International Security and Estonia

2016

Foreword
by the Director General of the
Estonian Information Board

Dear reader,

Until today, overviews, digests and reports compiled by the EIB – Estonia's foreign intelligence service dating back more than two decades – have been available only to a restricted group of politicians and officials. Naturally, this will remain the case for classified documents. 'International Security and Estonia in 2016' is, however the Estonian Information Board's (EIB) first publication intended for the public.

The idea for preparing a document describing international security environment which surrounds Estonia, and is orientated to the Estonian and foreign public, first occurred as a response to Russia's aggression in Ukraine. Not a day went by in the wake of annexation of Crimea and conflict escalation in eastern Ukraine without Estonian or foreign press asking: 'Is Narva next?'. Not to mention the numerous attempts to analyse the Kremlin's hidden agenda with regard to the Baltics. Yet public officials remained laconic or altogether silent in their statements resulting in burying the few competent messages that existed under an avalanche of inadequate information. This, in return, led to the public space being filled by doomsday scenarios, half-truths, and with a hunger for sensation. Without a doubt, such developments have a negative effect on a nation's psychological defence. At the same time, Estonia has its foreign intelligence service whose main task is to ensure that those with the 'need to know' have the best possible threat assessments at their disposal. With this publication, we are sharing these assessments with the wider public.

The main task for the EIB is to provide best possible threat assessments to our clients.

I would like to point out some of the key aspects. Firstly, this public threat assessment contains information collected and analysed by the EIB. As such, the assessments therein may not coincide with those of our partner services in all respects.

That does not mean that our assessments dramatically differ from those of our closest partners. Secondly, this paper does not cover every major topic – issues, such as Russian foreign influence activity, for example, will be left for another time. Thirdly, although EIB's assessments tend to be marked with a seal of state secret, this publication does not contain declassified material and is not a disclosure of any state secrets. Moreover, the current paper is not a publicly disclosed version of a recent classified threat assessment but is, rather, an entirely new product, specifically created for the wider public. Fourthly, to pre-empt potential criticism from experts – this document does not claim a monopoly of truth. The security environment surrounding Estonia has, in the recent years, become increasingly dynamic and complex. Analysis based on open sources may result in assessments and findings that differ from the ones compiled by the EIB. Also, as preparing this document took some time, new pivotal events may have occurred resulting in some of EIB's assessments being potentially outdated by the time of its publication. This document should not be used for making assessments on the world order in 2026 or 2050 as it focuses on the most critical events in 2015–2016. Finally, I would like to emphasize that the EIB is not a policy maker and does not decide which foreign, defence or other policy steps should the relevant authorities take based on our assessments.

The main focus of this publication is Russia. This does not mean that Estonia's security is solely influenced by its eastern neighbour or that EIB's analysis would only focus on matters concerning Russia. Estonia is organisationally closely integrated with other nations and naturally shares its partners' concerns. Rapidly globalising, increasingly IT based world has – amongst others – made the definition of security more ambiguous. Countries are increasingly using non-state measures and *vice versa* – non-state actors are trying to act as states. Events at geographically remote locations, which often go unnoticed, have a strategic effect on Estonia's security context. Still, we opted for such focus since the current policies practiced by the incumbent Russian government are likely to remain the sole external power threatening the constitutional order of the Republic of Estonia in the nearest future. Of course the previous does not mean that such threats will necessarily materialise. I kindly ask everyone to read this text

in its entirety, without taking certain sentences or paragraphs out of context.

Bonne lecture!

Mikk Marran
Director General
Estonian Information Board

Overview

- The policies adopted by the current Russian government will remain the greatest factor threatening the military security of the Baltic Sea region in the near future. Russia's disagreements with the West, growing voluntary isolation, and unpredictable and aggressive actions in executing its plans have a profoundly negative effect on the region's security.

- The Russian ruling elite is convinced that, in communication with the West, Moscow can only defend its interests from a position of strength, which includes a constant demonstration of military threats. The Russian leadership considers NATO's security reinforcement measures and the growing number of NATO members as an existential threat, and views the European Union's integration policy as damaging to its interests. This threat assessment was the basis for the aggression against Georgia and Ukraine: an attempt to obstruct any Western integration of countries within the sphere of Russia's perceived privileged interests, without any hesitation, and using any means necessary.

- Despite Russia's colossal investment in its military structures over the last decade, its military capability remains unbalanced. Russia's capacity to fight using only conventional means is limited, and the economic crisis it is facing does not make the situation any easier. Although unlikely, the use of military power against the Baltic States cannot be entirely ruled out since conflicts that occur farther away may spill over to the Baltics. However, deterrence and defence measures taken by NATO are decreasing the risk of direct military threats to Estonia, and most of the factors that made Ukraine susceptible to Russian aggression are not present in Estonia.

- Putin's regime lacks the ideas and willingness to modernise Russia's society and economy. The leadership is attempting

to consolidate its society by antagonism towards the West, creating an image of a foreign enemy, and seeking to restore the country's Soviet-era might. The Kremlin estimates that Russia's grave economic situation can be overcome in a few years, instilling a belief in the population that the hardships are temporary and have been caused by outside forces in order to weaken Russia. However, merely the lifting of sanctions and a higher oil price will not help Russia emerge from the crisis; economic revival requires extensive economic reform.

- The present wave of Islamist terrorism is the most extensive and dangerous the world has encountered. International terrorism is currently not a significant threat to Estonia, but it is a risk for Estonian citizens abroad. The greatest threat to Estonia in terms of Islamist terrorism arises from radicalised Muslim communities in neighbouring countries and from returning, radicalised EU citizens who have participated in jihad in Syria and Iraq.

- Since the security situation in the Middle Eastern countries remains difficult, something which has added significantly to the ongoing migration crisis, the high level of movement towards the EU is expected to continue. In the context of the migration crisis, several European Union Member States have witnessed a surge in the popularity of far-right movements and political parties displaying hostility towards the EU. This spread of extremist views and increase in tensions is used skilfully by Russia in order to achieve its foreign policy aims.

- Cyber-attack harming the equipment relying on IT or crashing critical information infrastructure offers a relatively cheap and effective way to destabilise a country's political and economic environment. The lines between cyber activists, criminals, and state-paid hackers are becoming increasingly blurred, and Estonia continues to be a constant target of cyber-attacks although the intensity of attacks is now quite low.

Russia

Foreign policy

Relations between Russia and the West are at their worst since the end of the Cold War. Russia's eagerness to use military force in order to achieve its foreign and security policy goals has had a serious effect on European security. Moscow's disputes with the West and its aggressive implementation of its plans provoke conflicts that pose a security threat to Europe. Russia has challenged European security principles and aspires to revise the fundamentals of the global security system. Lack of trust between Russia and the West results in increased unpredictability in international relations and escalates the risk of unexpected conflicts.

Since Russian leaders and society share a conservative and nationalistic mind-set, Russia's foreign policy will remain hostile towards the West, even though developing healthy trade and economic relations would be mutually beneficial. Russia is trying to portray itself as a civilisational centre with the right to evolve according to its own values and goals. Any attempts to criticise Russia's actions are met with accusations of Russophobia, which is a frequent justification for uniting Russians against a common foreign enemy, as well as a tool for stigmatising Russia's adversaries.

The Kremlin is convinced that the West (including the Baltic countries), and especially the US, is secretly working towards toppling the current leadership of Russia. This approach has led Russia to interpret many steps taken by the West as interference in Russia's domestic affairs or its security interests. Such misinterpretations may cause disproportionately harsh reactions (including military measures) in response to modern civil processes within Russia and its neighbouring countries. This conviction has led the Kremlin to believe that whilst communicating with the West, Russia can only defend its interests from a position of power, including a constant demonstration of military might.

Relations between Russia and the West are at their worst since the end of the Cold War. Lack of trust between both parties increases unpredictability in international relations and escalates the risk of unexpected conflicts.

Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin at G8 summit in Northern Ireland in June 2013

Reuters

Despite Vladimir Putin's declaration that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century, the Kremlin's goal is not restoration of the Soviet Union. Using modern political, economic and military instruments for restoring its sphere of influence is considered a much loftier purpose. Russia's ambition is to strengthen its influence in the CIS area and ensure Russian-controlled integration therein via the Eurasian Union. While considering the Baltic States as within its area of its vital interests, the Kremlin does not regard them as it does the CIS countries. Rather, the Baltics are viewed as an insignificant part of the Western community, and Russia's countermeasures towards these countries are often careless and imprudent compared to its relations with other Western nations. Since Russia fails to impress as a worthy leader in terms of so-called soft power, it uses aggressive and unpredictable means of pressure to achieve its foreign policy goals, especially within its illusory sphere of influence. In order to ensure wider international influence, Russia is seeking support from allies who have expressed criticism towards the West.

There is a widespread belief among the Russian leadership that the West (including the Baltics), and especially the US, is secretly working towards toppling the current leadership in Russia.

Although Russia is losing its international weight, the main target of its antagonism is the United States. Russia's ultimate aim is to get the US to recognise Russia's regional authority; however, it lacks any real power to 'defeat' the US in global politics. Russia seeks to control the US by looking for weaknesses in the latter's global position, and using these to achieve its geopolitical aims. For example, Russia skilfully used granting asylum to Edward Snowden for the purposes of its foreign policy goals. By offering Snowden asylum, Russia wanted to portray itself as an advocate

for human rights and the rule of law, and prove to the world that the US does not care for the values it proclaims (freedom of expression, human rights, etc.) but rather blatantly violates them.

In addition to testing and influencing the US, Russia is using a multitude of methods in attempts to split cohesion within the EU and between the EU and the US. Moscow often uses economic difficulties in EU member states and dependency on Russia's energy to incite disagreements within the EU. It also influences politicians and the public of EU Member States, taking advantage of their personal interests or lack of awareness of Russia's true aims.

Russia's ruling elite views NATO's security reinforcement measures and its growing number of members as an existential threat, and this threat is magnified by EU's integration policy – another aspect said to be hindering Russia's interests. Prompted by this threat assessment, Russia without hesitation launched aggression against both Georgia and Ukraine, seeking to obstruct any Western integration of countries within its sphere of interest, and using any means necessary. Russia wants to replace the NATO-based transatlantic security system with one where Moscow would have a veto. Russia considers expansion of NATO's infrastructure (including its missile shield) to Eastern Europe and to the Baltics as hostile activity. The Kremlin sees the entire Baltic area as a foothold from which NATO (led by the US) can potentially threaten Russia. Hence, Russia will remain disturbed by the fact that NATO's borders now meet those of Russia, with no 'buffer countries' between them.

The Western Military District and Russia's armed forces

Despite Russia's colossal investments over the last decade, its military capability remains unbalanced. Russia has a limited military capacity in terms of using conventional means in long scale conflicts; yet it is this capacity that is especially important for Russia, considering the country's geography. Not all conflicts can simply be solved using nuclear weapons, Special Forces, airborne and information operations, or the Russkiy Mir Foundation.

One of the key constraints of Russian conventional armed forces is the lack of qualified personnel; particularly trained contractual servicemen and junior specialists. Manoeuvre brigades of ground forces are typically capable of assembling only one battalion tactical group per brigade, either completely or substantially manned

Russia has limited capability to operate on more than one operational direction for a significant period of time.

by contractual servicemen. Most missile and artillery brigades are also capable of assembling only a single tactical group. Only airborne forces and Special Forces are better equipped; around a third of contractual servicemen there are serving their first contract term (i.e. they have served in the armed forces for 2–3 years).

The manoeuvre units of the Western Military District's ground forces are capable of fielding 13–15 battalion tactical groups, equivalent to five manoeuvre brigades, fully or mostly staffed with contractual servicemen who are sufficiently trained to execute combat tasks. Airborne forces are capable of assembling up to 15 and the naval infantry 2–3 battalion tactical groups.[1]

The Russian reserve units are mostly made up of conscripts operating poorly maintained equipment; hence their employability outside Russia is questionable. The third battalions of brigades and regiments serve as training centres and recruitment basis of contractual servicemen, and are unlikely to be used in combat. Many such units conduct combatant-level training throughout the year, which means that they are not prepared to function integrally as subunits.

Thus, the Western Military District is capable of fielding using around 30 battalion tactical groups. Considering the size of the area for which the district is responsible, ranging from Murmansk oblast in the north to Voronezh oblast in the south, that number is not high. The Western strategic direction is divided into six operational 'directions', each consisting of several tactical 'directions'. A simple calculation shows that Russia has a limited capability to operate in more than one operational direction for a significant period, considering that units need to be rotated.

The Russian army's personnel problems were clearly visible in the Ukrainian conflict. Units that were deployed to the Ukrainian border during the first major staging of forces were randomly composed, and had limited combat capability. During the winter/spring season of 2014, Russia focused on speed, deterrence,

Russia's capacity to fight using only conventional means is limited. It is simply not possible to solve all conflicts using nuclear weapons, Special Forces, airborne and information operations, or the Russkiy Mir Foundation.

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[1]   The Russian armed forces are divided into (in descending order) military districts; combined armies; and brigades or divisions. The two latter elements are further divided into battalions and regiments, respectively. A battalion tactical group (BTG) is a military unit capable of independently carrying out combat operations. The core of BTGs – battalions – are supplemented by supporting elements from other units. Typically, there are 700–900 soldiers in a BTG.

Russia's regional military commands

By December 1, 2010, the number of military districts in Russia will be cut from six to four. Unified strategic commands will be set up on their basis

The Kaliningrad special region
The Baltic Fleet

The Western Military District
(West Strategic Command)
with headquarters in St. Petersburg
The Moscow and Leningrad military districts

The Central Military District
(Central Strategic Command)
with headquarters in Yekaterinburg
The Volga-Urals Military District and
the western part of the Siberian Military District

St. Petersburg

Yekaterinburg

Rostov-on-Don

Khabarovsk

The South Military District
(South Strategic Command)
with headquarters in Rostov-on-Don
The North Caucasus Military District

The East Military District
(East Strategic Command)
with headquarters in Khabarovsk
The Far East Military District and the eastern
part of the Siberian Military District

The reduction of the number of military districts will not lead to cuts in the military personnel. The 150,000 officers currently serving in the Army will continue to perform their duties, but officers may be moved to serve at new locations

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and bluffing. The units fielded during the summer were better organised. However, the Ukrainian armed forces had, by then, survived the most difficult period, and Russia lacked the strength to launch a large-scale ground operation against Ukraine. In 2014, Russia's operations against Ukraine were conducted at the limit of its military capacity since a majority of its combat-capable manoeuvre units were tied down with this campaign.

In addition to contractual servicemen, Russia also lacks junior specialists: tank and armoured vehicle commanders, drivers, gunners, etc. This problem is especially acute in artillery forces. Moreover, a large number of junior specialists are conscripts who have had just a few months of practice at best. The lack of qualified personnel has a substantial effect on Russia's combat capacity and this may be one of the reasons why Russia decided not to move further into Ukraine.

The changed security environment and the economic and financial crisis are forcing Russia to make adjustments to its federal defence procurement programmes, which means that Russia will fail to meet its 2020 rearmament target, as a number of programmes have been frozen or postponed. The influence of sanctions is also increasingly apparent in several specific areas of the defence industry.

The last time the Western Military District managed to fulfil the federal defence procurement plan for armoured vehicles was

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in 2013 when most of the orders were made up of modernised equipment. Obstacles appeared in 2014 when the first new batches of equipment were to be delivered to the military district. The Armata, Kurganets and Bumerang-type armoured vehicles (as well as Taifuns) that were extensively publicised in the Russian media are still at the testing stage and have not yet been officially included in the order of battle.

The reasons for Russia's increasing efforts to conduct special operations using asymmetric means and attacks against critical targets lie at least partly in the weakness of its conventional forces. Tactical nuclear weapons have served a similar function in Russian military doctrine in the last decade. The Russian armed forces are best prepared for a local conflict against a small country without any allies where there is little or no threat of conflict escalation. Thus, wars similar to the one conducted in Georgia in 2008 are most suitable for the Russian armed forces.

Russia's military planning towards Estonia

Russia's aim for the Western strategic direction is creating a bloc-free security zone throughout continental Europe and curbing the US military presence until its complete withdrawal of forces from Europe. Estonia is not a priority for Russia's military planning. Instead, its priority areas include Kaliningrad, the Kola operational direction (the Arctic) and, since 2014, Ukraine. The biggest threat of a military conflict in the Baltic countries arises from the Kremlin's misconceptions which may be based on its distorted perception of threats from the Western strategic direction (including the Baltics). Also, Russia views Europe as a single entity and takes it into consideration in relation to developments in other regions. Thus, conflicts in Ukraine or the Arctic may spill over to the Baltic States as well.

Although Estonia is not a military priority for Russia, use of military force here cannot be ruled out. For instance, Russia may use military force when its armed forces fail to respond adequately to a NATO-Russia conflict in another region. By creating a conflict in the Baltics, Russia would attempt to gain a stronger position for talks following the armed conflict. In a situation of conflict Russia will consider the Baltic Sea region as a single entity, and Moscow will not respect any country's neutrality should war erupt. The Kremlin takes into account that NATO may also use infrastructure in Finland and Sweden, and therefore is prepared to attack targets in these countries despite their non-NATO status.

Russia views the Baltic countries as the NATO support area that is the most difficult to protect, and as a source of constant threat to Russia's security. Russia estimates that NATO may deploy 1–2 corps in the region should a war break out. Thus, Moscow has only two positive scenarios: the Baltic nations leaving NATO, or NATO ceasing to exist. All other solutions would be inconclusive for Russia.

Russia's military planning in the Baltic operational direction is based on the assumption that when staging forces, it has a temporal advantage over NATO. Moscow believes that it is capable of conducting a limited military operation before any effective response by NATO could be mounted. The goal of such operations would not be to seize the entire territory of Estonia or Latvia, but rather to impose control over some towns or areas close to the border. This operation would be conducted by units permanently stationed close to the Estonian and Latvian borders, reinforced by units of the 1st Tank Army and the Central Military District, and by tactical nuclear weapons as deterrence.

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RUSSIAN BALTIC FLEET

What is it? *The Russian Baltic Fleet is divided into two areas: the Baltiysk naval base (Kaliningrad oblast) and the Leningrad naval base (St Petersburg and Kronstadt). The main resources of the Baltic Fleet are located in the Baltiysk naval base. The Leningrad naval base has lost its military significance, mainly performing tasks concerning logistics, sustainment, and administration. The presence of the fleet there has remained mostly symbolic.*

Why is it important? *The Russian Baltic Fleet is relevant for Estonia's security mainly due to its location. Should political tensions escalate, Russia might use the Baltic Fleet to disrupting maritime traffic and hold demonstrations of force off the Estonian coast. Even though this is an unlikely scenario, Russia may attempt to use the Baltic Fleet to block traffic to and from Estonia's ports and cut off NATO convoys. According to theoretical worst-case scenarios, the Baltic Fleet may be used in attempts to seize Estonian ports, and conduct fire missions and limited amphibious operations against Estonia.*

Although the Russian Baltic Fleet is a military force to be reckoned with, it has a limited military capacity in terms of size, technology and geography, and is not comparable to the forces of NATO and Scandinavian countries located in the region.

Russia is gradually increasing its military capacity in the Baltic operational direction. Seemingly insignificant steps are part of a larger plan which is being implemented over time. The nature of Russia's actions becomes clearer when events are seen from a long-term perspective. Judging from the sequence of events, Russia has substantially strengthened its military contingent on the Baltic operational direction (Estonia, Latvia), and has increased the volume and complexity of its exercises in the region. Among the most significant changes are the formation of the 15th army aviation brigade in Ostrov (Pskov oblast) and placement of SS-26 'Iskander' tactical missiles (NATO reporting name – Stone) to Luga. Several units of the 6th Army have been relocated to the Narva tactical direction, and the Sertolovo training centre to the north of St Petersburg is to be transformed into a training centre for armoured forces. An army aviation brigade and a reconnaissance or Special Forces brigade may also be formed in the Baltic operational direction in the coming years.

In addition to the increase in the number of troops in the Baltic operational direction, new weapon systems placed in Kaliningrad and near the Estonian-Latvian border also pose a threat to Estonia. With these weapons (Iskander, sea or air-based cruise missiles, etc.) Russia will be able to isolate Estonia from its allies and attack critical targets preventing NATO support from being able to reach Estonia. Russian military planning is paying increasing attention to attacks against critical targets. In the Baltic countries, such targets may include infrastructure that is linked to the reception or servicing of NATO reinforcement. However, the use of tactical nuclear weapons against Estonian targets or NATO units located here is highly unlikely.

Testing of a Russian main battle tank T-90 on defence industry forum "Army – 2015" in Kubinka, Moscow oblast

AFP

Developments in Kaliningrad and Belarus are also important factors from the perspective of Estonia's security. Close military cooperation between Russia and Belarus – recently demonstrated by the joint exercise 'Union Shield-2015' in the Pskov and Leningrad oblasts – has a direct effect on Estonia's security. The activity of the Baltic Fleet should also be closely observed as Russia may use it to create long-term military deterrence to the EU and NATO if political tensions escalate. It is possible that, should the international situation deteriorate, additional temporary troops will be placed in Kaliningrad. However, despite Russia's official rhetoric, the Baltic Fleet is not a priority to the Russian Navy due to the stable security situation in the region.

Russia's aggression in Ukraine

The Kremlin's narrative of Russia as a global (or at least regional) superpower is a bizarre combination of Soviet nostalgia, yearning for revenge, and historical mysticism based on Byzantine and Orthodox heritage. If Russia did not control Ukraine – the heartland of Orthodox East Slavs – this concept would have no consistency or historical justification. Completely outdated in the 21st century, such justification serves as the basis for Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its annexation of Crimea.

Russian aggression poses a particular threat to the countries over which Russia is trying to prevail in order to restore its position as a global authority. Russia's foreign policy is based on the notion that all parts of the former Soviet Union (e.g. the CIS) belong to its sphere of influence. Thus, Russia considers itself a political and military guarantor that is responsible for stability

A separatist fighting in Donetsk

AFP

in the CIS area, and will do everything in its power to prevent any country from leaving this sphere. Since Russia is acutely aware of its weakness compared to the West, Moscow interprets Western integration as interference in its sphere of influence, and uses political, economic and military means to obstruct that. To this effect, Russia has cultivated 'frozen conflicts' and supported separatist regions in countries within its sphere of interest, including Transnistria in Moldova, Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, and Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia). Russia uses frozen conflicts as an instrument to prevent Western integration of countries in its 'near abroad', allowing Russia to portray itself as a peacemaker.

As Russia could not remain a convincing regional force without having control over Ukraine, Ukraine's turn to the West after the toppling of Viktor Yanukovych was crossing a red line as Moscow saw it. The aggression in Ukraine began with a special operation in Crimea. Units of Russia's Black Sea Fleet stationed in Crimea supported the seizure of Crimean infrastructure and military installations by unmarked Russian Special Forces. The annexation of Crimea was carried out smoothly because the operation was prepared, rehearsed, and executed according to well-laid plans. Russian Special Forces were also involved at the launch of the Donbass operation, but there Moscow decided to rely on the assumed prevailing pro-Russian support among the population of eastern Ukraine. Resulting from Russia's miscalculation of local pro-Russian activism and support, and Ukraine's delayed but steadily increasing response, the military conflict was confined to a small section in the oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk.

Weak local support created a need for a much greater contribution from Russia to keep the conflict going. This included equipping separatists with arms, ammunition, equipment and most of all, troops. Russia intervened in the conflict using both cross-border indirect fire as well as deploying units of Russian regular armed forces in the territory of Ukraine. Russia declared the need for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, but meanwhile Moscow contributed to the continuation of the conflict by supplying the separatists with hundreds of tanks, armoured personnel carriers, combat vehicles, artillery systems, and thousands of tonnes of ammunition, as well as training thousands of volunteers and regular troops and deploying them to the conflict zone. Russia has also applied political and economic pressure on Ukraine throughout the conflict.

Some of the factors that made Ukraine susceptible to Russia's aggression could have been avoided or reduced. Not expecting such aggression from Russia and not having a plan to contain it, Ukraine was paralysed when the conflict erupted. The planning and execution of defence measures, including the involvement of volunteers, was obstructed by bureaucracy, and there was a lack of political will to react decisively as the Ukrainians were hoping for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The uncontrollable corruption prevailing in the country worsened the situation even further. As in Russia, political power was used to gain economic benefits for particular interest groups. This, in turn, further increased concentration into clans and deepened Ukraine's economic dependence on Russia.

Other negative factors in terms of Ukraine's military planning and armed forces included a chronic lack of funding and questionable reforms introduced during Yanukovych's rule. The intelligence services also had unrestricted and uncontrollable cooperation with the Russian services, allowing the latter almost limitless infiltration into the Ukrainian establishment, including recruitment of collaborators. For Russia, the situation was facilitated due to the lack of efficient border guards and control at the Russian-Ukrainian border, and existence of Russian military bases in Crimea. It should also be noted that Ukraine is divided according to language into Ukrainian and Russian-speaking segments, resulting in the population falling into different information spaces. Similarly, the attitudes and language of troops depended on the location of units.

Ukraine's position remains vulnerable, politically, economically and militarily. In 2016, Russia will continue to destabilise Ukraine, using the unresolved conflict in Donbass to further this aim. Russia's goals in Ukraine will remain the same: to impede Ukraine's integration to the West, and to apply pressure for introducing legal mechanisms that would allow Russia to manipulate Ukraine's decision-making process via regions that have special rights. Since no participants want a military resolution to the situation, it will remain a frozen conflict.

Although Russia's military actions in Ukraine have a significant effect on Estonia, NATO's deterrence and defence measures are reducing the direct military threat to the country, and most of the factors that made Ukraine susceptible to Russia's aggression are not present in Estonia. The central aspects of preventing such threats are deterrence, defence cooperation and readiness, as well

Most of the factors that made Ukraine susceptible to Russia's aggression are not present in Estonia. The central aspects of preventing such threats are deterrence, defence cooperation, and readiness. A well-functioning, open, and democratic society, and the rule of law are equally important.

as an adequate and timely response. A well-functioning, open and democratic society and rule of law are equally important. For that reason, Russia is not able to threaten Estonia as a member of NATO and the EU as it threatens Ukraine.

Domestic policy

Putin's regime lacks the ideas and willingness to modernise Russia: there is no long-term development strategy and the predominant attitude among the ruling elite is 'let's rule until we die'. Visionaries and influential ideologists have mostly been replaced by obedient and corrupt followers in Putin's bureaucracy apparatus, including the Presidential Administration and the government. People at lower levels of the hierarchy are afraid of reporting problems or passing on information and assessments that are in conflict with the leader's vision. This has created a situation where the leadership is making decisions (also in the fields of foreign and security policy) based on incorrect assumptions. Such a pattern of behaviour is characteristic of all levels of Russia's state apparatus.

Corruption has become the norm among Russian leaders, and both the administration and businessmen associated with the Kremlin see the state mostly as an instrument for gaining personal wealth. For instance, it was propably thanks to his closeness with President Putin that the well-known Russian businessman Arkadi Rotenberg was appointed in charge of an electronic system for taxation of heavy-duty vehicles; running it will earn him roughly €70–80 million per year.

One of Putin's closest trustees Gennadi Timchenko (left) and Arkadi Rotenberg in Kremlin in June 2015. Both of them have been added to the US sanctions list

ITAR-TASS

Domestic policy issues are cast aside using political rhetoric. President Putin is trying to convince the people that the difficulties they are experiencing are temporary and should simply be endured. The leadership wishes to consolidate society behind antagonism towards the West, a desire to restore the country's Soviet-era might, and the creation of an image of a foreign enemy. Thus, the Kremlin is seeking support for its world view from the Soviet-era state system, implementing that era's principles both in terms of party policy and ethnic policy. Symbols from the Soviet era are used, particularly with the aim of influencing the youth.

Consolidation of the population by way of antagonism to the West – of having a joint foreign enemy and being surrounded by threats – is essential for the authorities in ensuring their success in the 2016 parliamentary elections. The ongoing economic depression and the upcoming parliamentary elections have made the Russian leadership conclude that 2016 will be difficult. An improvement in the situation is expected in about two years, provided that Western sanctions are lifted at least partially, and that oil prices start to increase. In light of the 2018 presidential elections, the Kremlin's intention is to get complete control over the media, including the most prominent writers in social media.

There is no free press in Russia. Media outlets are controlled by businessmen loyal to the Kremlin, and TV is completely controlled by the authorities. The Presidential Administration provides editors-in-chief with instructions weekly, detailing topics and key phrases that must be covered during the week. Most of the radio and print media is controlled by the authorities. The internet is the least controlled, but the Kremlin is taking gradual steps to influence that as well. For a long time, the Kremlin ignored the internet (Runet) and developments therein, but major changes were introduced in 2015 when two legislative amendments began regulating business activity on the internet and granting the authorities more ways to influence the activities of internet companies. The law allows websites that distribute pirated software to be closed down, and forces internet companies to keep users' personal data. For several years, the Kremlin has been using paid commentators (trolls) for influencing social media. In 2014, the State Duma approved a law demanding bloggers whose websites have more than 3,000 viewers to register themselves, thus equating popular bloggers with media outlets and thus making them subject to all the accompanying requirements and liabilities. This allows the authorities to gain control over potentially popular emergent opinion formers who share a liberal world view or are critical of the ruling elite.

The Kremlin attempts to consolidate society by antagonism towards the West and by creating an image of a foreign enemy. People are reassured that the difficulties are temporary and should simply be endured.

Controlling the media serves the purpose of eliminating any confrontation at the grassroots level, to prevent any possibility of a 'Maidan' in Russia. The Ukrainian coup magnified the Kremlin's fears that if developments in society cannot be directed and controlled, then Kiev's fate will be repeated in Moscow. A fear of social unrest that can result in a coup is a definitive factor in the behaviour of Putin and his administration, and this fear is magnified by the Russian leader's paranoid conviction that the US is doing everything it can to overthrow him.

Excluding the pseudo opposition created by the Kremlin (including the Liberal Democratic Party led by Vladimir Zhirinovsky, and the 'A Just Russia' party, both of which have helped the Kremlin channel people's dissatisfaction), there is no organised opposition in Russia. The absence of free media and any freedom of expression along with controlled domestic politics have led people to express their opinions covertly on the internet, not on the streets. For that reason, it is difficult for a functioning opposition to gain ground. Russia does have a multitude of political parties and movements, but each has its own goals. Divides in the opposition were further escalated by the society's extensive support to the annexation of Crimea.

Although the leadership takes substantial steps to quell opposition and prevent unrest, Putin's circle has not managed to find solutions to the problems concerning Chechnya and the North Caucasus. Moscow is attempting to alleviate the simmering social tensions in those regions by funding the ruling elites (clans) of the North Caucasus republics, and deploying internal troops who commit acts of violence which is mostly focused on Dagestan.

In Chechnya, the Kremlin saw a solution in Ramzan Kadyrov, who was expected to take complete control of the region. Failing to achieve this task, Kadyrov has irritated the Russian security authorities with his behaviour; he apparently felt that the North Caucasus had become too narrow for him, and is aiming to become a politician with pan-Russian reach. Fearing unrest and lacking a better alternative, Moscow has not removed him from power yet.

Economy

Russia is witnessing an economic crisis, the main reasons for which are dependence on exports of raw materials, endemic and thriving corruption, and slow progression of economic reforms. These factors have been further exacerbated by Russia's aggressive

foreign policy, and the economic sanctions imposed by the West to control it. This has resulted in a massive outflow of capital and a drop in investment in the economy. However, merely lifting sanctions and a higher oil price will not help Russia emerge from the crisis; economic revival requires extensive economic reform, but Moscow lacks the political will to carry out these reforms and thus mitigate the risks of a mono-product economy. Economic reforms could also be accompanied by a rise in domestic discontent which would be in direct contradiction of the image that Putin is trying to portray: Russia as an economically powerful and independent country.

Economic recession and the loss of oil and gas revenue has put Russia's federal and regional budgets[2] under great pressure. Since Western financial markets are closed to Russia, Moscow has started using reserves gathered during the period of high oil prices to cover the federal budget deficit. However, calculations by the Russian Ministry of Finance show that, should the current budget policy and oil price levels persist, the government reserve fund will be depleted in two years. From 2018, the budget deficit will mostly be covered by the domestic bonds market.

The rapid drop of the rouble has resulted in higher inflation, having a negative effect on real incomes and domestic demand. Russia's projected economic recession was 4% in 2015, and there is no sign of growth in 2016, because restoration of investment capacity and an increase in real incomes is not expected. After the monetary crisis in early 2015, the Russian central bank managed to stabilise the situation on the Russian money market by massive interventions and loans from leading commercial banks. Even though the floating rate policy has helped the central bank to avoid currency reserves falling below the minimum levels, and the Russian financial environment has mostly adjusted to the situation, this has not brought an increase in exports. The rouble's exchange rate against leading currencies is greatly influenced by the price of oil and remains subject to heavy fluctuations. This, in turn, keeps the inflation rate high and restricts investor activity. The central bank's foreign currency reserves have dropped from

Merely the lifting of sanctions and a higher oil price will not help Russia emerge from the crisis – this requires extensive economic reforms.

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[2] The Russian Federation is divided into 83 federal subjects (Russia itself considers Crimea and Sevastopol its 84th and 85th federal subjects): oblasts, krais, republics, autonomous oblasts, autonomous okrugs, and the so-called federal cities having the status of federal subjects (Moscow, St Petersburg and, in Russia's view, Sevastopol). The term 'region' is used as a synonym for 'federal subject' in this text.

BRENT CRUDE OIL ······ RUSSIA GDP GROWTH RATE

Comparison of Brent Crude oil to Russia's GDP growth rate

Trading Economics

$386 billion to $364 billion during 2015, although this is enough for it to respond to larger market fluctuations.

The declining revenue from the export of oil, natural gas and other natural resources will put increasing pressure on the Russian economy in the long term. This will sharply increase the need for reforms aimed at enhancing Russia's economic competitiveness. Also, the deteriorating demographic situation creates a necessity for rapid reforms in the social system, which is becoming the main source of the chronic budget deficit. The main demographic trends – a decrease in the working-age population and increase in the number and proportion of senior citizens – are expected to continue over the next decade. While people aged 20–59 made up 60% of the Russian population in 2015, this figure is expected to drop to 52% by 2025. The share of people aged 60 and older is expected to grow over the same period from 20% to 24%.[3] The total population of Russia is projected to decrease by more than two million, but in the working-age segment (20-59 years) the decline will be more dramatic: roughly 12-13 million people. This trend is problematic since the decrease in the working-age population facilitates immigration. Already, both legal and illegal immigrants make up a substantial share of the labour market, and Central Asian countries are likely to remain a source of immigration for Russia, which will bring about an increase in the proportion of people with Muslim origins in the population.

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3   Source and calculation basis: UN Population Division, World Population Prospects, the 2015 revision; http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/DataQuery/.

Russia has constantly postponed domestic reforms, preferring to contribute to its geopolitical ambitions by increasing the country's military spending. Although from a long-term economic perspective, Russia should be increasing spending on education, innovation and healthcare, the 2016 federal budget demonstrates an entirely opposite trend; allocations to healthcare will drop by 10.7% and to education by 8%. Instead of economic development and raising the population's standard of living, Russia has chosen the path of increasing its military might. By contrast, Russia's defence spending in 2015 was at least 4.2% of the GDP.

The recent years have witnessed escalation of budget deficits of regions along with the accompanying debt. A larger increase started in 2013 when the revenue of most regions dropped, but expenditure remained largely the same. In many respects, this situation has been caused by the central government's policy, forcing regions to increase spending despite shrinking revenues. At the beginning of Putin's latest presidential term, he approved a set of decrees that promised a pay rise in the public sector and an increase in social spending. These decrees caused a significant rise in the regions' expenditure while at the same time federal funding to regions started to decline from 2012. By the beginning of 2015, Russia's regions had a total debt of 2.09 trillion, and the combined debt of regions and local governments was 2.4 trillion[4]; 1.1 trillion of the debt amounts to banks.
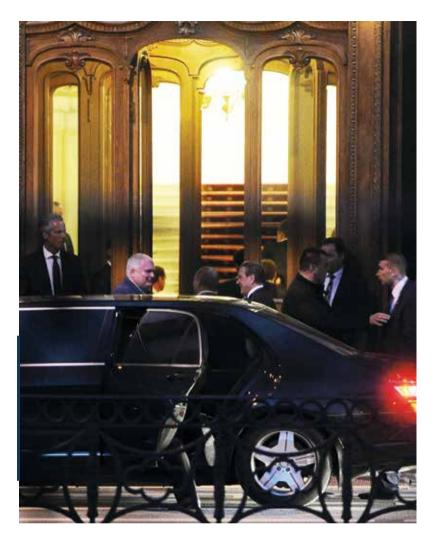
Energy security

Russia is using traditional economic instruments to achieve its foreign policy objectives, trying to increase its leverage in the CIS area and use EU member states to serve its federal interests. Moscow continued to actively follow this policy line after the onset of the crisis in Ukraine, hoping EU sanctions would be lifted; but the 'reorientation of economic cooperation to the East' that was enthusiastically announced by the Kremlin has not taken effect. The EU continues to be the main target market for Russia's raw materials, and thus Moscow continues its efforts to execute Gazprom's projects with a view to increasing natural gas exports to Europe.

Based on political considerations and the benefits of a few interest groups, the freshly launched pipeline project Nord

Instead of economic development and raising the population's standard of living, Russia has chosen the path of increasing its military might.

4 Source: Ministry of Finance, http://info.minfin.ru/debt_subj.php.

Matthias Warnig (left) and Gerhard Schröder (right) greeting Vladimir Putin on his arrival at Schröder's birthday party in St Petersburg in 2014

AFP

Stream-2 is yet another example of Russia's manipulations of Europe's energy needs.

Moscow continues its efforts to execute Gazprom's projects in a hope to increasing its influence in Europe.

Using Nord Stream-2, Moscow is also trying to fuel conflict within the EU and reduce the volume of natural gas passing through Ukraine. Hence, it is no coincidence that the deadline of the pipeline coincides with the expiry of the Ukraine-Russia gas deals in 2019. A realignment of the gas transit route will make Central and Eastern Europe more susceptible to Russia's manipulations concerning energy, as the new gas route will reduce the amount of gas reaching those areas. However, it is not very likely that Russia will use Nord Stream-2 to cut Ukraine off from natural gas transit altogether; Russia needs that route for supplying gas to Transnistria at the very least. However, a continuous decline in the volume of natural gas passing through Ukraine, accompanied by the loss of revenue from gas transit, would be a substantial shock to Ukraine's economy.

Like Russia's other strategic projects, Putin has included people from his closest circle in the development of this project, too. For instance, the executive director of both Nord Stream-1 and Nord Stream-2 is Matthias Warnig, Putin's longstanding friend and confidant. Their friendship began in Germany in 1980 when the former worked for the Stasi and the latter for the KGB. Their friendship strengthened in 1993 when Warnig arranged medical care in Germany for Putin's wife Lyudmila, who had suffered a serious accident. Putin is said to have not forgotten the favour, and has repaid Warning generously. Warnig's career took off during Putin's first term, and he has become a member of the board of directors of several strategic Russian companies including Rusal, Rosneft, Transneft, and VTB Bank.

Russia's state nuclear energy company Rosatom's cooperation projects abroad also play a key role in achieving Russia's foreign policy objectives. The Kremlin knows that there is little chance of sanctions being imposed in the nuclear energy sector as several EU member states and other Western nations have close ties with the Russian nuclear energy sector, including operation of nuclear power plants, supplies of nuclear fuel, and the Uranium trade. Thus, nuclear energy provides Moscow with an alternative to achieving its foreign policy goals. For instance, commissioning a nuclear power plant will tie the contracting entity to Rosatom for nearly 80 years. Rosatom has announced a goal of operating 30 international nuclear power plants by 2030.

Other threats

Terrorism

Emergence of the so-called Islamic State (Daesh)

The current wave of Islamist terrorism is the most extensive and dangerous the world has ever seen. It is linked to religious radicalisation and the spread of the accompanying conflicts including Sunni–Shia confrontations around the world.[5]

The current wave of Islamic terrorism is the most extensive and dangerous the world has encountered thus far.

In addition to a threat arising from al-Qaeda and its affiliates, the terror group Daesh with its Western-oriented influence, propaganda, and recruitment activity has forcefully emerged in 2014–2015. Unlike its predecessor al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Daesh is not a paramilitary or terrorist organisation in the classical sense, but more a hybrid between a terrorist organisation and an NGO. Its main goal is to establish a caliphate and thus achieve global dominance in the Islamic community. The caliphate would initially encompass the territory of Syria and Iraq, but Daesh aims to extend this area though constant warfare, involving both conventional military operations as well as paramilitary activity, including organising terrorist attacks.

Wishing to establish a caliphate, Daesh is not a terrorist organisation in the classical sense, but rather a hybrid between a terrorist organisation and an NGO.

5   The Sunni-Shia schism dates back to the beginning of Islam when after the death of Prophet Muhammad the question of his successor as caliph arose in the 7th century. There have been ups and downs in the more than 1,300 years of Sunni-Shia relations, but a definite reconciliation between these religious denominations has never been achieved. On the contrary, the Sunni-Shia conflict has become especially acute in the last decades, from the end of the 20th century. The reason for increased tensions between the Sunni and Shia communities and countries has been the emergence of radical scholars and religious movements in both denominations. A defining moment in this conflict was the Iranian Shia Islamist revolution in 1979, which made Sunni countries (especially Saudi Arabia) feel threatened.

The first public announcement on Daesh[6] was made by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on 8 April 2013 when he published a 21-minute audio message announcing a merger between AQI and Jabhat al-Nusra (JaN), and the formation of a new group, ISIL. However, JaN's leader Abu Muhammad al-Julani (also known as al-Golani) announced a few days later in an audio message posted on radical Islamist websites that JaN had pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda's leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, instead. Al-Julani also denied any allegations that JaN had joined AQI.

JaN was established by AQI, but with Syria's rise to be the main jihadist battleground, the group's importance and self-image had also expanded. The organisation gained much attention from al-Qaeda, including the arrival of al-Qaeda leaders in Syria. Therefore, Al-Baghdadi made the announcement of two organisations merging in order to avoid JaN being 'hijacked' by al-Qaeda. However, the idea of being directly affiliated with al-Qaeda was more appealing to JaN's leaders.

Al-Qaeda's leader al-Zawahiri also made a statement concerning the status of JaN in 2013, claiming that JaN is not a member of Daesh and is a sister organisation of al-Qaeda. Al-Zawahiri ordered ISIL to disband and return to Iraq; in other words, to return to being AQI. ISIL rejected this order and announced that it would not compromise and surrender. Despite disagreements at the top level, combatants of JaN and Daesh continued cooperation in Syria at the local level.

At the same time, other Islamist groupings fighting Bashar al-Assad's regime claimed that Daesh was more interested in establishing a caliphate in northern Syria than fighting against al-Assad's regime. In the second half of 2013, Daesh began enforcing Sharia law in Raqqa and Azaz, cities it controlled at that time. By November 2013, tensions between Daesh and other groups fighting al-Assad's regime had evolved into open hostilities.

In June 2014, Daesh, in cooperation with local Sunni tribes and former officers of Saddam Hussein's army, launched an offensive in Iraq, gaining control of significant parts of

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6   Daesh's original name was the 'Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)' but at the height of success, ISIL proclaimed a caliphate on 29 June 2014 and changed its name to Islamic State or Daesh. From then onwards, al-Baghdadi has called himself Caliph Ibrahim.

the north and west of the country, seizing oil fields and oil production infrastructure. Daesh also obtained large sums of money, military equipment, and arms.

In order to establish a caliphate and maintain control over its territory, Daesh will have to increase its human resources. Foreign recruitment plays an essential role in this regard. Having

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WHO IS CALIPH IBRAHIM OR ABU BAKR AL-BAGHDADI?

AFP

Name: *Ibrahim Awwadty Ibrahim Ali al-Badri al-Samarrai*
(إبراهيم عواد علي البدري السامرائي)
Born: *1971*
Aliases: *Abu Du'a, Abu Bakr al-Baghdad, 'Awwad Ibrahim 'Ali al-Badri al-Samarrai', Ibrahim 'Awad Ibrahim al-Badri al Samarrai, Abu Duaa', Dr. Ibrahim*

Prior to the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the current leader of Daesh, studied Islamist theology in Baghdad, focusing on Islamist culture, history, and Sharia law, obtaining a doctorate. In 2003, he and his comrades established a resistance group called Jaish al-Sunna, which joined al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in 2006. Al-Baghdadi was arrested by the US military in February 2004 in Iraq but was released in December of the same year from Camp Bucca since he was deemed harmless.

After the deaths of AQI leaders Abu Omar al-Baghdadi and Abu Hamza al-Muhajir in 2010, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi took over as head of AQI. In 2013 he declared himself leader of ISIL and, with the proclamation of the so-called Islamic State in 2014, he renamed himself Caliph Ibrahim. From 2011, al-Baghdadi has been included in the list in UN Security Council Resolution 1989 (2011) concerning people sanctioned in relation to Al-Qaida. The US has designated al-Baghdadi a wanted global terrorist in relation to dissemination of terrorism.

this goal in mind, Daesh knowingly exaggerates the proportion of foreign fighters in its propaganda to efficiently spread its message across the world. This is facilitated by the fact that Daesh has managed to seize large areas of Iraq and Syria, the very region that was the core of the caliphate that existed in between the 7th and 13th centuries. Having partial control of the core territory of the former caliphate is one of the main aspects that makes Daesh so appealing to radical Islamists. Throughout its existence, al-Qaeda managed to organise a series of large-scale terror attacks, but these do not outweigh restoring to historical caliphate.

How does declaration of a caliphate affect global jihadism?

There has been an ongoing power struggle between al-Qaeda and Daesh for the title of the leader of the global jihadist movement for the past two years. On February 2014, al-Qaeda's official media organisation As-Sahab made a statement claiming that al-Qaeda is not affiliated with Daesh since al-Qaeda had been neither informed nor consulted on the establishment of this organisation. According to the statement al-Qaeda was dissatisfied with the creation of Daesh and ordered it to dissolve, and emphasised that al-Qaeda was not responsible for Daesh's actions.

Daesh declared an Islamic caliphate on June 2014 and called upon all Middle-Eastern jihadist organisations to pledge allegiance to this Islamic State. Declaration of a caliphate has raised a dilemma for Middle-Eastern jihadist organisations, and also for al-Qaeda's sister organisations: should they pledge allegiance to Daesh, or continue to recognise al-Qaeda as the leader of the global jihadist movement? Thus far, al-Qaeda's sister organisations have remained loyal to al-Qaeda. At the same time, Daesh's military achievements in Iraq and Syria as well as its vision of a universal Islamic State are appealing to a great number of followers of the global jihadi ideology. This poses a serious challenge to al-Qaeda's leading role in the global jihadist movement. Neither can we rule out the possibility that al-Qaeda and Daesh will try to outdo each other in organising terror attacks in order to win over more jihadists.

The threat of terrorism in Europe and Estonia

Terrorists have successfully used cyberspace for disseminating ideology and actions as well as for communication. This has created a situation where jihadists can use the internet to reach people quickly and without any geographical restrictions.

Daesh's success in seizing large areas at the core of the 7th–13th century caliphate has gained the group popularity among radical Islamists.

Declaration of a caliphate has raised a dilemma for jihadist organisations; to whom should they pledge allegiance?

Daesh's propaganda agenda has been successfully spread to countries where there have been no problems with Islamist extremism in the past. Supporters of global jihadism are used for recruiting new combatants or inspiring them to act as 'lone wolves'[7] in spreading terror in their home countries. Daesh is increasingly attempting to establish contact with a younger generation of radicals who are unknown to European security services, and these people are notable targets of Daesh's influence activity. The situation is aggravated by the fact that the radicalisation process of voluntary combatants from Europe is becoming increasingly shorter, and radicalising networks are expanding, spreading into social media rather than religious

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TERROR ATTACKS IN PARIS

What happened? *On 13 November 2015, terror attacks were conducted by 8 terrorists in the 10th and 11th districts of Paris and near a football stadium located in the suburb of Saint-Denis. On 14 November 2015, the terror organisation Daesh took responsibility for the attacks. A total of 129 people were killed and 352 wounded in the attacks. This was the largest attack in Europe coordinated and prepared by Daesh's network. For the first time, suicide belts were used in addition to arms.*

Why is it important? *More dedicated to conducting foreign and information operations than before, Daesh called upon its fighters in a statement made on 14 November 2015 to continue attacks on members of the coalition fighting against Daesh. Daesh has changed its tactics: instead of inviting combatants to Syria, it is sending foreign fighters who have a war experience from Syria back to Europe to organise attacks there. In earlier terror attacks in 2015, mainly lone wolves with no experience from the Syrian war were used as attackers. The Paris attacks showed that the jihadists who executed the operation (led from Syria) were European citizens who belonged to an organised network, and returned to Europe from Syria using false identities. Daesh's goal was to demonstrate its operational capacity in Europe in order to motivate new volunteers to carry out new acts.*

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7 A so-called lone wolf is a person who has not received any direct training or an order to commit an attack from a terrorist organisation. They act on appeals of terrorist organisations to commit terror attacks in a given country or against a specific target. Lone wolves are typically individually radicalised people who are unknown to the security services, making them very difficult to detect prior to committing the attack.

centres. A well-functioning propaganda strategy has resulted in effective recruitment. Each member of Daesh can be a potential recruiter: they can develop their own propaganda networks and spread their message on social media, describing consistent military success against the West and glorifying life in the caliphate.

The profile of Europeans heading to Syria is varied. They are not only people who are miserable, uneducated Muslims who suffer from poverty or integration problems. They include both married and single people with varying levels of education, people with military combat experience, and convicted criminals. There are under-aged combatants, young women, and retired people. Radicalisation is usually not caused by a belief in Islam (in reality, they do not focus on studying or understanding Islam) but rather problems in one's personal life, personal contacts, a wish to start a new life full of adventure, or a yearning to experience war, execute a terror attack, or die as a martyr.

Radicalisation is not caused by Islam per se (in reality, they do not focus on studying or knowing Islam), but rather by problem s in one's personal life – a wish to start a new and adventurous life; to experience war, to execute a terror attack; or to die as a martyr.

Nearly 30,000 voluntary foreign fighters from across the world have headed to Syria to participate in the military conflict there. At least 6,500 are from Europe, mostly from France, the UK, Germany, and Belgium, but with increasing numbers from northern Europe. Most European volunteers have joined Daesh. The relative geographic proximity of Syria and Iraq also plays an important role in the multitude of foreign fighters. However, although the number of fighters heading to Syria from Europe is still increasing, the rate of growth has fallen in comparison to 2014.

Thus far there is no evidence of resolution to armed conflicts in the Middle East and Africa which facilitate the spread of religious extremism across the world, including to Europe. Therefore, extremists return to Europe and Daesh's large-scale and effective influence operations against the West – instigating lone wolves – continue to pose a serious threat to European security.

In the article 'From the battles of Al-Ahzāb to the war of coalitions' in the 11th issue of Daesh's magazine *Dabiq*, Daesh calls on fighters to attacks the coalition partners of operation '*Inherent Resolve*' and their supporters. For the first time, the targets mentioned include Estonia. It should be noted that l-Qaeda's magazine Inspire has never mentioned Estonia. Daesh's article calls on fighters acting outside the caliphate to attack the listed targets, their citizens and interests wherever and by

whatever means possible. However, it can still be concluded that international terrorism is currently not a serious threat to Estonia, but it is a high risk for Estonian citizens abroad. The greatest threat to Estonia in relation to Islamic terrorism arises from radicalisation of Muslim communities in the neighbouring countries and EU citizens participating in armed conflicts outside the European Union, mainly in Syria and Iraq.

International terrorism is currently not a serious threat to Estonia, but poses a potentially high threat to Estonian citizens abroad.

Conflict in Syria

The civil war in Syria began in 2011 with unrest inspired by the so-called Arab Spring protests that had erupted in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. The ruling al-Assad family in Syria (headed by Bashar al-Assad who became president after the death of his father Hafez al-Assad in 2000) responded to the public's demands for reforms with repressions that resulted in the civil war.

At the beginning of 2012, al-Qaeda's leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri called on its members in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey to join against al-Assad's regime and organise terror attacks. In reality, large numbers of foreign fighters were already flowing into Syria by the time of al-Zawahiri's appeal. By the summer of 2012 it was clear that al-Assad's regime was not capable of independently restoring control over the entire country, but neither was he threatened with immediate collapse. This resulted in stalemate. Even though armed opposition fighting against al-Assad's regime was increasing in terms of both human resources and technical capacity, it remained fragmented. Consequently, armed opposition units began to act increasingly as regional militia groups, which further aggravated the chaos in the country. The origins of the negative trends in the country include deterioration of the economy, increased ethnic tensions between the Alawites (Shiites) and Sunnites, increased presence of forces promoting global jihadism, and religious radicalisation of oppositional forces.

By the end of 2012, al-Assad's regime in Syria acted not as a government standing against insurgents but as a well-armed protagonist fighting in a civil war. This resulted in ever more violent battles since al-Assad's regime became less interested in the opinion of and pressure from the international community. At the same time, the international community became greatly concerned over the growing role of jihadists and their position in fighting against al-Assad's regime. The number of European citizens and residents going to fight in Syria, where they often

Al-Assad's regime in Syria acts not as a government standing against insurgents, but rather as a well-armed paramilitary combatant.

joined jihadist units, was also escalating. By 2013, the civil war in Syria had become the most appealing destination for jihadists around the world.

As combat activity intensified in the suburbs of Damascus, al-Assad's regime used chemical weapons there in the early morning of 21 August 2013. Consequently, Syria was put under great international pressure. This resulted in an unexpected turn in the politics of al-Assad's administration: the existence of chemical weapon was officially admitted for the first time on 9 September 2013. Hoping to forestall US military strikes,

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RUSSIA'S MILITARY CAMPAIGN IN SYRIA

Russia's military support to Syrian government forces is not sufficient to achieve a breakthrough on the battlefield, but this is not Moscow's aim as Russia's main efforts are directed at forming an international coalition. Military operations are only meant to support this goal. Air raids must convince the international public that Moscow is ready to contribute to the coalition and demonstrate Russia's military might – for which the Ukrainian conflict offered few opportunities. A military base in Syria gives Russia the opportunity to strongly position itself in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea. For instance, the anti-aircraft missile system S-400 covers not only Syria's air space but also the air space between the Syrian coast and Cyprus. One can assume that the real targets of the cruise missile strikes in Syria were European countries: Russia wanted them to see what an operation 'to destroy critical targets' would look like.

Russians will remain in Syria even if al-Assad should be ousted. Russia's military presence in Syria is expected to grow in the coming months and may reach 10,000–12,000 people in 2016. The permanent presence of such a large contingent in Syria is a financial and logistical burden. Taking into account rotation of units, at least 7–8 battalion tactical groups (only manoeuvre units) would be fixed in Syria. Considering the Russian army's constant lack of personnel, this is a substantial number.

For now, Russia's resources are tied down in Syria and only time will tell whether these risks were justified. They will if Moscow succeeds in building a coalition, breaking away from isolation, and restoring contacts with leading Western nations. Restoring contacts would be accompanied by (continued) influence activity towards these countries, which is one of the main goals of Moscow in its operation in Syria.

Daesh combatants marching into Raqqa, Syria

AFP

the Syrian government agreed to place its chemical weapons under international control. The Syrian minister of foreign affairs Walid al-Muallem announced the following day that Syria has agreed to disclose the locations of their chemical weapons storage sites, to stop producing chemical weapons, and to allow representatives of Russia, other countries, and the UN to access the facilities linked to chemical weapons. Al-Muallem also confirmed that Syria would join the international chemical weapons convention. In late September 2013, the Syrian government officially declared the chemical weapons the regime possessed and commenced international cooperation for destruction thereof.

The chemical weapons destruction treaty signed with al-Assad pushed several armed groups away from the secular opposition and created a belief that there will never be a Western military intervention in the Syrian civil war. Therefore, at the end of 2013 Jaysh al-Islam[8] and five other major local Islamist (but not jihadist) armed groups,[9] with a total of 45,000 combatants, announced merging to form the Islamic Front. Another factor contributing to the formation of this group was ISIL's rise in Syria, which escalated tensions between the secular and Islamist opposition, but also between Arabs and Kurds, and even between JaN and ISIL.

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8   In September 2013, 43 armed Islamist (but not jihadist) groupings operating in Damascus area pledged allegiance to Liwa al-Islam's commander Muhammad Zahran Ibn Abdallah Alloush. Named Jaysh al-Islam, the new grouping had 30,000–40,000 combatants.

9   The Islamic movement Ahrar al-Sham, brigades of Suqur al-Sham, Liwa' al-Tawhid, Liwa al-Haqq, brigades of Ansar al-Sham, and the smaller grouping Kurdish Islamic Front.

The Geneva II Conference on Syria took place under UN auspices in Montreux (Switzerland) at the beginning of 2014. Although both the Syrian regime and the exiled political opposition were represented at the peace conference, most of the armed oppositional groupings did not participate and failed to acknowledge Geneva II. It was clear from the start of the conference that a breakthrough would not be achieved, and the stalemate persisted in Syria throughout the second half of 2014 and into 2015. Russian air raids that began on 30 September 2015 also failed to bring a decisive breakthrough for the al-Assad regime. The Syrian conflict has a global impact, influencing not only Syria's neighbours but also other countries, including those in Europe. The security of these nations is threatened by extremists who have brought along terrorism and violence to their home countries after returning from fighting in Syria. Jordan, Lebanon and Israel are at the greatest risk of the conflict spilling over onto their territory, and these countries have faced to varying extents the consequences of the Syrian civil war: humanitarian crisis, mass movement of refugees, cross-border armed incidents, and extremist activity. Naturally, the Syrian conflict has a direct effect on the fight against Daesh in Iraq. There is little possibility of a diplomatic breakthrough in Syria in 2016. Even assuming that an unlikely agreement to form a joint position for negotiations can be reached between all the forces opposing and fighting al-Assad's regime, there are still many obstacles to the Syrian peace process. There is no consensus on Bashar al-Assad's role in the peace process. It is difficult to believe that Russia and Iran would stop supporting the current regime even if an agreement was reached on al-Assad's replacement. Moreover, the political parties and armed groups in Syria have diametrically opposing views on the future of Syria.[10] For example, Ahrar al-Sham, one of the largest and most influential groups within the armed opposition fighting against al-Assad, works in cooperation with JaN, al-Qaeda's branch in Syria. However, if major armed opposition groups such as Ahrar al-Sham or Jaysh al-Islam are left out of the peace plan, the plan could not be successfully implemented.

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10 There are numerous armed groups with various aims operating in Syria. Group sizes range from 100–200 people to thousands of members. Some of these groups are linked to a certain geographic area. The ideologies of these groups vary, ranging from moderate to radical views.

Libya

The greatest terror threat from Africa comes from Libya, which is becoming the next largest Daesh stronghold in the world behind Iraq and Syria. After Libya's leader Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi was toppled in 2011 after 42 years of rule, the country plunged into a civil war which fragmented Libya between several conflicting parties supported by various armed groupings. The so-called liberal government in Tobruk was supported by the Libyan National Army led by General Khalifa Haftar and militias from Zintan, and the Libya Dawn coalition (the so-called Islamists) controlled Tripoli and was mostly supported by units from Misrata. Since early 2015, violence has escalated in Libya, and Daesh has used this situation to its advantage. According to a UN report on 1 December 2015, Daesh has gained substantial weight in Libya and if the rival governments fail to reach an agreement on governing the state,[11] it may expand its territory in Libya even further. The report states that of all Daesh's branches or provinces, [12] Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi controls the Libyan branch the most and sees this region as having the most potential for expanding the caliphate. Daesh is already calling for people on social media to travel to Libya instead of Iraq and Syria. This may bring an increase of African jihadists in Libya. For now, Daesh may have up to 3,000 fighters in Libya, most of whom are from Tunisia and Morocco. Daesh has complete control over Sirte and its surrounding area, and has a smaller presence in Sabratha, Tripoli, Sabha, Benghazi, and Derna.

From all of Daesh's provinces, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi controls the Libyan branch the most and sees the region with the highest potential for expanding the caliphate.

11 The UN has attempted to invite the conflict participants to agree to and end the fighting from the beginning of 2015. Finally, a unity government deal was signed on 18 December 2015. However, the deal has been rejected by speakers of the legislative bodies of both Tobruk and Tripoli. Moreover, the main armed groups in the county did not participate in the talks. Thus, this deal is not as significant as the media has presented it since the main objective – achieving stability in Libya – is not realistically attainable.

12 Daesh has so-called provinces in Iraq and Syria, Libya, Egypt, Algeria, Nigeria, Afghanistan and Pakistan, Yemen and the North Caucasus.

For Daesh, Libya will remain a key location from which it can spread to neighbouring countries and to elsewhere in Africa. Libyan training camps present an extensive threat to the governments and tourism sectors of the neighbouring countries. This has been especially evident in Tunisia and Egypt where terrorists returning from Libyan training camps have committed several attacks. Tunisia is also the largest source of jihadists fighting in Iraq and Syria – up to 6,000 people, according to various sources.

If Libya is to become the preferred jihadist battleground, and jihadists will find it more difficult to travel to Iraq or Syria, Libya may into a larger destination for jihadist fighters. Also, combatants returning from Iraq and Syria may be heading to Libya next. Thus, if Daesh succeeds in making Libya its next major stronghold, attempts to attack Europe via Libya cannot be ruled out.

Migration crisis

Escalation of tensions in international conflict zones is a potential source of instability for Estonia and the whole of Europe. Failed states suffering from lawlessness are the main causes of the migration crisis. According to a UN assessment, 80% of the people who have reached Europe through the Balkans are fleeing conflict in Syria, Afghanistan or Iraq.

A massive increase of migrants heading to Europe in 2015 has resulted in escalated economic, social and political pressure, and security threats in EU member states. This holds true for both southern European countries at the frontline of the influx of migrants, as well as for northern Europe, which is an increasingly popular destination for migrants. European countries have a limited capacity and appetite to receive the increasing number of migrants, and more and more refugees are using illegal methods for entering the European Union. The number of people who have tried to enter the EU using false identification or have presented false information about their nationality also increased markedly in 2015. As the migratory movement intensifies, identification of people and checking identity requires more time and more resources.

Refugees on Macedonian-Greek border trying to get on a train to Serbia

Reuters

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Failed states pose a threat due to their links to religious extremism, international crime, and terrorism. Globalisation has magnified these effects even further. As the number of unidentified people illegally entering the EU rises, this serves as a basis for illegal activity that supports intertwined networks of terrorism, international crime, and illegal immigration, as well as for extremists infiltrating European countries. Other threats include the increasing number of people who have had contact with, or have been influenced by, members of terrorist organisations fighting in Syria, and the rising number of radicalised people in these target countries.

Since the security situation in the migrants' native countries remains difficult, this migratory movement towards the EU is expected to continue. In the context of the migration crisis, several EU member states have seen a surge in the popularity of far-right movements and political parties displaying hostility towards the EU. This rise of nationalism and intolerance may result in growing tensions, disorder, and civil disturbances in member states, and the spread of extremist views escalates conflicts within the EU, aggravating domestic tensions in member states and causing conflicts between them. This will undermine the integrity of the European Union as a whole. The spread of extremist views and escalation of tension is skilfully used by Russia in pursuing its foreign policy goals by attempting to fuel conflicts within the EU by, for example, supporting European far-right extremists.

Cyber threats

The rapid global development of information technology, including developed countries choosing IT solutions which provide greater efficiency, comes at the price of increased cyber threats to the security of these countries. Being little regulated in legal terms, the quickly developing cyberspace provides multiple levels of threats to countries since the direct targets of attacks may include both individuals and states. Nations find it difficult to provide their citizens with active protection in the cyberspace, since this would be accompanied by privacy restrictions. It is also difficult to identify the perpetrators of cyber-attacks – whether a country or an individual – and therefore adequate response to such attacks is also challenging. The lines between cyber activists, criminals and state-paid hackers are becoming increasingly blurred.

Security threats arising from cyber-attacks can be divided into three broad categories: attacks against the 1) confidentiality; 2) availability; and 3) integrity of information. The first category is usually associated with economic and diplomatic espionage. Countries systematically collect information, and an opportunity to use information that has been obtained via criminals or activists will not be passed up. This category also includes state-funded groups that use complex malware such as APT29, a cyber intelligence group linked to the Russian government. The second category includes attempts to disrupt the functioning of society or an institution and to discredit them internationally. The coordinated and massive denial-of-service attacks conducted against Estonia in 2007 fall under this category. The third group consists of cyber-attacks aimed at altering information in states' systems, and using the resulting incorrect information for the purposes of, for example, propaganda. In these cases, the goal is to discredit and confuse the country domestically and on the international arena.

The volume of worldwide cyber espionage – including the new phenomenon of state-coordinated cyber-attacks – has grown rapidly in recent years. In cyberspace, Russia is the source of the greatest threat to Estonia, the European Union and NATO. Estonia is a target of hostile cyber acts both as an individual country, and as a member of the EU and NATO. Russia is actively adding to its cyber-attack capacity and has a wide range of tools and resources necessary for carrying out attacks (denial-of-service, malware, security vulnerabilities, etc.). According to Russia's information doctrine, the country is in a constant information war with the West, and cyber activity is necessary for introducing (read: enforcing) its geopolitical power, position as a nation of authority, and its viewpoint. Following Edward Snowden's leaks, the paranoia that Russia is not in control of its information space and other countries are constantly spying on Russia using the internet is widespread among the Kremlin. Russia is manipulating social media and the press, spreading lies and its propaganda positions, and attempting to manipulate public opinion. The lines between cyber activists, criminals and state-paid hackers are becoming increasingly blurred, and cyber criminals are collaborating with the intelligence services of countries that are hostile to Estonia, which continues to be a constant target of cyber-attacks, although the intensity of attacks against Estonia is quite low.

Extranets of Estonian state authorities have been repeatedly 'mapped' and several test attacks were conducted against Estonia during 2015. The probable reason for mapping networks is to determine the resources necessary for future attacks. In other words, the adversary wants to find out what resources are necessary and in what volume for halting a vital service, or how that service is set up and defended. In previous years, there have been repeated attempts to gain access to sensitive networks using e-mails infected with malware (e.g. Ke3Chang and CosmicDuke attacks).

The term 'hybrid war' or warfare without declaring a war emerged in the context of the military conflict in Ukraine. In a future hybrid war, massive cyber-attacks and disruptions of information infrastructure may start much earlier than the actual military action. Disruptions of information and other vital infrastructure will be used for creating dissatisfaction with the government among certain segments of the population. This dissatisfaction will then be used for legitimising emergence of 'little green men' or 'militia groups'. Cyber activity and cyber warfare have become a part of modern warfare. However,

unlike conventional warfare, cyber warfare requires constant testing and assessment of the adversary's capabilities. It is relatively cheap and very effective to destabilise a country's political or economic environment using cyber attacks, and thus it would be folly to assume that the IT solutions currently available in Estonia are entirely safe. However, constant system improvement, international cooperation, and educating end users will help reduce the potential damage arising from hostile cyber activity. New technologies, user convenience, cost-saving, and international media coverage should not outweigh the importance of avoiding risk to the Estonian people and state.