# Considering Russia

## EMERGENCE OF A NEAR PEER COMPETITOR

Edited by Matthew R. Slater, Michael Purcell, and Andrew M. Del Gaudio

Foreword by George M. Dallas

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# Contents

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## Preface

## Introduction

## Chapter 1

## Chapter 2

## Chapter 3

# Illustrations

# Table

# Chronology

1990–91:        Mikhail S. Gorbachev served as the eighth and final president of the Soviet Union

1991:            Fall of the Soviet Union and end of Cold War

1991–99:        Boris N. Yeltsin served as first president of Russia with Vladimir V. Putin as prime minister (1999–2000)

1999–2000:      Yeltsin resigns, names Putin as acting president; Putin subsequently wins early presidential election

2003:            Rose Revolution, Georgia; Mikheil Saakashvili assumes presidency

2004:            Orange Revolution, Ukraine

2005:            Tulip Revolution, Kyrgyzstan

2006–8:          Georgian and Russian disputes intensify

2008:            Russo-Georgian War

2008–12:        Dmitry A. Medvedev took office as the third president of Russia with Vladimir Putin taking the position of prime minister

2012–present:   Putin takes office as the fourth president of Russia

2014–present:   Crimea annexation and Russian military intervention in Ukraine

# Foreword

## Colonel George M. Dallas, USMC (Ret)

I began my service in the U.S. Marine Corps well before the Soviet hammer and sickle flag was lowered for the last time over the Moscow Kremlin on 25 December 1991. As an artillery officer who spent his professional youth preparing to engage in large-scale industrial war against the Soviet Union, the idea that I, on the 25th anniversary of that earth-shaking moment, would serve as the director of the Marine Corps University's Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL) seems unlikely in hindsight. When General James N. Mattis, then serving as the commanding general of Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC), signed the charter that established CAOCL in 2006, his intent was to ensure that the essential nature of the human dimension of conflict was never forgotten. This publication, which draws on the professionalism of Marine Corps University's (MCU) Command and Staff College faculty, the intellectual curiosity of its students, and CAOCL's regional, linguistic, and cultural expertise, is proof that the Marine Corps continues to benefit from his wisdom.

This collection of papers helps us understand the implications for strategy and military planning behind Russia's failure to integrate, as was maybe too naively expected, into the Euro-Atlantic and global economic and security architecture. To the contrary, Russia's renewed assertiveness has created what might look like a new adversarial geopolitical context. This unexpected reality prompted our authors to analyze once again Russian military capability, tactics, and operational concepts, both through the contemporary filter of events in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria, as well as the historical legacy of the Soviet Union. All of the authors, whether writing about the idea of hybrid warfare or the potential for conventional conflict in the Baltic region, uncover the continuities and novelties of the current situation. They also offer recommendations grounded in their professional experience with U.S. security policy as well as the Marine Corps.

This publication is, in large part, a validation of MCU's strategic goal of pursuing greater academic outreach to leverage scholarship, research, publishing, and learning opportunities to support the Marine Corps, the broader national security audience, and the general

public. While the issues tackled in these pages appear difficult and demanding, it should be encouraging to all Marines that the Corps and its supporters have positioned the institution well to adapt and overcome emerging threats. The depth and breadth of the topics addressed here, from Russia's military policy in the Arctic to the history of Soviet partisan warfare, are proof that MCU continues to provide all the necessary components to allow future leaders to hone their critical and creative thinking skills against the most complex challenges that face the Corps today and into the future.

# Preface

Dr. Matthew R. Slater, LtCol Michael Purcell (Ret), and LtCol Andrew M. Del Gaudio (PhD)

In 2014, the Russian Federation appeared to many Western observers to have reemerged on the international stage demonstrating an intent and capability to act as a great power in a way that had not been seen since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. This evolution began with the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, the first one hosted in Russia since the end of the Cold War, continued through the invasion and annexation of Crimea, and ended with pro-Russian separatists in control of most of the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. The world had largely looked past previous Russian violations of Estonian sovereignty through cyberattacks in 2007 and its conventional invasion of Georgia in August 2008; however, as the lights faded on the Olympics and "little green men" appeared on the Crimean Peninsula, it became clear that increased Russian assertiveness was the new norm. Many Western observers saw both something fundamentally innovative in the way Russia waged "ambiguous warfare" in Ukraine and the new cracks in European security architecture.

Is Russia the new Soviet Union starting another Cold War, as suggested by some analysts? Or is this "new Cold War" a far more dangerous time because the West has forgotten how to understand and deal with Russia, and the nuclear dimension of the conflict, in the way it did during the Soviet period? It seems clear that, if the West fails to invest the time necessary to regain knowledge from 1991, a failure to understand Russia could lead to a dangerous dynamic of escalation and strategic miscalculation. Vladimir Putin once contended that the greatest tragedy of the twentieth century was the dissolution of the Soviet Union. From a Western perspective, there might be some truth to this argument in that it led to a sense of apathy about the need to understand and account for Russia's interests and the potential for compromising security in Europe.

In 2015, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph F. Dunford Jr., emphasized the need to understand Russia again when he stated, "If you want to talk about a nation that could pose an existential threat to the United States, I'd have to point to Russia.

If you look at their behavior, it's nothing short of alarming."[1] Months before, in February 2015, CNA—with the assistance of retired U.S. Marine Corps General James N. Mattis and Brigadier General Michael S. Groen, the director of Marine Corps Intelligence—called together subject-matter experts from inside and outside the Service to discuss recent Russian military actions in Crimea and the eastern Ukraine to determine: (1) how the Russians were operating and (2) what the Marine Corps should do to prepare for this "new generation" warfare. The product of this conference was CNA's report on Russia's ambiguous warfare.[2] Because of the significance to the Marine Corps specifically, and to policy makers generally, the editors of the Marine Corps University Press worked with CNA to republish a revised version of the report; the two intended to facilitate the ongoing debate about the meaning of Russian General Valery V. Gerasimov's work, "The Value of Science Is in Prediction," a document that supposedly outlines Russia's perspective on its use of new generation warfare.[3] In conjunction with the rerelease of the CNA report, the Marine Corps Command and Staff College, in collaboration with the Marine Corps Center for Advanced Operational Culture and Learning, and the Marine Corps University Press facilitated a guest discussion panel on 7 April 2016. This event allowed the Command and Staff student body an opportunity to test the value of the concept of ambiguous warfare against conventional and institutional knowledge about the art and science of war.[4] Primarily, the participants and observers concluded that ambiguous warfare brought nothing new to the study of war, nor could Gerasimov's work be thought of as the new "Russian doctrine," despite the desire of some in the West to label it as such. In many ways, the collective weight of these efforts lit a fire of interest with a generation of leaders who have known nothing but their own experiences from the small wars of Iraq and Afghanistan.

In addition to these efforts, Command and Staff students, in the tradition of Lieutenant General James C. Breckinridge, set forth to, yet again, explore and understand Russia, even as that country's bombs fell in Syria as part of a new campaign. The body of work assembled in this occasional paper is the academic fruit of several individual and collective

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[1] Dan Lamothe, "Russia Is Greatest Threat to the U.S., Says Joint Chiefs Chairman Nominee Gen. Joseph Dunford," *Washington Post*, 9 July 2015.

[2] Mary Ellen Connell and Ryan Evans, *Russia's "Ambiguous Warfare" and Implications for the U.S. Marine Corps* (Arlington: CNA, 2015), republished in *MCU Journal* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 30–45, https://doi.org/10.21140/mcuj .2016070102.

[3] Originally published in Russian in Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in Prediction," *Voenno-promyshlennyi kur'er* (*Military-Industrial Courier*), 27 February 2013. The English translation can be found in *Military Review,* January–February 2016, 1.

[4] The Russian ambiguous warfare panel consisted of Maria Snegovaya, Ryan Evans, and Michael Kofman. The panel was moderated by LtCol Del Gaudio, then-faculty member of Command and Staff College.

efforts from Command and Staff College. The college's Advanced Studies Program explored Russian actions in the Arctic and northern Europe through the lens of potential future scenarios in the context of Russian strategy and military capabilities. Throughout the course of the regular curriculum, many students were drawn to deeper engagement with Russian and Soviet history through the elective program and in their own reading.

As the students learned throughout the academic year, the study of history provides a venue to develop judgment for the future, and one observation in this case quickly becomes clear to the student of war and history. Current Russian actions are consistent with its past, and little it is doing now has not been done already. When considering current Russian actions in Eastern Europe, Ukraine, and Syria, one cannot ignore what Russia has observed at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war. In many ways, Russia's recent campaign in Syria highlights interesting similarities to 1936 Germany's actions in Spain. In Spain, Germany once again learned to project and support tactical formations on campaign over great distances, skills it needed for the 1939 invasion of Poland. History provides the student with an instructive narrative, but responsibility rests with the student to interpret and understand the application of the narrative in the current context. To this end, students of the art and science of war are ill-advised to cease their quest to understand the nature of war or its ever-changing character.

The contributions of the students contained herein would not have been possible without the excellent mentorship of the military and civilian faculty members of the Command and Staff College under the leadership of the director, Colonel Steven J. Grass and the dean, Dr. Charles D. McKenna (LtCol, USA, Ret). The efforts of the Advanced Studies Program were led by Commander Russell Evans, USN, Lieutenant Colonel Haakon Wahroe of the Norwegian Army, and Drs. Anne Louise Antonoff and James Joyner. The Center for Advanced Operational Culture and Learning provided essential knowledge and coordination with the external academic community to facilitate the Russian ambiguous warfare panel for the wider Command and Staff student body. Lastly, many thanks to Dr. Alexandra Kindell of Marine Corps University Press, who provided the initial spark and the finishing touches to these efforts and brought them to the reader in this current, and most timely, edition.

# Introduction

## Russia's Emerging Security Strategy

Dr. Matthew R. Slater

For many Americans outside of the foreign policy community, the end of the Cold War signified a victory over its only real foe in the post-World War II era. Because the victors write history, prior conflicts, such as Vietnam and Korea, could now be freely interpreted as triumphs attributable to the West's strategy of containment. Americans celebrated the vindication of democracy, typified by Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), while Russia fell into political and economic disarray. Moreover, new Russian leaders implemented reforms to replace the domestically perceived failures of *perestroika* (rebuilding) and *glasnost* (openness) that indicated a new and positive direction for U.S.-Russian relations. This optimism began to dissipate when Americans met Vladimir Putin, the hawkish, dominating personality serving as its current president.

Events of the previous 10 years demonstrated that things were not so simple. In 2009, during the presidency of Dmitry A. Medvedev, analyst Jeffrey Mankoff noted, "the West must get used to dealing with a new, more powerful, and more confident Russia that has not entirely freed itself of the baggage accumulated during its imperial and Soviet past."[1] Since then, analysts are even more explicit about the Medvedev-Putin era. In the months prior to the publication of this project, former Navy admiral and North Atlantic Treaty Organiza-

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[1] Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Middlefield, 2012), 310.

tion (NATO) Commander James G. Stavridis wrote about the "New Cold War" with Russia for *Foreign Policy* and he is not alone in describing the reemergence of the Cold War.[2]

This occasional paper generally focuses on the reemergence of Russia as a global player in terms of its growing military capability, but more importantly the will of its political leadership to reestablish a regional sphere of influence. The following papers are written from the perspective of students studying at the U.S. Marine Corps University's Command and Staff College (CSC) located in Quantico, Virginia. The authors address how Russia's assertiveness may manifest itself by domination of the Baltic states, expansion in the Arctic, and reanimating its Cold War global competition with America. These topics are widely covered in the academic forum, but here readers have the opportunity to get insight from military leaders who will have to grapple with the new Russia.

In the first paper, "Russian Military Reform, Exercises, and Current Operations: Indicators of Future Actions?," Major Jason C. Armas compares views about Russian strategic goals. The author argues that President Putin's strategic end state is to reassert control over the "near abroad" and to eventually assume full control of the former Soviet space. If this is the case, how should the United States respond to Russia as a new but familiar adversary in Europe, and also in other regions throughout the world?

In contrast to Armas's discussion, Major A. J. Goldberg, in the second selection, narrows the conversation down to the regional level. In "Baltic Flashpoint: Collective Defense for the Twenty-First Century," he warns that Russia is an emerging regional threat, and as a result, NATO may need to rediscover quickly its raison d'être. Would NATO risk broader conflict, or even a nuclear confrontation with Russia, by defending the Baltic states? If NATO plans to defend the Baltic states, what strategies should be employed to deter a potential attack?

Putin's newly energetic foreign policy likely has ramifications in other regions than the Baltics and Eastern Europe. The thinning ice in the Arctic opens new maritime passages for commerce, including the Northwest Passage, Transpolar route, and Northern Sea route (figure 1). Not only does this create more efficient sea lanes from the Pacific to the Atlantic, but it also opens the Arctic seabed for resource exploitation. Major Stephen E. DeTrinis explores these issues in his contribution titled, "Cold War Redux: Shaping the Arctic as Strategic Maneuver Space." He offers potential courses of action for how to address Russia's growing presence in the Arctic and other regions.

Security analysts are taking a hard look at the unconventional methods employed against Georgia and Ukraine by Russian forces. The final two papers in this volume pro-

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[2] Ibid.; James Stavridis, "Are We Entering a New Cold War?," *Foreign Policy*, 17 February 2016; and James Stavridis, "Avoiding the New Cold War with Russia," *Foreign Policy*, 20 April 2016.

Figure 1. Arctic sea routes
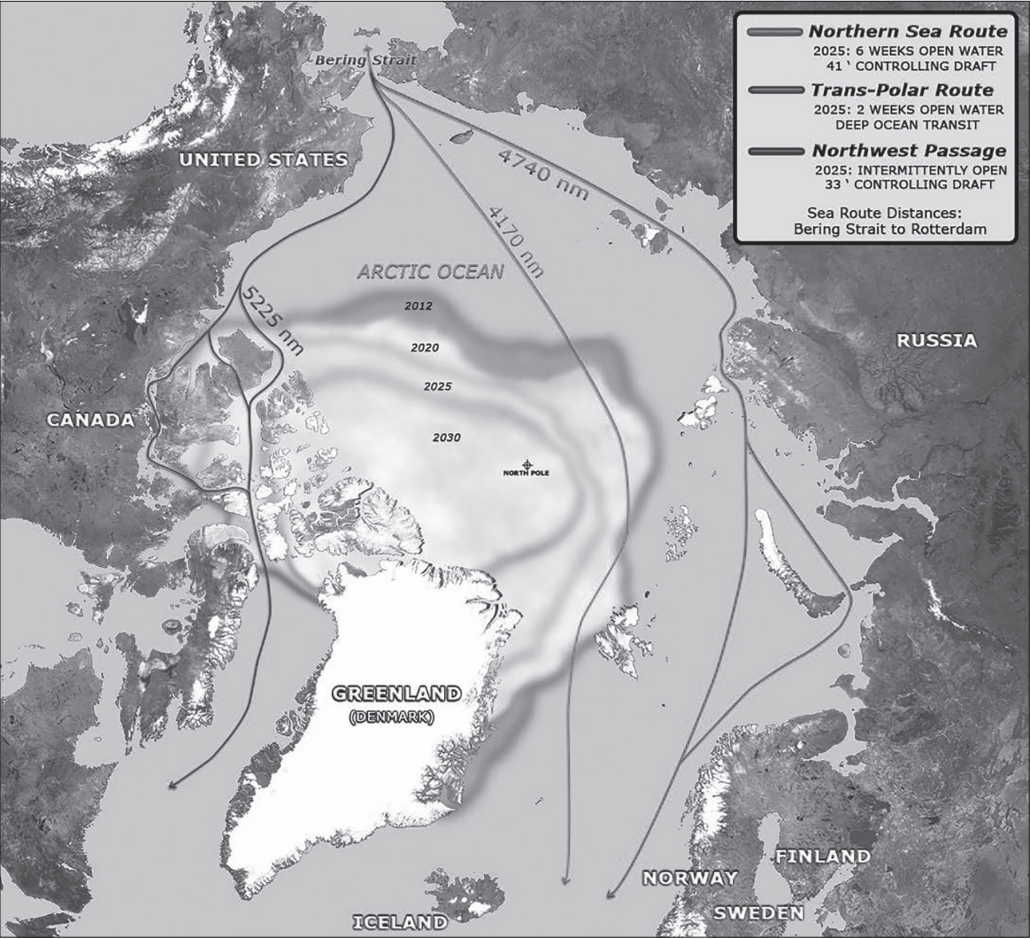


Official U.S. Navy map.

vide critiques of these methods referred to as either ambiguous or nonlinear warfare. In the first, readers will see how Major Anthony Mercado's paper, "The Evolution of Modern Russian Nonlinear Warfare," emphasizes the consistency of the Russian appreciation for the application of unconventional and other nonmilitary means of coercion from World War II through contemporary conflict by exploring the extensive Russian and Soviet history of experimenting with and employing what is now often referred to as nonlinear warfare. Then, Major Isaac D. Moore shifts the focus in "Russia's Military Resurgence and Adoption of Nonlinear Warfare: Comprehension and Response" by attempting an inclusive an-

swer to the question "How should we perceive and respond to Russia's military resurgence and adoption of nonlinear warfare?" This inquiry leads him to recommend that the United States and NATO take immediate action to confront this unconventional threat or risk further Russian aggression in the region.

Finally, Lieutenant Colonel Andrew M. Del Gaudio presents a particularly timely argument that, no matter what technological advances are on the horizon, geography and key terrain continue to play an essential role in strategy. Del Gaudio argues that nowhere else has the meaning of resurgent Russian power in relation to an adversary's physical geography been more important than in the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. He then guides the reader through a historical overview of how the geography of the Baltics has affected the conduct and outcome of prior conflicts in the region.

The tone presented by this selection of papers reflects a dramatic worsening in the relationship between NATO and Russia as well as the reemergence of Russia as an international actor that can foil U.S. military plans. As a result, U.S. and European hopes for an economically liberal and politically democratic Russia constructively integrated into global institutions seem naïve in retrospect. Although the prospect of renewed engagement with Russia should never be completely dismissed, the West must also consider the implications of a possible return to a security environment anchored by the concept of mutually assured destruction. In the near term, it seems almost a certainty that Russia will continue to pursue an increased separation of a Russian sphere of influence. These papers provide a broad look at how future military leaders perceive the real and potential Russian threat and their ideas and recommendations about how the U.S. military should adapt and respond to this challenge.

## Chapter 1

# Russian Military Reform, Exercises, and Current Operations

## Indicators of Future Actions?

Major Jason C. Armas

The president of the Russian Federation, Vladimir V. Putin, stated that "The breakup of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century."[1] This statement may illuminate the grand strategy of President Putin, although scholars continue to debate his final vision for modern-day Russia. Many scholars, such as Vera Zakem, Paul Saunders, and Daniel Antoun, assess the Russian grand strategy as one that includes the return of control of ethnic Russian territories and of global superpower status to Russia. They have labeled Putin's current actions as "mobilizing compatriots," using ethnicity as the link to Putin's grand strategy.[2] The Brookings Institution's Lilia Shevtsova advances this theory by claiming that Russian actions in the former Soviet space are a continuation of the anti-Western rhetoric espoused by Putin himself, and that Putin's Soviet KGB (*Komitet Gosudarstvennoi Bezopanosti*) background explains his ultimate goals.[3] Other scholars, such as Bruce Pitcairn Jackson, Nikolas K. Gvosdev, and Christopher Marsh, disagree and interpret Putin's moves

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[1] Vladimir Putin, "Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation" (speech, Moscow, the Kremlin, 25 April 2005).

[2] Vera Zakem, Paul Saunders, and Daniel Antoun, *Mobilizing Compatriots: Russia's Strategy, Tactics, and Influence in the Former Soviet Union* (Arlington, VA: CNA, 2015), 1.

[3] Lilia Shevtsova, "The Russia Factor," *Journal of Democracy* 25, no. 3 (July 2014): 76–84, https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2014.0038.

as less of a return to power and more as an attempt to stabilize Russia's struggling economy.[4] They view this as Putin's attempt to bolster Russia's current position to avoid collapse.

To better understand Russia's potential courses of action in either case, it is important to appreciate the evolution of its current military capability. This paper will examine the issue by dividing the resurrection of Russian security forces into three phases: (1) decline and reform, (2) implementation of reforms and exercises, and (3) operational application. The exploration of recent changes to force structure and doctrine may shed some light on Putin's strategic goals and the tactics he uses to achieve them. As demonstrated in recent military actions in Crimea and Syria, these changes have helped Putin and his military leaders create a more functional, and thus more potentially dangerous, armed force that increasingly positions Russia as a near-peer competitor with the United States.

## Decline and Reform, 1991-2000

To understand the current state of the Russian military, it is important to review the reforms that have taken place since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation were created on 7 May 1992, roughly four months after the collapse of the Soviet Union. There were fundamental conceptual and functional problems with the military, including mission focus, readiness and command structure, and the possession of vast quantities of obsolete equipment.

The new Russian government inherited a military force designed to fight a war of attrition against NATO on the plains of Europe. The force structure relied on mobilization, so as Aleksey Gayday discusses in his study of Russian military reform, "Of those 132 divisions, only 20 were kept at about 70 per cent [*sic*] of their full strength in terms of personnel and equipment. The rest were reduced or skeleton-strength formations."[5] The command structure was extremely top heavy. The majority of true personnel strength was at the command structure level, not the troop level, leaving empty ranks led by fully staffed commands. The Soviet military had many variations in their tables of equipment, leaving the Russian Armed Forces with multiple versions of the same obsolete equipment. Finally, the Russian Armed Forces suffered from a lack of capability to maintain the large arsenals and supplies it had in storage. Since the Soviet model relied on mobilization, the importance of stockpiling equipment and supplies created an abundance of supplies that required a large number

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[4] Nikolas K. Gvosdev and Christopher Marsh, *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors* (Los Angeles: CQ Press, 2014), 5.

[5] Aleksey Gayday, "Reform of the Russian Army," in Dmitri Boltenkov et al., *Russia's New Army*, ed. Mikhail Barabanov (Moscow: Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, 2011), 11.

of people and amount of money to maintain, both of which the current structure did not have.[6]

Knowing that they could not address all these issues at once, the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the General Staff of the Armed Forces created the "mobile forces" in the 1990s with the intent of moving in the right direction. The mobile force was a motorized rifle brigade manned at 95–100 percent strength with a full table of organization of equipment. These independent motorized rifle brigades would put an end to relying on mobilization to fill the ranks of their military, and the MOD leadership believed this would create a fully professionalized military that did not rely on conscription.[7] Despite these efforts, the First Chechen War (1994–96) highlighted again the need for military reform after the display of Russian military weakness and overall failure of the campaign. By the end of 1996, public support in Russia was so low for the Chechen War that the populace wanted an immediate withdrawal from the region.[8] Then-President Boris N. Yeltsin led new rounds of reform, this time, by making structured changes to the military. This ended in failure again with the Second Chechen War (1999–2000), setting the stage for the presidential election of Vladimir Putin in 2000 and an agenda that specifically focused on rebuilding Russian Armed Forces.[9]

## Implementation of Reforms and Exercises, 2001-8

The second stage of reforms took place after the election of Putin, who made military reform a top priority.[10] Putin began his changes slowly; the military establishment supported him and he knew that radical reforms, such as cutting a large number of high-ranking generals in a top-heavy organization, might cause them to withdraw their support. Despite Putin's goal to improve the armed forces, the military was one of the largest obstacles to reform. Knowing that the upper echelon of officers had the most to lose, especially with the amount of corruption nested in the military elite, Putin had to build his own power base before making major changes. Putin nearly doubled the military budget from 218.9 Rubles to

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[6] Ibid.

[7] David M. Glantz, "The Continuing Influence of Non-Linear Warfare on Russian Force Structuring," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 9, no. 2 (June 1996): 335–75, https://doi.org/10.1080/13518049608430237.

[8] Mike Bowker, "Conflict in Chechnya," in *Russian Politics under Putin*, ed. Cameron Ross (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004), 255.

[9] Athena Bryce-Rogers, "Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War," *Demokratizatsiya* 21, no. 3 (July 2013): 342.

[10] "[D]iscussions of military reform have been going on in our country for quite a while—but unfortunately, there has been little headway in this respect. I hope very much that we will be able to secure positive changes." Zoltan Barany, *Democratic Breakdown and the Decline of the Russian Military* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 127.

573 billion ($3.2–8.6 billion U.S. dollars) in 2001–7, but despite the increase, there was little change or improvement to equipment and weaponry.[11] Using the results of an MOD audit to identify corruption in the ranks of the military elite, Putin embarked on what Russian military experts call the "greatest transformation of the Russian military since the Red Army."[12]

Putin's most crucial reform came in 2004 when he modified defense law and formally established the defense minister and the Defense Ministry above the General Staff.[13] This reform not only established civilian oversight over the General Staff, it legitimized the position of the defense minister and gave him operational command and control of the armed forces. As Athena Bryce-Rogers points out in her study of Russian military reform following the Russo-Georgian War (2008), "With the General Staff subordinate to the Defense Ministry, the appointment of civilian masters—particularly that of Anatoly Serdyukov in 2007—became incredibly important for spearheading change."[14] Defense Minister Serdyukov represents a significant shift as the selection to this position, mainly due to the fact that he was an outsider to the military; Serdyukov's previous position had been with the tax ministry. As Roger McDermott, a senior fellow at the Jamestown Foundation, highlights, "Within the first three years of Serdyukov's appointment, he retired or fired senior officers from the top 34 positions on a total of 44 occasions; additionally, three officers within the top 34 posts remained in their posts."[15] This catalyst for change reached its pinnacle in the 2008 war with Georgia; Serdyukov had immediate influence in the Russian military, but the war in Georgia eliminated opposition to reform and highlighted the importance and urgency for change in the Russian Armed Forces.

## Operational Application, 2008-16

On 7 August 2008, Georgian military forces, after months of exchanging artillery salvos with the breakaway region of South Ossetia, drove across the border in an attempt to seize the South Ossetia capital of Tskhinvali.[16] The Georgian forces were stopped short of the capital by the defending forces from South Ossetia. By 9 August, Russian military forces, using armor and motorized infantry, were on the move and crossing into Ossetia in support

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[11] Bryce-Rogers, "Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War," 343.

[12] Ibid., 345.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Roger N. McDermott, Bertil Nygren, and Carolina Vendil Pallin, ed., *The Russian Armed Forces in Transition: Economic, Geopolitical, and Institutional Uncertainties* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 142–45.

[16] George Friedman, "The Russo-Georgian War and the Balance of Power," *Geopolitical Weekly*, Stratfor.com, 12 August 2008.

of the South Ossetia defense of the capital. Russia viewed the action as its responsibility to respond to Georgian aggression against the inhabitants of South Ossetia.

Without hesitation, the Russian military responded, as explained by Stratfor Chief Intelligence Officer George Friedman, "over the next 48 hours, the Russians succeeded in defeating the main Georgian force and forcing a retreat. By Sunday, Aug. 10, the Russians had consolidated their position in South Ossetia."[17] With the momentum, the Russian forces continued their offensive south into Georgia, attacking on two axes, toward the Georgian capital of Tbilisi. The Russian forces made it within approximately 40 miles of Tbilisi before stopping operations. With the primary objectives of the Russian counteroffensive met, the Russians knew their military execution was adept, but the overall execution of the operation still relied heavily on outdated Soviet-era tactics. The military success appeared quite shallow in that, should the war have lasted longer than five days or had NATO allies decided to commit on the battlefield, the results more than likely would have been drastically different.

Putin achieved his strategic goals in the 2008 war with Georgia, but at the operational and tactical levels, the Russian military could not hide deep-rooted problems that needed immediate and arguably major reforms. In late 2008, the Russian military—fresh off of the Georgian battlefield—conducted a full after action report focusing on the problems it faced in its latest campaign. Ineffective command and control, lack of combat readiness of military personnel, and aging technology presented the Russian military with multiple problems in Georgia. If not for Russia's superior numbers, these issues would have played a significant role in the outcome.[18] More reforms occurred as a direct result of the Russian military's execution on the battlefield in Georgia. This wave of reforms was the most profound, and transformed a second-tier force to a military capable of projecting power in the European Union's and NATO's spheres of influence.

Russian Defense Minister Serdyukov unveiled his military reforms on 14 October 2008. He claimed they were the most radical reforms since the end of World War II and began them with the changes he felt would take the longest to accomplish.[19] "First, increasing professionalism by overhauling the education of personnel and cutting the number of conscripts; second, improving combat-readiness with a streamlined command structure and additional training."[20] Upgraded military technology, or *rearmament*, would be a long-term

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[17] Ibid.

[18] Gregory P. Lannon, "Russia's New Look: Army Reforms and Russian Foreign Policy," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 24, no. 1 (February 2011): 39, https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2011.549037.

[19] Bryce-Rogers, "Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War," 355.

[20] Gustav Gressel, *Russia's Quiet Military Revolution, and What It Means for Europe* (London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2015), 3.

goal of the MOD, but not a priority in the initial phases of the reforms facing the Russian military. Officer ranks, both at the staff officer and general staff levels, were greatly reduced, focusing on a structure that reduced the number of decision makers at the top and created more line officers at the lower echelon. The professionalism of the officer corps continued to grow with an increase in officer pay coupled with a greater demand for management, leadership, and commitment from these officers. The goal was a combat-ready professional force of elite forces, paratroopers, naval infantry, and special forces instead of a large, mobilized, conscripted force.[21]

Removing the "paper tiger" units was the second focus. From 1991 to 2008, the Russian military still required mobilization to fill its ranks in times of crisis. As a result, divisions maintained a staff at 50–70 percent, typically with multiple regiments left unmanned. This would require cobbling units together by using "patchwork" to fill enough personnel until the mobilization of the main force was complete. The current reforms require high combat readiness of the combat brigades; these brigades have a strength of approximately 5,500 personnel focused on independent and flexible operations for a shorter deployment period and trained to face the more common asymmetric battlefield of today. The Russians converted 203 divisions to 83 fully manned and equipped brigades by 2009, drastically reducing the size of the overall force but exponentially increasing capacity.[22]

The final step in the streamlining process was to turn the traditional military districts into true joint force commands. The new structure gave the military districts control over ground, air, and naval forces and removed competing levels of hierarchy.[23] These joint force commanders created unity of command across all services and removed the coordination issue that caused so many problems during the Russo-Georgian War in 2008.[24]

## Proof of Concept: Crimea and Syria

The two most recent Russian conflicts—the annexation of the Crimea and support operations in Syria—validate Russian efforts to reform its military. The offensive in Crimea was far from a sudden emotional reaction to protect ethnic Russians. The growth of the Black Sea Fleet and the Russian naval influence in the Mediterranean are two important parts of Putin's strategic agenda, making Russian control of Sevastopol crucial. As it stood, the Russians were unable to increase the size of their naval forces in Sevastopol without Ukrainian

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Lannon, "Russia's New Look," 39–40.

[23] Gressel, *Russian's Quiet Military Revolution, and What It Means for Europe*, 4.

[24] Ibid.

approval. Throughout 1990–2000, Russian influence in Crimea was strong, and critical government actors were sympathetic to Moscow. This influence began to wane throughout the 2000s and was reaching a critical tipping point in 2013 as the political situation in Ukraine moved toward European Union (EU) inclusion. The EU and the United States characterized the color revolutions as peaceful prodemocratic protests, though the Russians contend that these "revolutions" were a subversive move by the West to undermine Russian regional influence. The West's enthusiastic support of regional political change worked in Putin's favor by supporting his victimization narrative. Many credit nonlinear warfare tactics for Russian success in the Crimea that included the use of "partisan teams . . . in unmarked uniforms . . . to take control of key infrastructure. . . . [and] information warfare techniques were applied to persuade Ukrainian forces to switch sides."[25]

Crimea's importance is tied directly to the Russian Black Sea Fleet and an increase in the Russian influence on the near abroad and beyond through the use of naval forces. Dmitry Gorenburg, a prominent analyst of Russian strategy, states that "In March 2013, Vladimir Putin announced plans to establish a Mediterranean naval task force, with up to 10 combat ships permanently operating in the region. The core of this force, including the command element, is expected to come from the Black Sea Fleet once that fleet has been modernized."[26] Less than a year later, in February 2014, Russia annexed Crimea through a smartly executed plan that started with the disruption of the current Crimean government, followed quickly by Russian separatists rising up, and finally, concluding with Russian naval infantry and special forces seizing control of key infrastructure.

Following the blueprint in Crimea, Russian military action in eastern Ukraine began with an asymmetric, or hybrid, counteraction. These well-placed pro-Russian separatist forces were well synchronized with conventional forces, working toward the ultimate goal of preventing the consolidation of a pro-Western government in Ukraine. The success of the Crimean operation had and continued to place the Baltic states on alert. As Gorenburg observed, "Baltic leaders see Russia's intervention in Ukraine as a potentially serious precedent for future Russian actions against the Baltic States."[27] Russia's vow to protect ethnic Russians abroad generated particular concern because of large Russian minority populations in Estonia and Latvia. Subsequent naval maneuvers in the Baltic Sea were interpreted by Baltic states' governments as a method to place pressure on their countries.

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[25] Connell and Evans, *Russia's "Ambiguous Warfare" and Implications for the U.S. Marines Corps*, 9–10.
[26] Dmitry Gorenburg, "The Impact of the Crimea Annexation on Russian Naval Interests," *Russian Military Reform* (blog), 25 September 2014.
[27] Dmitry Gorenburg, "Reassuring the Baltic States," *Russian Military Reform* (blog), 1 October 2014.

The outcome of the military campaign in Syria is very different from that in Ukraine and Crimea, but still aligned with Russia's long-term strategic goals. The Syrian campaign served the purpose of being a vetting process for the Russian military's reforms and demonstrated its capacity to conduct expeditionary operations and likely boost international sales of Russian defense equipment. The campaign validated years of reform for the Russian Armed Forces. The Syrian campaign, though small in scale, displayed a significant increase in the Russian military's capability and capacity to conduct complicated military operations far from its borders.

Creating the regional command structure enabled the Russian military to conduct well-planned and coordinated actions with coalition partners. The Russians have displayed exceptional capability and capacity to conduct a high operational tempo air campaign in support of Syrian and Iranian forces operating on the ground. This deconfliction and coordination of indirect fires, including surface and subsurface launched land-attack cruise missiles (LACMs) from the Caspian Sea, demonstrates the advanced capabilities of the Russian military command and control system. The creation and implementation of the National Defense Control Center enabled real-time information flow from operational theaters to leaders in Moscow, enhancing the speed of decision making throughout the Syrian conflict.[28]

Since the Georgian conflict in 2008, the Russians made great strides in the use of advanced weaponry in the Syrian area of operations. The Russian military employed aircraft-launched precision-guided munitions (PGMs) and surface and subsurface LACMs with success. Russian forces were targeting with the help of friendly Syrian forces and unmanned aerial vehicles. Aircraft platforms, such as the Sukhoi Su-34 Fullback strike fighter and Su-37 Flanker multirole, all-weather fighter, provided 24-hour support that conducted up to 127 sorties per day by the end of 2015.[29] Russia demonstrated a new strike capability when it launched Kalibr LACMs from diesel submarines in the Mediterranean Sea that were coordinated with Tupolev Tu-160 Blackjack bombers, Tu-95MS Bear-H strategic bombers, and Tu-22M3 Backfire C bombers, dropping both Kh-555 and Kh-101 cruise missiles and gravity bombs on targets in Syria.[30] Similar to the Germans in the 1930 Spanish Revolution, the Russians used this area of operations as an opportunity to test and evaluate the past decade of reforms—a capstone event for the Russians.

Expeditionary operations were not historically part of Russian military doctrine, so the

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[28] Ibid.

[29] In mid-November 2015, the Russian government announced additional 37 Su-34 and Su-27 aircraft, which allowed it to increase the number of daily sorties to 127. Dmitry Gorenburg, "What Russia's Military Operation in Syria Can Tell Us about Advances in Its Capabilities," PONARS Eurasia, March 2016.

[30] Gorenburg, "The Impact of the Crimea Annexation on Russian Naval Interests."

Syrian intervention represents a significant change. For example, the Soviet military was dependent on rail transportation. The Russians used the majority of their large transport aircraft and naval vessels for the operation, but also turned Turkish commercial vessels into Russian navy ships by leasing and reflagging them.[31] To support future operations, the Russians retained their naval base at Tartus and an air base at Latakia, both in Syria, as well as opening two more bases to support their efforts in Syria.

## Future Developments

More than 20 years of efforts to reform Russia's military is beginning to bear fruit. The simultaneous success and failure of the Russian campaign in Georgia was the catalyst for the most current military reforms within Russia. Though ultimately successful at the strategic level, the operation showcased many failures at the operational and tactical levels and weakened the credibility of the Russian military. Putin's push to modernize, professionalize, and streamline the Russian military was both carefully planned and intelligently implemented. Every change and every reform pushed through by Putin has been carefully thought out and crafted toward accomplishing a greater Russian vision—a return to great power status. The reforms resulted in a more Western-style, leaner force with highly trained units ready for deployment within 24 hours. Detailed planning and coordination between Russia, Syria, and Iran prior to the start of Russian operations displayed the ability of Russia to incorporate multinational support.[32] Russia's creative logistical solutions worked for the Syrian operation, but Russia has likely taken note of any shortcomings and other lessons learned and will work to increase their expeditionary capability in the near term. Russia's military has demonstrated its increased capability to conduct complex operations that span the range of military operations. From expeditionary operations in Syria to covert operations in Crimea and Ukraine, Russia has displayed an incredible leap forward with its military, making it a near peer to the United States in many military functional areas.

Retired three-star Air Force General David A. Deptula summed up Russian operations in Syria: "Essentially, Russia is using their incursion into Syria as an operational proving ground."[33] The vetting of capabilities and technologies in Syria has demonstrated to the international security system that Russia has both the capability and will to project its influence beyond the near abroad. The success of recent operations has another added benefit

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Steven Lee Myers and Eric Schmitt, "Russian Military Uses Syria as Proving Ground, and West Takes Notice," *New York Times*, 14 October 2015.

for Russia that can be summed up by the expression "everybody loves a winner." Due to the string of military and foreign policy successes, Russia is elevating its status to a competitor and, therefore, an effective counterbalance to U.S. hegemony. This not only bolsters Russia's diplomatic prestige, but also energizes Russia's lucrative arms export industry.

# Chapter 2

# Baltic Flashpoint

## Collective Defense for the Twenty-First Century

Major A. J. Goldberg

Twenty-five years after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), NATO must reorient itself to the threat of Russian aggression in Northern Europe. Planning to defend against an invasion of the Baltic states is a particularly difficult task. While it is debatable whether current Russian activity supports a call for immediate military response, the potential threat remains significant enough to warrant deliberate planning to shape the environment and provide deterrence. The United States and its NATO allies must understand the reasons for Russian aggression and how it could manifest in the Baltic region. This understanding will provide a basis for developing practical solutions to defend against such contingencies.

NATO can implement three concepts to better defend the territory and sovereignty of the Baltic countries. First, Baltic security forces must be able to offer a credible deterrent to Russian ambitions. Second, NATO should provide support by building a security network between its members and partners in the High North (specifically Finland, Sweden, and Norway) to garner efficiencies and ensure a unity of effort should there be a confrontation with the Russians. Third, NATO support to deterrence must be designed to deny Russia a "quick victory."

This paper will provide reasoned support to the preceding recommendations by examining the scope of the challenge, the historical legacy of Baltic-Russian relations, likely Russian methods for influence or aggression in the Baltics, and the resulting implications for conventional and nuclear deterrence and escalation strategies.

## NATO and the Baltics: The Scope of the Challenge

From the Arctic to the Eastern Mediterranean, Russia is probing the standing geopolitical order to gauge where opportunities exist to reassert itself as a global superpower. Due to a combination of geography, proximity, and historical precedence, the Baltic states seem particularly vulnerable to Russia's effort to challenge NATO's security guarantee to its eastern members. Russia likely views the Baltic states as the Achilles heel of the NATO alliance due to their small national defense forces, the limited footprint of NATO personnel in Northern Europe, and the logistical challenges of moving forces into the area from Western Europe. Nonetheless, based on the concept of collective defense as stated in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, other NATO member states are obliged to consider "an attack against one ally" as an attack against all allies.[1] Thus, deterring and defending against Russian aggression in the Baltic states is an essential, though difficult, task for NATO if it wants to retain its credibility in providing for the collective defense of Europe (figure 2).

The dilemma facing the alliance is that if NATO waits until Russia crosses a formal red line, it will not have time to mount an effective defense of the Baltic region. The challenge, therefore, is to find not only a convincing and credible deterrent but also, in the event of the Russians overrunning the Baltic states, to establish an effective capability for retaking the territory.

NATO will have a very limited amount of time to respond to an initial Russian attack due to the lack of natural boundaries and short distance between the Baltic states and Russia. During a series of recent wargames conducted by the Rand Corporation, analysts determined that Russia could overwhelm Baltic defense forces and press upon the Estonian and Latvian capitals within 60 hours.[2] Other estimates forecast an even swifter Russian advance upon the Baltic capitals. Czech General Petr Pavel, the acting NATO military committee chairman, states that Moscow would be able to conquer the three Baltic states—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—within 48 hours.[3]

The authors of the Rand report determined that such a swift defeat would leave NATO with three undesirable options: (1) recapture Baltic territory through a long and difficult counteroffensive, (2) escalate the conflict, or (3) "concede at least temporary defeat"

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[1] "Collective Defense–Article 5," NATO.int, North Atlantic Treaty Organization website, 16 December 2015.
[2] David A. Shlapak and Michael Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank: Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2016), 1, https://doi.org/10.7249/RR1253.
[3] Jeremy Bender, "Incoming NATO Military Committee Chairman: Russia Could Occupy the Baltics in 2 Days if It Wanted To," *Business Insider*, 28 May 2015.

Figure 2. Map of Baltic Sea
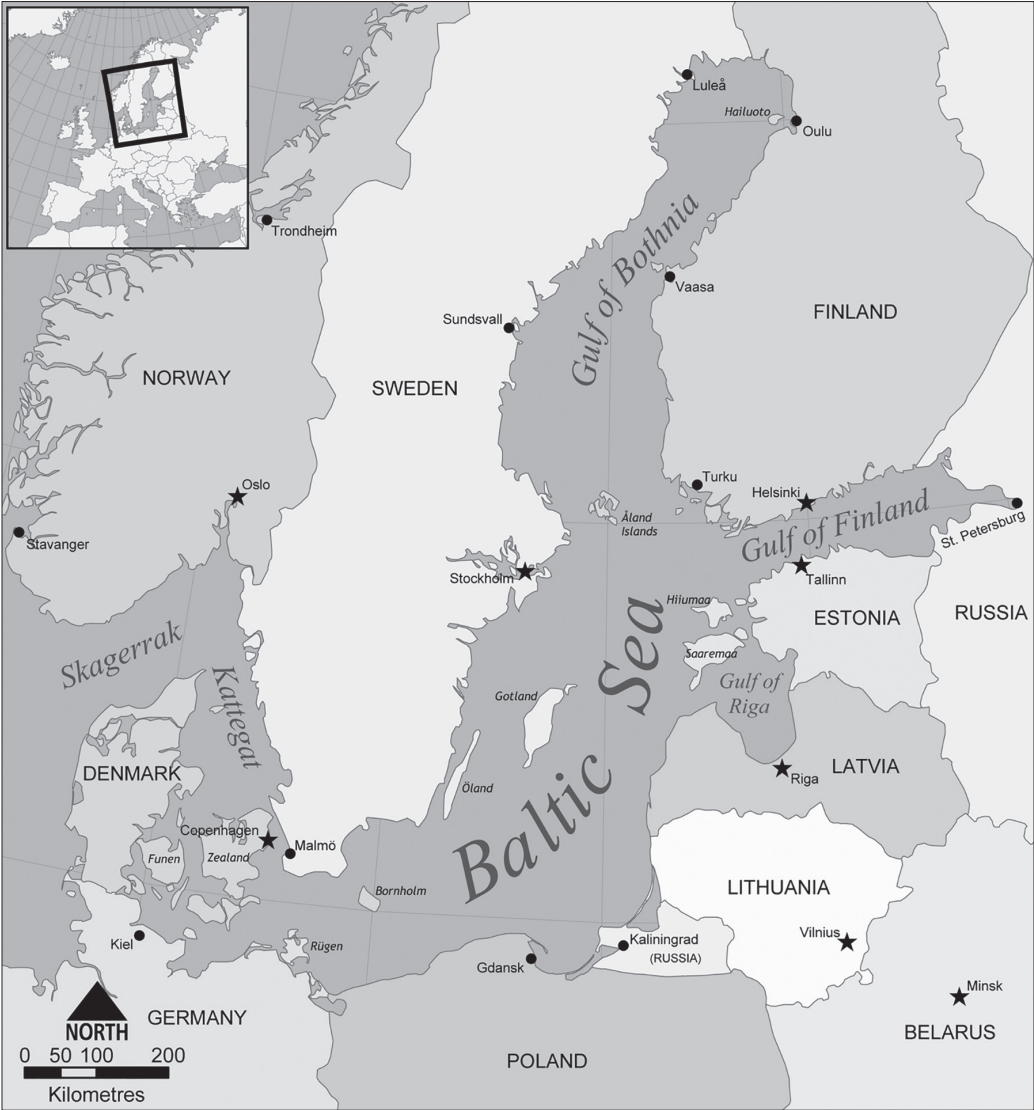


Courtesy of Norman Einstein.

and accept the "disastrous" implications for the NATO alliance and Baltic citizens.[4]

The new European front to face Russia—the "Nordic five" (Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden), the Baltic states, and Poland—is known collectively by the acronym NBP9.[5] Though all countries in the NBP9 are exposed to Russian intimidation, the Baltic states are most vulnerable to interference by the Russian government. Russia's Western Military District, located in St. Petersburg, can prepare five brigades for combat operation within a week of notification, with six more brigades ready within a month (figure 3). The rapid mobilization of Russian forces so close to the Baltic region is partially facilitated by the majority of the Russian population living west of the Ural Mountains.[6] Additionally, Russia's Western Military District can be reinforced easily with personnel and equipment from the Central and Southern Military Districts, "or by calling up mobilization reserves."[7] The Kremlin's renewed fondness for large-scale military exercises has focused on improving joint operations and a rapid response against a "highly-equipped adversary."[8] Russia will likely continue to improve its conventional capability over the next decade with the aim of creating a "modern, well-equipped military force by 2020."[9] The current threat posed by Russia, combined with its military modernization and reform program, gives NATO a narrow window of opportunity to address its deficiencies in responding to a Russian move against the Baltic states. While Russian forces are actively participating in campaigns in eastern Ukraine and Syria, NATO has the opportunity to prepare for potential future Russian aggression in Europe's High North. Deterrence of a Russian incursion into Baltic territory can only be achieved if NATO is serious about defending its member states with a credible and capable conventional force.

Moscow will likely continue to challenge NATO with the concerted use of "nontraditional military and security operations" as well as conventional forces.[10] Russia's recent campaigns in its near abroad demonstrate its comfort operating close to its own borders or in the proximity of long-standing military bases, as with the case of Syria. The Baltic

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[4] Shlapak and Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank*, 1.

[5] Edward Lucas, *The Coming Storm: Baltic Sea Security Report* (Washington, DC: Center for European Policy Analysis, 2015), 1.

[6] Jakob Hedenskog and Carolina Vendil Pallin, ed., *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective—2013* (Stockholm: FOI, Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2013), 58.

[7] Ibid., 58.

[8] Ibid., 45–47.

[9] Ibid., 145.

[10] Luke Coffey and Daniel Kochis, *The Baltic States: The United States Must Be Prepared to Fulfill Its NATO Treaty Obligations*, Backgrounder #3039 on North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation, 2015), 4.

Figure 3. Map of Russia's military districts



Courtesy of Stratfor.com, a geopolitical intelligence platform.

countries' proximity and historic significance to Russia make them an attractive target for aggression to a regime that might need to rally Russian nationalistic pride, in part, by embarrassing NATO to distract its citizens from domestic problems. An understanding of past Baltic-Russian connections between identity and foreign policy highlights their historic antagonism and can assist in predicting future conflict in the region.

## The Historical Legacy of Baltic-Russian Relations

On the premise that war is an act of force to compel a competitor to bend to one's will, this section provides the necessary attempt to gauge the will of the participants in a Baltic-Russian confrontation based on historical relationships and antagonisms.[11] Starting in the early eighteenth century, the Russian Empire slowly conquered the present-day Baltic territories through a series of military actions and land acquisitions. The Russian victory over the Swedes in 1710 provided Peter the Great with the warm-water ports of Riga in Latvia

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[11] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Elliot Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 75.

and Reval (modern-day Tallinn) in Estonia.[12] Further Russian partitions of Poland in 1772 and 1795 incorporated most of the Baltic peoples within the Russian Empire.[13] During the late eighteenth century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth became less secure, while Latvia and Estonia as sovereign nations had not yet come into existence.[14] Though Baltic territories were under Russian rule, German intellectual influence permeated Baltic culture and "supplied the intellectual underpinnings of the Baltic national movements."[15] Baltic national movements "were therefore directed towards achieving equality for the Baltic languages and cultures with those of other European peoples."[16] These early Baltic national movements aligned with Western values and shunned Eastern authority. The initial formations of Baltic national movements eventually blossomed into the drive for statehood after the turmoil of World War I, with the world community recognizing Estonian and Latvian sovereignty in 1921 and Lithuanian sovereignty in 1922.[17]

Though Russia has a history of Baltic conquest that predates the Second World War, the Soviet occupation of the Baltic states on the eve of World War II sets the stage for the strenuous relations the Baltic states share with present-day Russia. Both the Russians and the Baltic states have constructed historical narratives about the events between 1940 and 1945 that are used to galvanize the populations of their countries. For Russian foreign policy, this aspect has become known as the *humanitarian dimension*, which is based on "the principle of controlling the post-Soviet region by non-military, but quite aggressive tools" which includes "media manipulation" to broadcast an exclusively Russian portrayal of past events.[18] The Russian focus on providing a reinterpreted historical narrative through media outlets to influence events—or in their view, the protection of their historical virtuousness—was directly included in their 2008 foreign policy concept, which stated that Russia must protect against "attempts to rewrite history using it to build confrontation and provoke revanchism in global politics and to revise the outcomes of World War II."[19] This point creates an enormous amount of friction between Russia and the Baltic states, as the Russians promote the

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[12] "1710–1918—Russian Estonia," Global Security.org, 11 June 2012.

[13] James D. White, "Nationalism and Socialism in Historical Perspective," in *The Baltic States: The National Self-Determination of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*, ed. Graham Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 13.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 19.

[16] Ibid., 21.

[17] Ibid., 35.

[18] As quoted in Nerijus Maliukevičius, "Tools of Destabilization: Kremlin's Media Offensive in Lithuania," *Journal of Baltic Security* 1, no. 1, (2015): 118.

[19] Ibid.

idea that the Red Army was a *liberating* force from the Nazis during World War II, while most Baltic citizens continue to see the Soviets as having been *occupiers*.[20]

Under Russian President Putin's revised nationalistic version of history, he is also emphasizing and exaggerating the idea that the Baltic people were Nazi sympathizers.[21] A more balanced approach in viewing the predicament of the Baltic region during the Second World War is that the Baltic states were caught between Adolph Hitler's Third Reich and Joseph Stalin's Red Army in their struggle for continental dominance. During this time period, the Baltic states fell into an area "where the power and the malice of the Nazi and Soviet regimes overlapped and interacted."[22] The Baltic states, in effect, had to resist the expansionist plans of both the Germans and Soviets.[23] In June 1940, the Soviet Union occupied the newly independent Baltic states and quickly implemented a series of harsh measures against political and religious figures and groups associated with active opposition.[24] The most dramatic tactic used by the Soviets was large civilian purges, which transplanted Baltic citizens throughout the USSR. On the night of 13 June 1941, massive deportations began in all three Baltic states.[25] The Lithuanian political scientist Aleksandras Štromas writes, "It is estimated that Soviet repression and evacuations to the USSR in 1940–41 cost Lithuania 39,000, Latvia 35,000, and Estonia 61,000 citizens."[26] The indiscriminate nature of Soviet repression galvanized much of the Baltic population against Soviet rule. Many Baltic citizens were eager to take up arms against Soviet forces stationed on Baltic territory after the German invasion of the USSR. Tens of thousands of Baltic resistance fighters revolted against their Soviet occupiers and effectively used guerilla tactics to avoid direct confrontation with Soviet formations.[27]

In spring 1944, the Red Army's counterattack against Nazi Germany was fully underway, and it quickly conquered lands that it had ceded three years prior. Alexander Statiev, a Russian historian, describes Soviet forces as they approached the Baltic states: "the for-

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[20] Karsten Brüggemann and Andres Kasekamp, "Identity Politics and Contested Histories in Divided Societies: The Case of Estonian War Monuments," in *Identity and Foreign Policy: Baltic-Russian Relations and European Integration*, ed. Eiki Berg and Piret Ehin (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 51.

[21] James S. Corum, *The Security Concerns of the Baltic States as NATO Allies*, The Letort Papers (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College Press), 13.

[22] Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 384.

[23] As quoted in Aleksandras Štromas, "The Baltic States as Soviet Republics: Tensions and Contradictions," in *The Baltic States*, 90.

[24] David Kirby, "Incorporation: The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact," in *The Baltic States*, 76–79.

[25] Štromas, "The Baltic States as Soviet Republics," 86–87.

[26] Ibid., 87.

[27] Ibid., 89.

ests were full of people who had demonstrated their hostility toward the Soviet regime and who believed that this left them no option but to fight." As the Red Army closed in on Estonia, an anti-Communist militia known as the *Omakaitse* (home guard) dissolved into the wilderness, choosing to engage the Soviets with guerrilla tactics. Similarly, the *SS Jagdverband Ostland*, a composition of guerrilla units formed by the Germans from the *Latvian Wafen-SS*, became the core of resistance against the Soviets in Latvia. This was a common theme throughout the Baltics as "national guardsmen and German collaborators made the core of resistance in the Baltic provinces."[28] From 1944 to 1952, insurgencies continued against the Soviets in the Baltic states. The resistance fighters operated primarily in the large wilderness of the Baltics and received almost total support from the public. The Soviets enacted harsh penalties against urban areas of support. Soviet deportations were commonplace, with an estimated 600,000 natives relocated to Siberia during 1945–51. The guerrilla campaign eventually slowed in 1952, and an acceptance of the Soviets as occupiers of the Baltic nations became the status quo.[29]

The following 40 years of Soviet authoritarian rule over the Baltic states did not quell the deep-seated animosity against Soviet occupation or the longing for national identity that filled the hearts of Baltic citizens throughout the period of the Cold War. Further exasperating the divide was Soviet immigration policy toward the Baltic states. Russians were urged to migrate to the Baltic states to work, thus changing the ethnic makeup of the Baltic region.[30] As reported by author Marina Best, "By the time of the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the number of ethnic Russians was extremely high: Estonia with 474,843, or 30.3 percent of the total population, Latvia with 906,000 or 34 percent, and Lithuania with 344,500, or 9.4 percent."[31] The influx of Russian ethnic minorities into the Baltic region during the Cold War has had lasting implications that complicate the current relationship between the Baltic states and Russia.

Though the Baltic states gained their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the Baltic-Russian relationship continues to be turbulent socially as well as politically. In the book *Identity and Foreign Policy*, Elena Fofanova and Viatcheslav Morozov assess that Russia likens the Baltic states to the "black sheep of the European family" due to their long list of

[28] Alexander Statiev, *The Soviet Counterinsurgency in the Western Borderlands* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 98.

[29] Štromas, "The Baltic States as Soviet Republics," 93.

[30] Marina Best, "The Ethnic Russian Minority: A Problematic Issue in the Baltic States," *Verges: Germanic & Slavic Studies in Review* 2, no. 1 (2013): 34.

[31] Ibid.

alleged misbehaviors revolving around the historic narrative of the Second World War.[32] Putin has brought forth a catalog of grievances against the Baltic states, which include infringing upon the "rights" of Russian ethnic minorities, perpetuating pro-Nazi narratives that downplay the significance of the Soviet victory against the Germans, and refusing to abandon "territorial claims" on Russia. By emphasizing supposed Baltic transgressions, Russia hopes to promote itself as "an essential defining part of European civilization" and bar the assimilation of Baltic states into Western Europe.[33] In contrast, the Baltic states base their European identity on a rejection of Russian values. Therefore, both the Baltic states and Russia refute each other's "Europeaness," which plays a continuous role in their worsening political relations.[34]

Further aggravating the situation, the three Baltic states became full members of NATO and the European Union (EU) in 2004. Western policy makers viewed the decision to expand the alliance as a method to "stabilize the new Europe" and to induce former Soviet states to accept economic and social reform.[35] To the Russians, NATO enlargement was humiliating. The Baltic states had rejected Russian offers of a security guarantee in 1997 and fiercely resisted inclusion in a Russian sphere of influence.[36] This rejection by the Baltic states represented compounded denunciation coupled with the perceived disregard of Russian advice and interests in the prosecution of the Kosovo War (1998–99) and the U.S. invasion of Iraq (2003), while the United States' 2002 abandonment of the 30-year-old Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty was an embarrassment to Russian foreign policy and the country's credibility as a great power.[37] It was this series of events that finally convinced Russians that the international system was no longer bipolar, as it had been during the Cold War, and that they would have to aggressively pursue their interests from a position of weakness. Russia realized its demotion in world politics when it could no longer expect deference to its demands from the West as it pursued its own vision of the future of Europe.[38] NATO enlargement and the dismissal of Russian power fueled the Russian worldview that interprets

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[32] Elena Fofanova and Viatcheslav Morozov, "Imperial Legacy and the Russian-Baltic Relations: From Conflicting Historical Narratives to a Foreign Policy Confrontation?," in *Identity and Foreign Policy*, 28.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 29.

[35] Christopher Coker, "The West and Russia: The Challenge of Starting Anew," in *Northern Security and Global Politics: Nordic-Baltic Strategic Influence in a Post-Unipolar World*, ed. Ann-Sofie Dahl and Pauli Järvenpää (New York: Routledge, 2014), 44–45.

[36] Corum, *The Security Concerns of the Baltic States as NATO Allies*, 15.

[37] Coker, "The West and Russia," 45.

[38] Viatcheslav Morozov, "Aimed for the Better, Ended up with the Worst: Russia and International Order," *Journal on Baltic Security* 1, no. 1 (2015): 26–36.

the geopolitical landscape as "conspirological," an idea that there is "always some hidden truth behind politics." This uniquely Russian premise extols continuous cynicism about the nature of man, believing that all action is driven by greed, vanity, and a lust for power.[39] Time has passed, resentment has grown, and Russia now wants to remind the world that it is still a relevant, if not essential, force in geopolitics.

## The Art and Possibilities of Russian *Provokatsiya* (Provocation)

Russia's decision whether or not to destabilize the Baltics through ambiguous or traditional methods of warfare is dependent upon the foreign policy objectives of President Putin. Russia wants to rebuild its traditional sphere of influence in the near abroad; however, this is not Putin's only objective. According to Russian scientist and political activist Andrei Piontkovsky, Putin seeks "the maximum extension of the Russian World, the breakdown of NATO, and the discrediting and humiliation of the US as the guarantor of the security of the West."[40] Another dynamic that may prompt Putin into mounting aggressive action against the Baltic states is the drive to increase nationalist pride as a means to distract the Russian populace from domestic economic woes.[41] The Baltics represent a logical forum for Putin to pursue the above objectives because he can limit risk by using ambiguous tactics. The Russian president undoubtedly does not want to trade Moscow for Washington, DC, in a full-scale thermonuclear war. Rather, Putin will likely weigh risk against potential gain and only act when he is certain he possesses the advantage. An indistinct start to low-level activity in the Baltic region provides the Russian government with a variety of options to control the tempo and escalation of operations. Each decision Russia makes can be enhanced with additional capabilities or diluted to arrive at a course of action that provides Russian policy makers with the appropriate level of risk that they are comfortable accepting. If the initial salvo of low-level subversive activity can effectively shape the environment to Russia's advantage at a low cost, Russia may be emboldened to act more aggressively. The Kremlin's ability to gauge the degree of NATO's resolution to maintain Baltic security in a phased approach allows Russia to limit its risk. When preconditions are met, Russia has the option to introduce massive conventional forces that can rapidly outpace the NATO decision-making process, which according to Czech General Petr Pavel "are not synchronized to allow for a split-second response."[42]

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[39] Ibid., 32.

[40] Andrei Piontkovsky, "Putin's Russia as a Revisionist Power," *Journal on Baltic Security* 1, no. 1 (2015): 10.

[41] Michael Carpenter, "Baltic Defense & Security After Ukraine–Panel 1," Jamestown Foundation video, 37:16, from the Baltic Defense & Security After Ukraine: New Challenges, New Threats conference, 30 April 2015.

[42] Bender, "Incoming NATO Military Committee Chairman."

For this reason, Russian low-level action represents the most likely scenario in the Baltics. Low-level activities can be effective if they appear to be a prequel to further escalation. The Baltic states may be obliged to acquiesce to Russian demands if it appears subversive acts are just a prelude to invasion, particularly if Russia masses forces in Kaliningrad or on the Baltic's eastern border while simultaneously initiating ambiguously disguised provocative action, sometimes called *hybrid warfare*, within the Baltic states. This would be very similar to Russian tactics in the Ukraine during 2014. Security policy advisor to the president of Estonia, Merle Maigre, describes Russia's use of hybrid warfare in Ukraine as "a combination of regular and irregular forces, economic sanctions, energy blockades, political destabilization, information warfare, financial pressure, and cyber-attacks."[43]

When imagining a possible Russian-Baltic confrontation, an alarming scenario for military planners involves Russian aggression aimed to protect its small enclave of Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea. Kaliningrad is nestled between Lithuania to the north and east and Poland to the south. Historically part of former German East Prussia, Kaliningrad was to be "administered" by the Soviet Union after the Potsdam Conference of 1945. Throughout the Cold War, Kaliningrad was a heavily militarized district of the Soviet Union and was the homeport for parts of the Soviet Baltic Fleet.[44] Today, Kaliningrad remains a part of the Russian Federation, surrounded by NATO members. Kaliningrad continues to serve as the home to Russia's Baltic Sea Fleet as well as the Chernyakhovsk and Donskoye air bases; it is of tremendous strategic importance to the Russian Federation.[45] The small land mass is considered a Russian semi-exclave because, although it lacks a land connection with Russia, it does have access to the sea throughout the year.[46] Because Kaliningrad is a Russian island within the Baltic region, it is dependent upon imports from Russia that are largely delivered by rail. Russia also is dependent upon the port of Kaliningrad to export fossil fuel and other goods to client countries. Roughly 90 percent of all crude oil, refined oil products, coal, and fertilizers delivered by rail from Russia are ultimately exported from Kaliningrad.[47] The railways, which deliver Russian lifeblood to Kaliningrad, depend upon Lithuania for safe passage. This is a status quo that is likely bothersome for the Russians.

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[43] Merle Maigre, *Nothing New in Hybrid Warfare: The Estonian Experience and Recommendations for NATO,* Policy Brief (Washington, DC: German Marshal Fund of the United States, 2015).

[44] Kilian Strauss, "Crossborder Cooperation in Kaliningrad: Integrating the Russian Enclave of Kaliningrad into the Sub-Regional Structures of the Baltic Sea" (unpublished paper, Paris, 30 April 1998), 4–5.

[45] Tony Wesolowsky, "Kaliningrad, Moscow's Military Trump Card," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 18 June 2015.

[46] Artur Usanov, *External Trade of the Kaliningrad Oblast*, no. 21 (Turku, Finland: School of Economics, Pan-European Institute, 2009), 4.

[47] Ibid., 43–44.

To Russia, any act or probable threat of action against its vital supply routes to Kaliningrad would require a response. Russia has many options available to create a pretext for Russian forces to secure their lines of communication into Kaliningrad. The most likely method would be by staging what is well known in Russia as a *provokatsiya*. In English, the concept of provocation is typically used in the context of interpersonal relations in the sense of doing something to provoke a general response of anger or frustration. For Russians, provokatsiya is almost exclusively used in a political context wherein a state or intelligence agency undertakes a deliberate, often covert, action to elicit a self-defeating response from an adversary state or opposition group. For example, the provision of support to Lithuanian ultranationalist groups combined with a disinformation campaign that exaggerates the influence of ultranationalists, typically compared to Nazis, in Lithuania. Such groups potentially could be manipulated into sabotaging critical railroad junctions within Lithuania, thus, directly attacking Russian economic national interests. Russia could then seek to exploit any inconsistencies or inadequacies in Lithuania's response as justification for a conventional military intervention in defense of the vital economic interest of maintaining a secure transit corridor to Kaliningrad. For good measure, Russia also could claim it was "assisting" the Lithuanian government to root out subversive actors who threaten regional peace.

Without rapid NATO intervention, it is fairly certain that the Baltic states would quickly fall to the occupation of Russian forces. A 2014 Russian military exercise in the Central Military District demonstrated their capability to mass 65,000 troops, 177 planes, 56 helicopters, and 5,500 military vehicles within 72 hours.[48] Setting the invasion scenario aside, the mere mobilization of such a force on the border of the Baltic region potentially could force the United States to make uncomfortable concessions to the Russian government to gain explicit assurances that an incursion was not imminent.

Thus, if Russia seriously threatens or commits to a conventional military thrust in the Baltic states, it would dominate the escalation ladder by putting the onus on NATO to move to a higher and more dangerous level of response (i.e., the use of nuclear weapons or kinetic action within sovereign Russian territory).[49] The lack of NATO preparation to adequately defend the Baltic states from a Russian assault would likely compel NATO to broaden the conflict to areas outside of the Baltic territory. Initiating strikes inside Russia would no doubt be a dire decision for the United States, as events could quickly escalate to a nuclear confrontation. The decision would be complicated by domestic political concerns,

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[48] Maigre, *Nothing New in Hybrid Warfare*, 3.
[49] Lawrence Freedman, "The First Two Generations of Nuclear Strategists," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Peter Paret (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 763.

as it is unlikely that the majority of American people would consider the defense of the Baltic states worth jeopardizing the safety of U.S. population centers. Russia understands the difficulty American leaders face in maintaining both domestic and alliance unity in the face of localized aggression and may seek to exploit this vulnerability in the near future. Unfortunately, Russia's relative success using ambiguous techniques in recent years, such as provocations, without incurring a significant conventional response may have desensitized all parties to the dangers of escalation that could lead to larger conventional conflicts in the future.

## Subverting the Power of Provokatsiya

The United States stands at the crossroads of escalation dominance and credible deterrence. American reluctance to use nuclear weapons to stop a Russian invasion of the Baltics places the United States in the losing position on the escalation ladder. According to the Joint Chiefs of Staff's *Joint Operations* publication, "Deterrence should be based on capability (having the means to influence behavior), credibility (maintaining a level of believability that the proposed actions may actually be employed), and communication (transmitting the intended message to the desired audience) to ensure greater effectiveness."[50] The United States cannot rely solely on its nuclear forces or its ability to launch deep conventional strikes to deter Russia from invading the Baltics because the credibility of employment is questionable. Historian John Lewis Gaddis writes, "Deterrence, ideally, should involve expressing determination without actually having to exhibit it," yet the risks of global nuclear war are so great that they inherently detract from the credibility of any response.[51] Although the United States continues to maintain a "first use" policy, meaning that it would consider initiating nuclear strikes in response to non-nuclear aggression, Russia's volatile presence in Georgia and Ukraine supports a belief that America is not likely to risk global nuclear war without facing a direct threat to its population. The United States, in conjunction with its NATO and European allies, must have more options available to deter and, if necessary, defeat a large-scale Russian invasion of the Baltic region.

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[50] *Joint Operations*, Joint Publication 3-0 (Washington, DC: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011), V-39.
[51] John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 244.

Table 1. Estimated global nuclear warhead inventories, 2016

| Country | Warheads |
|---|---|
| United States | 7,100 |
| United Kingdom | 215 |
| France | 300 |
| Israel | 80 |
| Pakistan | 140 |
| India | 110 |
| Russia | 7,300 |
| China | 260 |
| North Korea | 8 |

Compiled from Arms Control Association data.

Figure 4. Russia's nuclear arsenal



CIA Factbook, adapted by MCUP.

After examining how the United States and its NATO allies dealt with past Russian threats, it is possible to extract useful strategies to handle present-day challenges of Baltic security. Certainly, the Soviet Union tested their resolve during the Cold War, especially in the 1960s. During that time, NATO stared down an impressive Soviet war machine poised

to storm across the Fulda Gap into West Germany. The Soviet onslaught never came and the Cold War ended without a direct engagement between the Soviets and NATO. What prevented the Soviets from attacking? One factor seems to have been the U.S. policy, promoted by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, to prevent the "nuclear threshold" from being passed and to rely on conventional means to defend Europe.[52] The roughly 250,000 American servicemembers stationed in West Germany during most of the Cold War likely gave the Soviets pause before mounting an invasion.[53]

European leaders, however, were not entirely sure they could hold back Soviet aggression with purely conventional means. War studies professor Lawrence Freedman explains that NATO countries' leaders were resistant to an entirely conventional response to Soviet action and that "[m]ore robust conventional forces for NATO might deny the Soviet Union a victory but the cost of failure to the Kremlin would be slight; Soviet territory itself would remain unscathed." Therefore, when the Russians did not need to worry about a nuclear threat, "Soviet risk calculations would be dangerously simplified."[54] European leaders feared the Soviets would be tempted to wage conventional war if the United States' nuclear guarantee was not on the table. Additionally, European governments sought to avoid increasing defense expenditures and conscription service lengths, both required to maintain a sizable conventional force in Europe.[55] Thus, in 1967, "a compromise was reached" when "NATO adopted the strategy of flexible response."[56]

The concept of flexible response holds that NATO forces would "attempt" to drive back a Soviet invasion using solely conventional means if achievable. If NATO's conventional forces were routed, a "gradual nuclear response" would be initiated to signal NATO's resolve to defend Western Europe. If this failed, a continuous climb on the escalation ladder hopefully would persuade one side or the other to cease hostilities before mutually assured destruction occurred.[57] In his book *Strategies of Containment*, John Lewis Gaddis describes flexible response (often referred to as *symmetrical containment*) as a method to provide policy makers with a wider array of options, rather than depending upon a binary choice between either escalation or embarrassment. Though the premise of flexible response provides varying levels of reaction, it lets the adversary decide the "nature and location" of combat.

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[52] Freedman, "The First Two Generations of Nuclear Strategists," 769.
[53] Tim Kane, *Global U.S. Troop Deployment, 1950–2003*, Center for Data Analysis Report #04-11 (Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation, 2004).
[54] Freedman, "The First Two Generations of Nuclear Strategists," 770.
[55] Michael Carver, "Conventional Warfare in the Nuclear Age," in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 786.
[56] Freedman, "The First Two Generations of Nuclear Strategists," 771.
[57] Carver, "Conventional Warfare in the Nuclear Age," 786.

Gaddis notes, however, that the United States has not been able to use this method well: "Despite expansionist economic theory, the United States in practice has never been able to generate the means necessary to support symmetrical containment over an indefinite period of time. Attempts to do so, as in Korea and Vietnam, have only led to frustration, disillusionment, [and] exhaustion."[58]

And yet mainly through the policy of flexible response, and perhaps some luck, the United States was able to deter a Soviet incursion into Western Europe during the Cold War. In his 1983 announcement of the Strategic Defense Initiative (a.k.a. Star Wars), President Ronald W. Reagan proclaimed, "[W]e must remain constant in preserving the nuclear deterrent and maintaining a solid capability for flexible response."[59] This statement displays the longevity of the flexible response policy and shows how it remained part of the security vernacular throughout the Cold War. While the policy of flexible response had several tenets, its main focus was to limit warfare to the conventional realm; holding nuclear weapons as an insurance policy in the event of crossing a subjective line. Michael Carver writes that if war "is to be limited in its effects, it must, as [Carl von] Clausewitz recognized, be limited in its aims."[60] The United States and the Soviet Union acknowledged limits during the Cold War, prompting both sides to develop their conventional forces as the first and, hopefully, only method of engagement if war materialized.

Assuming world leaders are rational players in the game of geopolitics, the first use of nuclear weapons in practice is likely considered what military theorist Clausewitz portrayed as "something pointless and devoid of sense."[61] In Henry A. Kissinger's book *Diplomacy*, he describes how French President Charles de Gaulle pinpointed the core of the nuclear problem, stating, "The potential risk of using any nuclear weapons was so exorbitant that its avoidance tended to drive various players to assume highly national and self-serving postures."[62] As we examine collective security for the Baltic states, it would be tempting in a time of fiscal constraint to rely on a reversion to massive retaliation. The global trend, however, seems to be avoiding the first use of nuclear weapons at all costs. Even though avoiding strategic nuclear war remains the priority, tactical nuclear weapons may remain an option for commanders who are faced with overwhelming odds. It is, therefore, too risky to depend on escalation models to limit the employment of nuclear weapons; once

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[58] Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 353.

[59] Ronald W. Reagan, "Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security" (speech, nationwide radio and television broadcast, 23 March 1983).

[60] Carver, "Conventional Warfare in the Nuclear Age," 814.

[61] As quoted in ibid.

[62] Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 611.

nuclear weapons are employed, the many variables of conflict make large-scale nuclear war a not-so-improbable outcome. If a war is fought over Baltic sovereignty, policy and process should prioritize keeping it conventional. This requires that the nuclear guarantee be emphasized as a credible deterrent to a Russian escalation outside of the Baltic theater of operations. Ultimately, NATO requires a consolidated approach of complementary methods to fight and win a war contained strictly to the Baltic region.

## Recommendations

The recommendations provided below include three steps, feasible both politically and militarily, that NATO can implement to better defend the territory and sovereignty of its Baltic countries.

### Bolstering Organic Deterrence in the Baltic States

A Russian conventional incursion into the Baltic states would obviously require a conventional NATO response. If Russia uses ambiguous warfare techniques, however, to start operations in the Baltics, then a whole-of-society approach—relying on a unified Baltic population—would be the most effective counter. Uniting Baltic citizens to passively resist Russian incitement will help neutralize ambiguous warfare techniques, as it takes away Russia's freedom of action to manipulate the population. The ability of Russia to use various portions of the population, through ethnic or economic incitement, to bring about political turmoil, as it attempted to do in Ukraine, is a tactic that can only be countered with Baltic efforts to better assimilate their Russian ethnic minorities. If ethnic Russians living inside the Baltic states can be better included in the national identity of the region, then as political scientist Maciej Bartkowski highlights in his work, the application of "non-violent civilian based defense" efforts would yield the response needed to counter Russian belligerence.[63]

Though the Russian minority has dwindled in each Baltic state since the end of the Cold War, Russians still represent a sizable minority with more than 25 percent in Estonia and Latvia and 6.4 percent in Lithuania.[64] Since the Baltic states have gained independence, Russian ethnic minorities in the Baltic region have experienced difficulty gaining citizenship, particularly in Latvia and Estonia. A Stratfor global intelligence report indicates that "roughly 7 percent of Estonia's total population and 13 percent of Latvia's are non-citizens

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[63] Maciej Bartkowski, *Nonviolent Civilian Defense to Counter Russian Hybrid Warfare* (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Advanced Governmental Studies, 2015), 5–6.
[64] Best, "The Ethnic Russian Minority," 34.

and barred from voting in national elections."[65] Though each Baltic government is seeking to better appease its ethnic minorities through cultural concessions, there would be no better way to galvanize the population than to offer easier paths to citizenship. This is the model Lithuania accepted with the "*jus soli* principle of citizenship or the 'right of the soil' principle."[66] This policy provides citizenship to every person born in the country, regardless of parental nationality. Differing from the more inclusive Lithuanian policy, Estonia and Latvia enacted the policy of "*jus sanguinis*, or the 'right of blood' principle."[67] Through this policy, citizenship is determined by the origins of the parents and not by the location of a child's birth. The successful initiatives undertaken by the Lithuanian government may instill a sense of nationalism into all of its natural-born residents. A similar program initiated in Estonia and Latvia would help integrate ostracized Russian minorities into society. A populace in solidarity denies Russia a mechanism to generate social unrest and better facilitates passive resistance techniques to take hold against ambiguous Russian aggression.

More than just creating unified national identities, Baltic governments and NATO officials also must organize these efforts. NATO must encourage Baltic defense officials to work with local Baltic community organizers and activists "to develop ground mechanisms for the rapid deployment of thousands of volunteers to create 'living walls' of unarmed people to defend local administrations . . . to block major railways, road arteries, or runways."[68] Bartkowski concedes that such brazen actions would likely cause civilian casualties. Unarmed civilians, however, would not die in vain if "civil resistance actions can create a moral and political outrage not only among the troops of the adversary but also among its public and the international community."[69] For this type of civil resistance to work, Russian minorities living within the Baltic states must be active participants in the peaceful demonstrations to deny Russia the justification of taking actions to protect its ethnic interests. The notion of Baltic Russian minorities supporting an anti-Moscow agenda is not far-fetched. During 2014, a newly formed group calling themselves European Russians in Latvia was created with the aims of "counterbalancing" extremist elements of the Russian community and supporting Latvia's "orientation toward the West."[70] Continued immigration reform and more inclusive policies by the Baltic governments will promote a more truly heterogeneous society

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[65] "The Baltic Countries Respond to Russian Minorities," Stratfor.com, 21 May 2014.

[66] Best, "The Ethnic Russian Minority," 35.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Bartkowski, *Nonviolent Civilian Defense to Counter Russian Hybrid Warfare*, 20.

[69] Ibid.

[70] "The Baltic Countries Respond to Russian Minorities."

capable of implementing passive resistance to effectively respond to Russian provocations and manipulations.

A Baltic desire to build a multicultural society based on trust and common citizenship will not only establish a first-line defense against foreign powers, it will serve as a respectable gesture to the Russian government as to the value of contributions of Russian heritage in the forging of a new national identity. In a best-case scenario, Putin may view Baltic reconciliation efforts as an acknowledgment of continued Russian relevance, providing the emotional reassurance he would need to deescalate hostilities. If Baltic-Russian relations deteriorate to the point of open hostilities, then civil passive resistance techniques can be developed independently of more traditional kinetic defense options, and "NATO could wage them at different times depending on whether it faces a hybrid or conventional assault."[71] It is in the best interests of NATO to promote passive civil defense techniques, as it provides the alliance with a tactic that can stand alone or be integrated into an overlapping network of defensive methods for the Baltics. NATO's director of intelligence, Rear Admiral Brett C. Heimbigner, suggested that through key leader engagements and closer cooperation NATO could foster the environment necessary for greater political inclusion and regional stability that serves to enhance collective defense.[72] Progressive reforms undertaken by the Baltic governments will likely garner world commendation and set the conditions necessary for passive civil defense to flourish. These actions can deny Russia the tempestuous environment required to launch hybrid warfare and halt initial Russian provocations before they escalate into violent action.

## Creating Unity of Effort in Northern Europe

The threat of Russian aggression extends beyond the Baltic states and potentially threatens the sovereignty of all countries within the NBP9. Fortunately, the combined gross domestic product (GDP) of the NPB9 is $2.3 trillion, which exceeds the Russian GDP by approximately $600 billion.[73] These countries have the means, resources, and technology to defend against a Russian assault. This essential core of nations, however, is split "into NATO and non-NATO, EU and non-EU" that are both "heavy spenders on defense and free riders."[74] The United States increased its efforts to merge disparate interests in the High North with the founding of the Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe (e-PINE) in 2003 to focus

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[71] Bartkowski, *Nonviolent Civilian Defense to Counter Russian Hybrid Warfare*, 21.

[72] RAdm Brett C. Heimbigner, comments to author, 3 March 2016.

[73] Lucas, *The Coming Storm*, 1.

[74] Ibid.

on "cooperative security," "healthy societies," and "vibrant economies."[75] While the United States' establishment of e-PINE improved engagement with the member states of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Sweden, the "forum for policy coordination" has not produced the tangible security requirements necessary to assure allies and deter aggression.[76]

Despite these obstacles, a successful multilateral arrangement between the Nordic nations has produced tangible steps toward implementing a cooperative defense that seeks long-term solutions to complex problems. The structure called Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFCO) is comprised of five Nordic nations—Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden—with the main purpose being "to strengthen the participating nations' national defense, explore common synergies and facilitate efficient common solutions."[77] The essence of NORDEFCO is to garner efficiencies through commonality in acquisitions, procedures, and intelligence sharing.[78] NORDEFCO promotes flexibility in that members have a certain degree of "self-differentiation" to decide to which activities they want to contribute.[79] Since the founding of NORDEFCO in 2009, the organization has made tremendous strides in harmonizing the efforts of member states to produce concrete results. The successful development of the Swedish-Norwegian artillery system, known as Archer, saved each procuring nation 50 million euros "due to sharing the development, acquisition and life cycle support costs."[80]

A current concept known as Battalion Task Force 2020 (BNTF 2020) will explore the modularization of a "generic Nordic battalion structure, formed around the main battle tank Leopard 2 and the combat vehicle CV-90, which can be deployed in whole or in segments in national or multinational configurations over the whole spectrum of conflict."[81] According to NORDEFCO, the BNTF 2020 concept was tested in Exercise Cold Response in 2016.[82] The BNTF 2020 is a tailor-made program designed to rapidly respond to

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[75] The e-PINE mission statement can be seen at "Cooperative Security," State.gov, U.S. Department of State website.

[76] Mark Evans, "The US-North European Partnership: Advancing Democracy beyond the Baltics" (keynote address, University of Washington, Seattle, 26 May 2005).

[77] "About NORDEFCO," Nordefco.org.

[78] Pauli Järvenpää, "Nordic Defense Cooperation: NORDEFCO and Beyond," in *Northern Security and Global Politics: Nordic-Baltic Strategic Influence in a Post-Unipolar World*, ed. Ann-Sofie Dahl and Pauli Järvenpää (New York: Routledge, 2014), 218–20.

[79] Ibid., 216.

[80] Ibid., 223.

[81] Ibid., 220.

[82] *The NORDEF MCC Action Plan: 2014–17* (Denmark: Nordic Defense Cooperation, 2013), 7.

a Russian conventional assault due to its lethality and common employment model among like-minded nations. A cooperative endeavor, similar to the NORDEFCO structure, should be replicated by NATO to include its Nordic members and partners, the Baltic states, and Poland to forge the NBP9 into a regionalized hub for security collaboration.

For Sweden and Finland, NORDEFCO provides defense cooperation with neighboring countries "without having to confront the messy and complex issues of membership" within NATO.[83] Both countries have been members of NATO's Partnership for Peace program since 1994, but have not applied to be full participating members of the alliance.[84] Despite reluctance to join NATO, both countries are increasing their military cooperation within NORDEFCO and their Baltic neighbors. In 2015, Sweden proposed to NORDEFCO that "the feasibility of assembling a modular-style Nordic-Baltic Battle Group (NBBG)" be examined to better safeguard the stability of the Arctic and Baltic region.[85] The integration of Finland and Sweden into a smart defense of the Baltic region would have serious consequences for Russian offensive plans. Within the maritime realm, Sweden and Finland preside over the strategically important Gotland and Åland Islands within the Baltic Sea. These islands are strategically located and can be used to cover the forcible entry of NATO forces in a Baltic-Russian war scenario.[86] Furthermore, these islands can potentially host an array of lethal systems to include surface-to-air missiles, naval mines, and antiship cruise missiles to counter the Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capability that emanates from the Russian semi-exclave of Kaliningrad. NATO should encourage greater participation by Finland and Sweden in security cooperation endeavors, offering the flexible terms inherent in the NORDEFCO memorandum of understanding. NATO implementation of a NORDEFCO model to bind the NBP9 countries in a cooperative framework, one that allows "countries to pick and choose the activities and forms of cooperation they find most appealing," will further advance "interoperability" and "cost efficiency" to enable unity of effort in facing the Russians.[87]

## Denying Russia the Quick Victory

A smart defense for the Baltics requires planners to use the principle of *economy of force* to withstand Russian superior numbers and advantageous logistic footing. The hard reality fac-

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[83] Ann-Sofie Dahl, *NORDEFCO and NATO: "Smart Defence" in the North?*, Research Paper no. 101 (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2014), 10.

[84] "Signatures of Partnership for Peace Framework Document," NATO.int, 10 January 2012.

[85] Gerard O'Dwyer, "Sweden Proposes Aggressive Nordic Defense," *Defense News*, 10 February 2015.

[86] Coffey and Kochis, *Baltic States*, 14.

[87] Dahl, *NORDEFCO and NATO*, 11–12.

ing NATO is that permanently garrisoning foreign troops in Baltic territories will violate an international treaty signed between the alliance and Russia in Paris. Basing rights are a "delicate question" as the 1997 Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation maintains "permanent foreign troops" will not be stationed in new NATO member states.[88] Any NATO diminishment of the Founding Act may encourage Russia to further militarize the conflict by prepositioning additional forces near the Baltics. Additionally, failing to honor the treaty will negate all hopes of lowering tensions with Russia. Even if NATO is comfortable with placing troops in the Baltics on a rotational basis, there is still the question of materializing the sizable force required to deter, and if necessary defeat, Russian forces in a budget-constrained and -stretched alliance. The recent deployment of a rotational U.S. armored brigade to Poland bolstered NATO's commitment to Baltic security; however, it is likely not feasible for NATO to match Russia's conventional capability in the region. Renewed focus must center on strengthening the Baltic states' organic defense forces in combination with increasing NATO troop rotations to the Baltics.[89]

The Baltic states have been active partners within the NATO alliance. All three countries have sent military forces to Iraq and have participated in NATO operations in Afghanistan. Though each country's GDP is relatively small, the Baltic states strive to meet the NATO mandate that all alliance members spend 2 percent of their GDP on defense. Estonia currently meets the 2-percent expenditure requirement, with Latvia recently pledging to increase its defense expenditures to 2 percent and Lithuania committing to 1.5 percent of its GDP.[90]

Understanding that they lack the budget and infrastructure to support an air force, each of the Baltic states cedes air defense responsibilities to stronger regional NATO allies. The Baltic states actively make up for their deficiencies in air policing by regularly participating in NATO "out-of-area operations."[91] When it comes to defending their sovereign territory, the Baltics should take a similar approach and relinquish the procurement of heavy mechanized forces to larger NATO countries. In place of matching Russian armor formations with comparable force, the Baltic states must develop asymmetrical capabilities focused on territorial defense to counter the larger Russian force.

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[88] Karoliina Honkanen, "NATO in the Nordic-Baltic Region: Focus on the Baltic Allies and Article 5," in *Northern Security and Global Politics*, 183.

[89] Shlapak and Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank*, 1.

[90] Coffey and Kochis, *Baltic States*, 2; and "Baltics Boost Defense Spending as Russian Threat Looms," *American Interest*, 30 July 2015.

[91] Honkanen, "NATO in the Nordic-Baltic Region," 173-74.

The Baltic defense forces are keenly aware of the Russian military's success during their conflict with Georgia in 2008. Specifically, Baltic defense officials are reviewing how Georgian armor fared against Russian forces. The highest percentage of Georgian military equipment destroyed by the Russians during the conflict was tanks.[92] Georgian armored units suffered for a variety of reasons, including a lack of trained tank crews and poor maintenance. Another factor that contributed to Georgian tank losses was the effective use of light antitank weapons by the Russians and local militias within South Ossetia (a now de facto independent state within Georgia's internationally recognized borders). At the beginning of the conflict, South Ossetia forces destroyed three Georgian tanks with rocket-propelled grenades, specifically RPG-7s.[93] Further on in the conflict, Russian airborne forces operating two stalled BMP-1 vehicles delayed an entire Georgian engineer convoy with the use of RPG-7s and the BMP-1's small 73mm cannons.[94] What the Baltic states are learning from the battle "is that they need lots of anti-tank missiles."[95] In 2013, the three Baltic states spent a combined $63 million to purchase M3 Carl Gustaf 84mm antitank rockets from Sweden.[96] The Baltic states also are acquiring U.S.-manufactured antitank FGM-148 Javelin missiles, with Estonia purchasing $55 million worth of these missiles in 2014 and Lithuania seeking to purchase $55 million in missiles in 2016.[97] NATO training efforts in the Baltics must expand on the strides the Baltic states have already made in preparing their light infantry to face off against Russian armor.

Reasonable estimates figure it would take approximately 10 days for NATO heavy armor to reinforce the Baltic states from Grafenwöhr, Germany.[98] If the Baltic states prepare for a war fashioned on mobile strikes and guerrilla action, it would be feasible to delay Russian forces from capturing the entire Baltic territory, giving NATO reinforcements the toehold needed for a counteroffensive. To do this, the Baltic states will have to accept the unpleasant planning assumption that the Baltic population centers may suffer heavy dam-

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[92] Robert Beckhusen, "To Beat Russian Tanks, the Baltic States Study the Georgia War: 2008 Conflict with Russia Proves that Anti-Tank Missiles Rule," *War Is Boring* (blog), 24 October 2014.

[93] Anton Lavrov, "Timeline of Russian-Georgian Hostilities in 2008," in *The Tanks of August*, ed. Ruslan Pukhov (Moscow: Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, 2010), 54.

[94] BMP-1 is a tracked infantry fighting vehicle, and the acronym stands for Boyevaya Mashina Pekhoty 1. It is similar to the American Amtrac used by the Marine Corps. See Lavrov, "Timeline of Russian-Georgian Hostilities in 2008," 71.

[95] Beckhusen, "To Beat Russian Tanks, the Baltic States Study the Georgia War."

[96] Ibid.

[97] Ibid.; and Defense Security Cooperation Agency, "Lithuania-Javelin Missiles and Command Launch Units," news release, 18 December 2015.

[98] Shlapak and Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank*, 8.

age or occupation. To mitigate this risk, however, Baltic forces could follow the partisan model used during the Soviet occupation, establishing bases of operation in the Baltic wilderness and using guerrilla tactics to delay the Russians. This would cede Baltic territory to the Russians in exchange for the ability of the Baltic military to continue to operate.

Another facet of this strategy that may be difficult for the Baltic states to accept is they will likely bear the initial brunt of casualties for the NATO alliance. This is not to say that NATO forces will be absent during the opening days of war; however, NATO ground operations would be limited in scale, likely involving special operations forces to assist with forward air control missions and intelligence collection. Whatever rotational conventional NATO troops might be present would serve more as a political deterrent signaling NATO's commitment rather than a decisive combat force. Significant NATO reinforcements could only come after much of the Baltic territory is presumably occupied by Russian forces. While accepting the costs of a mobile defense would be difficult for the Baltic political leadership, the alternative may be even more damaging. Asking NATO to hold Russian forces firmly outside the borders of the Baltic states would require deep strikes within Russia with either conventional, or worse, tactical nuclear weapons. If this occurred, it is safe to assume Russia will respond in kind in the Baltics or beyond. An asymmetric defense of the Baltics would be violent and destructive; however, implementing this strategy will make the opening days of conflict equally painful for Russian forces while giving NATO the time required to mount an adequate counterattack.

## Conclusion

For the purposes of this discussion, we assume that the first use of nuclear weapons in a conflict between NATO and Russia is unacceptable for either side. Thankfully, there seems to be historical precedent for this statement as no nation has employed nuclear weapons since the Second World War. The policy of flexible response provided Western leaders with scalable options to deter Soviet aggression that did not automatically default to a nuclear strike, while still allowing for that option if necessary. Likewise, a present-day NATO defense of the Baltics cannot mean the inevitable employment of nuclear weapons against Russian forces. In a Baltic-Russian war scenario, the threat from either side to employ nuclear weapons would alert Russian and NATO strategic forces and risk a general nuclear war.

Western politicians would likely find it difficult to convince their constituents of the value of risking New York and London for the sake of Tallinn, Estonia, and Riga, Latvia. Although the Baltic states may be dismayed by this reluctance, the reality of the situation is that Western leaders would likely try to contain any Baltic-Russian conflict squarely within

the Baltic region to avoid escalation and reduce risk to their own populations. If NATO were to unambiguously threaten all-out nuclear war against a Russian incursion into Baltic territory, it may effectively deter Russia. If Russia, however, calls the Western bluff and invades, NATO is left with the sole grim option of responding with nuclear weapons or losing credibility. It is very likely that Western powers, and their populations, will be unwilling to initiate the first use of nuclear weapons or even conduct conventional attacks into sovereign Russian territory. Even if the West does conduct strikes (conventional or nuclear) into Russia, we can assume that the Baltic states would be devastated by Russian retaliatory strikes.

Thus, NATO planners must accept the premise that preparing a smart defense is the best way to defend the Baltics and will involve several overlapping layers of protection, below the nuclear threshold, to deter or defeat Russian aggression within Baltic territory. The solutions provided here—passive civil resistance, unity of effort with regional partners, and mobile (guerrilla) defense—give NATO customizable options to defend against Russian aggression. Using these three solutions in combination creates an effective network of defense and increases deterrence.

There does not appear to be a lack of determination on the part of the Baltic populations of all three states to resist any infringement upon their respective national sovereignty. For the Baltic citizens' fight to be effective against foreign occupation, however, their efforts must be organized in a congruent manner to establish a smart defense of the Baltic region. If NATO countries intend to honor their Article V commitments and protect Baltic independence, then they must be prepared to fight and win inside the Baltics. Expansion of fighting outside of Baltic territory must be a response option for NATO only after Russia decides to broaden the conflict. NATO's ability to defeat Russian forces within the Baltics places the burden of escalation upon the Russians and will ultimately cause them, in accordance with deterrence theory, to abandon any territorial ambitions they might have in the Baltics.

# Chapter 3

## Cold War Redux

### Shaping the Arctic as Strategic Maneuver Space

Major Stephen E. DeTrinis

With 2015 as the hottest year ever recorded in the Arctic, ice melt in the region has increased at unprecedented rates, resulting in improved nautical navigation for longer periods (figure 5). Over the long term, competition within the Arctic region will increase because of the resources it contains and the expanded military maneuver space it provides.[1] In both respects, the Arctic will confer geopolitical advantages on those prepared to exploit it. For the near term, global and European turmoil and economic instability offer Russia's leaders an opportunity to increase regional and global influence.

Increased navigability in the Arctic may significantly change the geopolitical balance within Europe's High North and on the surrounding seas. The Northern Sea Route (NSR) is key to the Russian Federation achieving its strategic goals since it would allow the control of an important trade route connecting the North Pacific to the North Atlantic (see figure 1). By exerting indirect influence over trade between Europe, China, and the U.S.'s West Coast, Russia would be able to fulfill a geopolitical vision first realized during the Soviet era. The

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[1] Decreases in summer polar ice will likely allow for more options when exploring for oil and gas in certain offshore areas. Similarly, shrinking glaciers onshore could expose land containing valuable deposits of gold, iron ore, or other minerals that were previously covered by glacial ice. Currently, areas offshore of Alaska encompass more than 1 billion acres and more than 6,000 miles of coastline—more coastline than the rest of the United States combined—and are considered to have potential for energy development. These Arctic regions include the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas, the Bering Sea, Cook Inlet, and the Gulf of Alaska. Ronald O'Rourke, *Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2014), 25.

Figure 5. Arctic Sea ice cap comparison
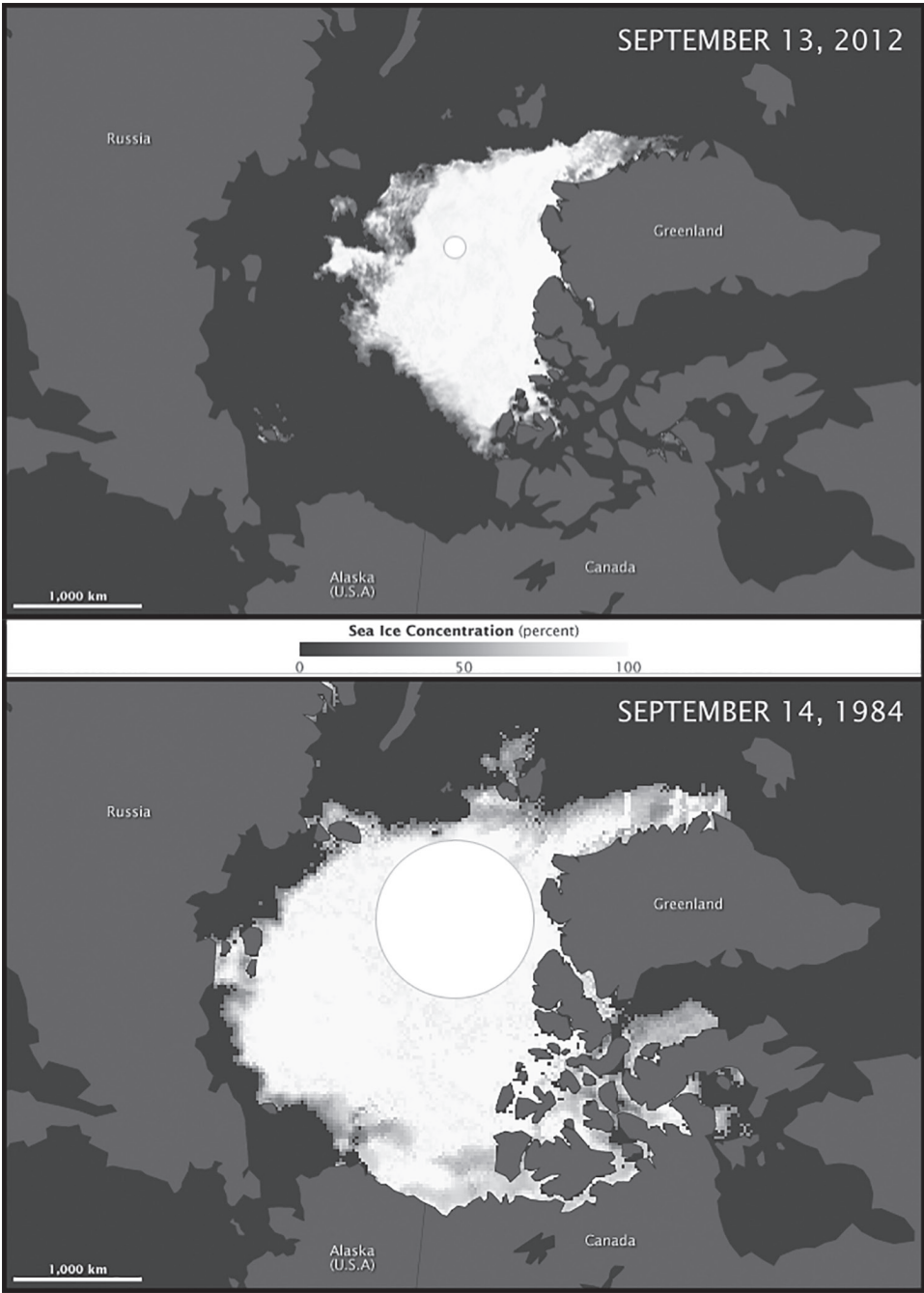


NASA Earth Observatory, images courtesy of Jesse Allen.

purpose of this paper is threefold: first, to compare the continuity between Russian and Soviet strategic culture; second, to investigate the role of the Sever Joint Strategic Command North (JSCN) within Soviet and Russian strategy; and third, to recommend an operational concept that provides NATO with reliable deterrence against potential Russian aggression.[2] The consideration of geopolitics combined with a nationalist ideology are central themes behind the Russian Federation's strategic calculus and must be accounted for in future U.S. and NATO operational concepts. By looking at the general principles and specific concepts governing the Arctic's role in Russian strategy, we can better understand the requirements for NATO's response. Geopolitical vulnerability and ideological destiny are ingrained in Russian culture and provide analysts a framework for understanding why Moscow behaves the way it does and what strategic actions it might take next.

## Soviet-Russian Strategic Culture

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact in 1991 did not relieve the Russian people of the burden of their history and geography. Perceived geopolitical and ideological hostility is as relevant to Moscow's strategy as it was during the peak of the Cold War. The ideological and geopolitical influences in Russian identity help explain the central role of conflict, and the JSCN, in Russian grand strategy. To analyze Russia's current policy on the Arctic JSCN, the continuity between Soviet and Russian strategy, doctrine, and politics must be considered. Key documents exist that demonstrate how Russia's nationalist ideology complements its current strategic and military thinking. In this section, we will review some of the most relevant documents that show the nationalistic character of both Soviet and Russian policies, and how this reoccurring pattern influences Russian decision making in the Arctic.

Corollaries between Russia's past and present exist, in part, because many current political and military leaders began their professional careers during the last decade of the Cold War. Thus, key concepts from the Soviet worldview help us better understand the Russian Federation's strategic aims. In Vasily D. Sokolovsky's influential work, *Soviet Military Strategy*, published during the apex of Soviet power in 1963, the centrality of Marxist-Leninist theory to Soviet strategy, military strategy, and doctrine is clear. In addition to Sokolovsky's work, *The Voroshilov Lectures: Materials from the Soviet General Staff Academy* provides evi-

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[2] For a detailed explanation of the Russian government's establishment of the new military region see, "Arctic Strategic Command: Sever (North) Unified Strategic Command (USC)," GlobalSecurity.org, 7 November 2017; and "Russian Military Map: The Joint Strategic Command 'North'," SouthFront.org, 7 August 2015.

dence supporting Vladimir Lenin's proclamation that "war is part of the whole, and this whole is politics."[3]

Lenin's conception of the relationship between war and politics remains a foundation of the Russian Federation's national identity and is key to understanding the cultural differences between East and West views on war.[4] Both Lenin and Putin seem to understand war to be the status quo among states, whereas the West views war as an abnormal condition. The Soviet Union's animosity toward the West is apparent in Sokolovsky's assertion that "the main source of the military threat today is the aggressive course of American Imperialism, which reflects the striving of US capitalist monopolies for world domination."[5]

We can see the combination of past and present in current policy documents. For example, "The Russian Federation's National Security Strategy" (2015) explains that strategic national priorities are "the most important areas of safeguarding national security." The document describes the Arctic's significance to its overall strategy and simultaneously identifies perceived threats posed by NATO and the West.[6] Analyst Olga Oliker points out the similarities between Soviet and Russian views when she states that the strategy "presents a Russia focused on increasing its influence and prestige and cementing its national unity; a Russia that believes it is accomplishing its aims, but which simultaneously feels threatened by the United States and its allies."[7] Appreciating the return to a Russian nationalistic ideology and its relationship to the development of national strategy, as Oliker indicates, is key to determining Russia's strategic and operational concept for the Arctic JSCN.

More important, Russian thinkers and leaders seem to consider war an acceptable means to an end. In *Soviet Military Strategy*, Sokolovsky explains, "Politics is the reason, war is the tool."[8] Early Russian and Soviet definitions of *national strategy*, *military strategy*, and

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[3] Vasily D. Sokolovsky, *Soviet Military Strategy*, ed. and trans. Harriet Fast Scott (New York: Crane, Russak, 1968), 173; and Ghulam D. Wardak, comp., *The Voroshilov Lectures: Materials from the Soviet General Staff Academy*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1989).

[4] Ibid., 173.

[5] Ibid., 185.

[6] The strategy document states, "The competition between states is increasingly encompassing social development values and models and human, scientific, and technological potentials. Leadership in exploiting the resources of the world's oceans and the Arctic is acquiring particular significance in this process. An entire spectrum of political, financial-economic, and informational instruments have [*sic*] been set in motion in the struggle for influence in the international arena. Increasingly active use is being made of special services' potential." Russian Federation Presidential Edict No. 683, "The Russian Federation's National Security Strategy" (translated), 31 December 2015.

[7] Olga Oliker, "Unpacking Russia's New National Security Strategy," Center for Strategic and International Studies, 7 January 2016.

[8] Sokolovsky, *Soviet Military Strategy*, 14.

*military doctrine* help analysts understand that the nature of military strategy is dependent on politics and takes economic, political, and scientific technical factors into account. The Soviet Union, in particular, when considering the implications of nuclear weapons on military strategy, was preoccupied with studying the conditions under which a future war may arise, including the deployment of armed forces and the methods of delivering the first strike and conducting the first operations in addition to the strategic utilization of the armed forces.[9] "The Russian Federation's National Security Strategy" document maintains the primacy of military doctrine in national strategy, stating that military doctrine sufficiently covers "Russian goals and plans."[10]

Assessing the relevance of historic Russian and Soviet teachings and worldviews requires an analyst to understand the generational ideological and geopolitical culture that nurtured Russia's current leadership. Sokolovsky proposed that, "The nature of military strategy is often influenced by such factors as general historically accumulated national and political traditions of a country."[11] He goes on to observe that Russian tradition holds that the geographical location of a country and the national characteristics of its population influence the content and nature of its military doctrine.[12] It is almost impossible to understate the significance of ideology and geopolitics in Russian strategic calculus regarding politics and war.[13]

Western strategists once viewed the Arctic as an obstacle to the geostrategic advantage provided by Russia's central position on the Eurasian steppe; this is also known as the "geographical pivot" area defined originally in 1904 by one of the founders of the new field of "geopolitics," Sir Halford J. Mackinder, an English geographer (figure 6).[14] At the height of Imperial Russia's power, Mackinder anticipated the need for the containment doctrine later articulated by George F. Kennan vis-à-vis the Soviet Union after World War II. Mackinder's pivot constituted the "heartland" of Eurasia, which he also called the "World Island." By projecting forces from East to West across the heartland, the most powerful inhabitants of Eurasia for many centuries had managed to dominate not merely the interior of the continent but, more important, its southern littoral.

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[9] Ibid., 8–10.

[10] Oliker, "Unpacking Russia's New National Security Strategy."

[11] Sokolovsky, *Soviet Military Strategy*, 17.

[12] Ibid., 39.

[13] For instance, see Richard W. Harrison's treatment of the topic in *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904–1940* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

[14] Caitlyn L. Antrim, "The Next Geographical Pivot: The Russian Arctic in the Twenty-First Century," *Naval War College Review* 63, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 18; and H. J. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *Geographical Journal* 23, no. 4 (April 1904): 421–37.

Figure 6. Mackinder's geographical pivot
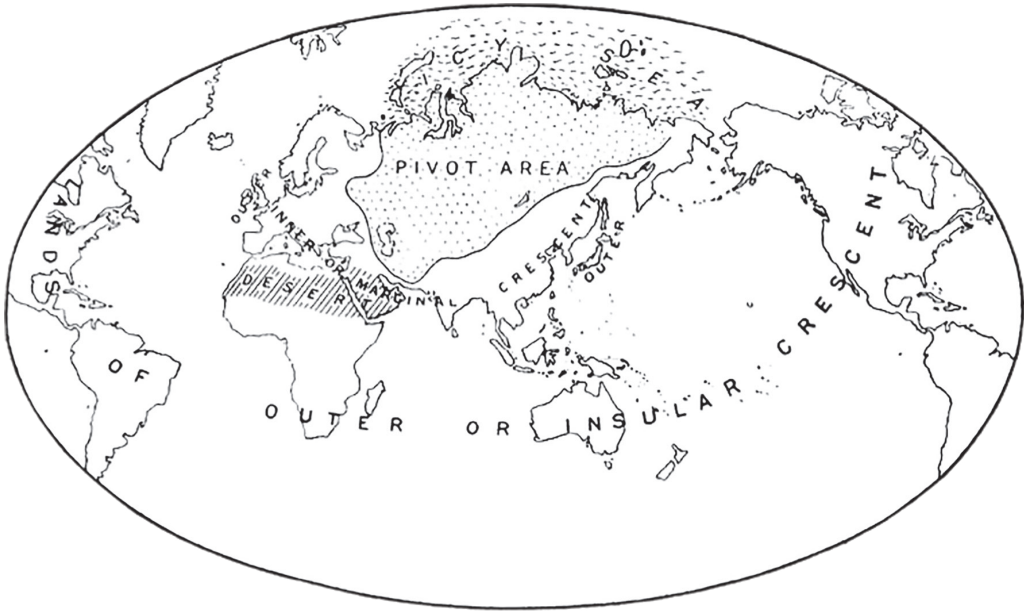


Originally printed in "The Geographical Pivot of History," *Geographical Journal* 23, no. 4 (April 1904): 435.

In the modern era, dominance of the heartland would enable any of the industrialized great powers also to become the largest maritime power of all. Thus, as Mackinder reformulated his concept in 1919, he fixed his understanding of central position's criticality stating, "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; Who rules the Heartland commands the World Island; Who rules the World Island commands the World."[15] First the British Empire and then, in its wake, the United States would, therefore, have to lead a global coalition to apply counterpressure along the flanks of this expansive power. In the 1940s, Yale University professor Nicholas J. Spykman considered the Arctic a critical component of any strategy to contain the Soviet Union.[16] Thus, opening the Arctic to commercial and military activity may empower the Russian Federation in a way that would challenge global stability.

The question arises as to whether Russian Arctic ambitions support Russian economic

[15] H. J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (London: Constable and Co., 1919), 194.
[16] Antrim, "The Next Geographical Pivot," 18.

interests or national defense, or is intended for offensive operations. When answering this question, it is important to remember that current Russian leaders formed their worldviews under the tutelage of the Soviet Communist system. They were versed in anti-West rhetoric, read antagonistic literature concerning the competition between Communism and capitalism, were unsupportive of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and were embittered by the diminishment of the Russian Federation. Soviet mentorship also fostered a complementary analytical model that divided Soviet military art into strategy, operational art, and tactics, accounting for economic, political, and scientific technical factors.[17] Moreover, the importance of geography in strategic calculus provides Westerners with context to analyze and understand Soviet strategic culture and offers a framework to interpret Soviet national-level documents. It also enables analysts to understand the genesis of Soviet-Russian geostrategic thought and culture because of Moscow's return to viewing itself as "the crossroads of power between East Asia and Western Europe," which captures the strategic potential of Arctic domain control.[18] Mackinder helps contextualize the importance of the Russian near abroad and the Arctic by stressing the criticality of ocean access to strategic mobility and maneuverability and the core belief that Russia can "strike on all sides and be struck from all sides, save the north."[19] This geopolitical context may help analysts and planners conceptualize the value Russia places on key access points, such as the Bering Strait, and support to operations along its flanks.

Geopolitics helps analysts develop a comprehensive understanding of the connections between Soviet and Russian deterrence, defense, and preparation for conflict with the West that is culturally necessary because of the military-geographic factors in relation to the flanking position of NATO countries.[20] The emergence of the idea of Eurasianism shows the influence of geopolitics on Russian intellectual and strategic thinking. This theory stresses "Russia's uniqueness and argues that Russia need not Westernize in order to modernize."[21]

The historical impact of Russia's geographic position on the Eurasian landmass has played a significant role in its national identity that is evident in its national strategy, mil-

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[17] Sokolovsky, *Soviet Military Strategy*, 7–8.

[18] Antrim, "The Next Geographical Pivot," 17.

[19] The Russian *near abroad* refers to the newly independent states that were once part of the Soviet Union. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," 436.

[20] Wardak, *Voroshilov Lectures*, 66–73.

[21] Charles Clover, "Dreams of the Eurasian Heartland: The Reemergence of Geopolitics," *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1999. See also Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

itary strategy, and military doctrine. Marxist-Leninist theory posits that "All of man's existence . . . was a product of impersonal historical forces. Understanding these objective forces would enable one to manage global, national, and personal problems."[22] Analyzing the significance of the JSCN requires combining an understanding of Russia's ingrained sensitivity to real and perceived threats to its geostrategic and ideological position relative to the West. Russia could dominate the entire Arctic by controlling key access points if NATO and the United States do not deter it. Control of the Arctic provides the Russian Federation with uncontested maneuver space and an important advantage along NATO's vulnerable northern and eastern flanks.

The Russian Federation's national-level documents reinvigorate the Russian nationalist identity and its belief that it is geopolitically vulnerable. Caitlyn Antrim addresses Mackinder's pivot area and the impact of increased navigability of the Arctic on Russia's geostrategic views as well as on its evolution to a power based on both land and sea. Antrim posits that Russia's interests in the Arctic are determined by its level of investment across four key factors: technology, economics, climate, and law.[23] Analysts must consider Moscow's *stated* goals for the Arctic with their *perceived* geopolitical and ideological competition with the West in conjunction with Russia's level of investment in the Arctic region, which provides a glimpse into Russia's potential operating concept for the NJSC. This holistic understanding can result in concerned Arctic nations rapidly increasing the military competition in an arena that could stimulate a "new Cold War."

The Russian Federation's goals in the Baltic and its military operations in Crimea, Ukraine, and Syria provide insight into the tactics and operational construct available to them. The strategic context and long-term aims remain debated; however, each conflict area provides the Russian Federation access to, and control of, other sea lines of communication (SLOC) choke points, including the eastern Mediterranean Sea. These choke points facilitate the Russian military, predominately a land power, implementing sea denial from the land with aviation and ground-based combined arms in the form of A2/AD assets. All of these SLOC and choke points have a bearing on the JSCN and Russia's national strategy. Understanding the Arctic east-west SLOCs within the context of existing Russian areas for sea denial increases the importance of countering Russia's militarization and control of the Arctic passages in the mid- and long terms. Left unchecked, the Russian Federation could counterbalance its vulnerable geopolitical position and relative weakness in naval power through land and air dominance of a key SLOC. Moscow could then support its long-term

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[22] Peter Vincent Pry, *War Scare: Russia and America on the Nuclear Brink* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999), 53.

[23] Antrim, "The Next Geographical Pivot," 24.

goals through combined effects of ambiguous operations along NATO's vulnerable flanks, sea denial from the Kola Peninsula with access to the Barents Sea, and diplomatic assurances with an increasingly aggressive China along the far eastern edge of the NSR. Without NATO deterrence, the Russian Federation would possess the capability to escalate tensions through the threat of economic exclusion in the NSR and the ability to increase the level of coercion in the High North or the Baltic region.

The NSR poses both opportunity and threat to the Russian Federation. An ice-free NSR could expose Russia's large Arctic coastline to attack. The huge area would prove difficult to defend. As an opportunity, however, the NSR is central to Russia's long-term goals to destabilize NATO and increase its global influence. The NSR has strategic implications for whoever controls it because it significantly reduces the shipping distance from China to Europe. A Chinese freighter, the *Yong Sheng*, took 35 days to sail from Dalian, China, to Rotterdam, Netherlands; however, using the Suez Canal would have taken two weeks longer.[24] As such, in its maritime policy, Russia highlights "the crucial role of the Northern Fleet for the defense of the state of marine and ocean areas, as well as the increasing importance of the Northern Sea Route for sustainable development of the Russian Federation."[25]

## No Assurance Along NATO's Flanks

Russia's strategic views on the Arctic are substantially different from those of the United States because of the area's relevance to global affairs. Russia's perspective is fundamentally different for a variety of reasons. First, Russia views the Arctic as critical to national defense because it provides maneuver space for conventional forces and key terrain for control of vital sea lines. Second, the Soviet-Russian perception has long been that geopolitics and ideological differences with the West force it into a persistent state of conflict. Because of this self-imposed security-centric view, Russian leadership views all foreign influence and presence in the Arctic primarily as a threat first. Finally, if war was to occur, Russia views the Arctic as necessary to escalation dominance in the critical early phases of conflict. A comprehensive understanding of Russian strategic aims in the JSCN is therefore key to deterrence and potentially to victory in future conflict. Russia's national security strategy highlights its realist worldview: "The competition between states is increasingly encompassing social development values and models, and human, scientific, and technological potentials. Leadership in exploiting the resources of the world's oceans and the Arctic is acquiring

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[24] Sergei Blagov, "Russia Eyes New Arctic Shipping Route for Trade with China," *Asia Times*, 1 March 2016.

[25] Vladimir Putin, *Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2020*, PR-1387 (St. Petersburg: Ministry of Defense, 2001), 11.

particular significance in this process."[26] This statement demonstrates how even economic and social dimensions of the Arctic are regarded as elements of state competition. The Russian perspective puts the JSCN in the category of a node within the Russian system, and the Russian state's role is "to safeguard the sovereignty, independence, and state and territorial integrity and to protect the rights of compatriots abroad."[27]

Recent aggressive acts by Russia are linked to that nation's broader view of competition with the United States. In recent years, General Valery V. Gerasimov links the "Arab Spring and other 'color revolutions' . . . with military capability development" and insists that the West commits "transgressions against the post-Cold War international order."[28] Gerasimov maintains that the United States executes a global strategy that violates national sovereignty. At the May 2014 Moscow Conference on International Security, Gerasimov highlighted U.S. military operations in Iraq (1991), Yugoslavia (1999), Iraq (2011), and the ongoing campaign in Afghanistan to prove that the United States acts as though it is the only superpower. His explanation of the current politico-military situation emphasizes that competitiveness for geostrategic space and economic and natural resources as well as the U.S. aspiration toward global dominance. Throughout the development of his argument, Gerasimov asserts Russia's reticence toward NATO and U.S. cooperation and the fear that NATO and the United States will continue its trend of inciting "color revolutions" that threaten ethnic Russians living in the federation's near abroad.[29] Russian anxiety related to the opening of the Arctic translated into an increase in their military capability. Currently, Putin is spending $700 billion to upgrade existing facilities and increase Russia's Arctic military presence.

Consequently, if Russia can dominate the Arctic, the United States and NATO will necessarily be more vulnerable. Russia could exploit the Arctic maneuver space to attack its contiguous neighbors more easily. To challenge this advantage, NATO and the United States must increase Russia's potential risk by fully committing to regional engagement, assurance, deterrence, and compellence along NATO's flank.[30] Currently, Russia maintains

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[26] "The Russian Federation's National Security Strategy," 4.

[27] Ibid., 3.

[28] Charles K. Bartles, "Getting Gerasimov Right," *Military Review* (January–February 2016): 30–38.

[29] The three *color revolutions*, a term coined by the press, were the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia, the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and the 2005 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan. See Anthony H. Cordesman, "Russia and the 'Color Revolution': A Russian Military View of a World Destabilized by the US and the West," Center for Strategic & International Studies, 28 May 2014.

[30] Public policy professor Thomas C. Schelling, in *Arms and Influence*, explains compellence in opposition to deterrence, so that instead of discouraging an adversary from acting it "involves initiating an action" and to compel means that "one gets up enough momentum . . . to make the other act to avoid collision." See Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 71–72.

a significant advantage in conventional force strength along its border in former Warsaw Pact nations and the Baltic countries. Conversely, the economic and political strength of NATO and the European Union provides numerous opportunities to help defend and assure the sovereignty of NATO partners by removing low-end, deniable, and ambiguous options from Russia.

The United States must develop an operational concept for NATO that provides assurance to its allies and deters additional Russian aggression in the region. Based on wargame findings that focused on the defense of NATO's Eastern Flank, David A. Shlapak and Michael W. Johnson concluded that a future concept must be "sufficient to mount a sustained defense of the region . . . achieve NATO's ultimate end state of restoring its members' territorial integrity," and "change the strategic picture as seen from Moscow."[31] Shlapak's and Johnson's stated requirements identify the significant threat Russia poses to the vulnerable Baltic states, but fail to take into account the altered strategic circumstances as compared to the Cold War. For example, how does a diminished NATO and U.S. military presence in Europe affect their options? How does contemporary European military geography affect its defense? In contrast, the implementation of the U.S. Army's AirLand Battle strategy occurred during an era of large NATO military budgets. Further, AirLand Battle assumed defensive and offensive maneuver space in Germany that far exceeds what is available in the Baltic states.[32]

The challenge for the West, therefore, is to develop a solution consonant with today's operating environment, while meeting the reality of the Russian threat. Maintaining open Arctic SLOCs is a long-term, strategic challenge with impacts across all components of national power. It includes, however, a near-term requirement for the United States and its allies to deter aggressive actions in vulnerable nations, such as the Baltic flank, with credible military solutions.

## Recommendations

The Special Operating Forces (SOF) Phase 0–Shape activities provide ideal instruments to counter Russia's ability to institute ambiguous warfare, including activities related to foreign internal defense (FID), counterinsurgency (COIN), security force assistance (SFA), as well as host nation and partnered forces training to improve cross-domain synergy within the host nations and partnered forces. Assignment of permanent and rotational U.S. and

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[31] Shlapak and Johnson, *Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank*, 2.

[32] For more on the AirLand Battle concept, see Douglas W. Skinner, *Airland Battle Doctrine* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 1988).

NATO SOF to vulnerable NATO countries to train national defense forces reduces the opportunity for Russia to recruit and train potential insurgents or rebels in an unconventional warfare environment. The loss of sympathetic elements in the host nation's military eliminates Russia's ability to use deniable, low-cost forces to sow disunity and confusion. This denies any aggressor a soft target and increases the cost of operating in NATO territory.

Any concept that addresses the complex, multidomain operational problem posed by Russia must address how the federation intends to maximize its Arctic advantage and sea denial capability. Many analysts assume that, in the long term, the Arctic ice will continue to melt and the NSR will become a key geographic area similar to the Panama Canal or the Strait of Hormuz. When international commercial traffic starts using the NSR with greater frequency, Moscow could continue its aggressive and provocative behavior by threatening to close or limit access to the NSR. Russia will likely combine this with harassing and destabilizing activities beneath the legal and popular thresholds necessary for opposition to respond with armed forces.

Increasing the amount of SOF in theater by one Operational Detachment Bravo or Marine Raider Company equivalent would enhance the assigned special forces units in theater with immediate impact forces and organic command and control, doing so without changes to existing doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, personnel, and facilities improvement cycles. Additionally, the commander of U.S. European Command (EUCOM) could receive the East Coast Expeditionary Strike Group/Marine Expeditionary Unit (ESG/MEU), which would still be able to support contingency operations in U.S. Africa Command, which exceeds the Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force's capability. The commander of EUCOM would task the assigned forces with increasing vulnerable NATO, European Union, and partner countries' capability to deter, deny, and defend their territories through FID initiatives, military-to-military engagements, and bilateral/multinational exercises.

Finally, in partnership with the U.S. Department of State, NATO must ensure vulnerable border nations receive defensive and offensive missile capability, such as integrated, ballistic missile defense systems, commensurate with Russia's sovereign Arctic offensive capability. The additional, concentrated capability would expand NATO's Smart Defence initiative and reduce Russia's operational options. The assigned and rotational forces would incorporate the enhanced capability into the previously mentioned continuum and plan for its use during denial and offensive operations against a determined adversary. All of the proposed options would assure NATO partners and deter Russia by eliminating its ability to accuse the West of initiating color revolutions. The elevated cost reduces Russia's opera-

tional maneuver space between low-level incursions and nuclear conflict with NATO in the near term, transferring the focus to the Arctic in the long term.

During the past 15 years, U.S. operating concepts have focused on understanding, preparing for, conducting, and supporting wars of insurgency and counterinsurgency. In recent years, a renaissance of concepts has emerged to solve the evolving threats posed by A2/AD and the challenge of operating in denied littorals, such as in *Joint Forcible Entry Operations* (JFEO) and *Joint Operational Access Concept* (JOAC).[33] The JFEO explains, "To be credible both as a deterrent and as a viable military option for policy enforcement, the Armed Forces of the US must be capable of deploying and fighting to gain access to geographical areas controlled by forces hostile to US interests."[34] The JOAC concept explains how the Joint Force will achieve cross-domain synergy and stresses a greater degree of integration across domains to maintain tempo.[35] While these existing concepts define the challenging environment and direct the Joint Forces to address predictable issues, they leave gaps because they lack the clarity of a defined, near-peer adversary against which to organize, train, and equip. Moreover, they do not direct the Services to organize, train, and equip in support of Geographic Combatant Command priorities.[36]

The type of threat that Russia poses does not call for profound changes to platforms or force structure, but it does provide the opportunity to revisit the deployment of our conventional forces and develop a forward basing infrastructure to better support our strategic policies. During the Cold War, the United States recognized how the Soviet Union posed a nuclear threat to NATO allies and provided operational and tactical solutions to counter it within such strategic and military doctrinal publications as the National Security Council's NSC-68 and the Army's field manual, *Operations*.[37] These documents outlined whole-of-government strategies, including containment and joint operational concepts such as AirLand Battle.

With NATO and the United States facing the resurrection of a globally ambitious Eurasian land power, it is imperative that the West develops new combinations of multidomain capabilities as creative solutions to an old problem. A joint Special Operations Command

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[33] *Joint Forcible Entry Operations*, Joint Publication 3-18 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2012); and *Joint Operational Access Concept* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2012).

[34] *Joint Forcible Entry Operations*, vii.

[35] *Joint Operational Access Concept*, foreword.

[36] The Department of Defense currently supports U.S. geographic commands: Africa, Central, European, Northern, Pacific, and Southern.

[37] Executive Secretary, *A Report to the National Security Council* (Washington, DC: White House, 1950); and *Operations*, Field Manual 100-5 (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1993).

(SOCOM), Navy, and Marine Corps solution could provide an effective balance of Phase 0 activities, including FID, SFA, and COIN at the low end of the range of military operations (ROMO), with the ability to conduct operational maneuver from the sea and forcible entry operations, such as lodgment and strike operations. Reallocating the East Coast MEU to the EUCOM commander is a return to pre-Global War on Terrorism employment concepts that presupposed a defined state adversary in the Soviet Union. This return to historic MEU employment is critical to including credible U.S. deterrence and strike capability within NATO Smart Defence and globalizing the partnered strike concept.

## Conclusion

The Russian Federation's aggressive foreign policy and use of deniable, scalable tactics to destabilize bordering nations threatens NATO's flanks, specifically the Baltic and Nordic countries. The militarization of Russia's own Arctic flank provides it a near-term operational advantage in the application of military power along its borders and a long-term strategic advantage through denial of east-west SLOCs. The United States and NATO must seize the initiative by increasing the cost and decreasing the viability of ambiguous and unconventional options across multiple domains. Additional U.S. and NATO SOF, conventional units, and ballistic missile capability would help deny Russia the ability to exploit internal lines and the Arctic maneuver space. Persistent Phase 0 forces would develop NATO flank countries' internal defense capabilities, improve NATO conventional capabilities, and prepare the environment to deny Russia the ability to manage force escalation. These types of actions would enhance NATO's Smart Defence initiative and deny Russia's capacity to destabilize the alliance, forcing its leaders to adopt costlier, long-term operational and strategic options and minimize the Russian Federation's near- and mid-term advantages in the Arctic. These solutions must be combined and joint, utilizing existing capabilities across multiple domains, to provide a creative solution to the emerging Arctic problem, where increasing navigability is enhancing the strategic significance of the region while intensifying the operational risk to the United States and NATO within Europe.

# Chapter 4

## The Evolution of Russian Nonlinear Warfare

Major Anthony Mercado

For more than 15 years, the U.S. Armed Services have been focused on the limited conflicts of Iraq and Afghanistan and counterterrorism operations. During this time, many Russian military leaders were observing U.S. operations, considering Russian lessons learned from recent conflicts, and mining works from master strategists such as Carl von Clausewitz, Georgii S. Isserson, and Alexander A. Svechin. Their purpose was to prepare Russian Armed Forces for what they saw as the future operational environment. The key conclusion they came to is that it is increasingly essential to coordinate and apply all facets of government power in the pursuit of national objectives. This paper critically examines Russia's extensive history of experimenting with and employing what is now often referred to as *nonlinear warfare*, a Russian concept involving the simultaneous application of military and nonmilitary means to achieve political goals in a newly dynamic information environment. This investigation shows the consistency of the Russian application of unconventional and other nonmilitary means of coercion from World War II to contemporary conflicts.

The United States and its Western allies seemed surprised by the success of the Russian military in Ukraine and Syria as well as its innovative cyberoffensives in Estonia and Georgia. During these conflicts, Russia demonstrated a style of warfare that more effectively leverages diplomatic, informational, military, and economic power (DIME). This application of a "system of systems" has allowed Russia to minimize or avoid deploying combat troops while still achieving its political objectives. Russia's recent successes will likely lead to an increasing number of state and nonstate actors trying to incorporate nonlinear warfare techniques into their military doctrine and operations. As these tactics proliferate and diversify, it is critical for military thinkers, politicians, and strategists to understand the

Russian history of partisan warfare to fully grasp modern Russian warfare. Since World War II, Russia has been willing to use political, economic, and social coercion to accomplish its objectives when military force has not been the best tool, adding to the complicated nature of postwar global security. The acceleration toward an increasingly complex environment challenges military leaders around the world, maybe most pressingly in Eastern Europe. While the nature of war may be consistent, the character of war changes with time; both state and nonstate actors change their tactics, techniques, and procedures in the planning and execution of military operations to respond to an evolving, dynamic environment. It is apparent that Russia is currently pursuing its foreign policy goals through the coordinated and simultaneous employment of multiple military and nonmilitary state tools. In practice, this method relies on an effective information operation (IO) campaign supplemented by coordinated special forces conducting unconventional warfare (UW) throughout the entire spectrum of the conflict.[1] While this type of warfare is currently referred to by a variety of terms, such as *hybrid* or *ambiguous*, we will use the term *nonlinear* as recently coined by Russian General Valery Gerasimov in his seminal article on the subject, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight."[2]

## The Soviet Partisan Movement of World War II and the Modern Roots of Nonlinear Warfare

The great Russian military thinkers of the 1930s—Major General Alexander Svechin, Marshal of the Soviet Union Mikhail N. Tukhachevsky, and Brigade Commander Georgii Isserson—shaped how the Soviet military perceived war. It was no longer conceived of as a series of interrupted encounters with the outcome of the entire war decided by one decisive battle. Instead, war was considered a continuous chain of synchronized combat efforts in space and time throughout the depths of the battlefield.[3] This concept was put into action during World War II when Soviet partisans fought against Axis powers in the Soviet Union

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[1] According to *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2016), *unconventional warfare* (UW) is defined in joint doctrine as "activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary and guerrilla force in a denied area." Central to *irregular warfare* (IW), which involves "a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over relevant population(s)," UW involves external parties aiding indigenous actors against governments.

[2] Gen Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations," *Military Review* (2016): 1.

[3] BCdr Georgii Samoilovich Isserson, *The Evolution of Operational Art*, trans. Bruce W. Menning (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, 2013), 5.

and Poland. The Soviet partisan movement played a vital role in this unconventional fight by facilitating the transition between deep and close fights, while simultaneously affecting German rear operations. Additionally, the partisan movement was pivotal in the ultimate success of the Soviets against the German Army of World War II and, therefore, has left a lasting imprint on the thoughts and methods of Russian military leaders. It is not surprising, then, that the Russians employed partisans in Crimea to conduct IO, subversion, and sabotage while simultaneously employing cyberpartisans to influence and organize via social media. The term *cyberpartisans* is used here to make clear the connection between the Soviet Partisan Movement (1941–44) and those substate actors who participate in modern cyberwarfare.

The Soviet Partisan Movement established itself during the onset of Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of Russia during World War II in 1941. This undertaking used elements of past resistance movements coupled with recent advances in communications, transportation, and weapons to create havoc in the German rear. During this first phase, its early members were small in number and consisted of scattered Red Army unit remnants led by their former officers and commissars, all who were bypassed by the advancing German Army.[4] These elements attacked supply chains, field hospitals, and rear guard units, which forced the Germans to divert more resources to deal with the partisans instead of advancing. In response to the partisans, the Germans mobilized a reservist force of World War I veterans and contracted local home guards to act as a rear area security force. In addition to the resistance movement, the Red Army used airborne operations behind enemy lines (on occupied Soviet soil) to conduct sabotage, espionage, and reconnaissance missions. These forces provided supplies and other support to partisan operations. Soviet agents were tasked with damaging or destroying German and Romanian infrastructure, such as rail lines, bridges, roads, and pipelines, to create panic; with identifying Soviet citizens who collaborated with the Germans; and with demoralizing German troops. Many of these missions were carried out by relatively small six- to eight-man units whose members came from the districts in which they were operating, giving them an inherent advantage over the enemy and increasing their will to accomplish the mission in defense of their homeland. Unfortunately for the Soviets, these units were poorly trained, were too often inaccurately inserted, and consequently saw marginal success.[5] Still, they contributed to the overall achievements of the Red Army and reinforced and validated the ability of the Communist Party to manage complex tasking. The Soviets continued to adapt and better organize the

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[4] Edgar M. Howell, *The Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941–1944* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1956), 43.
[5] Ibid., 63.

partisan movement and increase its effectiveness, and thus learned the value of government support for a centrally directed irregular movement.

The Communist Party directed its members, in conjunction with the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (known then as NKVD and later as KGB), to infiltrate enemy lines and establish and lead a partisan force to conduct sabotage operations, foment rebellion, and dissuade those who were, or thought of, assisting the occupying force in any way.[6] During this second phase of the movement, partisan membership increased dramatically and the groups were more organized. Additionally, the NKVD established destroyer battalions (истребители) whose primary missions included internal security of the Russian rear, defense against German airborne attack, and the destruction of all installations not destroyed by the Red Army in the case of retreat. In the event these destroyer battalions found themselves facing a German advancement, they would allow themselves to be passed by and operate as part of the partisan unit in the German rear, conducting sabotage operations and enforcing Soviet loyalty among local residents. The subversive nature of NKVD operations, a unit of the state government not accountable to its citizens, set a precedent that likely encourages the authoritarian methods of the contemporary Russian government.

As the Germans had penetrated far into the Soviet Union, their harsh occupation policies encouraged greater organic resistance in the vast area of German-occupied Soviet territory. The NKVD recruited, trained, and led partisan forces with the help of Communist Party cells. In a famous radio broadcast, USSR dictator Joseph Stalin detailed his "scorched earth" policy and directed that in "areas occupied by the enemy, partisan units, mounted or on foot, must be formed; sabotage groups must be organized to combat the enemy units, to foment partisan warfare everywhere, blow up bridges and roads, damage telephone and telegraph lines, set fires to the forests, stores, and transport."[7] Here was an appeal to partisan warfare from the head of state, emphasizing the importance and eventual familiarity of this act to the Russian cause. Additionally, the Russian leader announced that he had established a State Committee of Defense to stiffen the resistance of the entire nation at all levels.[8] The Partisan Movement matured in capacity and capability, ultimately playing a key role in the Soviet defeat of the Germans in World War II.

The Soviet government and military formalized the training, employment, and oversight of the partisans in occupied territories. Central oversight provided synergy and formed the

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[6] Ibid., 45.

[7] Joseph Stalin (radio broadcast, 3 July 1941).

[8] Arthur Rothstein, trans., *Soviet Foreign Policy during the Patriotic War: Document and Materials*, vol. 2, *January 1 1944–December 31, 1944* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1946), 21–24.

partisans and Red Army into something much greater than the sum of their parts, but also required the Soviet government to view the operating environment as a multidimensional entity. This allowed the Soviet government to view the assigned area and forces as a single, fused entity in relation to time, events, space, and purpose. Furthermore, the Soviet government could connect the effects of its forces to all aspects of the operational environment, enabling it to assess all the kinetic and nonkinetic effects of the partisan and Red Army's actions. Partisan members filled positions on the staffs within the Red Army field commands and Soviet Army intelligence, while NKVD counterintelligence personnel were attached to partisan staffs to control all Soviet intelligence operations in German-occupied areas. These attached personnel also assisted the partisans with sabotage, reconnaissance in support of combat operations, reconnaissance of base security, and political espionage. In addition, partisan units received guidebooks covering such topics as political espionage, intelligence gathering, antipartisan tactics, partisan propaganda, German use of native personnel, and methods of recruitment.[9] Additionally, the partisans reestablished the Communist Party in the German rear to unite the people, enhance anti-German/pro-Communist fervor, prevent further defection of Soviet citizens.

Resurrecting the Communist Party in the German rear also served as a self-sustaining partisan recruitment tool and set the conditions for a return of Soviet control. These Communist Party groups organized the locals to support the partisans by collecting food, clothing, and transportation in support of missions. They were then supplied with training and equipment to support the Soviet propaganda machine. Individuals were trained as editors, writers, printers, and artists to broadcast and disseminate propaganda material in German-occupied areas and over the illegal partisan radio stations. The selective subject matter consisted of Red Army and partisan victories, German intentions to reduce Russia to colonial status, stories of German atrocities, the German slave labor program, and the promise that the Red Army would prevail. The targets of the propaganda were primarily native (Soviet citizen) units serving under the Germans. By late spring 1942, these units saw considerable defections, and therefore, hampered German security and intelligence operations.[10]

Through this massive partisan operation, the Russians gained extensive knowledge and experience in diverse UW activities, such as establishing, training, supporting, and tasking a partisan force and the interoperability of that partisan force with formal military and intelligence operations. The movement helped develop tactics, techniques, and procedures for

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[9] Ibid., 51.
[10] Mao Tse-tung, *The Turning Point in World War II* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1968).

the conduct of UW, which assisted Russian political and military leaders in future conflicts, and more important, in conjunction with political instruments and overt military action. Specifically, the Russians used their experience to deal with the anti-Soviet resistance in Lithuania.

## Countering Anti-Soviet Resistance in Lithuania

On 23 August 1939, the Soviet Union and Germany signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (or German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact) just days prior to the beginning of World War II. Eastern Europe was divided into German and Soviet spheres of influence. Finland, Estonia, Latvia, and Bessarabia were apportioned to the Soviet sphere by the "secret protocols."[11] Poland was to be divided with the areas east of the Narev, Vistula, and San rivers going to the Soviet Union, while Germany would occupy the area west of the rivers. On 28 September 1939, the three Baltic states were given no choice but to sign a pact of "Mutual Assistance," which permitted the Soviet Union to station troops in their countries.[12] The same day, a supplementary German-Soviet directive transferred most of Lithuania from the German to the Soviet sphere of interest. This pact gave the Soviet Union the land buffer it desired in the west, prevented the Soviet Union from entering the war against Germany, and kept Germany from fighting a war on two fronts. A puppet Lithuanian government voted unanimously to join the Soviet Union on 21 July 1940. Although Lithuania disappeared from the map of Europe, the majority of Western countries did not recognize the annexation (as is the situation with Crimea today). Lithuanian national resistance to Soviet domination and brutality grew steadily from a largely political and social movement into an organized partisan movement.

The Soviet Union, aware of the civil unrest caused by the annexation, focused its efforts on identifying and tracking political figures and other potentially influential anti-Soviet individuals. These people often faced imprisonment, torture, or deportation to Siberia.[13] Despite Soviet persecution of dissidents, numerous underground organizations formed throughout the country, although they lacked a centralized, cohesive chain of command. The most prominent of these early partisan groups was the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF) headquartered in Berlin. When German Army invaded the USSR, the LAF organized a revolt on the 22 June 1941 and formed a short-lived provisional government. In many villages,

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[11] A secret protocol was appended to the original public pact on the same date, which divided Eastern Europe, while a second protocol was signed on 28 September 1939, clarifying Lithuania's borders.

[12] See "Pact of Mutual Assistance between the USSR and Estonia," *Lituanus* 14, no. 2 (1968): 94–96.

[13] Mao, *The Turning Point in World War II*, 25.

Nazi occupation was supported in response to promises of sovereignty. Almost immediately after seizing the Lithuanian capital, the Germans attempted to mobilize Lithuanians for assistance in their war against the Allies. The Lithuanians, however, eventually resisted these attempts and successfully prevented the establishment, unlike the other Baltic states, of a Lithuanian SS formation in the service of Germany, despite some support for the Germans' anti-Semitic program by a minority of Lithuanians. Ultimately, by the end of 1944, the Red Army returned and regained control of Lithuania.

During the Soviet reoccupation of Lithuania, the cruel actions of the Soviets—murder, torture, execution of civilians, and the destruction of private property—provoked the resistance movement into violence.[14] In the first year of partisan warfare, while World War II was still ongoing, approximately 10,000 Lithuanians were killed by the Soviet government, about half of the total deaths the nation suffered in the war. Men avoided conscription to the Red Army; instead, they hid in the forests and joined the Lithuanian partisans. The most active organizer of partisan recruitment and resistance during the Soviet reoccupation of 1944 was the Lithuanian Liberation Army (LLA). The LLA mission was to mobilize the resistance, defend the country, obstruct the formation of occupying bodies, and resist Red Army conscription to hold democratic parliamentary elections and reestablish the sovereign nation of Lithuania. They had a formal chain of command and rank structure, required partisans to take an oath of loyalty to the country and the partisan movement, possessed an ability to train and equip partisans, and even had military uniforms. These newly formed Lithuanian troops, who displaced themselves to the forests to train, plan, rest, and refit became known as the Forest Brothers.[15] By spring 1945, about 30,000 Lithuanians were actively fighting Soviet rule. Their leadership was partly comprised of former Lithuanian Army officers with combat experience in World War I or II. The resistance force's discipline, training, and support of the local people caused the Russian Red Army and NKVD to refine their tactics to more effectively collect information and conduct operations against the partisan movement.

Initially, apparently having learned nothing from the failure of the Germans, Soviet countermeasures were heavy-handed. In 1944, Red Army commanders seriously considered

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[14] Juozas Daumantas, *Fighters for Freedom: Lithuanian Partisans versus the U.S.S.R., 1944–1947* (New York: Manyland Books, 1975), 33.

[15] Daniel J. Kaszeta, "Lithuanian Resistance to Foreign Occupation, 1940–1952," *Lituanus* 34, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 5–32.

a proposal to deport the entire Lithuanian population to Siberia.[16] The Soviet leadership ignored all recommendations for less aggressive measures to deal with the partisans and ordered the execution of civilians suspected of supporting the resistance and burned their farms and villages. Soviet soldiers carried out these orders and committed atrocities in the process. By 1947, the Soviets had to admit their measures were as ineffectual as they were cruel. If anything, they only made the partisans stronger by increasing their civilian support. To counter Soviet aggression and increase efficiency, the partisans decentralized their command and control by organizing into smaller groups and dividing their area of operations into districts. The Soviets previously had called upon loyal operatives who had experience in WWII partisan warfare and had then successfully suppressed revolts in western Ukraine to do the same in Lithuania. One such man was Major A. M. Sokolovov of the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs, or MVD (*Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del*, formerly the NKVD secret police), an infamous counterinsurgency specialist.

The biggest problem in Lithuania, Russian experts decided, was the lack of reliable intelligence. Russian agents who attempted to infiltrate the partisan bands were quickly captured and killed by the wary Lithuanians. To counter this, the MVD turned to captured former Lithuanian insurgents who were amenable to being bribed, retrained, and sent to rejoin active partisan groups. Their knowledge of partisan jargon and ability to pass loyalty tests made them more useful. Eventually, the MVD organized fake partisan bands that engaged in staged battles with Soviet troops. The survivors of the engagement (MVD agents) fled to genuine partisan bands, which welcomed them as battle-tested reinforcements. Additionally, these MVD partisan groups would liberate MVD-held prisoners and deceptively obtain information on partisan meeting places, link up procedures, and more. Using this newly acquired information, these groups then made contact with partisan units and killed them and their families acting in the name of partisans.[17] These agents, who received training in surveillance, interrogation, and torture from a special Soviet secret police school, were known as *spetsgruppa* (special forces groupings) by the Soviets and *stribai* (destroyers) by the Lithuanians. They were extremely effective. Information recently uncovered in the Soviet archives reveals that, by 1949, the spetsgruppa had infiltrated partisan units to their very highest levels. Soviet agents identified insurgent leaders and their civilian supporters, and even penetrated Lithuanian expatriate organizations in the West.

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[16] Arvydas Anušauskas, *The Anti-Soviet Resistance in the Baltic States* (Lithuania: Genocide and Resistance Centre of Lithuania, 1999), 27.
[17] Ibid., 31.

These operations spread paranoia and provoked counterproductive partisan reprisals against suspected collaborators. The partisans responded by organizing reprisal actions against the collaborators with the Soviets. It is estimated that the partisans killed 19,000 such collaborators.[18] This aspect of the partisan warfare allowed the Soviets to portray the guerrilla fighters as "murderous bandits." This led to the sharp decline of the partisan movement's effectiveness and recruitment in Lithuania. The Soviets declared that organized partisan resistance had been completely destroyed by 1952. The Soviets had successfully refined and implemented the lessons learned during their WWII partisan operations in unconventional warfare to successfully counter the Lithuanian partisan movement from 1946 to 1952, including a full understanding of partisan tactics, techniques, and procedures. The Russians used an emphasis on political views to identify threats, to infiltrate the partisan units causing distrust, and to allow the guerrillas to turn on themselves—a divide and conquer tactic. Unfortunately for the Soviets, the lessons learned during WWII did not carryover to their conflict in Afghanistan.

## Afghanistan

Russian military involvement in Afghanistan has a long history, going back to Tsarist expansions in the so-called "Great Game" between Russia and Britain. This interest in the region continued on through the Soviet era, with billions in economic and military aid sent to Afghanistan between 1955 and 1978. Few in the West, however, took notice until the Soviets took the city of Kabul in 1979. This was the first time in several decades that the Russians fought an unconventional war against an enemy that used guerrilla-style tactics. Up to this point, the Russians had successfully conducted and thwarted unconventional means of warfare. Moreover, during the Soviet-Afghan War, the Russians made significant mistakes, including a failure to review past lessons learned and to prepare for the type of war they would be fighting. This ultimately led to a strategic defeat.

After World War II, the Soviet Union made a concerted effort, often in competition with Western powers, to win over Afghanistan and bring it into the Soviet sphere of influence. As of 1946, the Afghan government could be characterized as a limited democracy headed by a monarch but governed under a parliamentary structure.[19] In 1953, Lieutenant General Mohammad Daud Khan assumed the office of prime minister and worked to internally modernize the country and broaden its international economic ties by propositioning

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[18] V. Stanley Vardys, "The Partisan Movement in Postwar Lithuania," *Lituanus* 15, no.1 (Spring 1969).

[19] I. Mironov and G. Polyakov, "Afghanistan: The Beginning of a New Life," *International Affairs*, no. 3 (March 1979): 54.

the Soviet Union to engage in talks with Afghanistan regarding economics and security. The relationship eventually flourished, and in 1956, the Soviet Union agreed to train and equip the Afghan Army. Additionally, the Soviet Union improved the infrastructure of the country, spending in excess of $1 billion U.S. dollars by the mid-1970s.[20]

Intense opposition from factions of the Marxist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) was sparked by the repression imposed on them by Daud's regime and the death of a leading PDPA member, Mir Akbar Khyber, in April 1978.[21] The mysterious circumstances of Khyber's death sparked massive anti-Daud demonstrations in Kabul, which resulted in the arrest of several prominent PDPA leaders.[22] On 27 April 1978, the Afghan Army, which had been sympathetic to the PDPA cause, overthrew and executed Daud along with members of his family as a part of what is typically called the Afghan Spring Revolution. Nur Muhammad Taraki, secretary general of the PDPA, became president of the Revolutionary Council and prime minister of the newly established Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA).

Prime Minister Taraki agreed to a more concrete and long-term relationship between the DRA and the Soviet Union. Political turmoil ensued as power struggles among political parties erupted, fracturing the government and splintering the population. Then, Turaki's key rival, Hafizullah Amin, seized power in September 1979. The Soviet leadership placated Amin through general political talks but did not trust him. Amin perpetuated a policy of rapid modernization along socialist principles, antagonizing an already uncertain population that remained devoted to the Muslim way of life.[23]

The agreed-upon purpose for the eventual Russian intervention was to assist the Afghan people and the DRA in their efforts to suppress the revolution of mercenary bandits and their foreign sponsors (United States, China, and several Islamic states).[24] The Soviet Union viewed the conflict in Afghanistan as a very limited insurgency that could be defeated with minimal Soviet involvement. The plan was to destroy the insurgency while the DRA army was being resuscitated, and then have the DRA army take over and claim victory over the insurgency. The invasion also provided the opportunity for the Soviet Union to install a

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[20] Robert Baumann, *Russian-Soviet Unconventional Wars in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Afghanistan*, Leavenworth Papers No. 20 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Combat Studies Institute, 1993), 129.

[21] Henry S. Bradsher, *Afghanistan and the Soviet Union* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1983), 72–73.

[22] A. Z. Hilali, "The Soviet Penetration into Afghanistan and the Marxist Coup," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 18, no. 4 (2005): 709, https://doi.org/10.1080/13518040500354984.

[23] J. Bruce Amstutz, *Afghanistan: The First Five Years of Soviet Occupation* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, 1986), 24.

[24] Ibid., 132.

pro-Soviet government. Very quickly, the Soviets realized that the populations' dislike of the current government was fueling an insurgency that dwarfed the DRA army's capacity and resources. Paradoxically, the Soviet intervention intensified the struggle by providing a fragmented and unorganized resistance with a common focus and enemy, just as the Germans' offenses had inspired unity among Soviet peoples in World War II. Additionally, the Soviet intervention denied the DRA the credibility necessary for DRA legitimacy and survival. Ignoring past successes in dealing with resistance movements—specifically knowing the type of war being fought and knowing the enemy—the Soviets made a number of assumptions based on "like" areas of operation they had studied, specifically making fallacious comparisons with Iran. The higher staffs and political leaders failed to use their ties with their Afghan allies and Russian personnel on the ground to answer specific questions about the enemy (e.g., disposition, motivation, organization, size, and source of support).

Russian heavy-handedness with the local populace caused a violent reaction and further support for the insurgency as it had with the Lithuanian partisans decades before. The military and diplomatic strategies for increasing DRA military capacity and infrastructure improvements had minimal positive effect compared to the enormous efforts put forward by the Soviet Union. Another important lesson, which emerges from the early years of Soviet operations against the insurgency in Afghanistan, was that the inflexibility of the lower-level commanders to adapt to the unconventional and nonstandard tactical solutions was a critical weakness. This is attributed to the conventional orientation and rigid training of both the troops and officer cadre, which have little utility in a fluid counterinsurgency scenario. Although the Russians made early tactical adjustments to their strategy, they continued to employ large military formations according to the rules of conventional warfare without effect and with the hopes of winning through overwhelming military force.[25]

Soviet journalist A. Bovin, writing for the publication *Izvestiia* in December 1988, summed up the situation best when he wrote that "the overall effect of the presence of Soviet troops and their participation in combat operations clearly proved negative. We ourselves handed the counter-revolutionary forces some powerful means of influencing public perceptions. The foreign intervention stirred patriotism, and the appearance of 'infidels' spawned religious intolerance. On such a field, even a tie would have been miraculous."[26] The Soviets were slow in devising a counterinsurgency strategy to meet the growing threat in Afghanistan. More often than not, the response was reactive rather than proactive. There

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[25] Edward Girardet, *Afghanistan: The Soviet War* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1985), 34.
[26] A. Bovin, "A Difficult Decade," translated in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 40, no. 51 (1988): 10–11. Originally published in *Izvestiia*, 23 December 1988.

were deficiencies in Soviet employment philosophy, which was based on a rigid command and control structure and rigid reactions. Under this system, the Soviet forces were no match for the decentralized and agile insurgents. The Russians increasingly relied on their special forces (*spetsnaz*) and had initial successes; however, they failed to adequately adapt to the Afghan tactical situation. While Afghanistan proved a profound disaster for the USSR, hastening the demise of the country, lessons were learned. The experience helped convince military strategists that using a holistic unconventional approach to defeating adversaries is essential to success in all conflicts. The first real subsequent employment of this idea was in Russia's invasion of Georgia.

## The Invasion of Georgia

Following Georgian independence in 1991, secessionists seeking to remain part of Russia seized control, amid armed conflict with the central Georgian government, of the majority of Abkhazia and portions of South Ossetia before ceasefire agreements were reached in 1992 and 1994.[27] These conflicts remained unresolved and formed the roots for the five-day war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008. Although the Russian Army eventually invaded Georgia's territory outside of Abkhazia and Ossetia, responsibility for initiating hostilities at that time is still debated. What is not debated is that there were numerous coordinated Russian cyberattacks that accompanied the military campaign. This represents the first instance of a large-scale computer network attack conducted in conjunction with major ground combat operations. The cyberattack had a significant informational and psychological impact on Georgia; it effectively isolated Georgia, if only briefly, from the outside world. The Russians used cyberpartisans to digitally infiltrate behind enemy lines and conduct sabotage operations to dismantle enemy command and control capabilities and set the conditions for employment of ground forces.

On the surface, cyberpower would not appear to be particularly useful in a war with Georgia at that time. Only 7 percent of the citizens used the Internet daily, which might cause one to disregard Georgia's critical cybervulnerability.[28] Like partisan warfare of the past, however, aggressors can use the cyberspace domain as a means to gain an advantage—military, economic, or political—over an adversary to set the conditions for follow-on actions. More than half of Georgia's 13 Internet connections to the outside world passed through Turkish or Azerbaijani Internet service providers, many of which were in

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[27] "2008 Georgia Russia Conflict Fast Facts," CNN Library, 31 March 2016.

[28] Eneken Tikk et al., *Cyber Attacks Against Georgia: Legal Lessons Identified* (Tallinn, Estonia: Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, 2008), 5.

turn routed through Russia.[29] Georgia's Internet infrastructure suffered from a lack of internal connections known as Internet exchange points.[30] Consequently, a Georgian user's request for a Georgian website would more than likely be routed through Russia.[31] As a result, pro-Russian forces and offensive Russian cyberpartisans could employ cyberwarfare to affect a large percentage of Georgia's access to, and use of, the Internet. Lacking control of the infrastructure required for external or internal Internet use, Georgia could neither disperse network traffic nor cut Internet connectivity from abroad as defensive measures without ceding the cyberadvantages of Internet access if the state came under cyberattack.[32] This gave the Russians instant access to the public to spread pro-Russian and anti-Georgian propaganda and control the information going to the international community. Additionally, the Russians interrupted Geocell, the Georgian cell phone service provider, cutting off command and control capabilities for the Georgian military. The Russians also monitored Georgian leadership's cell phone conversations. Targeting cyberinfrastructure as a valued and vulnerable political asset reveals Russia's appreciation of lessons learned from past partisan activities.

Initially, Russian hackers primarily launched distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks to prevent the use of legitimate computer resources. One way to categorize DDoS attacks is to differentiate between semantic and brute force attacks. A semantic DDoS takes advantage of either a feature or bug in some software on the target system. A brute force (or flooding) DDoS attack occurs when the target system receives more Internet traffic than it can handle, which exhausts the command and control resources of the server, rendering it unavailable.[33]

The DDoS attacks were carried out primarily by botnets or groups of computers on the Internet (termed *bots* or *zombies*) that have been infected with a piece of software known as malware.[34] The malware allows a "command and control" server to issue commands to these bots. Often, botnets launch spam email campaigns, but they can also be used to launch wide-scale DDoS attacks. The hijacking of the zombie computers typically occurs in the same manner as infections with other viruses (e.g., email scams, fake websites, infected documents). The communication from the command and control computer to the zombies is

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[29] "Georgia, Russia: The Cyberwarfare Angle," Stratfor.com, 12 August 2008.

[30] Ben Arnoldy, "Cyberspace: New Frontier in Conflicts," *Christian Science Monitor*, 13 August 2008.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Tikk et al., *Cyber Attacks Against Georgia*, 5.

[33] Ibid.

[34] John Bumgarner and Scott Borg, *Overview by the US-CCU of the Cyber Campaign Against Georgia in August of 2008*, Cyberwar Resources Guide Item #138 (U.S. Cyber Consequences Unit, 2009), 2–3.

conducted over seemingly innocuous channels on the network (i.e., a channel normally used for Internet chat) to prevent discovery. Criminal organizations, such as the Russian Business Network (RBN), use and lease botnets for various purposes; the botnets used in the onslaught against Georgian websites were affiliated with Russian criminal organizations, including RBN, meaning Russia used any means necessary and all available assets to conduct war.

The attacks primarily targeted Georgian government and media websites with DDoS incidents. The Georgian networks, due to their fragile infrastructure, were more susceptible to flooding than the Estonian networks that Russian hackers attacked a year earlier. In the second phase, Russian cyberoperations expanded to inflict damage on more targets, including financial institutions, businesses, educational institutions, Western media (BBC and CNN), and a Georgian hacker website.[35] The assaults on these servers not only included DDoS, but defacements of the websites as well (e.g., pro-Russian propaganda on government sites, such as a picture comparing Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili to Adolf Hitler).[36] In addition, several Russian hackers used publicly available email addresses of Georgian politicians to initiate a spam email campaign. These actions displayed the technical prowess of the Russian government and further demonstrated the importance of harnessing all forms of national power in the pursuit of military and political success.

In conjunction with an effective cyber campaign, the Russians had stoked local discontent among ethnic Abkhaz and South Ossetians for many years prior to the invasion to make it harder for Georgia to pursue peaceful reconciliation. In this way, Russia empowered the regimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and pursued aggressive information operations in both territories to strengthen the perception of Georgia as an enemy among the local population. Additionally, Russia bolstered peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to discourage the spread of the color revolutions that had been successful in other parts of the former Soviet Union. In July 2008, these peacekeeping forces conducted an exercise dubbed Caucasus 2008 consisting of at least 8,000 troops, 700 military vehicles, and more than 30 aircraft. According to Russian officials, the main purpose of the exercise was to train for antiterrorism operations and to practice peace-enforcement operations in zones of conflict.[37]

The overall success of the conflict was due, in part, to the preparation of Russian general

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[35] "2008 Georgia Russia Conflict Fast Facts."

[36] Capt Paulo Shakarian, "The 2008 Russian Cyber Campaign against Georgia," *Military Review*, November–December 2011.

[37] Carolina Vendil Pallin and Fredrik Westerlund, "Russia's War in Georgia: Lessons and Consequences," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 20, no. 2 (2009): 400–24, https://doi.org/10.1080/09592310902975539.

staff. Their detailed operational planning, coordination, and effective implementation of all facets of government power, with a focus on strategic surprise, kept the war at a limited level to make politics decisive. Nonetheless, the Russian Armed Forces' conventional performance was subpar. Ruslan Pukhov, the director of the Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies in Moscow, said that "the victory over the Georgian army . . . should become for Russia not a cause for euphoria and excessive joy, but serve to speed up military transformations."[38] The Russians heeded Pukhov's advice, and evidence of this transformation was found in the invasion of Crimea.

## The Invasion of Crimea

The 2014 Russian operation in Crimea was an impressive demonstration of the effective employment of strategic communication, covert operations, tactical information operations, and political subversion. This successful nonlinear campaign resulted in the Ukrainian military surrendering all of their 190 bases without a shot fired.[39] Instead of relying on a mass deployment of tanks and artillery as in wars of the past, the Russians deployed fewer than 10,000 assault troops, mostly naval infantry, already stationed in Crimea. These naval units were backed by a few battalions of airborne troops and spetsnaz—all denying they were Russian soldiers—against 16,000 Ukrainian military personnel.[40]

Russia pursued political subversion through the use of mass media outlets for information operations, the encouragement of underground partisans, and highlighted government corruption. For example, components of Russia's foreign policy in Ukraine, specifically to support and increase the number of Russian speakers in the region and the number of Ukrainian citizens who identify with the Russian culture, are part of a long-term strategy of political subversion. Additionally, the surreptitious organization of pro-Russian demonstrations in the city of Sevastopol in February 2014 is another example. The use of proxies was emphasized in subsequent efforts with a step up in intensity through cyberattacks, the seizure of local government buildings, arming and training the underground resistance, and the employment of certain special operations forces to conduct unconventional warfare. Additionally, the Russians initiated the surreptitious introduction of heavy weapons to the resistance force and the integration of these forces into a Russian command structure, similar to how Soviet partisans during World War II functioned under the NKVD umbrella.

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[38] Christian Lowe, "Georgia War Shows Russian Army Strong but Flawed," Reuters, 20 August 2008.
[39] Jānis Bērziņš, *Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defense Policy*, Policy Paper no. 2 (Riga, Latvia: National Defence Academy of Latvia, Center for Security and Strategic Research, 2014), 4.
[40] Ibid., 5.

On 27 February 2014, a pro-Russian resistance force assisted by spetsnaz captured several government buildings, including the parliament in Simferopol on the Crimean Peninsula.[41] Russia conducted this aggression under the coercive cover of its nuclear deterrent. Russia's nuclear threats and large-scale regional military exercises support this type of coercion. Dr. Philip Karber, president of the Potomac Foundation and a frontline observer of the war in eastern Ukraine, argues that as the level of intensity increases in nonlinear warfare, a shift occurs from covert operations to overt operations; however, covert operations are continuous. Although Karber's argument sounds linear in nature, it is actually a nonlinear process. Before the commencement of boots-on-the-ground military operations, Russia led with a strong and effective information operations campaign.

Russia's information operations and use of cyberwarfare in Ukraine can be characterized by a high level of sophistication, orchestration, and planning, far superior to operations in Georgia but equal in sophistication (based on the technology of the time) to that of the Partisan Movement during World War II. Rather than adopting a singular, uniform information operations strategy for all audiences, Russia deployed a well-planned information operations strategy within Ukraine while simultaneously employing a different information operations approach outside of Ukraine against Western media. Inside Ukraine, Russia's investment in supporting Russian identity, including the promotion of Russian language and culture during the previous decade, essentially expanded the audience they could influence. Russia subsequently targeted this section of the Ukrainian population with information operations using the full spectrum of media outlets (e.g., Internet, radio, television, social media, and even direct SMS messaging to individual Ukrainian soldiers) to secure the population's support for military actions in Ukraine.[42] To disrupt the Western narrative condemning Russia's actions, the combination of disinformation and criticism through various media outlets was delivered in multiple languages, such as English, Arabic, French, Spanish, German, and other popular dialects. As a result, Russia was able to use media outlets to create an information space supporting military operations in Ukraine well before there were Russian boots on the ground. Simultaneously, the Russians exploited cyberspace to influence, cripple, and demoralize the Ukrainian leadership, military, and society. This level of subversive activity is generally unfamiliar to U.S. military leaders who tend to delineate the start of hostilities by the employment of conventional forces. In this way, and even compared to Georgia, the cyberattacks in Crimea and parts of the Ukraine are more sophisticated and commenced years before the actual military conflict.

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[41] Amanda Macias, "A Detailed Look at How Russia Annexed Crimea," *Business Insider*, 24 March 2015.

[42] Nicole Gaouette, "Sanctions-Strapped Russia Outguns the U.S. in Information War," *Bloomberg*, 2 April 2015.

During the Ukrainian revolution and Russian invasion, the head of Ukraine's Computer Emergency Response Team, Nikolay Koval, stated that cyberattacks rose in parallel with ongoing political events in both number and severity.[43] In 2012, Russian (or pro-Russian) hackers vandalized Ukrainian government websites with politically motivated digital graffiti. In 2013, Ukrainian network defenders discovered new and more menacing forms of malware, such as RedOctober, MiniDuke, and NetTraveler. In 2014, hacktivist groups (e.g., CyberBerkut) published stolen Ukrainian government documents, though counterintuitively; there was minimal proxy use by the Russians during the cyberwarfare campaign. Additionally, in Crimea, attacks ranged from cutting network cables to commandeering satellites. In eastern Ukraine, cyberespionage such as the use of location data from mobile phones and Wi-Fi networks aided in targeting Ukrainian Army units, a technique not used during the Georgia crisis. Additionally, the region was isolated from the rest of Ukraine by Internet censorship and regular forensics checks on citizens' computers and mobile devices.

In the past, the Russian (and Soviet) military as a whole has taken a heavy-handed approach by using large troop formations to deal with host-nation populations and anti-Russian groups, as previously mentioned during the partisan movement in Lithuania and in Afghanistan. However, recent Russian behavior shows a tendency to avoid overt military action when possible. These objectives include causing chaos and disrupting civil order, while seeking to provoke excessive responses by the state's security organs, and thus delegitimizing the Ukrainian government in Kiev. The change in approach reflected an effective use of a population centric mindset. These smaller, specialized forces focused on engaging the population and winning over hearts and minds to garner support for the Russian government. These specialized forces were considered polite and professional as they worked with the population, encouraged Ukrainian soldiers to defect, and only fired their weapons in the air to deter individuals from traveling along certain lines of communication. Additionally, to reduce civilian intimidation and to give Russia plausible deniability at first, the spetsnaz wore no unit or national insignia.

This change in tactics is best explained by General Valery Gerasimov in his previously mentioned article, when he states that one of the major changes in conducting war is the increasing application of political, diplomatic, economic, and other nonmilitary means with coordinated military effort.[44] Informational resistance opens a plethora of asymmetrical possibilities to reduce the combat potential of an enemy. He goes on to quote the great

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[43] Kenneth Geers, ed., *Cyber War in Perspective: Russian Aggression against Ukraine* (Tallinn, Estonia: NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, 2015), 55.
[44] Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight," 24.

Soviet war theorist Brigade Commander Georgii Isserson, who said, "War in general is not declared. It simply begins with already developed military forces. Mobilization and concentration are not part of the period after the onset of the state of war as was the case in 1914 but rather, unnoticed, proceed long before that."[45] This purposeful obfuscation reveals Russia's willingness to see warfare as the totality of conflict, something defined as extending beyond a call to arms.

## Conclusion

Russia is employing a variety of military and nonmilitary methodologies in an unprecedented manner that continues to surprise the international community. The methods are not new, however—only the technology that supports them is new. States have used propaganda, unconventional warfare, economic warfare, information operations, and other elements of warfare as long as they have existed. As U.S. Army historian Edgar Howell wrote in 1956, "The Soviet Partisan Movement which was established in the wake of the German armies invading the USSR in 1941 was, in both conception and scope, the greatest irregular resistance movement in the history of warfare."[46] It combined the elements of resistance movements of the past with modern technology of the day (1941), such as communications, transportation, and weapons, to aid the Red Army in the defeat of the Nazi onslaught.

Due to the recent success of Russia in Georgia and Crimea, an increasing number of state and nonstate actors will likely incorporate nonlinear warfare into their military doctrine and operations. As these threats multiply during a time of fiscal constraints and diversify as increasingly hybrid, asymmetric, and ambiguous, it is critical for military thinkers, politicians, and strategists to further their understanding of Russian warfare. The United States inaccurately labels new techniques of war, however, as *hybrid* war and *unrestricted* war. The United States needs to discontinue the use of trendy terminology to classify the ancient practice of war as something new, as it creates undue confusion and friction across the Services and the government, which in turn makes it difficult for military leadership to develop the right strategy to serve policy. This challenge has long roots and is in full relief today. Russians see this evolution clearly, and so now must the West.

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[45] Ibid., 29.
[46] Howell, *Soviet Partisan Movement*, 203.

## Chapter 5

# Russia's Military Resurgence and Adoption of Nonlinear Warfare
## Comprehension and Response

Major Isaac D. Moore

The purpose of this paper is to help answer the question: How should we perceive and respond to Russia's military resurgence and adoption of nonlinear warfare? There has been a decrease in the number of U.S. servicemembers stationed in Europe from 300,000 when the Cold War ended in 1991 to 30,000 today, which was prompted by an expectation that the demise of the Soviet Union would necessarily lead to a more stable security situation in Europe.[1] Unfortunately, Russia has increasingly demonstrated the intent, will, and capability to expand its influence through both an evolving nonlinear warfare methodology as well as high-end conventional capability. General Joseph Dunford, U.S. chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, emphasized this reality in his confirmation testimony before the U.S. Senate in 2015, stating, "If you want to talk about a nation that could pose an existential threat to the United States, I'd have to point to Russia."[2] Based on this assessment, it is essential that the United States understand how Russia might see its renewed military capability as a viable method to reach the aggressive national goals articulated in its recently updated national security strategy, signed by Vladimir Putin on 31 December 2015, that updated

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[1] Daniel Wiser, "U.S. General: We Have 'Hugged' the Russian Bear for Too Long," *Washington Free Beacon*, 7 January 2016.

[2] Matthew Rosenberg, "Joint Chiefs Nominee Warns of Threat of Russian Aggression," *New York Times*, 9 July 2015.

Russia's National Security Strategy out to 2020.[3] Specifically, the rapid evolution of Russia's approach to adapting warfighting methods to the ever-expanding information sphere requires a detailed investigation if we are to gain an understanding sufficient to effectively counter any further aggressive plans.

Although the term *nonlinear warfare* has no specific definition, it is generally characterized by an increased reliance on nonmilitary levers of national power, such as political, economic, informational, and sociocultural. This activity is supplemented by military means of a concealed character; for example, information operations (IO) and declared military action seen only in the final stages of conflict. Russia has applied nonlinear warfare successfully in Georgia, Crimea, and eastern Ukraine. The increasing complexity of the operating environment will likely make these tactics more common in the future and thus require a more deliberate response.

## Russian Military Reform after the Cold War

Russia's adoption of nonlinear warfare is driven both by its overall relative weakness in comparison to NATO forces in the post-Soviet period and its long historical familiarity and proficiency with unconventional warfare techniques. Despite the U.S. military's drawdown in Europe and prioritization of the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, Russia remained militarily weak compared to the United States and NATO in Europe for the two decades following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia during the past eight years, however, has significantly transformed its military. One of the major goals of the transformation was to reduce the size of the military, through a rapid and bold rearrangement of forces that included firings, staff "flattening," and consolidating commands from 1.3 to 1 million total personnel. In essence this was "the de facto renunciation of a mass mobilization army in favor of a more professional and combat-ready outfit."[4] The ultimate goal was to reinvigorate its military by creating a smaller but more efficient and flexible force along the lines of Western professional militaries.

This was no small task because, since the end of the Cold War, the Russian military has been characterized by skeleton units that relied on a long recall and build-up process to become operationally ready. In the article "Being Strong: National Security Guarantees for Russia," Putin bluntly assessed the situation in 1999: "When gangs of international ter-

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[3] Carl Schreck, "Putin Signs New Security Strategy Warning of Heightened Risks from West," *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, 31 December 2015.

[4] Mikhail Barbanov, Konstantin Makienko, and Ruslan Pukhov, *Military Reform: Toward the New Look of the Russian Army* (Moscow: Valdai Discussion Club, 2012), 15.

rorists directly attacked Russia, we found ourselves in a tragic situation. To put together a 66,000-strong task force, we had to scrape it up, literally, piece by piece, with composite battalions and detached companies." Moreover, he found that "the personnel of the Armed Forces exceeded 1,360,000. Yet we had practically no combat-ready units that would be prepared to go into action without additional preparations."[5] The idea of having a 1.3-million-man military that was in reality not combat ready was rooted in both historical precedent and bureaucratic, social, and economic limitations. The Soviet Union also had planned to mobilize several million personnel, but only maintained about 20 percent in a state of permanent readiness. In this scenario, there would be time to mobilize and mass forces. This seems a sound strategy in response to a major conventional threat preceded by indications and warnings, but when the Cold War ended, this bloated-but-hollow structure persisted.

Putin signaled his intent regarding comprehensive military reform in 2007 when he appointed Anatoly E. Serdyukov, who had served in the tax services rather than the military, to the position of minister of defense. There have been many failed attempts to reform the Russian military since the collapse of the Soviet Union, all of which met resistance for myriad reasons, such as corruption, entrenched interest groups who fought change, lack of financial resources, and lack of political will. Despite nearly nonstop reforms since 1992, the main problems inherited from the Soviet era remained more than a decade later. In reality, Putin, Serdyukov, and others had been working aggressively toward significant military reforms for several years and were making progress; however, poor Russian military performance in the five-day war with Georgia in August 2008 served as a catalyst that enabled bold and comprehensive reforms in quick order. Russia had been embarrassed and its leadership seized the moment.[6]

The primary goals of the reforms were to
- shrink the armed forces to 1 million by 2012 (down from 1.35 million);
- eliminate 200,000 officer positions to make the military less top-heavy;
- eliminate permanently understrength units;
- streamline command structures by replacing the traditional divisional model with flexible brigades under four strategic territorial commands;
- improve training and enhance the military education system; and
- modernize weapons systems.[7]

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[5] Vladimir Putin, "Being Strong: National Security Guarantees for Russia," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 20 February 2012.
[6] Bryce-Rogers, "Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War," 355.
[7] Alexander Golts and Michael Kofman, *Russia's Military: Assessment, Strategy, and Threat* (Washington, DC: Center on Global Interests, 2016), 4.

Serdyukov announced the reforms in October 2008, and by December 2009, Russia had implemented "the most radical transformation of the country's military since the creation of the Red Army in 1918."[8] Significant progress was made in decreasing the focus on mass and conscription, in favor of a smaller, but more professional and ready conventional force along with expanded special forces capable of fighting limited-scale conflicts and of influencing the local populace before and after armed conflict occurs.

The reforms also significantly increased the amount of money spent on technological capabilities required for the smaller and more specialized forces. In support of the transformation, Russia's State Armaments Program 2020 allocated $616 billion (U.S. dollars) to weapons and technology purchases between 2011 and 2022.[9] One of the top priorities of the program was to improve the command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems. The increased focus on building a command and control system, which facilitated the type of decentralized execution Western militaries have long been capable of, demonstrates that Russian leaders are prioritizing the development of specialized elements capable of multiple simultaneous and complex operations over traditional conventional forces.

Although Russia still calls for the containment of NATO through strategic nuclear deterrence, the outcome of Russia's military reform has been a more adaptable and flexible Russian force capable of employment in more limited and unconventional ways. The reformed military has evolved and morphed along with Russia's national military strategy during the past few years. As the military has transformed, so have new ideas about how best to employ it as a means to achieve national strategy. In 2013, President Putin's hand-picked Russian chief of the general staff, Valery Gerasimov, gave these new ideas structure and called for continued refinement of a new type of warfare.

## Russian Information Operations Theory and Practice

On 27 February 2013, an important, but unassuming, article appeared in Russia's *Military-Industrial Courier* (*Voenno-promyshlennyi kur'er*) entitled "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight."[10] The article outlines dynamic and creative methods for a nation to impose its will through a combination of nonmilitary and military means. In hindsight, Gerasimov provided a clear picture of how Russia viewed both military and nonmilitary uses of force and how they could be applied in the current and future operating environments. Although the

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[8] Barbanov, Makienko, and Pukhov, *Military Reform*, 7.

[9] Ibid., 3.

[10] Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight."

article received little attention at the time, Russia's military resurgence and subversive activities in Crimea and eastern Ukraine have subsequently made the article notorious among those debating the future of warfare.

In both Crimea and eastern Ukraine, Russia employed the theories and practices explained by Gerasimov. Indeed, one can read Gerasimov's article and match the major concepts with specific events within Russian operations in winter and spring 2014 in Crimea and Ukraine, respectively. The rest of this section provides a description of how Russia executed Gerasimov's intent in Crimea and Ukraine, and a brief discussion of what lessons Russia learned that may yield implications for the West.

Gerasimov began with the thought that "In the 21st century we have seen a tendency toward blurring the lines between the states of war and peace. Wars are no longer declared and, having begun, proceed according to an unfamiliar template."[11] This statement is significant as Russian leaders initially denied involvement in Crimea, about a year after Gerasimov published his ideas, and continued to behave as if it was not an active participant in the conflict in eastern Ukraine. In both cases, Russia never declared war. Gerasimov goes on to state that effective methods include "the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other nonmilitary measures—applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population."[12] It is noteworthy that in Crimea, the annexation, though military personnel were involved, was almost a bloodless affair due to Russia's use of political, informational, and other nonmilitary tactics. While it is true that in Crimea Russia enjoyed the advantages of a shared language, ethnicity, and Soviet political legacy, many other diverse countries, particularly in Central Asia, present similar conditions to varying degrees. Nonetheless, the level of language, regional expertise, and culture capability that Russian forces enjoyed in Crimea can never be achieved outside of the former Soviet space and, therefore, limits the applicability of similar methods elsewhere.

There is a tendency to view nonconventional tactics as new when they are employed in novel and challenging ways and in unique contexts. It should be noted that Russia has a long history of using political, informational, and nonmilitary measures as well as leveraging partisan activity in conjunction with conventional forces. Russian history reflects a tradition of dynamic and ever-changing applications of force, both military and nonmilitary, to achieve strategic goals.[13] Renowned scholar David M. Glantz describes that what the West refers to as nonlinear warfare is rooted in Russian military traditions of pragmatism and

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[11] Ibid., 24.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Glantz, "The Continuing Influence of Non-linear Warfare on Russian Force Structuring."

adaptation and is more of a continual evolution of warfare than an entirely new form of war. He believes that "beneath the surface appearance of apparent chaos and confusion in military affairs, Russian military thought remains remarkably vibrant and imaginative." Glantz emphasizes "continuing debates within the Russian military-theoretical community over the nature of future war and the shape and form of forces necessary to conduct it" and that this has been true since the early 1900s.[14] Gerasimov demonstrates this understanding when he quotes Russian and Soviet military leader and thinker Aleksandr Svechin (1899–1938): "It is extraordinarily hard to predict the conditions of war. For each war it is necessary to work out a particular line for its strategic conduct. Each war is a unique case, demanding the establishment of a particular logic and not the application of some template."[15]

Despite this continuity, in his article, Gerasimov describes a type of warfare that represents a significant departure from that employed by Russia in the past century. Specifically, there are aspects of Russia's nonlinear warfare that are new. More than any other nation state, Russia has developed and implemented the tenets of *netwar*, a concept defined recently by Robert Brose as consisting "of intentional activities to influence the domain of human perception via either overt or hidden channels, in which one or more actors seeks to impose a desired change upon the perception of another actor, in order that this change facilitate second- and third order effects of benefit to them."[16] They have exploited the rapid evolution of the information environment by effectively fusing this focus on the societal struggles most often associated with low-intensity conflict with cyber, diplomatic, and covert military actions. They also demonstrate an understanding of the idea that the ratio of nonmilitary to conventional military methods has been extremely imbalanced toward nonconventional tactics. Gerasimov states that "the role of nonmilitary means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness."[17] This statement shows that the head of the Russian military believes that the future of warfare is changing; indeed, the article highlights some of the methods he intends on employing to keep pace with an evolving world.

Some of the more effective methods of nonlinear warfare—and the ones most challenging for a conventional military force to counter—are old methods combined with new technology. IOs are enabled through the Internet, social media (including Twitter and Face-

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[14] Ibid., 336–37.

[15] Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight," 29.

[16] Robert Brose, "Cyberwar, Netwar, and the Future of Cyberdefense," in *2015 7th International Conference on Cyber Conflict: Architectures in Cyberspace*, ed. M. Maybaum, A. M. Osula, and L. Lindström (Tallinn, Estonia: NATO CCD COE Publications, 2015), 26.

[17] Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight," 24.

book), and the proliferation of mobile phones. Russia demonstrates the will and the vision to seek the most effective ways to use technology in support of its national objectives. Effective IO is central to Russia's nonlinear warfare—spetsnaz infiltration and agitation, state-run media, cyberattacks, and a network of "trolls" enable and contribute to all other methods of nonlinear warfare. Although it is a contentious question as to how effective Russia's IO campaign is, it continues to explore new methods and channels.

Russia's operations in Crimea and eastern Ukraine proved the effectiveness of modern IO. The Russian military uses slightly different terms to categorize, understand, teach, and conduct IO than the United States and its NATO partners. The large volume of competing definitions and well-developed IO theories in Russian military debates shows how important it is to Russian political and military strategy. According to Jolanta Darczewska of the Warsaw-based Centre for Eastern Studies, there are two main influencers of thought within Russia regarding IO—Igor Panarin and Aleksandr Gelyevich Dugin. Both advocate comprehensive and practical approaches to executing IO and assume the United States and NATO are Russia's likely adversaries.[18]

Panarin is a professor and political scientist focused on information warfare, geopolitics, and psychology who is influential with the Russian security and diplomacy communities. His early writings formed what would become the fundamentals of the Russian Federation's information warfare doctrine. In a book titled *Information World War III: War Against Russia*, he claimed that "all the so-called 'colour' revolutions in the former Soviet space and the 'Arab Spring' were a product of social control technology and information aggression from the United States."[19] The Panarin school of thought believes the best way for Russia to execute IO is through a centralized planning mechanism he refers to as the *Information KGB*, who then task and employ *Information Spetsnazes*, with their activities being broken down into the following categories:

> Propaganda (black, grey and white), intelligence (the service which collects information about the opponent), the analytical component (media monitoring and current situation analysis), the organizational component (coordination and steering channels, secret agents influencing the media which shapes the opinion of politicians and mass media to take the shape desired by the state involved in information warfare, and other combined channels, including special operation forces (sabotage

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[18] Jolanta Darczewska, *The Anatomy of Russian Information Warfare: The Crimean Operation; A Case Study* (Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, 2014), 7.

[19] Ibid., 14.

operations conducted under a foreign flag).[20] Most, if not all, elements of this IO school of thought were employed during Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Dugin is an influential revanchist political scientist. Similar to Panarin, Dugin suggests that the color revolutions were "artificial processes plotted in the West aimed at destabilizing entire regions in the post-Soviet area," with an ultimate goal of the "disassembly of Russian statehood."[21] Dugin publicly supports the idea that the Internet, social media, and technology form an important new dimension to engage in conflict with an adversary. The main way in which the two intellectuals differ is primarily in the nuance of how they believe Russia's netwar mechanism should be structured. Ultimately though, like Panarin, Dugin argues for the importance of creating what he calls the Eurasian Network to wage netwar on the Atlantic Network.

The Russian president, in his own writings and public statements, has appeared to embrace parts of both Panarin's and Dugin's ideas. In 2012, with Russia's military reforms underway, Putin's article "Being Strong: National Security Guarantees for Russia" reported that "We need to learn to look ahead, 'over the horizon,' and estimate threats for 30–50 years ahead. It is a serious task that requires that we mobilize the resources of civilian and military science and algorithms of reliable long-term forecasting." And he asked, "What kind of weapons will the Russian Army need? What kind of technical requirements will our defense industry have?" Putin also emphasizes that "information and communications technology, has fundamentally changed the nature of armed conflict" and that the "military capability of a country in space or information countermeasures, especially in cyberspace, will play a great, if not decisive, role in determining the nature of an armed conflict."[22]

With what at a minimum is at least indirect official permission, Panarin and Dugin inspire, coach, and lead a network of IO practitioners, often referred to as *trolls*. Russia's troll army reportedly consists of hundreds of paid bloggers who work shifts, maintaining operations 24 hours a day. These trolls flood Internet forums, comments sections, and social networks, often working in teams through proxy servers to spread propaganda that praises Putin and Russia's domestic and international policy, and seeks to discredit the West or at least pollute the information environment to Russia's advantage. This strong focus on IO is fundamental to Russia's current method of nonlinear warfare.

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[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid., 17.

[22] Putin, "Being Strong: National Security Guarantees for Russia."

## Nonlinear Warfare Case Study: Crimea

In 2014, Russia put its IO theories into practice and achieved impressive results. In the annexation of Crimea, Russia used its state-run media to first deny involvement and then spread disinformation to build public support within Russia for the annexation. Simultaneously, Russia used IO and netwar within Crimea to foment unrest within ethnic Russian communities and among Russian sympathizers. This resulted in a nearly bloodless annexation of Crimea and demonstrated Russia's successful employment of nonlinear warfare.

In the span of nine days, a crisis occurred, a decision was made, and military forces had occupied and annexed Crimea—that is, if one believes that the process started on 23 February 2014. There is likely more to the story than the official timeline of events offered by Putin and officials in the Kremlin. Indeed, Gerasimov's article, and the way of waging war that he outlined, describes the importance of preparatory and shaping operations when executing an adapted form of nonlinear warfare. An objective look at the timeline of events, informed by Gerasimov's article, leads to the conclusion that Russia was engaged in nonlinear warfare in Crimea well before the operation was executed (figure 7).

The model shows direct military action only occurs in Phase 3 when conflict actions begin. This implies that, on 23 February, when Putin oriented his commanders to take back Crimea, the two phases of "hidden/unnoticed emergence" and "sharpening" were possibly already underway in Crimea. Even if one believes that Russia was not involved in shaping and preparing Crimea prior to 23 February 2014, then one must be rightfully impressed by the speed and flexibility with which Russia's military can decide, communicate, and execute nonlinear operations.

True to the teachings of Panarin and Dugin, Russia dominated the narrative of what was actually happening in Crimea. Russia waited to admit its involvement in Crimea until its forces had firm control of the region, was certain that events would remain peaceful, and was clear that NATO would not become militarily involved. Only then did Russia admit its involvement, and even then Russia never admitted to the full extent of its operations there. Instead Russian IO pushed disinformation, spread rumors and falsities, and made counter-accusations against the West, in keeping with usual practices.

## Nonlinear Warfare Case Study: Eastern Ukraine

With such success in Crimea, due in large part to the effectiveness of IO, Russian operations in eastern Ukraine offer some glimpses into the shortcomings of nonlinear warfare. At this point, despite Russia achieving its objective of creating instability in Ukraine to prevent its integration with Western institutions, eastern Ukraine is far from under Russian

Figure 7. Phases of Russia's ambiguous warfare
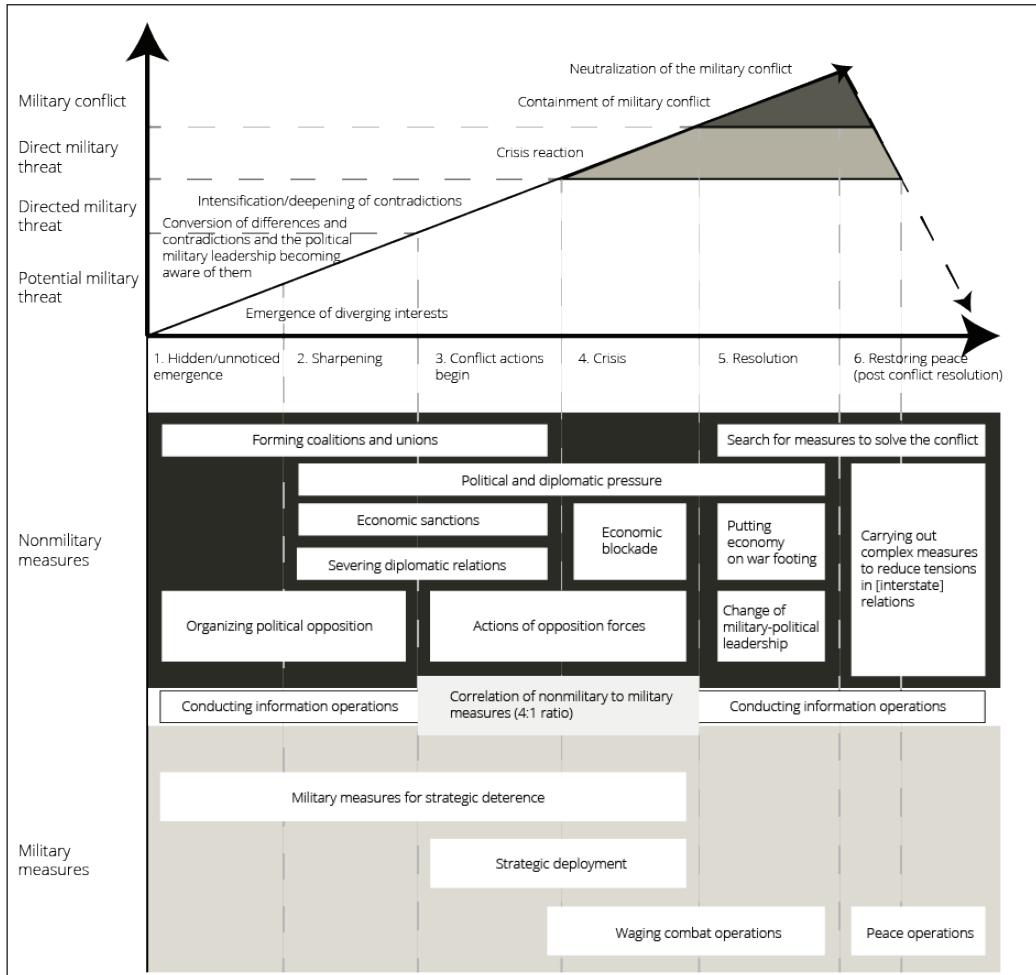


Adapted from *Voenno-Promyshlennyi Kurier*, No. 8, 27 February 2013, by MCUP.

control. In eastern Ukraine, events on the ground certainly demonstrated the lethality and effectiveness of Russian nonlinear and conventional warfare; however, Ukraine's successful resistance so far against Russia's efforts offers insight into ways to resist nonlinear warfare.

Russia's annexation of Crimea was, relatively speaking, an efficient and effective event. Overall, the conflict resulted in very little actual violence or loss of life. This was not the case, however, when Russia became involved in eastern Ukraine. Russian involvement in both Crimea and eastern Ukraine is essentially a part of the same overall operation, with

Russia's primary objectives being to gain influence and even territory while preventing Ukraine from aligning with what Russia sees as a U.S./NATO/Atlantic sphere of influence.[23] It is instructive, therefore, to examine some of the reasons for nonlinear warfare's varying levels of success between Crimea and eastern Ukraine's Donbas Region.

There were many factors that prevented Russia's operations in Ukraine from achieving full success; nevertheless, it is clear that Ukraine's timely and kinetic response was significant in disrupting the efforts of pro-Russian separatists, Russian agents, and conventional forces (both "little green men" and designated forces just east of the Russian border).[24] Within three days of the pro-Russian separatists seizing key terrain, Ukraine's leaders vowed to retaliate with force, and did so nine days later. This timely response, though plagued with challenges, missteps, poor coordination, and at times excessive force, blunted the initiative and momentum of the pro-Russian separatists. This success, in turn, served as a catalyst for Russia to deploy more overt and conventional military forces in Ukraine.

National security expert Phillip Karber, after a year in Ukraine researching the conflict, noted that "although weakened by two decades of force structure decline, lack of modernized technology, and abject neglect of readiness, the Ukrainian Army conducted the largest counter-mobilization of any European army since the end of World War Two."[25] This case study shows that conventional defensive actions act as an effective deterrence against nonlinear warfare tactics. This is a lesson that should not be lost on NATO. Military force capabilities, size, and proximity to the initiation of conflict mattered in Ukraine.

## Conclusion

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the concurrent end to the Cold War, the United States and most of the international community hoped that Russia would eventually become an open, democratic, and nonthreatening nation. This is reflected in the massive U.S. withdrawal from Europe of 300,000 troops down to 30,000. The point of this paper is neither to criticize this hope nor the action of the large drawdown of forces; but rather, it is to shed light on the reality that Russia's recent behavior indicates that it does not share this vision and the techniques it uses to promote its aggressive agenda should be thoroughly understood and actively countered. Under Vladimir Putin's leadership, Russia has steadily sought to strengthen its military, and his success is evidenced by the strikingly swift and

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[23] Zakem, Saunders, and Antoun, *Mobilizing Compatriots.*

[24] Connell and Evans, "Russia's Ambiguous Warfare and Implications for the U.S. Marine Corps."

[25] Phillip A. Karber, *"Lessons Learned" from the Russo-Ukrainian War: Personal Observations* (Vienna, VA: Potomac Foundation, 2015), 33.

broad-reaching military reforms that began in 2008. A pattern of overt aggression in Georgia and Ukraine and subversive activities in the Baltics, Central and Eastern Europe, and even the United States provide further evidence of Putin's malicious intent.

Along with the military reforms came the evolution of nonlinear warfare in Russia. This is less of an entirely new type of warfare, and more of a combination of familiar tactics with new technology in a new environment. Nonetheless, Russia's use of nonlinear warfare continues to evolve. With the recent success in Crimea, and operations in eastern Ukraine and Syria creating unwanted outcomes for Russia's competitors, it is logical to believe Gerasimov and Putin will continue to employ nonlinear warfare along Russia's periphery. Russia's continuing development and use of nonlinear warfare—including broad IO activities, infiltration, agitation, and undeclared troops—is a real challenge for the West. Hoping it just stops and goes away, however, is not a responsible course of action. The West is capable of defeating this threat, and it is time to implement logical, responsible actions. Russia's use of nonlinear warfare is alarming, but it can, and should, be defeated.

# Chapter 6

## Key Strategic Terrain of the Baltic

### The Role of Geography in Shaping the History of War

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In 1904, Halford J. Mackinder published his now-seminal work, "The Geographical Pivot of History" (see figure 6).[1] A decade before the First World War, Mackinder's work demonstrated the connection between the history of Eurasia and strategic considerations of physical geography essential to prosecuting a military campaign. A modern reading of Mackinder's work forces the reader to consider what has been widely forgotten regarding the connection between war and geography. Historically, belligerents have sought to satisfy strategic ends informed by policy through the use of their tactical means. The environment of military operations is defined by the influence of geographic space over the course of a set period of time. The timing of military operations is further affected by climate. Therefore, the science of war comprises elements of other scientific disciplines, including physical geography and climatology, which, with the variable of time, define the space of the conflict. These ancillary sciences inform those who must manipulate the environment when they employ the creativity of the art of war, and they must tread cautiously as they do so. Indeed, the experience of military professionals around the world in the last 15 years clearly highlights the connection of physical geography with the use of technology to influence strategic decision making through tactical military actions. Traditionally, it has been at the tactical level that military leaders have considered the importance of taking advantage of the environment to control key terrain, a location that gives them an advantage over their adversaries. Yet,

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[1] Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," 421–37.

recent events continue to demonstrate that key terrain is as important strategically as it is tactically, as evidenced by Russia's activities just beyond its borders.

While Western powers expended tremendous resources and manpower attempting to control chaos in their recent wars, a newly awakened Russia showed the world, quite vividly in 2014, an ability to create chaos through military operations on the Crimean Peninsula. Nowhere else has the meaning of resurgent Russian power in relation to an adversary's physical geography been more important than in the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Long before the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Baltic states were made keenly aware of their geography and how it influenced the history of conflict in the region, particularly during the wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The zenith of geographic study in relation to military operations occurred during the period of Baltic independence following the First World War, yet the importance of geography on its own, or in combination with other aspects, has not declined in significance for military leaders. As the wars of the twentieth century in the Baltic were dominated by operations on the land, sea, and air, study of Baltic terrain from this period yields informative thought about potential conflict in the twenty-first century that will include operations in cyberspace and space. In relation to the geography of Europe in a potential future conflict, Scandinavia and the Arctic comprise the Northern Flank and potential maneuver space for military formations, and the Black Sea region forms the Southern Flank, as they were in the Second World War (figure 8). This leaves the Baltic region in the central position, becoming *key strategic terrain*. While the term *key terrain* is typically associated with the tactical employment of formations, it should be argued that terrain also can have strategic properties that can yield disaster if not attacked or defended. An examination of the Baltic nations during the conduct of past military operations in the region shows the relevance of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as key strategic terrain.

## Estonia

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, several countries took an active interest in learning more about the physical geography of the Baltic region. Contained in a document uncovered at the Estonian National Defence Academy in Tartu, evidence makes it abundantly clear that the Estonians knew the Russians and Germans understood more about Estonian terrain than most Estonians did.[2] This important and extensively translat-

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[2] Nikolai Reek, *Eestimaa Sõjageograafia* [Estonian military geography], General Staff Holdings No. 29199 (Tartu: Estonian National Defence Academy, 1921). This document was translated with the assistance of Capt Rene Toomse of the Estonian Defence Forces.

Figure 8. NATO flanks and member nations
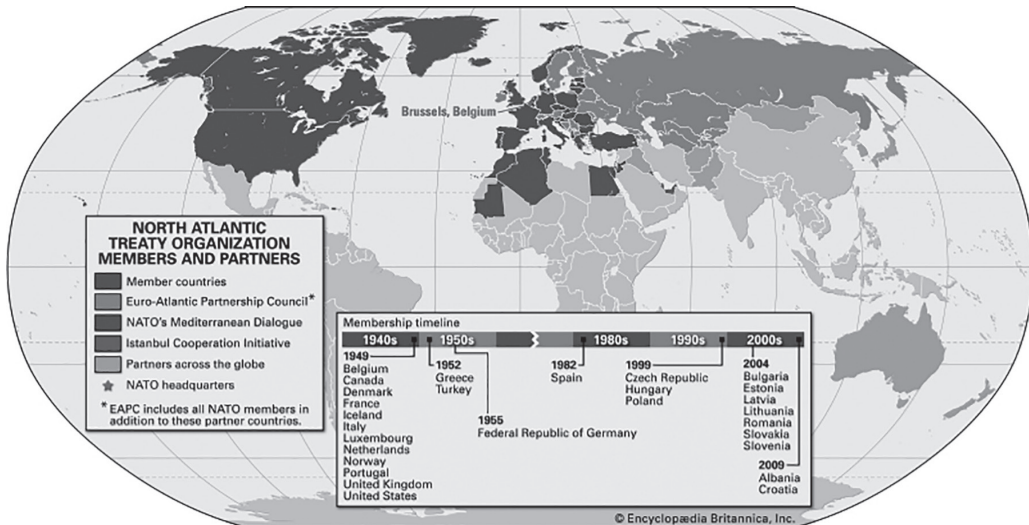


*Encyclopedia Britannica.*

ed work, *Estonian Military Geography*, was written, compiled, and edited by then-Colonel Nikolai Reek in 1920–21.[3] A little-known figure outside of Estonia, Reek was central to the Estonian military reform effort following the Estonian War of Independence (1918–20).[4] This 144-page document details Estonian physical geography as understood prior to 1921 and who the main contributors were. Reek did not act alone in the creation of this document. He makes it clear in the document's introduction that he tasked students of the Higher Command and Staff Studies Course (and, at times, senior general staff officers going through the Estonian War College) to assist in the collection of information relating to Estonian terrain. In the first sentence, Reek states that "All authors writing about Estonian geography agree there is not enough material written in Estonian about our homeland. Many of the most important works have yet to be written, because they could not be appreciated at the higher levels."[5] In this statement, Reek recognized the need for a document making use of strategic and operational considerations of terrain. Continuing to highlight the fact that other coun-

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[3] Ibid., 1.

[4] August Traksmaa, ed., *Eesti Vabadussõda* [Estonian war for independence], *1918–1920* (Tallinn, Estonia: Vabadussõja Ajaloo Komitee, 1939), 468.

[5] Reek, *Eestimaa Sõjageograafia*, 1.

tries knew more about Estonia than its residents did, Reek wrote, "In German, one can find many important works written about the Baltic states, including works on Estonia. However, the German publications are old, while newer works are published abroad making them difficult to obtain."[6] Reek expanded on this point by explaining:

> This is the situation with general Estonian geography. It is even worse with Estonian military geography. The Russian and German General Staffs have secret publications on the Baltic countries and one can find data on Estonian military geography, but the data from those sides is enlightened to suit either the German or Russian General Staffs from their perspective. On the other hand, data which concerns the state and economics are completely aged. Thirdly, names and descriptions do not correlate to names in Estonian. Lastly, the works are difficult to obtain because they are secret.[7]

It would be no secret how the Soviets were going to break the German hold on Leningrad. Thoughts developed about Baltic terrain during the interwar years that were reflections on actions from the Napoleonic, First World War, and Russian Revolutionary periods; combatants refined for action in the Second World War based on advances in armored warfare. Soviet forces delivered a crushing attack to Germany's *Army Group North* ending the siege of Leningrad lasting nearly 900 days in January 1944.[8] The Soviet Leningrad Front sought to drive a wedge between the German *Eighteenth* and *Sixteenth Armies*, the major subordinate commands of *Army Group North*. The goal of Soviet leadership was to isolate and destroy German units, while blocking critical avenues of approach for German reinforcements attempting to relieve the pressure on the isolated units.[9] To this end, Soviet operational plans called for a direct attack across the Narva River in Estonia onto the Narva Isthmus during the coldest winter months to avoid losing the tempo of their attack to de-

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] For a full treatment of the siege of Leningrad, see Harrison E. Salisbury, *The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1969).

[9] To examine Soviet tactical progression in the latter course of the Second World War, see Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East*, CMH Publication 30-5 (Washington, DC: U.S. Army, Center of Military History, 1968).

ploy assault bridging.[10] The Soviet leadership also was painfully aware of the German methods of defending in depth where German forces sought to trade physical geographic space for time while destroying enemy formations.[11] As the Soviets approached Estonia, they confronted German formations occupied in positions along the "Panther Line" along the Narva River and Lake Peipus in Estonia.[12] Dogged defensive battles allowed the Germans to keep the Soviets at bay until the water features were no longer frozen enough to be crossed by armor. The combined defensive strength of the Narva River and Lake Peipus eventually forced the Soviets to attack Estonia from the south, allowing the Germans the opportunity to retrograde precious combat power from the Narva area, following south through Dorpat (modern-day Tartu) and into Latvia.[13] The Soviets broke the Germans' control of Estonia by September 1944 as they continued their attack from the Estonian mainland into the Estonian Islands, the linchpin of the Baltic states.

The Soviet advance toward the Baltic islands of Ösel (Saaremaa), Moon (Muhu) and Dagö (Hiiumaa) in 1944 was not the first time in the twentieth century the islands would be fought over by the Germans and the Russians. During the First World War, in fall 1917, the German advance on the eastern front was stopped at the gates of Riga along the Düna (Daugava) River (figure 9). As the situation on the western front continued to deteriorate, Germany desperately desired to force Russia out of the war to free up combat power to be applied on the western front. Loading troops from the 42d German Infantry Division aboard transport ships in Libau (Liepaja), Germany conducted a successful amphibious attack, code named Operation Albion, on Ösel to operationally envelop Russian forces

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[10] The sequencing of Soviet forces in late 1943 through the end of the war makes clear that the Soviet Union's leaders had a clear pattern for how to attack, considering strategic ends in the form of war termination criteria along with the terrain and time of year for attack. Kiev and the Ukraine were retaken in fall 1943, while the breakout of Leningrad was executed in January 1944. Strategically, the Southern Flank and the ability to feed the Soviet people was necessary to enable Soviet forces to quickly secure the Baltic states without the use of precious assault bridging. Securing both flanks set the conditions for the Soviet main effort attack into Poland in summer 1944 that concluded with the destruction of Berlin in April 1945.

[11] Evolving during the new leadership of LtGen Erich Ludendorff and the 1916 publication of *The Principles of Command in the Defensive Battle in Position Warfare* by Col Bauer and Capt Geyer, this technique became the accepted German doctrine of defense. The objective of defense in depth was to force the attacker to expend energy and resources while the defender reserves strength. For more on the German defensive concept, see Timothy T. Lupfer, *The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine during the First World War*, Leavenworth Papers No. 4 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1981), 1–36.

[12] See GenMaj Burkhart Müller-Hillebrand et al., *Retrograde of Army Group North during 1944*, Foreign Military Studies Department P-035 (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1950) for more information on actions in the Kurland pocket and operations in Estonia.

[13] Throughout the course of this work, the use of the old German name is followed by the modern native name for the same place.

Figure 9. Map of Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia



Global International Waters Assessment, adapted by MCUP.

operating along the Düna River in Latvia, while strategically placing pressure on St. Petersburg, the Russian capital city.[14] Russia, soon after the invasion of Ösel, left the war due to the October Revolution (Bolshevik Revolution). There is little evidence to support claims Russia left the war as a direct result of this military operation. More likely, it was simply a product of coincidence.

Ösel again found itself on the front line of a world war in 1941 with the advance of German *Army Group North* into the Baltic with Operation Beowulf.[15] Like the First World War, the Germans saw the Baltic islands, in particular Ösel, as key strategic terrain. In contrast to the First World War, Germany now held naval superiority over the maritime domain of the Baltic Sea. Ösel's southernmost Sõrve Peninsula would become the scene of heavy fighting in fall 1944, as the remnants of two understrength German infantry divisions

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[14] For the Russian appreciation of operations against Ösel in the First World War, see Nikolai Reek, *Saaremaa kaitsmine ja vallutamine a. 1917* [The defence and conquest of Saaremaa in 1917] (Tallinn, Estonia: Tallinna Eesti Kirjastusühisus, 1937).

[15] *The Campaign Against the Soviet Union in the Northern Sector of the Eastern Front, 1941–1945*, Foreign Military Studies Department P-114a (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1952), 162.

destroyed four Soviet infantry divisions along with two armored divisions in a delay and defend mission.[16] In fact, Ösel could be seen as providing a German engagement area to shape and attrite Soviet forces in their attack on the Sõrve Peninsula. As demonstrated by the Soviet history of the Baltic states in the Second World War, the significance of the Sõrve Peninsula is not the island of Ösel, but rather the ability to influence the Strait of Irbe, and entrance to the Gulf of Riga:

> According to enemy actions it was clear he was firmly keeping their hands on the Kurland Peninsula and Northern Prussia. We [Soviet forces] must press against those two directions with as many Soviet soldiers as possible. At the same time, the Fascist command was trying to hold the Sõrve Peninsula.
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> On the Sõrve Peninsula, behind the narrow neck of the isthmus, behind deliberately prepared defensive positions, German units comprised of two infantry divisions and more than six Naval Infantry battalions were supported by naval artillery fire from the sea.
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> Such a persistent defense of the Sõrve Peninsula was dictated by enemy's desire to keep Irbe Strait.
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> Simultaneously holding Kurland Peninsula with its military-naval bases of Ventspils and Liepaja, Hitlerists created advantageous conditions for a significant defense of their own lines of communication in the Baltic States and for counteraction against Soviet troops attempting to land on the north shore of the Kurland Peninsula.[17]

The Soviet history above demonstrates the important relationship of physical terrain with military actions; the art of employing a joint force must yield to the science of geography and its effects on the physical domains of the land, sea, and air. The geographic intersection of the land and sea domains in the Baltic states is clearly at the Kurland (Kurzeme, or Courland in English) Peninsula creating a central position militarily in Latvia.

## Latvia

As the Baltic states represent the central position across the entirety of what is now NATO's Eastern Flank, Latvia represents key strategic maritime terrain, chiefly the Gulf of Riga,

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[16] The most comprehensive work on German operations in the Baltic islands during the First and Second World Wars is Walther Melzer, *Kampf um die Baltischen Inseln, 1917–1941–1944* (Stuttgart, Germany: Scharnhorst Buchkameradschaft, 1960).

[17] *Борьба за Советскую Прибалтику в Великой Отечественной Войне, Книга третья* [Battle for Soviet Baltic states during the Great Patriotic War, vol. 3] (Riga, Latvia: Liesma Publishing House, 1969), hereafter *Battle for Soviet Baltic States*, 10.

which acts as a maritime base of operations with several port facilities in the vicinity. The Gulf of Riga is separated from the Baltic Sea by the Kurland Peninsula in the west and the Düna River to the east. Without a doubt, the Kurland Peninsula has been historically the most important piece of key strategic terrain in the Baltic states. Actions late in 1944–45 demonstrate the importance of the Kurland Peninsula. Heavy contact with Soviet forces, since the beginning of 1944, yielded a disintegration of *Army Group North*'s combat power in the retreat through Estonia. Yet Germany continued to believe in the defense of the Baltic states as a mechanism to defend eastern Prussia and Germany writ large, while maintaining relationships with Finland and Sweden across the Baltic Sea.[18] With Finland signing a separate peace treaty with the Soviet Union in September 1944, Germany had lost its northern defensive position, hastening the Soviet offensive against the Baltic states. The Soviet history of operations in the Baltic region during the Second World War captures the relative strength of the German defense on the Kurland Peninsula as follows:

> After conducting successful offensive operations against Memel [Klaipeda] and Riga by Soviet forces [10–15 October 1944], more than 33 divisions of Fascist troops appeared on Kurland Peninsula cut off from Northern Prussia and pressed against the sea. Those were units of 16th and 18th Armies and Kampf Group "Kleffel" who had withdrawn from the area of Riga bridgehead. Enemy troops on the Kurland Peninsula, were united under Army Group North, in the first line of front defense, spread across 218 kilometers were 23 divisions, while in the rear, more than 10 divisions, including 3 tank divisions. Operational density of the enemy defense was quite tough. On average, a [German] division held around 7 kilometers of front.[19]

Locally, within the Baltic states, the Kurland Peninsula represented a strong shoulder strategically, with German tactical formation able to use the Gulf of Riga and the Baltic Sea as tactical terrain to anchor its defense. As a result of combining strong tactical positions in the land domain with total control of the maritime flanks, the Soviets were not able to break the German hold of Army Group Kurland, despite fighting six separate battles to capture the Kurland Peninsula.[20] While the Soviets were capable of investing the Kurland Peninsula from the south with the attack and total destruction of the then-Prussian city of Memel (now the Lithuanian city of Klaipeda), their attack through Lithuania was bounded

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[18] *The German Liaison Officer with the Finnish Armed Forces*, Foreign Military Studies Department P-041bb (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1952).

[19] *Battle for Soviet Baltic States*, 9.

[20] For details on the six battles for Kurland, see Franz Kurowski, *Bridgehead Kurland: The Six Epic Battles of Heeresgruppe Kurland* (Winnipeg, MB: J. J. Fedorowicz Publishing, 2002).

by the powerful Niemen River, the importance of which was remembered from actions predating the First World War.[21]

## Lithuania

The defensive strength of the Niemen River was first observed during the campaigns of Napoléon Bonaparte and has continued to attract attention by military historians and strategists. Theodore Ayrault Dodge, a Union officer from the American Civil War who later became a historian, indicated the importance of the Neimen's geography when he wrote, "Roughly speaking, the Russian frontiers ran from the Baltic [sea], north of the Prussian fortress of Memel, to the Memel [Niemen] River half-way to Kovno [Kaunas], up river to Grodno, down the Bobr and up to Brest-Litovsk and beyond, and thence along the border of Galicia." He then captured the essence of the Niemen's strength both tactically and strategically: "That portion of the Niemen [river] from Grodno to the sea was the scene of the most important early part of this [Napoléon's Russian] campaign. Its channel is sunk, and there are not many places where it can be crossed, even with pontoons."[22]

Dodge's statement points to the natural "L" made by the flow of the Niemen River east to west from Kaunas, Lithuania, to the Baltic Sea and south to north from Grodno, Belarus, to Kaunas that combined well with the naturally marshy area surrounding the river, creating an ideal terrain for defensive military operations. This terrain would again figure into both German and Russian plans during the First World War.

In *Topography and Strategy in the War,* Douglas W. Johnson considers German and Russian actions on the eastern front and reminds readers of the natural military advantages afforded by the Niemen River.[23] In the wake of the Russian failures at Tannenberg and Mazurian Lakes in summer and fall 1914, Russia was forced onto the defensive. After its attempt to crush East Prussia on the way to Warsaw, Poland, Russian troops then had to engage the Germans recently fortified with fresh combat power. Johnson described the consequences—seen by winter 1915—for the Russians when he wrote, "The sudden arrival of new German forces in February compelled another Russian retreat to the defensive line of the Niemen, Bobr, and Narew."[24] Appreciation of modern combat methods has not lessened the requirements of modern land forces to gain mobility in the areas in and around the Niemen

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[21] For more information on the destruction of Memel in English, see Prit Buttar, *Battleground Prussia: The Assault on Germany's Eastern Front, 1944–45* (London: Osprey Publishing, 2010), 46.

[22] Theodore Ayrault Dodge, *Great Captains: Napoleon*, vol. 3 (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin, 1907), 454.

[23] Douglas Wilson Johnson, *Topography and Strategy in the War* (New York: Henry Holt, 1917).

[24] Ibid., 66.

River, nor has it lessened our need to understand the effects of changes in the political geography.

With the destruction of Memel in 1944 and the long-standing German dream of an empire in eastern Prussia, the Soviet Union recognized its need to solidify a hold on the Baltic states as a buffer from the West. The Soviet Union laid claim to Königsberg, Germany, and with the end of the Second World War, changed the name of the historic East Prussian capital to Kaliningrad. It remains Russia's strategic observation post in the heart of NATO's Eastern Flank. Strategically, with Kaliningrad in the west and Belarus in the east, the portion of Lithuania in between becomes a potential target for future Russian aggression, even with the Niemen River creating a formidable obstacle in the north and in the east. The loss of Lithuanian territory between Kaliningrad and Belarus would mean that accessibility of the Baltic states to other NATO countries would only be achievable from the Baltic Sea.

## Conclusion

The intentions of nations are difficult to forecast at best, but their ability to use military force to pursue those interests will always be bounded by the restrictions of physical geography. During the last 200 years, Eastern Europe and Russia have seen the suffering and death of millions as a result of military conflict. Napoléon, Kaiser Wilhelm the Second, and Adolf Hitler all failed to understand not only the will of the Russian people but also their ability to negotiate the realities of the physical terrain of Eastern Europe. The Baltic states have proven themselves to be an essential pivot point of conflict between West and East for centuries, and their security continues to be precarious. If the past is any metric to forecast the future in the Baltic region, optimism about the Baltic nations' quick assimilation into a more stable Euro-Atlantic economic, political, and security community should be tempered. While technology can hasten the rapidity of action in time and space, both physical and virtual, it does not yet provide an escape from the constraints of physical geography. No attempt to understand the environment of likely future conflict is complete without a deep understanding of the physical realities of the environment. The history of war in the Baltic region has a clear constant: the limited maneuver space and restricted terrain facilitate the survival of a force that can mass, can be supported in multiple domains, and can survive, but will eventually lose out to a larger foe.[25] This lesson—that the effective use of key strategic terrain throughout the Baltic region can allow a smaller force to buy the vital time required

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[25] See R. G. S. Bidwell, "The Five Fallacies: Some Thoughts on British Military Thinking," *Journal of the Royal United Service Institute* 112, no. 645 (February 1967): 53–55, https://doi.org/10.1080/03071846709420378.

to generate more combat power—is certainly relevant for the NATO alliance as it contemplates how to guarantee the sovereignty of its Baltic members. Ultimately, contemporary military and political leaders should adhere to the advice of General Reek and understand the physical environment of the Baltic before planning military operations in the region.

# Suggested Further Reading

## Articles of Interest

Bukkvoll, Tor. "Russian Military Power: Russian Special Operations Forces in Crimea and Donbas." *Parameters* 46, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 13–21.

Connell, Mary Ellen and Ryan Evans. "Russia's Ambiguous Warfare and Implications for the U.S. Marine Corps." *MCU Journal* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 30–45. https://doi.org /10.21140/mcuj.2016070102.

Del Gaudio, LtCol Andrew M. "Russian Reflections and Military Renaissance: The Breckin-ridge Legacy." *Marine Corps Gazette* 100, no. 9 (2016).

Glantz, David M. "Force Structuring: The Continuing Influence of Non-Linear Warfare on Russian Force Structuring." *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 9, no. 2 (1996): 335–75. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13518049608430237.

Golts, Alexander, and Michael Koffman. "Russia's Military: Assessment, Strategy, and Threat." Center on Global Interests, June 2016.

Hoffman, Frank. "The Contemporary Spectrum of Conflict: Protracted, Gray Zone, Am-biguous, and Hybrid Modes of War." *2016 Index of U.S. Military Strength*. Heritage Foundation, 2015.

McDermott, Roger N. "Does Russia Have a Gerasimov Doctrine?." *Parameters* 46, no. 2 (2016): 97–105.

Milevski, Lukas. "Strategy & Policy: Strategy Versus Statecraft in Crimea." *Parameters* 44, no. 2 (2014): 23–35.

Renz, Bettina. "Russian Military Power: Why Russia Is Reviving Its Conventional Military Power." *Parameters* 46, no. 2 (2016): 23–36.

Votel, Joseph L., Charles T. Cleveland, Charles T. Connett, and Will Irwin. "Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone." *Joint Force Quarterly* 80 (2016): 101–9.

## Books

Kalb, Marvin. *Imperial Gamble: Putin, Ukraine, and the New Cold War*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2015.

Mazarr, Michael J. *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict*. Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, 2015.

Menon, Rajan and Eugene Rumer. *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015.

Simons, Greg. *Mass Media and Modern Warfare: Reporting on the Russian War on Terrorism*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2010.

# Glossary

Ambiguous warfare

This term has no proper definition and has been used within U.S. government circles since at least the 1980s. Generally speaking, the term applies to situations in which a state or nonstate belligerent actor deploys troops and proxies in a deceptive and confusing manner with the intent of achieving political and military effects while obscuring the belligerent's direct participation.

Asymmetric

In military operations, this is the application of dissimilar strategies, tactics, capabilities, and methods to circumvent or negate an opponent's strengths while exploiting its weaknesses.[1]

Battalion Task Force 2020
(BNTF 2020)

A Nordic Defence Cooperation concept exploring the ability to generate a common Nordic Battalion Task Force and providing common tactics, techniques, and procedures as a basis for common ground combat arms training, deployments, and procurements.

Color revolutions

An informal name commonly applied to political opposition movements demanding greater transparency and accountability of governments in countries in the former Soviet Union and eastern bloc (i.e., countries accused of not having sufficiently consolidated democratic reforms). The most notable of these so-called revolutions have been associated with a flower or color, such as the 2003 Rose

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[1] *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms.*

Revolution in Georgia, the December 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and the 2005 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan. Russian security and political elites and their allies often use the term pejoratively to imply that these movements are not organic domestic movements but rather instigated and supported by American or Western European governments.

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| Compellence | A form of coercion that forces another state into action, typically by threat or demonstration of violence. The term is usually associated with the work of American economist Thomas C. Schelling and his work *Arms and Influence* (1966). |
| Cyberpartisans | A term applied to those actors in the cyber realm who support government agendas through hacking or other cyberattacks without obviously being in its employ or direct control. The term intentionally recollects the Soviet Partisan movement of World War II and the indirect methods of state control and support to sympathetic forces behind enemy lines. |
| Deterrence | A form of coercion in which a state creates unacceptable costs to prevent another state from taking a particular action. In the nuclear age, the term has largely been associated with the concept of mutual deterrence, a situation in which nuclear states are prevented from attacking one another due to unacceptable risk that the targeted state would retain the capability and will to inflict an equally grave retaliatory strike. |
| Denial of Service (DoS) attack | An attempt to deny legitimate users Internet services or the ability to access information, typically by flooding a |

computer, server, or network with a volume of requests large enough to overwhelm the capacity of the system.

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| Distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack | A denial of service attack launched from a distributed network of computers, usually by exploiting security vulnerabilities to remotely control "botnet" computers without the owner's knowledge or consent. The use of additional computers makes this type of attack more powerful, harder to diagnose, and more difficult to defeat than a standard DoS attack. |
| Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe (e-PINE) | A cooperative framework advanced by the United States to promote a safe, secure, and supportive environment in Northern Europe to pursue common interests with the Nordic and Baltic nations of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The three broad areas of focus for cooperation under e-PINE include cooperative security, healthy societies, and vibrant economies. |
| Flexible response | A defensive strategy developed in the 1960s by the John F. Kennedy administration and designed to control escalation toward a general nuclear strike in stages. Initially, the United States and NATO would attempt to blunt a Soviet conventional attack with a direct defense with conventional forces. In the case that the Soviets gained an unacceptable conventional advantage, the United States and NATO would respond through deliberate escalation and the use of tactical nuclear weapons. The final resort would be a general nuclear response and would involve a massive nuclear retaliation against the Soviet Union and its allies. |

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| Geographical pivot of history | The title of an article by Sir Halford John Mackinder in 1904, who is credited with the idea of extending geopolitical analysis of the effect of human and physical geography on international politics to the entire globe. Mackinder, in particular, posited that control of the center of Eurasia (from the Volga to Eastern Siberia) was the key "pivot" of global power. |
| Gray zone warfare | Competitive interactions among and within state and nonstate actors that fall between the traditional war and peace duality. They are characterized by ambiguity about the nature of the conflict, opacity of the parties involved, or uncertainty about the relevant policy and legal frameworks.[2] |
| High North | Although not a precise term, it generally refers to those parts of the Nordic countries and Russia in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region, the Norwegian Sea, the Barents Sea, and the southern parts of the Polar Sea. |
| Hybrid warfare | An abstract term generally used to describe aggression that includes a combination of conventional and irregular activities and usually implies an effort by the aggressor to avoid attribution used in combination to achieve a political objective. Although the use of the term is still debated, it continues to have resonance for the U.S. military as it wrestles with the idea that many, or most, potential enemies will seek an asymmetric advantage through means that would be considered illegitimate by U.S. legal and moral norms (e.g., terrorism and criminal networks). |
| NATO's Flanks | A term that has been used to refer to the Northern, Eastern, and Southern borders of the NATO alliance |

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[2] *The Gray Zone*, USSOCOM White Paper (Washington, DC: U.S. Special Operations Command, 2015).

countries, reflecting the post-Cold War confusion about NATO's actual orientation and purpose.

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| NATO Smart Defence Force | A NATO concept for cooperatively and efficiently building a collective defense capability by coordinating requirements, development, procurement, and operations. NATO seeks to act as an intermediary to help member nations align national and country priorities, encourage deliberate national specialization, and share development costs for complex capabilities. |
| NBP9 | An acronym used to refer to the Nordic states (Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland), the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia), and Poland. The term is typically used in the context of the countries most vulnerable to Russian aggression. |
| Netwar | An evolving concept reflecting the pace at which technology amplifies the strength of networks generally consisting of intentional activities to influence the domain of human perception via either overt or covert channels, in which one or more actors seeks to impose a desired change upon the perception of another actor. This is done to facilitate second- and third-order effects of benefit to them. These activities utilize cyber and social systems as infrastructure and exploit the ambiguity of cyberidentities. |
| Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFCO) | A cooperative arrangement established in 2009 and among the five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden) focusing on bilateral and multilateral activities related to security policy, operations, training and exercises, capability development, and armaments. |

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| Nonlinear warfare | Although the term is fluid, it is generally characterized by an increased reliance on nonmilitary levers of national power, such as political, economic, informational, and sociocultural factors, supplemented by military means of a concealed character, such as covert direct action and information operations. The term was popularized after appearing in a short story by Kremlin ideologist Vladimir Surkov about a fifth world war, the "first non-linear war" in a dystopian future in which it would be "all against all."[3] |
| Nuclear threshold | The point in a conflict where nuclear weapons are, or would be, brought into use. |
| Provokatsiya | A Russian concept wherein a state or intelligence agency undertakes a deliberate, often covert, action to elicit a self-defeating response from an adversary state or opposition group. The most famous example is probably the Soviet Trust Operation of the 1920s, when enemies of the Bolsheviks living abroad were lured home to their deaths by a fake resistance organization created by the secret police. |
| Scorched Earth Policy | A military tactic employed during a withdrawal or retreat to destroy anything that could be of use to a pursuing enemy force, including civil infrastructure and food sources. |

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[3] Nathan Dubovitsky, "Without Sky," *Russian Pioneer*, no. 46 (May 2014). Surkov writes under the pen name Nathan Dubovitsky.

# Index

Afghanistan, xii, 36, 49, 54, 62–65, 70, 73
  *See also* Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA)
aircraft
  Sukhoi Su-34 Fullback strike fighter, 12
  Sukhoi Su-37 Flanker all-weather fighter, 12
  Tupolev Tu-22M3 Backfire C bomber, 12
  Tupolev Tu-95MS Bear-H strategic bomber, 12
  Tupolev Tu-160 Blackjack bomber, 12
AirLand Battle strategy, U.S. Army, 50, 52
Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD), 35, 47, 52
Arctic, 2–3, 16, 35, 40–53, 85
  *See also* geopolitics, High North, NATO Flanks
Arctic sea routes, 3
Armas, Jason C. (Maj), 2, 5
Army, German, 56, 59–60
  *Army Group North*, 87, 89, 91
  *Sixteenth Army*, 87
  *Eighteenth Army*, 87

Baltic Sea, 11, 17, 25, 35, 89, 91–93
Baltic states, 2, 4, 11, 15–39, 50, 59–60, 85, 87–88, 90–91, 93, 101
  *See also* Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania
Battalion Task Force 2020 (BNTF 2020), 34, 97
Black Sea Fleet, 10–11

Breckinridge, James C. (LtGen), xii
Center for Advanced Culture Learning (CAOCL), ix, xii–xiii
Chechen War
  First (1994–96), 7
  Second (1999–2000), 7
Clausewitz, Carl von, 30, 54
Cold War (1947–91), xi, 1–2, 22–23, 25, 28–31, 40–53, 72–75, 82
color revolutions, 11, 49, 51–52, 67, 79, 97–98
  Orange (2004), 49fn29, 98
  Rose (2003), 49fn29, 97–98
  Tulip (2005), 49fn29, 98
Command and Staff College (CSC), ix, xii–xiii, 2
commands, U.S.
  Africa Command (AFRICOM), 51
  European Command (EUCOM), 51, 53
  Geographic Combatant Command, 52
  Special Operations Command (SOCOM), 52–53
Communist Party, 56–58
compellence, 49, 98
counterinsurgency (COIN), 50, 52–53, 61, 64
Crimea, xi–xii, 6, 10–13, 47, 56, 59, 68–71, 73, 76, 78–83
  *See also* nonlinear warfare
Crimean Peninsula, xi, 85
cyberpartisans, 56, 65–66, 98

de Gaulle, Charles, 30

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