

U.S. ARMY



Project 1704

**A U.S. Army War College
Analysis of Russian Strategy
in Eastern Europe, an
Appropriate U.S. Response,
and the Implications for U.S.
Landpower**

The United States Army War College

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Project 1704 and is produced under the purview of the United States Army War College to foster dialogue of topics with strategic ramifications. This study drew upon the expertise of hand selected U.S. Army War College faculty and students from across the services, departments, agencies and from eight nations to provide a thought-provoking and relevant discourse of a topic of timely relevance; the reemergence of Russian strategic landpower.

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Executive Summary

In the summer of 2014, Russia forcibly annexed Crimea from Ukraine and then actively supported ethnic Russian separatists in an on-going irredentist bid in Eastern Ukraine. This aggressive policy threatens to challenge NATO and the United States in its support of Ukraine and other nations of Eastern Europe. From this changing strategic environment, three central questions emerge: (1) What is the Russian strategy in their periphery? (2) What is the appropriate U.S. response? (3) What are the implications for U.S. landpower?

The Russian Strategic Environment

Vladimir Putin's grand strategy relies on a complex mix of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic factors to preserve and expand Russian global power. Putin's strategy hinges on maintaining internal legitimacy, advancing a narrative of Russian greatness, manipulating nationalism, and protecting sources of revenue. He seizes opportunities to improve his position by controlling the media and the wealth of the elite class. Additionally, he maintains government control of large sectors of the Russian economy and industry, while engaging in energy politics abroad to advance its national interests. Finally, Putin is determined to keep former Soviet bloc countries oriented politically and economically toward Russia. In this, he espouses distinctly anti-Western rhetoric, casting NATO and the United States as Russian adversaries.

Putin wields substantial control over the entire Russian system, and he will not willingly give up power. His governing style is called "competitive authoritarianism," which is a blend of old Soviet style leadership laced with hints of democracy. Yet, in this, he must maintain popular support, energy revenues, a strong military, and an elite that will not challenge his position. Adding to his woes, Putin's aggressive tone against the West gives him less and less room to maneuver diplomatically. Yet, he will continue to propagate a nationalist agenda, while bashing the West and blaming America for Russia's hardships. It seems, that at least domestically, his gambit is working. In the wake of the crises in Crimea and the Ukraine, Putin's popularity has reached impressive heights.

Yet, not all is going well for him as there are dark economic predictions on the horizon for Russia. Western sanctions indeed have taken a toll, but they are only partly responsible for the economic crisis Putin now faces. Other factors include Russia's energy-dependent market, a "corrupt-and-control" economy based on patronage and fraud, the collapse of the ruble, and declining oil prices. To compound matters for Moscow is the inclination of some European customers, not wanting to be subject to potential economic blackmail, and thereby seek non-Russian alternatives to their energy needs.

Russian Landpower

The 2008 invasion of Georgia and the ongoing intervention in Ukraine demonstrates Russia's increasing 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 strictly conventional approach by manipulating a sympathetic population and using a robust security infrastructure from the Sochi Olympics to capture the region. Finally, with the subsequent unrest eastern Ukraine, Moscow inspired and led a separatist movement hidden behind a cloak of ambiguity, backed by the powerful capabilities of its army.

Despite the differences, these operations, exhibit common features of Russia's use of military force. First, Russia depends heavily—almost exclusively—on landpower to achieve its strategic military objectives in its near abroad. This landpower-centric approach has been part of a broader Russian strategy to roll back the expansion of Western influence (especially NATO and the EU) in the former Soviet republics. Second, Russia has enabled its ground forces to conduct hybrid, irregular warfare as the primary means of warfare against its smaller neighbors. Additionally, it has shifted to a less centralized military structure, relying on special operations forces and other unconventional units to achieve its strategic ends. Finally, information operations (IO) and cyber capabilities have emerged as key components of Russian military operations. IO and cyber operations were used independently against Estonia in 2007. In contrast, they were integrated as key elements of a coordinated military campaign more recently in both Georgia and Ukraine.

Russia's military reforms started shortly before the war with Georgia and accelerated after the conflict exposed critical shortcomings in a number of areas. Ongoing reform and modernization progress are directed at developing a capability to intervene quickly and decisively in the region. To do this, it is concentrating resources on a small number of elite units, primarily airborne and special operations forces that make up the core of its emerging Rapid Reaction Force.

From Putin's perspective, the West is acting provocatively by turning Russia's neighbors into potential adversaries. He blames prodemocracy movements on the United States, and refuses to believe that a people would not want to be under the influence or control of the Kremlin. In this, the propensity of Russia to see itself as besieged by the West will, in the words of Olga Oliker of RAND, make it "difficult to reassure and easy to escalate with."

The Emerging Russian Operational Approach

Moscow uses deception and disinformation 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. By doing this, Putin operated inside the decision-making cycle of NATO and

thus retained the strategic initiative. Additionally, this approach exploits fissures between NATO and the E.U. When Putin believes that employing conventional forces is too risky, he resorts to using unconventional forces, scaled and adapted to the strategic environment. This “strategy of ambiguity” is being applied with effect in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.

Putin’s “strategy of ambiguity” is comprised of seven components:

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.
2. Capitalize on long-term IO campaign. The tools of the IO campaign include high-quality Russian television, radio programming, hockey clubs, youth camps, and the internet. They are designed to export Moscow’s strategic messaging across Europe, specifically targeting the Russian diaspora.
3. 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 in any region Putin chooses. As in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, these movements start as peaceful protests, but ultimately lead to taking over government buildings and inciting armed insurrections. Once engaged in low-level combat, the Russian rebels proclaim their right to self-determination and eventually appeal to Moscow for aid. However convenient, the Kremlin does not need popular support in the Russian diaspora to achieve its strategic ends. Should the local populace in a contested region not support an uprising, Moscow can simply export a separatist movement from Russia to provide the pretext for an intervention.
4. 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.
5. Leverage ambiguity to maintain strategic flexibility. Deception and disinformation are the key ingredients of the Russian approach, and Putin uses these tools to sow ambiguity and thus obscure his strategy. As a result, Putin remains a step ahead of NATO’s decision-making process, and quickly adapts his actions to keep the Alliance off balance.
6. Violate international borders and support the 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. These “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.

7. Seize an area to achieve a limited strategic end. When the security of a targeted region collapses, the international response is mired in debate, and a humanitarian crisis ensues, the conditions are set for Russian forces to intervene. Despite characterizing the intervention as a temporary salve to an unacceptable human crisis, Putin would deploy forces for as long as needed to achieve a security environment favorable to Moscow. With such an approach, Russia can attain limited strategic objectives with minimal risk. The ultimate goal of this methodology would be, in the long term, to discredit NATO and thereby undermine the security of the Baltics. In the short to midterm, such an approach could easily be used against Moldova or other area outside of NATO to expand Russian influence.

The challenge facing the United States and NATO is how to respond quickly to ambiguous and nontraditional military threats emanating from Russia. Although the strategy of ambiguity has proven effective in Ukraine, it is vulnerable to political resolve and military deterrence. The United States and NATO should therefore craft a clear policy and implement an unambiguous strategy to deter further Russian aggression in Europe.

Analysis and Recommendations

U.S. policy aims should consist of: (1) a strong NATO alliance as the backbone of European security (i.e. no further talk of a “European Army”); (2) Russian compliance with international norms that recognizes and respects international borders; (3) recognition by regional powers (including Russia) of the right to political self-determination in Ukraine and elsewhere; (4) A clear, unambiguous NATO policy to deter Russian aggression in Eastern Europe.

There is a need for a strong NATO to ensure a safe and stable Europe. A resilient NATO bolsters the confidence of member states while moderating the behavior of would-be aggressors. Non-NATO members likewise benefit from these effects, albeit to a lesser degree. The path to forging a strong NATO must include significant activities in the land domain. Given the wide range of U.S options, capabilities, resources, and relationships necessary to bolster European security, the new U.S. Army Operating Concept is well-suited for this strategic challenge. While military forces in all domains will play a role, landpower will be a decisive component of the combined joint force for this long-term strategic challenge.

Countering Russian advantages in geography, forces, and ethnic-based nationalism requires a balanced and multi-faceted approach to deny Moscow the strategic initiative.

There are ten key objectives U.S. and NATO leaders should pursue to counter the Russia advantages that drive its hybrid operational approach:

1. Cultivate increased NATO commitment and resolve.
2. Build and maintain a credible and scalable deterrent force forward in Eastern Europe.
3. Develop effective intelligence capabilities across the region.
4. Develop focused information operations and cyber capabilities.
5. Develop capabilities and set conditions to counter Russian special operations forces and their development of proxies.
6. Buttress operational security, counterintelligence, and communications security capabilities in potential flashpoints.
7. Counter anti-Western rhetoric in the near abroad.
8. Influence Russia's centrally controlled decision-making process.
9. Decrease energy dependence on Russia to mitigate Russia's political, economic, and informational leverage against NATO countries.
10. Maintain the credibility of the U.S. nuclear deterrent.

Moscow seeks to assert authority over its near abroad (the region) while discrediting NATO. The latter goal is accomplished if Article V is not triggered in the face of "local," Moscow inspired unrest. The way to counter such provocation is to signal to Moscow that stirring trouble in any part of the Baltics—Narva, Riga, eastern Lithuania, or elsewhere—will trigger Article V. Unfortunately, rapid decision-making is not a strong suit of the 28-member alliance, especially given Russia's ability to apply economic pressure and other disincentives to action. Yet, NATO is the best hope for European security. The challenge is to provide a capable and credible forward deterrence that allows NATO to have time and space for deliberations.

The clearest way to undermine Putin's strategy of ambiguity and to deny him the advantage of time and space is to station NATO (especially U.S.) forces in the Baltic countries. This should be a credible deterrent force that would be committed to combat in the event of Russian intervention or attack, whether conventional or unconventional. Such a forward deployment would underscore NATO's resolve, demonstrate physical commitment, and deprive Moscow of the strategic initiative. Such a robust strategy would deprive Putin of the strategic initiative regarding the most vulnerable NATO members, while deterring Moscow from aggression. In this regard, "a single U.S. infantry company in Estonia would have a greater deterrent effect than a heavy brigade

stationed in Germany.” With this simple stroke, Putin’s advantage in time, geography as well as his advantage with rapid decision making is muted. The strategic calculus changes from, “if Narva (or other Baltic area) is worth New York,” to, “is Narva worth Moscow.” Simply put, Russian adventurism in the Baltics would be too risky.

The burden of paying for this forward presence need not be borne alone by the United States. The cost can be mitigated by requiring the host nations to provide adequate infrastructure and logistic support. Additionally, NATO and the European Union should be requested to provide financial support as well, since they are the beneficiaries of a forward American presence. NATO and the EU should also offset the costs of logistics, transportation, etc to further reduce the cost of a forward American presence. Finally, NATO nations should commit to providing military enablers to round out this American forward force. This will not only reduce the expense for the American taxpayer but also make this force truly multinational. In this way, the tax payer, whether in New York, or Berlin, will know that all of NATO is doing its part in providing for a mutual defense. However, the United States must take the lead. This will set the conditions for other NATO nations to take an increased portion of the burden, and over a short period, this forward force will be truly a multinational NATO element.

Vladimir Putin’s approach to Europe and the United States is to divide and conquer. He craftily leverages economic incentives and energy politics to weaken the resolve of NATO and EU member states. In this, Moscow succeeds when, for the sake of economic concerns, bilateral agreements are signed between Russia and any given European nation. With this in mind, the ongoing discussion of creating a “European Army” would be a decisive strategic victory for the Kremlin should it ever come to fruition. Such a force would weaken NATO and ultimately fracture the friendship and cooperation between Europe and North America. Why, after nearly seventy years of peace and stability, would leaders either in Europe or North America create a force structure that would benefit Moscow? A European Army, despite its merits otherwise, would not only draw off NATO’s already limited assets, resources and capabilities, but would set the conditions for a rival North American / European military force. Nothing could be better for the Kremlin than such an outcome or worse for NATO as an Alliance.

Despite its flaws, NATO is the most successful alliance in history. It weathered the dangers of the Cold War, provided Western Europe the longest period of peace that it has enjoyed since the Dark Ages, kept an expansionist Soviet Union at bay, survived the post-Cold War tribulations of the Balkans (despite predictions of its demise otherwise) and proved both adaptable and committed in the complex post 9/11 world. In the midst of this success, it is folly to entertain any discourse on setting the conditions for the Alliance’s end by ripping from it a “European Army.”

Putin’s tactics of manipulating the Russian populations of neighboring nations to stir instability and thereby attain limited strategic objectives is a threat to the NATO Alliance and European security. Putin’s actions in Georgia, Crimea and Eastern Ukraine demonstrate that he is willing to break international law to advance his regional ambitions. The United States has an opportunity to implement concerted measures to avert future Russian trouble in the Baltics. The message to the Kremlin must be that

any cross border activity will categorically result in a confrontation with the United States, period. Whether it is Narva, Tallinn, Vilnius or Riga, the Kremlin must understand that meddling with the Baltic's Russian populations is not an option and these nations are off limits to any type of Moscow inspired destabilization. Any such meddling will be met quickly by determined force.

What of the region's large minority populations? The significance of fully assimilating the ethnic Russian populations is an important consideration for the Baltics. Steps must be taken to ensure that the ethnic Russians feel a part of society and enjoy economic prosperity. However, even if the Baltic countries fully integrate their ethnic Russian populations, there is still a risk. This will reduce the threat of Kremlin meddling, but it will not eliminate it. For instance, the turmoil in Eastern Ukraine was inspired and led by Russian Special Forces and intelligence operatives. If there is not sufficient popular backing locally, Moscow will simply export it, in the form of professional military forces attired in civilian clothes. Yet, forward basing of American conventional forces, bolstered by willing NATO troops and SOF changes the strategic calculus and makes such an act too risky for Moscow no matter how ambiguous their approach.

The options for countering Moscow's territorial aggression against Ukraine are far more complex. Putin views this nation, and Belarus, as squarely in his zone of control and influence. Any moves away from the Russian sphere of influence (such as gravitating toward the EU or NATO) are viewed as a direct threat to Moscow's vital interests. Yet, NATO and the EU's prevarications on how to deal with Putin's ongoing war against Ukraine serve to strengthen his position and only embolden him, not unlike the effect of the 1930s appeasement of Hitler. NATO should train, arm and equip the Ukrainian Army to defend its territory from Russian aggression in addition to the other indirect approaches to strengthen Kiev. Vladimir Putin must understand that North America and Europe will not tolerate his his invasions of neighboring countries.

For example, in Georgia, the Russian attack of 2008 derailed all attempts for this nation to seek integration into NATO and the EU. A plan should be developed by NATO to get Georgia back on its membership plan. Until this is decided, Moscow retains the strategic initiative with the message that its use of military force was successful in imposing its will on neighboring states.

There are no easy solutions to the challenge that Moscow poses to the stability of Europe. The nearly seventy years of peace that most of Europe has enjoyed is unprecedented in its history. This stable environment, which was largely provided by the United States, is taken for granted by our European Allies. Clearly they must do more to maintain this peace and security. Yet, the United States should not put this peace at risk by reducing its presence in Europe. The surest way to deter aggression directed against the Baltics is a viable American deterrence force forward deployed in these countries. With this, there will be clarity in the halls of the Kremlin, and in the mind of Vladimir Putin, of the resolve of the United States to ensure a Europe whole and free. Although maintaining such a credible force is costly, the risks of not honoring that commitment are far greater.

Preface

The Great Northern War commenced in 1700, as Czar Peter the Great of Russia forged an alliance with Denmark and Poland to contest the supremacy of the Swedish Empire. After a direct engagement with the formidable Swedish Army, the Danes quickly surrendered. Meanwhile, Peter the Great and his commanding general fled the scene, as the Swedes handily routed the Russian forces, inflicting heavy casualties and seizing the entire Russian artillery line.¹



Czar Peter the Great leads Russian forces to capture Narva in 1704. By Nikolay Sauerweid.

Whether Peter the Great's retreat was driven by fear or conceived as a strategic move to garner reinforcements is unknown. Regardless, he used the experience as a catalyst to create a modern army. In 1704, Peter the Great returned in force to lead a successful Russian siege of Swedish Narva (present-day northeast Estonia.) The victory was a remarkable reversal of Russia's trajectory, and it marked the country's formal emergence as a great European Power.²

More than 300 years later, shadows of the 1704 conquest linger. Today, the contours are much the same, as Russia

navigates economic hardships, and renews aggression against its neighboring countries in its near abroad. Thus, this study bears the title "Project 1704" as Moscow's recent actions mark yet another iteration of Russia flexing its muscles to maintain its status as a great European Power.

In historical terms, weakness begets aggression. A century ago war clouds gathered in European capitals following the assassination of Austro-Hungarian Crown Prince Archduke Ferdinand. The Imperial Kaiser of Germany, Wilhelm II, ordered his ambassador in London to ask British Foreign Secretary Lord Grey if the English would defend Belgium in the event of a German attack. With a one-word negative answer, the war might have been averted. Unfortunately Lord Grey prevaricated and refused to commit to Belgium's defense until it was too late. A more firm and timely response might have deterred the German attack westward and provided more time to find a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

Chapter 1: The Russian Strategic Environment



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Historical Introduction

The Great Northern War commenced in 1700, as Czar Peter the Great of Russia forged an alliance with Denmark and Poland to contest the supremacy of the Swedish Empire. After a direct engagement with the formidable Swedish Army, the Danes quickly surrendered. Meanwhile, Peter the Great and his commanding general fled the scene, as the Swedes handily routed the Russian forces, inflicting heavy casualties and seizing the entire Russian artillery line.³

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The approach adopted by the Kremlin in 2014 against Ukraine, is linked to the Russian grand strategy, the political power of Vladimir Putin and his view of American policy in relation to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This is compounded by the complex, yet close history Russia and Ukraine have shared across the centuries, and fears of Ukraine shifting its allegiance to the European Union (EU). Yet, the reality is Putin will use his military power to impose his will on Russia's neighbors when they stray from a pro-Moscow view, at least in the case of the non-NATO states. The key component of this coercion is Russian strategic landpower as demonstrated in its annexation of Crimea and the ongoing crisis in Ukraine.

However, to merely assess Russian strategic landpower misses the bigger picture, as the strategic environment from which it operates is a complex "system," replete with diverse political, economic, and domestic considerations that both directly and indirectly influence Putin's strategy. A closer examination of Russia's strategic environment reveals an atmosphere rife with frictions, tensions, and fissures, which Putin must balance while pursuing his grand strategy.

Russia yesterday

The end of the Romanov Dynasty in 1917 unleashed a century of unparalleled suffering at the hands of the Bolsheviks, and internationally, the Nazis. Russians died in the tens of millions during the revolution, civil war, famine, foreign invasion, and totalitarian violence.⁵ Yet the Soviet Union defeated the Nazis, built an industrial base, launched the world's first artificial satellite and man in space, and became a nuclear superpower.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union gave rise to hopes that Russia could transition to democracy and play a constructive international role. Instead,

the country was left with a bankrupt economy, and unstable relations with its neighbors.⁶ The last leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, attempted reforms, but these only hastened the unraveling of the entire system. Individual republics split away, including the three Baltic republics, Ukraine, and others in the Caucasus and Central Asia.⁷ Former allies in the communist bloc began the transition to liberal democracies and market-based economies. In 1991, Boris Yeltsin won the presidential election and defeated a coup led by leaders of the military, police, KGB, and government that further accelerated the union's breakup. By year's end, the Soviet Union was no more.

Yeltsin's Russia, with only 80% of the landmass of the Soviet Union, faced a new security environment. It organized a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and deployed peacekeeping forces to quell civil wars on its unstable periphery. The Warsaw Pact was eventually dissolved, and Soviet forces withdrew from Central Europe and negotiated terms, with Ukraine for the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea and with Kazakhstan for the Baikonur Cosmodrome.

The Russian economy was reorganized, as 120,000 state-owned firms were privatized by 1997.⁸ Despite the promises of Western reformers, the Russian economy nose-dived. Russia's gross-domestic-product (GDP) fell 45% between 1989 and 1998—a more drastic drop than the United States experienced during the Great Depression. Crime and hyperinflation ravaged the country, and Russia was forced to import basic produce to feed its population. The economy finally hit bottom in 1998. Russians compared the 1990s, with some exaggeration, to the 17th century "Time of Troubles."⁹ Vladimir Putin later described these terrible years in stark terms:

The collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama. Tens of millions of our co-citizens and co-patriots found themselves outside Russian territory. Moreover, the epidemic of disintegration infected Russia itself.¹⁰

Instability continued on the frontiers and sometimes within Russia itself. The Russian Army fought a costly war from 1994 to 1996 to prevent Chechnya from breaking away.¹¹ In 1994, Russia joined the NATO Partnership for Peace, and three years later NATO and Russia established a permanent Joint Council. The Russia-NATO Council eventually replaced the Joint Council in 2002. However, Russia grew alarmed over NATO intervention in the Balkans, especially its 1999 military operation to halt Serbia's campaign against ethnic Kosovo Albanians.

The Russian economy began to recover in 1999, buoyed by rising world oil prices—as Vladimir Putin, a former KGB officer, became president. Under his direction the Russian Army successfully fought the Second Chechen War from 1999 to 2009, although this triggered Chechen attacks across Russia and even Moscow itself. When the United States declared a global war on terrorism in September 2001, Putin reminded the West that Russia was already fighting violent Islamist separatists in Chechnya and the Caucasus.¹²

Under Putin, Russia's society and economy stabilized. Although economic inequality increased, overall income levels grew as well, giving hope to a small but growing professional middle class. The Russian Orthodox Church revived as a pillar of Russian national identity. Meanwhile Putin consolidated his control over government, the oligarchs, the media, and increased spending for the military and security forces. The 2003 arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Russia's richest man, was a signal that Putin would act to squash opponents. He forged a coalition among the loyal oligarchy, which included many *Siloviki*—officials from the intelligence and security services who were positioned to profit from the improving economy.¹³

When his term as president expired in 2008, Putin arranged for one of his protégés, Dmitry Medvedev, to assume the presidency, while he retained power as prime minister. To tighten control over sources of dissent, Putin squeezed independent media and civil society organizations, including an opposition movement in 2011-2012. Putin returned as president in May 2012 as a candidate of the United Russia party, and while he is clearly a product of Russia's past, and the face of Russia's future.

Russia today



The Kremlin, Moscow, Russia. Courtesy of Peter Kazachkov via Wikimedia Commons

The Russian Federation encompasses a large territory and stretches over eleven time zones.¹⁴ The federation comprises “85 federal subjects grouped into nine federal districts,”¹⁵ each administered by an envoy appointed by the president.¹⁶

While democratic leaders seek popular support for election and re-election,

authoritarian leaders also need support—often achieved through coercion or

persuasion—to prevent a revolt against their rule. Putin manipulates popular support by appealing to nationalistic and patriotic feelings, claiming to be the leader of all Russians.¹⁷

The population of the Russian Federation is just over 140 million and yet it is on the decline.¹⁸ The fertility rate is 1.6%, lower than the replacement level of 2.1%. The Russian government provides incentives such as increased cash grants, maternity leave, and enhanced day care services to encourage parents to have more children.¹⁹ Despite lower than average scores in some areas measured by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Better Life Index, over the last decade the Russian Federation made progress in improving the quality of life of its citizens. Although average income remains low, many groups benefited from economic growth.²⁰ Nevertheless, a substantial gap remains between the economic elite and the working class.

Another positive development is the Russian education system. According to OECD's 2012 Program on International Student Assessment (PISA) study and the 2014 Education at a Glance study, Russia's scores for math, rival those of the United States.

Additionally, more than 90% of the population completes a high school level education, far exceeding the OECD average of 74%.²¹

The Russian population is not homogenous. Eighty percent of the population is Russian, but the federation includes a mixture of various ethnic groups and subgroups with different positions and interests. In addition to the majority Russian population, this poly-ethnic society includes Tatars, Bashkirs, Chechens, Ukrainians, Mongols, and others—all of which can be further subdivided into even smaller groups.²² The diversity across the population could be a source of discord, however, Putin leverages a common narrative that unites the Russian population.²³

Over the centuries Russia has been invaded by Western powers. According to the standard Russian historical narrative, the West has repeatedly been the aggressor and cannot be trusted. Putin uses this traditional distrust to his advantage. By blaming the West for the crises in the Ukraine and in Georgia, and accusing NATO of expanding up to Russia's borders, he stokes the fire of Russian nationalism. This dangerous mix of nationalism and patriotism is a powerful unifying force. Compared to even ten years ago, more Russians now blame the West for the fall of communism.²⁴

This sense of nationalism also extends to the estimated thirty million ethnic Russians who live in Georgia, Ukraine, the Baltic states, and even in the United States.²⁵ This Russian diaspora is an accelerant for nationalism. On-the-other-hand, it is a tool used by the Russian leadership to exercise influence beyond the borders of the Russian Federation.

Putin uses this nationalism for two main reasons. First, he blames the Western powers for the current economic malaise, keeping the population distracted from domestic problems, and giving them a scapegoat. He also uses this as a reason to interfere in domestic issues in bordering states such as Ukraine. In this way, he prevents Western states from gaining influence in these bordering countries and maintains domestic leverage across the region. However, nationalism is a double-edged sword for Putin. It can serve as a unifying force, but it can also cause instability. As the fever of nationalism spreads, separatists also gain momentum. Though not openly, some provinces and republics are striving for more autonomy in the Russian Federation.²⁶ The danger for Putin is that as he continually relies upon nationalism, the fervor can take on a life of its own to destabilize the region and the Russian Federation.

Russia in crisis

From Putin's perspective, NATO expansion in 1999 and 2004 was a violation of a post-Cold War covenant between Russia and the West.²⁷ NATO's inclusion of nine states, which were previously part of the Soviet Union or members of the Warsaw Pact, thrust Russia and the Alliance on a collision course. The United States and other NATO members made several efforts to improve relations with Russia, but with little effect.

Putin also grew concerned about the spread of the "color revolutions" that overthrew post-Soviet authoritarian regimes in Georgia and Ukraine.²⁸ In November 2014, as public protests mounted in Kiev, he warned:

In the modern world, extremism is being used as a geopolitical instrument and for remaking spheres of influence. We see what tragic consequences the wave of so-called color revolutions led to. For us this is a lesson and a warning. We should do everything necessary so that nothing similar ever happens in Russia.²⁹

In other neighboring countries, Russian leaders acted quickly to protect or advance their interests. An example occurred in Tallinn in 2007, as the Estonian government relocated the World War Memorial Bronze Soldier of Tallinn. The statue was a symbol of liberation to Estonia's Russian-speaking minority, and these actions sparked protests among Estonia's large ethnic Russian minority. Websites in Estonia were battered for weeks by the most powerful cyber-attacks the world had ever seen.

Another example transpired in 2008 when Georgia made an attempt to resolve the disputed status of South Ossetia by force. However, Russia responded with overwhelming force and sealed the fate of Georgia's two breakaway regions.

More recently, in November 2013, demonstrations began in Maidan Square in Kiev to demand closer ties between Ukraine and the European Union. In the end, this caused the pro-Russian leader Viktor Yanukovich to flee to Russia. In the ensuing turmoil, pro-Russian forces seized Crimea in February 2014, just days after the concluding ceremonies of the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi.

Today, the Russian Federation is moving deeper into authoritarianism as Putin maintains a tight grip on the Russian presidency.³⁰ Elections are unlikely to remove him from power. While Putin continues to enjoy popular support, he is wary of the color revolutions that have plagued his counterparts. Thus, Putin cements his power by demanding that the oligarchs play by his rules, while ensuring that they also benefit and profit from his politics. Putin is skilled at manipulating the oligarchs, but controlling the middle class may prove to be a greater challenge.

The growing middle class presents both risks and opportunities for Putin. Like the oligarchs, the middle class benefits from an improving economy.³¹ They are better educated and have access to Internet and other media, which in turn spawns alternative viewpoints. In this light, the middle class is the most likely group to appeal for more democracy, if it feels its voice is not heard. This poses a credible threat to Putin's power.

According to the Levada Center, popular support for Putin has increased over the last year, and most Russians approve of Putin as president.³² This comes after a decline in popularity in previous years. In January 2013, Putin's popularity dropped to 62%—the lowest since 2000—but after the crisis in Ukraine began, his popularity began to rise.³³ The question remains whether this data accurately measures popularity, or is a product of the rising fear in Russia to express opposing views. Under Putin's initiatives, freedom of speech, media and public demonstrations have become increasingly restricted.³⁴

Putin's response to the Ukraine crisis galvanized popular support, but as the preceding paragraphs demonstrate, Russian society includes a variety of conflicting interests. Putin's Russia is precariously balanced on a bed of ethno-nationalism, anti-western

sentiments, a struggling economy, a rising middle class and a group of oligarchs. Putin's ability to navigate the tensions, friction, and fissures of this dynamic environment will either define his success, or lead to his demise.

Putin's Rise to Power

Out of nowhere



Vladimir Putin. Courtesy of kremlin.ru

Vladimir Putin was born into a life of poverty in St. Petersburg, then Leningrad, in 1952.³⁵ His father, a factory worker, served in the "Great Patriotic War" and was permanently disabled from wounds he suffered during the war. His mother worked as a night watchman and a housekeeper. Vladimir is the only surviving son of the Putins—one son died during infancy before the war and the other died in an orphanage shortly after World War Two. Masha Gessen described Putin's post-war Leningrad as

"a mean, hungry, impoverished place that bred mean, hungry, ferocious children."³⁶ Putin was no different and was known to be quick to get into a fight.

After graduating from Leningrad State University in 1975, he began his career in the KGB as an intelligence officer and was stationed in East Germany. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Putin retired from the KGB as a lieutenant colonel

and returned to St. Petersburg as a protégé of Anatoly Sobchak, a liberal politician. After Sobchak was elected mayor of St. Petersburg in 1991, Putin became head of external relations. In 1994, he became Sobchak's first deputy mayor.³⁷



Anatoly Sobchak, 2012. Courtesy of Post of Russia, designer A. Moskovets

After Sobchak's defeat in 1996, Putin moved to Moscow where he emerged quickly from the shadows. In 1998, Boris Yeltsin appointed Putin as deputy head of management and charged him with overseeing the Kremlin's relations with regional governments.³⁸ Shortly afterward, Yeltsin selected Putin to head the National Security Council (NSC). He was subsequently appointed head of the Federal Security Service (FSS), an arm of the former KGB. In August 1999, Yeltsin dismissed his prime minister and promoted Putin in his place. In December, Yeltsin resigned, and Putin served as acting president until the elections of early 2000. Putin then

served a second term as president after winning re-election in 2004. He was unable to run for the presidency 2008 because of term limits; however, Putin managed to stay in

the forefront of Russian politics by securing the position of prime minister, under Dmitry Medvedev. He then succeeded Medvedev as president in the 2012 elections. Soon after assuming the presidency, he appointed Medvedev as prime minister.³⁹

Putin's Russia

For Putin, being distinctively Russian somehow translates into being uniquely anti-Western. He turns away from partnership with the West as evidenced in his frequent warnings of outside interference and the need to resist Western influence. Putin governs using a “competitive authoritarianism” style of governance, which encompasses a savvy blend of old Soviet rule, touched with hints of democracy.⁴⁰ He exerts enormous control over political society, but skillfully offers concessions in individual life such as access to the Internet, cell phones, foreign goods, foreign travel and the purchasing of homes—all taboo under the old Soviet regime. The repression practiced in Putin's Russia is carefully targeted against those who threaten his leadership and interests. Essentially, he secures his power by limiting everyone else's. Putin refers to this as “managed democracy.”⁴¹

Establishing his rule

In his first two terms in office, Putin's priority was the reestablishment of a strong Russian state by limiting the political influence of the oligarchs from the Yeltsin administration. Putin made clear his desire with a very frank ultimatum—give up political



Mikhail Khodorkovsky at Maidan in Kyiv, Ukraine, March 2014. By BO Сеобода. Wiki Commons

power, security, and continued prosperity—or lose everything. Those who chose to challenge him were promptly punished and silenced. Case in point, Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the head of the Yukos Oil Group and one of the world's richest men.⁴² The tycoon was arrested and thrown in jail on charges of fraud and tax evasion as a consequence for meddling in politics.⁴³ More recently, Vladimir Yevtushenkov, head of the Sistema group, which controls the oil company Bashneft, and the mobile phone company MTS, was

placed on house arrest on charges of money laundering, because of his differences with the regime.⁴⁴ Under Putin, the influence of the *Siloviki* grew and currently resides in positions throughout the government.⁴⁵

In addition to containing the oligarchy, Putin stifled political competitors by routinely



Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, 2011. Courtesy of government.ru

falsifying elections or making false accusations against his adversaries.⁴⁶ Furthermore, he abolished elections for regional governors and now hand selects them.⁴⁷ He also took control of the main television channels and administers them as state-run media propaganda machines. In essence, Putin is a puppet master acting on the stage of an intricate system that he himself created through careful manipulation and corruption.

The man and his method

Vladimir Putin has been the President of Russia for over 14 years and has cultivated a reputation as a strongman. Ben Judah writes, “The President behaves as though he is made of bronze, as if he shines. He seems to know that they will flinch when meeting his eye.”⁴⁸ Putin is a man who enjoys the power his position allows. Psychologists describe him as a man who believes that if you have power you must exert it—those who do not are weak.⁴⁹

Putin does not live in Moscow, and prefers to live outside of the city in Novo-Ogaryovo, which is 24 kilometers west of the Kremlin. He works mostly from his palace in Novo-Ogaryovo.⁵⁰ He is very private and little is known about Putin. He has successfully



Vladimir Putin, 2013. Courtesy of kremlin.ru

managed to keep his private life out of the public. However, he is obsessed with information and incorporates a review of the various media outlets into his daily routine. He likes to maintain the pulse of the Russian street and loves to read foreign press.⁵¹

Geopolitical theorist, Aleksandr Dugin, described Putin as “a man divided within himself—‘the solar Putin,’ who is a Russian patriot and a fierce conservative, and ‘the lunar Putin,’ who is a ‘conformist’ and

pro-Western.”⁵² Although his focus was on centralizing the government when he came to power in 2001, Putin was not initially anti-West.⁵³ Many argue that the West’s treatment of Russia as a second-class nation rather than an equal, coupled with NATO expansion changed his view.⁵⁴ When he returned to power in 2012, his rhetoric against the West was hostile, and he set out to right the perceived wrongs of the past.

Ironically, the position Putin has taken against the West has boxed him in a corner of limited his foreign policy options. As a result, it will be difficult for him to change direction. Putin is wedded to the propagation of a nationalist agenda that bashes the West and blames America for Russia’s hardships. These narratives are the cornerstones of his strategic messaging. Yet, the question remains: what will Putin do when the populace tires of his rhetoric and demands results? Lilia Shevtsova summarizes the consequences of Putin’s actions best:

In any event, Putin is in bobsled mode. He is hurtling down the track; no one can stop him, and he can no longer reverse course. But the more he acts to preserve his power, the more damage he will inflict on his country. Angela Merkel was wrong saying that Putin is living in another world. He actually fits rather well into his system of power. Every new step he takes along this course makes his departure from power even more improbable, forcing him to take greater and greater risks.⁵⁵

The Russian Military

Disarray

Like most of Russia, the military fell into disarray when the Soviet Union collapsed in December 1991. Throughout the 1990s, the military remained plagued by numerous challenges such as declining budgets, aging equipment, and poor living conditions. Under President Yeltsin, the government attempted to modernize the military but these

The Russian military fell into disarray and disrepair following the collapse of the Soviet Union

reforms were ineffective. Even though the military was dependent on the central leadership for resourcing, it behaved in a semi-autonomous manner, often delaying or even disregarding reform. This led to a series of ineffective Defense Ministers and degradation of capabilities. Under President Putin, and following the 2008 Georgia War, reforms aimed at modernizing the military have been more effective. However, while

structural and doctrinal changes under President Putin have centralized control of the military, many of the social and economic challenges remain. Analysis of the current state and the history of military reform in Russia reveal fissures between the military and the central leadership. Likewise, there is also a growing gap between the population and the central leadership. These fractures provide context to the current readiness and modernization of the Russian military.

Shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union, President Yeltsin began his program of military reform. During his tenure as President, Yeltsin pushed for reforms to reduce the size of the military, convert it to an all-volunteer force, and make it more rapidly deployable.⁵⁶ In



*President Putin with Defense Minister Igor Sergeev, June 2000.
Courtesy of kremlin.ru.*

five years, Yeltsin appointed three different Ministers of Defense, but political resistance, a difficult conflict in Chechnya, and underfunding hindered these reforms.⁵⁷ A significant challenge to the Yeltsin initiatives lay within the power structure of the Ministry of Defense. The Ministry of Defense and the General Staff were led by general officers, which were both equally

subordinate to the President.⁵⁸ This created a gridlock of sorts, as neither the Ministry of Defense nor the General staff was subordinate to the other. Additionally, both organizations lacked the civilian oversight and accountability found in Western systems. These factors created a tension between the two organizations, which undermined the reforms as well as the tactical employment of Russian Forces.

The consequences of these tensions was demonstrated in the 1999 Kosovo crisis. While negotiations were ongoing between Russia, NATO, and the United States, President Yeltsin confided in US President Bill Clinton that he had to fire a Battalion Commander in the Far East District for preparing his unit for combat in Serbia (presumably against NATO).⁵⁹ Furthermore, Russian Paratroopers operating in Bosnia as part of the Implementation Force (IFOR) under the direction of the General Staff, but without the knowledge of the Minister of Defense, departed Bosnia and seized the Pristina Airport in Kosovo.⁶⁰ By operating independently from the Ministry of Defense and possibly the rest of government, the General Staff directed actions which actually contradicted Yeltsin's intended strategy.

Ivanov doctrine

Nearly one year after assuming power as the President of Russia, President Vladimir Putin replaced Yeltsin's last Minister of Defense, General Igor Sergeyev with a trusted friend and ally, Sergei Ivanov.⁶¹ Putin's appointment of a civilian was a radical departure from Russian and Soviet traditions. Like Putin, Ivanov was a graduate of Leningrad State University and a former KGB, SVR, and FSB agent with time abroad in the United Kingdom, Finland, and Kenya.⁶² Putin's appointment of Ivanov was a result of the military's poor performance in the Chechen conflict and Putin's desire to make "a step toward demilitarizing Russia's public life."⁶³



Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov, May 9, 2005. Courtesy of whitehouse.gov.

Minister Ivanov and President Putin laid the groundwork for the most effective and far-reaching military reforms since the fall of the Soviet Union. The Defense Doctrine of 2000 was Putin's first national strategy document. This strategy became the basis for civilian control of the military, making the General Staff subordinate to the Ministry of Defense in matters of coordination, and leaving the General

Staff responsible for operational control, planning, mobilization, and employment of the Army.⁶⁴ In June 2003, Minister Ivanov formally subordinated the General Staff, when he

persuaded the Duma to pass laws granting the Ministry of Defense direct oversight of the Russian Armed Forces.⁶⁵

Based on what would come to be known as the Defense White Paper of 2003 or the “Ivanov Doctrine,” these reforms changed the organization of the Russian military. The White Paper directed that Russian forces would be capable of participating in two simultaneous military engagements (local or regional conflicts) and one peacekeeping operation.⁶⁶ Another significant reform included dividing the Armed Forces into operational forces and institutional forces. The operational forces encompassed strategic, operational, and tactical units with Brigades as the centerpiece. Institutional forces included strategic nuclear, space, and air defense forces as well as those departments responsible for manning, equipping, and administrative support to the armed forces.⁶⁷ To prevent opponents in the military leadership from stalling these reforms, President Putin and the Defense Minister Ivanov made several personnel changes to the Russian military leadership, installing general officers that were young, reform minded and experienced in the Caucasus wars.⁶⁸



Russian soldiers in Chechnya. Courtesy of kremlin.ru

Continued reforms

What Minister Ivanov began—his successor Anatoliy Serdyukov, under the Presidency of Dmitry Medvedev—completed. Drawing on lessons learned from experimental exercises as well as the invasion of Georgia in August 2008, the Russian Armed Forces continued to downsize and transform into a three-tiered structure. The country was divided into military districts responsible for the strategic planning and employment of

their assigned forces.⁶⁹ In each district, the military instituted regional commands and brigades responsible for tactical employment.⁷⁰ In the end, the armed forces shrank to one million, created a professional non-commissioned officer corps, and reduced conscription.⁷¹ Finally, the Ministry of Defense planned to modernize the remaining brigades, replacing outdated equipment enabling brigades to become more “mobile” and “autonomous.”⁷²

In addition to reforming the structure of the armed forces, defense documents under Presidents Putin and Medvedev also outlined the threats Russian forces faced and how

the armed forces should expect to be employed. The Military Doctrine of 2000 listed several threats to Russia but highlighted a “general fear” of NATO’s expanding influence and addressed items such as “the creation and buildup of troops and force structure leading to the violation of the existing balance of forces.”⁷³ From

“One of the foremost dangers to Russia is the “military infrastructure of NATO member countries closer to the borders of the Russian Federation...”

2006-2007, articles and speeches from former head of the General Staff, General Yuri Baluyevsky, pointed to the United States and NATO as two of the leading threats to Russia, claiming that the West's expansion was designed to weaken and undermine the Federation.⁷⁴ While the 2000 Defense Doctrine implied that NATO expansion was a threat, the 2010 Defense Doctrine was explicit, saying that the leading "danger" was the expansion of "the military infrastructure of NATO member countries closer to the borders of the Russian Federation, including by expanding the bloc."⁷⁵

The concept of asymmetry first appeared in modern Russian military doctrine in the "Ivanov Doctrine." Drawing on the lessons learned from conflicts from 1970 to 2003, the doctrine emphasized that asymmetric warfare relied on information and electronic warfare, unified command and control, and joint warfare which would replace large-scale conventional war.⁷⁶ In a 2012 article in *Foreign Policy*, President Putin acknowledged the unlikelihood of a major nuclear war between the super powers, but predicted that Russia would face a new world of local and regional wars created by an expanding NATO and European Union.⁷⁷ Putin believed that Russia could not "rely on diplomatic and economic methods alone to resolve conflicts," but needed to increase military capability. He claimed military strength was the only way for Russia to "feel secure and for our partners to listen to our country's arguments."⁷⁸ Finally, he called for a military with better space, information, and cyber defense capabilities.⁷⁹

Reforms since 2008

The reforms since 2008 have benefited not only from the operational experience of the military but also from the increased funding to transform an aging army. From 2008-2013 Russia increased its defense spending by 31% and defense spending in 2014 is projected to account for over 20% of all government spending.⁸⁰ While this increased spending benefited the Russian military, it will take several more years of increased investment to overcome a decade of neglect. The ability of the Russian economy,



Russian paratroopers during the 60th Anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War, May 9, 2006. Wiki Commons

largely dependent on energy exports, to continue to support conventional military modernization is questionable as energy prices decline.⁸¹ If the price of oil remains low, efforts to reform and modernize the Russian Armed Forces will be at risk.

Public opinion of the military has been on the rise, as many of the reforms have produced tangible military successes. In a poll conducted by the Associated Press and the National Opinion Research Center at the University of

Chicago, 65% of respondents indicated that they trusted the Russian military to "do

what is right.”⁸² This was an increase from 40% in previous polls.⁸³ Additionally, data from the Russian Public Opinion Foundation showed that 54% of respondents had a positive view of the military—a significant increase from the 30% recorded in 1998.⁸⁴

What is not clear is how much public opinion will be affected by the human costs of continued military involvement in Eastern Ukraine and elsewhere. Despite the progress made since 2008, conditions such as low pay, poor living conditions, hazing, and suicide continue to an underfunded Russian Army.⁸⁵ Additionally, the Russian military, like its Soviet predecessor, has continued the practice of denying and underreporting casualties from conflicts abroad. Human rights organizations such as the Soldiers’ Mothers Committee and the Russian Human Rights Councils cite examples of mothers and wives receiving the remains of their loved ones with no documentation or explanation of the circumstances surrounding the cause of death.⁸⁶ The ambiguity regarding soldiers in Ukrainian captivity is similar, as the Russian government disavows any connection to soldiers fighting in the Ukraine, leaving family members to learn of their loved ones captivity from informal sources such as fellow soldiers and social media.⁸⁷ In a poll reported in *The Economist*, within nine months of annexing Crimea and invading the Ukraine, support for continued Russian troop presence in the Ukraine dropped from 73% to 23%.⁸⁸

Concerns

President Putin’s more aggressive application of military power increases the opportunities of a tactical miscalculation that could result in strategic consequences. Consider for example, the engagement of Malaysian Air Flight 17. Though the evidence remains inconclusive, eyewitness accounts indicate that the operators of the SA-11, “Buk” air defense missile system were either separatists from Donetsk with Russian advisors or even Russian soldiers.⁸⁹



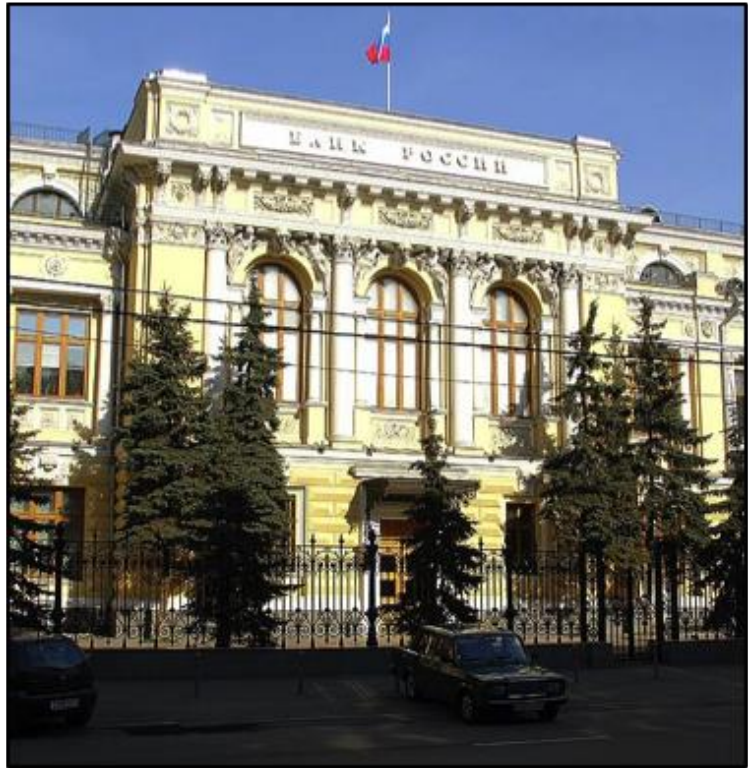
An anti-aircraft missile system, NATO reporting name SA-11 Gadfly, acquired by Finland from Russia as part of payment of the Soviet bilateral debt. December 2005. Wiki Commons

The Russian Air Force is taking similar strategic gambles. Playing a dangerous cat and mouse game, the Russian Air Force is scrambling Bear bombers and armed fighters on unannounced flight plans without transponders to seemingly test NATO resolve. In 2014, NATO conducted three times as many intercepts of Russian aircraft near member nation borders as they conducted in 2013.⁹⁰ As recently as December, Russian fighters had near midair collisions with civilian aircraft from both Denmark and Poland.⁹¹ While Putin’s reforms have successfully centralized control of the military at the

executive level, it is not clear how effective they have been at centralizing control of the Russian military at the tactical level and ensuring that such miscalculation does not occur.

The Russian Economy and Energy Sector

In 2012, Russia's GDP was \$2.015 trillion, making it the sixth largest economy in the world.⁹² Nevertheless, Russia's economy is stagnating. In 2013, its economy grew at a rate at less than half of the 2012 economy, achieving only 1.3% growth.⁹³ For 2014, the adjusted Russian GDP growth was even worse—for the first half of 2014 it was a mere 0.8%, down significantly from 3.4% in 2011-2012.⁹⁴ This is the fourth consecutive year of a slowing economy. Compared to an average global GDP growth of 2.4% in 2013 and 2.8% growth in 2014 (and a forecast of 3.4% growth in 2015 and 3.5% in 2016), Russia's economy is growing far less than other high-income emerging countries.⁹⁵



Central Bank of Russia, Neglinnaya Street, Moscow. Courtesy of NVO.

The 2015 forecast is not promising. Russia's economic development ministry estimates the Russian economy will contract by as much as 0.8% and household disposable incomes will decline by as much as 2.8%.⁹⁶ Maxim Oreshkin, head of the Russian finance ministry's long-term strategic planning department, added that oil prices would need to stabilize around \$80 per barrel in 2015 for the Russian economy to experience only a 0.8% contraction.⁹⁷ Russia's oil-fed economy has become accustomed to oil prices averaging \$110 per barrel.⁹⁸ To balance the Russian budget, oil prices per barrel will need to average \$105.⁹⁹ However, oil prices dropped below \$60 per barrel in December 2014 and remain low in 2015.¹⁰⁰ If prices remain this low, the Russian Central Bank forecasts that the economy will contract as much as 4.5%.¹⁰¹ The bank also predicted capital outflows of \$120 billion in 2015, \$75 billion in 2016, and \$55 billion in 2017.¹⁰² Russia's road to economic recovery could prove to be a very long one.

According to Bloomberg, this economic downturn results from the inability of consumer spending to compensate for lagging investment, coupled with a drop in oil prices and global demand for oil. The Western embargo, imposed following Russian intervention in Ukraine, only serves to exasperate Russia's economic plight.¹⁰³ Sanctions have placed considerable limitations on the Russian economy, but they are focused against individuals and companies placed on a blacklist.¹⁰⁴ These sanctions have been costly.

For instance, Bank Rossiya has lost nearly \$21 million, as reported by the *Wall Street Journal*.¹⁰⁵ Overall, Western sanctions have limited foreign investment, cost Russia foreign currency, and sparked inflation as Russia banned western food imports.¹⁰⁶ According to the European Commission (EC), the European Union's (EU) executive body, sanctions will "knock" 0.2—0.3 percentage points off Russia's GDP growth.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, EU bank exposure to Russia fell more than 7% since the beginning of 2014.

A weak ruble

As the price of oil falls, so too does the value of the ruble.¹⁰⁸ In the last few months of 2014, the ruble fell 25%, to 53.40 rubles per dollar (culminating a 38% slide in 2014). A weak ruble makes servicing foreign debt difficult, as it becomes more expensive. Russian sovereign debt is about \$57 billion (roughly 35% of Russia's GDP), but its corporate debt is nearly ten-times as high.¹⁰⁹ As a result, more than \$100 billion has left the country this year. The exodus prompted Putin, during his December 4, 2014, annual address to Parliament, to offer amnesty for those willing to return rubles, to outline a four-year freeze on tax rates, and to prompt the National Welfare Fund to lend money to major Russian banks on favorable terms.¹¹⁰ Russia's firms have over \$500 billion in outstanding external debt, of which \$130 billion is payable before the end of 2015. However, they also hold a federal foreign exchange reserve of \$370 billion (however, some argue that the real figure is only \$270 billion, since more than \$170 billion is in the country's two wealth funds and much of that is already earmarked for government pensions). Nevertheless, Russian reserves have already diminished by \$100 billion over the past year.¹¹¹

Although a weak ruble makes Russian exports more competitive, it makes imports more expensive.¹¹² Exacerbating this dynamic are that businesses which took foreign loans are having difficulty refinancing their debts and unable to gain access to Western currency.¹¹³ Interestingly, domestic food production industries have benefitted from Western sanctions as Russia banned nearly \$9 billion in Western food imports.¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, Russian banks are closing accounts and facing a shortage of foreign currency. Higher interest rates are also affecting profit margins on loans and forced some state-controlled banks to ask Moscow for help. Russia's energy companies suffered significant losses as the price of oil fell in 2014. Likewise, those energy companies with larger levels of foreign debt were hit harder when the ruble fell.

Putin attempted to prop up the ruble in 2014, spending \$40 billion (nearly 8%) of its foreign reserves between January and May to shore up its currency.¹¹⁵ After months of inaction, the Central Bank returned to buying rubles in October, spending nearly \$350 million a day to keep the ruble afloat. To also shore up the ruble and "defuse the economic currency crisis threatening its stricken economy," Moscow raised its key interest rate to 17%. This was the largest single increase (from 10.5% to 17%) since 1998 when interest rates soared past 100%.¹¹⁶ "This decision is aimed at limiting substantially increased ruble depreciation risks and inflation risks," the Central Bank said in its press statement.¹¹⁷ The announcement underscores the financial difficulties Russia is facing. Higher rates only continue to constrain an economy already besieged by falling oil prices, Western sanctions, and corruption.

Energy dependency

The oil and gas sector account for 16% of Russia's GDP, 52% of federal budget revenues and over 70% of total exports.¹¹⁸ The natural gas industry is vital to the Russian economy. It accounts for more than half of the energy consumed in Russia, amounts to roughly 13% of total export revenues, and constitutes 8-9% of the Russian GDP.¹¹⁹ Russian gas reserves are some of the largest in the world, consisting of 44.7 trillion cubic meters (tcm).¹²⁰ Gazprom, the state-owned gas company and one of the largest in the world, reported reserves of 29.8 tcm. However, more than a third of these reserves are located on the Yamal Peninsula and in the Shtokman field in the Barents Sea and require significant investment before they become usable.¹²¹

Russia has pursued a vigorous pipeline foreign policy, aiming to strengthen its hold over the international gas market by acquiring "downstream assets," namely distribution and storage capabilities in western countries.¹²² Russian energy companies—the majority of which are owned by the state—have continued through the 1990s and early 2000s to cement their positions by securing key assets and preventing diversification.¹²³ For instance, the Nord Stream pipeline, which takes gas under the Baltic Sea to Germany—permits Russia to deliver gas independently to Western Europe, thereby allowing Russia to control gas deliveries to Ukraine, Belarus, and Poland without disrupting gas supplies to Western Europe. As such, Russia has increased its leverage over Ukraine and Belarus by applying this gas-based diplomacy.

On June 16, 2014, Gazprom shut off all natural gas supplies to Ukraine over a payment dispute. For temporary relief, Ukraine turned to gas imports from Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary; however, this reverse flow could not replace all of Ukraine's gas needs, leaving 60% of Kiev's buildings without heat during the first cold spell in November.¹²⁴ Consequently, Ukraine ultimately brokered a "winter package" deal with Gazprom, agreeing to pay \$378 per 1,000 cubic meters of gas through the end of 2014, and then another \$365 during the first quarter of 2015.¹²⁵ Alexander Novak, Russia's energy minister, called this deal a compromise. However Alexei Miller, head of Gazprom, promised that gas flow would continue uninterrupted only upon Kiev's payment of \$2.2 billion.¹²⁶ This deal is temporary and valid only through March, and could dissolve in the spring if fighting continues between Ukrainian troops and Russian-backed rebels in eastern Ukraine. Nevertheless, Gazprom's ability to leverage gas supplies against Kiev worked, for the Kremlin-backed energy company forced Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko to agree to Gazprom's demands and debt repayment schedule.

Gas diplomacy becomes even more troubling when Europe's dependency on Russian gas is considered.¹²⁷ In January 2009, Gazprom stopped providing natural gas to Europe through the Ukrainian pipeline.¹²⁸ Gas prices increased by 50% during the three-week shut-off.¹²⁹ Since 2009, Europe's dependence on gas supplies transiting the Ukraine dropped from 80% to 50%. When Gazprom shut-off all natural gas supplies to the Ukraine earlier in 2014, it elected to keep the transit supply to Europe open.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, the Ukrainian crisis highlights the European energy market's dependency on natural gas. Europe depends on Russia for 36% of its natural gas supplies, or roughly 152 bcm.¹³¹ In Central and Southern Europe (Germany, Italy, Hungary, and

Poland), Russian gas amounts to 80% of total gas imports, while Finland and Belarus imports 100%. With supply disruptions already affecting alternative gas suppliers in Africa, any disruptions in Russian gas could result in EU import costs rising more than 50% (or about 0.15% of GDP). Although Europe is taking steps to reduce its reliance on Russian gas, it will take several years before these measures come to fruition.¹³²

Russia continues to produce 10 million barrels per day and export between 5-6 million barrels daily. Russia is the world's largest oil supplier—producing approximately 13% of the total global crude production. Russia's continued oil production, occurring, as it does, when US shale oil production is increasing and when global demand is decreasing, depresses oil prices. Consequently, as Russia continues to sell more oil, it floods the market and drives oil prices even lower. For the Kremlin, it is a catch-22, with Moscow's dependency on the energy sector leaves few other options.

Impact of Ukraine crisis

Conflict between Russia and Ukraine has adversely affected both nations and their projected GDP growth. As trade declines between the two countries, the World Bank

reported Russia's GDP dropped 1.7% in the second half of 2014 and Ukraine's GDP contracted 7%. Exports from the Ukraine will continue to suffer as it loses access to Russian trade markets. Recent emergency financing, in the amount of \$17.1 billion (of which \$3.2 billion was immediately available), from the International



President Putin meeting the heads of Russia's leading companies and commercial banks. Courtesy of kremlin.ru.

Monetary Fund (IMF)

and \$1.5 billion from the World Bank will help Ukraine avert financial collapse, but the country will need to adopt significant stabilization and structural reforms.¹³³

The crisis will also diminish by 0.3% GDP growth in neighboring countries.¹³⁴ Many of these countries already suffer weak economies. Consequently, the sub-region of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) experienced a marked economic slowdown in the second half of 2014.¹³⁵ Furthermore, the World Bank reports that Belarus, Armenia, and Moldova are vulnerable through their trade linkages with Ukraine, while remittances from Russia constitute a significant portion of the GDPs of Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and Tajikistan.¹³⁶ Belarus is the most vulnerable, for

trade with Ukraine amounts to 8.8% of its total trade, and trade with Russia constitutes 47.5% of total trade.¹³⁷

Ukraine and Russia are also large grain producers, producing 5% and 11%, respectively, of total global wheat exports, while Ukraine produces more than 14% of global maize exports. Moreover, Russia is a key grain supplier for Turkey and Egypt, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East. Economic grain sanctions would have detrimental consequences on these regions. Regarding financial linkages and exposure, European banks have roughly US \$183 billion in Russia (\$165 billion, or 1.0%) and Ukraine (US \$23 billion, or 0.1%). US bank exposure to Russia is approximately \$32 billion (1.1%). Meanwhile, Russian banks (Gazprom bank, Sberbanks, the majority-state-owned VTB, and the state development bank VEB) reportedly hold an estimated \$28 billion of assets in Ukraine.¹³⁸

In response to Putin's strategy, several European energy customers shifted their energy buys to Central Asia or the United States. The European Commission also announced plans to expand Ukraine's natural gas pipeline and seek new projects in Turkmenistan and Israel. Similarly, Putin's actions in Ukraine and the subsequent sanctions have delayed foreign banks and investors' interest in financing the South Stream. The South Stream project was intended by Russia to circumvent Ukraine by building pipelines to the south, across the Black Sea. With little money available for investment and expansion, Russia dropped the South Stream project in December, opting to pursue a pipeline to Turkey and a gas distribution hub on the Turkish-Greek border. Overall, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development estimates that the number of Russian projects fell 13% since June, representing over €673 million in losses.¹³⁹ The cancellation will deprive southeastern Europe of not only an alternative supply of gas to the disruption-prone Ukrainian pipeline, but also foreign investment for local construction and infrastructure projects.

Concerns

While Western sanctions have damaged the Russian economy, they are not entirely to blame for the economic crisis Putin faces. Rather, an energy-dependent market, a "corrupt-and-control" economy based on patronage and corruption, a collapse in the ruble, and falling oil prices, have compounded the problem. Putin's corrective attempts—namely increasing interest rates against the falling ruble—have not worked. As the *Economist* wrote, Putin "should seek accommodation in Ukraine to lift western sanctions, diversify away from dependence on energy and gas, and reduce corruption and patronage."¹⁴⁰

Russia faces a dilemma, in that, it cannot continue to threaten to suspend gas exports to extort concessions from neighboring countries, because of its dependency upon the revenues of gas sales. Likewise, this policy incentivizes consumer nations to explore other options for gas imports, thereby decreasing the demand for Russian energy. Russia is experiencing the innate tension that emerges when oil prices drop significantly—namely, the dilemma in how much oil to export. Russia is pursuing means to reduce this vulnerability and expand its energy market. Earlier this year, Gazprom began negotiations over a \$400 billion energy deal with China, while the

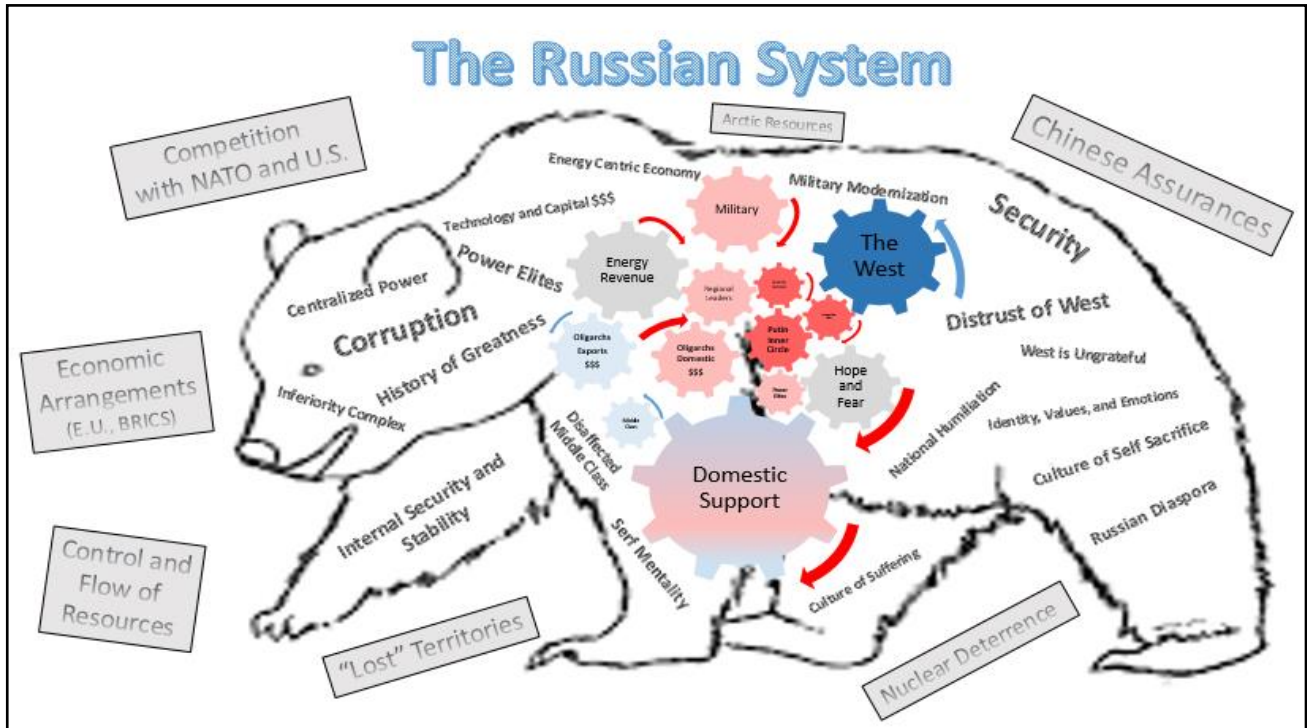
Kremlin is cooperating with Argentina over a nuclear energy deal.¹⁴¹ Both ventures are indicative of Putin's desire to diversify Russia's energy market.

Western sanctions are designed to exploit inherent tensions in Russia's economy. These sanctions are directed against those individuals and companies closest to Putin—those who are most able to pressure Moscow. However, not all sectors of Russia's economy are affected evenly. Federal banks and energy companies are negatively impacted as foreign currency and investment is curtailed and Russian investors send their rubles abroad. Yet, domestic food companies are experiencing larger sales and profit margins as sanctions ban food imports. Meanwhile, mobile phone companies are suffering, steel is benefitting, and auto sales are down.¹⁴² Consequently, sanctions—coupled with plummeting oil sales and a falling ruble—are curtailing Russia's ability to deal with an impending economic crisis. However, while a weakened Russian economy may erode Putin's popular support, economic hardships allow him to increase authoritarian rule and to galvanize popular support by blaming the West.¹⁴³

The Russian System

The system that drives behavior and decisions in the Russian Federation is a complex arrangement of actors, organizations, interest groups, and both physical and non-physical factors, which converge and interact to shape Russian identity. The size and complexity of the system makes it difficult for external observers to comprehend and anticipate Russian actions. Analysis reveals several tension points, frictions and fissures that work to counter other forces within the system, generating unpredictability as well as potential for transformation.

In the end, Putin's focus is the preservation and well being of a small, highly centralized leadership body.¹⁴⁴ Entrance into the closed leadership circle is based upon trust, power, wealth and standing. The polity elite, which can be referred to as Putin's Inner Circle, makes decisions based upon their ability to maintain and improve a grip on power. Losing political support and legitimacy through the erosion of control and influence over the domestic population is a substantial factor in determining how the Inner Circle makes decisions.¹⁴⁵ Trends reveal a desire by Putin's Inner Circle to expand efforts to centralize power, control, and influence over the oligarchs, the economy, the flow of information, and modernizing the military.¹⁴⁶ Maintaining and perpetuating the system of power and wealth distribution within Russia is the overarching objective.



Visualization of the Russian system

Putin’s Inner Circle, in close coordination with the economic oligarchs, regional governors, and the security services, closely manipulates the economic and political levers of power, generating the resources it needs to provide governance, jobs, and wealth for the elite, and the resources required to modernize the military.¹⁴⁷ This arrangement is known to the populace and is perceived by many as illegitimate. This system harkens back to Russia’s imperial past, as an empire ruled by a centralized power elite, a compliant military, a small enterprising middle class, and an obedient working class.



Pro-Russian crowd gathering in Donetsk, Koyla, April 2014. Courtesy of Voice of America.

One of the more important instruments leveraged by Putin is the skillful blending of hope and fear to manipulate nationalism and domestic support. Nationalism is the fundamental tool to create domestic support for decisions and actions.¹⁴⁸ National humiliation in the aftermath of the Cold War, distrust of the West, a culture of endurance and suffering, and a history of greatness are narratives which fuel the nationalism the ruling elites use to manipulate the populace.¹⁴⁹ This nationalism may take the form of a longing for the Imperial Russia that once ruled over a vast empire, or a dangerous xenophobic bent of ethno-

nationalism harkening to a “pure” Russia that stands separate from and above all other nations.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, between 15-21% of Russians reside in former Soviet republics outside today’s Russian Federation.¹⁵¹ This Russian diaspora maintains family and other ties inside the Russian Federation that creates additional appeal among domestic Russian audiences for nationalistic messaging.¹⁵² This gives Putin leverage in neighboring nations with a large Russian population.

Trends

Maintaining control over the decision-making is a prerequisite for Putin’s regime preservation. Relationships between the elite groups are central to Putin’s power. Kremlin-appointed regional rulers, security service chiefs, military leaders, bureaucratic directors, and business oligarchs must have a common vision. Contrarian actors, like Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the head of the oil group Yukos, who can effectively resist this



Putin visiting the Russia Today broadcasting center. Courtesy of kremlin.ru

arrangement are identified as threats and removed to maintain system harmony.¹⁵³ The Inner Circle is allowed some latitude to voice differences and air grievances, but outright opposition or competing ideas that directly challenge the established elite are not tolerated. Russian domestic and military well being, in large part, results from the effectiveness of centrally controlled political–economic arrangements and adherence to the rules of laws. Influences from the West or from intellectuals in Russia pose the greatest threat, thus the information and media elite are carefully primed to counter their influence.¹⁵⁴

A small-disaffected middle class of professionals and intellectuals is one node in the system that generally runs counter to the overall design.¹⁵⁵ These teachers, entrepreneurs, doctors, professors, artists and others are necessary for the Russian state to function, but they also present a challenge to system preservation. Yet, this

middle class represents a minority in Russian society and lacks power to drive quick change.¹⁵⁶ Accordingly, Russian leadership can focus efforts on the manipulation, control, and influence of the larger working classes, security forces, and the military, while mitigating the effects of the middle class through intimidation, nationalism, or sound governance.¹⁵⁷

Control over information is essential for maintaining system credibility. The Russian state invests significantly in information systems and media controls to maintain legitimacy and prevent external influences from reaching the middle class, the broader population, and the Russian diaspora.¹⁵⁸ The tension between the need to control information and maintain credibility through information is a vulnerability to the system.

Control of the military and security forces is another guarantor of regime preservation. Loyalty through personal relationships and power sharing between the security apparatus and the military ensures centralized control over both.¹⁵⁹ However, the government must resource the military, allowing for modernization and thereby retains the loyalty of this important part of the Russian system.

To circumvent or to undermine the European Union and NATO, Putin seeks a diplomatic “divide and conquer” approach. These divisions within Europe and between Europe and North America are fractures that Putin exploits to maintain his system.¹⁶⁰ To this end, Russia seeks bilateral relationships and economic agreements with individual states such as Turkey, Germany, and Hungary. This approach not only improves revenue, but also creates leverage against Western unity and resolve—leverage that the system may need in order to secure itself into the future.

The divergent views across the NATO Alliance of the Ukraine crisis personify this cleavage. Some nations would like to provide direct support to the Ukrainian Army, while others seem bent on appeasement of Russia and doing all they can not to antagonize the Kremlin. Putin of course benefits from the lack of a coherent and unified strategy, which serves to strengthen his hold on power domestically and expand his interests internationally.¹⁶¹

Putin uses information dominance to promote nationalism and to maintain tight control over internal security services. This same dominance allows him to shield the regime from a popular backlash in the face of decreased revenue, a failing economy, or interference from internal or external actors. The decision-making elites fire up nationalistic rhetoric when confronted by economic or political challenges. This action serves as a diversion to channel the population’s attention away from the domestic source of the problem to a foreign foe.¹⁶² The rhetoric is also used to justify increased spending to modernize the military.¹⁶³

Tensions, frictions, and fissures

Tensions—parts of the system that work against each other

- “Radical Actors” seeking change, possibly counter-influencing the system
- Petrol-Diplomacy vs. Revenue Flow
- Need for external capital investment vs. need for anti-Western narrative

Points of Friction—parts of the system that compete with each other

- Military modernization and the economy
- Centralized control of wealth distribution and relationship with oligarchs
- Internal Dissent and Discord: Middle Class vs. Elites and Working Class
- Government officials: those that benefit vs. hard core pro Putin

Fissures—flaws, gaps and seams within the system which can be exploited

- Domestic vs. export oriented oligarchs
- National level vs. regional level power elite
- Balancing influence of the West vs. controlling domestic opinion

The influence of “the West” is a key point of tension and affects Russian strategy more so than any other external actor.¹⁶⁴ The West influences the power elite, oligarchs, military, middle class, and the domestic population. Western culture and influence, accelerated by social media and information technology, can run counter to the Russian need for information control. These force the central elite and security services to restrict information access, create counter messaging, and if necessary, increase nationalistic rhetoric to counteract external influence.

Another internal tension and potential fissure is the dynamic relationship between the economic oligarchs, power elites, and Putin’s Inner Circle. This arrangement of power brokers changes based on cost-benefit analysis by all actors involved. When they play by the same rules, a peaceful coexistence generally results. However, in these complex and interdependent relationships, there is rarely a unifying logic, goal, or direction. In general terms, profits and greed drive the oligarchs, while control and power drives the central leadership. Where these motives align, there is a peaceful coexistence; where

they depart there is friction, distrust, and competition. The power elite, especially the economic oligarchs, are vulnerable to outside influence, investment, and technology. The economic sanctions in the aftermath of the Ukraine Crisis, is dividing the oligarchs.



*Alexander Lebedew, Russian financier of the National Reserve Corporation.
Courtesy of Jurg Vollmer. Available on Wikicommons*

Export centric oligarchs who profit from trade and ties to the West, are being hurt the most, and have shown signs of unrest. Meanwhile, domestically focused oligarchs have seen improved wealth and influence through import substitution. These individuals actually stand to gain through continued support of Putin's Inner Circle. Over time, this could lead to a rift between the economic elite and the Inner Circle. Should this rift manifest, the system will react to protect the steady flow of revenue it requires for sustainment and perpetuation.¹⁶⁵

The disaffected middle class is another fissure in

the system that if left unchecked could pose a threat to Putin's control. The middle class within Russian society is a small, but steadily growing, segment of the population, typically possessing advanced education. The class holds many of the key technical and intellectual jobs and positions within Russian society such as professors, doctors, teachers, military officers, and engineers. The middle class is less vulnerable to information dominance and is more open to new ideas and outside influence. The middle class recognizes that the corrupt government and unequal wealth and power distribution impacts them the most. They also understand their precarious relationship with the security apparatus and the need to moderate their behavior to ensure survival.

As previously discussed, nationalistic rhetoric is a tool to influence and control levels of domestic support, but left unchecked, runaway nationalism *could* become a threat. For example, when the E.U. and the U.S. placed economic sanctions against Russia at the onset of the Ukraine crisis, Putin's Inner Circle responded with increased nationalistic rhetoric, painting the West as the reason for Russian suffering. This has increased over time, and resulted in foreign investors withdrawing technology and capital from Russia. Similarly, increased Russian nationalistic rhetoric drives many foreign nations to become less dependent on Russian energy imports. This aggravates the wound to the Russian economy and creates tremendous problems for the system. Additionally,

should this nationalistic fervor spread to Russians outside the Federation, this could trigger a miscalculation and even disaster. In the end, the over-reliance on Russian nationalism to control the populace is a double-edged sword and may become the proverbial genie that Putin can't get back into the bottle.

The evidence is clear—Putin's system is fragile, and when it fails, and power arrangements unravel—this could result in a violent scenario with power struggles cascading in any number of directions. The dramatic decline in the price of oil and gas, and Western economic sanctions are deeply straining the country. Russia is leveraging nationalist rhetoric to offset the effects of sanctions along with declining revenue and foreign investment. This nationalist trend buys time and space, but if unchecked, can adversely accelerate economic decline, while simultaneously creating fear and uncertainty.



Secretary Kerry is greeted by President Putin, May 7, 2013. Courtesy of U.S. State Department.

This uncertainty also highlights another system

trend: greater centralization, and control by Putin's Inner Circle. As internal and external pressures increase, Putin's Inner Circle is further centralizing its control and influence over decision-making, the economy, information, and internal security measures. The Russian political system also appears to be trending towards conflict, as a legitimate means to perpetuate itself. Georgia, Crimea, Ukraine, and competition with NATO, are all indicators that could affect how Russia navigates strategic issues and decisions in the mid to long term. Increased defense budgets and a modernizing military make the use of the military more likely in future scenarios.

End state

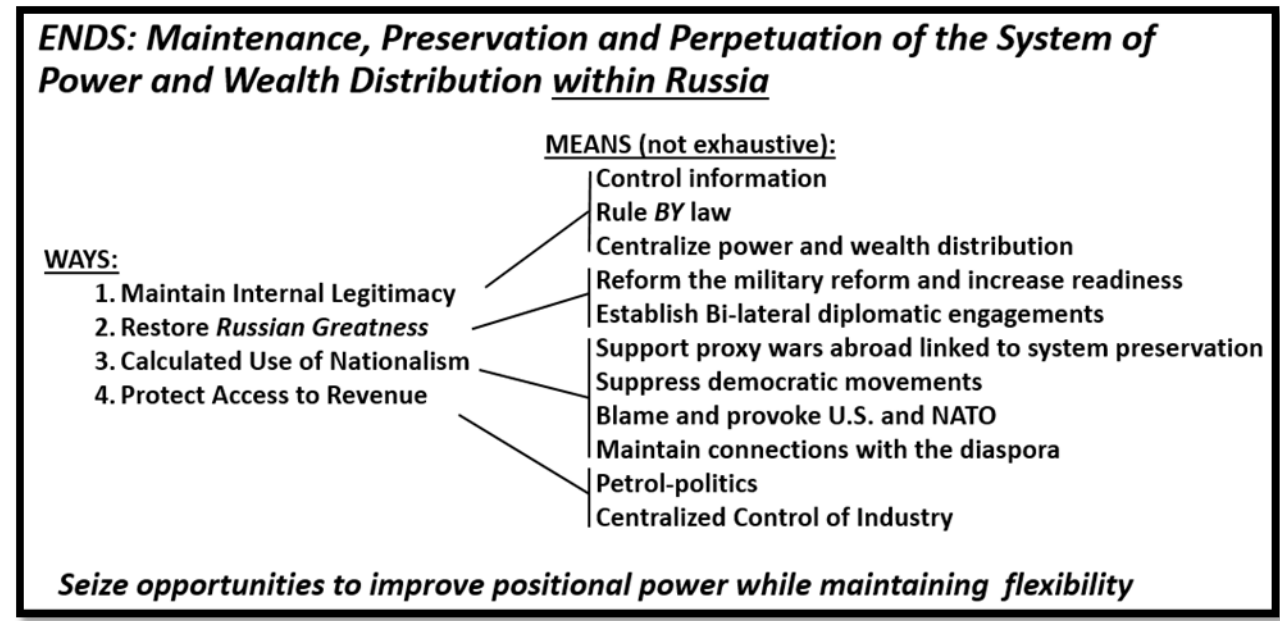
A decline in oil and gas prices and improved European independence from Russian energy, will have an impact on Putin's Russia, forcing the power sharing structure to either evolve or to fall into conflict. An awakening of the middle class or nationalism that spins out of control will also serve as precursors to internal and external conflict and power redistribution. The current trends make these shocks more likely in the mid-term.

Putin desires to maintain, preserve, and perpetuate the current system of power and wealth distribution within Russia. He seeks to accomplish this by maintaining internal legitimacy, restoring a narrative of Russian greatness, harnessing Russian nationalism, and protecting sources of Russian revenue. Putin seizes opportunities to improve his position of power, while maintaining strategic flexibility by creating economic ties

Putin's Grand Strategy is to preserve Russian global power while maintaining and perpetuating the current system of power and wealth distribution.

with China. He controls the flow of information throughout the domestic media outlets. Putin ensures government control of large sectors of the Russian economy and industry while engaging in petrol-politics abroad. He is attempting to reform the military and increase the armed forces' readiness and supports proxy wars. He desires to keep former Soviet bloc countries politically and economically reliant on Russia and views the EU and NATO as encroaching on his interests and territories.

Our desired strategic end state should consist of the following four elements: (1) a NATO-alliance as the backbone for international security; (2) Russia should follow international norms that recognize and respect international borders; (3) countries in the region (including Russia) have political self-determination; (4) A united NATO is central for security and stability in Europe. This means that bordering countries do not feel threatened by a Russian invasion in any form.



Conclusion

The fall of the Soviet Union has brought the Russian population little peace or stability. Putin's control over the Russian system seems to be as strong as ever, yet it is increasingly fragile. To maintain his position he needs popular support, energy

revenues, a strong military apparatus, and an elite that will not challenge him. The position he has taken against the West allows him very little opportunity for negotiation, and as a result, he will not change direction. Putin will continue to propagate his nationalist agenda, while bashing the West and blaming America for Russia's hardships. Support for Putin has been rising to an impressive height, and support for the Russian diaspora and the crises in the Ukraine, Georgia, and the Baltic States is part of this nationalism. However, unlike the majority of the population, the middle class is actually feeling the pain of the western economic sanctions. How long they will tolerate this situation remains to be seen.



Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin meeting in Northern Ireland, June 16, 2013. Courtesy of ShadowNinja1080 and available on Wiki Commons

The Russian armed forces are going through a modernization process with a recent doctrine change occurring in 2014. Yet, the use of the Russian military increases the likelihood of a tactical miscalculation having a strategic impact as evidenced by the shoot down of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17. The chances of a military miscalculation will increase as fractures and fissures in Putin's elaborate web of power grow. The pressure of shrinking energy revenues, and the crunch of sanctions are just two factors testing the limits of Putin's power. Should a worst-case scenario emerge from this, his greatest source of power may end up being the nationalistic fervor that he has so brilliantly leverage to maintain popular support. Just how far he will go to maintain power is yet to be seen.¹⁶⁶

With these considerations in mind, sufficient pressure should be applied against Putin's system to shape and deter him. Yet, excess pressure on this power network could

result in a collapse, which would invariably end in conflict domestically and perhaps internationally. Therein lies the challenge. How should the West nudge Putin away from war in the Ukraine without appearing weak or defaulting to appeasement? The best approach will be a united front by the Western nations. Yet, the nuances of the strategy must be carefully balanced. Placing Putin into a corner where he feels his regime is threatened will only drive him to take desperate measures to maintain power.

Chapter 2: Russian Landpower



By Vitaliy Ragulin (Репетиция парада.) [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons

Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, the primary domestic objective of the Russian government is the preservation of a small, highly centralized, decision-making body to ensure the regime remains in power. With this view, the objective of Russia's foreign and security policy is to increase Russia's standing in the world, especially in territories it once occupied. A successful Russian foreign policy not only advances its international standing, but shores up domestic support by strengthening nationalism. To this end, it uses its military and security services to counter threats and seize opportunities abroad, while curbing challenges at home. Over the past decade the Russian military has pursued reform and modernization, while conducting operations in its self-proclaimed near abroad. Fearing pro-NATO and pro-European Union movements in neighboring countries, Russia has used its military to destabilize those countries to keep them "in the Russian sphere."

Following the conflict with Georgia, the Russian military incorporated lessons learned into its reform efforts and applied them in the annexation of Crimea. The pretext for this annexation was the protection of Crimea's ethnic Russian population from what Russia claimed was an illegitimate and "fascist"-leaning government in Kiev. Another justification given for the annexation of Crimea was the rectification of an historical injustice: the transfer of Crimea from Soviet Russia to Soviet Ukraine by Khrushchev in 1954.

The adaptation and change in Russia's application of landpower over the past decade has been stunning. Moscow's war against Georgia in 2008 depicted an army fighting largely in accordance with a Soviet model. Yet, these operations were executed with a force that had degraded since the Soviet period due to lack of investment by the Russian state, especially in the 1990s. This translated into deficiencies at the tactical level.

Russia depends heavily—almost exclusively—on landpower to achieve its strategic military objectives in its self-proclaimed near abroad

Drawing on the lessons learned from the conflict with Georgia, Russia accelerated its reform programs and updated its doctrine and equipment, allowing it to annex Crimea bloodlessly using a hybrid approach. Operations in Eastern Ukraine—although not fully analogous to those in Georgia or

Crimea—demonstrate improvement of this hybrid approach, including the use of local proxies and "volunteers," augmented with Russian military forces. Using actions in the Ukraine and Georgia as a model, the state of Russian landpower, focusing on the areas of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and personnel can be discerned.

Recent Russian Military Operations

Russia's wars in Georgia and against the Ukraine demonstrate that Russia views NATO as its primary threat, and reflects Russia's determination to re-emerge as a major power. These campaigns also reveal important lessons about Russian military capabilities, which have developed significantly during this period. The three key military lessons are that Russia (1) relies on landpower to achieve its military objectives, (2) relies on decentralized special operations forces (SOF) to conduct hybrid, irregular warfare, and (3) incorporates extensive information operations (IO) that link strategic messaging to operations on the ground.

The 2008 Russia-Georgia Conflict

Russia's invasion of Georgia in August 2008 had two main goals: to reestablish Russian power in the region, and to end NATO's enlargement. The five-day conventional military campaign in Georgia's breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia demonstrated that Russia is the dominant actor in its region and will use all instruments of national power to achieve its strategic goals. Landpower was the dominant force employed by Russia, and the conflict revealed that Russian conventional and special operations forces (SOF) had significant readiness problems. The Russian Federation's military campaign in Georgia was a reaction to the Georgian offensive in South Ossetia. However, the origins of this conflict can be traced long before the shooting started in August 2008. Russia's 'fifth column' (SOF and Russian intelligence agents) provoked this conflict using a proxy campaign, which had accelerated in the spring of 2008. Before the beginning of the Georgian offensive on 7 August 2008, Russia had bombed Georgian territory twice (in March and August, 2007), increased the size of its military contingent in Abkhazia, repaired a railway line that would be used in the Russian offensive, and introduced the advance elements of two Russian regiments and paramilitary forces into South Ossetia.¹⁶⁷

The Kremlin ordered its army to attack Georgia due to fears of its movement toward integrating into NATO and the EU.¹⁶⁸ Georgian integration into NATO threatened Russia's strategic sphere of influence and geographical advantage since it could block Russian passage to the Middle East. In addition to its strategic significance, Georgia possesses historical and symbolic importance for Russia. The annexation of Georgia in the 18th Century, and the role of Georgia and Georgians in both the imperial and Soviet governments were central to Russia's rise to great power status.¹⁶⁹ "Losing" Georgia to NATO and the EU was unthinkable to a Russia bent on returning to the world stage as a power to be reckoned with.

The Russian military campaign in Georgia was successful due to the strategic and operational preparations for war against Georgia, undertaken by Russia in the months prior to August 2008. These preparations ensured overwhelming military power was available to Russia early in the conflict, which allowed it to achieve its objectives despite significant tactical deficiencies.¹⁷⁰

Russia's Lessons Learned

Russia's Reliance on Landpower. The war demonstrated Russia's willingness and ability to fight conventional wars. It also revealed a reliance on landpower as the primary means of Russian warfare. Russia's success, however, was relative to the force ratios, which heavily favored them.

Command and Control. Another observation from the war—Russian C2 systems did not have modern satellite or GPS capabilities. Therefore, tactical units communicated primarily by low quality radio or mobile phones. This slowed the pace of communications needed in modern warfare and reduced the level of security. At the direction of the President, they have accelerated the purchase of improved systems such as the GLONASS, and senior leaders appear to recognize the need to improve communications.¹⁷¹

Intelligence. Russian intelligence was ineffective. For instance, the Russian military was unaware that Georgia had purchased the SA-11 anti-aircraft system from Ukraine and the Spyder anti-aircraft system from Israel before the war. These systems were responsible for many of the Russian aircraft shot down by Georgia once the war began.¹⁷² The lack of satellite reconnaissance capabilities resulted in incomplete information on the Georgian forces' preparations and activities, including lack of knowledge of where the major Georgian military garrisons were located.

At the operational and tactical levels the lack of modern reconnaissance systems also hampered Russian intelligence efforts. This nearly had disastrous results for the Russian Army when the Russian 58th Army command group drove into a Georgian ambush that destroyed 25 of its 30 vehicles, killing a large number of officers and soldiers and wounding the 58th Army Commander.¹⁷³ Lack of funding, lack of modernization and lack of training took its toll on the once-strong Russian warfighting intelligence function. Russia has begun to correct those deficiencies by fielding a modern intelligence system, complete with satellite and UAV intelligence capabilities.

Maneuver. The Russian Army had problems using helicopters to deploy soldiers in Georgia. This resulted from insufficient helicopter training in mountainous terrain.¹⁷⁴ Russian mechanized maneuver in this war reflected the Soviet tactics, with units "moving in column formation, fighting from the lead elements and continuing to press forward after making contact. They generally made no attempt to stop, establish support by fire positions, and maneuver to the flanks of the Georgian units they encountered."¹⁷⁵

Fire Support. There were several observations concerning fire support. The first is that the Russians lacked sufficient GPS, satellite communications and UAVs for target acquisition and designation. This precluded the effective use of Russia's relatively modern precision-guided munitions.

Counter-battery radars were also lacking, resulting in an inability to find and engage Georgian artillery units.¹⁷⁶ These shortcomings increased the need for large volumes of artillery fire. Russian reports indicate that they are addressing this concern by purchasing UAVs from Israel. They also recognized the need to train artillery observers,

Special Forces, and recon unit personnel to operate with artillery and aviation to employ precision weapons. The Russian hybrid warfare in the Eastern Ukraine, or proxy war, depicts how Russia's doctrine has changed since 2008.¹⁷⁷

Combined & Joint Operations. Combined arms operations involving the infantry and artillery generally worked well, but joint operations between the Army and Air Force were less effective. There were clear indications of inadequate inter-service cooperation. The high losses of aircraft, despite being piloted by experienced pilots, indicate deficiencies in pilot training and aircraft capabilities. Most notably, the Air Force did not have air controllers with ground units. In addition, ground units and pilots could not communicate effectively because radios were often not compatible.¹⁷⁸

Sustainment Operations. Reports indicate severe logistical problems because of a bureaucratic supply system. For example, a Russian tank platoon was surrounded and destroyed by Georgian rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) after the platoon ran out of ammunition.¹⁷⁹ Maintenance and logistical problems also hampered the Russian advance even after effective Georgian resistance had ended.

Protection. Russian Air Forces were not able to suppress Georgian air defenses. At least seven Russian Su-25 and Su-24 aircraft and one Tu-22 bomber were destroyed by Georgian air defenses. Furthermore, Su-25s were old and not well equipped to fly in bad weather or at night. The Russians are replacing the aging Su-25s, and revising doctrine to improve air-to-ground and air-to-air coordination to suppress enemy air defenses. They are also improving pilot training by increasing annual flying hours from 40 to 200, and improving electronic warfare capabilities.¹⁸⁰

Manpower. The war against Georgia exposed several weaknesses in the Russian personnel system. First, the war demonstrated that the cadre system was ineffective. Under this system, only key command and staff positions are filled in peacetime, and the unit is supposed to be capable of rapidly expanding in wartime with the addition of new recruits. Next, the war exposed a lack of professional (or "contract") soldiers, forcing the Russian Army to deploy conscripts to the fight, despite official policy forbidding the use of conscripts in wars.¹⁸¹ As part of its reform efforts, Russia is eliminating cadre units and expanding the number of professional soldiers in its Army.

Finally, Russia has changed the way it generates manpower, by formalizing the use of paramilitaries and proxy groups (long a force multiplier used by Russia in its wars). Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree, which allows foreign citizens to serve in the Russian army as contractors.¹⁸² The decree reads:

Military men, who are foreign citizens, can participate in carrying out the tasks during military situations, and also during armed conflicts, in accordance with admitted principles and norms of international law, international treaties of the Russian Federation, and the Russian legislation.¹⁸³

Georgia's Lessons Learned

The following reflect lessons learned by Georgian forces to defend their homeland against the Russian forces against further attacks.

When defending against a larger enemy force with more capabilities and resources, the use of irregular warfare is a valuable approach. It is most practical when the military instrument of national power is used as a last resort because irregular forces can be employed while other, overt means to avoid war are leveraged.

Infantry Battle Groups (IBGs) should form the backbone of the defense. Territorial Army (TA) Regiments should be created to support the IBGs. Georgia created defense zones (DZs) inside the country and allocated one IBG supported by 3-4 TA regiments to each DZ. Several other IBGs should remain in reserve. IBGs manned with professional soldiers serve as a core fighting force, aided by TA regiments manned by reservists.

Georgia increased air defense, artillery, attack helicopter (AH) and Special Forces (SF) units to mitigate problems caused by a lack of firepower.

Georgia increased light infantry and SOF units to better enable a small country's defense force to conduct hybrid warfare. Relatively small, decentralized infantry units are less vulnerable to enemy air attacks and are more mobile. Man-portable weapons and light armored vehicles are cheaper than heavy armor and aircraft. Hybrid warfare provides a cost-effective and a more deployable force for Georgia.

Georgia decreased heavy armor units and fixed wing aircraft.

Georgia improved command, control, communications, computers (C4) and intelligence, surveillance and target acquisition (ISTAR) capabilities.

Both Russia and Georgia relied mainly on landpower during the 2008 conflict and have improved their military capabilities. Both countries have expanded their reliance on landpower, but have shifted from a heavy force—reliant upon conventional forces, armor, and heavy aircraft—to a lighter force that employs more SOF, light infantry and helicopters, and leverages more hybrid or irregular warfare.

The 2014-2015 Russian-Ukrainian Conflict

Russia's strategic objective in Georgia was to dominate its neighbors and to counter NATO influence. These same objectives re-emerged in Ukraine in 2014. Although Russia's strategic goals in Georgia and Ukraine were similar, its military performance in Ukraine demonstrated significant improvement since the war with Georgia. Russia again used all instruments of national power to achieve its strategic goals, but it has learned from its experience in Georgia. Although the campaigns are somewhat dissimilar—with Georgia largely a conventional, maneuver war, Crimea a bloodless example of "hybrid war" where information operations and special operations played a dominant role, and Eastern Ukraine is a combination of these approaches—there are still lessons to be drawn from comparing the three conflicts.

Russian Operations in Crimea

Although Russian operations in Crimea reflect its broad strategic goals of dominating regional neighbors and countering NATO influence, they were also driven by other geopolitical factors. Crimea is an important strategic location for Russia. Its seaport

provides control of the Black Sea, and the Black Sea straits provide strategic access to the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Mediterranean region, and the Middle East. The annexation of Crimea, particularly the Sevastopol seaport, provides significant military and economic advantages to Russia.

Crimea was a different type of operation than Georgia. Nevertheless, in the Warfighting Functional Areas of command and control (C2), intelligence and manpower, useful comparisons between the two can be drawn. Command and control of the Russian operation in Crimea was

Russia executed a coup de main in Crimea—relying on speed and surprise to accomplish its objectives in a single blow

decentralized in execution, unlike the Soviet style centralized control of Georgia 2008. Another difference in the two operations has to do with the wide availability of tactical communications equipment, including individual radios, in Crimea. In Georgia, the lack of such equipment forces Russian forces in many cases to communicate by mobile phones.

The annexation of Crimea has been extremely popular in Russia with its mass media lauding the role of staff and Russian generals. This was seen as a successful, bloodless military operation. According to Putin, "Nothing was prepared, everything was done, they say, on the fly, based on the current situation and the requirements of the moment, and in a highly professional manner."¹⁸⁴

In the area of intelligence, the Russian performance in Crimea showed significant improvement over that in Georgia. Russia understood the lack of mobility, low level of training and low morale of Ukrainian forces in Crimea, and thus felt secure in the knowledge that these forces would be unwilling or unable to resist Russia's seizure of key infrastructure and facilities.¹⁸⁵

Russia's actions in Crimea caught Ukraine and the rest of the world off guard, thus achieving strategic and operational surprise.¹⁸⁶ The Crimean campaign was centered on Russian Landpower, but it involved hybrid, non-linear warfare. This has been described as fourth generation warfare that blurs the lines between politics and war, and between combatants and civilians. In this, Russia was more reliant on SOF and information operations (both are discussed below in more detail).

The cleverness of this emerging approach to warfare is manipulation of local ethnic Russian citizens. This struggle involves the entire spectrum to influence the civilian population. Both sides seek to exploit the "human terrain," which is the true center of gravity of the conflict. The rebels attempt to blend into the population to avoid being targeted, and to provoke the Ukrainian armed forces to isolate the central government from the local population. The Ukrainian armed forces, on the other hand, must use the "human terrain" to convince the local population of their intent to restore order, establish the rule of law, and protect the lives and property of its citizens.

In addition to the human realm, the campaigns in Ukraine have demonstrated significant changes from the force structure Russia fielded in Georgia. Landpower remains the key component, but Russia relies heavily on decentralized SOF elements. The combination of forces in Ukraine includes all types of rapid reaction forces modeled on the VDV (Airborne). It also includes the Marine Corps, GRU Special Forces, and agile support teams. The forward echelon of the Russian Army in Crimea included SOF, Spetsnaz, reconnaissance units of VDV (Airborne), Marine Corps units, Air Force units (military transport and army aviation), and the Navy.¹⁸⁷

Russian troop movements, operations, and discipline during the Crimean operations were all enhanced since the 2008 Georgia invasion. The quality of Russian soldiers was also improved as a direct result of the 2010-2012 reforms in the VDV (Airborne) and Ground Forces. Notably, the battalion tactical group (BTG) is now staffed by professional soldiers.¹⁸⁸

Russian planning for Ukraine was exceptional. During the campaign planning, the Russian Defense Ministry assessed the capabilities of the Ukrainian forces, and added the appearance of armed separatist groups. In particular, the Russians placed groups in the "right sectors" of Crimea, and organized sabotage at key Black Sea facilities. There were also elaborate plans for the capture of hostages and troops, and other contingencies.¹⁸⁹

Russia's improved use of modern digital communications, electronic warfare measures, and military deception allowed the Russian invasion force to evade detection by Ukrainian and NATO intelligence services.¹⁹⁰ Russia also held a large-scale exercise, "West-2013" in preparation for the Ukrainian scenario in September 2013. This was the cover in which Russia moved 150,000 soldiers from the Baltic Sea to the Ural Mountains, diverting the West's attention from Crimea. The Crimean campaign emerged from the shadows of these exercises and surprised Ukraine and the West.¹⁹¹

The Crimean campaign was centered on Russian Landpower, but all armed forces were involved and joint coordination was significantly improved since Georgia 2008. Russian forces successfully performed tasks such as monitoring and blocking of key facilities, reconnaissance, and receiving follow-on forces. These operations took place in the framework of agreed upon limitations on the number of the Russian Armed Forces in Crimea. At that time, according to the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense, there were 18,800 Russian troops in Crimea and Sevastopol.

Russia also leveraged information operations and cyberwarfare in Crimea. On the surface, Russia portrayed its annexation of Crimea as a legitimate, legal action that was overwhelmingly supported by the Russian and Crimean populations. This was an improvement over Russia's 2008 operations, where it provided Russian passports to ethnic Russians in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and then invaded to allegedly save its citizens from Georgian aggression. In Crimea, Russia leveraged this same basis to protect its Russian "compatriots," but it also cited the historical control over Crimea and ties to the Crimean people, which was more effective.

NATO analyzed Russia's actions and concluded that information campaign was central to operations in Ukraine.¹⁹² President Putin's control of mass media has been a key

factor. This has made it difficult for democratic states with free media to compete with the strong, synchronized messaging of the Russian government. The Russian narrative included the following themes:¹⁹³

- Russian Nationalism (in opposition to a “decadent” Europe)
- Russians and Ukrainians form one nation, and historic ties justify Russia’s action
- Ukrainians are unable to sustain their own country, and the notion of Russian “compatriots” allows Russia to defend Russians abroad
- Dividing the West (pitting the EU against the USA, and more hesitant Western European nations against Eastern European nations)

The NATO IO report has several general conclusions.¹⁹⁴ One is that the crisis in Ukraine is a result of Russia’s long-term strategy to dominate its region and stand against NATO. Another is that Russia was prepared to conduct a new form of warfare in Ukraine where an information campaign played a central role. A third conclusion is that Russia has used deception as a tactic to distract and delay, but such disinformation campaigns erode and are less effective over time. For example, the Russian information campaign alienated some in Ukraine along with Western audiences.¹⁹⁵

In conclusion, in the areas where useful comparisons with the 2008 Georgia operation can be drawn, Russian operations in Crimea showcase significant improvements. As Bartles and McDermott argue, the Crimean operation was the first *coup de-main* (swift attack that relies on speed and surprise to accomplish its objectives in a single blow) since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In this sense the operation had more in common with Soviet interventions in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968) than with the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008.¹⁹⁶

Russian Operations in Eastern Ukraine

Eastern Ukraine escalated into an open armed conflict between the pro-Russian separatists and regular formations of the Ukrainian Army with episodic participation of Russian military forces

As in Crimea, the most fruitful areas for analysis of this operation are command and control, intelligence, manpower and the strategic narrative/information operations. In Eastern Ukraine, Russia applied lessons learned from Georgia and Crimea, and has improved its execution of hybrid war. It has better employed SOF

and other irregular forces, leveraged surprise, and employed strategic information operations that befuddle the West. Russia has tied its military operations to its desired strategic end state (to garner respect for Russia as a world power; to make Ukraine a friendly, but subordinate partner; and to discourage members from trying to leave the Russian Federation).¹⁹⁷

Russia has focused its efforts on the pro-Russian populations of Donetsk and Lugansk regions. There, Russians are leveraging separatist groups conducting full-scale, hybrid warfare. These groups are trained and equipped by Russia, and led by Russian SOF and other irregular forces controlled from Moscow, to:

- Promote the self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Lugansk
- Undermine the authority of the Ukrainian government by provoking social tension, complicating negotiations to resolve the conflict, and delaying the exchange of prisoners of war
- Destabilizing the region by conducting warfare (including operations with conventional Russian Army units) and exercises in the border regions¹⁹⁸

In Eastern Ukraine, the situation escalated into an open armed conflict between the pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainian Army and National Guard. Meanwhile, under the cover of training exercises, Russia repositioned large troop formations to the Ukrainian border that included the 20th, 58th and 41st Armies, and the 76th VDV (Airborne) Division, which participated in Georgia in 2008. Since the summer of 2014, elements of these units have entered Ukraine and clashed with the Ukrainian Army. SOF personnel have also been actively employed in reconnaissance and sabotage to destroy command, control, and communications systems (both military and civilian). These elements have been employed in a decentralized and effective manner.

Russia continues to conduct effective information operations and successfully employed propaganda at the tactical and operational levels. For example, Russia conducted artillery strikes with large weapon systems, such as the “Grad” and “Uragan” MLRS, that caused collateral damage to civilians in Eastern Ukraine. Russian misinformation widely attributed the strikes to the Ukrainian Army. This indicates that Russia recognizes the importance of popular opinion and has achieved a high level of sophistication with its information operations.¹⁹⁹

Recent Russian Military Operations: Similarities and Differences

RUSSIA TODAY:

- (1) Depends heavily on landpower to achieve military objectives***
- (2) Relies on SOF to conduct hybrid, irregular warfare***
- (3) Incorporates effective information and cyber operations***

Three key military lessons have emerged. The first is that Russia depends heavily on landpower to achieve its strategic military objectives in its self-described near abroad. This landpower-centric approach has been a constant in recent Russian campaigns, and these campaigns are critical components of a Russian strategy designed to halt expansion of Western institutions (NATO, EU) into the former Soviet Union.

The second lesson is that Russia has transformed its landpower forces to conduct hybrid, irregular warfare as its primary means of warfare against smaller neighbors. Russia has shifted to a less centralized military structure, relying more heavily on SOF, Spetsnaz, and other unconventional forces. In Ukraine, Russian conventional or general-purpose forces (GPF) have played only limited roles, while SOF was heavily engaged. In addition to GRU (military) SOF, there are indications that SOF of the FSB (Federal Security Service, Russia’s KBG successor) are operating in Eastern Ukraine. These suspicions have been substantiated by observations in Eastern Ukraine such as

“six-man groups, armed with expensive Russian equipment such as VSS Vintorez sniper rifles and wearing Special Forces camouflage,” assisting the rebels.²⁰⁰

According to Nigel Inkster, a former U.K intelligence officer, Ukraine is considered by Russia as an internal issue and all near abroad issues are conducted by the FSB.²⁰¹ Inkster further states that the tactics used in Ukraine are classic FSB—such as the planning, incitement and organization of local forces without the use of large numbers.²⁰² Ukraine was well suited for covert activity by the FSB as the ousted former President (Viktor Yanukovich), who was friendly to the Russian government, had placed up to a third of the personnel in the Ukrainian security Services and had access to tremendous human intelligence for operations.²⁰³ The depth of the role of the FSB in Ukraine may not be completely understood, but their involvement is certain. The use of the FSB in the conflict in Ukraine is further demonstrated by the Russian Federation admission that FSB generals, including Colonel General Sergei Beseda, visited Kiev in February 2014.²⁰⁴ Sergei Beseda is the head of the FSB's Operational Information and International Communications, which is responsible for conducting intelligence activities focusing on the former Soviet republics.²⁰⁵

Finally, Russia has developed effective information operations and cyber capabilities. Its information operations leverage modern technology and communications and synchronize its messaging from the strategic to tactical levels. In conjunction with information operations, Russia has made extensive use of cyber warfare in both Georgia and Ukraine, as well as against other adversaries in its near abroad. Russia's first use of cyberwarfare against a neighbor came in 2007. Prompted by the Estonian removal of a Soviet-era war memorial, the cyber-attacks against Estonia were responsible for shutting down the President's website as well as the websites of other ministries within a government based largely on online services.²⁰⁶ Despite the Russian government's denial of involvement, the source of the attacks included servers located in Russia. The attacks were coordinated with other governmental actions such as the closure of rail service from Russia to Estonia.²⁰⁷ The most likely direct source of the attacks was a group known as the Russian Business Network—a shadowy organization with no direct ties to the Russian government.²⁰⁸ While not associated with any military involvement, the attacks sparked a debate among the NATO Alliance about the future of cyber warfare, and its impact on collective defense.²⁰⁹

Prior to the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008, Russia began an aggressive cyber campaign against Georgia. Like the preceding attacks in Estonia, these attacks were the work of the Russia Business Network. This Distributed Denial of Service (D.D.O.S.) shut down Georgian servers, government websites, communications and transportation networks, and expanded as Russian Forces entered Georgia.²¹⁰ Additionally, these attacks were persistent and lasted until the announcement of the ceasefire.²¹¹

Much like the conflict in Georgia, cyber-attacks preceded the fall of Crimea and separatist attacks in eastern Ukraine. This model was similar to the initiation of conflict in Georgia with denial of service attacks on government websites and attacks against social networking sites as well as physically damaging phone and internet cables.²¹² Additionally as the crisis in Crimea escalated, cyber-attacks became more precise, targeting the mobile phone carriers for members of the Ukrainian parliament, hindering

their ability to determine how to respond to the incursions.²¹³ In short, Russia has linked its strategic messaging and cyber warfare activities to its operations on the ground.

Russian Landpower Today: State of Modernization and Readiness

Russian operations in Georgia and the Ukraine brought about the greatest changes in the doctrinal employment of their armed forces since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In both Georgia and the Ukraine, the Russian strategy was to use tactical actions as a means of countering a European or pro-NATO influence. For example, in Georgia, the invasion followed NATO's announcement in the Bucharest Summit that Georgia would one day be a part of the Alliance. Similarly, actions in the Ukraine followed the protests of Euromaidan and the removal of the pro-Russian Yanukovich government. Following each conflict, Russia conducted its own assessment of its successes and failures, and each operation has resulted in changes to Russian military doctrine from the tactical to the strategic level.

Doctrine

Two years after the war in Georgia, President Medvedev published the Doctrine of 2010. Unlike its predecessor, the doctrine of 2000, this doctrine described the characteristics of future modern military conflict. Future conflicts would be defined by being unpredictable, and would involve a range of military, political, economic, and strategic objectives. Additionally, information operations would make it possible for the state to achieve political objectives without the use of force. According to the doctrine of 2010, possession of the "strategic initiative" and "supremacy on land, at sea, and in the air" would become decisive factors in future conflict. Each of these—with the exception of garnering international support—were present as Russian forces quickly invaded and annexed Crimea.

Although it was published months after the commencement of operations in the Ukraine, the 2014 Doctrine builds upon many of the concepts of the 2010 Doctrine. One addition in the 2014 Doctrine's definition of the characteristics of military conflicts is the addition of protest and popular movements. When viewed through the lens of this doctrine, this brief statement could easily be a reference to movements like Euromaidan and the potential they have to create instability for Russia both internally and externally. While the 2010 doctrine mentioned irregular and hybrid warfare, the 2014 doctrine expanded this concept and included a reference to irregular armed forces and the use of private military companies. Evidence of this expanded concept can be seen in the Eastern Ukraine where Russian paramilitaries and other private organizations have openly fought and operated.²¹⁴

Significantly, both the 2010 and 2014 doctrines list unresolved regional conflicts along Russia's borders and the enlargement of NATO as the most significant threats Russia faces. Additionally, both doctrines imply linkages between the re-eruption of regional conflicts and NATO's enlargement process. For example, a "continuing tendency toward a strong-arm resolution of these conflicts" along Russia's borders, along with a "desire to move the military infrastructure of NATO member countries closer to the borders of the Russian Federation" to "destabilize the situation in individual states and regions and to undermine strategic stability"²¹⁵ are listed prominently among threats

described in both versions of Russia's military doctrine. Russian claims that NATO's enlargement process and the conflicts in Russia's neighbors are inextricably linked, and Russian pronouncements that NATO is attempting to destabilize its neighbors—and ultimately Russia itself—by reigniting dormant conflicts along Russia's periphery are meant to justify Russian intervention in these conflicts.

Organization

Following the conflict in Georgia in 2008, the Russian leadership identified several organizational changes required by the Russian Armed Forces. One of the critical lessons the leadership learned from the Georgian invasion was the linkage between combat readiness and the organizational structure. Prior to the reforms of 2008, less than 17% of the Russian ground forces were combat-ready.²¹⁶ When considering both the readiness and ineffectiveness of large, traditional formations in Georgia, Russian military leadership embarked on reforms with the goal of creating smaller, more mobile forces.²¹⁷ These reforms began the transition from a conventional mobilization based armed forces to the permanently ready combat forces based on a brigade structure and included the consolidation of formations above the brigade into strategic commands.²¹⁸

Prior to the invasion of Georgia, the Russian Armed Forces were based on a large mass mobilization structure. Realizing both the high cost of this structure and the impact it had on preparedness for the invasion of Georgia, President Medvedev began the most drastic reforms in Russian military history, by abolishing the mobilization structure replacing partially ready regiments and divisions with permanently ready brigades.²¹⁹ During the annexation of Crimea, only Russian Airborne and Special Operations Forces were used.²²⁰ Charles Bartles and Roger McDermott suggest that the Russians used operations in Crimea as a test of the creation of a Rapid Reaction Force.²²¹ This command, numbering up to 80,000 personnel and still in the process of being formed, would consist largely of Airborne and Special Operations forces, augmented by up to three brigades of conventional forces. Its purpose would be to quickly deploy to and conduct operations in small-scale regional conflicts, and to counter terrorism, proliferation and insurgency. Since 2008, a large proportion of Russian spending on land forces has been allocated to these units.²²²

Training

To properly employ their new doctrine the Russians have established a training regimen which focuses on better-combined arms operations and the integration of General Purpose and Special Operations Forces. This has been evident over the past year as the Russian army conducted more than 1,500 different exercises in 2014.²²³ While the total number of exercises for 2015 has not been released publically, the Russian armed forces has announced that they are planning to conduct more than 150 different exercises, of which 18 will be joint and combined arms exercises involving all services within the armed forces, and will stress the mobilization of the force for deployment, the synchronization of fires and maneuver, and stability operations.²²⁴ The exercises in 2015 will focus on operations in mountainous terrain and the arctic. With an increased focus on arctic operations, Russian Airborne forces (VDV) will join the North Fleet and Naval Infantry (Marines) in exercises which focus on forces with higher readiness levels.²²⁵

Materiel

The 2008 war with Georgia exposed a weak and decayed post-Soviet Armed Forces, and Russia still struggles to develop the combat and support systems required for modern conventional warfare. The sweeping defense modernization plan announced by Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov in 2011—viewed by many as overly ambitious when it was announced—has been rendered impossible by economic constraints and insufficient industrial capacity.²²⁶ As a consequence, Russian ground forces continue to rely heavily on variants of Soviet-era equipment. However, there have been areas of improvement in overall ground force equipment, particularly in the Southern Military District since 2008.²²⁷

Russian equipment used in Georgia came from a military industrial base that had a limited capability. Despite being the world's second largest weapons supplier, Russia's defense industry was unable to supply its armed forces modern 21st century equipment.²²⁸ The military equipment used in Georgia may have been recently produced, but due to industrial plants built more than thirty years ago and equipment designs created ten to fifteen years ago, the gear was outdated.²²⁹ Both sides used the T-72 tank, but Georgian tanks had been modernized with the addition of GPS, thermal imaging, night sights, and improved communications systems. This enabled Georgian armor to work at night and in poor weather, while Russian tanks were essentially blind.²³⁰ Reports indicate Russia, having learned from this experience, has re-equipped its ground forces in the region with upgraded equipment to include T-90A tanks and BTR-82A armored personnel transports. This activity was part of its effort to establish “new look” brigade units in South Ossetia and Abkhazia following the Georgian conflict.²³¹

Russia is also now reaching beyond its own defense industry for combat systems. The Tiger light utility vehicle—which is replacing the BTR, BMP, and MTLB in some units, and has been very visible during operations in Crimea and East Ukraine—is manufactured by Russia's GAZ auto company.²³² Russia's purchasing of modern military equipment extends to communications and weapons have been framed for smaller, lighter, more mobile forces (airborne, naval infantry, select motorized infantry, and Spetsnaz (SOF) at the expense of heavier mechanized forces.²³³ The Airborne Forces, which played key roles in all three conflicts examined here, are taking delivery of the newest Russian military electronic warfare equipment, including the Infauna (jammer) and Judoist (ELINT, locating) vehicles and command and control systems.²³⁴

Another shortfall observed in Georgia but addressed prior to the Crimean annexation involved communications and navigation systems. Media reports during the Georgia campaign indicate Russian elements were unable to communicate among themselves or with higher headquarters.²³⁵ Commanders were forced to use their personal cell phones to coordinate operations on a regular basis.²³⁶ The widespread presence of compact push-to-talk encrypted radios down to the small unit level in Russian forces in Crimea reflected a mitigation of this problem.²³⁷ Most appeared to be of Western origin, suggesting Russia either does not have the capacity to mass produce them or has simply chosen to purchase them abroad.

Clearly, ammunition resupply was a problem in Georgia. “We simply ran out of ammunition, and they surrounded us with grenade launchers, a Russian tank commander explained to the newspaper *Moskovskii Komsomolets* after two Russian tanks were blown up during the fighting in the village of Zemo-Nikozi.”²³⁸ Poor maintenance of ground equipment severely taxed the ground logistical system. This may have been the root cause for the halt of the Russian advance at Igoeti (approximately 30km outside Tbilisi).²³⁹ Similar logistics support was not required in Crimea, and has not been necessary in East Ukraine. Yet, the broader evidence of Russian mobility and transport reliability suggests there have been improvements since 2008. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether current logistic support and sustainment capabilities are sufficient to support a robust, protracted conflict.

Leadership

Russia continues to struggle to improve its military education system and create a professional non-commissioned officer (NCO) corps. There has been some progress since 2008, but significant reforms are still required to create a truly professional force. For example, the current system awards promotion based on the whims of immediate supervisors, rather than competition and superior performance.²⁴⁰ This type of corruption drives talent away from the military.

The resulting recruitment and retention shortfalls compound the problems. As a result, many newly minted cadets brought up from the ranks and graduating from military academies are serving as NCOs to fill essential gaps.²⁴¹ However, the NCO corps may be “beginning to gradually break through from the bottom,”²⁴² meaning that despite indifference and corruption within the officer ranks, a professional NCO corps may be starting to emerge in the Russian Army.

Another problem has been the profession education curriculum. The legacy education system—particularly at junior levels—was designed to meet a Soviet-era emphasis on technical systems training. Russia is now in the process of consolidating its education system. Over a dozen schools have been closed, and courses are being refocused to concentrate on humanities and sciences more appropriate for leaders.²⁴³ Although these changes will take time and are bound to meet institutional resistance, if consolidated, they promise to improve the Russian professional education system.

Personnel

Russia wrestles to achieve balanced capability and sufficient manning in its ground forces. In Georgia, an inability to deploy sufficient professional troops (known as “*kontraktniki*” for their contracted term of service) forced Russia to deploy conscripts to the theater of operations. Conscript units were not supposed to be employed in combat, and there was an outcry when several conscript units suffered casualties.²⁴⁴ It is unclear whether this was a result of poor command and control, or a reflection of unanticipated troop requirements.

An evaluation of Russian capabilities based on observed activities in Crimea and Ukraine is problematic. The Army is currently an uneven force with many poorly trained and equipped units, and only a handful of exceptional units. The concept of establishing permanent readiness units fully manned by professionals was abandoned

in favor of concentrating capability in elite rapid-reaction units.²⁴⁵ These elements comprise only 25% of the total force. As a result, the majority of the ground forces are a mix of professional and conscript personnel.²⁴⁶ Most of the troops in the non-elite units are conscripts enlisted for one-year terms of service. Half of this force turns over every six months, creating discipline and training problems. The officers assigned to conscript units are reportedly inferior as well.²⁴⁷

Despite massive downsizing of the force, the conscription-based manning model is not sustainable given current trends and demographics. There are widespread shortfalls due largely to lower birth rates in the late 1980s and early 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union.²⁴⁸ Low pay, abuse, and lack of status make conscription service highly undesirable.²⁴⁹ Fifty-four percent of respondents to a 2011 poll said they would not want their sons to serve in the military. The primary reason given was hazing and abuse.²⁵⁰ Russian demographics are going to make this problem even more problematic in the coming years. The reduction in service from two years to one has doubled the number of conscripts required at a time when Russia has a declining population of qualified, conscription age youth due to a falling birth rate.²⁵¹ To compound the problem, a third of the 400,000 students graduating high school in 2010 were deemed unfit for service.²⁵²

The Russian Army sought to end reliance on conscripts and improve the capabilities of its personnel through the practice of hiring professional soldiers, called “*kontraktniki*.” Media reports during the Georgia conflict indicated seventy percent of the troops sent to South Ossetia were *kontraktniki*. The 76th Guards Airborne Division from Pskov that deployed to Georgia was made up entirely of *kontraktniki*.²⁵³ Reporting from Crimea and Ukraine indicates that the practice continues. However, given the challenges in building an NCO education and training system, it remains to be seen whether this trend of relying more on professional soldiers and less on conscripts will improve the overall quality of the Russian military.

In the meantime, Russia continues to rely on paramilitaries and mercenaries to do much of the fighting in Ukraine, to an even greater extent than it did in Georgia. In addition to indigenous forces—Abkhaz and Ossetes in Georgia and Russian-speakers in Ukraine—Russia has recruited and deployed paramilitary forces to the conflicts. These forces provide needed manpower, and also provide Russia a level of deniability to being a party to the conflict. This is particularly important in Eastern Ukraine, where Russia portrays itself as an external observer to a conflict in a neighboring state. Vladimir Yefimov, a former Special Forces (*spetsnaz*) officer in Yekaterinburg (Urals) may represent how Russian paramilitary forces are recruited and deployed. He reportedly sent 150-250 fighters to Ukraine’s Donbass region in 2014. They were paid in a range of \$1000 to \$4000 for their service based on experience and seniority. Moscow is purposefully avoiding overt affiliation with these activities.²⁵⁴

Finally, Russia leaned heavily on its Spetsnaz forces (SOF) in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, but the nature of their operations made it difficult to evaluate what may have changed in their mission and capabilities since 2008. The problem is complicated because there is no way to distinguish between military Spetsnaz, primarily residing in the GRU and those associated with the Russian Federal Security Services (FSB).



Key Insights

- Russia depends principally on landpower to achieve its strategic objectives in the region.
- Russian landpower is tailored to the strategic environment and tactical situation.
- Information and cyber operations are key enablers.
- Russia is modernizing its forces and adapting its operational approach to new conditions.

Conclusion

The three campaigns examined here differ in key respects. Georgia was a conventional maneuver war preceded by a long period of escalation and preparation by both sides. Crimea was a *coup de main*, in which Russia was able to use local bases, a sympathetic local population, and security infrastructure still in place from the Sochi Olympics to swiftly and bloodlessly achieve its objectives. Russian actions in Eastern Ukraine revolve around support to a violent separatist movement in a neighboring state, with the episodic involvement of Russian military forces.

Despite these differences, a comparison of these campaigns reveals patterns in Russia's conduct of military operations in neighboring states:

- The military relies heavily on landpower to achieve Russian objectives in its self-described near abroad.
- Airborne and Special Operations Forces are used extensively in both conventional and non-conventions roles.
- Information operations are employed to seize and relentlessly reinforce the strategic narrative.

An analysis of Russian operations in these three campaigns reveals significant improvements between 2008 and 2014, especially in the areas of command and control, intelligence, manpower generation and information operations. Despite deficiencies in other areas, Russian land forces are sufficiently modernized and ready to attain Russian objectives in the near abroad. The creation of a Rapid Reaction Force (RRF) indicates that Russia intends to institutionalize the lessons learned from these conflicts, with an eye toward conducting similar operations in the future. However, with a projected end strength of 70-80,000, this force will probably only be sufficient to conduct one major intervention (similar to that in Georgia) or two more limited interventions (similar to what is now underway in Eastern Ukraine) at a time.

The organization of the RRF, which is heavy on Spetsnaz and VDV (Airborne) forces, suggests that these forces—especially the VDV—will be used primarily in a conventional role, as they were in Georgia. The level of integration of Russian Special Operations Forces (when not operating in a conventional role) with Russian conventional forces will remain limited due to their differing command structures and the marginal capabilities of conventional forces. One final note on Russia's military modernization plans: the pressure on the Russian state budget brought about by the combined effects of Western sanctions and falling oil prices will surely stifle the pace of modernization.

As noted in the beginning of this chapter, the overall strategic objectives of the Russian government are to stay in power and to increase Russia's standing in the world. Especially in its self-described near abroad, Russia measures its standing and those of other states in terms of power—especially military power. To achieve its objectives, Russia must halt what it perceives as Western encroachment into its sphere of influence. The 2010 and 2014 military doctrines reveal that Russia views NATO enlargement and instability along its borders as inextricably linked. Therefore, Russian attempts to improve its ability to fight the types of smaller-scale, hybrid wars described here can be seen as an indirect approach to countering NATO.

Both NATO and the EU demand political liberalization of prospective members. Therefore, any Russian neighbor that enters into close association with these institutions will undertake reform processes to increase political competition and consolidate its democratic transition. The fear among the Russian leadership is that this “contagion” may spread and infect the Russian body politic, threatening the government's ability to maintain its hold on power. This worldview of a Russia besieged and threatened by the West, in the words of Olga Oliner of the RAND Corporation, makes Russia “difficult to reassure and easy to escalate with”.²⁵⁵

Chapter 3 - The Emerging Russian approach



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Strategy of Ambiguity

Moscow's annexation of Crimea, followed by its support of separatists in Eastern Ukraine unveiled a new strategy, which is to leverage influence over its neighbors, via the ethnic Russian populations residing there. This emerging strategy seems to come to fruition when neighboring states are out of step with Moscow's prerogatives. The strategy opens when the disgruntled portions of a nation's ethnic Russian population are encouraged by the Kremlin to seek independence. Once the struggle begins, Moscow then provides the covert support necessary to ensure that the separatists achieve success. As the fighting escalates, Russia's next move is to deploy a large conventional force to the border to ostensibly secure the frontier and to provide humanitarian aid to the suffering populace. However, the real design is to intimidate the neighboring country from taking decisive action against the separatists (for fear of triggering a Russian response), and to have its forces poised to provide direct and sustained support for the separatists as required. The key to success in this strategic approach, however, is ambiguity, which gives Moscow flexibility and the initiative. Should things go awry, Moscow can simply pull its support from the separatists and deny any role in the crisis.²⁵⁶

The 2008 Russian-Georgian War marked a beginning of a new era for Moscow. After the Russian forces defeated the Georgian Army, it quickly recognized the independence of the two breakaway regions (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), and expanded its control over their puppet regimes there. But, more disconcerting was Moscow's disregard of international agreements, borders and norms begging the question at how far Russia would go in relation to neighboring territories especially those looking to the European Union and integration into NATO.²⁵⁷ Despite this, Western nations tended to give Moscow the benefit of the doubt.²⁵⁸ To that end, President Obama, in 2009, announced a desire to "reset" US-Russian relations, seeking cooperation on nuclear proliferation and a "move away from cold war policies."²⁵⁹

Any hope of a reset ended 2014 with Russia's capture of Crimea and its precipitation of a civil war in Eastern Ukraine, which now calls itself Novorossiya (New Russia). The timing of Moscow's actions was no accident and was a manifestation of its policy toward the "near abroad." Putin's decision to take Crimea, and to carve out part of Eastern Ukraine was linked to the fall of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014, who was committed to close ties with Russian. This led to a popular uprising that forced Yanukovich to flee Kiev on February 21, 2014, being replaced by pro EU Oleksandr Turchynov. It seemed that Putin's influence over the Ukraine was slipping away.²⁶⁰

Taking advantage of the political upheaval in Kiev, Putin ordered his troops to secure key positions in the Crimean Peninsula on February 26, which put the region under his control. Putin denied that these were his troops and thereby used strategic ambiguity, combined with the manipulation of the peninsula's Russian population to stymie a response from the United States and Europe. The speed that he achieved his

objectives was breathtaking. His military objectives were accomplished in less than a week and his political objectives in less than a month.²⁶¹

Putin's approach in Eastern Ukraine echoes some of the patterns witnessed in Crimea, albeit with, initially, a less visible conventional aspect. However, the pattern of alleged deprivations directed against Ukraine's ethnic Russian population served as a convenient recipe for Moscow to foment unrest that would eventually escalate to direct support of the rebels. Yet, even in this, the Kremlin maintain a cloak of strategic ambiguity that provided Putin with flexibility to adjust his foreign policy based upon the international environment.²⁶²

In the context of ambiguity, the overarching Russian strategy seeks to maintain internal and external conditions that preserve the distribution of wealth and power inside Russia. As changes in these conditions alter Putin's strategic calculus, he focuses Russian national power to exploit vulnerabilities and shape conditions to achieve his strategic aims. This approach is patient, methodical, and offensively-minded. Each action taken has sufficient ambiguity to foster disinformation and deniability. The ambiguous quality to Russian strategy creates enough doubt as to the true nature of Russian actions to paralyze political action and decision-making in the West that enables Russian forces to seize the initiative and create conditions on the ground that are irreversible and a fait accompli.²⁶³

While there is no single blueprint for Russia's strategic and operational approach to resolving these conflicts, there are elements and objectives that are common to identify trends and indicators where Russia may act next. Short of the threshold of war, Russian power in its sphere of influence lays a foundation for success through its intelligence agencies, persistent psychological operations and propaganda, while cultivating political and economic dependency on Russia. Should soft power fail, Russia has demonstrated a willingness to use the military instrument of power in conventional and unconventional ways to return the strategic equilibrium to Russia's advantage.

Beginning with the occupation of Transnistria in Moldova after the 1992 intervention by the Russian 14th Army and Russia's war against Georgia in 2008, Moscow has steadily projected power in the near abroad. Conventional operations in Georgia led to Russian-recognized independence of and treaties with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Soft power diplomacy consolidated military gains and created conditions of political, economic, and military dependence that bound these breakaway republics to the Russian Federation. This created two outposts of Russian power in Georgia from which Russia can influence Tbilisi if it attempts to lean further westward—a fact that Georgia must get used to according to the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister.²⁶⁴

2014 began with the Olympic Games in Sochi and ended with Ukraine's territorial integrity in tatters. Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, pressured by Moscow to keep Ukraine fixed in Russia's orbit, rejected closer ties to the EU. After a popular uprising ousted Yanukovich, Vladimir Putin ordered Russian troops to secure key positions in the Crimean Peninsula on February 26. This crisis ended with the

annexation of Crimea on March 18th after the Crimean population voted to join the Russian Federation.²⁶⁵ “With a speech and a stroke of a pen, Putin was able to wrest the valuable Crimea from Ukraine” and return her as Russia’s 84th region.²⁶⁶ Operations farther east pitted Russian Special Forces leading local proxies against Ukrainian forces, and permitted the pro-Russian populations of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions to proclaim their independence.²⁶⁷

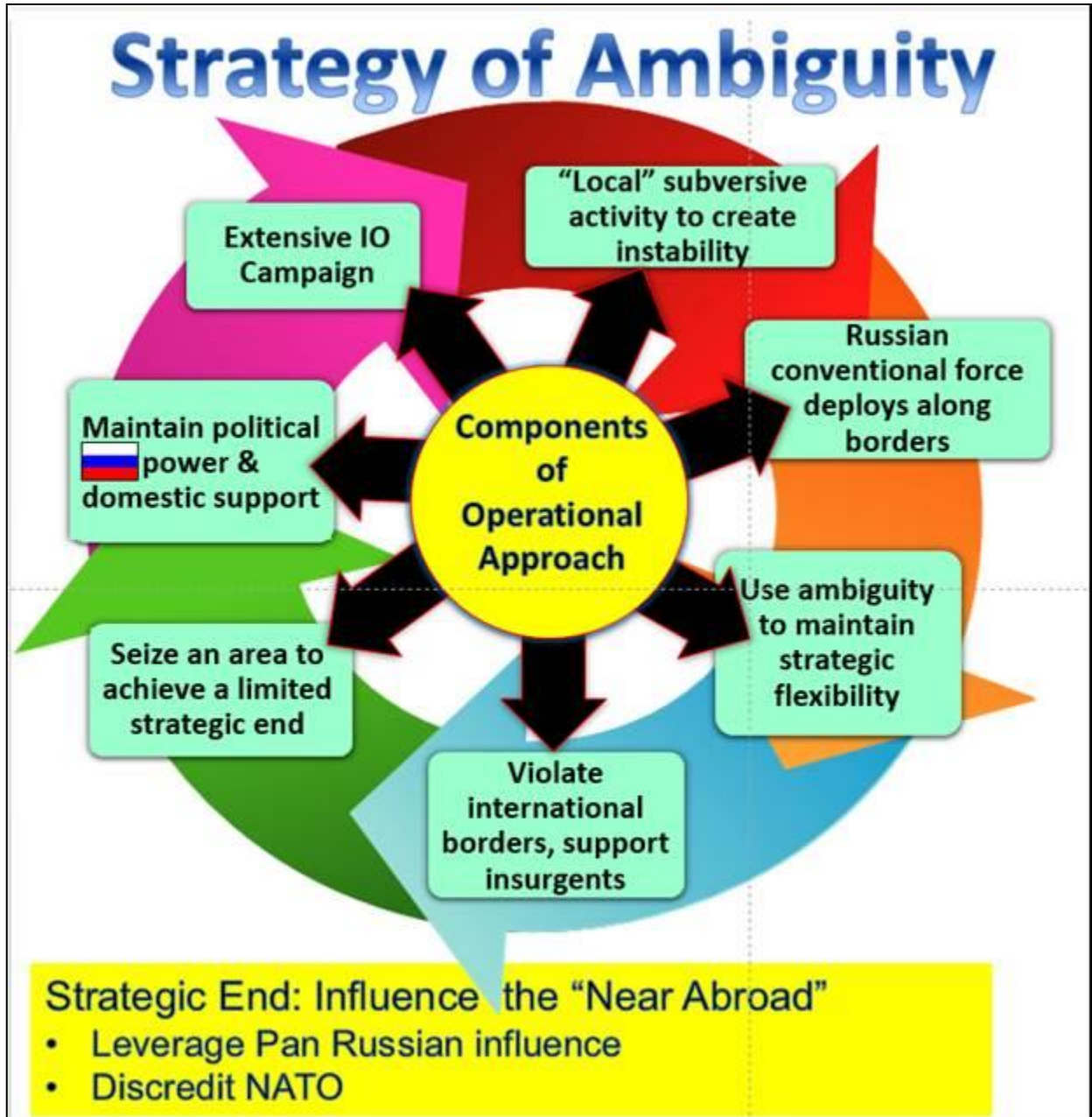
The application of ambiguity and surprise, combined with the manipulation of the peninsula’s Russian population, helped prevent a comprehensive response from the United States and Europe that was capable of arresting Russian gains on the ground. Putin’s approach in Eastern Ukraine echoes some of the patterns witnessed in Crimea, although the conventional military aspects are less visible. However, the pattern of deprivations directed against Ukraine’s ethnic Russian population served as a convenient recipe for Moscow to foment unrest that would eventually escalate to Russian conventional military backing of the rebels. Yet, cloaked behind this overt support to the Eastern Ukraine separatists was a strategy of ambiguity that provided Putin with flexibility to adjust his foreign policy based upon the international environment.²⁶⁸

Overt Russian military activity has significantly increased in the past two years in the region. NATO has characterized Russian air activity as “more assertive and frequent” and has had to respond four times as frequently in 2014 compared to 2013.²⁶⁹ Speculation that Russian nuclear submarines have been active recently in Swedish and British waters may signify an increased readiness in the Russian fleet, and a new confidence to challenge the Western powers.²⁷⁰ Not only does this behavior showcase Russia’s military might, this activity has a political component as well, reminding European capitals of Russian displeasure with EU policies, NATO encroachment, and economic sanctions.

The manifestation of Russian power has evolved over time from a conventional operational approach in the war against Georgia to a hybrid force, fusing conventional and special operations forces, proxies, and state security organizations in the ongoing conflict within Ukraine. This strategy of ambiguity enabled this force to achieve significant, but limited, political and military objectives. Supporting this strategy is an operational approach with seven elements:²⁷¹

1. Putin/regime maintenance of power
2. A sustained (continuous) IO campaign designed to control narratives, foment dissent, and weaken NATO political resolve
3. Subversive activity to create instability in an area (Russian proxies, SOF, SSO, and conventional forces mix)
4. A large Russian conventional force deploys along the borders to deter action against insurgents and provide combat support
5. Russian troops positioned to provide support to the Russian insurgents to maintain their momentum.

6. Leverage ambiguity to maintain strategic flexibility.
7. Seize an area in the contested space to achieve a limited strategic end.²⁷²



Strategy of Ambiguity. Courtesy of Douglas Mastriano

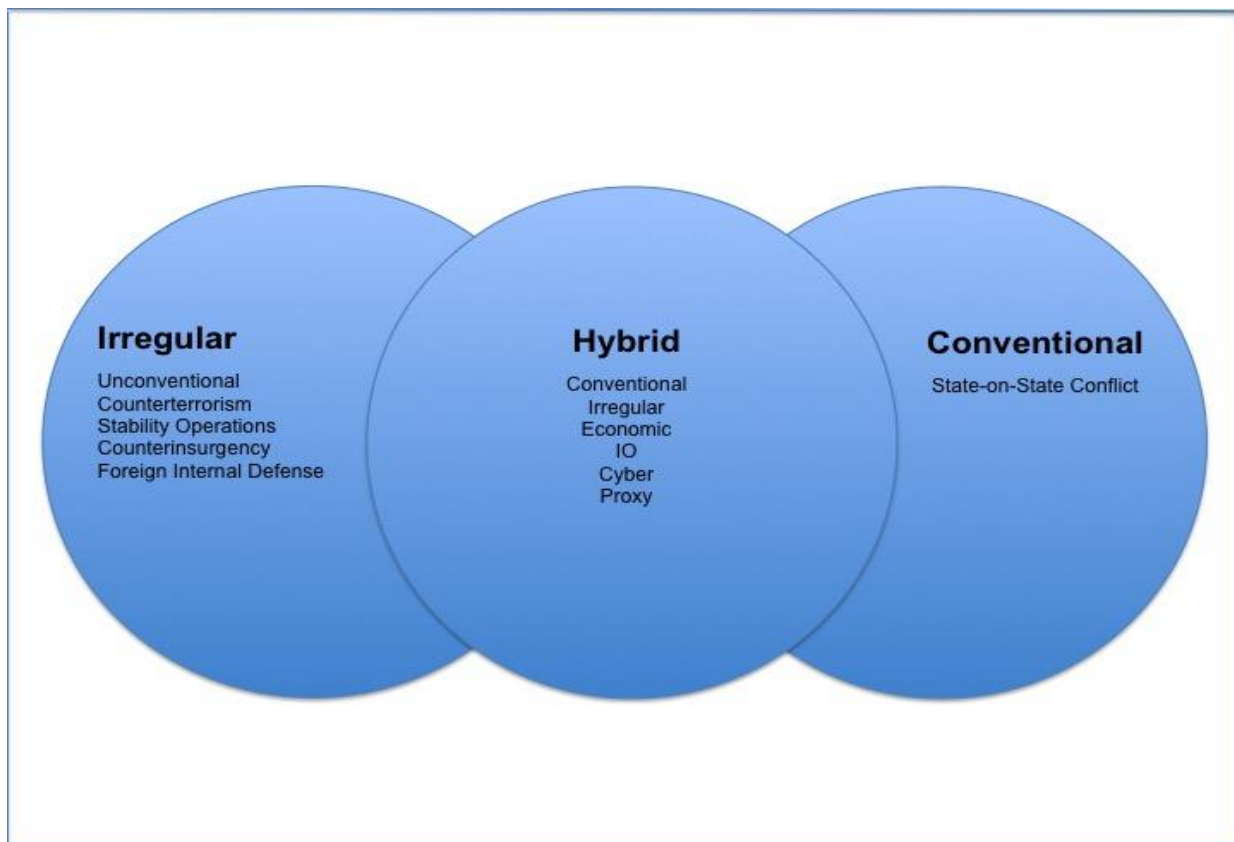
In the midst of this, Moscow uses ambiguity, deception and disinformation to prevent a quick response from the West. Such was the case in Crimea, where despite evidence to the contrary, Putin denied that the "little green men" were his soldiers until after he completed the annexation of the region. Meanwhile, the Russian media advanced Putin's denials, while many national capitals called for restraint from the Ukrainians.

With this approach, Putin operates inside the decision making cycle of the NATO nations, which gives him significant flexibility in retaining the initiative. This approach also exploits fissures within the NATO Alliance, as member nation's grapple with divergent views on how to counter Russian aggression—ranging from military intervention to appeasement. The Russian application of a “Strategy of Ambiguity” is comprised of seven components, described below:²⁷³

1. Consolidate political power and utilize nationalism to maintain domestic support. At the core of the “Strategy of Ambiguity” is the maintenance of Putin’s powerbase and his need for continued popular support. Putin fuels this engine of nationalism by casting the West as the enemy of Russia.
2. Capitalize on long-term information operations (IO) campaign. This takes the form of high-quality Russian television, radio programming, hockey clubs, youth camps and internet. These are designed to export Moscow’s strategic messaging across Europe, specifically targeting the Russian diaspora.
3. Utilize 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 in any region where Putin sets his gaze. Using Crimea and Eastern Ukraine as the precedent, these movements start as peaceful protests, but ultimately lead to the takeover of government buildings and escalate to armed insurrections. Once engaged in low-level combat, the Russian rebels proclaim their right to self-determination and naturally appeal to Moscow for aid. Moscow need not have popular support in the region selected for destabilization. If this is the case, the Kremlin will simply export the separatists from Russia to the region to plan, lead and organize the protests and violence.
4. Move a large conventional force along the borders to dissuade action against the subversives. As seen in 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.
5. Leverage ambiguity to maintain strategic flexibility. Deception and ambiguity are the key ingredients of the Russian approach, and Putin uses these tools in nearly every aspect of his strategy. As a result, Putin remains a step ahead of NATO’s decision-making process, and quickly adapts his actions to keep the Alliance off balance.
6. Violate international borders and support the 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. These “volunteer” soldiers provided armor, artillery and air defense assets, which blunted Ukrainian offensive action. Meanwhile, the Kremlin masked its actions behind a shroud of ambiguity, and denied any involvement in the conflict.

7. Seize an area to achieve a limited strategic end. Should there be a determined international response against Moscow, Putin can withdrawal support from his separatists, deny that he had anything to do with the unrest, and simply wait for a more opportune time to try again. With such an approach, Russia can attain limited strategic objectives with minimal risk. The ultimate goal of this methodology would be, in the long term, to discredit NATO and thereby threaten the security of the Baltics.²⁷⁴

A key aspect of this Russian operational approach is its limited objectives. The operational approach is designed to seize desired objectives when the opportunity presents itself. Whether this happens by chance or by design through IO, it enables Russia to monopolize the initial strategic initiative. If conditions change, the built-in deniability of the operational approach allows Russian withdrawal to await a better opportunity.



Hybrid Warfare Diagram. Adapted from GAO Hybrid Diagram. By Heath Niemi

Putin's grip on power is largely supported by the will of the Russian people, and Putin's propaganda enterprise is well tuned for manipulation. While degradation in the price of oil has been a significant challenge for Russia, Putin spins the narrative to blame the United States and NATO, further cementing his stature and popularity. Putin's current 80% approval rating, buttressed by his control of state media, demonstrates that his IO campaign is remarkably successful. This popular support provides Putin the political

capital necessary to execute his strategy and makes competing with the narrative inside Russia exceedingly difficult, if not impossible.

Concurrently, Putin's concentration of executive power allows him to rapidly seize strategic opportunities. Likewise, the transformation of Russian landpower to conduct hybrid warfare against its smaller neighbors is a key enabler. Russian leadership now has the capability to exercise a rapid decision cycle to exploit strategic windows of opportunities with military force.²⁷⁵ NATO, subject to the political consensus of 28 nations with individual decisions cycles and interests, cannot react with the same political speed. Because Russian decision-making is tightly woven around the persona of Vladimir Putin and a small circle of *Siloviki*²⁷⁶, unfettered by either institutional debate or cross examination in a free press, it can be quick and decisive.²⁷⁷ This provides Putin with initiative at every level to act when and where he chooses.

Russia's proximity to the near abroad enables it to use interior lines to deploy a sizeable conventional force along the border of a target state. This large force intimidates the neighboring country and deters a significant conventional response by NATO. Unless the target state has substantial international support, it could hesitate to take decisive action against the Russian provocation, internal or external, out of fear of antagonizing a response from Moscow. Thus was the case in Eastern Ukraine. The Russian Army was poised to provide support to beleaguered separatists with so-called volunteer soldiers, armor, tube and rocket artillery, and air defense assets. This action blunted the Ukrainian offensive and ultimately forced Kiev to grant the restive areas unprecedented autonomy. These capabilities, if arrayed against force projection platforms in neighboring countries, could provide some degree of anti-access/area denial capability that hinders deploying forces or host nation forces. Additionally, Russia's proximity permits high quality Russian television entertainment, radio programming and internet to export Moscow's strategic messaging across Eastern and Central Europe, specifically targeting Russian diaspora.

Initiative and geography permit Russia to take advantage of time to shape conditions to Russia's favor. Psychological operations require time to penetrate the targeted audience, assimilate the messages transmitted, and change the target audience's behavior. Russia's sustained message machine in the near abroad can monitor and adjust the message for maximum effect. Additionally, the decentralized and ambiguous nature of the strategy enables Russian forces and their proxies to conduct aggressive activities in the targeted area until the objective is achieved or the threshold for outside intervention is almost reached. In the latter case, uniformed Russian forces can retrograde to safe havens across the border, and await more favorable conditions, thereby removing the incentive for outside intervention. As long as the conflict is kept below the threshold of conventional war, Russia, having the strategic initiative, can chose to continue the active pursuit of its objective as long as the cost/benefit analysis is positive—or disengage or reduce the intensity of the conflict, if it becomes negative.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the near abroad emerged as a term of Russian parlance to describe not just Russia's immediate neighbors, but also the special relationship Russia maintained with the former republics in the post-Soviet space. It is that special relationship that continues to dominate the international politics

of the near abroad today. The commonality of borders with Russia facilitates the employment of Russian power should one of these nations fall target to Russia's strategy of ambiguity.

The near abroad contains a large Russian diaspora as a remnant of history and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Whether they are sympathetic to Russian influence, aggrieved by ethnic and political marginalization, or an active participant in Russian designs to destabilize a target nation, this widespread diaspora serves many purposes. The Russian Military Doctrine states that it "shall deem legitimate the employment of the Armed Forces to provide protection of its citizens outside the Russian Federation in accordance with generally recognized principles and rules of international law."²⁷⁸ This affords Putin a large external audience susceptible to his designs and a legal framework for intervention.

Intelligence forces and proxies in concert with strategic messaging may lay the groundwork to manipulate local ethnic Russians to rise up against real or imagined injustice. Central to Putin's approach is the use of Russia's sophisticated message apparatus that controls and synchronizes social media, television, radio, and news media to create and compound seed conditions in the target state by propagating Putin's strategic messages.²⁷⁹ The messages are tailored for the audience and often follow the basic formula of Russia as a symbolic protagonist ready to counter some antagonistic internal or external condition. The antagonistic conditions—kleptocracy, security, poverty, a breakdown of central authority, or the effects of inequality—furnish opportunities to create instability and to manipulate the diaspora, through unconventional and subversive elements, which in turn influences domestic Russian opinion at home. These also burnish Putin's credentials as the protector of Russians.

These messages create other conditions favorable to binding Russia and these breakaway republics closer.²⁸⁰ For example, used with propaganda, espionage identifies corruptible politicians and officials "most vulnerable to Russian influence and helps to nullify any institutional points of resistance such as an effective security service."²⁸¹ These intelligence operations play a key role in perpetuating existing conditions and creating new opportunities for Russia to establish soft hegemony in the near abroad.²⁸²

Dependence upon Russian energy forms another critical condition for Russia's strategy. Russian gas pipelines that transit Ukraine provide natural gas for Europe and neighboring countries. Like others in Europe, Ukraine is dependent on 58% of its natural gas requirements from Russia. In addition, 66% of Russian gas exported to the European Union (EU)²⁸³ is transported through Ukrainian-supported pipelines. This creates EU and NATO divisions, as member states are dependent upon Russian natural gas which amounts to approximately 30% of their gas imports, paying around \$250 billion in annual energy bills.²⁸⁴ These divisions create bilateral opportunities for Russia to interfere with NATO and EU consensus-based decision-making.

NATO/EU Divisions

A Russian attack in the near abroad may not take the form of a traditional military offensive. The indicators will be opaque and confusing as Russia employs a tailored

hybrid approach, leaving room for different interpretations of events and Russian intentions. This increases the possibility of varied resolve in NATO as each member can believe what it chooses and act accordingly.

Russia's preferred tactic to destabilize a NATO member is by fomenting internal unrest through SOF and proxies but without sending large conventional forces across the border. Estonia and Latvia both have a significant Russian minorities, and the intensity of Russian interest in the Baltic is high due to shared borders and the Baltic States status as new NATO members.²⁸⁵ In an interview with The Telegraph, the former Secretary General of NATO Anders Fogh Rasmussen warned that "there is a high probability that he (Putin) will intervene in the Baltics to test NATO's Article 5."²⁸⁶



Strategy of Ambiguity Exploits...

Putin's Advantages

- Geographic proximity (affords space and time)
- Rapid decision-making
- Multi-dimension force
- Scalable objectives

NATO's disadvantages

- Geographic dispersal and distance
- Slow decision-making (28-member alliance)
- Diminished American presence in Europe
- Decreased military budgets of NATO members

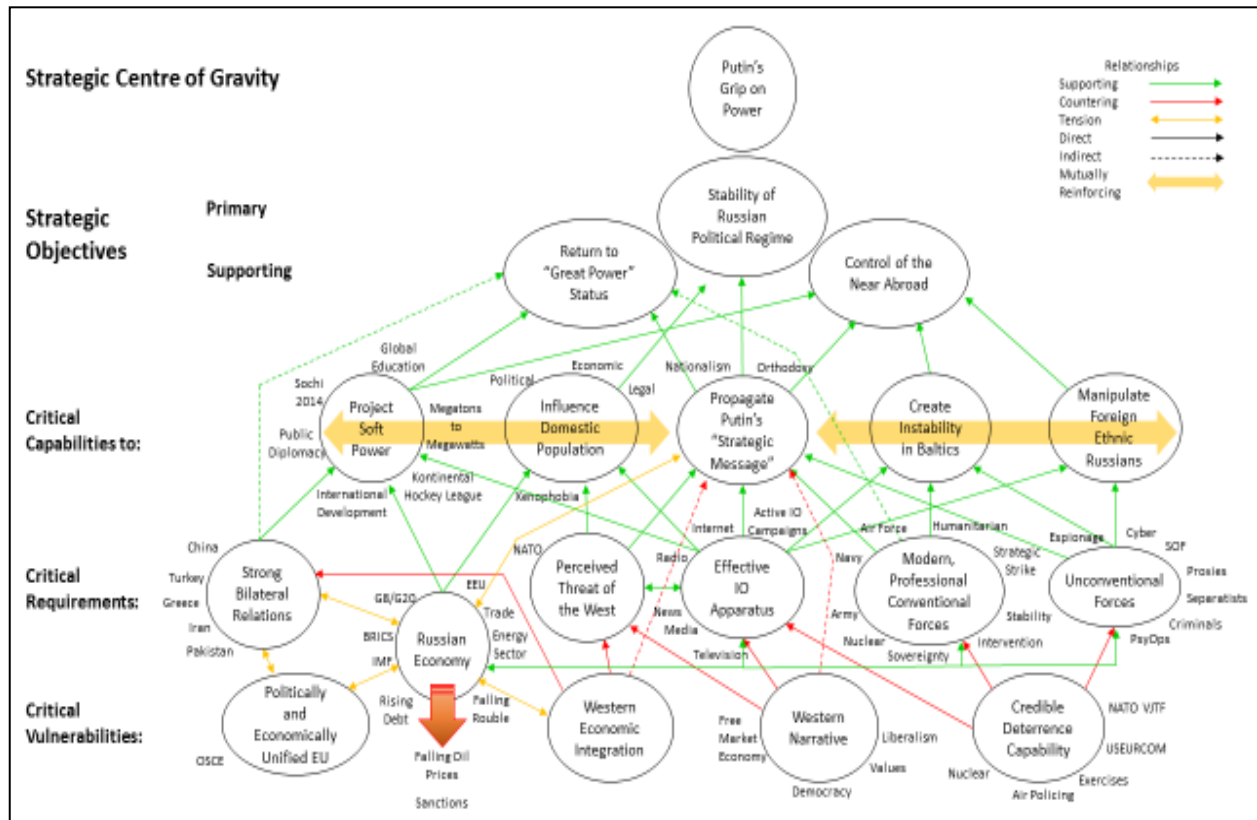
In the absence of a uniformed threat, NATO will be pressed to define the Russian activities as a direct attack, and this issue will in all probability define the internal NATO debate, prolonging the NATO response. Russia's ability to create a narrative that the unrest is an internal matter could divide member nations. Russia will seek to influence NATO countries that may fear active conflict with Russia, and are wary of a return to the highly expensive posturing of the Cold War. A perceived absence of a conventional enemy may raise questions of the utility of NATO's most prominent and recent instrument—the enhanced NATO Reaction Force.²⁸⁷ Should it be deployed to the targeted Baltic state, it may act as a deterrent to the Russian conventional force across the border, or as an accelerant to wider conflict. However, some NATO members may

lack an appetite for engaging “civilian” insurgents in a Baltic state.²⁸⁸ Even when deployed in a deterrent role, where the actual fighting against insurgents and proxies is left to the Baltic State, the NATO force would constitute a target for insurgents wishing to provoke a reaction that could draw NATO into the conflict to discredit it.

The decision to deploy the force without the presence of Russian “boots on the ground” in any NATO member state comes with inherent dilemmas. If the force deploys before a significant Russian force is assembled along the border, Russia will brand NATO as the aggressor and undermine the communication of NATO defensive intent. If it deploys after a Russian force is assembled along the border, Russia will make the same argument, leveraging the advantage of interior lines to claim that the force is training, deploying for defensive purposes due to the unrest in the neighboring state, or preparing for humanitarian intervention.

Another major fault line is the perception of American resolve. The 2010 U.S. pivot to the Asia—Pacific region.²⁸⁹ European policy makers may continue to interpret this as weakening American resolve in relation to European matters. The NSS indicates that the rebalance is not an abandonment of Europe, but shrinking U.S. force structure realities in Europe remain.²⁹⁰ Yet, with U.S. forces no longer arrayed in force to respond to sudden Russian aggression, it is easy to question U.S. resolve.²⁹¹ The importance of maintaining NATO cohesion through effective and timely strategic messaging is paramount. NATO and its collective and individual history come with fault lines—whether they are U.S. rebalancing, a diminishing U.S. presence in Europe or failure of European countries to invest in their militaries.

An assessment of Russia’s long-term strategic objectives provides context to the special relationship Russia actively cultivates with the states of the near abroad. As illustrated previously, Russia’s primary strategic objective is the stability of the political regime. With this in view, Moscow’s strategic calculus maintains two supporting objectives. The first is regaining control of the near abroad, and by doing so, preventing the expansion of NATO into what was Russia’s sphere of influence.²⁹² The second is Russia’s return to great power status— an ambition to resurrect Russia to its former glory by increasing its global influence and, by providing the strategic counter-balance to the hegemony of the United States. For the first supporting objective the states of the near abroad are the objective; for the second they are pawns in a much bigger game.



Analysis of Russia's Strategic Centre of Gravity. Compliments of Ted Middleton

Given that Russia's Strategy of Ambiguity actively creates the conditions for success, envisioning them is only the first step. By conducting a nodal analysis of the between Russia's strategic center of gravity—the source of national power—and its related critical capabilities, critical requirements and critical vulnerabilities, these conditions can not only be identified, but the ways and means supporting them can be ascertained as well.²⁹³ The following assists in this endeavor:

Strategic Center of Gravity

Putin's grip on power is assessed as the strategic center of gravity. According to Andrew Kuchins, the director of the Russia and Eurasia program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Putin is a brutally cold, calculating pragmatist whose main goal is preserving his political power.²⁹⁴ Described as a ruthless autocrat, Putin's consolidation of power has had a disciplining effect within the Russian bureaucracy that has resulted in a comprehensive and synergistic approach to policy formulation.²⁹⁵ It is this czar-like leadership that is a key source of Russia's strategic power.²⁹⁶

Critical Capabilities

The principal ways Putin has at his disposal to achieve the three strategic objectives are his ability to project soft power, the ability to influence Russia's domestic population, his ability to create instability in the Baltics, and his ability to manipulate foreign ethnic Russians. These critical capabilities mutually reinforce the ability to propagate Putin's strategic messages, both domestically and internationally. These strategic messages

can be described as “Putin’s Doctrine”, which the director of Russian Studies at the American Enterprise Institute says is a desire to recover Russia’s political, economic, social, cultural, and geostrategic assets that were lost in the Soviet collapse.²⁹⁷ In the domestic sense, this means re-establishing the state’s control over: politics, the legal system, the economy (the energy sector), and the national cultural narrative.²⁹⁸ In the international sense, it means adopting an assertive, if not outright aggressive, approach relating to; Russia as a nuclear superpower, Russia as a great global power, and Russia as a hegemonic regional power.²⁹⁹



Photo taken at the Estonian/Russian border. Narva, Estonia in on the left of the photo. On the right, across the bridge, Ivangorod, Russia. Photo by Col Douglas V. Mastriano.

Critical Requirements

The means Putin has at his disposal to enable the ways include: strong bilateral relationships with key international partners beyond the near abroad; the perceived threat of the West; a highly effective Information Operations apparatus; modern, professional conventional armed forces; and a robust unconventional force capability. The Russian economy is of course a key Critical Requirement in this analysis; however, due to the complex and adaptive nature of the Russian economy as a sub-system of the global economy, Russia's economy can also present a Critical Vulnerability. The synergistic effects of rising debt, a plummeting ruble, freefalling oil prices and Western economic sanctions are today jeopardizing that lever of national power, causing it to trend from Critical Capability to Critical Vulnerability.

A key to Putin's success in pursuit of his strategic objectives is the creation of conditions that he can exploit in the near abroad. The operational approach of Putin's strategy of ambiguity applies ways and means to peddle influence in a synergistic fashion, creating conditions of contention that become crises that spawn new strategic conditions. The subtle ways in which Moscow has bound the breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Russia are indicative of the effectiveness of Putin's strategic narrative at perpetuating the notion of historical reunification, a notion inspired by the symbolic political milestone of the "Crimean Spring."³⁰⁰ By stoking patriotism in ethnic Russians, the Kremlin's IO apparatus spurs a resurgence of shared national identity and domestic support for Eurasian integration, which advances Putin's strategic objectives.³⁰¹ By leveraging models such as the nodal analysis presented earlier in this section to better understand how these conditions are actively created and exploited, policy-makers should be forewarned, and therefore forearmed, when Putin's Strategy of Ambiguity sights in on its next target state of the near abroad.

Flashpoints

Given the internal and external environment and the conditions that Russia seeks to preserve, it is necessary to examine what flashpoints may disturb the strategic equilibrium that Russia wishes to maintain. Putin has criticized the West for expansion of NATO and the EU up to Russia's borders by taking advantage of Russian weakness in the 90's. This stripped Russia of a buffer zone against NATO which Russia has named as the principle military threat to the Federation. The integration of former SSR's into the EU has lessened economic dependence on Russia, weakening Russia's ability to use economic power to secure political agreement with Russian policies and robbing Russia of the opportunity to become a credible political and economic alternative to NATO and the EU. Additionally, political policies by nations in the near abroad toward their ethnic Russia minorities may provide a pretext for Russia to protect these minorities, as stated repeatedly throughout the 2014 Russian Military Doctrine. Should the strategic balance shift out of Russia's favor, these flashpoints may result in another Russian campaign to restore the strategic balance in their favor.

Protection of Ethnic Russians Abroad

The 2014 Russian Military Doctrine legitimizes the use of military force to protect ethnic Russians outside of the country. This has been seen as justification for interventions in Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine. The picture below shows the density of ethnic Russians in neighboring countries to Russia³⁰²:

A scenario outlined by former Putin advisor Andrey Illarionov would be using the tactics of Eastern Ukraine in a region of the Baltics heavily populated by ethnic Russians. Illarionov suggests a likely candidate would be Narva. Located in the northeastern tip of Estonia, and conveniently located on the Russian border, Narva's population is 82% ethnic Russian.³⁰³ As an ironic aside, Narva's sister city in Ukraine is Donetsk, the heart and soul of the Russian-led unrest against Kiev.³⁰⁴ Other candidates are: Riga and Daugavpils in Latvia, Klaipėda in Lithuania, and Prednestrovia in Moldova.

Given the current environment and reaction to the situation in Ukraine, sanctions, previous Russian interventions (a step-by-step reoccupation of former Soviet Union states territories, keeping conflict in Prednestrovia and Abkhazia, occupation of South Ossetia, economic "occupation" of Central Asia states, occupation of Crimea), it seems likely that there will be a pause for the next few years. Putin will continue to message and strengthen soft power influence in neighboring and economically weak countries. He will shape the information environment for possible action with one of assets of hybrid war waiting for the window of opportunity for the next operation according to prepared contingency plans.

Western Alignment of a State

One of Putin's repeated refrains is the westward expansion of NATO and the EU and how this has threatened Russia. While the Baltic States are firmly in NATO and in the EU's camp, other states such as Belarus and Moldova are not. An article by John Mearsheimer in Foreign Affairs states:

Next, Putin put massive pressure on the new government in Kiev to discourage it from siding with the West against Moscow, making it clear that he would wreck Ukraine as a functioning state before he would allow it to become a Western stronghold on Russia's doorstep. Toward that end, he has provided advisers, arms, and diplomatic support to the Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine, who are pushing the country toward civil war. He has massed a large army on the Ukrainian border, threatening to invade if the government cracks down on the rebels. And he has sharply raised the price of the natural gas Russia sells to Ukraine and demanded payment for past exports.³⁰⁵

A nation in the Russian periphery that chooses to align with the West, either politically, economically, or militarily, could provoke a Russian response.

The Russian Military Doctrine lists military-political cooperation with Belarus as a strategic priority.³⁰⁶ Belarus enjoys many benefits to include, "Moscow's assistance in the form of cheap oil and gas, and other Russian subsidies and scams that are estimated to add over 15 percent to Belarusian GDP."³⁰⁷ Russia's oligarchs benefit

through transit trade with the EU through Belarus, reinforcing their ability to gain and distribute wealth that is crucial to the Russian system of power.³⁰⁸ With nations such as Belarus critical to Russia's system of power, changes in conditions that threaten that system may provide the justification for a Russian response. This serves as an additional flashpoint in the strategic system with Russia that could lead to wider conflict between Russia and the West. How Russia responds to these changes is analyzed in the next section. The bottom line is that Moscow will not tolerate Belarus to embrace democratization or closer ties with the West.

Anatomy of the Russian Response

The Russian Operational Approach

Russia's use of a hybrid operational approach is not a new concept and evolved from the Soviet military theoretician, Georgii Isserson, who wrote *Fundamentals of the Deep Operation* in 1933.³⁰⁹ The newly appointed Russian Army Chief of Staff, General Gerasimov refers to Isserson and Deep Battle in "an article that appeared in the Russian defense journal VPK. He states that methods of conflict have changed and now involve the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian and other non-military measures." Isserson posited, "Mobilization does not occur after a war is declared, but "unnoticed, proceeds long before that".³¹⁰ The military is supplementing this type of attack by "means of a concealed character, including carrying out actions of informational conflict and the actions of special operations forces."³¹¹ Gerasimov also elaborates on the concealed use of military forces by hiding in broad daylight as "peacekeepers and for the use in crisis regulation"³¹² and that the military is to be used as a last resort.

The following diagram encapsulates the new Russian hybrid operational approach³¹³:



Russian Hybrid Operational Approach. Compliments of Heath Niemi

The remainder of this section analyzes Russia’s objectives, mechanisms, desired conditions, and lines of operation.

Objectives

Strategic. As stated earlier, Russia’s strategic objective is the maintenance, preservation and perpetuation of the system of power and wealth distribution in Russia.

Operational. To support its strategic objectives, Russia will seek to achieve a portion of the following objectives based on the unique circumstances of any future conflict:

- Influence targeted population
- Influence popular support
- Increase Russian Economic Influence
- Protect Ethnic Russians
- Increase Russian Commodity Exports

- Overthrow Local Governments
- Seize Terrain for Limited Strategic Gain
- Defeat Opposing Military Force

Mechanisms

Russia's use of various mechanisms in its operational approach provides a flexible array of tools to achieve their desired conditions. The ability to influence and isolate their target prevents the target and the West from providing military, economic, political, and psychological support to the embattled population. Russia's ability to mass conventional and unconventional combat power enables them to destroy military opposition. Irregular forces and proxies create the instability necessary to shape the environment suitable for Russian success or through criminal gangs and other unconventional forces, compel the target to cede to Russian desires. A backdrop to all these mechanisms is the deniability of Russian actions. Russia limits the signature of verifiable Russian presence and engages in outright disinformation or lies about Russian presence and intentions.

Desired Conditions

The end result of this strategy is to create a set of desired conditions favorable to Russian interests. Above all, Russia seeks to provide deniability of its participation in these conflicts and to control the narrative surrounding these incidents. Putin sees popular support at home and support among the diaspora in the near abroad as legitimizing his actions. Weakening the economic situation in targeted countries sufficiently to ensure their continued dependency upon Russia reinforces the wealth distribution crucial to the Russian system. Appealing to real or perceived grievances among the diaspora provides a tool to use against targeted governments. Cyber disrupts and controls the communications infrastructure necessary for the functioning of government and the flow of information. Finally, conventional, unconventional, and strategic forces seek to provide a coercive and deterrent presence near the targeted country as well as abroad to demonstrate credible Russian military power and political intent.

Lines of Operations and Examples

Diplomacy. On January 23rd, 2015 the Russian Duma ratified an "Alliance and Integration Treaty" with Abkhazia, deepening the relations between Russia and the Georgian enclave by creating a common space for defense and security.³¹⁴ The treaty not only compels Abkhazia to coordinate its foreign, defense, economic, and social policies with Moscow, it further mandates the creation of a joint Russian-Abkhazian military unit and a joint information/coordination center for "the organs of internal affairs."³¹⁵

The South Ossetia Treaty of Alliance and Integration, unlike the Abkhazia version which was re-drafted in an effort to preserve some resemblance of Abkhazian sovereignty, in essence hands South Ossetia's armed forces and security services over to Russia while granting trade and border authority to Moscow.³¹⁶ Interestingly, both the Abkhazian and

South Ossetian treaties were composed by “Kremlin advisor and spin-doctor Vladislav Surkov.”³¹⁷ Most South Ossetians appear happy with the treaty as Russia promises government salaries and pensions commensurate with those received in the Russian North Caucasus. Georgia’s other pro-Russian breakaway region, South Ossetia, adopted its own treaty with Putin.

Russia has essentially been in control of South Ossetia since recognizing its independence in 2008 after the five-day Russo-Georgian War. Again, Russia applied soft power diplomacy as a critical capability to entice South Ossetia to surrender its foreign policy and security apparatus, creating a condition to more closely bind the breakaway republic to Moscow. Both examples show how Russia consolidates its military gains with diplomacy that solidifies its ties to breakaway republics. While these treaties may not be known or widely recognized outside of Russia, it will matter little if Russia perceives that conditions run counter to the interests satisfied by the ratification of these treaties. If Russia continues this trend, regions in the Ukraine that formally secede may receive this diplomatic largesse from Russia.

Russia’s ability to disrupt the NATO and EU blocs through bilateral engagements with vulnerable members presents challenges to maintaining political consensus to use tools such as sanctions. In the recent visit to Russia by the Greek Foreign Minister, potential daylight has been exposed on a NATO and EU member’s stance on sanctions. Sergei Lavrov was quoted as appreciating, “the stance of the Greek government, which understands the complete counter-productivity of attempts to speak this language with Russia.”³¹⁸ Reinforcing this statement was the Greek FM Ktzias saying, “the bloc should not see its ties with Russia “through the prism of Ukraine” and should come out with a “positive agenda” instead.”³¹⁹ Finally, Russia indicated that it would entertain a financial request from Greece should it be received. While Greece is likely using sanctions with Russia as a bargaining chip with the European Central Bank and other Eurozone members to soften the austerity regime currently in place as a result of the Greek debt crisis, this economic vulnerability of NATO members, to include Portugal and Spain, could lead to diplomatic opportunities by Russia to disrupt the consensus required by NATO and the EU.

Economic. Russia’s wealth relative to its neighbors allows it to use economic means constructively or coercively. In Georgia, Putin pledged to invest more than 12 billion rubles—approximately \$270M USD—in Abkhazia over the next three years, the equivalent of more than twice Abkhazia’s 2014 government budget.³²⁰ According to Abkhazian President Paul Khadzhimba the “ties with Russia offer [Abkhazia] full security guarantees and broad opportunities for socio-economic development.”³²¹ The use of economic power solidified military gains. In Abkhazia the seed condition of a disenfranchised Russian diaspora was well rooted. By leveraging Critical Requirements such as the Russian economy and the Russian IO apparatus, Putin was able to apply the Critical Capability of projecting soft power to create a condition that supports the strategic objective of controlling the near abroad.

Russia’s leverage over economies in the near abroad provides a coercive tool that limits the ability of non-EU states to diversify their economies and reduce their vulnerability to Russia’s use of economic power. In an analysis of Russia’s use of economic power

over Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia, the Center for European Policy Studies found that Russia was able to reduce trade flows by blocking the three countries' exporters from selling to Russian markets and at the same time, the burden of raising quality and overcoming strict technical standards limited the three countries' ability to sell within the EU.³²² Without a corresponding increase in domestic demand, this weapon can lead these poorer nations into recession and threaten their economic livelihood. At the same time, pushing their economies toward the EU may cross Russian redlines, both politically and diplomatically. Russia, in trilateral talks with the EU and Ukraine, has already threatened to use existing CIS trade agreements to cancel free trade preferences if economic policies pursued by member states damage or threaten to damage Russian economic interests.³²³ Given this vague threshold, it provides a legal and ready-made tool for Russia to capitalize on a legal agreement to coerce a near abroad neighbor to return to the Russian fold. While other examples exist, this provides sufficient evidence that Russia will use economic means to coerce a neighbor.

Information. The hybrid approach heavily depends on strategic messaging where Russia set the narrative. The Russian media/propaganda machine is one of its most potent tools against the Ukraine, NATO and the United States. Under Putin, he has tightened control of the press and most media outlets, to include Internet functions. Russia is known to pay reporters to spin the news along their guidelines—a “Troll army of paid internet commentators, all working to a script”.³²⁴ Putin has created the “us vs. them” mentality within Russia through the effective use of the state-driven media propaganda machine. He has justified the annexation of Crimea, vilified the West's response of sanctions by highlighting the economic hardship on the people, demonized the perceived threat of NATO, and approved the expansion of NATO as the primary military external threat in the recent 2014 Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation. Additionally, the news is tailored to support the Russian annexation of Crimea and support the Russian militants in eastern Ukraine. These actions create turmoil within the targeted country as citizens begin to lose confidence in their local and national governments. Russian intelligence services use the media effectively—a skill that they inherited from their Soviet predecessors.

Cyber. A relatively new domain of attack that requires very few resources and if done correctly, leaves no “digital fingerprints”, cyber warfare makes it almost impossible to convict a nation of conducting aggressive operations. This domain is rapidly becoming a primary tool of ambiguity and although a relatively new domain, cyber has played an important role in destabilizing the Ukraine while providing Russian deniability. Early on it was determined that a Russian malware program called “Snake” was used to affect intelligence gathering on the Ukraine, especially the post-Yanukovich provisional government.³²⁵ In Crimea, cyber weapons crippled communications networks and government websites were overwhelmed by “denial of service” attacks.³²⁶ Mobile and Internet networks were hacked with social networks becoming corrupted. Additionally, it is reported by the online security firm Symantec that numerous “computers in the Ukrainian prime minister's office and about ten Ukrainian embassies abroad were infected with a cyber-espionage weapon linked to Russia.”³²⁷

Intelligence. Russia's use of unconventional means is textbook and predictable. One of the primary functions of unconventional tactics is the undermining of the enemy state

from within by training, resourcing, and sometimes “advising” indigenous personnel to conduct irregular warfare against their own government. The primary perpetrators of this style of warfare are Special Forces and on March 6, 2013, General Gerasimov announced the creation of the new Special Operations Forces of the Russian Federation or SSO.³²⁸ The Russians were successful in destabilizing the local and national government of “Ukraine by organizing pro-Russian separatists and dispatching advisers and fighters from Russian Special Forces and intelligence units to assist them. Activities include funding and arming, tactical coordination, and fire support for separatist military operations”.³²⁹

Some of the more visible actions of the assisted “pro-Russian militants” include the seizure of the Crimean Parliament on February 27, 2014 shortly after President Yanukovich denounces the “coup”.³³⁰ In coordination with Russian conventional forces, this intervention led to the annexation of the largely Russia speaking Crimean Peninsula on 18 March, 2014 after Ukrainian citizens in Crimea voted overwhelmingly to join the Russian Federation of 16 March, 2014. In Eastern Ukraine, Russian Special Forces acted with Russian militants to battle Ukrainian forces and seized government buildings in the cities of Donetsk, Krarkiv and Luhansk while proclaiming the region independent of Ukraine on April 07, 2014.³³¹

Resourcing indigenous militias is also a primary function of the SSO. Specifically heavy anti-aircraft weapons found their way into the hands of the pro-Russian rebels. This has resulted in numerous successful attacks on Ukrainian aircraft. On June 13, 2014 an Ilyushin 76 transport plane crashed after being shot down by a shoulder fired “Igla” missile.³³² On July 14, 2014, an Antonov 26 transport plane was shot down by a Russian anti-aircraft missile from flight level 21,000 feet and crashed near the Ukraine-Russian border of Izvaryne.³³³ And finally, a Russian Buk surface-to-air missile fired from rebel controlled territory during the Battle in Shakhtarsk Raion near Donbass, shot down Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 (MH17) on July 07, 2014 resulting in the death of all 298 personnel on board.³³⁴ This incident caused an international uproar, with Russia denying any participation in the event although the use of a sophisticated Buk system requires trained professionals.

It is surmised that Russia is trying to agitate the Eastern Ukraine with Special Forces and other methods of hybrid warfare to incite a clash with Ukrainian security forces. This would create enough reason for Russia to push “peacekeeping” forces in the form of traditional tank and mechanized infantry brigades poised on the Russian to protect ethnic Ukrainian Russians.³³⁵ Though the insidious use of Russian SSO to train, advise, and assist Russian Ukrainians, Putin has repeatedly denied active Russian involvement in the conflict in the Eastern Ukraine.

Conventional Forces. Russia has amassed upwards of 40,000 conventional military personnel on the Russian—Ukrainian border at times. Not only does the positioning of conventional military force “threaten” Ukraine, it also compels Ukraine to be cautious about counter military actions against the pro-Russian militants. Russian active military might is convincingly overwhelming when compared to the Ukraine. Russian ground forces are estimated at 845,000 vs. 130,000 in Ukraine.³³⁶ Russia has about 1,400

military aircraft as opposed to the 200 aircraft possessed by Ukraine.³³⁷ The sheer might that Russia can bring to bear against its weaker neighbor is prodigious.

Russia's conventional force, combined with efforts of its Special Forces and other elements of hybrid warfare, has contributed to the annexation of Crimea and has resulted in armed friction in Eastern Ukraine. In Crimea, Russian naval vessels blocked three Ukrainian ships in Sevastopol, as well as, blocked both ends of the Kerch strait on March 07, 2014.³³⁸ Russian conventional forces are also reported to have crossed numerous times into Ukrainian territory, although Russia continues to deny direct military involvement. Often Russia has used the excuse of military personnel on leave, who have personally decided to take part in the Ukrainian conflict, in order to shift blame.

On August 07, 2014, Ukraine reported destroying a Russian armored convoy with artillery that was illegally entering the country.³³⁹ Also ten Russian airborne soldiers of the 331 Regiment of Svir Airborne Division 98 of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation were captured on August 25, 2014 near the settlement of Zerkalny near the Donetsk region.³⁴⁰ On September 07, 2014, it was reported that a Russian armored convoy crossed the border near Luhansk Oblast. The column was made up of T-72 tanks, Strela-10 and Vityaz surface-to-air missile systems.³⁴¹ The use of conventional forces disguised as "peacekeepers" or "humanitarian aid" was also observed. On September 14, 2014, Ukraine denounced the intrusion of a second Russian "humanitarian convoy" of about 210 trucks³⁴² as illegal after the first Russian humanitarian convoy illegally entered Ukraine on August 22, 2014. It is quite evident that Russian conventional forces have crossed the border and are involved in direct conflict with Ukraine; however, the strategy of ambiguity is giving Putin's Russia deniability.

Russian Strategic Forces. While not related directly to any of the conflict zones, the recent uptick in external flexing of strategic forces has been another outgrowth of increasing Russian aggression. Russian strategic moves under the leadership of Putin have kept the Western Alliance off balance.³⁴³ This strategic flexibility is derived mainly from a lack of democratic constraints on Putin's decision-making process, Russia's ability to operate mostly in interior lines, and Putin's capacity to sense and quickly act on opportunities within his operational reach. This is equally true for the large-scale Russia air activity over Europe recently.³⁴⁴ NATO has characterized Russian air activity as "more assertive and frequent" and has had to respond four times as frequently in 2014 compared to 2013.³⁴⁵ Not only does this behavior reflect Russia's military might, this activity likely has a political component as well, showing European capitals Russia's displeasure with EU policies, NATO encroachment, and economic sanctions. Speculation that Russian nuclear submarines have been active recently in Swedish and British waters, and in 2009, near the United States, may portend not only increased readiness in the Russian fleet, but also a new confidence to challenge the western powers.³⁴⁶ These missions signal Russian greatness, increase readiness of strategic forces, and remind NATO and non-NATO members of Russia's strategic deterrent capabilities. However, some of the aerial tactics such as transponders being off and buzzing military and civilian aircraft may lead to miscalculation or accidents. Given the

level of tensions currently, a mishap resulting in lost lives could inflame the international situation further and led to more conflict.

Amid these tensions, on May 12, 2014 Lugansk People's Governor Valery Bolotov announced: "We have chosen our own path of independence from tyranny and bloody dictatorship by Kiev junta, from fascism and nationalism. We have chosen the path of freedom and the rule of law." Donetsk followed suit. Its People's Republic co-chairman Denis Pushilin declared: "We, the people of Donetsk People's Republic, after the results of the referendum held on May 11, and on the basis of the Donetsk People's Republic's sovereignty declaration, announce that the Republic, from now on, is a sovereign state".³⁴⁷ As of January 27, 2015, the Ukrainian Parliament votes to call Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics terrorist groups. The parliament went further to declare Russia an aggressor state, "It is necessary to declare the Russian Federation to be an aggressor state that has fully supported terrorism and blocked the activities of the UN Security Council, putting international peace and security under threat".³⁴⁸ Pending the lack of Ukrainian resolution to continue the fight against Luhansk and Donetsk and under the guise of supporting the popular resolution of the ethnic Russians in the region, Russia will overtly move military force into the area to "stabilize" and recognize these two new Republics. Putin will have won by controlling these territories through pro-Russian proxy governance.

Assessment of Russian Strategy

Russia's Strategy of Ambiguity has been successful in the near abroad. The actions in the Crimea and Ukraine have focused global and regional attention on Russia and have forced the global community to pay attention to the Russian agenda. Although economic sanctions and isolation are hurting Russia, it is once again playing a major role on the international scene, rather than being relegated to a secondary role. The following section will analyze advantages and disadvantages of the Russian strategy with respect to time, space, and resources.

Time. Reacting to the Russian strategic narrative will be hampered by limitations in time. While NATO can provide a counter-narrative, its capability to penetrate local areas near the Russian border is inadequate. Therefore, stories of Ukrainian atrocities, Ukrainian nationalism cloaked as fascism, and the like remain largely unchallenged within the targeted area. Consequently, NATO fails to expose Russian disinformation—which would be one of the most potent ways of undermining the Russian narratives.

Another Russian advantage in the dimension of time is its short strategic decision cycle. With executive power concentrated in a few persons, Russia can seize strategic opportunities quickly if equally responsive instruments of power exist. The transformation of the Russian landpower instrument to conduct hybrid warfare against its smaller neighbors constitutes an alignment of the military instrument that permits the Russian leadership to leverage its rapid decision cycle to exploit strategic windows of opportunities. NATO's 28 members, each with different decisions cycles, cannot react with the same political strategic speed. This difference may actually lead to misunderstandings and even apathy, as NATO is presented with rapidly developing situations, not easily understood and countered with the instruments and strategies

available. In extremis, Russian actions may even be interpreted as irrational, when examined through conventional lenses.

Space. The Russian approach depends upon interior lines to be successful. Tailored to the near abroad, it draws its strengths from the geographical closeness of Russia proper. Information operations, SOF, conventional forces and local insurgents can be sustained almost indefinitely from Russia that also provides a safe haven from kinetic strikes.

The reliance on interior lines is also a Russian advantage should NATO chose to deploy conventional forces as deterrence to a threatened area. Such a deployment will most likely involve some of NATO's rapid deployment forces to show collective intent and resolve. Indeed, the official declaration from NATO's summit in Wales in September 2014 stated "we will establish a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), a new Allied joint force that will be able to deploy within a few days to respond to challenges that arise, particularly at the periphery of NATO's territory."³⁴⁹ Should NATO in a future scenario deploy this type of force to its periphery to balance Russian forces, Russian advantages of interior lines become clear. While Russia can maintain their forces through short lines of communications, the sustainment of NATO's multinational force will be far more costly in resources as well as disadvantaged by distance. Russia can orchestrate this effect to display NATO impotence should Russia choose to stay in the field until other commitments or waning resolve prompts the withdrawal of the VJTF.

In extremis Russia, by applying its operational approach sequenced throughout its near abroad, would be able to replicate a "cry wolf" effect in NATO—that could eventually lead to political fatigue and loss of prestige as NATO is forced to respond to Russian initiative time and time again. Another option to counter such an approach would be to forward base NATO units on a more permanent basis paying the cost that this entails. International voices—such as the former presidential national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski—are already recommending the latter strategy as an effective deterrent against Russian aggression.³⁵⁰ Forward basing of NATO, and in particular, U.S. forces in the Baltics and other former Soviet SSRs would likely be viewed as provocative and incendiary by Russia.

Resources. While a shadow of its former self, the contemporary Russian military might has managed to marry organization, technology and doctrine into a viable and relatively effective tool capable of pursuing Russian objectives in tune with existing conditions. By concentrating available resources on elite units and using these as force multipliers to leverage the capability of proxies, Russia has managed to achieve strategic effect beyond what could have been achieved by conventional force alone. When not deployed over the Russian border, these forces participate in the overall posturing along the border to dissuade action against insurgents in the targeted area. This dual role economizes force and allows lessons learned from incursions across the border to be assimilated rapidly across the force.

The effect of the Russian deployment of large conventional force along the borders affects all three levels of conflict. Tactically, this force serves as a deterrent against smaller neighbors as it tries to cope with the insurgents and provides a pool of manpower, transport and supply sustaining the kinetic fight across the border.

At the operational level, the conventional force deters wider intervention by external actors by reminding regional actors of the risk of escalation and outright war.

Arguably, the greatest impact can be found on the strategic level where the presence of the conventional force has reawakened some of the dynamics of the Cold War. Many parameters have changed since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and not all of them work in NATO's favor. After a decade of expeditionary warfare in Iraq and Afghanistan, the combination of fiscal austerity and the absence of a large conventional threat against Western Europe has led to a transformation of most NATO armies. Mass has been sacrificed to enable expeditionary capability. NATO's focus on its core tasks has shifted from collective territorial defense against the Soviet Union to global crisis management and an enhanced "out of area" ambition.³⁵¹ Consequently, NATO's ability to field large conventional forces in Europe has shrunk. This development, in combination with the U.S. withdrawal of substantial forces in Europe has severely weakened NATO ability to counter the emerging Russian doctrine.



Recent Russian Campaigns- Learning and Adapting



Faced with the prospect of fighting a conventional war in Europe, particularly over a non-NATO nation, varied political interests may limit NATO's ability to field a comprehensive response as an alliance. NATO enlargement after the Cold War pushed NATO boundaries eastwards as new members sought the security guarantee of NATO's Article V. Older NATO members, now geographically removed from Russia by the buffers of the new NATO states, see Russia asserting its influence in its near

abroad; they may be inclined to interpret this as Russian political signaling, rather than as a prelude to military invasion. To newer NATO members, who were under the Soviet yoke only 26 years ago, recent Russian actions and rhetoric can only be interpreted as an existential threat to their sovereignty. Putin can leverage this difference of perspective, especially when targeting non-NATO members not included by Article V. While direct attacks on NATO members only can be construed as an attack on the Alliance, NATO's commitments to non-NATO members are less clear. Faced with the prospect of deploying large percentages of their shrinking forces to the limits of NATO's expanded borders for prolonged periods, some members might deem their intensity of interest too low to warrant such commitment. In such situations, other NATO members might have to resort to "coalitions of the willing" or even unilateral action.

The previous section outline advantages and disadvantages to the Russian operational approach. Comparing these with known U.S. and NATO capabilities, these translate into asymmetrical advantages—advantages that Putin has and can leverage to achieve desired objectives. Some of these asymmetries may be permanent in nature given the differences between the Russian Federation and the United States and its NATO allies. Others may be temporary if priority and resources are aligned to mitigate the effects of these advantages.

The nature of the Putin's centralized decision-making ability enables Russia to seize and retain the initiative vis-à-vis NATO and the United States. Combined with a fusion of operations at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels, this provides Russian forces and their proxies the ability to operate within the decision cycle of NATO and Russia's target. According to the Russian Army Chief of Staff General Gerasimov, "the differences between strategic, operational, and tactical levels, as well as between offensive and defensive operations, are being erased!"³⁵² Centralized authority lacking dissent that can enable a force that can rapidly operate at multiple levels of war simultaneously will pose a difficult challenge for any force seeking to wrest initiative away from Russian aggressors. *Army and NATO planners must assume that Russia will possess the initiative until NATO adopts a course of action.*

The information environment within which Russia shapes its narrative provides a second asymmetrical advantage. Within Russia, long-standing xenophobia and distrust of the West, a desire to return to great power status after what Putin described as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe" in Russian history, and restore Russian preeminence in world power politics, and increasing control of the media enable Putin to maintain his control over his population.³⁵³ This fact is borne from the Russian Military Doctrine in that one of the responsibilities of the Russian Federation is to:

Unify efforts of the state, society, and the individual to protect the Russian Federation; develop and realize measures aimed at increasing the effectiveness of military-patriotic indoctrination of citizens of the Russian Federation and their preparation for military service.³⁵⁴

These factors that buttress his popular support at home make it difficult to challenge any political base of support.

Abroad, Russia has demonstrated its resolve to shape domestic opinions through a relentless barrage of government-backed themes. It is estimated that more than a million Euros a day are spent by Moscow on Russian television programming directed at the Baltics. This results in “high quality” entertainment that is of course interlaced with news projecting Moscow’s strategic message. The Baltic States are hard pressed to match the quality of what Moscow offers. Although Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia recently agreed to collaborate on a Russian language television alternative to Moscow’s propaganda, they are yet to get it off the ground. Centrally planned and bilaterally distributed, the magnitude of Russian information resources deployed throughout the region will make it challenging to compete with their narrative in the short-term.

The ability for Russian conventional forces to operate near contested areas enables them to shield these forces from conventional countermeasures while simultaneously positioned to support their proxies within the borders of neighboring states. This facilitates the ability for Russia to protect their proxies with fire support and advanced air defense capabilities. This mismatch enables proxy forces to employ significant lethal force in support of their operations. Unless political resolve exists to target supporting Russian forces within the borders of Russia, this sanctuary will remain unchallenged.

Additionally, the presence of advanced air defense capabilities in the vicinity of the area of operations poses a unique component of the operational environment for which U.S. forces are relatively unprepared. While the return of decisive action training, aviation task forces have begun to relearn pre-9/11 lessons learned of dealing with semi- and non-permissive environments. Conversely, U.S. and coalition forces have enjoyed tactical air superiority with nothing to fear from enemy tactical aviation. Russia’s capability is growing in this regard and the loss of short-range air defense capabilities in the U.S. Army is a tactical asymmetry not soon undone. Given NATO interoperability challenges with mission command and integrating early warning systems seamlessly, this advantage could limit allied freedom of maneuver in these contested border areas where Russian proxies enjoy combat support from Russian conventional forces.

Finally, Russian forces, permanently based near border regions where they could operate, possess an advantage over a VJTF model based on a political decision to employ it as well as numerous nations operating under a force generation model. Not only will Russian forces possess significantly greater local knowledge and understanding, their proximity enables them potentially to outlast NATO presence as the length of time for a given crisis increases. Given the covert and clandestine nature of Russian infiltration into a target country, the effectiveness of a uniformed, conventional response will likely be limited—its symbolism of response and resolve more important than the ability to internally police another ally. The VJTF and any conventional response must stabilize the environment—greater instability would only discredit NATO. Additionally, any miscalculation or misconduct by NATO forces on Russian diaspora or proxies would only inflame the situation. Finally, member nations will likely balk at deploying the VJTF against a perceived internal dispute and the concomitant national caveats may limit the effectiveness of the VJTF if used to stabilize an area. The capacity of the VJTF, if not sufficiently sized for several contingencies, could find itself fixed in its response to one contingency while Russia foments and operates with near-

impunity in another. Using time as its ally, Russia can outlast NATO response forces should Russia choose to exercise operations in several areas near simultaneously.

Flexibility and Risk. Perhaps one of the most compelling aspects of Putin's "Strategy of Ambiguity"³⁵⁵ is not only the inherent flexibility it provides the Russian state but also its ability to manage risk with each strategic move. Putin's strategy allows him to simply decide walk away from an activity or action that is either not working or that has drawn too much political risk. Because he completely controls the media, he can manipulate the truth as well, further distancing himself from the reality of the strategy. This strategy has all the earmarks of the old Soviet doctrine of *Maskirovka*: denial and deception should accompany an action in order to conceal forces, objectives and means in order to confuse an enemy until it is too late to respond effectively.³⁵⁶ In both the Ukraine and Crimea, with Russia's use of proxies, volunteers and unidentified Spetnaz and regular forces, has demonstrated an effective return to *Maskirovka*, and provided plausible deniability for the Russian leadership to pursue multiple courses of action, all the while mitigating risk should any one of them fail or no longer suit their aims.

Conclusion

The key to this developing strategy is the application of surprise, deception and ambiguity, which are the most important components of this emerging Russian approach. Moscow need not confront NATO directly and would be imprudent to do so. By leveraging deception and ambiguity behind a volatile and ambiguous environment, the Kremlin can retain strategic agility and gradually reassert influence over its neighbors without actually going to war with them (or NATO). Should there be a determined international response against Moscow, Putin can simply withdrawal support from his separatists and deny that he had anything to do with the unrest. Moscow retains the initiative and can wait for a more opportune time to try again. With such an approach, Russia can secure limited strategic objectives with minimal risk. The ultimate goal of this methodology, however, would be to discredit NATO and thereby threaten the security of all three of the Baltic States in the long term.³⁵⁷

Despite Putin's bombastic comments of being able to take the Baltic capitals in two days, a far dangerous, and more likely tactic would be to attempt a limited land grab, while using this approach of ambiguity. One scenario would be using the tactics of Eastern Ukraine in a region of the Baltics heavily populated by ethnic Russians, with the region of Narva being a prime candidate. Located in the northeastern tip of Estonia, and conveniently located on the Russian border, Narva's population is 82.1% ethnic Russian.³⁵⁸ As an ironic aside, Narva's sister city in Ukraine is Donetsk, which is the heart and soul of the Russian led unrest against Kiev.³⁵⁹ Andrey Illarionov asks how NATO would respond if "little green men turned up... in Narva?"³⁶⁰ Should NATO react decisively to quell the unrest, then Putin would simply back off and claim he had nothing to do with the crisis. But, if the Alliance is caught in a debate on how to respond to perceived domestic unrest, then Moscow has a window of opportunity to act. Additionally, should the unrest spiral out of control and a humanitarian crisis emerge, which would be the next phase of the plan, then Putin could easily order his army to restore order to ameliorate the suffering. The messaging from Moscow would be that the occupation is purely humanitarian and temporary, promising that Russian forces

would leave once the crisis ends. Moscow would bog the process down through negotiations, and then feel obliged to stay after the local residents hold a referendum seeking autonomy from Estonia. Citing the separation of Kosovo from Serbia as a precedent, Moscow would feel legally obliged to recognize the independence of the restive Narva region. With relative ease, and little strategic risk, Moscow could undermine NATO and discredit its Article 5 with such an innocuous approach all while maintaining the flexibility to reverse its course should the international environment turn unfavorable.³⁶¹

Russia has successfully used the strategy of ambiguity to create an operational environment of deniability. Through the use of a hybrid operational approach, Russia has maintained maximum flexibility by systematically degrading the stability of the Ukrainian government in order to add Ukraine, at least in part, to the list of countries within Russia's control of the near abroad. Potential flashpoints in the near abroad or changing of alignment in states either friendly to Russia or non-aligned may indicate potential conflict zones in the future, particularly if strategic conditions in these areas change Russia's strategic calculus.

Questions are a natural byproduct of ambiguity, and as Russia's ambiguous strategy evolves, there will be many more questions to answer. Yet, given Putin's actions and our current understanding of the strategic environment, it is time to answer at least one question: What is the United States going to do about it? The final chapter will present options for the U.S. response.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Recommendations



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A comprehensive and decisive program to win the peace and frustrate the Kremlin design should be so designed that it can be sustained for as long as necessary to achieve our national objectives.

***–National Security Council
Report 68, April 1950.***

Introduction

Two overarching questions dominate the study of Russian landpower. First, what are the ramifications of the emerging Russian operational approach? Second, how should the United States and NATO respond? These questions must be answered not only in strategic context, but also in the context of NATO's evolution from a defensive alliance during the Cold War to one more willing to flex its muscles outside political boundaries. In the 1990s, for example, NATO responded to the crisis in the Balkans with a mix of diplomatic, economic, and military measures to enforce peace. In the years following the terror strikes of 11 September 2001, it provided financial and technical assistance to Afghanistan and deployed soldiers to serve in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). In September 2014, NATO leaders met in Wales to acknowledge the newest Russian challenge to the Alliance. How the United States and NATO respond to this challenge will determine the future of Europe and shape the world for generations to come.

As noted, the emerging Russian approach is best described as a strategy of ambiguity that manifests in an increasingly predictable way.³⁶² Putin deliberately sows discontent among ethnic Russian minorities in neighboring countries. Meanwhile, Russian media outlets inspire public distrust of the West, while Russian forces mass provocatively near conflict zones. Where Putin sees an opportunity for a *coup de main*, such as in Crimea in 2014, he can strike without warning. In other areas, such as eastern Ukraine, he prefers covert, subtle action.

Chapter 1 examined Russian policy objectives, grand strategy, and Russian governance. Although it is undeniably powerful, that system is subject to significant challenges. Russia's economic situation has worsened due to a sharp decline in world oil prices and Western sanctions following the Ukrainian campaign. Regardless, Putin and his inner circle have consolidated their power by suppressing dissent, controlling the press, and persecuting non-compliant oligarchs through arrest, trial, and/or exile.

Chapter 2 assessed the effectiveness of Russian landpower over the past decade, especially during incursions into Georgia, Crimea, and Ukraine. Instead of addressing its long-term social and economic ills, Moscow decided instead to invest in specific modern military capabilities and use them as a lever to resolve international disputes.

Chapter 3 analyzed Russia's employment of a hybrid mix of conventional and unconventional forces and activities to achieve limited strategic ends. In addition to the review of Russia's operational approach, the chapter also examined potential flashpoints where Putin was most likely to use the approach.

This chapter will assess the ramifications of the Russian operational approach for the United States and NATO from the perspective of the strategy formulation model. The model provides a disciplined way of understanding national interests and strategic ends, assessing strategic options, and recommending courses of action. The recommendations will then be compared to the new Army Operating Concept, illuminating how U.S. strategic landpower can ensure we win in a complex world.³⁶³

Ends

The Kremlin's objective is to prevent NATO expansion into its sphere of influence. The approach relies on using Russian nationalism to shore up Putin's domestic political support and sowing discord among the 28 NATO members. By declaring himself the protector of the Russian diaspora, Putin seeks to exploit ethnic nationalism in ways that would inevitably invite unrest within the borders of neighboring countries.

Meanwhile, the United States seeks to keep Europe "whole, free and at peace" to foster enduring interests in the transatlantic security space.³⁶⁴ Its strategic end state encompasses the following four elements:

1. A strong NATO alliance as the backbone for international security. The United States and its allies believe that a purposeful and united NATO is important for security and stability in Europe.
2. Russian compliance with international norms that recognize and respect international borders.
3. Recognition by regional powers (including Russia) of the right to political self-determination.
4. Deter Russian aggression with a clear and determined strategy that will prevent conditions that lead to miscalculation of purpose and escalation of violence.

NATO's strategic objective is to forge a politically viable, militarily able alliance capable of deterring adversaries and defending member territory and populations from attack. A secondary objective is the prevention and management of crises and the stabilization of post-conflict environments. Lastly, NATO promotes international security through cooperative arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation efforts.³⁶⁵

Strategic Approach of the United States and NATO

The United States and NATO must counter Russia's Strategy of Ambiguity and hybrid operational approach. Russia's, political, geographic, and cultural positions within the region offer marked advantages and regional influence to dominate their near abroad. Russia also has strategic advantages in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics: geographic proximity, depth of regional understanding, effective intelligence capabilities, and centralized decision-making processes. Putin can afford to be patient,

creating favorable conditions, while simultaneously reducing strategic risk. Russia can always choose to wait for a more favorable situation. Its advantages in interior lines, access to resources, nuclear deterrent, and placement of loyalists and sympathizers throughout the region give it the ability to dictate the pace of conflict escalation. Lastly, Russian asymmetric advantages in information operations, the use of Russian “compatriots,” regional intelligence, special operations forces, covert operations potential, and speed of decision making must all be considered when creating a framework to prevent and, if necessary, prevail in future crises in the region.



NATO: Regaining the Strategic Initiative

US/NATO response must be part of a larger DIME strategy

- Develop intelligence capabilities in the region
- Decrease energy dependence on Russia
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- Maintain credible NATO land forces in theater

An effective NATO strategy should include the following efforts.

1. Increase NATO Commitment and Resolve: Russia has strategic and operational flexibility with a divided, hesitant, or uncommitted NATO; conversely, its options narrow considerably when the Alliance acts decisively and in unison. Russia uses the full spectrum of national power to create doubt and sow division in NATO via bilateral diplomacy, economic leverage, military intimidation, information operations, and deception campaigns. The elements of national power must be used in concert to reinforce and strengthen NATO commitment and resolve to combat the Russian Strategy of Ambiguity and hybrid operations.

2. Build and Maintain a Credible and Scalable Deterrent: Russian advantages in geography, initiative and intelligence give them a high probability of achieving surprise. These same advantages also support the use of hybrid and unconventional warfare,

which fall just beneath the threshold of conventional action. NATO requires a capable, ready, and scalable deterrent to prevent and, if necessary, defeat the range of options the Kremlin might employ. Basing, readiness, interoperability, situational understanding, and the ability to conduct operations across the spectrum of conflict are necessary to build a credible deterrent. Such a force will need the ability to integrate with host-nation militaries, police forces, special operations forces and intelligence, as well as other NATO formations and capabilities, if it is to achieve the scalable aspects of deterrence. Credible minimal deterrence (CMD) is partially achieved when the Russians, specifically Putin, recognize U.S. and NATO commitment through geographic position of forces. This resolve is solidified as Nations demonstrate their ability to conduct effective and decisive operations that are synchronized with all instruments of national and alliance power. However, credible deterrence in Eastern Europe and Russia's near abroad must be comprised primarily of land power capabilities—the decisive domain of that theater and Russia's primary military strength.

3. Develop Effective Intelligence Capabilities across the Region: The United States and NATO need better human and signals intelligence capabilities, specifically in ethnic Russian communities and among Russian sympathizers in host-nation departments and agencies. The Alliance also needs to improve intelligence related to Russia's special operations forces, including enablers and command and control nodes where vulnerabilities may offer access. Success in this area would enable NATO to anticipate Russia's actions, thus mitigating Russia's advantages in time, initiative, and information operations. Additionally, it would arm NATO leaders with information necessary to avoid political and military miscalculation during a crisis. It would also inform and increase the effectiveness of IO and Cyber activities.

4. Develop Focused IO and Cyber Campaigns to Counter Moscow's Influence with Ethnic Russians and Russian-Speaking Peoples across the Region: A pillar of the Russian hybrid approach is the effective and persistent use of information operations to influence populations within Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics. U.S. and NATO information operations and cyber capabilities, integrated with the capabilities of partner nations provide options to mitigate the effectiveness of Russian IO. This would be more effective if it originated from those communities, requiring trust, relationships, and support, tied to host nation efforts to integrate and provide opportunities for disaffected people.

5. Develop Capabilities and Set Conditions to Counter Russian Special Operations Forces and Their Development of Proxies: Russia has developed innovative applications of its special operations forces as part of this hybrid approach. Russian special operators develop, train, and lead proxy forces, and they support proxy operations with intelligence, fire support, air defense, and advanced weapons training. They also support command, control and liaison with the Russian Army—an essential component of hybrid warfare. Russian special operations forces are also capable of traditional special operations activities, such as raids, seizure of key infrastructure, deception, psychological operations, and covert operations. Russian special operations forces have been involved in every major Russian land power engagement since World War II and will remain a cornerstone of future operations. Countering Russian special operations capabilities requires a balance of intelligence and counterintelligence support

to allied and partner nations, development of host-nation police and internal security forces, and regional partnerships with U.S. special operations forces. These actions will improve interoperability and bring capabilities such as precision action to the menu of options available for U.S. and NATO leaders.

6. Buttress Operational Security, Counterintelligence, and Communications Security Capabilities of Allies and Partner Nations: The exploitation by Russian special operations forces of intelligence operations, local sympathizers, electronic warfare, and cyber and signals intelligence proved effective in eastern Ukraine. In response, NATO must improve partner capability to protect signal communications, counter Russian unmanned aerial vehicles, disrupt Russian human intelligence operations, and harden command systems against cyber-attack.

7. Counter Anti-Western Rhetoric throughout the Near Abroad: Anti-Western rhetoric is an important component of Russia's approach to hybrid warfare. It strengthens domestic support for Russian leaders, influences target populations outside Russia, and erodes the will to act in the international community. NATO countermeasures should include a messaging campaign to illuminate the flaws in Russian policy, develop credibility and trust in target populations in the near abroad, and celebrate the positive aspects of Western values and opportunities.

8. Influence Russia's Centrally Controlled Decision-making Processes: As described in Chapter 1, Russian decision-making is highly centralized around Putin. This arrangement is advantageous in terms of speed and decisiveness, but it is disadvantageous because Putin can only take in so much information and there is a risk that he will manipulate policy for short-term, personal ends. A small body of trusted decision-makers is vulnerable to group think and mirror-imaging, and they are structured to lose more than they can gain by accepting risk. Understanding and influencing this dynamic would help NATO design effective methods of influencing Putin and avoid unnecessary escalation of tension.

9. Decrease Energy Dependence on Russia: Russia's use of energy as leverage against Europe is well documented. The Kremlin uses this approach to divide the European Union, create hesitancy in NATO, and isolate antagonist nations. In response, NATO can exploit the fact that Russia's economy is heavily dependent on revenue from oil and gas. Increasing Europe's energy independence would reduce Russia's economic leverage and thus its political influence. The United States, NATO, and the European Union should implement a parallel effort to increase trade and cooperation as a means to counter Russia's anti-Western narrative. External stakeholders could be enticed to action with infrastructure and other projects, as well as resource controls that could affect Putin's cost-benefit analysis concerning future Russian aggression.

10. Demonstrate the Effectiveness of the U.S. Nuclear Deterrent: Russian military doctrine envisions rapid escalation, even to the point of nuclear war, to resolve crises on favorable terms. To prevent nuclear blackmail, the United States must invest in its nuclear deterrent capability despite political pressures to the contrary and the relatively high cost..

There are no easy solutions to countering the Russian Strategy of Ambiguity and their hybrid operational approach. The United States and its NATO allies must commit themselves to decisive action in the face of Russian efforts to sow confusion and discord. They must use all elements their national power to deter aggression and, if necessary, defeat it.

Ways

Over the past decade Russia has used a variety of approaches to achieve its desired ends. In Georgia, Russia largely used conventional forces and took full credit for its military action. In Crimea, Russia used special operations forces, but denied involvement until after the Russian parliament voted for annexation. In eastern Ukraine, Russia is again denying official involvement, while NATO declares that Russia is indeed supplying troops and military equipment to ethnic Russian separatists.³⁶⁶

While Russia has not taken offensive action against the Baltic States, Moldova or Belarus, it has appealed to ethnic Russians to set conditions for such an eventuality. Moscow's media narrative -- a protector of Russians -- is the first step in the grooming process of a dissatisfied minority. In Ukraine, Russia uses dissatisfied ethnic Russians as surrogates to fight a proxy war behind which Russian forces can blend and hide. The same diaspora are then portrayed as victims, providing Russia with a narrative to justify intervention.

By appealing to ethnic Russians, President Putin exercises political influence on the domestic politics of its border states. Although Moscow is concerned that border states will replace Russian trading partners with Western trading partners, the regime is most fearful for its own survival. Russia's fear of Western political ideas and NATO expansion is rooted in a belief that the United States and its allies ultimately desire a "color revolution" regime change in Russia.³⁶⁷

Countering the Russian Approach to the Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania)

The Russian approach toward the Baltic States is to increase IO messaging via Russian-language television and internet content, issuing Russian passports to ethnic Russians living in Baltic States and polling loyalties to those states.³⁶⁸ In addition, Russia's aggressive military flights over Scandinavia and the Baltic region are meant to intimidate the Baltic States by reminding them of Russia's renewed power.³⁶⁹ Their NATO membership helps justify Putin's narrative that the West is trying to encircle the Russians.³⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Putin's actions in Georgia, Crimea and eastern Ukraine illustrate he is not afraid of doing the unexpected, especially if he believes that the West cannot or will not act. The Baltic States are understandably wary of Russia's ambiguous sabre rattling and internal meddling.

Considering all elements of national power, there are several actions that the United States and NATO could take to counter Russian hostility against the Baltics in the construct of the Diplomatic, Informational, Military and Economic instruments of power (DIME).

Diplomacy: The United States must encourage NATO to provide their share of any force package sent to the Baltics. A unified front is critical in sending a diplomatic message to

the Kremlin. Western states must also encourage Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to engage their ethnic-Russian citizens and implement policies that improve living conditions and involve them in political processes.³⁷¹ Political and social engagement undercuts Russia's efforts to cast ethnic Russians as victims needing Russian protection. Europe and the United States must maintain a unified front in dealing with Russia's renewed nationalism and aggressive foreign policy, but must also seek healthy engagement with Russia and its people. Russia's role as Europe's primary energy provider and its reinvigorated military make it relevant to Europe's long-term stability. The United Nations (UN) offers programs and systems to appeal to those sympathetic to the Baltic states; action in the UN would also inform and support Information activities.



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Information: The West should counter Russian propaganda among ethnic Russians in the Baltics. Alternate sources of information that are accessible and appealing to regional Russian speakers are necessary to combat Moscow's maskirovka (deception).³⁷² Channels for such a counter should be existing Russian-language broadcast media, such as the British Broadcasting Corporation, Agence France-Press, Deutsche Welle, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and the Voice of America. There is also an information requirement among NATO allies, the EU and Russia proper. Information efforts must be consistent and aligned with what is and what is intended, in relation to the Baltics.

Economic: The United States and NATO must encourage / assist the Baltic States to develop economic opportunities for ethnic Russian citizens. Like political and social engagement, increasing economic opportunity helps ethnic minorities feel a part of the nation and would lessen Russia's ability to foment discontent. Since the Baltics depend heavily on Russian energy supplies, one option would be to help Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania develop greater energy-source diversification and set aside some of the

energy-related jobs for ethnic Russian citizens.³⁷³ Economic arrangements with Russia and others could also be designed to reward expected behavior and punish aggressive behavior.

There are a variety of measures that the United States should take to deter Russian adventurism in the Baltics and Eastern Europe.

Military Course of Action (COA) 1—Forward Presence and Basing: In this COA, NATO develops a permanent forward presence in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as a deterrent to Russian aggression and a significant indicator of commitment and resolve of the Alliance. It is noteworthy that Russia's recent aggression began after significant U.S. drawdowns in Europe and continued NATO inability to meet military alliance commitments.³⁷⁴ An increased U.S. military presence in Europe and the Baltics would also provide a material deterrent and message of US commitment to NATO.³⁷⁵

These forward forces must be capable of sustainment, mission command, and combined arms maneuver. In this COA, the US movement and maneuver forces forward positioned in the Baltics are limited to Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) or Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) structures, with enabler and SOF enhancements, to best align capabilities with terrain, and to limit the offensive threat to Russia. A 2-Star Division-level Headquarters (HQ) would foster the relationships, trust, expertise, and oversight required to integrate U.S. rotational forces with other NATO and host nation capabilities. This fully functional two star HQ would demonstrate U.S. resolve, and require the traditional enablers to accompany it including, fires, intelligence, sustainment, and maneuver support and protection. Movement and maneuver forces in this COA would deploy from CONUS and use prepositioned equipment in the Baltics.³⁷⁶

Military Course of Action 2—Forward Rotation of Forces: Continue current rotation of U.S. forces into allied nations to deter further Russian aggression. This option allows a NATO presence visible to both Russia and the Baltic states, signaling NATO's commitment to Baltic defense.

This COA maintains the regionally aligned forces concept of rotating a Division HQ (-) and BCT (-) to maintain a visible U.S. presence in the Baltics and other NATO countries across Eastern Europe. Other warfighting function requirements are met through a combination of theater augmentation, CONUS reach back or organic Division and BCT assets. The Division HQ maintains strategic level leadership and capability forward in Germany or Poland, and provides oversight to NATO exercises, conducts engagement, and employs the BCT (-) in company and battalion sized elements as part of the visible deterrent and means to improve interoperability. Theater Military Intelligence (MI), Air Defense Artillery (ADA), and Sustainment brigades would need to be reinforced to full-strength levels according to Modification Table of Organization and Equipment (MTOE). This allows for continuous support and presence while preserving the ability to support other theater contingencies.

Military Course of Action 3—Over-the-Horizon Force Presence: The U.S. would forward base additional combat power, such as a Heavy Brigade Combat Team and Fires Brigade, as well as round-out existing enablers to full capability i.e. MI, Sustainment,

and Aviation. The increased forward presence could occur in the following countries: Germany, Italy, Poland, or Hungary. This additional land combat power in Europe would be far enough away from the Russian border that it would not appear aggressive, but would be close enough to quickly react to Russian aggression.

Military Course of Action 4—Special Operation Forces (SOF) Forward and Over-the-Horizon: This COA creates a SOF 2-star level HQ and rotational SOF capability forward positioned to develop allied and partner capabilities and conduct engagement. In addition to SOF, an Airborne Brigade Combat Team and Fires Brigade, would be positioned over-the-horizon (Central Europe) to provide flexibility for the Joint Force Commander and present the Russians with another consideration in planning their next hybrid campaign.

Countering the Russian Approach to Georgia and Ukraine

The Kremlin has focused on maintaining influence among all former Soviet republics and views Western relations with Georgia and Ukraine as an affront to Russian prestige.³⁷⁷ Russia argues that it is protecting ethnic Russians from human rights abuses and helping Russian populations to achieve self-determination.

The United States and NATO could take several approaches regarding Georgia, many of which could be equally applicable to the situation in Ukraine. We must look at all traditional elements of national power: diplomatic, information, military and economic.

Diplomatic: The US and Europe have remained resolute in maintaining sanctions on Russia in response to its military actions in Crimea and Ukraine. However, many European states rely on Russian energy supplies³⁷⁸ and several, such as Greece, have recently elected governments that are less willing to confront Russia when it harms their people economically.³⁷⁹ To bolster Ukrainian government credibility among its citizens, Western governments should offer anti-corruption and rule-of-law training and monitoring. They should also encourage governments to pass reform measures that would strengthen government integrity. Public dissatisfaction with government corruption is a weakness Russia can exploit in its appeal to ethnic Russians. If these nations present a better form of government than Moscow, it may fare better in healing the wounds and appealing to the population once fighting ends.

Information: The United States should assist Ukraine in exposing Russian fabrications regarding both the fighting and the involvement of Russian troops. The United States and its NATO allies could provide local assistance for counter-information operations. Western governments must do a better job combatting Russian revisionist history by stressing Russia's agreement in the Minsk Protocol to recognize and honor Ukrainian sovereignty.³⁸⁰

Economic: The United States and European states should assist Ukraine financially and offer humanitarian assistance in the form of food, shelter, medical care and other provisions for internally displaced persons. Eventually, direct financial assistance to Ukraine should be tied to verified progress in fighting corruption and establishing improved rule of law for all citizens. As Ukraine is deeply in debt, immediate financial assistance is required to prevent the government from collapsing.³⁸¹ Western states

must continue economic sanctions against Russia. The United States should link the removal of economic sanctions to achievable Russian actions, allowing Putin a way ahead with some level of dignity.³⁸²

Military Course of Action 1—Permanent Forward Presence and Military Defense

Assistance: Develop a permanent forward presence in Georgia and Ukraine to deter further Russian aggression, as well as provide Georgia and Ukraine with lethal and non-lethal weapons and appropriate training. If confronted by a strong Western response, it is unlikely that Russia will challenge the security or territorial integrity of other states, including NATO members Estonia and Latvia. Not only does a permanent presence deter, it speaks to the level of U.S./NATO commitment. Additionally, the force will train and conduct exercises with European forces and provide a quick response capability to the combatant commander.

In this COA, a BCT (IBCT or SBCT) would provide a permanent U.S. presence in each country, while conducting expedited training on lethal and non-lethal weapon systems. The U.S. should provide military defense assistance to increase the capabilities of Georgia and Ukraine. The objective would be to achieve a capability that could inflict significant damage on the Russian military and proxies. Raising the risks and costs for Russia will assist in deterring further aggression and seize the initiative from its ground commanders. Assistance should include heavy weapons capable of providing overmatch capabilities in response to those Russia has provided to separatists and an adequate number of air defense systems, including radars, to counter the potential for future Russian air strikes.³⁸³

Non-lethal systems should include unmanned aerial vehicles with the capability to enhance various mission sets to include ISR, communications, secure ground communications, medical support equipment and supplies (class VII), armored vehicles and complimentary ADA counter-battery and ground radar systems (see Figure 1).³⁸⁴ Training should focus on both utilization of military systems provided and on the associated military tactics and operations, especially at the HQ level for mission command oversight capabilities. Military advisors from NATO would be complimentary to this option as they provide expertise in employment and proper utilization of non-lethal effects to Ukrainian forces.

U.S. forces will conduct warfighting function requirements through a combination of organic assets (primary), theater augmentation (tertiary), and CONUS reach back (supporting). The Division headquarters will provide strategic engagement and oversight and will employ the BCT as required to implement the coalition plan. Sustainment will be paramount in this option, not only for U.S. forces, but also for new equipment provided to Ukraine and Georgia since the host nations will provide operators and unit-level leadership, but will not have inherent sufficiency in sustainment capabilities for U.S. equipment until the DOS institutes FMS and EDA systems.

Military Course of Action 2—Rotational Forward Presence and Only Non-Lethal

Equipment: Provide a rotational U.S. force presence with other NATO countries to train and conduct exercises with the Ukrainian and Georgian militaries. This option allows a visible presence and demonstrates resolve and unity of purpose within NATO, signaling coalition resolve to Russian aggression in the region while providing non-lethal

capabilities to Ukrainian and Georgian forces. This COA utilizes the regionally aligned force concept and a Division HQ(-) and a BCT(-) to each country establishing habitual relationships between U.S. and host nation forces in the region. U.S. forces would train and exercise with host countries on current equipment, as only non-lethal U.S. military equipment would be provided. While there would not be a permanent presence, like COA 1, US/NATO leaders could help host nation military leaders develop training and exercise plans that would continue growth and development when there was no significant US/NATO force in country.

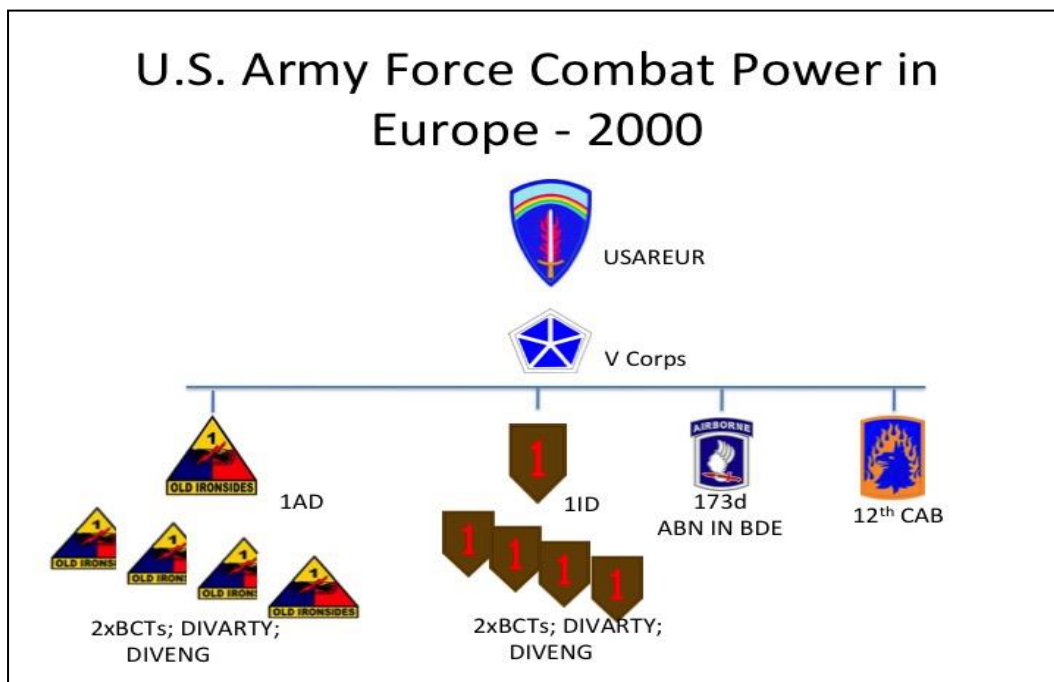
Military Course Of Action 3—Rotational SOF and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) Support Personnel and Equipment: Provide U.S. and NATO intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets to help Ukrainian and Georgian commanders identify threats in their AORs and utilize U.S. and NATO SOF as military advisers. Policy-makers may also desire to establish a “redline” by declaring a geographic feature as a boundary beyond which U.S. and NATO forces would commit to providing air assets to halt any separatist or Russian offensive actions and stage forces for future offensive actions to reestablish recognized international borders.

This COA calls for a small number of boots on the ground and provides additional ISR capabilities to host nation commanders. It would assist the U.S. and NATO in developing a common intelligence picture of Russian operations in the region and provide early warning of possible expansion of aggressive actions by Russian/separatists forces. Recent reports indicate there is a gap in U.S. and NATO intelligence estimates in and near the Ukrainian and Georgian regions.³⁸⁵

Countering the Russian Approach to Other Potential Russian Targets (Moldova and the Arctic)

While Russia has not acted aggressively toward Moldova, in the Arctic or in other border areas where it has interests, it will if the regime believes Western powers may encroach onto what it sees as its rightful sphere of influence. For these areas we recommend quarterly interagency, multi-national indicators and warnings assessments of Russian actions, a review of U.S. and NATO Arctic military capabilities, maintaining relationships with Moldova and other border states, and assuring Russia of our peaceful intent toward all states. The Arctic may offer an opportunity for cooperation with Russia, but the emphasis there and in other areas mentioned should be diplomatic, economic and informational.

Putting the Army Operating Concept into Action



Major ground combat units forward deployed in Europe in 2000—10 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

By thinking through the approaches for responding to the strategic problem of an aggressive Russia, the new Army Operating Concept (AOC): Win in a Complex World, is a good fit, given the wide range of options, capabilities, resources, and relationships necessary to achieve U.S. strategic policy objectives with regards to European security.³⁸⁶ First and foremost, this strategic challenge resides mainly within the land domain. Other domains complement the application of landpower, but landpower will be the decisive component of the combined joint force for this long-term strategic challenge. Russia also views landpower as decisive for their strategic and political aims. To add additional context to this discussion, the following charts depict the variance in size of U.S. ground forces in Europe over the past 15 years.

U.S. Army Force Combat Power in Europe – AUG 2008



The status of US combat power forward deployed in Europe the month Russia invaded Georgia. Headquarters, 1st Armored Division and its 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 12th Combat Aviation Brigade, and the 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment, all based in Germany at the time, were engaged in combat operations in Iraq. The 172nd Stryker Brigade was just standing up with orders to deploy to Iraq in November 2008. The 173rd Airborne Brigade, based in Italy, had recently returned from Afghanistan and was scheduled to return in 2009.

U.S. Army Force Combat Power in Europe - 2014



Major Army combat power forward deployed in Europe in 2014, the year that Russia began aggressive actions against Ukraine.

Where the Army Operating Concept Fits Well Where the Army Operating Concept Fits Well

The AOC best fits the landpower challenges of Russian aggression in the following areas.

1. Landpower capabilities, forward-deployed or regionally-engaged in Europe, operate as part of a joint, inter-organizational and multinational team to prevent conflict, shape the security environment to show U.S. resolve and improve deterrence, and create multiple options for responding to, or resolving, crises.³⁸⁷
2. “Army forces communicate U.S. commitment.”³⁸⁸ The forward and continuous presence of Army forces is a key component of cultivating NATO resolve and demonstrating U.S. and NATO intent to Russia.
3. Each of the Army’s core competencies comes into play in any scenario or framework to prevent Russian aggression. Each delivers a critical component of the overall strategy of deterring Russian aggression, assuring allies and partners.³⁸⁹
4. Landpower capabilities tailored and scaled as required to adjust to the threat while avoiding provocation or miscalculation.
5. Landpower capabilities attune to the complex culture and history of the Eastern European operating environment. Becoming adaptive and innovative in that environment, leaders and teams that understand and appreciate the environment.
6. Landpower force structure in theater that demonstrates full interoperability with NATO to provide civilian leadership with multiple options during a crisis, while maintaining a real capability to present the adversary with multiple dilemmas.³⁹⁰
7. In the complex Eastern European environment of multiple allies, actors, speed of information and the presence of a capable adversary, the levels of war are significantly compressed. Joint, combined and Army capabilities must navigate between the tactical, operational and strategic levels of abstraction. Leaders who can do this will be at a premium for this force construct.³⁹¹
8. Conflict with Russia in an Eastern European environment will not be resolved through firepower alone. Given Russian trends in hybrid and non-linear approaches to war, full spectrum capabilities and options must either be on hand or rapidly deployable. Leadership and allies must demonstrate the capacity for mental agility to adjust to the nature and tactics of the threat in order to prevent miscalculation or runaway escalation.
9. The maritime, air, space and cyber domains will play a significant role in deterring or defeating Russian aggression. There is a critical landpower component for each of these domains that must be filled by either U.S. or NATO capabilities to ensure mission success.³⁹²
10. This strategic challenge, while under the threshold of traditional war, remains a “contest of wills.” New tactics, technologies, nuclear deterrence and the presence of non-combatants change the nature of how a war in this region will be waged. The AOC

correctly identifies that the Army must be prepared to operate within these non-traditional conflicts.³⁹³

11. The AOC and Army guidance to invest significantly in leader development supports the nature of deterrence and limited conflict in Eastern Europe. The ability to build teams, see change and evolution in adversary approaches, determine second- and third-order effects of actions, and to exploit opportunities to innovate and adapt force structure and methods will be one of the most important contributions the Army can make to securing peace and prosperity in Europe.³⁹⁴

12. The Army will be required to operate in close coordination with all the other elements of national power to counter Russian advances. Integration with NATO allies and partner militaries, police and security services, international organizations and non-governmental organizations and other U.S. government efforts to advance stability is all part of a long term approach to preventing conflict and shaping the security environment. The Army cannot operate independently from these other activities.

13. The cost of intervening after Russian aggression has overwhelmed local defenses could be extraordinarily high. The cost of prevention and forward presence and deterrence is much less.³⁹⁵

14. The AOC identifies that landpower is needed to deter Russian aggression. Land forces play a central role in any conflict in the Eurasian landmass. Russian aggression will continue unabated without credible landpower capabilities to deter it.³⁹⁶

15. Creation of a viable deterrent to Russian hybrid operations requires the force to demonstrate the ability to conduct joint combined arms maneuver with allies and partners. Integration with other joint forces and special operations forces to conduct forcible entry operations and complement forward-positioned forces creates options for the joint force commander and communicates to the Russians that they will face multiple dilemmas.³⁹⁷



Army Operating Concept

(In the context of the current NATO force structure in Europe)

Well adapted in principle:

- Communicates U.S. commitment
- Emphasizes landpower capabilities
- Calls for full-spectrum operations
- Enables joint and combined-arms maneuver
- Focuses on leader development
- Emphasizes sustainment

Falls short in practice:

- Insufficient forward deployed forces
- Limited interoperability of 28 NATO members
- Diminished sustainment base

Where the Army Operating Concept Falls Short

1. Is our force capable of executing operations in the spirit of the tenets either unilaterally or more importantly as part of a multi-national force? Interoperability efforts and exercises are making progress, but we may need a holistic assessment of our ability to fight our doctrine as a combined element to judge how credible the deterrence truly is.³⁹⁸

2. The AOC describes the need to provide civilian leaders with multiple military options as well as the requirement to respond globally through rapid deployment of forces from the continental United States. Options are limited without a credible forward presence. Forward forces need to be designed to perform the warfighting functions. Additionally, an analysis should be done to understand the feasibility of surging forces from the United States. Many NATO allies and partners bordering Russia have little depth, and may not have the time for deployment of forces from the United States.

3. The AOC does not clearly define the role of landpower in deterring conflict or what it takes to build an appropriate deterrent. The current Army structure in Europe is symbolic of U.S. commitment, but does it constitute a real deterrence to the Russians?

4. The AOC assumes that a “larger percentage of the force will be based in the continental United States.” While a fiscal and political reality, this must be balanced with the ability to create a multi-national deterrent that is interoperable, founded on trust

and familiarity, and able to see and understand its operating environment. Russian advantages in time, initiative, speed of decision-making, the ability to generate surprise, and geographic proximity suggest that “over the horizon” capabilities may be too little, too late. Crisis escalation will be difficult to manage without the right forces forward-based.³⁹⁹ We know the value of established theater infrastructure and the Army’s key role and value to a Joint/Multinational Force in this area.

Tenets of Army Operations and the Current Force Structure in Europe

The tenets of Army operations provide a valuable lens by which to examine where the Army may need to adjust or develop capability and force structure in the European theater to achieve national security objectives.

1. Initiative: Trust and relationships with allied and partner militaries and security forces, understanding of the complex environment, interoperability, and the ability to conduct sustained combined arms maneuver are key aspects of any force that seeks to gain or maintain the initiative in a crisis involving Russia. The current force posture carries the risk of losing flexibility and initiative.
2. Simultaneity: A joint force able to operate across all of the domains is needed to establish a true forward-presence capability. Conflict in Eastern Europe will be fought in all the domains. Development of irregular war concepts, conventional combined arms maneuver, police and security force support will all be necessary to present the Russians with multiple dilemmas and demonstrate political will.
3. Depth: This is a significant challenge for defending our NATO allies in Eastern Europe. The Russians structure their operations to attack an adversary in depth. A properly aligned forward deterrence will need both near and far (over-the-horizon) capabilities, precision fires, irregular-war capacity, combined-arms maneuver at the brigade level and higher, information operations, cyber and air-defense capability to be able to fully challenge the Russian operational approach.
4. Adaptability: Forward presence, interoperability efforts, combined joint exercises, and leader education and exchange programs are necessary to build adaptive leaders and cohesive teams necessary to adjust to Russian tactics and approaches.
5. Endurance: This may be a significant shortfall. Limited logistics support, small formations widely dispersed, among other challenges, are major weaknesses in the current design and will limit options and the ability to conduct sustained operations.
6. Lethality: Current forward units are simply too small. Company and battalion (minus) formations are symbolic, but largely ineffective as a lethal deterrent.
7. Mobility: Tempo, force concentration, operating in depth and maneuver are dependent upon force mobility. Platforms, logistics, bases and control of terrain are all part of the mobility equation. These requires a credible deterrence force in theater that can adapt in a crisis or conflict.
8. Innovation: This will come from leaders and teams that spend time in the environment and an understanding of the environment. Rotation of forces is effective in

maintaining continuous forward presence without permanent basing, but it does not support the tenet of innovation as this security challenge will be long-term.

The Army Operating Concept: Risk and Mitigation

The AOC considers the impacts of risk and how to mitigate it as it looks to understand future conflict. Several of the risk areas identified in the AOC are applicable to the strategic problem of an emergent Russia. The lack of resources and readiness due to fiscal constraints will limit options in Europe.⁴⁰⁰ Forces need to be forward-stationed to become interoperable with allies and partners. The cost of preventing a conflict with Russia may be higher than the appetite for growth or overseas basing, but the cost of prevailing in a conflict with Russia in Eastern Europe will be markedly higher. Current force structure in Europe depend on rapid deployment and projection of capabilities from the United States and NATO commitment. Given the lack of depth in the Baltics, and the lack of permanent forward basing there, time and initiative is in the Kremlin's court.⁴⁰¹ The Russians have many advantages in the region that provide them the capability to exercise/exploit strategic surprise. Investment in intelligence, and force structure that mitigates the impact of a strategic surprise while offering options to decision makers is something to consider when thinking through this problem.

Means

The following tables provide a consolidated assessment of the Army capabilities required to support the courses of action (COA) introduced in the preceding "Ways" section. The tables also identify risks associated with each COA. These assessments are based on the Army Operating Concept (dated: 31 October 2014) and the seven warfighting functions: Mission Command, Movement and Maneuver, Intelligence, Fires, Sustainment, Maneuver Support and Protection, and Engagement. Each COA assumes NATO endorsement and support, with U.S Forces in a leading role.

Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania)

Military Course of Action 1—Forward Presence and Basing: Develop a permanent forward presence in the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as a deterrent to Russian aggression and a significant indicator of U.S. commitment and resolve to the NATO Alliance. The forward presence must be capable of sustainment, mission command, and combined arms maneuver to be a meaningful deterrent. In this COA, movement and maneuver forces forward positioned in the Baltics are limited to IBCT or SBCT structures to best align capabilities with the terrain of the region, and also to not pose an offensive threat to Russia. A 2-Star Baltic States Division level HQ would be established to create and foster the relationships, trust, expertise, and oversight required to integrate U.S. forces with other NATO and host nation capabilities. A fully functional two star HQ demonstrates U.S. resolve, and would require the traditional enablers to accompany it including, fires, intelligence, sustainment, and maneuver support and protection. Movement and maneuver forces in this COA would comprise a single IBCT or SBCT that would rotate forward from CONUS and fall in on POMCUS style forward positioned equipment in the Baltics.

Warfighting Function	Pros	Cons
Mission Command	2-star, Division level HQ, forward based in Baltic States provides permanent strategic level leadership and capabilities. Demonstrates resolve to Allies, regional partners, and Russia.	Vulnerable to Russian action based upon lack of depth, time and space. Reinforces the current Russian Anti-Western / U.S. narrative.
Movement and Maneuver	POMCUS battalion sized sets of IBCT or SBCT equipment in each Baltic State. Forces rotate from CONUS reducing the cost of permanent basing of large numbers of troops, and is less provocative by limiting the MTOE to IBCT or SBCT capabilities. Also supports current USEUR force structure. This COA will lead to long term improvements in interoperability with allies and partners.	HQ and equipment facilities, security, and sustainment costs are significant. There is very little depth to help preserve capability. It would be more difficult to scale and adjust forces as part of a crisis escalation.
Intelligence	Organic to Division HQ	Vulnerable to Russian collection
Fires	Requires a DIVARTY to support the Division HQ.	Vulnerable to Russian preemptive actions. May be seen as provocative by the Russians.
Sustainment	Requires a DISCOM style capability	Immature logistic systems in the Baltics; requires additional investment in theater infrastructure.
Maneuver Support & Protection	Need to ensure Engineer and ADA capabilities are consistent with force protection requirements in the Baltics. Will require elements of each across the Baltics based upon further analysis.	Forward positioned ADA could be seen as provocative by Russia.
Engagement	A fully functional and staffed 2-Star HQ will be able to engage and integrate with all branches of government, military, police and security forces and be in a position to fully understand the	Rotational movement and maneuver forces will not have the depth of engagements as the permanently deployed HQ, but this is off set by the depth of relationships built

COA 1 - Forward Presence and Basing

Risks: The forward basing of a Division HQ and enablers, with IBCT / SBCT equipment to support rotational forces provides the clearest indicator of U.S. commitment and resolve, and will go far in shoring up fears and concerns of the regional Allies and partners. This COA reinforces Russian propaganda that the United States and NATO are posturing against Moscow. Yet, no matter how great or small the force stationed in the Baltics, the Kremlin will spin up its propaganda machine. Another challenge is the infrastructure in the Baltics, which is insufficient to support such a force.

The strength of this option, is that it completely changes the strategic calculus. The discourse on the Baltics today, should Putin set his gaze on them, is to ask if they are worth New York. With American forces physically present in the Baltics, however, the strategic initiative is ours and the question to Putin will be if the Baltics are worth Moscow. The bottom line is that any aggression will immediately include American forces, increasing the strategic risk for the Kremlin. This COA would be further strengthened, and thereby the security of the Baltic nations increased, should other NATO forces be a part of this forward basing. This COA removes all doubt of resolve. Should Russia wage war in the Baltics, it will face the full might of the United States.

Military Course of Action 2—Forward Rotation of Forces: Continue the rotation of U.S. forces in allied nations to deter further Russian aggression. This COA maintains the regionally aligned forces concept of rotating a Division HQ (-) and BCT (-) to maintain a visible U.S. presence in the Baltics and other NATO Allies across Eastern Europe. Other Warfighting Function requirements are met through a combination of theater augmentation, CONUS reach back, or organic Division and BCT assets. The Division HQ maintains C2 forward in Germany or Poland, and provides oversight to NATO exercises, conducts engagement, and employs the BCT (-) in company and battalion sized elements as part of the visible deterrent and means to improve interoperability. Theater MI, ADA, and Sustainment BDEs would need to be reinforced to full BDE MTOEs, to provide support and presence. In this COA it is possible to rapidly increase or decrease the force as required.

Warfighting Function	Pros	Cons
Mission Command	Regionally Aligned Forces (RAF), Division HQ (-), BCT (-) HQ, provide senior leadership presence and staff capability. Will improve NATO interoperability, relationships and trust, though not to the degree of a permanently based mission command capability.	Controlling the activities, exercises, and events without full enablers, with limited interoperability, and significant geographic dispersion will limit the potential of these elements given that they will rotate frequently.
Movement and Maneuver	Creates the ability to rotate an ABCT (-) forward bringing heavy force capability that does not exist in Europe. An ABCT (-) also compliments the 173 rd and 2CR MTOEs offering more options to the JFC.	CO and BN (-) formations dispersed over significant distances create a very thin and inflexible footprint. There is little ability to conduct combined arms maneuver at levels that truly improve interoperability. This force would have difficulty gaining or maintaining initiative if faced with a Russian hybrid warfare. The small footprints are also vulnerable to Russian preemptive actions.
Intelligence	Requires theater augmentation (USAREUR; 66 th MI BDE) Using forward forces is always best long term, but requires the MI BDE to be brought to full strength and capability.	UAVs are high-demand, low-density asset; may not get all the coverage needed. Will need increase language and HUMINT capability.
Fires	Organic capability to BCT (-) comprised of cannon batteries and platoons. Will be able to test some interoperability issues with other nations.	Very limited capability; insufficient to support combined arms maneuver to the level needed to establish a credible deterrent. Theater still lacking Rocket Artillery and the flexibility and precision those systems bring.
Sustainment	Ad hoc and hybrid support structure using: CONUS, theater, organic, and Host Nation (HN) assets. It is cost effective short term, and a method to identify	Ad hoc formations are less effective overtime. Current capabilities can only support a limited footprint, inflexible, and would be difficult to rapidly expand or scale

COA 2 - Forward Rotation of Forces

Risks: The small force structure loses the deterrent and resolve benefits of the larger force package. Because of this, it also lacks flexibility, it has little chance of seizing the initiative, or simultaneity. Rotating leadership reduces an understanding of the environment. This structure and employment offer limited ability to conduct combined arms maneuver in accordance with Tenets of Army Operations. While this COA is expedient and less costly, it may not show U.S. commitment and resolve in the short term.

Military Course of Action 3: Over-the-Horizon Force Presence: Forward base additional combat power to create a more credible deterrence than what exists in the European Theater. Forward base a Heavy Brigade Combat Team, Fires Brigade, and round-out existing enabler formations to full capability (Intel, Sustainment, Aviation, etc....). Greater combat power strengthens the resolve and shows U.S. commitment in the long term. The increased forward presence could take effect in Germany, Italy, Poland, and / or Hungary to deter to further Russian aggression without placing forces in nations that border Russia.

Warfighting Function	Pros	Cons
Mission Command	Permanent Division level HQ assigned to USAEUR, to provide oversight, leadership, and staff support for a 3 x BCT force in Europe. (173 rd , 2CR, and 1xABCT TBD).	Will require the stand-up of a new Division HQ. Rotational Division HQ will not be sufficient.
Movement and Maneuver	1 x ABCT will round out current capabilities and provide more options to decision makers. A fully functional ABCT will increase deterrence.	No forces in nations that border Russia. May create less trust and confidence in these nations vulnerable to Russian aggression.
Intelligence	Round out the 66 th MI BDE (-) to full capability. Improves reach-back into national & theater level Intelligence (IA, theater, NATO), and builds depth in regional understanding and intelligence collaboration and interoperability.	Additional combat power without corresponding increase in 66 th MI BDE, results in limited support; limited PED capability forward; NATO interoperability is a challenge; Need increase in HUMINT and linguistic capability to conduct HUMINT operations in Russian/sympathetic regions
Fires	Fulfills shortfall in fires capability in European Theater. MLRS/HIMARS BDE provides operational flexibility, more options, and standoff advantages. This will also increase deterrence; DIVARTY (Poland/Germany); Retain and round-out 12 th CAB (-) (ATK BN) to full CAB capabilities	Increased costs, and requires basing agreements with host nations.
Sustainment	A forward based, multi-functional logistics capability, will reduce ad hoc structure, will also create systems for long term efficiencies and cost savings	Poland and Hungary are immature logistic footprints and require additional funding.
Maneuver Support & Protection	ADA brought to full BDE strength to provide protection across multiple missions:(Israel, Turkey, NATO, Germany, Italy); 7 th Tactical Signal BDE.	There is no current capability to counter Russian UAV/CAS/ADA; This COA requires a SHORAD capability;

COA 3 - Over the Horizon Force Presence

Risks: This COA will cost more than the previous two COAs. However, it may not be able to react fast enough to prevent the Russians from overrunning the Baltic States if they choose to do so.

Military Course of Action 4: Special Operation Forces (SOF) Forward and Over-the-Horizon: Utilize U.S. and NATO SOF as the forward presence in Allied and Partners that border Russia. Develop an over-the-horizon deterrent force that presents Russia with multiple dilemmas. This COA creates a SOF 2-star level HQ and rotational SOF capability forward positioned to develop Allied and Partner capabilities, IW concepts, and engagement. A conventional, ABCT and Fires BDE, positioned in Central Europe, create flexibility for the Joint Forces Commander, and present the Russians with difficulty in executing their hybrid approach.

Warfighting Function	Pros	Cons
Mission Command	Build a U.S.-led NATO SOF 2-star HQ (SOJTF-Baltics); Rotational Division HQ conducts mission command for conventional forces over the horizon.	Requires growth and infrastructure in the Baltics. NATO must support it.
Movement and Maneuver	U.S. SOF BN (-) that is rotational and reports to SOF HQ. Additional ABCT is forward based to augment and complement the 173 rd IBCT (Abn), 2CR SBCT	Heavy BCT forward; limited Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) support due to unit deactivation; SOF (OTH) limited interoperability with NATO SOF.
Intelligence	Utilize capability that is internal to the U.S. SOF in addition to the 66 th MI BDE (-) reach-back into national & theater Intelligence.	Limited support from MI BDE; limited HUMINT and linguistic capability able to conduct HUMINT operations in Russian/sympathetic regions
Fires	MLRS/HIMARS BCT for distance and flexibility; DIVARTY (Poland/Germany); Retained and round-out 12 th CAB (-) (ATK BN)	Limited counter-battery and radar capabilities
Sustainment	Multi-functional logistics support forward; Non-rotational (NATO interoperability)	Poland and Hungary are immature logistic footprints
Maneuver Support & Protection	Forward SOF aviation package in addition to the ADA brought to full BDE strength (Israel, Turkey, NATO, Germany, Italy); 7 th Tactical Signal BDE	Counter Russian UAV/CAS/ADA; SHORAD capability; Additional reach-back capability for surge
Engagement	SOF engagement in addition to the Intelligence sharing, exercises, officer training, and PME	Russian diaspora engagement and collection; Train partners in irregular warfare (IW); Rotate/align Civil Affairs (CA); Baltic MISO capability in addition to the CIV-MIL coordination and interoperability

COA 4 - Special Operation Forces (SOF) Forward and Over the Horizon

Risks: A blending of SOF and conventional forces presents the most capable deterrent and also provides NATO with the most flexibility for decision-making. This COA forces the Russians to react to multiple threats, this COA is scalable, and creates the best time and space cushion for NATO. The perception of U.S. SOF along the Russian border could be a “red-line” for the Russians, and would have to be managed carefully. A

border exclusion zone should be imposed on US forces in the region. This will require authorization and special training before entering. Russian forces have conducted at least one abduction that included an Estonian security official in 2014.

Georgia and Ukraine

Military Course of Action 1—Permanent Forward Presence and Military Defense

Assistance: Develop a permanent forward presence in Georgia and Ukraine to deter further Russian aggression, as well as provide Georgia and Ukraine with lethal and non-lethal weapons and appropriate training. If confronted by a strong Western response, it is unlikely that Russia will challenge the security or territorial integrity of other states, including NATO members Estonia and Latvia. Not only does a permanent presence serve as deterrence, but also speaks to the level of U.S. commitment. Additionally, the force will train and conduct exercises with European forces and provide a quick response capability to the combatant commander.

In this COA, a BCT (IBCT or SBCT) would provide a permanent U.S. presence in each country, while conducting expedited training on lethal and non-lethal weapon systems. The U.S. should provide military defense assistance, which increases the defense capabilities of Georgia and Ukraine sufficient enough to inflict significant damage on the Russian military. Raising the risks and costs for Russia will assist in deterring further aggression and seize the initiative from its ground commanders. Assistance should include heavy weapons capable of providing overmatch capabilities in response to those Russia has provided to separatists and an adequate number of air defense systems, including radars, to counter the potential for future Russian air strikes.⁴⁰²

Non-lethal systems should include unmanned aerial vehicles with the capability to enhance various mission sets to include ISR, communications, secure ground communications, medical support equipment and supplies (class VII), armored vehicles and complimentary ADA counter-battery and ground radar systems (see Figure 1).⁴⁰³ Training should focus on both utilization of military systems provided and on the associated military tactics and operations, especially at the HQ level for mission command oversight capabilities. Military advisors from NATO would be complimentary to this option as they provide expertise in employment and proper utilization of non-lethal effects to Ukrainian forces.

U.S. forces will conduct warfighting function requirements through a combination of organic assets (primary), theater augmentation (tertiary), and CONUS reach back (supporting). The Division headquarters will provide strategic engagement and oversight and will employ the BCT as required to implement the coalition plan. Sustainment will be paramount in this option, not only for U.S. forces, but also for new equipment provided to Ukraine and Georgia since the host nations will provide operators and unit-level leadership, but will not have inherent sufficiency in sustainment capabilities for U.S. equipment until the DOS institutes FMS and EDA systems.

Warfighting Function	Pros	Cons
Mission Command	Provide permanent senior leadership and HQ element	Puts a “US face” on operations very close to Russian borders; may lead to provocation; U.S. troops dispersed b/w two countries
Movement and Maneuver	Training exercises and communications fidelity improves coalition capability as Ukrainian and Georgian forces utilize U.S. provided equipment	Training and exercises could be miscalculated as aggressive actions by Russia
Intelligence	Utilizes U.S. and NATO assets, as well as assets provided to host country	Host country will need train-up time on proper collection, processing, exploitation, and dissemination techniques
Fires	Utilization of fires capabilities will be positively augmented by the use of ISR and complementary capabilities provided through FMS/EDA options	Escalation, miscalculation, and could incite more aggressive behavior between various participants
Sustainment	Permanent multi-function logistics capability	Will have to develop infrastructure for long-term logistics
Maneuver Support & Protection	Advance warning and negation provided by ADA and radars will enhance maneuver and force protection	Host countries will need train-up time on new equipment
Engagement	Training and exercises provides habitual engagement and builds mutual trust between the U.S., host countries, and NATO	CIV-MIL coordination; frequent large-scale training and exercises may negatively impact civilians

COA 1 - Permanent Forward Presence and Military Defense Assistance

Risks: The COA could be miscalculated by Russia and fuel Moscow's narrative that the U.S. and NATO are posturing to attack for regional hegemony. This COA also runs the risk of creating an over-reliance on the U.S. with regards to equipment sustainment and adequate training. The U.S. can mitigate these risks by providing equipment that is not overly sophisticated and does not require the U.S. to operate or maintain although a long-term solution will require established Lines of Communications (LOC) for sustainment support. The U.S. government needs to be aware that there is the risk of military equipment provided to the host nation militaries ending up in the hands of nefarious actors. It is recommended that anti-tamper means be employed on any military equipment provided to support this and any other options if deemed a strategic concern for the U.S.

Military Course of Action 2—Rotational Forward Presence and Only Non-Lethal Equipment: Provide a rotational U.S. force presence with other NATO countries to train and conduct exercises with the Ukrainian and Georgian militaries. This option allows a visible presence and demonstrates resolve and unity of purpose within NATO, signaling coalition resolve to Russian aggression in the region while providing non-lethal capabilities to Ukrainian and Georgian forces.

This COA utilizes the regionally aligned force concept and a Division HQ(-) and a BCT (-) to each country establishing habitual relationships between U.S. and host nation forces in the region. U.S. forces would train and exercise with host countries on current equipment, as only non-lethal U.S. military equipment would be provided.

Warfighting Function	Pros	Cons
Mission Command	Provide regionally aligned rotational senior leadership and HQ element	Rotating HQ element disruptive; puts a "US face" on operations very close to Russian borders; may lead to provocation; U.S. troops dispersed b/w two countries
Movement and Maneuver	Training exercises and communications fidelity improves coalition capability as Ukrainian and Georgian forces utilize U.S. provided equipment	Training and exercises could be miscalculated as aggressive actions by Russia
Intelligence	Utilizes U.S. and NATO assets, as well as assets provided to host country	Host country will need train-up time on proper collection, processing, exploitation, and dissemination techniques
Fires	Utilization of fires capabilities will be positively augmented by the use of ISR and complementary capabilities provided through FMS/EDA options	Escalation, miscalculation, and, allow less likely, could still incite more aggressive behavior between various participants
Sustainment	Permanent multi-function logistics capability	Will have to develop infrastructure for long-term logistics
Maneuver Support & Protection	Advance warning and negation provided by ADA and radars will enhance maneuver and force protection	Host countries will need train-up time on new equipment
Engagement	Training and exercises provides habitual engagement and builds mutual trust between the U.S., host countries, and NATO	Rotating troops disruptive to established relationships; CIV-MIL coordination; frequent large-scale training and exercises may negatively

COA 2 - Rotational Forward Presence and Only Non-Lethal Equipment

Risks: While this COA could be miscalculated by Russia and fuel Putin's narrative that the U.S. and NATO are posturing for future aggression against Russia, it could also be perceived as a temporary commitment by the U.S. Leading Russia to believe that the U.S. has limited resolve and will quickly grow tired and eventually lose interest in the region. Additionally, rotating U.S. forces has an inherent risk in regards to train-up time, costs, and expertise in the region. The utilization of only non-lethal support to Ukrainian and Georgian forces risks additional losses by friendly forces and will more than likely play out badly in the international media community while bolstering Russia's state run media. This option should be considered in light of strong diplomatic opportunities and the establishment of an environment whereby the U.S. and NATO can quickly flex to more direct lethal assistance to both the Ukraine and Georgia if needed.

Military Course Of Action 3: Rotational SOF and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) Support Personnel and Equipment: Provide U.S. and NATO intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets to help Ukrainian and Georgian commanders identify threats in their AORs and utilize U.S. and NATO SOF as military advisers. Policy-makers may also desire to establish a "redline" by declaring a geographic feature as a boundary beyond which U.S. and NATO forces would commit to providing air assets to halt any separatist or Russian offensive actions and stage forces for future offensive actions to reestablish recognized international borders.

This COA calls for a small number of boots on the ground and provides additional ISR capabilities to host nation commanders. It would assist the U.S. and NATO in developing a common intelligence picture of Russian operations in the region and provide early warning of possible expansion of aggressive actions by Russian/separatists forces. Recent reports indicate there is a gap in U.S. and NATO intelligence estimates in and near the Ukrainian and Georgian regions.⁴⁰⁴

Warfighting Function	Pros	Cons
Mission Command	U.S. led NATO SOF HQ	Puts a limited "US face" on operations and may send mixed signals to Russia
Movement and Maneuver	Small unit tactics will improve as Ukrainian and Georgian SOF forces utilize limited U.S. provided ISR equipment.	U.S. provided SOF personnel and equipment, if captured, will provide great propaganda to the Russian state media and feed Putin's narrative. SOF presence may seem as provocative by Russia
Intelligence	Builds common intelligence picture b/w U.S. and NATO. Develops common intelligence collection, processing, exploitation, and dissemination practices. Will increase regional expertise	ISR assets are high-demand, low-density; may be unable to maintain long-term OPTEMPO.
Fires	Not applicable	Not applicable
Sustainment	Smaller number of troops reduces the requirement for a large logistics footprint.	Will have development logistics infrastructure to sustain troops and ISR equipment.
Maneuver Support & Protection	Provides resources to counter Russian UAVs and provide advance warning	Small number of SOF in advisory role does not have the capacity to deter/delay Russian aggression
Engagement	SOF engagement and intelligence collection, processing, exploitation, and dissemination will form habitual relationships with host countries and NATO partners	Unable to engage Russian diaspora; does not provide the rank structure for strategic engagement

COA 3 - Rotational SOF and Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) Support Personnel and Equipment

Risks: While this COA could be misunderstood by Russia and fuel Moscow's narrative that the U.S. and NATO are posturing to attack, it could also be perceived as an obligatory commitment by the U.S. because of the small number of U.S. SOF personnel. Russia may believe that the U.S. will lose interest, grow tired of the region, and lack the will to consider escalation of more traditional ground forces if the SOF option does not provide adequate results to support U.S. national objectives. Additionally, rotating SOF personnel has inherent risks in acclimation to the region and operational interactions with host nation forces in the region.

Other Potential Russian Targets (Moldova and the Arctic)

While Russia has not yet acted aggressively toward Moldova, in the Arctic or in other border areas in which it might have an interest, its recent past indicates that it is willing to do so if the regime believes that Western powers may encroach onto what it sees as its rightful sphere of influence. For these areas we recommend maintaining a watchful eye on Russian actions in those areas, reviewing U.S. and NATO's Arctic military capabilities, maintaining a positive relationship with Moldova and other border states and assuring Russia of our peaceful intent toward all states. The emphasis should be on the diplomatic, economic and informational elements of national power.

Warfighting Function	Pros	Cons
Mission Command	Provides US leadership current and factual situational awareness of activities in the region.	Limited physical presence of any tangible military forces. May not deter Russian expansion efforts in the region.
Movement and Maneuver	Facilitate U.S. and NATO naval presence in the region for situational awareness and provide training opportunities for specialized U.S. and NATO ground forces for exercises in the region or region-like areas.	Any increased U.S./NATO presence in the regions will provide propaganda to the Russian state media and feed Putin's narrative.
Intelligence	Increased situational awareness and preemptive capabilities are facilitated with this option as this region is the next area of friction between Russian and NATO. Having forward positioned personnel allows for anticipatory capabilities and provide a direct deterrent capability to Russian expansion desires.	Misreading the increased U.S./NATO interest in the region may feed Putin's narrative and legitimize further Russian expansion in this region.
Fires	Future use of fires capabilities will be augmented by having regional knowledge and interpersonal exchanged with NATO counterparts.	Escalation of a U.S./NATO presence in the region may force the Russian leadership to continue escalation and possible use of further Russian ground forces.
Sustainment	U.S. and host nation forces in the region will facilitate exercise of sustainment capabilities and provide lessons learned for future long-term engagements in the	Exposes U.S./NATO forces to Russian media and propaganda which may feed Putin's narrative.

COA for other Potential Russian Targets (Moldova and the Arctic)

Risks: This COA could be misunderstood by Russia and fuel Moscow’s narrative that the U.S. and NATO are expanding into its region of influence. It may be perceived that U.S./NATO forces are posturing for a possible future attack against the Russian homeland. The U.S./NATO may be put at additional risk with the flexibility of use of other options by spreading their combined military capabilities too thin throughout the region to address the Arctic/Moldova options. Russia may believe that the U.S. will lose interest and grow tired of the multiple regions option and lack the will to consider escalation of more traditional ground forces.

	Ends	Ways	Means	Risk
Baltic States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A NATO-alliance as the backbone for an international security. Russia should be compliant to international rules and recognizes and respects international borders. 	<p>COA 1: Forward presence and basing</p> <p>COA 2: Forward rotation of forces</p> <p>COA 3: Over the horizon force presence</p> <p>COA 4: SOF forward and over the horizon</p>	<p>COA 1: IBCT/SBCT, DivHQ</p> <p>COA 2: RAF BCT(-), DivHQ</p> <p>COA 3: BCT, Fires Bde</p> <p>COA 4: SOF 2-star HQ, ABCT, Fires Bde</p>	<p>COA 1: provocation</p> <p>COA 2: Provocation</p> <p>COA 3: Speed</p> <p>COA 4: Costs</p>
Georgia and Ukraine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The countries in the region (including Russia) have self-determination and are free to choose its form or rule, its government and its partners. 	<p>COA 1: Permanent forward presence and MDA</p> <p>COA 2: Rotational forward presence and non-lethal equipment</p> <p>COA 3: Rotational SOF, ISR, and equipment</p>	<p>COA 1: IBCT/SBCT</p> <p>COA 2: BCT(-), DivHQ(-)</p> <p>COA 3: SOF(-), ISR, equip</p>	<p>COA 1: provocation</p> <p>COA 2: Provocation</p> <p>COA 3: Provocation</p>
Other potential Russian targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provocation of any party should be avoided. 	<p>COA: ISR, assess capabilities, and maintain relationships</p>	<p>COA: ISR, LNO</p>	<p>COA: Provocation, boundary flexibility</p>

Summary of COAs.

Recommended Role for NATO

For NATO to be effective, the United States must lead. However, there are certain actions that the United States should negotiate from NATO members to generate credible NATO landpower against the changing strategic environment. Perhaps the most important area is that all NATO countries move quickly to fulfill the commitments their leaders made at the Wales summit in September 2014. In particular, NATO should quickly establish the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force as a spearhead in the NATO Response Force. This force must be able not just to deploy rapidly, but, should deterrence fail, be able to fight.

Additionally, in light of Putin’s use of ambiguity to confuse concerted action by the West NATO should declare that Article V will be triggered not only by a conventional attack, but also by an ambiguous threat to destabilize member governments, such as cyber-

attacks or civil disorder inspired by external actors. Furthermore, NATO should clarify the conditions under which Ukraine and Georgia might be offered Membership Action Plans. This decision cannot be held hostage to Russian protests, or Russian threats, but should be tied directly to their requirements for collective security.

Conclusion

The United States and NATO should quickly implement a new strategic approach to counter Moscow's hybrid operational model of ambiguity. Russia's geographic, political, historic and cultural position gives it marked advantages and flexibility to determine how to achieve its policy of regional influence and domination of the near abroad. Indeed, Moscow has distinct advantages in strategic initiative and time across Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics. It also has the luxury to choose when to act. It can afford to be patient, shaping an environment that creates favorable conditions, while simultaneously reducing its strategic risk. It has advantages in interior lines, access to resources, nuclear capable forces and potential sympathizers across the region. Lastly, Russian asymmetric advantages in information operations, the use of Russian "compatriots," regional intelligence, special operations forces, covert operations, and speed of decision making must all be considered when creating a framework to deter Kremlin inspired conflict in the region. Countering these significant Russian advantages requires a balanced, multi-faceted and variable-tempo approach to deny Moscow the strategic initiative.

One hundred years ago, a simple strategic miscalculation led to the First World War. As the clouds of war gathered across Europe in July 1914, only one question made Kaiser Wilhelm II take pause: would the United Kingdom honor its treaty to defend Belgium when the German Army crossed its border? If the British declared the sovereignty of Belgium a red line that would result in all-out war between England and Germany, then Kaiser Wilhelm would not attack. The German Ambassador was dispatched to London to press the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Grey for an answer. However, Grey hesitated, and refused to clearly state if the United Kingdom would go to war over Belgium. Had Grey made it clear to the German Ambassador that Belgium would be defended, the First World War would have been a regional conflagration centered in the Balkans and Southeastern Europe.

A century later, we have a similar situation in the Baltics. As described in this study, Moscow views this territory as their exclusive zone of influence and will move to (1) discredit NATO, and then, (2) assert its authority over the region. The best way to prevent such an outcome is to unambiguously signal to Moscow that stirring hostility in any part of the Baltics, whether Narva, Riga or eastern Lithuania will automatically trigger Article V. However, anticipating rapid and credible decision making from the NATO Alliance is not realistic, especially in an environment where Putin can leverage economic pressure / incentives to cause some allies to hesitate. Even in a perfect environment, 28 nations simply need time to deliberate.

The clearest way to remove doubt from Putin's strategic calculation and to buy NATO time is to forward deploy American and other willing Allied forces into the Baltic countries. This should be a credible deterrent force that will be committed to combat in the event of any type of Russian intervention or attack. Such a force removes all doubt

about resolve, demonstrates unswerving commitment and deprives Moscow of the strategic initiative. Additionally, this deterrent posture ensures that any type of Russian intervention, meddling, or even hybrid war will automatically draw in the United States and other forward deployed NATO nations regardless of how long the debate drags on in Brussels. With this simple stroke, Putin's advantage in time, geography as well as his advantage with rapid decision making is toppled. The strategic calculus changes from, "if Narva (or other Baltic area) is worth New York," to, "is Narva worth Moscow."

References to the Cold War have been judiciously avoided throughout this paper. This is not a new Cold War as the strategic environment is different in many ways. Yet, there are lessons from the Cold War that are relevant to our strategy today. For example, West Berlin—although deep in East Germany—remained a bastion of hope, despite Soviet attempts to strangle it. The two factors that kept West Berlin free were nuclear deterrence and forward deployed French, British and American troops. Any attack on West Berlin would result in the automatic commitment of the British, French and American Armies and their nations in a war against the Soviet Union. Western resolve was undeniable. In the end, Russia's calculus was clear: West Berlin was not worth Moscow. Such an approach should be implemented in the Baltics.

Having reviewed the menu of options available to the military instrument of power, the following hybrid application is recommended for immediate implementation in the Baltics: The approach on ensuring the security of the Baltics is a hybrid of course of action 1, 2, 3 and 4:

Military COA 1: Forward Presence and Basing,
Military COA 2: Rotational Forces,
Military COA 3: Over the Horizon,
Military COA 4: Special Operation Forces (SOF).

The combination of these COAs, provides a credible forward deterrent force, capable of expanding should the security environment require it if Vladimir Putin meddles in the Baltics. As to the size of the force, a company of forward deployed American soldiers in each Baltic nation should suffice, with the capability to expand to an IBCT. One battalion Headquarters should be set up in the Baltics. The location should rotate between Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania to foster relationships, and to balance assurance to each Baltic nation. Beyond this BN (-) forward deployed HQ element, and three forward deployed companies, the remainder of the force should take the form of prepositioned equipment sets in select sites across the Baltics that can equip a full BCT (COA 3) with over the horizon soldiers.

The rotational aspect (COA 2) encompasses willing NATO forces deploying to the Baltics to train with local and American forces already in place. This will foster enduring relationships with other NATO members, improve interoperability and put a much needed NATO face on the force. The preferred end is that will eventually result in an enduring, a truly multinational NATO forward deployed capability in the Baltics.

The final portion of this force (COA 4) is the SOF capability, which should rotate through the ethnic Russian regions of the Baltics to understand and to shape the environment. This SOF component should, in the end, be a multinational NATO effort. The concept is that they would be poised to provide indications and warnings should some sort of Moscow inspired insurrection be planned and work with local security forces to avert such an outcome. More importantly, however, this SOF capability will build relationships with the local leaders and population, to create an environment favorable to NATO.

The aim for this slimmed down version of forward basing is twofold, (1) lack of sufficient infrastructure, (2) reduces cost. The Baltics lack an adequate infrastructure to field / sustain a large troop presence. The proposed small foot-print, balances reducing costs against the need for extensive new infrastructure. Finally, this package is sufficient to *deter* Putin inspired aggression, while not being a large provocative force. Moscow will certainly launch an IO campaign against the presence, no matter what the size, yet providing a credible deterrence is more important than appeasing the Kremlin's agenda.



This hybrid application of COAs 1, 2, 3 and 4 removes any doubt of U.S. resolve and deprives the Kremlin of the strategic initiative. Although there is little appetite for forward basing, especially in light of ongoing drawdowns and rebasing units to the United States, it is the only viable option. Moscow has changed the strategic calculus in

Eastern Europe and now is the time to have an answer to this new dynamic threat that the Baltics face.

Although there is a lack of appetite for forward presence due to fiscal and political concerns, there is no better way to clearly signal America's willingness to honor its Article V obligation to the Baltics no matter what form of aggression Putin should use. Additionally, a permanent forward presence deprives him of the advantage of time and geography. Simply stated, the best way to deter Putin's stated objective of dominating the region than with American boots on the ground. This force need not be large, but enough to commit the United States should the Kremlin use any form of aggression to threaten the security of the Baltics.

In addition to this forward troop presence, there is a need for a focused NATO intelligence framework in the Baltics. This should be mainly in the form of a HUMINT Center of Excellence (HCoE), focused on developing relationships in the ethnic Russian areas of the Baltics. The HCoE should be tied in with NATO SOF to coordinate and direct their activities in the region. NATO SOF must be permanently integrated into the HCoE to ensure focused and coordinated operations in the region. This will provide both early warning of Russian HUMINT activities in the area, in addition to building vital relationships with local political leaders and security forces. The preponderance of the intelligence personnel working in this organization should be Russian linguists.

The HCoE should also have an analytical capability to conduct intelligence fusion and analysis. This Baltic HCoE would report directly to the NATO Intelligence Fusion Center (NIFC) in Molesworth, UK. The NIFC should have OPCON over this HCoE. Although being predominantly a HUMINT center, this unit should also have a modest SIGINT capability, initially relying on the rotation of various NATO SIGINT units. To provide the HCoE with the ability to conduct limited intelligence gathering, it should also have an intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability in the form of tethered aerostats deployed in each of the Baltic nations. The aerostats would provide early warning, persistent surveillance and other required intelligence gathering capability. More importantly, however, it would serve as visible assurance of NATO's commitment to the Baltics. The presence of the tethered aerostats, however, should be backed by the deployment of UAV units to provide the regional players an opportunity to integrate this capability into their collection plan. Together, this assets would provide near real time intelligence on Russia's Western Military District.

This HCoE would serve as the headquarters to coordinate and integrated NATO intelligence and SOF in the region. Additionally, this HCoE, supported by an intelligence analysis capability, would be used as the primary location to train and practice intelligence skills for our Baltic and regional partners since most nations do not have the capability to train intelligence professionals. In this manner, the Baltic NATO members would gradually assume greater responsibility over the HCoE as they build a core body of intelligence analysts/professionals.

The HCoE should be located in Riga, Latvia, due to its central location and also because it has the largest ethnic Russian population. The existing NATO STRATCOM

Center of Excellence, presently located in Riga, should be moved to Vilnius. The NATO CYBER Center of Excellence should remain in Tallinn. In this way, each of the Baltic nations would have an equal share of NATO special capability to leverage.

The NATO STRATCOM Center of Excellence should be funded to a level that it can seriously respond to the barrage of Kremlin directed propaganda focused on influencing the Russian diaspora. The United States can offer the technology and expertise found in its European based Armed Forces Network (AFN) to provide a starting point for NATO's STRATCOM for a concerted counter-messaging campaign. The Baltics, with NATO and EU support, should have a modern version Russian language Voice of America type capability, replete with radio, television and internet outlets that provide high quality programming and truthful reporting that is directed to the Russian diaspora in NATO and EU nations. The intelligence gathered by the HCoE should be coordinated with NATO STRATCOM to inform and focus its messaging to ensure a fused and effective IO campaign.

The presence of NATO SOF should be permanent in the Baltics. The United States should take the lead with SOCEUR setting up a liaison office in Riga that would work in coordination with the greater NATO SOF effort. The United States, together other NATO nations, should maintain a regular SF presence in the region. This permanent forward presence is a requirement to build and foster relationships with the region's ethnic Russians, in addition to acquiring a familiarity whereby they will be able to quickly recognize Russian HUMINT agents operating in the area. This modest measure is the surest way to counter Putin's Strategy of Ambiguity.

The change in the strategic environment also predicates a reconsideration of the so-called "pivot to the Pacific." The bottom line, the exodus of a credible forward American presence in Europe must stop. The rapid drawdown was predicated upon a strategic environment where Russia played a positive and supportive role in Europe. Their war against Georgia in 2008, the 2014 invasion and annexation of Crimea and its ongoing war against the Ukraine are evidence enough that the strategic calculus has changed. This, combined with Moscow's daily information war directed against America's allies in Eastern Europe is evidence enough that it is time for the United States update its strategy in the region to confront the realities of an antagonistic Russia.

The current American ground based force structure is inadequate; the United States lacks enough forces in Europe to provide a deterrence. Instead of drawing down American forces in Europe, a small buildup should rather occur. All base closure, and transition of facilities to host nations should immediately stop so that the United States retains at least some capacity to expand its already meager footprint in Europe. Former American bases still unoccupied, such as Campbell Barracks in Heidelberg, should be considered (and negotiated for) reintegration back to US authority to support the introduction of a modest level of forces back into Europe.

At a minimum, the United States must have at least one fully manned armored or mechanized Brigade Combat Team in the European AOR in addition to the forward brigade set that should be staged in the Baltics. This active BCT is a requirement to

maintain both a credible deterrent in Europe, in addition to having sufficient forces to actually train and integrate with NATO on the continent and to be able to exercise the AOC. The separate aviation brigade must also be retained (or returned) to Europe.

Finally, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania will need to realign their forces for the changing strategic environment. Their current force structure is based upon a model of a cooperative government in Moscow. Under Vladimir Putin, such a case does not exist. Their improved capability should encompass both a modest addition of mechanized forces, as well as a robust SOF capability. These two adjustments to their force structure would help ameliorate the threat the Russia increasingly poses to their territorial integrity.

The burden of paying for this forward presence need not be borne alone by the United States. The cost can be mitigated by requiring the host nations to provide adequate infrastructure and logistic support. Additionally, NATO and the European Union should be requested to provide financial support as well, since they are the beneficiaries of a forward American presence. NATO and the EU should also offset the costs of logistics, transportation, etc to further reduce the cost of a forward American presence. Finally, NATO nations should commit to providing military enablers to round out this American forward force. This will not only reduce the expense for the American taxpayer but also make this force truly multinational. In addition these measures, all NATO members should share the burden and cost of these deterrent measures. This includes both the recommendations above in addition to spending the agreed upon 2% of their respective GDPs on defense. In this way, the taxpayer, whether in New York, or Berlin, will know that all of NATO is doing its part in providing for a mutual defense. However, the United States must take the lead. This will set the conditions for other NATO nations to take an increased portion of the burden, and over a short period, this forward force will be truly a multinational NATO element.

Vladimir Putin's approach to Europe and the United States is a divide and conquer methodology. He craftily leverages economic incentives, and energy politics to weaken the resolve of NATO and EU member states. In this, Moscow succeeds when, for the sake of economic concerns, bilateral agreements are signed between Russia and any given European nation. With this in mind, the ongoing discussion of creating a "European Army" would be a decisive strategic victory for the Kremlin should it ever come to fruition. Such a force would weaken NATO and ultimately fracture the friendship and cooperation between Europe and North America. Why, after nearly seventy years of peace and stability, would leaders either in Europe or North America create a force structure that would benefit Moscow? A European Army, despite its merits otherwise, would not only draw off NATO's already limited assets, resources and capabilities, but would set the conditions for a rival North American / European military force. Nothing could be better for the Kremlin than such an outcome.

Despite its flaws, NATO is the most successful alliance in history. It weathered the dangers of the Cold War, provided Western Europe the longest period of peace that it has enjoyed since the Dark Ages, it kept an expansionist Soviet Union at bay, survived the post-Cold War tribulations of the Baltics (despite predictions of its demise otherwise)

and proved both adaptable and committed in the complex post 9/11 world. In the midst of this success, it is utter folly to entertain any serious discourse on setting the conditions for the Alliance's end by pulling from it a "European Army." The creation of such a force would not solve the growing security issues that we face, but would further complicate an already complicated environment and strengthen Moscow's strategic position. In the midst of growing Russian aggression, we should focus on efforts to make NATO stronger, rather than pulling resources that only would weaken it.

Until concrete steps are taken, Putin's tactics of manipulating the Russian populations of neighboring nations to stir instability is an existential threat to the NATO Alliance. Putin's actions in Georgia, Crimea and Eastern Ukraine demonstrate that he is willing to break international law to advance his regional ambitions. The United States has an opportunity to implement concerted measures to avert trouble in the Baltics. The message to the Kremlin must be that any cross border activity will categorically result in a confrontation with the United States, period. Whether it is Narva, Tallinn, Vilnius or Riga, the Kremlin must understand that meddling with the Baltic's Russian populations is not an option and these nations are off limits to any type of Moscow inspired destabilization. Any such meddling will be met quickly by determined force and squashed.

What of the region's large minority populations? The significance of fully assimilating the ethnic Russian populations is an important consideration for the Baltics. Steps must be taken to ensure that the ethnic Russians feel a part of society and enjoy economic prosperity. Yet, even if the Baltic countries fully integrate their ethnic Russian populations, there is still a risk. This will reduce the threat of Kremlin meddling, but it will not eliminate it. For instance, the turmoil in Eastern Ukraine was inspired and led by Russian Special Forces and intelligence operatives. If there is not sufficient popular backing locally, Moscow will simply export it in the form of professional military forces attired in civilian clothes, not unlike what was experienced in the Ukraine similar to those proxy wars waged by the Soviet Union in Asia, Latin American and Africa during the Cold War. Yet, forward basing of American conventional forces, bolstered by willing NATO troops and SOF changes the strategic calculus and makes such an act too risky for Moscow no matter how ambiguous the challenge is.

The options for countering Moscow's territorial aggression against Ukraine are far more complex. Putin views this nation, and Belarus, as squarely in his zone of control and influence. Any moves away from the Russian sphere of influence (such as gravitating toward the EU or NATO) are viewed as a threat to Moscow's vital interests. Yet, NATO and the EU's prevarications on how to deal with Putin's ongoing war against Ukraine serve to strengthen his position and only embolden him, not unlike the effect that British and French appeasement of Hitler in the late 1930s had. NATO should train, arm and equip the Ukrainian Army to defend its territory from Russian aggression in addition to the other recommendations delineated earlier in this chapter. The bottom line is that Vladimir Putin must understand that North American and Europe will not tolerate his proclivity to invade neighboring countries.

Then there is the case of Georgia, where the Russian attack of 2008 derailed attempts for this nation to seek integration into NATO and the EU. A plan should be developed

by NATO to get Georgia back on its membership plan. Until this is developed, we are in effect yielding to Moscow the strategic initiative with the message that its use of military force was/is successful in imposing its will on neighboring states.

There are no easy solutions to the challenge that Moscow poses to the stability of Europe. The nearly seventy years of peace that most of Europe has enjoyed is unprecedented in its history. This stable environment, which was largely provided by the United States, is sometimes taken for granted by our European Allies. Clearly they must do more to maintain this peace and security. Yet, the United States should not put this peace at risk by reducing its presence in Europe. The surest way to deter aggression directed against the Baltics, is a viable American deterrence force forward deployed in the Baltics. With this, there will be clarity in the halls of the Kremlin, and in the mind of Vladimir Putin, of the resolve of the United States to ensure a Europe whole and free. Although maintaining such a credible force is costly, the rewards of the commitment are well worth the investment.⁴⁰⁵

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