement in this conflict is indisputable, the response from Europe and the United States has been sluggish and inconsistent at best. Even after the downing of a civilian airliner (Malaysian Air MH 17) in July 2014, the resolve of Western leaders to blunt Russian aggression in Ukraine is still in question.

More than 2 years later, Ukraine remains in the midst of a bloody war, and an increasingly frustrated Putin is turning up his bellicose rhetoric. Targeting both his domestic audience and the Russian ethnic populations residing in NATO nations, Putin blames his woes on "the West" and has put together a powerful information operations campaign to manipulate the minds of his people. In the midst of this, Moscow announced that it will modernize both its nuclear and armed forces. The region to benefit first from

this modernization will be the Russian Western Military District, the only one with a land border with NATO . . . in the Baltics.

Although the Russians today have a large conventional force, Moscow has demonstrated for the moment that it would rather avoid a direct confrontation with the West by employing a “strategy” of ambiguity. This ambiguity undercuts decision making and provides Putin with plausible deniability of being behind any crisis. Using Eastern Ukraine as the example, Russia employs “local” proxy forces, bolstered by Russian Special Forces in ethnic Russian zones. These are supported by small groups of conventional assets to wage its war.

### The Baltic States



Feeling threatened by Russia's increased meddling in the region and its belligerent rhetoric, the NATO member states in Eastern Europe, especially Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania, have called for increased measures to deter the danger to their nations. The Baltic States suffered terrible deprivations and ethnic cleansing under the Soviets and do not want a repeat of this. Faced with this threat, the 28 NATO member nations continue to wrestle with an appropriate response to the belligerent Russian behavior in the region. The United States took the first action in early 2014 by rotating small units of Army Soldiers through the region. Now dubbed "Atlantic Resolve," this force is designed to reassure the Baltic States of NATO support. This was followed by a NATO announcement in September 2014 that it would create a force capable of rapidly deploying anywhere in the region. Most recently, at its July 2016 summit in Warsaw, the Alliance announced the deployment of four battalions of NATO forces by early 2017. These battalions will be stationed in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Despite these steps, the questions remain: should a crisis unfold in the region, can sufficient NATO forces arrive in a timely and credible manner, and how prepared will they be to operate in a dynamic hybrid environment?



The Russian Victory Day Commemoration Parade, May 9, 2016. (Kremlin Photo)

There are specific measures that NATO should take to mitigate the rising threat that Russia poses to the Alliance. The recommendations in this article focus on the military element of power. However, any strategy must apply a comprehensive approach that includes diplomatic, economic, and informational aspects of power. The following five proposals are a starting place to build credible deterrence in the Baltics.

**Early Warning:** The nature of the Russian threat to the sovereignty of the Baltic nations goes beyond a hybrid ethnic uprising. There is also a formidable Russian conventional capability literally on the border of each state. The Kremlin has demonstrated this capability through aggressive activities by its air, sea, and ground forces. However, the most provocative of its actions are so-called “snap exercises.” These unannounced training events have increased in scope and scale over the past year and demonstrate that NATO would have virtually no early warning to prepare for the unthinkable.

The reality of the changing strategic environment demonstrates the need for NATO to take concerted action to reduce the element of surprise. This can be done by stationing forward a modest early warning intelligence capability. This should include a linguistic element, equipped with electronic warfare intercept capability, UAVs, and other intelligence assets to monitor military activity in both Russia and Belarus.

NATO’s Intelligence Fusion Center (NIFC) should provide the oversight and synchronization of this forward Baltic Intelligence Center (BIC), which would reduce duplicative and costly “national” capabilities. The focus of the collection and analysis would be on the regional Russian military activities of the Western Military District. Although the idea of employing so-called “reach-back” capability from headquarters in Western Europe is popular, nothing can surpass having a forward presence, where analysts will be able to both see and feel the Russian threat. There must be a forward and robust intelligence and early warning capability in the Baltic region.

The BIC should be commanded by a U.S. Army Colonel with extensive intelligence and NATO experience. All too often, senior U.S. officers with little to no experience working with NATO are assigned to key positions in the Alliance, which puts them and the Alliance at a distinct disadvantage. This U.S. Army Colonel will also serve as the senior intelligence officer (G2) in the forward U.S./NATO division headquarters assigned to the region (discussed later). The focus and mission of the G2’s task is to provide both real world analysis and long range reporting on the disposition, capabilities, and assessment of Russian forces in the region. This G2 will not only need to provide more than near-term intelligence, but also long-range forecasting that understands and predicts the application of both its conventional and hybrid capabilities. The bottom line is that the BIC will be NATO’s expert on Russia’s emerging doctrine and approach to war.

**Build Capacity – increase the size, survivability, mobility, and lethality of the Baltic armed forces:** All three of the Baltic States have increased their defense spending since Russia’s invasion of Crimea and its subsequent war in Ukraine. Estonia is making great strides to improve the size, mobility, survivability, and lethality of their forces; Latvia has also increased its defense spending; and Lithuania has taken the bold decision to reintroduce conscription. However, all three of these nations must have a robust force capable of responding to both conventional and unconventional threats to create strategic depth. The greatest disadvantage of the Baltics is geography. The place to begin is here to create time, space, and depth for a larger, survivable, and mobile force. Such a force must be capable of contending with an “ethnic uprising,” while also being able to secure vital infrastructure (air/sea ports, major roads, etc.) from conventional threats.

Defense spending is a place to start to measure a nation's commitment to building capacity. However, of the Baltic nations, only Estonia is exceeding the agreed upon 2% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defense. The increase in national defense is of key importance in that it provides tangible evidence of the Baltic Nation's commitment to their own defense. Additionally, it will enable them to expand their military infrastructure to support the modest increase of forward stationed forces and assets. Key to this is building partner capacity (BPC). The United States could provide the nations in the Baltic region surplus U.S. Military equipment sitting in depots in North America. These can be provided at a cost and used to improve the lethality, survivability, and mobility of their indigenous forces. However, maintaining and employing these assets comes with a cost, something that the increase in national defense spending could compensate.

**Special Forces Capability:** The nature of the emerging Russian use of hybrid warfare makes a purely conventional capability ill-suited. In addition to building a robust conventional force, the Baltic States must also have a complimentary Special Forces capability. This should be an adaptive element that works effectively with local security forces (which includes civilian law enforcement and national counter-intelligence services) and other NATO Special Forces, and is interoperable with NATO conventional units. Additionally, this force should build relationships in the ethnic Russian zones of their respective countries and thus be positioned to detect an exported Moscow inspired ethnic Russian separatist movement.

NATO should also establish a permanent forward multinational NATO Special Forces presence in the region. These can support the training and development of a local Special Forces capability, while also building relationships that can be leveraged in a crisis. Additionally, these forward assets should be tied into local security units, and can provide an early warning should Putin set his gaze upon the region in the form of some sort of Moscow directed exported "ethnic" uprising. Finally, if deterrence fails, Baltic Special Forces could form the core of an unconventional warfare capability that would keep occupying Russian forces off-balance and insecure until NATO can mount a conventional effort to liberate its Baltic allies.

**Forward NATO Presence:** Although the United States and several other nations are rotating small military units through the region, there should be a decision by NATO to create a permanent forward presence of ground forces. There is no greater deterrence than for NATO nations to commit a modest force forward in the Baltics. This would dramatically alter the strategic calculus for Vladimir Putin, so that if he should ever seek to assert influence over the Baltics, the price would perhaps be too high. Any Russian adventurism would have to contend with the reality of having NATO troops already forward, and an attack on them would guarantee a response. This permanent forward force would have far-reaching ramifications beyond deterrence and would also serve as the nucleus for follow-on NATO forces to build and expand.





Soldiers of the Danish 1st Tank Squadron on an exercise in Poland in 2015. (U.S. Army Photo)

Building on NATO's decision to station a battalion in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, an expanded permanent forward force should be a three-brigade element, one in each Baltic nation. Estonia should have an American-led mechanized Brigade Combat Team, and Latvia a regional Baltic Brigade that should include forces from Sweden and Finland (if they are willing to participate as non-NATO partners). The brigade in Lithuania should be a multinational NATO force permanently stationed in the Suwalki Gap. Keeping this gap open is imperative to prevent any ideas in Moscow that it could easily cut this essential land route from the rest of NATO.

This three-brigade model for the Baltic nations borrows from the Berlin Brigade concept from the Cold War. Although the American, British, and French Brigades stationed in West Berlin could not stop a Soviet invasion, these served as a guarantee that, should there be an attack, three powerful nations would fight to defend Germany. Additionally, these brigades would make their task bloody and difficult to accomplish. Simply put, the cost/benefit analysis was too high for Moscow to try a violent seizure of West Berlin. This is the same end desired for the Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

The three-brigade Baltic force will not stop a Russian attack, but it would make their task difficult to accomplish. More importantly, however, the risk of attacking the Baltic nations, and thereby fighting professional ground forces from the United States and the rest of NATO, would be too risky and would ensure the commitment of the entire Alli-

ance to come to the defense of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. There would be no question of resolve and no chance of a successful gamble from the Kremlin with a forward ground force in the region.

To support planning and coordination of this three-brigade multinational force, the United States should create a permanent two-star headquarters in the Baltic region. The headquarters would serve as the command and control of the division size multinational force in the Baltics and would oversee contingency planning, coordination, and integration of NATO forces into this organization. Additionally, this would serve as the basis to expand from a division level headquarters to a Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command (CJFLCC) should there be a large multi-division exercise or contingency in the region. The headquarters should be centrally located in Riga to facilitate command and control, but prepared to move to either Estonia or Lithuania to support NATO training. This U.S.-led headquarters would work closely with Multi National Corps Northeast (located in Szczecin, Poland) to ensure integration and synchronization with NATO.

**REFORGER-like exercises and capability:** During the Cold War, the most important annual training event was “Return of Forces to Germany,” or REFORGER in military language. REFORGER exercised the ability of forces from outside of continental Europe (mostly the United States) to arrive in Western Europe, receive their equipment at the ports or man their forward equipment sets, and then rapidly deploy to the region of Germany where the large exercise culminated with a force-on-force training scenario. The REFORGER units would join forward deployed units (those forces already stationed in Germany) in a complex series of training events that replicated a NATO response to a Soviet attack into West Germany.

In the spirit of REFORGER, an annual exercise of a deployment of “over the horizon” forces from across NATO should be implemented in the Baltics. Perhaps naming it “Deploy Forces to the Baltic (DEFORTIC),” this annual training event would encompass a robust force (albeit much smaller than REFORGER) that would arrive from Western Europe and North America to exercise and demonstrate the ability to quickly respond to a threat to the sovereignty of the East European allies.

There are three concerns related to any DEFORTIC like force: (1) Rapidity; (2) Interoperability; and, (3) NATO Strategic Depth. The lack of geographic depth in the Baltics means that NATO must respond to any crisis with exceptional rapidity, which is not normally a characteristic of NATO decision-making. The second concern is the actual composition of the force. After a force arrives, which forces bolster/support them in the region? The concern is that it will be in the midst of a crisis that a NATO forward joint and multinational force will have difficulty operating as a joint and multinational team. Additionally, the ever-shrinking defense budgets in most of Europe mean smaller armies, which equals a lack of strategic depth from the Alliance at large.

DEFORTIC addresses two out of the three of these concerns. An annual DEFORTIC would allow NATO's Very High Readiness Task Force and follow-on NATO Response Forces (NRFs) to exercise their ability to deploy forward into the Baltics. As to interoperability, an annual DEFORTIC exercise would help deployable NATO forces to refine this important skill set and build a team able to operate in a joint/multinational environment.



## FINAL THOUGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Colonel Douglas Mastriano, Ph.D., U.S. Army War College (USAWC)

Rolands Henins, the Director of Latvian Defense Policy, identified three chief concerns that make the Baltic nations vulnerable:

1. Speed of recognition to identify threat
2. Speed of assembly [of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces]
3. Speed of decision [by NATO]<sup>472</sup>

Former Lithuanian Defense Minister Rasa Juknevičienė agreed with Henins concerns and added a brilliant summation that the region faces, saying, “We need two things, #1, a realistic approach, because it is impossible to have the right treatment if you do not know the diagnosis, and #2, we need deterrence to end Putin’s idea that he can test NATO. He needs to know that he can’t control the Baltic Sea.”<sup>473</sup>

The nature of the threat that Moscow poses to the sovereignty of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania is a near and present danger. Yet, it need not remain a point of vulnerability for the West. As previously discussed, there are concerted measures that the Baltic nations and NATO should take now to deter Russian aggression. The question is whether NATO will take advantage of its window of opportunity to prevent the unthinkable from happening. With ever-decreasing budgets and shrinking military forces, a preponderance of NATO nations are facing the changing security environment from a position of weakness. It is such weakness that historically results in war – with a cost far higher than what prudent defensive measures in peace could have otherwise averted. It seems that “Russia understands only one language, the language of power”;<sup>474</sup> meaning that, through concerted action to maintain a sufficient force in the Baltics, peace can be preserved.

The response from Moscow regarding any measures that NATO takes to ensure the security and independence of the Baltic nations will be predictably filled with umbrage and condemnation. So-called Russian trolls and their boosters in the West already attack anyone advocating Baltic defense as warmongers. However, even if NATO adopts the recommendation of stationing a 3-brigade division in the region comprised of 9 maneuver battalions, it will be out-numbered, facing nearly 30 Russian ground maneuver battalions. The idea that this force is provocative or a threat to Russia is preposterous.

The purpose of this forward multinational NATO division is to both assure the Baltic allies and to deter Russian aggression. It is not designed to defeat a major Russian attack. However, should the unthinkable happen, it would make any adventurism from Moscow costly and bloody. More importantly, this force guarantees that there would be no chance of Russia permanently reasserting control over these NATO members.

The saying that freedom requires eternal vigilance seems particularly pertinent to us today. The NATO Alliance should take decisive action to deter the Kremlin from

meddling in the Baltics. Such deterrence should come in the form of forward deployed forces, an early warning capability, larger and more lethal Baltic forces, a Special Forces presence, and an annual Deploy Forces to the Baltic (DEFORTIC) exercise that demonstrates a NATO capability to defend its eastern allies.



Vladimir Putin meets with President Barack Obama during the 70th session of the UN General Assembly in New York City, September 28, 2015. (Kremlin Photo)

These recommendations are realistic and achievable. The key is that these prudent measures can avert World War III by materially demonstrating resolve and strength that would remove any doubt or uncertainty of NATO's commitment to protect its members from any sort of foreign intervention, whether conventional or hybrid. The Western powers experimented with appeasement in the 1930s, and the result was a horrific and costly war that placed the world on a precipice of peril. The cost of half measures and weakness is too much to bear. Now is the time for resolve and strength in the face of an aggressive and assertive Russian foreign policy bent on dominating the region.

The measures recommended in this paper are not provocative; in fact, they are defensive in nature. Indeed, a little action now can go a long way to assure the eastern allies, and deter Russian aggression. History demonstrates that the certain path to war is passivity and appeasement. This is not the time for hesitating and weakness. Now is the time for all of the NATO members to demonstrate resolve and strength. The simple measures offered in this paper lay out a clear path for the alliance to prevent war and to maintain the security and stability of the continent. More importantly, it will protect entire populations from deprivations and destruction. The map of Europe has been the battlefield of countless battles and wars. Often, those who pay the ultimate price are not the leaders who give into weakness and indecision; it is the people. America and its allies stand for freedom and against all forms of tyranny. Will we falter now in the face Putin's hostile regime, as Prime Minister Chamberlain did in 1938 when confronted by

another hostile leader; or, rather, stand firm on the principles written in our founding documents and preserved by sacrifices of those who went before us? Indeed, what we do in life matters, it echoes across the generations and into eternity. Our challenge today is to make decisions that will pass on to our heirs a better and safer world. This can only be achieved by eternal vigilance and responsible strength.

The idea that “[n]ew things are old things happening to new people” (Dr. John Lennox) remains true. This is not the first time that the United States and NATO have faced a rising foe in the east. The old foe was held at bay by vigilance and strength. This is a proven strategy and our answer for the modern version of this old adversary. History indeed gives a long list of lessons that weakness and appeasement invite war. The answer is peace through strength. As Ronald Reagan brilliantly stated in 1964:

*You and I know and do not believe that life is so dear and peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery. If nothing in life is worth dying for, when did this begin – just in the face of this enemy? Or should Moses have told the children of Israel to live in slavery under the pharaohs? Should Christ have refused the cross? Should the patriots at Concord Bridge have thrown down their guns and refused to fire the shot heard ‘round the world? The martyrs of history were not fools, and our honored dead who gave their lives to stop the advance of the Nazis didn’t die in vain. Where, then, is the road to peace? Well it’s a simple answer after all.*

*You and I have the courage to say to our enemies, ‘There is a price we will not pay.’ ‘There is a point beyond which they must not advance.’ And this – this is the meaning in the phrase . . . ‘Peace through strength.’ Winston Churchill said, ‘The destiny of man is not measured by material computations. When great forces are on the move in the world, we learn we’re spirits – not animals.’ And he said, ‘There’s something going on in time and space, and beyond time and space, which, whether we like it or not, spells duty.’*

*You and I have a rendezvous with destiny.*

*We’ll preserve for our children this, the last best hope of man on earth, or we’ll sentence them to take the last step into a thousand years of darkness.<sup>475</sup>*



American and Hungarian Soldiers on a NATO exercise in Lithuania in 2014. (U.S. Army Photo)



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The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

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Moscow effectively uses deception and disinformation to generate ambiguity as a means to prevent a quick response from the West. Such was the case in Crimea, where despite evidence to the contrary, Putin denied that the 'little green men' were his soldiers until after he had completed annexation of the region. With this approach, Putin operated inside the decision-making cycle of NATO and thus gained the initiative. This approach exploited fissures between NATO and the EU, as each European nation must conduct a cost-benefit analysis on the prospect of responding to Russian aggression and enduring the potential economic consequences. When Putin believes that employing conventional forces is too risky, he resorts to using forces unconventionally, scaled and adapted to the strategic environment.

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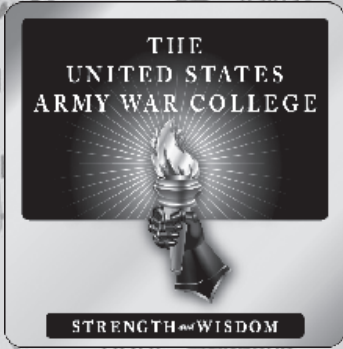
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